

...BRIDGES IV... June 2004

prepared as a Supplement to the Czech Working Group Newsletter and as a Service to the American Working Group by Joyce Michael, Mission Co-worker with PC(USA)

When John and I returned to Prague on May 1 after attending the dedication of the hostage, the city was awash with visitors. Some of those folks had come to attend an international hockey tournament. However, other people were present to celebrate the nation's entry into the European Union. It was evident that many people shared the sense of hopeful expectation that the Moderator and Lay Moderator expressed in a letter to other churches in EU nations. "We are...experiencing joy...because something of which our distant ancestors could only dream is becoming reality." Of course, many opinions about the Czech Republic's entry into the EU were circulating prior to, and have continued to develop since, that event. At soon point, I hope to reflect a bit more personally on these matters in a Mission Connections Letter. However, at this point, I want to share with some key emphases that the Moderator of the ECCB expressed in an address about the implications of joining the EU delivered at a conference for church leaders that was held in Vienna on June 4-5, 2004. Although space constraints have made it necessary for me to omit large sections of this address, I hope that the following paragraphs will give you a sense of Rev. Ruml's understanding of the benefits and responsibilities that entry into the EU will may for churches in member countries.

...Churches, including, among others, the minority reformed protestant church of the Czech Brethren, have also entered the European Union along with the Czech nation.... Czech society belongs among the most atheistic societies in Europe. Therefore, its expectations are also, first and foremost, related to economic losses and gains and are concerned with other values only consequentially... Our nation is still learning to live in freedom, and to not be afraid of freedom. Yet, the church has an advantage insofar as, through the instrumentality and the call of the Lord God, it has a summons to freedom... That is why I cannot view the opportunity of living within the community of European nations as anything but a proposal from the Lord God...

The Czech Protestant Church is commanded by its biblical foundations and its heritage to maintain a critical stance toward the state and human institutions.... Therefore, it is the churches' task to keep a watchful eye on the paths that politicians, who are focused more on the ends than on the means, often tread. It is the churches' task to 'raise a warning finger' everywhere that they recognize the ominous human tendency to ascribe a salvific character to the service offered by politicians.

...Henceforth, the task of the church will remain to plausibly and concretely introduce the call of the gospel to the universal pull of success, popularity, and prosperity, in whose aftermath, there sometimes remain far too many victims of cynicism, pain, and disillusionment. We expect that the European milieu will offer us a more intimate...setting for interchurch dialogue and collaboration. Thus, we may...reveal that the standard of living is dependent on building a milieu of trust, hope, truth, and justice. The fellowship of the church and relationships among churches must be a symbol for others that it is possible to construct such settings; that it is possible to create such a milieu.

...I see the Church's role...to reside in this: we are called by God to arrive at a better formulate of that which has been the foundation of human life since its creation, by articulating this more vigorously, more faithfully, more plausibly, and in ways that are theologically clear and explicit through a rapprochement of the traditions of individual nations. Europe will be a peaceful society only when peaceful people live in it. The simplest way to enduring peace lies in Jesus Christ.... therefore, let us be united in truth and integrity by following him.

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