

## ...BRIDGES... January, 2007: Healing Springs

on behalf of the ECCB's American Working Group and PC(USA)'s Czech Mission Network by Joyce Michael

Soon after returning to Prague in November 2006, I began to translate articles for the Czech Protestant News, which is the forerunner of Czech Mission Network News. After being in the United States for six very intense months, I was both tired and out-of-practice, so preparation of the articles was not an effortless endeavor for me and my colleagues. However, several of the submissions reacquainted me with what had been going on in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren while John and I were away, and the editorial contained some imagery that I found to be especially compelling. Unfortunately, as often occurs, the part of the editorial that spoke to me with the most power had to be omitted because of lack of space. Thus, I asked for permission to use the two paragraphs that were eliminated as the first BRIDGES of this new year. I hope that their depiction of healing springs will be a source of encouragement in this time when new beginnings seem to be so necessary on so many fronts.

After describing the setting of the seventh 'Euroregional' Church Day, which brought Christians from the Czech Republic, Saxony, Thuringia, and Bavaria together in the Czech city of Cheb and the German town of Marktredwitz last September, Ivana Benešová, the press spokeswoman for the ECCB, created a moving verbal picture when she recalled the ecumenical worship service that was held in the historic center of Cheb at the Church of St. Nicholas (Mikuláš.)

"In exploring the theme, 'Life Begins at the Spring,' Wilfried Beyhl, the bishop of the Protestant Lutheran Church in Bavaria, recalled a moving service of reconciliation that took place in 1995 on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War. At that time, both sides asked for forgiveness for all of the horrors of the war and the suffering that resulted from the expulsion of the German residents of Czechoslovakia. 'We mutually extended the hand of reconciliation with the words of forgiveness that God has promised to both of our nations,' the German bishop said, before adding: 'The former wall still stands in the minds of some people. However, a green fern is growing in the cracks of this wall, as it is depicted on the poster for Church Day. Trust between us

must grow continually until our countries and our life together become a flourishing garden.'

At the end of the sermon, the bishop invited those present to fill little cups with healing water from four nearby spas after the service had concluded. 'During illness and affliction, we seek the power of healing springs at Františková Lázně and Mariánská Lázně, as well as at spas in Alexandersbad and Bad Ester. Here, I have four pitchers with healing water from these spas.... Which healing spring could make you well? Is there also healing water when our soul has fallen ill and is thirsting for life?' Bishop Beyhl asked. According to him, our faith and hope can be revived by healing water from God because 'in God is the source – the spring – of life.'"

Similarly, at the closing service in Cheb, Jochen Bohl, the bishop of the Protestant Lutheran Church in Saxony, thoughtfully concluded: "Trust and hope begin with a contrite look at the past and the guilt that we have placed upon our shoulders...." As the 'editor' of BRIDGES, I would urge us to join our Czech and German friends in praying that times of "soberly and honestly facing the painful truth of history" will continue to issue in renewing encounters with healing springs of grace.