

## ...BRIDGES... Number 6, 2008: "Set Apart by Hope"

by Joyce Michael for the ECCB's American Working Group & PC(USA)'s Czech Mission Network

As I begin to write this BRIDGES, I am reminded of a note that Gareth Baker from the First Presbyterian Church in Waverly, Ohio sent to me after reading BRIDGES 3, 2008, which had an ecological theme. In that message, Gareth declared: "We agree fully with your ecological concerns, and we also have friends who don't believe we should be concerned about global warming. That seems strange to us when we have had so many weather changes of a severe nature plus the melting of the glaciers. Most people do not have solar panels, but it makes sense.... Evelyn and I used to RV full time...., and we saw that many RV'ers have solar panels installed on their trailers or motor homes. RV'ers are very careful about the environment...." I am grateful to Gareth for thinking about the issues that Dr. Jiří Nečas addressed in the essay which I quoted in BRIDGES 3. Likewise, I hope that you will not mind if I take another look at that theme in this up-date.

Last Friday (June 27), I climbed into the Diaconia's mini-van with several traveling companions, and we headed to Bratislava, Slovakia for the "Gathering of Christians," which brings folks from Poland, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic together every three years. While I was there, I attended a "Forum" where Dr. Nečas was joined by like-minded presenters from Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to consider how we may help protect the environment at this precarious juncture. In spite of very comfortable chairs and very warm temperatures, no one succumbed to an early afternoon nap. The dialogue was both thoughtful and lively, and I was glad that I had chosen that Forum from among the wide range of programming options which were available on Saturday afternoon.

Since I had translated a couple of essays by Dr. Nečas' just a couple of months ago, I did not hear much that was "new," until a member of the panel followed a matter-of-fact reference to the work of secular ecological groups with a telling observation. The Forum's moderator noted that as the extent to which our planet is endangered becomes increasingly more acute, some folks in the secular sphere are finding themselves immersed in a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, which has the potential to hamper efforts to effectively address issues related to climate change. Sometimes, such folks cannot see whether there is much, if anything, which can be done to reverse the process of global warming and similar ills. However, Christians stand in a different position in this regard because they realize that it is not human effort alone that will save our planet. God, the Creator, will not leave us to our own devices in our struggles to live in ways that are more responsible. Thus, we do not need to be trapped in helplessness or despair. We can readily embrace our duty to care for our damaged earth because we are aware that everything does not depend upon our feeble efforts. We are not

working alone. The Lord of Life will not let destructive patterns have the final word.

I left that Forum with the hope that my on-going practice of recycling everything I possibly can will not be in vain. While we must regularly pursue existing efforts to find a way beyond the ecological threat, we simultaneously may be heartened to realize that the solutions for which we long may take a shape that our finite human minds cannot yet imagine.

Such a supposition is one that a-theistic tendencies within our souls and our societies cannot fathom. And yet, a similar word of hope rang true a couple of weeks ago as a clergy member of the Synodal Council reflected on a biblical text prior to introducing the new "general secretary" of the ECCB's national offices to us. "The kingdom of God is here already, but it has not come yet," Pavel Klinecký declared, using common eschatological parlance, before going on to say that we stand between death – in the sense of crucifixion – and life – in the sense of resurrection. That observation may also seem rather commonplace; yet, it struck me as being remarkable in the present age when so many individuals and nations appear to be caught in the iron grip of crucifying realities. Rev. Klinecký offered a compelling cause for hope when he stressed that standing between death and life means that we may—or even "must"—move toward life. We are not held captive by the powers of death – that is not the part of the "between" which has laid claim to us. Rather, we are called to life— that is the challenge and promise of God's gift and will for us, for our neighbors in conflicted areas, and for the little planet which is struggling to bear our weight.

Being BETWEEN life and death means that we are already oriented toward life. Thus, let us embrace our opportunity and responsibility to help our world see that truth more clearly, so that together, we can move beyond the paralysis of hopelessness into a mode of constructive and renewing solidarity with the earth and its people.