

# Czech Protestant News

A Bulletin of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren,  
the Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren,  
and the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University

# 18

## EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF CZECH BRETHREN (ECCB)



P.O.Box 466, Jungmannova 9,  
CZ 111 21 Praha 1, Czech Republic  
Tel.: (+420) 224 999 215(16); Fax: (+420) 224 999 219  
E-mail: [ekumena@srcce.cz](mailto:ekumena@srcce.cz)  
Web page: [www.srcce.cz](http://www.srcce.cz)

The ECCB originated in the year 1918 through the unification of the Protestant churches of the Lutheran and Reformed confessions, which were permitted only after the harsh Counter-Reformation movement ended. However, the ECCB has deeper roots in the Czech reformation: in the Utraquist *Hussite Church* (1431–1620) and in the Unity of Brethren Church (1457–1620). The ECCB has about 115,000 members in more than 260 congregations which are broken down into 14 seniorates (presbyteries) throughout the Czech Republic. At the head of the church is the 6 member Synodal Council, elected for a six-year term of office and represented by the Synodal Senior and the Synodal Curator.

## DIACONIA OF THE ECCB

**Diakonie**   
Českobratrské církve evangelické

Belgická 22, CZ 120 00 Praha 2, Czech Republic  
Tel.: (+420) 222 487 811; Fax: (+420) 222 487 834  
E-mail: [ustredi@diakoniecce.cz](mailto:ustredi@diakoniecce.cz), Web page: [www.diakoniecce.cz](http://www.diakoniecce.cz)

Diaconia (from the Greek *diakonein*: to serve) originated in the year 1989 as a special establishment of the church for serving people in need. It continues the work of the old Czech Diaconia (1903–1952). It has 33 centers throughout the entire Czech Republic, which provide the following services: retirement homes for the elderly; care for people with mental and combined disabilities; care for people with health afflictions; health care and nursing services; guidance and community work; work with the homeless and unemployed; work with the Romany. The Diaconia also operates eight special schools for children with mental and combined disabilities. It is administered by a 9 member board led by a chairperson who is elected by the Synod of the ECCB for a four-year term of office. The board chooses the director of the Diaconia.

## PROTESTANT THEOLOGICAL FACULTY OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY (PTF-CU)



P.O.Box 529, Černá 9,  
CZ 115 55 Praha 1, Czech Republic  
Tel.: (+420) 221 988 211; Fax: (+420) 221 988 215  
E-mail: [intl@etf.cuni.cz](mailto:intl@etf.cuni.cz)  
Web page: [web.etf.cuni.cz/ETFENG-4.html](http://web.etf.cuni.cz/ETFENG-4.html)

The faculty is the successor of the Hussite Faculty (1919–1950) with an interruption between the years 1939–45) and the Comenius Faculty (1950–90). In the year 1990 it was incorporated into Charles University. The administration of the faculty is directed by a dean of faculty and 4 assistant deans, elected for a three-year term of office. The faculty has 8 departments and 3 institutes. For the school year 2008–2009, the faculty has approximately 550 students. The faculty is ecumenically open to all. Pastors of the ECCB receive their theological education here.

## Editorial: The Churches and the Czech Republic's Presidency of the European Union

From January to June 2009, the Czech Republic has been presiding over the European Union. Thus, it has had an opportunity to directly influence the issues with which the EU is engaged. However, first and foremost, the Czech Presidency must seek concord and compromise among the interests of the twenty-seven member countries and communicate with the international community on their behalf.

Information is appearing in the Czech and European media about how the Czech Presidency is working to strengthen energy independence and to resolve the economic crisis and the conflict in Gaza. At the same time, you may have already heard or read discussions about the degree to which a rather small, new, "Euro-skeptic" country in Central Europe can pull off this responsible role, especially during a time of widespread uncertainty and anxiety due to the economic decline.

However, the European Union is still grappling with other difficulties, which have come to the fore during the Czech Presidency, mainly in conjunction with June elections to the European Parliament. A central concern is a long-standing disharmony between EU institutions in Brussels and the general public in member nations. This has to do with varying ideas about what European cooperation should involve and how it should develop. A quest for the basic meaning and mission of European integration is at stake.

This is exactly where the churches may contribute with their perspective. Czech churches have accepted this challenge by working together ecumenically and by making contact with churches in other countries. In doing this, they have started from the motto of the Czech Presidency: "Europe without barriers." To be sure, Christians are called by their Lord to overcome barriers of enmity and misunderstanding, and to take in the orphans and widows, to treat friends and enemies as their neighbors, and to live with everyone in peace. Yet, this calling is not restricted to life in the church. It is the calling of Christians in the world.

Nevertheless, like "Brussels," churches and individual Christians simultaneously experience barriers of disharmony and misunderstanding. Both within the broader Church and individual churches, it often is difficult to apprehend the desires and needs of all of the members; to communicate with one another; and to reach agreement regarding joint activities.

Christians are also a minority that is often relegated to the shadows in secularized Europe. However, it is exactly as a minority that Christians may be free of the temptation to power and may listen to those who are in need. Indeed, this minority should be the salt of the earth, an advocate for the powerless, and a voice for the meek, and, at the same time, for those who are bringing alternatives to life.

Hana Volná

Officer-in-charge of the Ecumenical Council of Churches'  
Commission for the Czech Republic's Presidency of the EU  
[johanaruth@hotmail.com](mailto:johanaruth@hotmail.com)

## ■ Regarding the Churches' Contribution to the Czech Republic's Presidency of the European Union



*Anthea Cox, co-moderator of the Church and Society Commission of CEC, speaking at the conference on the Presidency in Spring, 2008*

In November 2007, at the suggestion of the ECCB, the General Assembly of the Czech Ecumenical Council of Churches passed a resolution, which mandated that Czech churches should be actively involved in preparing for the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Therefore, it

established a commission to draw up specific proposals regarding how Czech churches could participate in preparations for, and during the course of, the Czech Presidency.

The Commission has been working at several levels. For example, it initiated communication with church leaders about the Presidency. This was followed by dialogue between the churches and the government of the Czech Republic, which is responsible for the Presidency. The Commission has worked steadily with the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches in Brussels. Following up on the activities of churches in other countries that have held the Presidency of the EU Council is also important. Thus, the Commission has reflected on the "presidential experiences" of Finland, Germany, and Austria, and is working with churches in Sweden, which will assume the Presidency after the Czech Republic.

The ECCB presented a proposal to the Commission regarding how Czech churches can contribute to the Presidency. On the basis of that, the Commission recommended that the churches start from the motto of the Czech Presidency, "Europe without barriers," and emphasize ways that churches contribute to that slogan's realization within the civil society.

The Commission prepared a Czech-English publication in which the churches of the ECC summarized their missions and described specific activities designed to overcome barriers in society. The commission also communicated regularly with the government of the Czech Republic about the agenda of the Czech Presidency and, in the name of the churches, raised the issues of social solidarity, demographic developments, migration, and alternative sources of energy.

In spring 2008, the Commission organized an all-day conference on the Presidency at which representatives from Czech churches became acquainted with the nature of the Presidency and the churches' opportunities in relation to that. They also became familiar with the priorities of the Czech government, the activities of the Conference of European Churches vis-à-vis the EU, and the "European experience" of Finnish churches. At the suggestion of the Commission, a Study Day on "Eco-theology" took place in April 2009. A guest from Sweden spoke at that conference.

On October 28, 2008, the Commission introduced the public to "overcoming barriers" at the second annual pilgrimage to Mount Říp. During the Presidency, a Day of Open Churches was organized for the general public on May 9, the Day of Europe. Thus, less than a month before European Parliament elections, there was an opportunity to discuss what we are expecting from the integration of Europe and how we can contribute to that process.

Hana Volná  
Officer-in-charge of the Ecumenical Council of Churches'  
Commission for the Czech Republic's Presidency of the EU  
johanaruth@hotmail.com

## ■ The Churches' Contribution to an Open Civil Society

A slim, twenty-two page manual in Czech and English versions, supplemented with small illustrations and an enclosed CD, which contains detailed information about the church activities described in the manual, has resulted from the work of the Ecumenical Council of Churches' Commission to Prepare for the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The brochure is divided into six chapters, written by Hana Volná of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren; Rüdiger Noll, Director of the Church and Society Commission and Associate General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC); Zdeněk Kučera, Professor of Theology at the Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University; and Roman Juriga, Director of the Orthodox Academy in Vilémov. Included in the individual sections are well-designed color maps of the Czech Republic with the centers of diaconal service; educational establishments; and community, counseling, and investigative facilities of all eleven denominations clearly marked.

The layout of the publication is well-arranged. It presents basic information about the churches' activities and their benefit to the whole society, and invites wider use than just the presentation to Brussels that was first planned. Appreciation is due to all of the members of the Ecumenical Council of Churches' Commission to Prepare for the Czech Presidency of the EU, and above all, to Hana Volná, for her professional work from the very beginning to the final step.

Ivana Benešová  
Press Spokeswoman  
ivana.benesova@srce.cz

## ■ Czech Ecumenical Council's Visit to Brussels

"You are not guests here; rather, you are at home here." A seventeen-member delegation from the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic (ECC), under the leadership of their president, Dr. Pavel Černý, repeatedly heard these words when they visited Brussels from January 27-29, 2009. The Conference of European Churches (CEC) had invited the ECC to Brussels, and the ECC had gladly accepted the invitation. Given the Czech Republic's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the work of this European institution was especially topical for the ECC. During the three days in Brussels, "not guests, rather at home" – which, at the beginning, had sounded like a nice postulate – became a reality. Through conversations and meetings, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Council took on flesh and blood contours, which included the faces of people who are leaving a mark on events in Europe, such as the Slovak, Ján Figel (the Commission for Education, Training, Culture, and Youth); the Czech, Vladimír Špidla (the Commission for Work, Social Welfare, and Equal Opportunity), and members of the EU parliament from the Czech Republic, Germany, and Sweden. These people gave the Czech delegation insight into their work and its opportunities and limitations. Along with their colleagues, Rüdiger Noll (the Director of the CEC's Church and Society Commission) and Petr Pavlovič (Study Secretary) introduced the multi-faceted work of the CEC and invited collaboration. The intensive program ended with midday prayers in the Ecumenical Chapel of the Resurrection and a careful look at a work of art entitled "Entropa," which the Czech artist, David Černý, created for the EU's Council building. That work was based on the philosophy that "Europe is alive, and partially lives by provocation." It is clear that the artist has succeeded in stimulating conversation about Europe. The delegation is thankful that through the program in Brussels, the CEC was able to give Czech churches an impetus to ponder their involvement in, and on behalf of, Europe.

Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus  
Ecumenical Secretary of the ECCB  
reininghaus@srce.cz

## ■ New Church Building in Domažlice

At the end of November, 2008, a new church building was dedicated in Domažlice. Joel Ruml, the Moderator of the ECCB, preached at a celebratory worship service, in which Mahulena Čejková, the ECCB's Lay Moderator; her deputy, Pavel Stolař; and Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus, Secretary of the ECCB's Ecumenical and International Department, also participated. Among other things, Frey-Reininghaus extended greetings from the people who were not present from churches in other countries, which had taken part in financing the new church building. They included the Protestant Churches of the Rhineland, of Hesse-Nassau, and of Baden, as well as the German aid organization, Gustav-Adolf-Werk and HEKS, Hilfswerk of the Reformed Church in Switzerland.



Knut Geisler, the GAW's representative from Saxony, also greeted the guests.

The design of the unique, modernly-subdivided building, which has lots of windows and is located at the edge of the town's Hánov Park, posed a great challenge for the architect, Ladislav Schejbal, who said: "It was also enjoyable, and in the end, I think it turned out well." This statement was confirmed by the fact that the new building won a competition called the "Construction of the

year in the region of Plzeň for 2008."

In addition to the worship space, the building includes an apartment for the pastor and the caretaker, as well as a meeting area. A bell, weighing a quarter of a ton, has been hung in the unique building, for which the Synodal Council was able to obtain funding from the state budget, as well as from the previously-mentioned Protestant churches in other countries. The bell arrived in Domažlice from a closed church in the Náchod region of eastern Bohemia. It originally was cast in Bautzen, Germany from a Turkish cannon. It was placed in a church there in 1830. The bell, bearing a German inscription "God with us" and adorned with portraits of the reformers, Luther and Melancton, was taken down in 1899, and was given to the Protestant Czech congregation in Rokytín in the Náchod region.

Ivana Benešová ■  
Press Spokeswoman  
ivana.benesova@srccce.cz

## ■ Conference on Cuba in Prague

For a second year, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, in conjunction with People in Need, the Ecumenical Council of Churches, and the Pontes Institute, held an international conference entitled "Quo vadis, Cuba?" in Prague on March 17-18. This gathering took place in the Old Town at the premises of the Prague Philharmonia. Associated events, which attracted more visitors than the conference itself, were also part of the program.

One of these was an auction of paintings by various Czech artists and pictures by Cuban children and students at the Brethren School in Prague 7. Filip Rajmont moderated the auction with humor and

decorum, and the group, Nsango Malamu, provided music during the breaks. The proceeds of the auction – 33,000 Czech crowns – have been earmarked to support the work with children and youth in Cuba.

The second day, a series of symbolic events, called "Cuba libre," went on. In Cuba, it is commonly said that a traditional cocktail of rum and cola known as "Cuba libre" is "Mentirita" – a little lie. After a symbolic toast to political prisoners in the lobby of the Lucerna Theatre, a procession of people carrying white umbrellas bearing the inscription, "Damas de blanco," walked to the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Wall. The march was designed to pay tribute to the courage of the movement "Women in White," a coalition of the wives and sisters of political prisoners who, dressed in white, silently protest against the imprisonment of their husbands and brothers.

At the conclusion of the conference, an ecumenical worship service, which included intercessory prayers, was held at the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Wall. "Cuban Christians belong to God, and not to the state," Rev. Svatopluk Karásek said in his address. "Through our prayers, we meddle in the internal affairs of Cuba, and across the border, we shout this slogan: 'We were what you are, and you will be what we are.'" Svatopluk Karásek went on to say: "We were persecuted and cut off like you are today, but we firmly believe that someday, you will be like we are today: free citizens with obligations, faith, and rights."

Ivana Benešová ■  
Press Spokeswoman  
ivana.benesova@srccce.cz

## Briefly

### ■ New Team at the Ecumenical Council of Churches

The Ecumenical Council of Churches has a new team of workers. Rev. Sandra Zálabová has been its new General Secretary since September 1, 2008. She assumed this position after Zuzana Dvořáková went on maternity leave. Sandra Zálabová comes from Nymburk, and is a graduate of the Hussite Theological Faculty, where she received a degree in the fields of Hussite Theology and Psycho-social Science. She is the co-owner of a Community Center called "On the Way," which operates a tea-room, a health food store, and a non-profit cultural center. Since 2006, she has served as the pastor of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church in the Břevnov section of Prague. Aleš Čejka and Helena Pichová (who is in charge of managing the ECC's guest house) are the General Secretary's assistants.

### ■ Honored with Medals of Appreciation

Three times in recent months, the ECCB has had an opportunity to express its gratitude on the occasion of farewell celebrations for German church leaders and to give thanks for the common path, the solidarity, and the sisterhood that exists between the ECCB and the churches with which it is connected. The ECCB presented its medal of appreciation to Professor Dr. Peter Steinacker, President of the Protestant Church of Hesse and Nassau; Eberhard Cherdron, President of the Protestant Church of the Palatinate; and Rev. Wilfried Beyhl, the Bayreuth Regional Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria. All three churches maintain active ties with the ECCB. In particular, Wilfried Beyhl retired at the end of January 2009. As the regional bishop, he had been engaged in German-Czech reconciliation since 1992, and had actively helped create and support border-transcending cooperation between the regional church of Bavaria and the ECCB.

## ■ A Future for Plesná – A Future for Everyone

The story of the town of Plesná, which is located on the border with Germany, is no different than that of other towns in the region where German residents, who were forced to leave the Sudetenland after the Second World War, once lived. However, a church, which was built in the nineteenth century with the help of a German association known as Gustav-Adolf-Werk (GAW), remains there. A hopeful view of the future – in the form of a project entitled “A Future for Plesná” – arose from pleasant memories of its earlier history, and the ECCB’s Synodal Council initiated and approved the implementation of this project.

On both sides of the border, people for whom the fate of the Protestant church and Plesná is not a matter of indifference banded together. Workers from the ECCB’s Central Church Offices, people from the ECCB congregation in Cheb, the Protestant congregation in the Saxon town of Bad Brambach, Gustav-Adolf-Werk, and representatives from the towns of Plesná and Bad Brambach met in June, 2008 to work together to preserve the church, not just as a building and a memorial to the past, but also as a living cultural and spiritual center for the future. They want the church to become a true meeting place for everyone – a place where worship services and concerts, lectures, and theatre may take place. A working group, which approved a plan designed to acquire financial resources from various sources, was subsequently set up.

By making use of European Union programs – and especially, a program entitled “Czech-Saxon border cooperation (Objective 3)” – the working group wants to implement events shared by the local congregations in Cheb and Bad Brambach. These include joint Czech-German worship services, a conference on the project and an exhibit concerning reciprocal relationships, concerts by children’s choirs, and large worship services together at Christmas and Easter. Minor structural repairs, which are needed at the church facilities in Plesná and Cheb, are also part of the project. The establishment of a historically-educational footpath with the name “The Way, the Truth and the Life” between the towns of Bad Brambach and Plesná is also connected with the project. Dr. Schmidt from the GAW drew up the working plans for this. The path connects both the towns and the churches with an imaginary arch. It will have eight stops with educational markers about the mutual history of the two places, Czech-German relations, and the present life of the two congregations. In addition to the plates, there will be resting places for people who pass that way and meeting places at former boundary stones. One of these will be a former Protestant cemetery which has become a sacred place.

The preparation and implementation of these projects is demanding, but the working group has the support of the towns of Bad Brambach and Plesná, the leaders of the ECCB, and the sessions of both congregations. In the course of time, the working group has become a well-functioning team, and sincere appreciation must be extended to all of them. We believe that the good work, which they have begun, will reach a good conclusion.

Janka Halukova ■  
Fundraiser of the ECCB  
halukova@srcce.cz

## ■ The ECCB and the PC(USA) are now a step closer to one another

Although geographical, linguistic, and cultural distances separate the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren from one another, last fall brought the two denominations a little closer together. In the autumn of 2008, two significant events involving the ECCB and the PC(USA) took place.



*Participants in the Partnership Conference*

The first of these, which occurred from September 10-16, was a visit by 28 Presbyterian women from different parts of the United States. This event, which is called the Global Exchange and is put on by the PC(USA)’s Presbyterian Women every three years, has the goal of becoming acquainted with the life, service, and work of women in churches in various countries throughout the world. This time, the participants in the Global Exchange set out on a journey to Central Europe. They began their trip in the Czech Republic, and proceeded to Hungary and the Ukraine. Themes of the trip included immigration, the life of Roma people, and racism. The women were also interested in ecumenical relationships and in the PC(USA)’s partners in Central Europe. In our country, they visited Prague, Pardubice, and Vsetín, where they met with women involved in various aspects of church work, including women in church leadership, women who are pastors and chaplains in hospitals and prisons, and women from the Diaconia, the field of social work, and public life. At the same time, the Presbyterian women were interested in the position of women in our society, church, and history. Their interest and questions gave not only the women from the United States, but also our local women, an awareness of the ways in which the work, service, and status of women are unique in our cultural context.

The second event was the “Partnership Conference,” which took place on October 14-24, 2008, although a lengthy period of preparation preceded it. A year in advance, congregations in both denominations were invited to express interest in establishing a partnership with an ECCB or PC(USA) congregation. These congregations then completed a questionnaire in which they introduced themselves and stated what they would expect from a partnership. Thus, even before the conference began, partnership pairs were formed and established contact with one another. In the autumn, seventeen representatives from PC(USA) congregations came to Prague to become acquainted with the life of the ECCB, its history, and its current situation, as well as with the Protestant Theological Faculty and the ECCB’s Diaconia. Then, during the weekend, the guests visited their Czech partner congregations. After that, they spent four days with some representatives from ECCB congregations at Janské Lázně. There, they devoted themselves to the topic of cultivating a partnership: its possibilities and pitfalls, how to develop a partnership, and what to avoid. Here, in contrast with the initial days in Prague, Czech participants were able to become more familiar with the spirituality and culture of their American partners. Thus, the Partnership Conference opened a new chapter in the relationship between our two churches.

Magda Matulíková ■  
Member of the Ecumenical and International Department  
matulikova@srcce.cz

## ■ Struggle on behalf of the Shelter for Homeless Families in the Southern City District of Prague

It came like a bolt out of the blue. "We have received a notice that we have to vacate the building in three months." Milena Svobodová, the director of the Walking Together Center, brought us this word in November 2008. In 1998, she had approached the congregation with a request for help with a social service project. As people from the congregation offered assistance and provided contacts with Dutch sponsors, the work began. A counseling and guidance center (with 1,800 clients annually), a shelter for homeless families with 65 places (22 apartments, the second largest in Prague and the only one that offers assistance to larger families) and a program designed to reintegrate families into society was established in Prague's Southern City District.

The congregation demonstrated its affinity for the work of this center by building the new Church of Milíč of Kroměříž in close proximity to the homeless shelter in 2003-06. Thus, an internally- and externally- connected network of material and spiritual assistance – which linked worship and diaconal service – arose. It came into being with significant support from, and the careful attention of, many Christians from all over the world.

A working group called SOS-azyl sprang up in support of the shelter, and an unprecedented surge of solidarity began. Around 7,000 people from throughout the Czech Republic signed a petition calling for the Walking Together Center to be preserved, and several demonstrations took place. Authorities from three ministries of the Czech government also called the closure of the shelter a mistake. The ECCB's Synodal Council was also actively involved in the negotiations. Dozens of partners from other countries – individuals, congregations, and representatives of churches and other organizations – expressed their support. In a letter to the mayor, Dr. Johannes Friedrich, the bishop of the Protestant Church in the region of Bavaria, wrote: "The city's decision against a project initiated by a concerned citizen and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, which has found strong support among partner churches in other countries and only serves the social well-being of that part of the city of Prague, is incomprehensible to us." The German ambassador also met with the mayor of Prague regarding the Walking Together Center.

The council members of Prague 11 are sitting tight. Their adversarial stance – not only toward the shelter for homeless families, but also toward the church – and their manner of speaking are suggestive of the anti-church methods used by communist officials in the past. For example, at one of the meetings, the mayor of Prague 11 threatened that the city hall could forbid the congregation to use the walkway to the church and the adjacent parking lot if we did not stop bothering them.

Hundreds of people have passed through the homeless shelter. Often, it has been their last hope for, and image of, a new chance. The center is to be closed because of the city hall's preposterous decision. However, the activity of the Walking Together Center has not completely ceased. Its office is moving to quarters in the director's home; the program of social reintegration will continue in the field. Since the middle of March, the counseling center has been continuing at the church, where we have opened up lounge to it. The city of Prague is talking about renting the center some apartments designed for people in need.

We are grateful for all of the support: letters, messages, telephone calls, and prayers. We know that we are not fighting alone. The struggle on behalf of the shelter for homeless families has cost us a lot of time and energy, thanks to which the congrega-

tion has united and has found new momentum for its work. We have lost a beautiful and functional space for our work on behalf of people at the margins of society, but we want to continue that, even if our program will look different than it has up to now. With God's help.

Michal Šourek ■

Pastor of the ECCB congregation in Prague's Southern City  
Jizni-mesto@evangnet.cz

*(Since this article was written, negotiations with Prague's city hall and Czech governmental institutions have continued, and are still going on.)*

## ■ Jiří Otter's 90th Birthday



Jiří Otter

On July 31, ThDr. Jiří Otter will be ninety years old. However, his brisk level of activity is not finished yet. Dr. Otter comes from Plzeň, where, during the Second World War, he, as a student, and his father, as a pastor, were arrested in May 1944 and held in Nazi prisons until the end of the war. Immediately after the war, he began to study theology in Prague, and later, in Dublin, Ireland. After that, he worked as a pastor in Mariánské Lázně, as the moderator of the Presbytery of Western Bohemia, and as the General Secretary of the Central Church Offices in Prague. Upon retirement, he began to tirelessly publish articles, brochures, and books. In his books, he has focused on three areas: bible studies; the popularization of the history of the Czech Reformation and its landmarks in Prague (in Czech, German, and English), and reconciliation and mutual understanding between Czechs and Germans. The titles of those publications are telling: *The Lot of the Czech-German Region in Light of its Shared History*; *Czechs in the Embrace of Germans*; and *Czechs and German Together As Well*.

Dr. Otter lost his wife less than two years ago. His son is a pastor in Hradec Králové, and his daughter and her family live near her father. However, Jiří Otter remains independent and is incessantly productive. The Lord God has blessed him, and is blessing many through him.

Blahoslav Hájek ■

ECCB Minister  
blahajek@volny.cz

## ■ ***Behind the Bars and Wires: From a Slightly Different Perspective***

This is the title of a little book by Jiří Otter, which was issued by the Kalich publishing house and whose German edition we are anticipating this June. In its introductory section, we read that the book deals with "the story of a young prisoner at the time of the Nazi protectorate and the Second World War, who learned to embrace his fate by means of biblical faith."

During the war, this twenty-five year old student of theology kept a daily journal, which he has now developed into a commemorative volume. In May, 1944, the Gestapo apprehended Jiří and his father, Ebenezer Otter, in the steeple of their church. They were then held in German concentration camps in Bavaria until the end of the war when American troops liberated the prison in Aichach.

Jiří Otter has dedicated the slim book to his deceased wife, Zdenka, and has divided it into six chronological parts. Short, individual chapters – that are almost like "feature stories" – are incorporated into the

larger sections. The scope of the book is quite manageable; its sections are very readable; each chapter has been provided with a fitting title; and almost all of them can be read independently. In the chapter entitled "A Strange Night-time Occurrence as an Omen of an Impending Evil Outcome," the author recounts a story in which upon returning home late at night, he forced his way into his house through a darkened window, in the erroneous assumption that the Gestapo was already at the door of the cordoned-off apartment. This anecdote bears witness to the author's sensitivity, and demonstrates his ability to understand and describe subconscious human premonitions.

In an introductory word, the admirably vital Jiří Otter – who will be ninety years old this summer – modestly describes his latest quality publication as "a very simple elaboration of my daily journals."

Ivana Benešová ■  
Press Spokeswoman  
ivana.benesova@srcce.cz

## ■ ■ ■ ■ News from the Diaconia ■ ■ ■ ■

### ■ **The Diaconia and the Church Begin New Joint Projects**

Since 1989, the Diaconia of the ECCB has been able to develop a number of traditional social services. However, in addition to these, there are programs that do not consist of establishing new centers, but of involving volunteers from within the ranks of the church. Included among these projects is care for immigrants, humanitarian assistance during natural or industrial disasters, and the battle against various forms of violence. The development of such programs may contribute significantly to the elimination of social injustice or, to be more precise, to the amelioration of the suffering of many people.

The ECCB's Diaconia wants to develop these programs in co-operation with ECCB congregations because an important spiritual context and human resources for resolving particular problems are now being recognized within the congregations. Such programs contribute significantly to connecting the "institutional Diaconia" with ECCB congregations. Thus, an appropriate setting for developing other diaconal programs is springing up. In addition to specific acts of assistance and support by individual church members, these projects may simultaneously contribute to the growth of social sensitivity within the church, beginning with children and youth by means of Sunday School programs, for example.

#### **Assistance during natural and industrial disasters**

The ECCB's system of humanitarian assistance during natural and industrial disasters is an example of a project that is working well. This grew out of the experience that the ECCB acquired during floods in 2002 and 2006, when the church sent hundreds of volunteers into the field to give direct aid to flood victims by removing the results of material damage and by offering psychosocial care. Following these experiences, a concept of humanitarian aid was developed, and a practical organizational structure was established, which makes it possible to tap into both the material and the human resources of



*Training Volunteers for cases of unexpected natural or other types of disasters*

the ECCB's diaconal centers and congregations.

In the event of a natural or industrial disaster, the priority is for volunteers to assist individuals, and to especially focus on people who are placed at a disadvantage by virtue of their state of health, age, or social status. The volunteers' work mainly consists of helping clean up the damage by getting rid of ruined things, cleaning and repairing living quarters, and, if need be, saving brickwork and dehumidifying residences. Volunteers may also be sent to help in cases where it is necessary to preserve landmarks and other cultural valuables or to protect the environment. Experienced team leaders organize the work, and volunteers – who are well-prepared and have been fully-trained for this difficult, and often hazardous service – work on these teams.


#### **Children on the Road to Jericho**

An entirely different example of the cooperation of the ECCB's Diaconia and its mother church is a program called "Children on the Road to Jericho," which is in the process of being developed. This project gets its inspiration from the story of the Good Samaritan, who recognized his neighbor in distress beside of the road and responded appropriately. This program will be directed toward children and youth. It should bolster their social sensitivity and their ability to respond to situations that they will encounter during their lifetimes. At the same time, it may contribute to an increased interest in the field of social work, and prepare young people for involvement in diaconal work within their congregation or even as a future career. This is one of the Diaconia's opportunities to enlist future co-workers from within the ranks of the church.

A team will be formed from the ranks of pastors, teachers, graphic artists, computer experts, and other people who design educational programs for children in Sunday Schools. A teaching method will be proposed, and teaching aids – for example, manuals for Sunday School teachers, video programs, computer games, and competitions – will be produced. The ECCB's Diaconia is looking for the right person to coordinate these activities. That person will also be in charge of searching for accessible materials from partner churches in other countries, so that existing experience can be utilized and suitable teaching aids, which are already in use, can be translated.

#### **The ECCB against Violence**

Another project, which is in the making (although the Diaconia already has had a number of experiences in the area), is "The ECCB Against Violence." Among other things, the ECCB's Diaconia operates various counseling centers, shelters for women and children, and halfway houses for teenagers from socially-deprived settings. In its



profession, the Diaconia sometimes encounters victims of violence or signs that are closely associated with violence. These involve various forms of domestic violence, violence against senior citizens, and the sexual violation of women and children. Thus, its workers are already dealing with the topic of violence in individual projects. The ECCB's Diaconia has also participated in a church commission dealing with human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women and children along the Czech-German border. However, in spite of these specific activities, the topic of violence has not yet been dealt with systematically. Therefore, the Diaconia welcomed the fact that in 2008, the Synod of the ECCB adopted a resolution to develop activities to help in the areas of violence against women and children that are related to human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Our goal is the implementation of systematic work on the issue of "violence." We want to set up a network of diaconal centers, ECCB congregations, and cooperating organizations that can help victims of violence in a professional way. However, in addition to that, it is necessary to establish a circle of helpers who are equipped to assist victims of violence on a personal level. With the help of training programs and various educational materials, these people may acquaint the members of congregations and the broader public with the signs of various forms of violence, so that these can be recognized and responded to with professional and non-professional types of help. In this process, the main emphasis will be placed on supportive activities that may take place right where the violence is happening and where it may be possible to reach the victims. A similar approach was used, and worked well, when the Diaconia's work with immigrants was being started.

In 2008, the ECCB's Diaconia was also engaged in developing an international project that will draw upon children's experiences with violence. The users of services, workers at the Diaconia's centers and headquarters, and partner organizations in other countries are to be involved in this project. They hope to have children between the ages of twelve and sixteen describe their personal experiences with violence. In conjunction with various specialists, they will also look for methods of stamping out violence. Part of the project will be an advertising campaign about the elimination of some expressions of violence. The outcomes of this project will be an important source of information about the direction of additional activities within the context of the ECCB's systematic approach to the topic of violence.

#### **Assistance to Orphans and Widows in Ethiopia**

An entirely new area of cooperation between the Diaconia and the ECCB is represented by their joint participation in developing programs in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia. This project involves assisting orphans and widows who are victims of the Aids pandemic. In this one African country alone, there are almost 750,000 orphans whose parents have died of this horrible disease. The ECCB's Diaconia has established contact with Protestant Churches in Ethiopia and with international partners, and is developing several, rather small, projects to help. We will provide more details about these developing projects in some of the next issues of the Czech Protestant News.

Pavel Vychopen ■

Coordinator of International Relationships for the ECCB's

Diaconia

vychopen@diakoniecce.cz



## **News from the Faculty**



### **■ Changes in the Study Programs at the Protestant Theological Faculty**

In recent years, a number of changes have taken place in the scope of the study programs offered at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague. Some new programs have been launched, while some of the older courses of study have been modified to bring them into line with what is known as the "Bologna process." This attempt to introduce a more standardized system of higher education throughout Europe should make it easier for students to move from one country to another and for degrees from different countries to be recognized. Below is a brief overview of all of the study programs that are currently being offered at PTF and of the ones that are being planned for the near future.

#### **Protestant Theology**

For many years, this was the only course of study offered at PTF, and it is still seen as being the "classic" degree program. In keeping with the Bologna Process, the original five-year program was divided into a three-year bachelor's program and a two-year master's program in 2008-09. The bachelor's program provides a basic grounding in the classical theological disciplines: biblical studies, systematic and practical theology, church history, ethics, philosophy, the comparative study of religions, and biblical languages. The master's program offers the opportunity to deepen this knowledge, to engage in more specialized study, and to carry out research. The Protestant Theology program is primarily designed to prepare candidates for church ministry, although some graduates work in other fields that require a background in the Humanities. It is possible for students to finish their studies after receiving a bachelor's degree. However, in order to be considered for the ordained ministry, a master's degree must also be completed.

#### **Pastoral Care and Social Work**

PTF offers this three-year bachelor's program in conjunction with the Catholic JABOK Institute and the Evangelical Theological Seminary. This course of study provides theoretical and practical training in social work from a Christian perspective. Many graduates from this program go on to work in church social work organizations, such as the Diaconie (Diaconia) or Charita (Caritas). Plans are underway to begin a two-year master's program in 2009-10. This course of study will focus on areas such as social work administration, academic research, and social work in multi-cultural and multi-religious settings. The master's program will be offered in both Czech and English. The English course of study will be part of a master's program entitled the Diaconia and Christian Social Practice, which is currently being prepared by a consortium of nine European universities from five different countries.

#### **Theology of Christian Traditions**

This three-year bachelor's program is intended for students who are studying a different subject or are already working. While these students do not plan to engage in full-time ministry, they are interested in theology or want to bring a theologically-informed approach to their professional work. Courses are taught in the evening and are ecumenically-oriented, examining classical theological disciplines – such as biblical studies, church history, dogmatics, and liturgy – from the perspectives of different Christian traditions. In 2009-10, a two-year master's program will be launched, in which graduates of the bachelor's program will be able to take their ecumenical studies further, so that they can prepare for work in the field of Ecumenism.

#### **Post-graduate doctoral studies**

In line with Charles University's goal to become a leading academic research center, the number of doctoral students at PTF has increased considerably in recent years. Currently, around 70 of PTF's



550 students are engaged in post-graduate research in biblical theology, historical theology and the theology of religions, systematic and practical theology, or philosophy. While these students' main emphasis is on writing their dissertations, they are also expected to meet a number of other requirements, such as publishing, attending colloquia, and presenting papers.

#### Short-Term Studies

This program is taught in English, and is primarily intended for exchange students who are, or have been, studying theology in other countries. These students come to Prague for a semester or a year before returning to complete their studies at their home university.

Peter Stephens  
Office for International Relations  
intl@etf.cuni.cz

Jindřich Halama  
Vice-Dean for Study Matters  
halama@etf.cuni.cz

### Protestant Theological Faculty Celebrates its 90th Anniversary

This year marks the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Protestant Theological Faculty. The Faculty will commemorate this occasion on November 19-22, 2009 with a conference that will focus on the theme of "Hermeneutics of the Christian, and in particular of the Protestant, Tradition in the Cultural History of Europe."

#### LODGING AT ECCB FACILITIES

If you are planning to visit Prague, you are invited to stay at **Church Pension Prague – Hus House**

Address: Jungmannova 9, CZ – 110 00 Prague 1

Web: <http://www.churchpension.cz>

E-mail: [churchpension@srcce.cz](mailto:churchpension@srcce.cz)

Tel.: +420 296 245 432, mobile phone: +420 603 554 785

In the Krkonoše Mountains, you will find accommodation at

**Horský domov – Herlíkovice**

Address: CZ – 543 52 Strážné 157

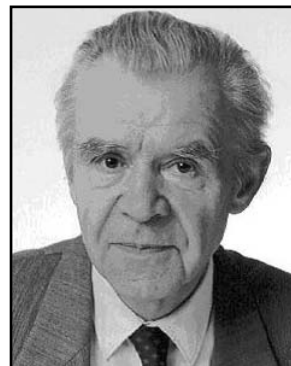
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E-mail reception: [hdrecepce@quick.cz](mailto:hdrecepce@quick.cz)

Tel.: +420 499 434 300, mobile phone: +420 604 434 300

### Professor Josef Smolík (1922-2009)

Prof. ThDr. Josef Smolik, Dr. h.c., D.D. h.c., STM, Professor Emeritus and former Dean of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague, died on Wednesday, February 4, 2009, at nearly 87 years of age. Professor Smolík was born in Jičín, Czechoslovakia. During the Second World War, he secretly studied theology, and served as a deacon of the Rokycany congregation of the ECCB. Later, he served as a vicar in Pardubice and



Josef Smolík

Prague. He also studied for a year at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. In 1949, he was ordained as the pastor of the ECCB congregation in Pardubice, and from 1962-66, he served as the pastor of the Salvator Church in Prague. In 1950, he was granted tenure, and received the rank of Associate Professor of Practical Theology at what was then known as the Hus Theological Faculty. In 1966, he received the rank of Full Professor and assumed a full-time teaching position at the Protestant Theological Faculty, where he was active until his retirement in 1997. Beginning in 1978, he served five terms as the Dean of the Faculty. He was elected Dean for the last time in 1990, and played an important role in the Faculty's incorporation into Charles University. He was granted honorary doctorates at theological faculties in Bratislava and Budapest, and in 1980-81, he was a visiting professor at the University of Erlangen. Professor Smolík was the author of a number of monographs, and composed textbooks for each of the separate disciplines in his area of expertise. He initiated and conducted extensive team projects, such as the preparation of liturgical manuals and homiletical treatises on biblical pericopes. Throughout his life, Professor Smolík was intensely engaged in concrete service to the church and in inter-church cooperation. He held a number of important posts in ecumenical organizations, including membership on the Central Committee and the Commission for Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and the Presidency of the Unity of Constance. He also systematically devoted himself to scholarly and edifying publications.

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### CZECH PROTESTANT NEWS

#### Editorial Staff:

Ivana Benešová, Oliver Engelhardt, Blahoslav Hájek, Daniela Hamrová, Joyce Michael, Peter Stephens, Constance Šimonovská, Pavel Vychopeň

**Coordinators:** Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus, Magda Matulíková

This newsletter is produced by The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB); The Diaconia of the ECCB; The Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University

**Contact through:** ECCB

P. O. Box 466, Jungmannova 9, CZ 111 21 Praha 1, Czech Republic

Tel.: (+ 420) 224 999 217(16), Fax: (+420) 224 999 219

[ekumena@srcce.cz](mailto:ekumena@srcce.cz)

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