

--- Policka Press ---

Information and thoughts from the Czech Republic

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February was a busy month, jam packed with events. February also saw two anniversaries: our 7th month in the Czech Republic and 1 year of marriage!

www.czechtheline.blogspot.com

English Programs

As many of you know, Jan has left for three months to study and work with the Protestant church in Mexico and Cuba. We hope that he is having a wonderful time enjoying the sun, indulging in some below-the-border spices and practicing his Spanish. Still, I am not so sure that his schedule was as exciting as ours was in February.

From Jan leaving, to the 80's Fitness Dance Party, to Mardi Gras, to Cesky Krumlov, to the Pokec to the movie night, and even to the snow, this month was constantly in motion. It was so much fun, yet a lot of work. And, as the spring birds are chirping from their nests, March has been a refreshing change.

I would be remiss, however, if I was negligent in giving you a quick rundown of what just occurred. As much as my mind is enraptured with the rains and flowers of spring, I know that I must reflect on the winds and white of winter.

Our first major event was the Filmovy Vecer, which I have about every two months. This program is a carry-over from one that Kati started and I enjoy it very much. I have shown three movies so far, and each one of them was well attended. Even this past movie, which happened to be on a night when much snow was falling, managed to attract 10 people.

The film I chose was *Smoke Signals*, which is the first movie written, directed and acted by Native Americans. The story is quite powerful in that it is a journey into the relationship between fathers and sons and begs the question of forgiveness. Many of the Czechs who came found it powerful and touching; it left such an impression that some could not believe the program was free. I told them that I don't take money for my movies and at that, they were completely flabbergasted. Yet they were persistent, so Anna and I took their money as a donation to the Church. Their willingness to give, is a tangible example of how these programs DO matter to Policka and how this church is creative in its ministry to the Czech people.

Next on the list, was our much anticipated "80's Fitness Dance Party." When Jamie and I thought of the idea, we had no clue how it would be received. You see, the major crux was that we were going to exercise, as a group, while watching Richard Simmons' *Sweatin' to the Oldies*. I know that if we were to have this idea in the United States people would love it and laugh; however, it was hard to gauge whether the kids would find the idea humorous or down-right strange, as humor is a notoriously bad partner in cross-cultural experiences.

Our nerves were soothed when we heard from some of the high school students that they heard about it in school: it seems that many of our friends were talking about it,

and people were looking forward to the event. The party was gaining some traction in the steam-rolling effect, where their friends and boyfriends wanted to attend. It was a relief. Maybe it was the music? Maybe it was the clothing? Or, maybe it was RICHARD SIMMONS!?

The party was a complete success from the standpoint of entertainment, costumes, and attendance; Jamie and I would have liked if more confirmation class youths showed, but 18 high school students is not bad! We had a hula-hoop contest, a dance contest and, of course, a costume show. The most creative costume wearers got to take home their very own “Best of the 80s dance music CD” compiled by Jamie and me. Who could ask for a better gift?!

Our last MAJOR program was Mardi Gras. For the past four months, Jamie and I have been planning this party, as we hoped it would be the EXTREME spring event. And in truth, we didn’t get as many students as we would have hoped for. It seems that having the 80’s Fitness Party just one week before was a little taxing on some of the youth: they didn’t want to dress up. However, those that did come had a spectacular time.

We have posted on our blog about this event, so if you want to read more in-depth then check there. Just know that the party was the best decorated party EVER (no offense to Kati and the Halloween Parties). There was color everywhere: fantastic Dixieland Jazz, beads, glittering things hanging from the ceiling, big posters of random cactuses and palm trees, pink flamingos, green monkeys, a cascade of gold and even the first piñata in Policka history.

It was truly a feast for the eyes. Jamie did such an amazing job. Next year, we believe that this party will garner a reputation, because the 12 students who came, were overwhelmed with the “coolness.”

Thank you to Ashley, Paula and our families, because there is no way we would have made this a success with out you.

Please enjoy the pictures that we have attached: the latest Pokec, the 80s Dance party and Mardi Gras.



Ministry news and notes

Since Jan has left, Jamie and I have taken up some responsibilities that were not a part of our every-day work in the Fall. One that has been the most rewarding for the both of us, has been leading the confirmation class.

Comprised of a bunch of young teenagers, the class itself can sometimes be a handful to control. I must admit that I was a little bit skeptical of their ability to respect and listen to Jamie and me, especially since some of them choose to misunderstand English when they are being scolded or disciplined. However, three weeks have gone past and we are beginning to feel confident about this opportunity.

For one, planning Biblical lessons and thinking of exciting games gets us back into a form of the “counselor” mentality that we both had acquired from working at Pine Springs; we really enjoy engaging youth by making them think and ask questions about their faith. Also, I can’t help but reminisce back to the times with the Waynesburg First Presbyterian, where I got connected and had relationships with many of the young high school students in the community. I recall the youth group as the first real instance where I felt accepted into the church.

The kids would invite me to their parties, to their sporting events, trips and even to their dances. I got take them out to lunch and play sports with them; it was a fantastic time. And now, I feel some of that coming back.. Of course, it will be more difficult, because there are language and cultural barriers that must be accounted for, but I am hopeful that these three months will be an excellent foundation for our relationship going into next year.

Our first lesson was a page right out of the “team building handbook” (if you counseled or worked at any camp, you know this). Jamie and I put the whole class into situations where their regular communication would be impaired. Sometimes the kids were not able to talk , and in other instances, they could not see. The main thrust of the program was to encourage them to accomplish a goal as a unit; however, with the added handicaps of communication, this goal is

normally very difficult. These types of situations are excellent for evaluating the make up of a group: some of the kids are leaders, some of the other youth are doers, and inevitably, some are bullies.

Many of the “confirmants” got into the events and did a fairly decent job of accomplishing the goal at hand. Jamie and I tied this theme in with the idea of communicating. We told them that since Jan is gone, communication can be strained for all of us. Sometimes, people will want to give up (like in the activities), or on the other hand, the difficulty in communication will be the catalyst for more focused attention. I left it up to the class to chose what type of people they would be.

Just this past week was the first time that Jamie and I really challenged them with a Biblical message. It felt really good talking about faith on such an open level, because most of our conversations about faith, outside of the church, can be emotionally strained; Czechs don’t like to talk about it. Yet, these kids are here to delve into the Bible, so we took up the opportunity.

The lesson that we prepared was really two pronged: we wanted to challenge their notions of Christianity and we wanted to debase uneducated judgments. To do this, we need a bunch of pictures.

Jamie and I collected about 100 images of anything we could think of: guitars, cars, dancers, clothing, people, nature, pottery, art, sports, etc. then, we decided to mix in about 20 images of typical Christian symbols: Crosses, Bibles, Nuns, Priests, older people, Mother Teresa, etc. We then split the kids into groups of two and asked them to do one thing: put all the “non-Christian” images into a pile and place all the “Christian” images into another.

Just as I expected, many of the groups were done in about 5 minutes., even though each of them had about 25 images to look at. They quickly took all the pictures of nuns and crosses and placed them into the Christian pile, and proceeded to place anything “cool” into the non-Christian. I then asked them to tell me why.

After their reasoning for placing the images where they did, I gave them a surprise by telling them that each picture should be placed in the Christian pile. The kids were shocked; they couldn't believe it was true.

We told them that when we judge Christians as being old or irrelevant, we effectively put ourselves in boxes. Of course young teenagers are going to think getting a tattoo is cooler than reading the Bible. But, what happens if the tattoo artist is a Christian and HE reads the Bible as well? What happens when the break dancer or the band leaders are Christians? Why can't Christians be rock climbers? Painters? Sculptors? Fashion Designers? Jewelers? Actors? Models?

The pressure to think of anything Christian as "lame" or "weird" is so strong in this culture. Jamie and I just wanted to show them that Christian people are able to be the most driven, creative and passionate in the world, as our power comes through Christ and our vision is altered by his coming Kingdom. Sometimes the most radically interesting people in this world are those who go to church every Sunday, not the man in the rap videos writing lyrics to make money.

Also, Jamie and I are using the high school students to give some of the Biblical lessons for the confirmation class. We feel that this is an excellent way to get the older students involved. Just think, how powerful could it be for the middle school students to see the 17 and 18 year olds sharing their beliefs?

We kindly remind you about the pledge letters that we sent in January. We request any pledges to be sent to the church by March 31st. Thank you.