

A Question of Partnership

Text and Photos by Jim Nedelka

(except where noted)

Special to the Presbyterian News Service

Part I - Communion with Husův Dům

HVOZDNICE, CZECH REPUBLIC, Sunday, October 19, 2008: My wife, Holly, and I have found our way this morning to Husův Dům – literally, *House of Hus* or Jan Hus Church, a member congregation of Českobratrská církev evangelická, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB).



Inscription over the church front door in Hvozdnice

Husův Dům is tucked just inside the northern border of this small Bohemian village, a relatively short drive to the southwest from the capital city, Prague. The roomy-yet-intimate Sanctuary shares the ground floor of the three-story church building with the Pastor's office and a kitchen/meeting room. Immediately upstairs is the pastor's apartment; climb one more flight, pass several colorful stacks of cloth-covered mats and slide open the door to reveal another comfortable open space. On Wednesdays, it is home to a moms-and-toddlers playgroup; when visiting church groups sleep over, they simply park the toy trains on a siding, put the dollies on a shelf and spread out the mats.



Call to Worship

This particular morning at Husův Dům is Thanksgiving Sunday, akin to Reformation Sunday in the PC(USA); the Eucharist is to be celebrated. For these dedicated worshippers – small of number yet large of heart – there is an extra special reason for giving thanks: two Americans representing Jan Hus Church in New York City are worshipping with them. Later, we will break bread together while discussing the possibilities of a potential church-to-church partnership, part of the hoped-for result of the ECCB - PC(USA) PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE '08.

But first, it is time to break bread in remembrance of Jesus, and Vendula Kalusová, standing at the communion table in her black robe and white-lace prayer tabs, begins. She is Husův Dům's pastor. As is the custom of the ECCB, the clergy title of Reverend is not used; she is simply "Vendula."

While the Words of Institution are familiar to Holly and me, the language is not.

As if scripted by Czech poet and playwright Václav Havel, at the moment the consecration begins the sun's rays break more brilliantly over the low buildings across the street and shine in through the trees. It dances off DaVinci's *Last Supper*, the silvery bas relief embedded in the preaching lectern on the communion table and glints off the silver and gold chalice, racing around the cup's hand-etched scrollwork and playing on the walls.



Invitation to Share the Bread and Cup

Vendula personally conveys the Bread of Life to each congregant.

Then, it is time for the Cup of Salvation.

With the Spirit definitely present in this sunlit white room, Vendula continues a practice begun some 600 years ago by Reform Movement pioneer Jan Hus at Prague's Svatý Martin ve zdi (Church of St. Martin-in-the-Wall): *inviting the congregants to share both the Bread and the Cup during Holy Communion.*

Until Hus, a 15th-Century Roman Catholic priest and educator influenced by the progressive writings of John Wycliffe, only the Body of Christ was shared during communion. Hus' key "radical notion" was his belief that the Eucharist was incomplete without the sharing of the Cup. Additionally, Hus believed the Bible should be available in a people's native tongue, decrying the Roman Church's edict, which made it a capital offense to possess the Bible in any language other than Latin.

Hus outraged Rome's hierarchy, ultimately leading to his excommunication and execution as a heretic on July 6, 1415. Studies by the Bible Museum suggest that Hus' last statements included the prediction: "in a hundred years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed." 102 years later, in 1517, Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses of Contention* to that Wittenberg church door.

Ironically, in the Czech Republic - a country where a high percentage of the population considers itself to be "non-religious" or "atheist" and where the overwhelmingly dominant Christian denomination is the Roman Catholic Church – Protestant religious leaders and symbols adorn their paper money; July 6th is the festive Jan Hus National Holiday.

Today, the Cup is an ECCB sacred symbol, prominently featured on denominational seals. Often, the Cup occupies that honored place in the Sanctuary usually reserved for the Cross.



**The Cup adorning
the chancel wall
of Svatý Martin ve zdi**

