

--- Policka Press ---

Information and thoughts from the Czech Republic

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Issue 4 Dec. 10, 2008



Classes

Our first snowfall came and blanketed the streets and fields with white. It was really beautiful. The whole countryside would sparkle when the moon light would reflect off of the millions of snow flakes. The trees seemed to just grab the snow as it came falling out of the sky and the limbs bent under the weight. I loved it. However, just as quickly as it came, the snow was gone within a week. Green and brown now dominate the landscape, and one would be hard pressed to see the remnants of the first snowfall.

In parallel fashion to the melting snow, November was fleeting. I remember writing in the last newsletter that the month of October flew past. Well, it is the same story for November. Idleness is what makes time creep along, but everyday Jamie and I are planning classes, engaging in new social settings and stretching our comfort zones. So, there is never really a minute to be physically or mentally idle, and this is what makes months feel like weeks and weeks feel like days.

Jamie and I have entered our 10th week of class. We have had some frustrations, but for the most part, it is business as usual every week: we plan classes in the morning, teach in the afternoon and participate in choir and band at night. We are continuing to receive new students, which is a great sign for our program. The more people hearing about our lessons, the more people who are entering the Church.

This month saw a movie night for children and a shopping trip to Brno.

The movie night was held on a Friday evening, which was a really poor decision on our part. Not many people came to it, because we had planned the timing very poorly; many people do not come to events on Friday night. Yet, we still did have an audience of about 7 and watched Disney's *A Sword in the Stone*. Jamie and I thought that it would be good for the Czechs to see a Disney movie that was made before the "international" Disney corporation of today. I think that many enjoyed the animation, but today's children need more action and speed. Sadly, Disney's fairytales can hold nothing on *Finding Nemo*.

At the beginning of November, Jamie and I were batting around ideas about how to engage and relate to the teenage girls that are in the church. As many of you know, this is not an easy task. For Jamie, it is very difficult, because even when she was a teenager, it was hard for her to relate to her peers. And now, she is a married, 23 year old who doesn't listen to hip-hop; therefore, she is really LAME. So, we came up with the idea to take the girls to the big mall in Brno; they could shop, cruise for "cute" guys and try on really expensive dresses. About four girls went and it was a complete success. If you want to know more, please check out the blog, because Jamie wrote about the excursion there.

In our classes, Jamie and I talked about Thanksgiving. Jamie went around the room and asked the children to draw turkeys and then express what they are thankful for. Of course, they said their family, but family was often the second choice. What came first was quite shocking: cell phones, Mp3 players, hair irons and computers.

Disappointing, but maybe it wasn't so surprising after all.

With the adults, I wanted them to think more deeply about the Thanksgiving holiday. We talked a lot about the fact that Thanksgiving can be a celebration in remembrance of immigration: new people, natives and hardship. We did not get into the rosy view of Thanksgiving about natives and Puritans coming together in brotherhood; instead, we talked about how the Czech Republic deals with immigrants and the clash of differing cultures. I don't think Czechs think about this much, in regards to their own nation, so we had some pretty thought-provoking conversations.

December is already here and Christmas is fast approaching. Be sure to check up with our blog regularly, because I think we might have some surprises in store for you about the Czech traditions around this time of year; it should be great!

Additionally, Jamie and I are already preparing for some spring activities: Mardi Gras party, cultural presentation, "fancy" party. We will need supplies for the Mardi Gras celebration, so if you have any green, gold and purple lying around, send it!

Culture

One day I decided to walk over to the Policka library to do some studying. I wanted to work on my Czech, and being in the apartment was especially stifling that day, so I used this opportunity to experience a Czech library for the first time. Nothing was really unusual upon entering: there were some people sitting at desks, children looking through some video games and stacks of many books. I asked the woman where the Czech language books were and she directed me to the back. I found one, sat down and began to look over grammar and vocabulary. Twenty minutes into my study, I was distracted by music.

Of course it is unusual to hear music playing in a library, but sure enough, there was music blaring through one of the speakers in the ceiling. I thought that it might be a cultural thing; you know, maybe Czechs don't follow the social etiquette of being quiet. So I pushed on, trying to block the extraneous sounds coming from above. However, five minutes later, I was again distracted from my studies, but this time, by something far worse.

In the middle of going over Czech vocabulary for the supermarket, I was shocked when I heard the most vulgar, explicit and crude English. The song had changed and now the radio was broadcasting ballad that took the pleasure of explaining, through its

lyrics, the art of sexually pleasing a women, while at the same time, degrading her humanity. Now, I can understand playing classical music when studying, but this was just horrendous. No one seemed to care, but I was completely unable to concentrate. Then I realized, no one else really understood.

For about three minutes I wrestled with the idea of whether I should go up to the librarian and tell her to change the station or turn it off, but I felt that this would have been a fruitless undertaking, as she would probably misunderstand my broken Czech and be horribly offended. However, it was shocking to me that the library was willingly playing such music. So, I debated and sat in disbelief. I did nothing.

This is not an unusual occurrence here. Many times the young school children and teenagers buy into the pop culture that is exported from the United States; they wear the clothing styles, the hats, the jewelry and listen to the music. It is just as easy to see a hip-hopper wearing timberland boots and an Atlanta hat, as it is to see an "emo" girl caked in black eye-liner, wearing a *Thursday* hoodie.

These kids know that they are defining themselves by the style of clothing they buy and the logo that they plaster on their chest. They want to represent a culture and fit in with a group. However, how shallow is it to define yourself by a culture that you do not understand at all?

The United States runs on capitalism and the American consumer is almost as powerful an economic force as the World Bank. Often times, I hear the U.S. lambasted as a nation rooted in superficial facades and ignorant materialism. Yet, is it any different here? We can just as easily criticize the in-ward looking American consumer as being oblivious to the world around them, but an uncritical Czech consumer is doing the same thing. When a girl wears a shirt that proclaims, "I love b****s," because it was cute, is that ok?

I think that these experiences would be found in any country on the earth. Maybe it does come back to a spiritual issue. Just like in the United States, some people here have chosen to define themselves not by a deeply-held conviction or a faith, but by the type of car they drive and the stores they shop in. People need to feel a part of something; sadly, it is misplaced.

We as a Church, need to think creatively about how to engage this international trend. People are looking for purpose and we need to know how to speak to it. Jamie and I want these kids to see that Christ has more to offer them than some band

from America. It will be a challenge and we need some good ideas. So, please be praying for the ministry.

Ministry news and notes

Life in the church is gearing up for Christmas, and Jamie and I have been busier than ever. This month, we will have a Pocec (concert with the Church Band), a Christmas Play, a family Sunday (with lunch), a youth retreat, a live nativity scene and multiple Christmas services.

We are hoping that these church activities, along with our English programming, will show the people in the community that this is an active and lively congregation. The more we can be seen in the community, the more Jamie, Jan and I will work to break down mental and physical barriers between the church and the regular people.

One sign of this progress is by looking at the amount of teenagers that are coming to this church on a regular basis. I have two high school-aged classes that are full and a band that is comprised mainly of teenage students. Each Sunday there are groups of them who come with parents and WITHOUT parents. This weekend we will be headed to a youth retreat and we will be bringing 14 students, which most likely will be the most out of any Church congregation in our county. And, when young people are involved, it is usually a healthy sign.

Just this morning, Jamie and I were eating breakfast and we noticed a picture of Jamie in the local newspaper. Next to the picture was a little article, written by a mother of one of the students. The woman wanted to thank us for our work with her children and for the fun atmosphere we bring to our classes. She did say that it takes place and the church and she wanted to the town of Policka to know about us and the type of people we are. This has been the third time that we have been in the Policka newspaper since we have been here, which doesn't sound so impressive, until I tell you that there have only been four Policka papers since July. Three out of four, that isn't too shabby.



Game night!



Sleepover in the church



Church band playing during worship