

**...BRIDGES... Number 4, 2009: "Cuba Alive!"**

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

A few years ago, John found it to be very meaningful to be asked to translate a letter of support written to let Cuban Christians know that the ECCB is standing in solidarity with them as they live under oppressive conditions. Thus, I was filled with anticipation when I was invited – as part of our partner denomination's ecumenical team – to attend a conference on Cuba that the ECCB helped plan and host in March.

As that event unfolded, I was glad that I had been able to set aside my usual tasks for a couple of days! I found the presentations about political dynamics in South America and Cuba to be a valuable source of information. Likewise, I was thankful that careful descriptions of church life in Cuba were supplemented by a timely report that Jan Dus sent regarding a visit that he recently made to that country during a three-month study leave in Mexico. The conference was further enhanced by guest speakers from Slovakia and Germany, and enlivened by the presence of an immigrant from Cuba who now lives in Brno.

However, the most memorable aspects of the conference were experiential in nature. For instance, an auction of art works designed to raise money for the work with children and youth, which is being carried out by Cuban Protestants, was characterized by much camaraderie, as church friends and work colleagues engaged in amiable competition for delightful pictures by Czech artists, Cuban children, and students at the ECCB'S Brethren School. Different rounds of bidding were well-complemented by the rich and moving sounds of a local group that performs spiritual music from the Congo and Angola. Thus, that evening, extending care felt like a joyful and hopeful act.

The next afternoon, extending care took on deeper tones, as conference participants and supporters received cards describing specific political prisoners who are being held in Cuba, and unfurled white umbrellas to carry in a procession to the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Wall. That act was symbolic of similar walks that are staged by Cuban "women in white" in silent protest against the unjust imprisonment of their husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers. As the names of those prisoners were read during the ecumenical worship service which followed that march, the plight of Cuban advocates for

human rights took on a palpable immediacy, which is such to leave a lasting impression.

Extending care became a practical possibility for me a few days later when a member of our team exclaimed, "I have a sweet task for you! The Synodal Council needs you to translate a letter on behalf of Cuban Christians that they want to give to President Obama when he is here this weekend." A sweet task, indeed! In my wildest dreams, I could never have imagined daring to write a letter to the President of my country. Yet, here I was – helping my Czech colleagues communicate their concern to someone having the potential to make a real difference. Perhaps, as you read their words, you will also take the Synodal Council's plea to heart.

Esteemed Mr. President,

Our Czech Republic, which you have decided to honor with your visit, has now been living in democratic conditions and with full civil liberty for practically twenty years. Since in the past under the rule of the communist party, we experienced oppression, and many Christians were persecuted because of their peaceful struggle for freedom, the fate of our brothers and sisters in Cuba lies on our hearts.

Recently, at an ecumenical worship service in Prague, we remembered the names of fifty-four Cuban activists for human rights, who have been imprisoned under difficult conditions since 2003, and, in some cases, have been sentenced for up to 28 years. Their perseverance and the faithfulness of their "women in white" moves – and obligates – us to get involved.

Please use the new opportunities in American politics, and your influence, to liberate the prisoners of conscious in Cuba, and, together with us, please pray for them.

United in one faith, hope, and love,

The Synodal Council of the ECCB  
March 31, 2009