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Report about my visit to the United States from October 5 until October 27, 2010

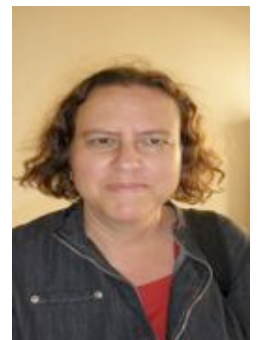
On the invitation of the Czech Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA) I visited from October 10 to October 27, 2010 several congregations in the PC (USA) as well as the Central Office in Louisville to follow up the Partnership Conference between the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB) in October 2008 in Prague.

The roots of the fellowship of Presbyterians in the US and Protestants in the Czech Republic go way back into the 19th century, when several US Czech Presbyterian Congregations were founded by immigrants from Bohemia and Moravia.

A new and dynamic chapter in the relations between the PC (USA) and the ECCB began after the Breakdown of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the year 1989. The new political situation made new ways of fellowship and cooperation possible and so in the year 1995 working groups were formed, a Czech Working Group within the PC (USA) and an American Working Group within the ECCB. In the last years the Czech Working Group within the PC (USA) transformed into a Czech Mission Network, which is today the framework within the PC (USA) for the relations between the two denominations.

The relations between our denominations are very much alive and there are quite a few people and several congregations that are interested in becoming an active part of these relations.

A few weeks before I left Prague for this trip Rev. Dr. Karen Moritz, a mission co-worker from the PC (USA) arrived in Prague to be here for at least three years, working on the relations between our denominations. We are thankful to the PC (USA) and Karen Moritz for this great possibility for sharing human resources in this very special way.



Karen Moritz

Thank you!

Before I start to write about the many encounters with people and the many places to which I travelled, I would like to thank all who have in one way or the other been a part of this wonderful trip. It was an overwhelming experience of hospitality, of preparedness to help in many ways to organize, to care and share, to talk and explain and so often to prepare and share delicious food in a great fellowship around the table. And not only the delicious food, but combined with this fellowship of sisters and brothers in Christ, was such a good experience for me. It was like angels were around me all the time: really everything worked just perfect, the cars and the planes brought me wherever I planned to go and the suitcase was

always at the right place. We always found each other without problems. It was just unbelievable. Thanks so much to all who opened their homes, their hearts, their fellowship, their cars and shared their time. I enjoyed being with all so much.

Prior to my visits in the Presbyterian Church (USA) I was “warming up” for this visit by being with my American family, the Weaver family in Buffalo, N.Y., with whom I lived as an exchange student 40 years ago, in the year 1970-1971, organized by the “International Christian Youth Exchange – IYCE” . During this year we really became a family and good friends and during the 40 years since then we have been organizing many international Encounters between Americans and Germans and then Czechs under the motto “In search of Shalom”.



With Barb & Don Weaver



Because the Weavers are United Methodist Ministers, my visit in Buffalo from October 5 until October 10, 2010, was also a visit to Kenmore United Methodist Church, where I preached in the Sunday worship services and made a presentation in the Adult Class. We also had a Reunion with many people who have been participating in these activities through all the years. The Weavers also invited Presbyterians from Buffalo for a coffee hour, but this invitation was without response.

Visit in Annapolis from Monday, October 11 until October 14, 2010

The First Presbyterian Church in Annapolis

A good way to start my visit in the Presbyterian Church (USA) was a visit to the congregation in Annapolis. This congregation has already been a partner congregation of an ECCB congregation in Letohrad, East Bohemia for 10 years. There is a vivid partnership and a very good formal agreement between Annapolis and Letohrad about the partnership. Almost a hundred people have visited Letohrad and the Czech Republic during this partnership. One shared project is a tutoring program for people who want to practice their English with native speakers, the participants are invited to the church to participate in evening classes and at the same time learn something about the congregations as well as about Christian



We are all one global family

faith in general. The importance of this experience is that people are doing something together. The congregation of Annapolis has a committee, which deals with the partnership and it was great to meet most of the members of this committee. It is sure helpful, that the pastor of the congregation is part of this work and is supportive of this work very much.

It was the congregation in Annapolis, which took the initiative to organize a Partnership conference in the Czech Republic with representatives of seven congregations of PC (USA) and seven congregations of the ECCB.



Betty Mc Ginnis

This conference, in October 2008 in Prague, included the congregations participating in an existing partnership and those interested in joining the partnership between our denominations. It was a very moving experience, which helped the congregations to deepen their understanding of partnership or start one. Now after two years we wanted to evaluate the development and can say, that these partnerships are on their way – some more, some less. Some congregations need some more initiative to get the partnership going. The motor of this partnership was Betty McGinnis, who has been in the Czech Republic after the fall of the Iron Curtain many times, organizing groups and participating in programs like the International Youth Camp of the ECCB, which took place several times in the Krkonoše Mountains. Just before I left to the US, Betty was visiting the Czech Republic with a very motivated group with participants from Annapolis and other congregations.



Charles Hargrove

My visit in Annapolis started with a tour of the Naval Academy with Charles Hargrove who welcomed the guest from the Czech Republic with a Czech flag at the porch of his house. Charles was a pediatrician in the Navy. Since he has retired and is living just around the corner from the Naval Academy he is now a tour guide of the Academy and I could experience his excellent tour.

The Naval Academy is the school for the US Navy officers with 4.400 students, who are preparing for service in the Navy and are involved in a very demanding program during the four years of their studies. After a tour of the Naval Academy and an excellent lunch Charles took me to the center of the city and to the harbor, where they had a big boat show. One of the organizers of the boat show is Ed Skinner, who welcomed us with at the harbor boat house, where we had an excellent view over the harbor – and a good cold beer.



Ed Skinner



With Robert and Gundel

After this tour of the Academy and downtown Annapolis Charles took me to my hosts, Robert and Gundel Bowen, who made me feel very much at home. Gundel is originally from Germany and got to the US as an Au pair a long time ago.

She got to know Robert and just stayed in the US, where they became a family. Now they are retired. We had a lot to share, how it is to live in another country than the home country. How do we communicate? What is difficult and demanding? Once when I got back around midnight, Gundel was prepared to serve a midnight meal. I did enjoy it very much. I was impressed how the two of them live their senior age actively and with a lot of energy.

In the evening of the first day in Annapolis there was a gathering at the manse with delicious food from the grill in the garden and very good salads and other fine things. We had a very nice talk about the partnership between Annapolis and Letohrad, about the situation of the ECCB, the question of reconciliation between Czechs and Germans and also about our plans for the Kirchentag 2011 in Dresden (June 1-5, 2011). We had the idea that it could be very interesting and enriching, if somebody from Annapolis would join a group from Letohrad going to the Kirchentag,



Sharing at the Manse

a huge gathering of about 100 000 Christians from Germany and other countries with worship, discussion, music and many ways of meeting interesting and involved Christians. At the end of this evening I was overwhelmed by listening to so many stories of sharing and growth over all of the borders. I was so thankful for these great possibilities we have as Christians in being one big family of Christ around the globe.

A trip to Cumberland (October 12)

The next day Bill Hatchl took me on about a three hour trip to Cumberland in the very west of the state of Maryland to speak to the congregation about a potential partnership which they hope to develop.

But before we got on our way to Cumberland we stopped at the Presbytery office in Baltimore to talk with the Executive Presbyter of Baltimore Peter Nord. During this talk it was good to hear that the partnership between Annapolis and Letohrad is something which is also well known in the Presbytery. And it was also good to hear that the Presbytery would also very much support a possible partnership in the ECCB with the Presbyterian Church in Cumberland. In our talk I learned more about the structure of the PC (USA), where there are four levels in the structure: the congregations are connected in a presbytery. Several presbyteries



Presbyterian Church in Cumberland

together make a synod. And above the level of the synod is the national level. I understood, that some synods are working very well and other synods are rather weak and do not have much life. The Presbytery is especially important for local churches in the area of personnel questions. When there are changes of ministers for example, then it is mainly the presbytery, in consultation with the local church, which deals with the questions of a new pastor.



Bill Hatchl

After a very good crab cake lunch we got on our way to Cumberland. Starting out in a flat area around Baltimore, we got in a more hilly area getting closer to Cumberland. We have been invited to Cumberland to make a presentation about the ECCB, talk about the possibilities of a partnership and Bill had the task to share the Annapolis partnership experiences. The Presbyterian Church in Cumberland (www.fpc-cumberland.org) just celebrated the 200. anniversary of the congregation the Sunday before our arrival. We were already expected, got a tour of the city of Cumberland and the surroundings before we met for supper with a group of about 30 people, who were interested in the ECCB and the question of partnership. Our presentations were well received and we had an intensive talk about the church here and there and about the chances of partnership. At the end of our meeting there was a small committee formed, which has the task to follow up on the question of partnership. I took with

me the task to find within the ECCB a congregation, which would be interested in a partnership. The congregation in Cumberland is a very active congregation, which has already been supporting a school in India for several years. Cumberland is a town in a rather rural area and the people there are used to the fact, that the people coming to Cumberland do not come by chance, but really want to come there. In the group we met there were two women who have been in the Czech Republic and are very interested in deepening their relations.

Among them was Linda Smith who has a great interest in the ECCB and has been many times with the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic and the Presbytery of Baltimore in the Czech Republic to visit the ECCB and Diakonia projects. She was also with the last group who came to learn more about Czech history, religious life, the ECCB, the culture and get to know the members of ECCB. Linda will chair the partnership team in Cumberland. Just in these days the congregation in Vsetín, Moravia, decided, that they will be happy to be the partner congregation of Cumberland.

Also I met Dr. Joan DeVee Dixon (www.joandeveedixon.com), who is one of the organists in Cumberland and who is teaching music at a college. Joan has been participating in a project called “American Spring”, a festival in the Czech Republic with musicians and lecturers from the US. She gave last year for example a concert in Pardubice. She will again have concerts in the “American Spring 2011” Festival, organized by the International Dvořák society (www.interdvoraksoc.cz). It would be great if one of Joan’s concerts could be in Vsetín on the way to be a partner congregation of Cumberland.



Linda Smith



Joan DeVee Dixon

A day in Washington, D.C. (October 13)

It was a great privilege for me to spend a day in the capitol, in Washington, D.C. Asked, what I would like to do and see there, I mentioned the Holocaust Museum, about which I had read a lot, but never had a chance to see it. Jennifer J. Monteith and Ed Skinner, two members of the partnership committee who took me to Washington were prepared to accompany me there. I must say, that this museum deals with the Holocaust in a very sensitive way helping to understand the historical background and the ways in which the victims of this terrible crime went through their way of suffering. I found it very helpful that I could share my feelings and thoughts with Jennifer and Ed.

After several hours in the Holocaust Museum we went on a long walk at first around the White House and then to the Mall, the long wonderful lawn between the Lincoln Monument and the Capitol, the house of the US-Senate. The first time I was here on this wonderful lawn in the center of Washington, was in May 1971, during the large demonstrations against the Vietnam War.



Ed and Jennifer



This time, we went to the Vietnam Memorial Wall a place to remember the 58,195 names of men and women from the US, who died in the Vietnam War. This memorial wall invites us to remember the victims of the war, who are not only numbers, but people with names and with their history. Near the wall there is a book, where you find all the names and when you want to know more about the victims, you can study the webpage of the wall (<http://thewall-usa.com/>), where you find a lot of information about these people and their sad

story. This wall reminded me of the wall in the Pinkas Synagoge in Prague, where you find on the wall all the names of the Jews who have been murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust.

I realized that the lower part of the Mall is to a great extent a place for war Memorials. Besides the Vietnam Memorial there is a Memorial of the Korean War and since a few years a Memorial of World War II, which is designed as a Memorial of the Winners of the War, even though I think, that it is more modest than I would expect.



In fact, in the center is a large water fountain that gives the whole monument something which is good for the soul, when you think of all the suffering the war meant to the whole world.

It was a day with many impressions of history, politics and nature all together. It was very moving, how we are trying to find a way as Christians and as nations to deal with the giant wrongs which have been done and find in the background of this a way to live for peace, for Shalom.

A very nice evening in the home of Mark and Connie Moran with a good supper gave us time to reflect and to relax, to remember the times the Morans have been in Germany with the army and the recent trip to the Czech Republic, Poland and Austria, in which Connie and Mark participated.



Connie and Mark Moran

The Presbyterian Church in Annapolis and another visit to Washington (October 14)

The last day in Annapolis was a time to visit the church and some mission projects, that First Presbyterian Church in Annapolis is involved in. First, Steve Hays took me to his home and office and gave me an introduction into the mission projects and the finances of the congregation. Then we drove by a Habitat House project, where the Non-profit Habitat organization is involved in building houses for people who could not afford to build a house by themselves.

The Light House

Then Steve took me to the Light House, which is a home for homeless people, who badly need a place to sleep. This concern for homeless people I got to know several times in various congregations, where they usually ecumenically care for homeless people. This caring has in Annapolis a long tradition, but the old house was too small. So a completely new house was built and it was the day before the new Light House opened. So there were many people in the house getting the last preparations done and getting ready for the opening. It was a wonderful house for about 70 people, prepared with love and many caring thoughts for the new inhabitants.



After our tour through Annapolis we met with Rev. Bill Hathaway in the Church then we had lunch together in a nice old fashioned restaurant near the harbor. This was the only day when it rained during the whole trip, but this rain was really very strong. I learned more about the congregation and about the ways this congregation is dealing with the partnerships with the ECCB churches.

Steve is also responsible for the web about the partnerships, which provides information about the partnerships, which currently exist and how they develop. (www.czechpartner.org) It is good to know, that the Annapolis Presbyterian Church is prepared in helping to develop new partnerships between congregations.



Bill Hathaway & Steve Hays

In the afternoon Betty took me on another trip to Washington to visit the Czech Embassy. On the way Betty showed me two very impressive churches, the Roman Catholic Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (<http://www.nationalshrine.com>) and the Washington National Cathedral (www.nationalcathedral.org). Both giant churches are witnesses in stone of how much Christians of various confessions wanted to express their faith, and that the churches have to witness their faith in God in the Nation's Capital and so to the American people.



Roman Catholic Cathedral



National Cathedral



With Alice Navrátilová and Betty McGinnis at the Embassy

At the Czech Embassy we met with Mrs. Alice Navrátilová, the Vice Consul at the Embassy and mother of my colleague Olga in the Central Office in Prague. We had a good talk about the relations of the Czech Republic and the US, about the churches in both countries and about the challenges we are facing today.

The day ended with a nice farewell dinner with Betty and John McGinnis at a harbor restaurant in Annapolis. There were so many experiences in these few days in Annapolis – and especially I experienced a great

excitement for the partnership of our churches and a sense of sharing and interest, which did impress me very much. So I left Annapolis thankfully and full of hope, that there is a lot which will continue to grow between our churches.

A great weekend in Pittsburgh (October 15 to 17)



Tracey and Sandra

At Pittsburgh Airport I was expected by Mike Nemeč, who took my luggage to his home, where I was staying during the weekend. But because the time of the weekend was very limited, the first meeting started right away on the airport, where I was picked up by Rev. Tracey C. Henry and Sandra L. Clem. I had met these two young ladies two years ago in Prague, when they participated in the partnership conference, representing their congregation in Sewickley near Pittsburgh.

<http://www.sewickleypresby.org/>

They took me to a restaurant with a grand view of the city of Pittsburgh. But just when we arrived the electricity broke down, because of a car, which nearby hit an electric pole. So the restaurant could not cook and we could enjoy only the great view of Pittsburgh. But Tracy and Stacy took me to another very nice restaurant close to one of three rivers of Pittsburgh in an old railway station, which is now an old fashioned style restaurant. Here we could share our memories of the partnership conference as well as update what is going in Sewickley and in the ECCB. Sewickley has a partnership with the ECCB congregation Boskovic near Brno and is also supporting the ECCB as well as the Diakonie of the ECCB and the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University. Sewickley was one of the first congregations of PC (USA) I got to know in the person of David Murdoch, a presbyter in Sewickley who visited our church already in the first years after the “velvet revolution” and was very much involved in supporting the ECCB as well as our Diakonia and the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague. Unfortunately, David was out of town this weekend so we could not meet.



At Pittsburgh Theological Seminary



The next place to visit in Pittsburgh was the Theological Seminary, where I was expected by Donald J. Dawson, responsible for the World Mission Initiative and the New Wilmington Mission Conference, activities he explained briefly to me. Betty Burgess gave me a tour of the seminary including a visit in the interesting Archeological museum and the very fine Library of the Seminary. This seminary is one of nine Theological seminaries, which are related to the Presbyterian Church (USA). At the moment there are about 250 students.

Knowing the conditions of our Faculty it is impressive, how expansive such a seminary is. In the past there have been quite a few contacts with our Faculty in Prague and it sure will be good to keep contact and look for possibilities of exchanges of teachers and students.

Here I met Rev. John Michael, a former mission co-worker in our Ecumenical Department in Prague, who had to finish this task because of health problems. So it was good to meet again and have time to share, what had happened since he left Prague. John spent 8 years in Prague and started this good tradition of mission co-workers from the PC (USA).



John Michael

From here again an angel, Julie O'Shaughnessy, picked us up to take us to a church which has a program for homeless men, who find in this church a shelter and something to eat. Again a very impressive program, which helps the people who really need very badly help!

The rest of the day I spent with Julie in my new home with Mike and Ilma Nemeč, wonderful people who took very well care of me.

Meeting with the Lutheran bishop Kurt Kusserow



Bishop Kurt Kusserow

Some months before my trip to the US I had heard from Rev. Arden Haug, a representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), that the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA (<http://southwesternpasynod.org>) had been dealing with the question of having a partnership with the ECCB. I did not know more about the background of dealing with this question in this synod, but I was eager to learn more about the background. The best way to learn more about this was a meeting with the Bishop of this Synod, the Rev. Kurt Kusserow. We met for lunch and we had a very good meeting, learning a lot from each other and telling about our churches. I learned, that the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod has been dealing some time with the question of having a partnership with a Church in Central Europe, thinking about Hungary, but also the Czech Republic. Because of financial cuts in the budget, the question was postponed for some time, but I had the feeling, that now it could be a real option.

We agreed, that a partnership would be somehow connected with the PC (USA) partnership and a good frame for this could be the Formula of Agreement, in which the ELCA and the PC (USA) declared full communion in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. (The Formula of Agreement is something like the Leuenberg Fellowship in Europe). At the end of our very open talk we agreed to discuss this question in our churches and in the partnership with PC (USA) and then we will see what could be possible.

Meeting with Rev. Karen L. Battle from the Pittsburgh Presbytery



With Karen Battle and Julie

After a wonderful afternoon in the Fall Flower Show with Julie we met with Rev. Karen L. Battle, who is responsible for Justice Ministries and Mission in the Pittsburgh Presbytery. It was a very informative meeting, sharing our experience as churches in different contexts. I also shared some of the ideas of our talk with Bishop Kusserow and asked, if it would be thinkable, that the Presbyterians and Lutherans together could have a partnership with the ECCB. I understood from this

talk, that this could be a good way of cooperation between the churches. Again we agreed that we will check in our contexts, if there would be a good way in going ahead with such a plan.

Sunday in the Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church

During the last years I have heard, quite a few times, about the partnership between the Diakonia of ECCB and the Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh. Now I had the chance to experience Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church personally. It was a very good experience and as a matter of fact: this service was the first Presbyterian worship service I ever experienced in the US. (Before the worship services were connected with my American family and so they were United Methodist).

The Fox Chapel Congregation (<http://www.fcpc.us/newsite/index.html>) is a very big congregation and has a very nice Church building with a wonderful sanctuary, a big hall and many rooms for Sunday school and many other activities.



Every Sunday there are two worship services at the same time, one traditional and one contemporary. I participated in the traditional service where an adult choir and a children's choir sang. I had the honor to address the congregation with a word of greeting.

Pastor Chris Taylor started his sermon with speaking about the budget of the congregation and pointed out how important it is for the life of the congregation, that everybody is taking his and her responsibility for the budget of the next year. Stewardship is an important word in churches in the US. So far I am looking for the right translation into Czech. I think, this is one of the fields where our church can learn a lot from churches in the US.



Carnegie Samuel Calian with his wife

After the worship service followed a reception in honor of my visit, where I could greet many people, among them a friend of our Protestant Theological Faculty, Professor Carnegie Samuel Calian. After his retirement from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary he is a visiting professor of Strategy, Organizations, Leadership and Ethics at the Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business.

After the reception we had a partnership lunch with sisters and brothers who are especially interested in the ECCB and its Diakonia. This was organized by Nancy Jane Edelman, who has been in the Czech Republic several times visiting and supporting the Diakonia. A panel with pictures and information about the mission trips witnessed about this very nicely. It was very good to hear that the Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church is planning for spring/early summer 2011 a mission trip to the Czech Republic, organized by Nancy Jane Edelman. As I understood, the Taylors are planning to participate in this trip. I promised from my side, that I will do whatever is possible to support this mission trip to our Diakonia as well as to our church. It was very nice from Nancy, that she had prepared for me a copy of the Pittsburg agreement, signed on May 30, 1918 planning a Czechoslovak Republic after World War I.



Nancy Jane Edelman

A special experience on Sunday afternoon was a tour of the cathedral of learning of the University of Pittsburgh, which is a unique way to learn about various nations of the world by visiting so called classrooms, dedicated to these nations. Of special interest for me was the Czechoslovak classroom, where the Czech and Slovak traditions are still united.



Wilma and Mike Nemeč

The weekend in Pittsburgh was full of interesting people, good talks, great experiences and especially full of friendship and caring. Thanks to Mike and Wilma Nemeč, who opened their home for me, I felt very much at home and leaving after the weekend meant saying Good bye to friends with a the deep feeling, that we will be sharing also in the future – even though we are living many miles apart from each other.

Visiting an old Czech Presbyterian Church in Clarkson, Nebraska

(Monday, October 18)

From Pittsburgh I went, via Chicago, to Omaha, Nebraska, in the Mid West.

Jody Filipi, the Coordinator of the Czech Mission Network, and Roger and Sue Shoemaker, the former coordinators, expected me at the Airport. After an Italian lunch the Shoemakers took me to Lincoln, the capitol of Nebraska.

After a short rest we were on our way to Clarkson, Nebraska, a village about 100 miles North of Lincoln, to visit a congregation, which was originally founded by Czechs. Via the town of Prague, sure a place which was founded by Czechs, we got to Clarkson, where we were already expected. We got a tour of the church and of the very interesting museum, which is telling the story of this congregation with the name "New Zion Presbyterian Church" (<http://www.newzionclarkson.ws/>).



Sue & Roger Shoemaker, Cathy Allen, Shirley Hamernik

dedicated on September 23, 1923. A Sunday School was organized in 1898 by Rev. Losa, the first long term pastor. The Christian education unit was added in 1961“.

For many years pastor Bohdan A. Filipi was here, the grandfather of the husband of Jody Filipi. During his time of service the new church building was built.

After dealing with the history and the life of the church today we had, together with the pastor Cathy Allen, a delicious supper in the home of Shirley Hamernik.

On the web-side of the congregation we get this information about the history: "New Zion Presbyterian Church in Clarkson was organized on February 6, 1888 to meet the needs of God's people in this area. A group of Czech people had come from Europe to live in their new land and believed that part of their life was in their church. The first building was constructed on Fourth and Maple in 1889. The present sanctuary and fellowship hall was



Lunch at the First Presbyterian Church in Lincoln (Tuesday, October 19)



A lunch meeting with representatives of several congregations in Lincoln was special, because Rev. Karen Moritz, our mission co-worker in Prague, had her office just in this church before she left for Prague. So Karen had this meeting advertised with the slogan "Meet my new boss!" Not only because of this reason, I

enjoyed this meeting. It was a meeting with about 20 very interested sisters and brothers, who were very interested in the ECCB and its joys and sorrows. I am glad to hear, that the First Presbyterian Church in Lincoln is interested in a partnership with a congregation of the ECCB.

Meeting with people from the Presbytery of Missouri River Valley (October 19/20)

While most of the partnerships between PC (USA) and the ECCB are between congregations, there is one partnership, on the American side, that is a Presbytery, which would be in Czech terms a seniorat. On the Czech side of this partnership there is the ECCB congregation of Klobouky and the home for people with a handicap Rolnička.



Jody Filipi

Besides my continuous talks with Jody Filipi, there were three meetings with the Presbytery. The first meeting was in the Bohemian Café in Omaha, where I met with about 20 people from various congregations of the Presbytery. After a good Czech meal (Svičková with lettuce or vegetables) and Pilsen Prazdroj beer we had a discussion about the development of church and society in the Czech Republic. I presented some of our projects like the project “ECCB against violence” in which the

ECCB and our Diakonia is dealing with the problem of trafficking women and sexual violence against women, children, but also violence against older people and unemployed people. Again I met people with a sincere interest in the Czech Republic and some of them are planning a trip to the Czech Republic this year or in the next years. Jody Filipi is planning a trip for the Presbytery probably for the year 2012.

The second meeting was a breakfast meeting with members of the Presbytery Mission Team, which is moderated by Jody Filipi. It was a very good meeting with well informed and highly motivated colleagues.



Kevin Keaton

Then I met with the Executive Presbyter Kevin Keaton, who is responsible for the administration of the Presbytery. This meeting was again helpful in understanding the functioning of the PC (USA) and its Presbyteries. The Presbytery of Missouri River Valley is a rather small Presbytery with a small administration. But I understood, that the Presbytery is important for the congregations and their life. We had a very nice talk and I got a feeling of the way how Kevin is doing a great job in caring for the Presbytery.

Meetings in congregations (October 20)

Besides the meetings with representatives of the Presbytery I visited three congregations in Omaha.

West Hills Church

The West Hills Church (www.whcomaha.org) is designed to be the partner church of the ECCB congregation in Trutnov. I had the chance to meet Stephen H. Burgess, who is together with Jody Filipi responsible for the partnership with Trutnov. Both of them said that there was not much development in this partnership since the Partnership conference in 2008. But there is still an interest and we agreed that we will try to do something for some development in this.



Jody and Julie

I think, that this could be a chance for both congregations. West Hills Church is a very big church with about 800 members and a few hundred friends. In the service of this Church there are many very interesting ministries and a openness for new activities. I got this impression by an excellent tour of the church building by Julie Burgess and Jody Filipi, who explained to me the service of this church and introduced to me some of the workers in this church.

First Presbyterian Church Bellevue (<http://www.1stpresbvue.org/>)



About 30 people responded to the invitation to an afternoon tea with me. I made a presentation of the ECCB and answered many questions about the service of our church in a secular society and about the challenges we are facing. The First Presbyterian Church Bellevue is a dynamic church with many activities. Just by looking around in the rooms of the church it was impressive how the church is informed about the program to collect winter clothing for people who are not able to afford this. Therefore: Help Bertha get ready for winter. It makes such a big difference when we are doing things how we call and promote them!

Wheeler Presbyterian Church

Finally we visited the Wheeler Presbyterian Church in Omaha . At first Jody and I participated in the Bible study with a very dedicated group of about 12 people, led by pastor Dr. Edwin G. Steinmetz. Then we had supper together, a time for sharing. After the supper I again made a presentation about the ECCB and I got into the theme of reconciliation between Czechs and Germans, which evoked many questions, which led to a very intensive sharing of experiences of reconciliation. After this meeting and a tour of the very nice sanctuary I was eager to rest. So I skipped a concert with a Czech music band, which was in Omaha.



I was very thankful, that Jody accompanied me all the time and took me to so many places. During our time together we had time to share many questions around the further development of the Czech Mission Network and agreed, that it is now a very good time for a new start in developing a concept of the work of the Czech Mission Network and of our cooperation between PC (USA) and the ECCB.

Visit at the Central Office of PC (USA) in Louisville, Kentucky (Thursday, October 21/22)



Since I started to serve as ecumenical officer of the ECCB in 1996 I have been in contact with the Office of the General Assembly of the PC (USA). I have been communicating with many colleagues during this time. So it was a special experience, now for the first time, to personally be in this place, to meet the people, and to get an understanding of the building and of the functioning of this office.

Even though it was only a day and a half I spent in Louisville I got some understanding of “what Louisville is like”. I was glad to meet the people who are important for the understanding and development of the partnership between PC (USA) and the ECCB.

It was very nice, that Douglas M. Welch, the Associate Director of the Department for World Mission (Mission Partners & Programs) picked me up at the airport and took me to the Presbyterian Center, where we had an intensive talk about the ECCB and its understanding of identity and service. Amgad Beblawi, the new secretary for the Middle East, Europe and Central Asia, also participated in this conversation. He was just assigned to this position to start in December 2010. Amgad Beblawi will be responsible for the relations with our church and he follows Rev. Jon Chapman, who ended his service in the summer of 2010.



Douglas Welch

I was glad, that I had also the possibility to have a meeting with Hunter Farrell, the Director of the Department for World Mission. We shared some of our ideas of the future cooperation between our churches, with an emphasis on the important role of the Czech Mission Network, which is very much supported by the Department of World Mission. In a time of more and more limited human resources in Louisville, it will be more and more essential to cooperate with the Networks.



With Hunter Farrell

Amgad Beblawi will have in his new position so many challenges, that he will be happy to cooperate very much with the Czech Mission Network and expect a great deal of the work from the Network.



Amgad Beblawi

It was good to meet Lis Valle, Associate Director of the Department for World Mission, responsible for Equipping the Church for Mission Involvement. Lis said that she will be happy to help the Czech Mission Network in developing good working structures.

Besides these important meetings with our partners I had the chance to participate in a meeting of the ecumenical officers in the PC (USA), who are active all over the US. They had their meeting in Louisville and invited me to join in in the evening discussion and in the morning plenary, where we heard a very interesting lecture about the Changing Ecumenical Landscape in the US. In this meeting I met Robina Winbush, who I had met a few times before as the ecumenical officer in Louisville. We had met the last time in May 2010 in the Ecumenical Officers meeting in Bossey. For a few minutes I had the chance to talk to the Stated Clerk Rev. Gradye Parsons.

It was also good to meet Jon Chapman for lunch, my former colleague, with whom I discussed the current political situation in the US just before elections in November. I also met Stacy Gregory, who was Jon's administrative assistant and is now responsible for Africa. We have been in contact during the last years and Stacy was always a big help, so also this time, when she was taking care of my practical problems like on-line check in at the airport.



Stacy Gregory

I was glad to meet with Barry Ensign-George who is working in the Office of Theology and Worship

(<http://gcmc.pcusa.org/ministries/theologyandworship/>) and we had a good talk. Barry was also so kind to give to me the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship, which will be very helpful in preparing worship services in English.



In Manhattan Upper West Side (October 23 – October 26)



Ondřej and Martina

The last stop of my tour de PC (USA) was Manhattan, Upper West Side, where I was warmly welcomed by Rev. Ondřej/Andrew and Martina Stehlík. Andrew and Martina moved from Prague to the US in the year 2000, at first to Binghamton. In November 2009 Andrew was elected as a pastor of the Rutgers Church on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Spending my last days in the US with Andrew and Martina was a very good way to reflect with them on my impressions and experiences and get some more understanding of the life and church life in the US and especially in the PC (USA). At the same time it was a good preparation of coming back to the Czech Republic in its so different situation than the US.

It was great, that Andrew and Martina had time to do something together. I enjoyed very much a visit with them to the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), a very fine and world famous art museum in the heart of Manhattan.

The Rutgers Presbyterian Church

The last Sunday morning in the US I spend with the congregation of Rutgers Presbyterian Church (www.rutgerschurch.com). Rutgers Church is a congregation with a long tradition, starting in the year 1798 in Lower Manhattan (29th street and Madison Ave.). 1926 the congregations moved to a new location at 73rd street and Broadway, where the congregation has a very fine church building, just not as high as all the huge buildings around. Connected with the church is an administrative building, where there is among others a bank, which is quite a big help in financing the congregation as I understand.



In the very interesting book (The Story of Rutgers Church by Vera Mowary Roberts, 1998), edited on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the congregation, we read about the special profile of this unique congregation now on the Upper West Side of Manhattan (page 186): Love of music has been a constant golden thread in the entire tapestry. For every bit of programming and activity that currently exists, there is a parallel in previous generations. Even the present struggle for the full inclusion of lesbians and gays in the life of the church has a parallel in the early nineteenth century struggle over the inclusion of theatre and theatre folk.” Rutgers Church is really a special church with a few hundred members, a lot connected with the cultural life of the city. The church has programs for all ages and is dealing with the modern challenges like HIV Aids and many other problems.

On the Sunday I was there, the congregation had a guest preacher from the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (www.covenantnetwork.org) Rev. Tricia Dykers Koenig. In her sermon she pointed out, how essential it is for the church, that all people have a home there and that they are accepted by God. I had the possibility to say a word of greeting.

Before the worship I participated in the adult class, where I had a presentation about the ECCB and again about the reconciliation between Czechs and Germans, which seemed to be very interesting for the participants. After the service and the coffee hour we went with some people to lunch in a restaurant, where I had the possibility to learn more about the life of the congregation. It was good to meet again Holly Nedelka, who participated in the partnership conference two years ago and is together with her husband in contact with the ECCB congregation in Hvozdnice near Prague. The afternoon and evening gave us time to really talk about God and the world.

A day with the Presbytery and the United Nations (October 26)

The last full day of my trip I spent together with Andrew visiting three people.

The first person was Tony De La Rosa, the Interim Executive Presbytery of the New York City Presbytery (<http://www.nycpresbytery.org/>). Besides the presentation of our churches we talked about a possible partnership congregation between a congregation of the New York City Presbytery and a congregation of the ECCB. Tony thought, it would be great to have a congregation with a Black majority to make clear, that the PC (USA) is not only a White Middle Class Church, but also has congregations with other ethnic groups. Tony said, he could check out some possibilities and then get back to me to follow up on this question of partnership.



The next two meetings we had at the Church Center for the United Nations, just on the other side of the street from the United Nations building, which is well known from TV. What you do not see on the TV so well is the bad shape of this building. From the windows of the Church Center you see this very well. I hope that this is not a symbol for the shape in which the UN is. The message we got from the two men we talked to here at the Church Center is, that this is not a sign. Both of them see that there is a lot of good work done in the UN, which is just not so much in the media as the problems which the UN is not able to handle very well.

Our first talk was with Dennis W. Frado, the Director of the Lutheran Office for World Community, whom I had met at the General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, which took place in Stuttgart in July 2010. It was good to meet again and get more understanding of the service the churches are doing in cooperation with the United Nations. (www.elca.org/advocacy)



Dennis W. Frado



Mark Koenig with Ondřej Stehlik

The second talk was with Rev. W. Mark Koenig, whom we had just met on Sunday in church, where he accompanied his wife, who was the guest preacher at Rutgers Church. He just started to work as the Director of the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, who has his office also in the Church Center for the United Nations. He introduced us to a Presbyterian Program against children soldiers by the Office of Child Advocacy of the PC (USA), with the action of the Red Hand campaign saying no to the practice in which about 300 000 children are engaged in armed conflicts.



This day with looking at the perspective of the Presbytery and the whole world was a good way to see my whole trip in this worldwide context, in which we live as Christians and are challenged to act and react as Christians to the situation of the world. “Think globally and act locally! “ This motto of the conciliar process for the justice, peace and the integrity of creation is a good way to deal also with our partnerships and the ways we can live them – oftentimes in small but meaningful activities, sometimes just in prayer.

This trip with all its meetings with so many wonderful people at so many places brought to me a deep thankfulness for this global family we are a part of wherever we are. And that this is not a theory, but real life, this is what I felt so many times during this trip. So once more thank you to all who have been a part of this experience in so many ways. I returned to Prague with a lot of new inspiration and hope for our partnership in the coming months and years. Thanks to God for these great possibilities!

Prague, February 1, 2011

Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus

