

Ecumenical Relations Facilitator, Czech Republic

Position: Ecumenical Relations Facilitator

Organization: Ecumenical Church of the Czech Brethren

Location: Prague, Czech Republic

Ecumenical Partner: Ecumenical Church of the Czech Brethren

Mission Co-Worker: Karen Moritz

Ministry Description: The fall of communism has presented Christians in the Czech Republic with many new opportunities to relate to Christians beyond their borders and participate in joint mission efforts with them. The leaders of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren (ECCB) want to realize more of this potential for expanding the church's ministries. Therefore, they have requested a mission co-worker to help build relationships and facilitate mission work with Christian denominations of other countries. The new mission worker, Karen Moritz, will work with several congregations and presbyteries from the PC(USA) that are involved in partnerships in the Czech Republic and help the ECCB and Presbyterian congregations explore even more opportunities for such relationships. Though the church only has 117,000 members, it operates 32 Diaconal Centers that offer much needed social services for children, youth, seniors and impoverished people. They are highly respected by governmental and community leaders. The ECCB sees these centers as presenting good opportunities for ministry with Presbyterian World Mission and PC(USA) congregations and presbyteries.



Country Context: The Czech Republic was established in 1993, after the peaceful division of former Czechoslovakia into two states. The Czechs are a Slavonic people who have been living in the area since the 5th century. The country has one of the most prosperous and stable of the post-communist states. Its per capita GDP is 82 percent of the European Union average. The Czech Republic has been called one of the most secularized countries in Europe. According to a 2001 census, 59 percent of its population is atheistic or agnostic, 27 percent is Catholic and 2.5 percent is Protestant.

Karen Moritz Profile: A renewed spirit of mission commitment is spirit is moving across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and it captured the heart and mind of Karen Moritz.

“As I began my discernment process for a new call, I learned that our denomination had renewed its commitment to worldwide mission,” she says.

Karen had thought that mission service would be an option as she approached retirement. However, the current mission renewal caused her to look carefully at current opportunities posted by Presbyterian World Mission.

“As I moved through my discernment process it became clear to me and my discernment committee that God was calling me to serve in the Czech Republic,” Karen says. She became aware of the connections she had with the region and PC(USA) involvement there. She also is attracted to the ministry’s ecumenical component and its interfaith context.

She senses God is calling her to both change her place of ministry and re-examine her personal priorities. “I believe God is inviting me to live in another culture and in that process simplify my life,” Karen explains. “God certainly opens doors and presents opportunities in the most unexpected ways.”

Karen brings experience as a chaplain, parish pastor and campus minister to her new duties. For the past three years, she has been pastor at Cornerstone Campus Ministry, an ecumenical outreach at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Previously, she was pastor of Miller Park Presbyterian Church in Omaha, Nebraska, and for part of her tenure there also held a part-time campus ministry position at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

Karen has also been a chaplain at Iowa Lutheran University in Des Moines and First Presbyterian Church in Guthrie Center, Iowa. She holds a bachelor’s degree in humanities from Coe College, a Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry degree from San Francisco Theological Seminary. She also earned a diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction from San Francisco Seminary.

Karen says the guiding Scripture for her life is Luke 4: 16-21, where Jesus proclaims the inauguration of God’s reign whenever those on society’s margins are served. She anticipates the truth from this passage will illuminate her ministry in the Czech Republic.

“As a legally blind woman, I resonate with those on the margins, particularly at the edges of our churches,” she says. “Throughout Jesus’ life he ministered to those on the margins and every time we do that we manifest God’s reign.”

In her position, she will help U.S. Presbyterians join with Czech Christians in their efforts to serve God and others. She looks forward to the ministry opportunities that await her. “Many of their churches strive to reach out to those on the margins, and I value the opportunity to be a part of such a ministry.”

Position Start Date: July 1, 2010