

Snapshots from Our First Visit to Trutnov

Rev. Jody Filipi

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord ...” with these words from the Shema (Deut. 6: 4-9), the congregation in Trutnov began their worship service on the Sunday we were visiting. It is how the service begins every Sunday. When we exchanged gifts, during the announcement portion of the service, Pastor Tomas Molnar gave us a framed copy of these verses. His wife, Marcela, a member of the congregation’s English speaking group, explained the significance of this passage to their congregation. The Shema is said each week as a reminder to keep God first and to love God with all their hearts and all their might and to faithfully teach their children about God because for so many years under the communists they were forced to think of other things and they do not want that to happen again.



Tomas Molnar
and son Aaron

My husband, David and I, along with Julie and Steve Burgess had arrived in Trutnov the previous evening after following Tomas, Marcela, and their young son, Aaron across the Czech countryside to their home in Northeastern Bohemia. We were met by the English speaking group, consisting of a few elders and several members of their active youth group. Over a wonderful spread of traditional Czech finger food, around a large table in the basement of the parsonage (which also served as their church) we began to get to know one another. Introductions were made and conversation flowed as we and they shared stories of our churches. One comment stood out. They told us how their congregation was 1500 strong immediately after World War 2. Then the Germans were expelled from their country, impacting greatly the *Sudetenland*, which included the town of Trutnov. Shrinking in size when the Germans left and after the communists rose to power, only three remained. Yet from those three, a faithful remnant, God has grown their current congregation of 300 members. Their hope and trust that God would continue to bless their congregation was evident in all our interactions.

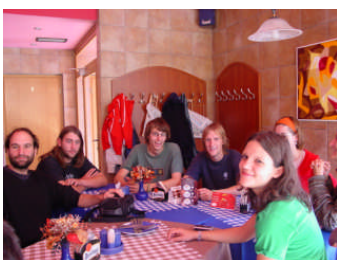


Hiking in the Krakonos Mountains
From left to right: Steve, Marcela
Molnarova, Jody, Elizabeth, Tomas
Molnar and Petr Dohnalek



Th.Dr. Pavel Filipi
Eva and

That hope brought me back to our first night in Prague and our dinner with Dr. Pavel Filipi and his wife, Eva. Dr. Filipi is the immediate past dean of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University. He is currently vice-dean, head of the department of practical theology and director of The Ecumenical Institute. During our dinner, Pavel, shared some thoughts about the uphill battle the church faces in the Czech Republic. Julie asked about whether he has hope for the church in the face of the situation there. He responded, “Of course, that’s why I am a theologian!” While in the Czech Republic, we did not see the healing miracles of China or hear about Jesus appearing to people in their dreams as in the Middle East. Instead, we met people like us, faithful to God’s call to be in ministry and mission. People involved in outreach in their community, hopeful that God would grow His kingdom there from the mustard seed of their faith.



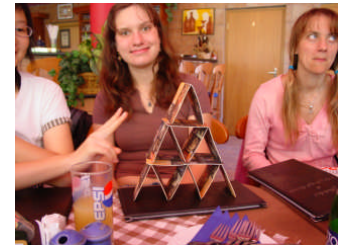
some members
of the youth group

The Trutnov church has an active youth group and includes a group called “*Wrong Sing*”, a YMCA Ten Sing creative and performing arts group, so named because they said they were not very good singers. It was our privilege to get to know many of these youth as we hiked together, visited an art gallery, the town museum, and ate together on several occasions. We had great conversations about everything from food to music, school and jobs to worship services and prayer. On Monday evening, we were privileged to participate in a Bible study with

some of them, and members of another congregation in Trutnov held in their parsonage. In addition to Bible study, our conversations ranged from everything to questions about our church and prayer to food and relatives who long ago had moved to America.

In addition to the connection, we made with the youth; four adults stand out for me. The pastor and his wife, who I had gotten to know through email conversations even before our visit. The curator, Petr Dohnalek, who invited us to visit his protection relay company in Mladé Buky.

During our visit, he shared his joy at seeing freedom in his lifetime. Before the “velvet revolution,” it was something he hoped the children of his grandchildren might know, never daring to dream it might be a reality in his own life time – and how sweet it tasted – being free and able to practice his faith openly. In addition, there was Jana, the mother of Deana, a member of the youth group, and host to an exchange student from Thailand, Pang. Jana sat across from me at our lunch following church on Sunday. I noticed she was wearing a frog necklace and I asked about it. She told me she got it in Mexico because she loved frogs. I shared that I too loved frogs and we had an instant bond. She admired the small beaded frog I had hanging on my backpack, so I gave it to her. The next day she gave me two frog figurines and a frog candle. The figurines sit on my desk. I sent her a picture I took of them sitting there. If I will find another frog key chain, I will travel with it hooked to my backpack or purse -- maybe it will open the door for other friendships.



Deana and Jana



Photo of “Velvet Revolution”

In our visit to the Museum of Communism, a song by Czech folk singer, Karel Kryl, played in the background of the third part of a film about communism in Czechoslovakia. The third part was entitled a season of hope. As I was intent on listening to the narration, I did not catch all the words of the song as they scrolled across the bottom of the movie in English. Those I caught made me think that Kryl was thanking the communists for how the pain felt under them had made him stronger and humble. I bought a CD with the song on it. Looking up the lyrics, I saw a hymn thanking God for pain that teaches one to ask, for failure that teaches diligence and weakness that teaches humbleness. In the last verse of this hymn, Kryl says “thank you for the fact that I love, although fear grabs my heart, thank you, lamb, you did not die in vain.” Here in the words of a protest singer from the communist era – perhaps a glimpse of the depth of faith that exists in the Czech Republic.

Everywhere we went, we found faithful older believers worshiping alongside younger believers. Hope for the church abounds in those we met. Our prayer is that God might use these faithful, older and younger believers alike, to draw people to Him and restore the vital faith, which once permeated the Czech nation just as He is using miracles and dreams in other parts of the world to bring people to Him. Even though the church here in the states has not known the trials of the Czech church, we find ourselves praying the same prayer for the church here in the USA -- for today we face similar challenges.