

...BRIDGES VI... “With a Voice of Singing.” prepared as a supplement to the Czech Working Group Newsletter and as a service to the American Working Group by Joyce Michael

“With a voice of singing, declare ye this and let it be heard!” Thus begins an anthem, which has meant a great deal to me ever since I was part of a festival chorus that performed this work. That event occurred many years ago, but I have repeatedly experienced the transforming power of the voice of singing. For instance, I have seen popular music become the impetus for movements of peace, unity, justice, and compassion, and I have felt religious music quicken people’s sense of God’s comforting presence, Christ’s challenging call, and Life’s sacred goodness. I have heard, seen, and felt the renewing power of the voice of singing.

However, until recently, I was not aware that institutional bodies and administrative leaders are as amenable to being shaped by the voice of singing as individuals and grass-roots organizations may be. In fact, I have not always been mindful that administrative agencies are commonly made up of individual seekers who feel deeply and reflect carefully. Thus, I am grateful that recurring opportunities to interact with the national leaders of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren have refuted lingering, subconscious stereotypes about high-level administrators and national agencies. Indeed, I am especially thankful that I have been able to see the transforming power of the voice of singing which is at work within the administrative branches of the ECCB.

I want to expand on that comment by recalling that in November 2003, the ECCB installed an entirely new leadership team, which lacks direct continuity with the preceding Synodal Council that heroically guided the Church throughout the years of transition which followed the collapse of the communist regime. The new Council has inherited many challenges and faces responsibilities that might be daunting, if its members could not sing together. However, that group is made up of a guitarist, a singer, three pianists, and a composer who are approaching their tasks with a voice of singing that is uniting them in a spirit of

respectful cooperation.

This harmonious course is very valuable since the present council has begun its work with a completely clean slate! Insofar as no long-standing patterns must be preserved, the entire Church is anticipating—and is prepared for – change. This state of affairs has given rise to a certain sense of freedom, which Moderator Ruml alludes to when he says: “I do not feel the need to protect my position.” Instead, Rev. Ruml is seeking to develop open relationships and to foster a spirit of solidarity among church workers that may facilitate a creative approach to “that which has been given.” Thus, the voice of singing, which unites the council in a spirit of solidarity, may bring more and more people within the range of its harmony.

Forging new directions is a complex process that might spawn tense deliberations if such harmony did not enable the members of the council to fully accept, and willingly share, responsibility for both the positive and negative results of their decisions. However, the present council is letting itself be led by a new song, which is characterized by a degree of enthusiasm, creativity, and service that would have been unimaginable fifteen years ago. Thus, its story surely confirms the possibility that the “sad songs,” which so often resound in our world, can actually be transformed by new tonalities.

I want to add that I am grateful that in August, I was able to experience the voice of singing that binds the staff of the Worldwide Ministries Division in Louisville to all of PC(USA)’s mission co-workers. Those committed folks (who support us so faithfully when we are far from home) hosted this year’s Mission Sharing Conference with the sorts of warmth, humor, and honesty that are the hallmark of faithful seekers who ‘feel deeply and think carefully.’ It is my prayer that the grace, which characterized the Sharing Conference, will radiate throughout the PC(USA), uniting more and more people in a spirit of solidarity within the range of a God-granted harmony.