…BRIDGES VII… September 2004: "All over this Land" (prepared by Joyce Michael)

As a prelude to more intentional efforts to link congregations which have a relationship with the ECCB, its Seminary, and the Diaconia, I want to share some "verbal snapshots" of interested congregations that John and I were privileged to visit in August and September. If our experiences in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia are representative, it seems reasonable to conclude that there are Czech connections 'all over the land:' in 'mid-America' and beyond!

Pine Run PC is located on a winding rural road in western Pennsylvania. The morning we spent with that congregation was notable for the way that the church musicians supported the themes of my sermon and John's slide show. The choir's anthem amplified my considerations of what it means to live "For the Sake of Joy," and the pianist spontaneously improvised an offertory using the tune of a Czech hymn that John had sung at the conclusion of the sermon.

Rehoboth PC is also located in a rural area in southwest Pennsylvania. John's slides elicited a number of questions, which, in turn, led to many interesting conversations after the worship hour and during a church picnic that was held at a nearby park. I was particularly moved by the comments of several elderly people who thoughtfully reflected on the need for our world to find its way to peace.

Little Britain PC is located near Pennsylvania's border with Maryland. Although this congregation is currently without a pastor, a number of folks gathered at the church to share a midweek potluck dinner with John and me. This relaxed setting issued in a fascinating assortment of questions about the Czech church and our work. We are grateful for the interest and encouragement that was expressed by this supportive group.

Fox Chapel PC is a large church located in suburban Pittsburgh which has an on-going relationship with the ECCB's Diaconia. At the first of two gatherings organized by this congregation, members of Fox Chapel described previous contacts with the Diaconia and anticipated a mission trip to the Czech Republic that was slated to occur in late August. The people who attended the second gathering were especially inquisitive about a number of issues related to the ECCB and our endeavors! Reciprocal learning and valuable sharing characterized both evenings.

Mount Pisgah PC is a lively congregation that is also located in a suburban Pittsburgh neighborhood. This church has a long history of fostering interracial connections on the local level, even as it contributes to international missions. Participation in the Eucharist and the receptiveness of a delightful group of children to a Czech *pohádka* (story) made our experiences at Mount Pisgah quite memorable.

Indianola PC is located near the campus of Ohio State University, and is the site of my first encounter with the intricacies of the Czech language. Thus, it was very meaningful to be able share with that congregation and to thank its members for the role that Indianola's Czech connections played in furthering my interest in, and involvement with, the ECCB.

John Stewart United Methodist Church and First PC in Upper Sandusky Ohio joined together to welcome John and me to this county seat town in north central Ohio. Our evening with these congregations was distinguished by a high degree of interest, which generated a large number of questions and a powerful affirmation of our unity in Christ. It was exciting to have an opportunity to foster interdenominational ties, even as we sought to strengthen international connections.

First PC in Waverly Ohio is closely related to the PC(USA)'s Bristol Village Retirement Community. Thus, the people with whom we worshipped and shared during our time in Waverly were exceptionally responsive. We appreciated having an opportunity to renew ties with people who have participated in study tours to the Czech Republic and/or who attended the workshop on Comenius that I led at that church in 2001.

First PC in Parkersburg West Virginia was also an exciting place to be! It was an honor to be part of the start of this fall's program of Wednesday night gatherings at that church. The hospitality was grand, the singing was joyful, the fellowship with warm, and we left Parkersburg with several tangible reminders of ways that we can foster living ties between members of First PC and the ECCB.

First PC in Logan Ohio is a county-seat church with a proud heritage of community involvement. Thus, the group which gathered at the church on a Sunday evening in late September came prepared to ask a broad range of thoughtful questions about the ECCB. As a result, absorbing conversations characterized our entire evening at First PC. There certainly does appear to be a lot of interest in the ECCB 'all over the land!'