

...BRIDGES VIII... CELEBRATIONS!!!!, October 2004 prepared by Joyce Michael
as a supplement to the Czech Working Group Newsletter and as a service to the American Working Group

When John and I returned to the Czech Republic at the end of September, we could not have anticipated the flurry of exciting events that would await us, but I am pleased to be able to tell you that:

On **October 24**, we attended an afternoon worship service in which a new pastor was installed at one of two ECCB congregations located in the Žižkov section of Prague. All of the elements of a joyful celebration were in place as a modest worship area filled with people. The presiding pastor read Psalm 121 in a compelling way; a thoughtful prayer was offered by another minister; and the installee delivered a sermon that invited us to learn to practice the art of waiting. After the installee and congregation had pledged to support one another in mutual service, ministerial colleagues and lay representatives brought greetings from a number of other churches. Honesty, humor, and warmth characterized those remarks, and particular delight was generated by the musical interludes that punctuated the event. A visiting choir sang a cappella works characterized by exquisite harmony; a youthful group from the installee's previous congregation sang lively tunes to guitar accompaniment; and eventually, a number of children joined the installee in singing a cheerful chorus that he had taught them when he was their pastor. It was evident that the Žižkov II congregation has chosen a fine pastor with some extraordinary talents.

On **October 24**, Kliment Church in Prague 2 was the site of a service of ordination for five women and one man who have completed their vicariates (pastoral internships) and are beginning to serve ECCB congregations. The pristine sanctuary of this lovely church was filled to capacity as the ordinands took the vows of ordination, experienced the laying on of hands, and were welcomed by clergy colleagues who came to the chancel area to be part of the ritual. Prior to that ceremony, one of the ordinands delivered a thought-provoking sermon on God's command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. That young man may have been anticipating the rigors of ministry when he concluded that if we submit to God's appeal for us to give up the very promise that has the potential to fulfill our lives, a sacrificial lamb will be provided us.

After words of welcome, challenge, and encouragement were offered by a variety of respected church leaders, the service concluded with a prayer offered by three young people who are also anticipating ordination. This service was also augmented by festive organ music, joyful congregational singing, and warm guitar strumming, and was followed by an opportunity for everyone to greet the ordinands on the church lawn, as well as at a reception that was held in an adjacent hall. The entire event was a wonderful celebration of faithful devotion.

On **October 28**, John and I were privileged to attend a special commemoration of the heritage of the Unity of Brethren that was held in the village of Kunwald, which is located in a remote corner of Moravia. That event began with a speech about John Amos Comenius who was the last bishop of the Unity of Brethren before they were forced into exile by Catholic authorities in 1621. In that address, the mayor of Kunwald stressed that Comenius and the Unity of Brethren handed down a valuable legacy of love, peace, and justice that has endured to this very day. Greetings were extended by the regional commissioner who helped secure governmental funds for the production of a video about the history of the Unity of Brethren, which was the focus of the day's festivities. After the video was premiered, Miroslav Brož, a venerated leader emeritus of the ECCB, reflected on the history of the Unity of Brethren who faithfully nurtured the traditions of the Czech Reformation during times of oppression and carried that legacy to the farthest corners of the earth. The afternoon climaxed with a concert given by a folksinger who uncovered Comenius' musical version of the Psalms while he himself was in exile in the Netherlands during the communist era. I cannot imagine a more meaningful and authentic way to celebrate the national holiday which is observed each year on October 28 to commemorate the formation of the Republic of Czechoslovakia.