

Czech Protestant News

A Bulletin of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren,
the Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren,
and the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University

Ecumenical Bulletin 41 – Summer 2017

Editorial

Dear Readers,

one might often ask whether the church should be interested in politics. We believe it definitely should. We must not be indifferent to the injustice and wrong we see happening in the world around us and neither should we ignore who is in charge of governing our country, whether these leaders are behaving morally in their positions, and whether their decisions are based on seeking the good of their country and citizens rather than seeking their own benefit. Dirty politics, people say, but that is not the way we should approach it (even though it is obviously prone to corruption and other issues). Politics is the administration of public affairs and that is something we certainly shouldn't stay away from – precisely because we are Christians.

The statement of the ECCB's Synod concerning the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in the Czech Republic, which you will find in this edition of the Bulletin, addresses this very issue. It is a general statement which, however, clearly proclaims that our church cares about the way our country is governed and who is to be in charge for the years to come.

I would also like to draw your attention to an extensive interview with a long-standing worker of the ECCB's Central Church Office that many of you will know personally. Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus retired in April, but he is definitely not planning to sit idly in the corner.

Many will be interested in hearing about the latest developments at our Diaconia. You will hopefully be amused and pleased to read our slightly unusual statue story from the Diaconia's centre in Litoměřice – a story with a good ending.

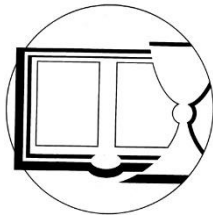


The next edition of the Bulletin will be published during the Advent. Until then, we wish you peace and hope in all you pursue, may your time be filled with meaningful events and activities.

On behalf of the Editorial Board,

Jana Plíšková

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The foundations of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren stem from the Hussite church (1431–1620) and the Unity of the Brethren (1457–1620). The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB) was established in 1918, when the Lutheran and Calvinist wings of the local protestant creed were united in one. Their existence, however, had not been legal until Joseph II issued his Patent of Toleration in 1781, following a long and tough anti-reformation campaign that began in 1620. Even after issuing the Patent of Toleration, Protestants still had to face many restrictions, which would only be lifted following the Protestant Patent of 1861.

At the time of its establishment, the ECCB had 250,000 members, the number increased to 325,000 in 1938. Today, the church is divided into 14 seniorates and has a total of approximately 250 congregations and 100,000 members. The church is headed by a six-member Synodal Council, elected for a six-year period, represented by the Synodal Senior and Synodal Curator.

Working on Ecumenical Activities Broadens Your Horizons An Interview with Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus

The original intention of spending two years in Prague changed a bit as time passed

Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus (*1951) grew up in a family of four children in the Württemberg region in the South of Germany. After graduating from high school, he spent a year in the United States, obtained a Master's degree in theology and worked as a pastor in Köngen near Stuttgart for eleven years. In 1990, he arrived in Prague, first for a two-year scholarship at the Protestant Theological Faculty, but he received an offer to work for the ECCB's Central Church Office. He is retiring after more than twenty years of work as Head of the Ecumenical Department and Head of the External Relations Section.



What was your childhood like and where did you spend it?

I spent my pre-school years in a village called Neckarmühlbach in Southern Germany, a traditionally religious region. My parents were working in an agricultural company that

specialised in the production of seeds for various crops and the whole family was helping with running the farm. My mother was a war widow – her first husband died in the war, which is why I have an older half-brother. My two sisters and I were born in the second marriage. In 1958, we moved to Weissbach, where we were all helping out at the farm.

Where did you study?

When I was fifteen, I left for a seminar, actually a monastic school to be more precise, in Maulbronn, and for a similar school in Blaubeuren after two years. In the Württemberg region, you can receive a scholarship for studying high school. Tuition at these boarding schools has existed since the times of the Reformation, i.e. for almost 500 years. This allowed children whose parents couldn't afford to pay the studies to attend school. Nowadays the system is slightly different, but it is still a chance of receiving high-quality education. For me, it was also an escape from the endless work at our farm, in a way. After graduating from high school, I spent one year in the United States, which influenced and changed me quite significantly; it was a student exchange programme, I lived in a Methodist pastor's family, taught German language and culture and worked in the social area as well. I only went on to study theology after that.

What motivated you to become a pastor?

My mommy says that when I was four, I decided I would be a pastor and preach from the pulpit. And in fact, my plans never really changed in this respect. When I was little, I received an illustrated Bible from my parents, in which you could colour the pictures. I loved that. My parents would always support me and step by step, I fulfilled this "vocation". I studied theology at the university in Tübingen and Mainz. I also focused on prison chaplaincy and social work, especially help for those who have been released from prison. But working as a pastor had always been my priority.

How did you get to the Czech Republic?

After finishing my studies, I was the pastor at a congregation in Köngen, a larger village near Stuttgart, for 11 years. My wife, also a theologian, was working with the youth there. She would organise, for example, meetings for young people behind the Iron Curtain – in Czechoslovakia, Poland or Hungary. At that moment, we came to the decision that it was time for a change, and that we could try living abroad. We explored various possibilities and finally received a scholarship in Prague, granted by the World Council of Churches, where the political situation was getting a little more relaxed under the influence of the "glasnost" and the "perestroika". These scholarships would usually last a year, but we were told Czech was such a difficult language that they would send us for two years, so we have time to learn the language. We made our decision in 1989 and only wanted to go for one year. So we arrived at the ECCB's Synodal Council, Josef Hromádka was the Synodal Senior back then, and at the Theological Faculty, reporting to Jaroslav Ondra. We were supposed to undergo postgraduate studies, not too academic, rather practice-based.

What did you do in Prague at the beginning of your stay?

I wanted to study materials on J. L. Hromádka, I was fascinated by his ecumenical personality. My wife had started working on projects for the World Day of Prayer before leaving to Prague, so she wanted to continue, and also look into some feminist issues. In 1990, Czechoslovakia was to prepare the liturgy for the World Day of Prayer. However, things started happening in Europe in the autumn of 1989, and we arrived in a completely different Prague in 1990.

How did you manage language-wise?

We wanted to master Czech, of course, but at the same time, the revolution brought a huge demand for learning foreign languages, especially German and English. We received an offer to teach German at the Theological Faculty. Most of the students knew some German, so the beginnings were not extremely difficult, and we were learning Czech at the same time, so it was going quite well. We were also attending a grammar course at the Faculty of Arts and conversation at our Theological Faculty – there was a group of around 10 foreigners there who were attending an intensive Czech course at the time. Later we also had private teachers – basically friends, we would visit each other, cook together, they would speak Czech to us and we'd speak German to them, so we were mutually perfecting our language skills. An elderly lady would also take us sightseeing and although she enjoyed chatting with us in German, we asked her to speak Czech only.

The initially planned two years lasted a bit longer, didn't they?

Our stay was first prolonged by a year when professor Filipi offered us the positions of specialised assistants at the Department of Practical Theology. Then the dean of the Faculty, Jakub Trojan, asked me to work as his assistant, which meant another three years. At that time, a new concept was being planned for the Faculty, which was to be reincorporated into Charles University. The Faculty was looking for a new building, supporters and donators were sought, and then a new building was bought and renovated. I was in charge of international relations in this whole process. And because the money we received from cross-border churches could not be used to fund a state university building, it was being collected for the ECCB. This meant a number of meetings I had to organise at the Central Church Office; I was entrusted with many different tasks at the time.

How did you start working at the Central Church Office?

The cost of the faculty building, including the renovation and furnishings, finally climbed to approximately 130 million crowns – quite a sum. When everything was finished, there was some outstanding debt to be paid. The Synodal Senior at the time, Pavel Smetana, asked me to continue managing the situation, as I was already familiar with it, I knew everything about the funding of the faculty and I also had the necessary contacts abroad. At the same time, I was still a pastor of the Württemberg church. Thanks to my activities in the field of Czech-German relations, the Württemberg church let me stay another four years, as they considered building these new relations meaningful and necessary. As a result, I was able to start working at the Ecumenical Department of the Central Church Office from 1 September 1996. It was twenty years ago last autumn.

The oecumene means establishing contacts not only with churches of other confessions, but also with Protestants around the world. How many churches does the ECCB cooperate or have a partnership with?

It's around forty churches and church organizations. We have a very good relationship with our neighbours - the Bavarian Lutheran Church and the Saxon Lutheran Church. We do some things together, often see each other and visit each other. Personal contacts also play a very important role of course – at the levels of individuals, congregations, interest groups as well as at the level of the entire church.

Which churches are closest to the ECCB and who do we cooperate with the most closely?

We have the most in common with the United and uniting churches in Germany, from the Baden, Hessen, Rheinland and Pfalz regions. Just like our church, the ECCB, they carry both the Lutheran and the Calvinist traditions, we have been cooperating with them since the fifties. We are, of course, also close to our brothers and sisters in Slovakia, we have flourishing contacts both with the Lutheran and the Reformed churches. In Poland, our relations with the local churches have been enriched in the past few years thanks to the meeting of Christians from Central and Eastern Europe; in the past, we mostly knew about our compatriots in Zelów or the Reformed exiles that left after the Battle of White Mountain, but we did not have many contacts with the local Lutheran church. We have very significant contacts with the Reformed church in Hungary since the times of the Patent of Toleration, when the Hungarians helped provide pastors in the sudden shortage. Many Hungarian students from the Reformed church in Slovakia studied at our Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague in the seventies and eighties, and the friendships have lasted since then. We also cultivate relations with Austrian churches, so we can say we have relations with all the protestant churches in all our neighbouring countries. And we would also have to add our traditionally warm relations with the Waldesians in Italy, with the reformed church in France, with the United Reformed Church in Great Britain, and with the Scottish church.

Okay, so far we've only talked about the situation in Europe. What about the overseas?

Before we get to that, I still need to mention that the ECCB has also been part of the Lutheran World Federation since 2004, which has broadened our network of contacts with Lutheran churches in Scandinavia and the Baltics. We also shouldn't forget about our compatriots in Eastern Europe – Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Poland and Ukraine – but that is a slightly different story. As far as overseas contacts are concerned, in the USA, we have been cooperating with congregations that were also established by compatriots, but today they are basically Americans with a strong love for the Czech Republic. They mostly belong to the Presbyterian Church, but we also cooperate with American Lutherans: in the past years, they have been inviting our students to lead their summer camps. After the revolution, we have also started developing relations with the Presbyterian Church in South Korea – it began with one student, today, we have a large group of Korean Christians in the Kobylisy congregation. A few years ago, we got in touch with another Presbyterian church in Korea, and even with Taiwan. These are our active contacts. We also have contacts of a personal nature in Mexico, Cuba, Kenya and possibly other countries. I am a bit concerned about the

fact that the “Third World” is receiving much less attention from us than the Western Countries are.

Do we have any form of international help?

We help our compatriots’ churches in Eastern Europe, that is something of the sort. German churches engage in developing countries, we take care of these initially exiled Czechs scattered in Eastern Europe. We are a small church – we do what we can.

What is the most interesting part of working at the Ecumenical Department and what do you find the most rewarding?

The most interesting part is meeting people from other churches and talking with them, celebrating Sunday services together. Every country is a different culture, and yet we have so much in common. And the most rewarding part? When partnerships grow into something more specific and deep – for example when our pastors go to Scotland to serve in local churches for a year or two.

Upon retirement, you are handing your office over to your successor. Will you continue helping the ECCB with something?

I will have been serving the church for forty years in March. This means I’ve spent more years in the Czech Republic than in Germany. The oecumene has become my life, as our interview shows. I will keep helping out at the Ecumenical Department as a part-time job, so I am able to wrap up the activities that are connected with the anniversaries we’ve been celebrating in the past few years – I am the chairman of the committee that has been set up for this purpose. We still have an international conference coming up to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Luther’s Reformation at the Senate, and the ECCB will be celebrating the anniversary in Ratiboř in September. I am looking forward to having more time for reading. Fellow pastors have also been telling me they will be inviting me to preach in their place when they leave for a work trip. I am looking forward to that, given that I am healthy and capable. I am staying in Prague and don’t think I need to be afraid of getting bored.

We hope you get all the deserved rest and still have enough strength to continue your work cooperation. What would you wish to our readers?

I would like to thank many people at the ECCB and the ecumenical circles for their warm welcome and their friendships, I am very grateful for all that. I wish your readers that they might always see a reason for joy. And our faith gives enough reason for that. Ecumenical activities broaden your horizons and let you feel that we are all part of one body, of our Lord Jesus Christ, all over the world. If we are to experience this, we cannot only wait for something to come to us, we have to gather enough courage to seek and to set off into the unknown. I wish everybody would feel that our faith gives us strength, a strength that is more liberating than burdening.

Prepared by Daniela Ženatá.

A Word of the Synod of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren Concerning the Upcoming Elections

We will soon be facing two difficult elections in the Czech Republic. In the autumn, Czechs will be electing Members of the Parliament, and a President is to be elected in early 2018.

We have been living in political freedom for nearly 30 years now, but there is generally very



little trust in political parties and politicians. We believe that striving to improve the administration of public affairs and engaging in civic activities is well worth the trouble. We do not want to give up responsibility for public affairs. As citizens, we should do our best to get to know those who are competing for public offices, familiarise ourselves with their

political platforms as well as their previous activities, in order to be able to make a wise decision on whom to trust.

Christianity is not a political platform. The following call is not connected with any political party, it is only based on respect for the basic values of human co-existence. In making an electoral decision, we should support candidates from whom we expect that in their position, they will:

- * tell the truth and act in accordance with what they say;
- * put the general benefit before personal interests or the interests of certain groups;
- * seek justice and serve as an example of respect for law, education and traditional values of politeness;
- * enhance the respect for freedom and truth, thus countering those who seek cheap popularity through spreading fear and hate;
- * encourage people, even in difficult times, to stand up for human rights and to help those who have been struck by tragedy;
- * listen to what worries their fellow citizens, seek peaceful solutions and deal with problems concerning the whole society;
- * honour those who are successful, honest and modest, but at the same time pay attention to those who are in any aspect weak and excluded by society;
- * consider environmental issues a serious topic and support decisions that are responsible with respect to future generations and the state of our planet; and
- * be prepared to become actively involved in issues that reach beyond domestic politics, seek general benefit and strive for solidarity within the EU as well as outside its borders.

We consider the upcoming elections an opportunity to positively influence the role that the Czech Republic is to play both in European and in world politics in the years to come. Lately, many countries, including the Czech Republic, have seen a rise in opinions doubting the fundamentals of democracy – the rule of law, the freedom of speech, solidarity – and thus doubting the functionality of the unique European political project that we are part of. History has taught us that rejecting these values could have a very detrimental impact of the lives of us all.

Let us maintain our hope that each of us has a chance to influence how things go and that indifference and selfishness do not defeat the will to live together in peace and creative spirit.

The Pro Ecclesia Decoration Awarded to Jaroslav Kalousek The Tireless Seventy-Year-Old Standing at His Watch

The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren maintains long-term relationships with communities of compatriots who have managed to keep their protestant faith as well as the Czech language (at least to a certain extent) alive despite the distance and the years they have spent abroad. It would be impossible to name all the key personalities of the local congregations, but to mention at least some of the people I am grateful for: the late Mr and Mrs Hájek from Veliko Središte in Serbia and the deceased brother Josef Jančík from Bohemka in Ukraine, who passed on his responsibility for the congregation to Ludmila Sverdlová in his elderly years; Marie Provazníková from Veselynivka in Ukraine, Zdenka Pagáčová from Bjeliševac in Croatia, Karel Pospíšil and Věra Pospíšilová from Zelów in Poland – all these people have been absolutely essential in keeping their congregations alive and running.

The personality I wish to honour today is Jaroslav Kalousek, curator and assisting preacher at the Peregu Mare congregation in Romania, who was awarded the PRO ECCLESIA decoration by Istvan Csurí, bishop of the Reformed Church in Romania, on 9 December 2016. He received the award on the occasion of his 70th birthday, which he celebrated in January 2017.



I take the privilege of reproducing the text that was read to Mr Kalousek at the ceremony, and wish him strength of the body and the mind for the years to come.

Laudation to Jaroslav Kalousek from the PRO ECCLESIA award ceremony

Jaroslav Kalousek was born on 27 January 1947 in Peregu Mare, which was inhabited by Czechs, Slovaks, Germans and Hungarians at the time. His father, who had been a key personality of the Czech Reformed congregation, an elder of the local presbytery for 30 years, had served as an example with his love for people and his faith in God. Jaroslav was only 25 when he took his father's position and after nine years as an elder, he was elected curator in 1981. Jozsef Kovacz, priest at the neighbouring Kispereg who would also come to Peregu Mare, noted that Jaroslav was the youngest curator in the Banat seniorate, which the Peregu Mare congregation was part of, at the time.

The first important task he was faced with was to plaster the church built in 1960, which had never had any plastering before. No construction workers were hired; the ECCB contributed financially. It should be pointed out that the enthusiasm of Jaribacsi (= uncle Jaroslav) would always encourage the members of the congregation to bring any task to a successful end.

After the plastering, the roof had to be repaired – this took two rounds of repairs, and subsequent painting. When the “Old School” (the first building that the Czechs built upon their arrival to Peregu Mare) was returned to the congregation as part of the restitution process, it was in a state of severe disrepair; the members of the congregation managed to renovate and furnish it under Jaroslav’s management. It was also Jaroslavov’s idea to create a small museum of agricultural tools and kitchen utensils from various times in one of the church rooms. The exhibits reflect almost every aspect of the local farmers’ life.

Since 1990, Mr Kalousek would often lead services with a read sermon, apart from his job as a curator. Thanks to the help of the “wandering preacher” Petr Brodský, the congregation had access to many sermon books, prayer books, hymn books, Bibles and magazines.

Even though the Czech reformed congregation in Pereg is part of the Romanian Reformed Church, it has a very close relationship with the ECCB. In 2007, following thorough preparation and a brief examination, Jaroslav Kalousek was ordained a priest by the Synodal Senior Joel Ruml before members of the Synodal Council. The whole Pereg congregation, as well as a large delegation of the ECCB’s members, participated in the celebration. The Czech reformed church in Peregu Mare continues to have a strong bond with the ECCB even after Petr Brodský’s retirement. The ECCB’s Pavel Šebesta from Hodonín is now in charge of the cooperation with the congregation in Romania.

For Jaroslav, who carries out all his church work for no financial compensation whatsoever, his family, always supporting him, is of uttermost importance. His wife Věra, also a devoted member of the congregation, runs various church activities and events and is in charge of the church’s card index. Jaroslav’s son Valik is the church’s organist. The congregation sings its hymns in Czech.

Jaroslav Kalousek is standing at his watch, he has stationed himself at the ramparts (Habakkuk 2:1a). He is now celebrating his 70th birthday and knows very well, as do the rest of us, that their small, slowly diminishing congregation, despite its distance from the homeland, will last as long as each member preserves their faith and their mother tongue. I believe that the Lord God Almighty will ensure there is always somebody standing at his watch.

Tibor Gyorgy Tobias, pastor at Peregu Mare and Kispereg

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The Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB) is a Christian non-profit organisation that offers help and support for living a dignified and full life despite age, illness, disability, isolation, difficult social situations or other forms of crisis situations that occur in life. The services of the ECCB's Diaconia are based on the message of the Gospel about the Love of our Lord and the example that Jesus Christ has given us in serving others. In its centres and special educational facilities, the ECCB's Diaconia offers social and educational services, healthcare, and ministry. It is the second largest non-governmental organisation providing social services in the Czech Republic.

2016 Was a Successful Year for the ECCB's Diaconia

The Diaconia is growing. Its centres and schools are currently running over 130 facilities all over the Czech Republic. It employs more than 2000 people; its schools and kindergartens are attended by 423 children and students. The Diaconia's Academy, which offers training courses for social service workers, is also getting on well. The courses are designated not only for employees of the Diaconia, but also for other social service providers. At the moment, the Academy is offering 50 educational topics and is the only provider on the market to offer long-term (6-month) training for social service managers, for workers caring for clients with dementia or for assistants to intellectually disabled and autistic clients.

The Diaconia's centres in Litoměřice and Písek have celebrated 25 years of their existence!
The Diaconia's Litoměřice centre focuses on helping people with a health or social handicap integrate themselves into society and work.



To draw attention to the 25 years since its founding, the clients of the daily services centre placed statues into the streets of Litoměřice. They created them alone and literally using their own bodies: the light sculptures copy the silhouettes of their live models. Each of them depicts a different position – one is sitting on a bench with a coffee cup in its hand, another is waiting at the bus terminal, two statues are walking into the local Diaconia centre, hand in hand. However, nobody from the Diaconia had imagined what a wonderful response the project would have. Today, the whole town lives with the sculptures. Not only clients of the Diaconia and their parents, but also

office workers, policemen, businessmen and others are increasingly interested in the lives of the centre's clients, as each of the statues provides the name of the specific client it represents, including their story. This is a way for anybody interested to be able to learn about the lives of handicapped people and about the services that are offered to support them; it makes the often "invisible" handicapped people more visible to the society.

We should also mention what happened during the first weekend following the festive installation of the sculptures. On Friday, the statue of Honza disappeared. On Saturday, Honza's statue appeared in front of the Lidl supermarket, but its head was missing. On Sunday, Martin's statue was found with graffiti on it, while Michael's was found on the ground with its hand and leg ripped off... and somebody had taken Jára's statue.

The workers of the Diaconia decided not to get turned off and followed the example of the way vandalism had been handled in New York: each broken window must be repaired immediately, each wall with graffiti must be cleaned without delay. Therefore, the statues were fixed and re-installed right away, on Monday.

The events triggered a wave of solidarity and interest in the town. Destroyed statues of handicapped people were a piece of news that had the right "conflict potential" for the media. The Diaconia received many offers of help with protecting the statues. Perhaps this also pricked some of the vandals' conscience: the statue of Jára was returned after a week with a note of apology.

And the situation today? People stop the Diaconia's clients in the streets of Litoměřice to ask how they are doing and wish them all the best.

The Diaconia's Blanka centre in Písek is also celebrating a quarter of a century of its existence. Founded on 1 May 1992, it has been providing care to elderly and ill people from Písek and its surroundings from the outset. The centre also includes an elderly people's home called Domovinka, a special-regimen home named Vážka, a field care service and a home care service.

The lent collection to support Burma

The funds raised in this year's lent collection, which took place in all the congregations of the ECCB, were donated to the approximately 100,000 people living in camps for "internal refugees" (internally displaced people) in the West of Myanmar/Burma. Some fled their homes following conflicts between various nationality groups, others ran away from floods. The Diaconia has been providing help in the region for three years. Over 400,000 CZK was raised in the collection this year. The money will be used for the renovation of five schools and for the support of 400 households in the refugee camps.

Adam Šůra

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The Protestant Theology Faculty of Charles University (PTF) is the successor of the Jan Hus Faculty (1919–1950) and the Comenius Faculty (1950–1990). In the year 1990 it was incorporated into Charles University. The administration of the Faculty is directed by a Dean and a board of Vice-Deans, elected for a four-year term of office. The Faculty offers study programmes at Bachelor's and Master's level in Protestant Theology, Diaconia (Pastoral and Social Work), and Ecumenical Studies, and at doctoral level in various theological fields. The faculty is ecumenically open to all. Pastors of the ECCB receive their theological education here.

Theologians from Prague in the Holy Land



On 6 May 2017 Prof. Martin Prudký and Dr. Filip Čapek, together with a group of eight students from the Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague, set off for Jerusalem in the Holy Land, where they stayed till 20 May. The reason for the trip was an invitation from Yuval Gadot, Professor of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, to participate in the “Ancient Jerusalem Excavation project” in Zone E in the City of David, situated to the southeast of what is today the Old City of

Jerusalem. Under the supervision of Helena Roth, Gadot’s assistant, and Johann Regev, an expert on radiocarbon dating, the group, together with other archaeology enthusiasts, worked on exposing materials such as ash, bones, olive pits, and ceramic shards, from as many different levels of sediment as possible, in order for them to be analysed later in the laboratory. The academic background to the project was the attempt to draw up a complete chronology of Jerusalem as a basis for dating further historical events and finds. The primary focus, according to Gadot, is on the Iron Age (11th – 7th century BCE), so that the excavations concentrated on the sediment layers from this period. At the end of the two weeks we spent working on the project we had discovered more material than we had expected, and so further excavations will take place on the same site in July in order to secure more material and to construct a complete chronological picture. In addition, Gadot

plans to visit Prague next year in order to present the results of the excavations. It will be interesting to see what archaeological discoveries about Jerusalem the work of the delegation from Prague has contributed to.

But we did not spend the whole of the two weeks working on the excavation. We were also able to learn something about the culture, history, and current themes of the Holy Land. For example, we heard a lecture by Dr. Joe Uziel about the latest excavations in the City of David and their importance for investigations into ancient Jerusalem, while his colleague Dr. Omer Sergi spoke about Jerusalem in the 10th century BCE. We also went to see the Albright Institute and St. Stephen's Church with the attached Dominican monastery in the east of the city and visited the churches on and around the Mount of Olives, followed by a walk along the Via Dolorosa. A visit to Warren's Shaft, not far from the excavation site, and a walk through the Canaanite and Hezekiah Tunnels, (the latter still today brings the water from the Gihon Spring into the Pool of Siloam in the city), also gave us an insight into pre-Christian Jerusalem. More extensive knowledge about the history of Jerusalem was provided by a tour by Dr. Guy Stiebel through the Israel Museum, in which a detailed model of Jerusalem in the period of the Second Temple is to be found. A further highlight of our stay was a guided tour by Amit Re'em of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the heart of the Christian quarter.

In between the two weeks of digging there was a weekend that was just as special. On the Saturday, as well as climbing up to the former Jewish fortress of Masada and bathing in the Dead Sea, we visited the Qumran settlement, in which Bedouins found the oldest known Bible manuscripts in 1947. On the Sunday, guided by Dr. Norma Franklin, we first went to Shiloh, which is said to be the site of the first shrine of the Israelites after they took control of the land. This was followed by a visit to Mount Gerizim, which is revered as their sacred mountain by the Samaritans, who, like the Jews, regard themselves as the direct heirs of the people of Israel. According to their high priest it is in fact the site of the sacrifice of Isaac. The weekend ended with an instructive visit to Samaria, the capital of the former Kingdom of Israel.

We brought back home with us memories of two special weeks, which provided us with a profound insight into the history, archaeology, and current situation of the Holy Land, and I would recommend anyone to go and see this magical land with their own eyes one day.

Richard Roch

Professor Petr Pokorný from the Prague Theology Faculty receives prestigious award Donatio Universitatis Carolinae

In October 2016 the Rector of Charles University announced a prestigious new award, the Donatio Universitatis Carolinae, to be awarded to leading researchers who have made an exceptional contribution to the international specialist prestige of the University. The award is accompanied by a grant of one million Czech crowns to support the research interests of the prize-winner.



In 2017 five researchers were chosen by an international advisory council to receive the award from among candidates submitted by the 17 faculties of Charles University. One of these initial five recipients, who received the award from the Rector at a solemn assembly on 6 April 2017 to mark the anniversary of the founding of Charles University, was

Professor Petr Pokorný from the Protestant Theology Faculty.

Pokorný has been an internationally recognised scholar in the field of New Testament studies for several decades. He is a member of a number of leading Czech and international scholarly associations. As long ago as the 1970s he was a member of the translation team responsible for the *Czech Ecumenical Translation of the Bible*, chairing the New Testament group. The award of the Donatio is recognition of his specialist research in fields such as Coptic Gnostic literature, the history of the Synoptic Gospel materials and the deutero-Pauline epistles, and the hermeneutics of the Bible. The financial support will help further his current research projects, in particular the series of publications entitled *The Czech Ecumenical Commentary on the New Testament* and historical research into Jesus of Nazareth.

A Scottish University Chaplain in Prague



Rev Dr Alistair Donald came to Prague on an Erasmus visit hosted by the Protestant Theological Faculty in early May. A minister of the ECCB sister church the Church of Scotland, he is employed by Heriot-Watt University – a science and technical university in Edinburgh – as its Chaplain. He here gives impressions of his visit.

Although I had visited Prague before for a short holiday, my week here gave me a much fuller appreciation both of the city and of the church and student context. I had helpful discussions with both staff and students in the Faculty as well as with others involved in student ministry in Prague.

There are many interesting similarities as well as differences between the cities of Edinburgh and Prague. Both are dominated by a huge castle on a hill and have histories reaching back over a thousand years, although in Edinburgh we have no equivalent of the Vltava running through the city. It was interesting to see the statue of Jan Hus given such prominence in Old Town Square and to learn that he is a national hero in the Czech Republic even among those who

do not consider themselves religious. In contrast, many in Scotland today seem rather ashamed of our reformer John Knox, keen to denigrate him and often apparently quite ignorant of the great emphasis he played on education for all.

The secular contexts in which churches operate in the two countries of course have very different histories, but the problems today seem quite similar: some openness to spiritual questions, but a scepticism and sometimes even hostility to Christianity.

As I have a background in science, one of my interests is the relation between science and faith and to show that they are not 'enemies' as is often supposed. It was good to chair a lively question time with staff and students at the Hussite Theological Faculty following a lecture I gave there.

My grateful thanks are due to Peter Stephens for his valuable help in giving me a wide variety of contacts for my visit, and also to the many members of the Faculty and others involved in ministry to students in Prague for their time and assistance in exchanging good practice.

Alistair Donald

UK in the UK: Charles University (Univerzita Karlova) visits the United Kingdom



Charles University is one of the oldest universities in the world. It has survived because it has been able to adapt, and this is what it continues to try to do today. One important element of this is international cooperation, and the university is making huge efforts to form partnerships across the world.

With this aim in mind, a group of 25 people from various faculties of the university, led by the Rector and his team, travelled in April to the United

Kingdom. The theological faculties were well represented, with three members of the Protestant Theological Faculty, the Vice-Dean for International Relations, Dr Jan Roskovec, along with Associate Professor Pavel Hošek and Associate Professor Tim Noble, and two colleagues from the Catholic Theological Faculty, Dr Martin Kočí and Dr František Štěch.

We began with a visit to Cambridge, meeting a group of people from the Faculty of Divinity, with some of whom we had contacts already. Interreligious relations, Biblical Studies, and the relationship between faith, theology and culture were areas of common interest we discussed. In Oxford we met with a couple of representatives of the Faculty of Divinity and looked at our common interests in the history of the Bible, and in contemporary philosophy and theology, as well as in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

From Oxford Dr Roskovec and Associate Professor Hošek continued to Edinburgh and St Andrews in Scotland. Especially in Edinburgh, with its long Reformed tradition, there was a natural partnership and it was more a question of building on existing relationships to see how we can cooperate further. The other three theologians in our group went to Durham, with which our faculty already has an Erasmus exchange. There we discussed cooperation with CODEC, a research centre for digital theology.

Personally I was struck in all the meetings with the importance of personal contacts and how meeting people face to face is so helpful and enables the building up of relationships. Theology in the university is facing many challenges across Europe, and only by working together will we be able to meet these challenges and provide a faith-inspired response to all that is good and bad in our cultures. It is also good to realise that with our experiences in the Czech Republic we have something to offer to universities in Britain, as well as drawing on their expertise to complement our own. As a post-totalitarian and fairly mono-cultural society, we have different experiences and demands that need to be heard, and we can use the more multi-cultural and interfaith experiences in Britain to examine our reactions and what we lack. It is the personal meetings that bring this home and make such trips as this to the UK so worthwhile. And we even had quite a bit of sunshine!

Tim Noble