



## EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF CZECH BRETHERN (ECCB)



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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.

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### Prison Chaplains Sent Into Service, Ecumenical Cooperation Contract Signed A Unique Expression of Cooperation Between Churches



Last year on the 14th of December, on the occasion of the Day of the Czech Prison Service, 15 new prison chaplains and 19 volunteers were commissioned for service at a ceremonial event. For the first time this was an ecumenical church service held at the church of St Wenceslas in Zderaz, Prague, which used to serve as the New Town penitentiary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The new chaplains took an oath before the general secretary of the Czech Bishops' Conference, Stanislav Přebyl, and the chairman of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, Daniel Ženatý.

Pastoral Care in Prisons is a supra-confessional association striving to provide well-balanced and educated spiritual and pastoral care in prisons and custodial prisons. The representatives of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Czech Bishops' Conference have therefore concluded a contract with this association, based on which only experienced priests and laymen who are well acquainted with the ecumenical environment and the specific conditions of

prison facilities are to be entrusted with spiritual and pastoral care. The Pastoral Care in Prisons association organises training courses and interdisciplinary seminars for new members and also provides for their further education. All three contractual parties consider it necessary that the candidates for chaplaincy service go through a one-year training period, as volunteers carrying out spiritual and pastoral care in prisons, before actually starting the job. The signing of the contract underlines the unique character of ecumenical spiritual care in Czech prisons, carried out in cooperation between 13 churches.

The contract was signed on 14 December 2017 by the chairman of the Pastoral Care in Prisons association, Pavel Zvolánek, the authorised bishop of the Czech Bishops' Conference, Josef Kajnek, and the chairman of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, Daniel Ženatý.

## What Can We Do for the World Around Us? Lent As a Time for Reflection



What can we do for the world around us? The period of Lent, lasting forty days before Easter, which began on 14 February this year, should serve as a time of reflection. This may also lead to a deeper consideration of environmental issues. The ECCB offers people several interesting ways to spend this time.

Every day of Lent this year our calendar brings a new insight into how to improve people's lives and their environment. It provides guidelines for calculating one's environmental imprint, ideas on how we can avoid dangerous chemistry in

household chores, how to make a responsible choice when buying a mobile phone, or why civic involvement is a good thing. Every Sunday brings a short Biblical reflection written by a pastor.

"Car-fasting" (<http://autopust.cz/>) is a challenge for the period of Lent (or at least for its last week), asking people not to use their car during this time, or at least to significantly reduce the number of journeys travelled by car. In the Czech Republic, car-fasting has been taking place each year since 2011 and hundreds of people have participated in the activity. The organisers were inspired by similar challenges taking place in Austria and Germany. The newly-introduced calculator, found on the webpage, calculates the amount of time actually saved (or lost) when travelling by car.

Both activities should trigger deeper reflections on how we treat the environment. In the Biblical story of Creation, humanity is entrusted with ruling over the Earth, which means we should behave responsibly in this respect.

Both initiatives are organised by the ECCB's Advisory Department for Environmental Issues in cooperation with the Czech Christian Environmental Network. Environmental protection has also inspired another activity called "Bike to Church", organised by the same Department in September. On a given Sunday, people are invited to raise environmental awareness by leaving their car at home and cycling to church.

## The Anniversary of the Reformation and Paths Towards Reconciliation After the Velvet Revolution



How did the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren cope with the change of its position after the Revolution of 1989 in terms of “reconciliation and forgiveness”, taking into account also the wider framework given by Martin Luther’s teachings, proclaimed five hundred years ago?

Martin Luther was, without a doubt, a conscious member of the Catholic, i.e. universal church. The existence of the universal church was perceived as a given fact also by John Hus. What the church found unacceptable was Luther’s realization that the church was neither the owner nor the mediator of salvation. One may not buy penitence or forgiveness, let alone a fulfilled life. We should keep in mind what Luther said: that we are, or may hope to be, part of the invisible Church, the one church that belongs to God. Why, then, do we fear so much for our Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren?

### The church during totalitarian times

In what ways did the situation of the churches in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989 differ from the times of the Reformation? As opposed to the middle ages, the churches during the communist era were defined and restricted through legislative regulations imposed by the state: they were not autonomous in their own affairs and decisions.

Seeking an easier co-existence among other democratic states, the Czechoslovak government signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This was used as an argument by critics of the communist regime, including church members, claiming they would help the government in fulfilling the Declaration. Those who held power were thus prepared to present our country to the international community in a very different light from the government’s menacing behaviour towards critics.

The church was facing two forms of pressure. For one thing, it was clear that the conditions set by the Declaration were very difficult to respect, often even against the law. The second type of pressure was based on the fact that there were also such critics among church members who were striving for a general improvement and whose activities were reaching beyond the scope of the church. We may ask whether their case was not similar to the actions of the Reformers who worked to “reform all human matters” in the spirit of Jan Amos Komenský.

### Citizens and church members facing pressure

Let me try to recall some of the ways people reacted to the pressure they were facing:

- Internal emigration, focusing on private, family life, activities with friends, in various communities or the church. This is something we can still relate to today.
- Perceiving the church as something that is completely non-secular and only seeking the coming of the Kingdom of God. “Don’t draw the attention of state authorities to your activities” – this was a common attitude justifying people’s unwillingness to express their real thoughts.
- Behaving and speaking in evasive ways in order to “prevent the worst”.
- Interrogations and oaths of silence, “cooperation” offers. Sometimes it seemed that even close colleagues were considering options that would enable them to be on good terms with both the church and the Communist party. My question is: How does one measure human weakness? Is it up to us to judge?
- An involved attitude (resistance?). Sometimes, this was an emergency decision, other times well-considered, sometimes this was an approach clearly resulting from one’s principles and values. Whatever the case, my personal experience is that such a decision puts an end to irrational anxieties and fears about how I would manage, and, surprisingly, also opens doors to a new community, a new fellowship of people who support each other on their journey.

## After the Revolution

The long-lasting situation in which so many of us were struggling with fear, anxiety, doubt, losing face, was suddenly changed. Was this a trial for those who believe in our Lord, Jesus Christ? Could it be put this way? Did we withstand the trial? Do we stand up to today's tests?

## A step towards freedom

Some people admit their weaknesses and failures, at least to themselves. Some even publically proclaim them and apologise. There are others, however, who refuse to admit they may have made any mistakes.

A few years ago, at a training course for pastors, Jan Šimsa gave the participants – anybody who might be burdened with feelings of remorse – the opportunity to come to confession; whether during the training, or before the board of the pastor association, before individuals, or in any other way they preferred. I asked him: "Are you sure somebody will be interested?" "Yes, I'm sure, I know a number of people," he replied. Nobody came, as far as I remember. After a few years, it turned out that Jan Šimsa, who had always been very firm and categorical in matters concerning the truth, had become the pastor of those he had had in mind back at the training course.

To conclude, let me repeat an audacious statement: As far as breaking the unity of the church community is concerned, the communist regime was successful. The privilege of Christ's church should be living united in diversity, while being able to debate freely, agree or disagree while being able to breathe freely: "that all of them may be one..." (John 17:21)

Tomáš Bísek

## The Ways to Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Czech-Sudeten German Relations

### A Personal View

*Love. Forgive.* "However, concerning the Sudeten Germans it is not that simple!" This is the objection that I often hear.

I (born in 1952) have grown up in the Sudetenland, in the German speaking village of Hackelsdorf/Herlíkovice on the upper Elbe in the Giant Mountains. We knew nothing. Nothing about the subdivision of the concentration camp Groß Rosen. We had no idea what the houses were used for before or that there used to be a school, a mill house, a grocery store and pubs. With other children I used to look through the windows into the empty wooden houses on the mountain side and poked with sticks into the graves (what if there is a dead German to find?). The people did not know each other, as every family came from somewhere else they glowered at each other and did not trust one another. There was no past, no community. Maybe nostalgia.

Much later, my eyes were opened by the texts of a historian, Ján Mlynárik (in the socialist era publishing under the pseudonym Danubius). After his texts were published, the life in the Sudetenland for many Czechs that once "occupied" the German houses brought no fortune any longer. *Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.* My family is a testimony of that. Do you believe in the power of a curse?

The other end of the circle of my life: In September 2017 I participated in the meeting of the "Heimatkreis Hohenelbe" in the Bavarian Marktoberdorf. There were friends of mine among the



participants. The homeland connects us. Many of them were so empathetic and understanding towards us Czechs that I occasionally had to oppose them. And vice versa – my weakness for the old people of that land is familiar to me. Only because I am a Germanist and because my earlier husband is a Sudeten German? I see the Sudeten Germans as those who had always been getting the short straw – as an involuntary minority in the time of the first Czechoslovakian Republic, as Hitler’s “Cannon Fodders” on the East Front, as victims of the expulsion from Czechoslovakia based on a collective guilt, and also as suspicious refugees in the destroyed post-war Germany.

When discussing with those who defend the expulsion I often ask (myself): how would we have acted politically if we were the Germans? Would we have passed the tests of the time of war?

The nostalgias tend to strive for fulfillment. Hence, once the revolution took place, I was able to help in building up the contacts and cooperation with the Heimatkreis Hohenelbe. (Finally those whose roots originate in my hometown!). I participated in making plans for the community centre in Vrchlabí, which in the end, unfortunately, did not come about. Yet the joy from personal friendships made along the way has remained.

Life tends to pull itself together meaningfully. I became a member of a small community “Přátelé Herlíkovic/ the Friends of Hackelsdorf) and our activities (such as the renovation of an old village house or of the small mountain church, cleaning up the German cemetery nearby, thematic Czech-German Weeks taking place all year long, Church anniversaries) are delightful for me. Because this is how we search for ways to reconcile the present with the past.

“Your old men will dream dreams”. I have dreams as well. I dream of finding Gottfried and Günther one day. In 1946, as small kids, they had to leave their house in Hackelsdorf, the house that our community now maintains. I dream that they might come back and we would say: “Your house!” I also dream that the train station in Hohenelbe / Vrchlabí might house a memorial, with the names of the nearly 45 000 Germans “transported” from here between 1945 and 1946 in freight trains. I dream that history, the history taught in schools, might not end with the Second World War. And I wish that our country would finally agree conclude a War Graves Agreement with Germany (which would, beside the “war graves”, also concern itself with the civilians who perished as a result of the war).

“The thing will be solved once they all die out,”. This is how an acquaintance of mine summed the thing up for himself. Only extraordinary people are capable of jumping over their own shadow. Many Czechs, and also many Sudeten Germans, are still entrenched in their positions. My problem is not the German guilt. It is the failure of *my* people that lies upon my shoulders. “It is difficult to act with humanity in a time of human hostility so that no new injustice arises”, says our friend, minister Erich Busse from Dresden.

When talking with people in Marktoberdorf, there was always a wish expressed: that the never-ending circle of injustice and revenge would be broken. Ingrid Mainert, supervisor of the Hohenelber and professionally a psychotherapist, speaks of the necessity of a mediator. She is also against the Beneš-Decrees (“Who wouldn’t be!”), however it is clear to her how extremely complicated this matter is for the Czechs. But are our politicians always making their decisions with regard to the closest elections, actually willing to solve the problem? Is it not our task? There are no merely “private” life stories. Each one of us is responsible in our concrete historical time. And as Christians we are not sentenced to any kind of a circular motion, but – as living “Ichthys” – we are intended to swim against the stream. Is not the Spirit of God the most competent mediator?

That acquittance of mine was right with his statement – but in a different way than he intended. Once there will be no more of us expelled Sudeten Germans, then they will finally come. They will come back into the literature, a literature that we will begin to uncover. Memorials and museums will be opened, the German cultural heritage will be respected. And for sure in Prague, there will one day be a big and much visited exposition with a short name: ODSUN. But that all will no longer will have to do with reconciliation and forgiveness.

Hana Jüptnerová

## The Memorials of the Toleration Period The Heritage of Our Fathers Has Its Value



It is a bit of a shame that Prague has no permanent exhibition on the topic of the history of the Reformation in the Czech lands. You will find a number of Protestant museums in France or Germany, the same applies to Budapest. Raising awareness of our Reformation-related history is important, especially with regard to the current series of anniversaries we have been commemorating: the publishing of the Kralice Bible, the deaths of Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague, the beginning of the

Reformation (Martin Luther), and the meeting of the Czech Protestants at which the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren was established. It is strange that our Protestant history should not be presented more proudly to the public when it has so much to offer: Hus and his predecessors as the heralds of the European Reformation, the years of religious peace with the Unity of the Brethren, the Toleration years, and the unique combination arising from the unification of the two branches of the Protestant tradition.

The discovery of an original chapel from the Toleration period, located in Truhlářská Street, has helped draw attention to the matter. In its time, the chapel used to serve both the Czech and the German Protestant churches in Prague – it was shared by the Lutheran and the Reformed confessions. Since it is currently a ramshackle building owned by the Prague municipality, it had originally seemed that gaining it with the purpose of hosting the planned Protestant Museum would not be a problem – until it turned out that the municipality had its own plans for the building and the necessary repairs would be much more extensive than expected. This makes any prospect of constructing the Protestant Museum at this site unrealistic, at least in the near future.

The situation is quite different in the countryside, with the Museum of the Czech Reformation in Velká Lhota near Dačice, opened recently as a result of the work of the Association of Friends of the Museum, and the Memorial of the Toleration period in Vysoká near Mělník, which was established on the premises of the Protestant church in Vysoká by the ECCB's congregation in Mělník. The Memorial includes a church from 1786, a parish house with other buildings, and a cemetery. The modest exhibition on the topic of the Toleration period is located in the former morgue and provides information about the local Toleration churches but also about those that were founded later in Prague: the Kliment and Salvator churches. It is a pity that the chapel in Truhlářská Street is not mentioned.

Let's treat old things with care and respect

We should truly value church archives and parish house attics, which often hold real treasures. The first portrayal of the Bible with the chalice, created by Jan Wégh, which has served as the symbol of the Protestant church for over 200 years, was found in Libiř, for example. Drafts of a church that was supposed to be constructed adjacent to the house in Truhlářská Street were found in the archive of the Salvator church. Although there is currently no Protestant museum or central depository, we should strive to preserve not only any documents referring to our church's past, but also the valuable historical furniture and other movables that are often disposed of due to ignorance. Perhaps at least founding a central register, to keep records of all such objects, would be worth considering.

Jan Mašek

## Scottish Pastor in Prague

### David Sinclair Will Be Responsible for the ECCB's Relations With English-Speaking Countries



David Sinclair, a pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, will be a significant contribution to the rich relations existing between the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and churches in English-speaking countries. He has been working in the ECCB's Central Church Office since the beginning of the year and is to spend the coming four years taking care of foreign visitors, organising their programme, and being available to any congregations wishing to develop partnerships with churches in English-speaking countries.

David Sinclair was the pastor of Wellington church in Glasgow from 2008 to 2017. During that time he also spent a year as Moderator of Glasgow Presbytery; and before this time he was the Secretary of the Church and Society Council, which is part of the organisational structure of the Church of Scotland. He commented on his four years in the Czech Republic by saying: "Before retiring is the right time to accept a new challenge."

He came to the Czech Republic with his wife Mary, who used to be a teacher. They both started attending an intensive Czech language course in November and only went home for Christmas to spend this time with their children and grandchildren in Scotland.

The Church of Scotland has had long-lasting and close relations with the ECCB. The Scottish presbyterian-synodal arrangement served as an example when the ECCB's administrative structure was being set up in 1918, when the ECCB was founded. Czech theologians had already studied in Edinburgh in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; contacts between both churches were renewed after 1989. In recent years, the ECCB's pastors Magdaléna Trgalová and Petr Peňáz were sent on a mission to Scottish churches, where they worked and lived with their families. At present, Ida Tenglerová is fulfilling this service. "Cooperation is one of the joyful parts of our earthly journey towards building the Body of Christ and seeking ways to testify our reformed faith," said the Secretary of the World Mission Council of the Church of Scotland as David Sinclair was sent to work in the Czech Republic.

Our hope for the Sinclairs is that these words will come true and that they will have a good time living and working here with us.

## DIACONIA OF THE ECCB



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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.

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### Keeping Hope

#### To Whom and How Will Help a Donation From the Fast Collection



Zaatari, one of the biggest refugee camps in the world, can be easily accessed by car. Usually, one sets off on a highway, which leads from Amman, the capital of Jordan, to the boarder with Syria. Once over the border one usually turns onto the so-called Baghdad road, drives through a mildly hilly desert landscape, and from a distance one can already see a big city. Before 2012, Zaatari described a small village. Everything has changed since the war broke out in Syria. More and more refugees arrived in Jordan. For the establishment of

the refugee camp, Zaatari for several reasons proved to be a good place – a source of groundwater was needed, a crucial thing in the desert arid land. The camp was established in cooperation with international organisations and under the supervision of experienced Jordanian authorities; the country has a lot of experience with the arrival of refugees (see box).

At one time, more than 200,000 people were in the camp, and now their number has stabilised at 80,000. Regarding the area, it is kind of as if the inhabitants of Zlín had to settle in the area of Žižkov in Prague. It is quite tight in the camp. Otherwise, it seems like a regular city, albeit with special rules.

#### Meeting on the Champs-Élysées

Of course one can only get inside with a permit and through police and military patrols. But these are quite friendly, their actions seem like the swift control at the borders of a friendly country. What, however, captivates an inexperienced visitor for the first time is that the camp is an endless clutter of

building cells, arranged carelessly. In each of them there lives a family with up to six members. Of course, the inhabitants of the dwellings keep improving them – extensions made of corrugated metal and other materials, often waste, which is at hand. A person accustomed to organised European cities has an impression of permanent chaos.

In reality, however, the camp lives according to rules. Each building cell has a descriptive number (even though a visitor does not understand their logic), the paths between them have their names and the heart of the camp forms a sort of main street, which is called Champs-Élysées by locals, like the famous Parisian boulevard. It obviously has its irony, but also pride – pride that even in extremely difficult conditions creativity and the desire to live can win.

The main campus of the refugee camp offers almost everything. There are two official supermarkets in the camp, where one can shop with special camp cards. On the boulevard, however, they compete with the semi-legal shops and establishments - there are, we are told, several thousand of them – and they offer almost everything. There is a wedding salon, a mobile phone or Apple computers store, and all other sorts of things. One can trade both for money and for goods; information and gossip are also shared here. It feels just like Paris...

So, as you can see, the camp residents do not have to fight for survival. Gone are the days when they only lived in tents, which did not protect them from the desert storms or from the cold, and people were glad to have anything to eat. Today, a sewerage system is being built, the camp has been electrified for a long time (the Czech government also played a major role in this in 2015). The greatest risk for its inhabitants is lurking elsewhere – above all in idleness. There's nothing to fill your time here.

The end of dreams and ambitions

"Sometimes, in the morning, I convince myself that I'm in a hurry and I have to do a lot of things. I get up quickly, dress and have breakfast in a hurry. I go out and walk somewhere fast. There is no point because, in fact, I have nothing to do..." That is how today's 23-year-old Syrian Alad described the worst camp trauma to Diakonie's workers. When she fled with her parents from Syria, she was in the third year of high school. She was planning on studying law. Today, she might have been finishing and would be looking for her first job. Instead, she has been in the dull camp stopgap for several years. Her feelings are not uncommon; refugees from Jordan cannot work in order not to compete with locals. In a country without a great deal of wealth, there is a tax to maintain social peace. There are nearly ten million Jordanians, and almost three million refugees. Before the war, an authoritarian regime capable of eliminating its opponents with a terrible brutality ruled in Syria. Those, however, who did not care about politics were offered a decent standard of living - people could do business, and study for free at decent state schools. They often had similar ambitions and life plans that we have in Europe. But the war turned it all into dust.

"When the refugees arrived, they originally thought they would stay for a month or two. Today they have been here for five years," says the Czech Ambassador to Jordan Petr Hladík. He reverses the myth that the goal of all refugees is to continue their journey to Europe. "My personal experience - and I have been meeting those people for more than four years - is different. They want to go back home." But this is still not possible, and it does not seem like it will be in the foreseeable future. The war in Syria still carries on, its conduct is unclear, and no one knows how to stop it. You even have to remember that Syria will never recover its original form.

Thank you for your help

The most important thing now is to help people in the camp keep their hopes up and deal with feelings of frustration. That is what Diakonie is trying to do in what is called the Peace Oasis. In cooperation with the Czech government and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) it has built a complex from several cells, where there are courses for sewing and for working with a computer. There are also a children's playroom and an outdoor playground where football is played. However, it is becoming more and more important that people are allowed to talk openly about their pain, worries and hopes. A well-trained guide is also required. There is often a theme of violence against young mothers and girls, which they experienced during their escape. Children and young people in

the camp conditions also need to be able to confide in somebody about their worries and their uncertain future. This kind of support can help prevent both conflicts and radicalization.

Besides the Peace Oasis, there is still a piece of free land. Diakonie, together with the Czech Embassy, plans to expand the meeting facilities in this small part of Jordan – to create a library and a community café.

The Czech Embassy will contribute some of the funds, and we would like to fund the extension from the donations of the Lent collection.

Thank you!

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.

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## Signs of Peace – Thoughts From My Exchange Studies in the US



“Let us now share the signs of peace with one another.”

When I heard the pastor say these words, I stood up, ready to smile and calmly shake hands with people in the neighbouring pews, just as we do in my hometown church in the Czech Republic. But what I got was something quite different. Suddenly, people jumped out of their seats. The band burst into a fast-paced song. Everyone started running around the church, greeting anyone and everyone who happened to stand in their way. Many warm hugs, kisses, and firm handshakes were loudly exchanged. After at least five minutes of this chaos (and after everyone but me circled around the whole church at least once), people seemed to start to calm down. When

they finally found their places again, the service moved to its next point as if nothing happened. But I couldn't move on; I had so many questions! “What just happened? How was this mayhem a sharing of the sings of *peace*? And most importantly: which of the several lunch invitations I just received will I accept?!”

Surprising moments like these became an everyday reality during my stay in the United States. I had the opportunity of spending my fall semester of 2017 at Columbia Theological Seminary (CTS) in Decatur, Georgia. And I loved it.

There is a long-lasting relationship between CTS and my “alma mater”, the Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague. The schools regularly exchange students (and sometimes even teachers).

Moreover, once every couple years, there is a group of students from CTS visiting Prague, learning about the history and present situation of Christianity in the Czech Republic.

Since Columbia Theological Seminary is a *seminary*, the teaching there tends to be a bit more practical-oriented. The overwhelming majority of its students are studying with the intention of becoming pastors, counsellors, youth workers, etc. But that definitely doesn't mean that the teaching there would be too easy or shallow, not paying heed to the depth of theological knowledge; the legacy of Walter Brueggemann, the world-renowned Old Testament professor who spent 17 years at CTS is still very much alive.

I think the strongest thing that I got to experience at CTS was the community. Unlike to what I am used to, most students live on campus there, and many teachers have houses in the neighbouring streets. Dinners, potlucks, or evening deep-talks accompanied by a glass of wine (or a glass of one of the locally brewed beers) are things that soon became a cherished part of my CTS life. The school also meets in one of its chapels four times a week for prayers and regular services. Both the teachers and the students are very active in the fight for social justice as well.

I learned a lot from my stay. Even though the culture, food, spirituality, and so many other things were different (it definitely took me a while to get used to the omnipresent air-conditioning for example), I experienced what being accepted feels like. Despite my language inabilities and many tragic faux pas, I tasted what being welcomed is like. And I learned there can be peace in difference.

May we in the Czech Republic, in Europe, or anywhere else share the signs of peace with one another as well.

Jordan Tomeš