



Ecumenical Bulletin 49 – EASTER 2020

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Our pre-Easter edition of the Ecumenical Bulletin is ready – here it is.

Easter is an invariable – something we can cling to, as Easter happens regardless of the fact that an impertinent virus is spreading all around us. It cannot jeopardise Jesus’s power over our world.

Concerning the texts in this edition of our Bulletin, I would like to draw your attention to the interview with Tomáš Jun, a minister of the ECCB. Tomáš Jun made quite a daring decision to take up the job of minister at the languishing congregation in Ústí nad Labem. The changes that have taken place during the short time he has been in office so far could easily be called a miracle. For Tomáš, this was a real challenge: he did not want to see a congregation in a regional city of approx. 95,000 inhabitants disappear. Have a read about what this 34-year-old minister has achieved so far and what he is planning to do in the future. May his work also encourage us to realise that even seemingly hopeless projects may be meaningful, fruitful and fulfilling.

The other thing I would like to mention, something that is almost hard to believe, are the activities of the group called “A Million Moments for Democracy”. Two young people, the founders of this civic protest, have managed to set in motion our nation’s disapproval with the government, and namely its PM, in a way which almost seems as if taken from another era. The numbers of people attending the protests organised by this group are certainly the highest since the Velvet Revolution in 1989, in fact they are not far from reaching the massive attendance of November 1989!

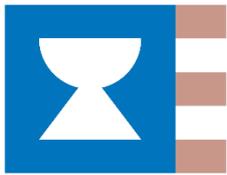
Dear friends, the virus will not leave our world in ruins. May Easter bring you peace and hope that surpasses our world’s troubles in every way!



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.

Synodal Senior Daniel Ženatý visits the Presbyterian Church in South Korea



Synodal Senior Daniel Ženatý made a long-planned visit to the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) at the end of October.

The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren has had very friendly contacts with this church. Korean Christians meet regularly in Prague, in our churches in Kobylišy and in Střešovice.

In Korea, the Synodal Senior attended interviews with church leaders and with teachers from the theology seminaries in Seoul and Gwangju. He met a representative of the Korean

mission, which operates in 127 countries, and also visited a newly formed parish near Seoul. He preached in two churches in Seoul and at the Gwangju University. At both seminaries he lectured on “ECCB from non-freedom to freedom, the transition from totalitarianism to freedom”.

The Synodal Senior heard from Christians in South Korea how deeply they care about the situation in North Korea and pray for this country to become free and for some form of unification.

The Koreans are interested in the experience of our Church, which went through a period of two totalitarianisms in the last century. Our experience helps them understand what life in

the absence of freedom means. They are also watching how we manage the transition to full financial independence at a time when there has been a certain decline after years of rising numbers of members.

It is essential, as the Synodal Senior emphasises, that we are aware of each other on our planet and that we pray for the freedom of those who do not have it.

Danela Ženatá

Crowds Will Come Pouring In



A young man, polite, relaxed and easy-going, with a cigarette in his hand, answers the door, followed by a large dog with kind eyes. Tomáš Jun is just beginning his ministry – like many others. However, his decision to serve at the Ústí nad Labem congregation sets him apart. It was a brave and rather risky decision, yet so far, everything proves it was a good one: keeping in mind the events of the past, the current situation looks quite hopeful.

Tomáš Jun is a Protestant Theology graduate. He served his vicariate at the Prague-Libeň congregation and, in 2018, he was assigned to Ústí nad Labem. He moved in with his wife, a graduate of Pastoral and Social Work at the Protestant Theological Faculty of the Charles University, and with two very little boys.

The villa which serves as the protestant manse is an ancient house. The wall of the office is decorated with a couple of old photographs, one of them showing the confirmation of approximately fifty young church members at the beginning of the 1950's. The congregation had roughly 4000 members altogether at the time! Ten years later, this number had dropped to a tenth of the original.

What was your first impression of the Ústí nad Labem congregation?

The congregation basically ceased to exist, there is no core to keep it going. There have been no elders for eight years – and a congregation without elders is really no congregation at all: it lacks people that would be willing to take care of it. A combination of negative influences has led to this situation. I might point out that throughout the whole socialist era, an office of the State Security was located right opposite our church building, which we share with the Hussite church.

This means some people were simply afraid to attend church.

When I ask elderly people about this era, they often say they did not want to cause trouble for their children. Although the congregation has four thousand members, they did not have very close bonds, they were people who arrived after the war, after the Germans were

expelled. They didn't really know each other. What's more, going to church was not popular at work. It's no wonder the numbers dropped so significantly.

What about the town itself?

It depends on the place. Some socially excluded localities are in a horrible state. Předlice, Střekov – thousands of people living in ways that are beyond comprehension. The average income in Northern Bohemia is much lower than in Prague, for example; many Roma people live here who only have auxiliary, unqualified jobs, receiving minimum wages. This may come as a surprise, taking into account that before WWII, Ústí was a very rich city. It still has many parts where you can find beautiful old villas, like the one where our parsonage is located. The city's history was marked by several tragic events. There was the massive post-war expulsion of local Germans – out of the 62,000 inhabitants, 50,000 were expelled. There also used to be a very strong Jewish community here – these people were murdered by the Nazis. And in April 1945, Ústí was hit by a massive bombing raid, the old city centre was left in ruins. The owners of the ruins were expelled and socialist high-rise blocks were constructed on the location.

So you basically knew what to expect. Why is it you still decided to come? Didn't you have any concerns? Or were you, on the contrary, attracted by the risk?

I'm not a teenager any longer, so no, I am not drawn to danger. However, there is such a significant lack of ministers that I feel it is necessary to go wherever the need is the most urgent. Where else should one preach the Gospel if not here in Northern Bohemia, where the bad news is frequent and where there is not much hope?

I don't want to accept the common mindset: do I like the place? What's the manse like? How big is the congregation? We need to stop focusing on these typical questions that preoccupy the minds of young ministers-to-be. The church needs to be open to its surroundings, attract the "seekers", as Halík calls them. I'm not saying I know how to do it.

I'm sure you received many offers.

Yes, the demand was enormous, I received offers from 17 congregations – and my colleagues, who were serving their vicariates, had a similar experience.

Why has there been such a steep decline in the number of ministers and theology students? Surprisingly enough, the numbers were better during the communist era.

I would say believing is no longer "trendy" today. Before the revolution, revolting against the regime was a strong aspect. Nowadays, anyone who believes in God is irrational, hence stupid, in the view of the majority. Wearing this kind of label in today's consumerist and very (at least seemingly) rational era does not exactly make one popular. You need a lot of support – from others, from God. People have many misconceptions about the Protestant Theological Faculty: it really isn't an easy school. There were 70 of us in the first year, including long-distance students, and only 10 of us actually graduated.

Does this mean there are many students who don't become ministers after studying theology?

Yes, in my mother's times, all theology graduates would go on to become ministers. Nowadays, it is half of the students or less. I am sure money is an important issue here. Then there is also an element of uncertainty about the future: should I become a minister, when no one can tell where the church will be ten years from now? The decreasing number of ministers is a problem, but what I am even more concerned about is the lack of protestant youth. When I used to attend youth assemblies from all over the Czech Republic, usually around a thousand young people would come. Nowadays, it is approximately 500. I think our church doesn't really know how to work with young people, how to attract them.

Could you say any significant changes have occurred since your arrival? For example the number of people attending Sunday services?

In the first half of 2018, eight people would attend on average. I came in October and at the end of the year, the average was 23. I am also pleased I have three new young men preparing to be baptised, and they have brought their families to our church. I should also mention that some people have come from other churches. I'm not trying to say I deserve the credit for all of this.

The congregation in Ústí is a "supported" one. What exactly does that mean?

This mainly concerns the personnel fund. If a congregation is unable to make contributions to this fund, it may ask for financial support, which must be approved by the Synod. The support lasts four years, then you have to apply again if necessary.

What about the missing elders?

An administrative commission has been put together for this purpose. It meets once a month here in Ústí nad Labem and it has nine members. We can only form a Session once we find six people, plus two substitutes, who are willing to commit to this for a period of six years. I am afraid we will not succeed this year.

You are clearly managing well. Is there anything you were not counting on, something that really caught you by surprise?

The majority of my time is taken up by things that have nothing to do with being a minister. Which is a terrible hindrance when trying to get the church life going. I spend a large part of my day on the phone, around forty hours per month, I am also taking part in the construction work, and I also don't want to neglect our two boys. And the amount of paperwork is unbelievable! I usually write my sermons on Saturday nights – I go to bed around 5 am. In fact, most of my actual Biblical work takes place at night.

Are you glad you decided to come here? Is there anything you regret?

There certainly isn't! I believe I am where I'm supposed to be. Nobody else wanted to come here. Fair enough. I did! And I can see it was a good decision, there is hope in the air. People who did not come here in a long time have come back. We have new faces. It is essential to build a core of people who will perceive the congregation as being their own, people who will care about it. I believe that fifteen years from now, this will be a strong congregation and crowds will come pouring in.

Jana Plíšková

A Visit from Glasgow to Prague



In the second week of Advent last year we in Dejvice congregation, Prague 6, were visited by six people from the congregation of Wellington Church, Glasgow. The visit was the first step towards a possible future relationship between our two congregations. Some time ago our elders had agreed to explore the idea of a link between ourselves and a congregation from another country. They set up a small group of four volunteers, including our two ministers, our church secretary, and myself, to take this matter forward and, in cooperation with David Sinclair, the Church of Scotland minister working with the ECCB, the idea of contacting Wellington Church arose. The Advent visit was the first fruit of this contact.

Our guests were with us from Friday to Monday. On the first evening our visitors attended a concert in our church and had a meal with some representatives of the congregation at a local brewery.

Saturday included an exploration of historic Prague (greatly enhanced by having our church secretary, Martina Studentova, also a professional guide, as our leader). This was followed by a visit to the Charles Bridge Museum and a boat trip on the river Vltava. A visit to Bethlehem Chapel, the re-creation of Jan Hus's 15th century preaching station, interested our visitors so much that we spent over an hour there before tea and more concerts beckoned.

On Sunday, our guests attended our worship for the second Sunday of Advent, which included a considerable contribution from our church choir and was led by our minister, Magdalena Trgalová. This was followed by tea and coffee and a chance to meet and talk with members of our congregation, before the group had lunch in the Sinclairs' flat.

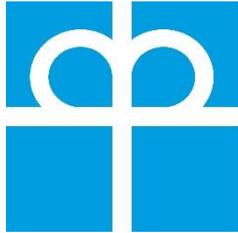
On the final day of the visit our group were taken by our minister, Pavel Ruml, to visit the prison and the army hospital; and a visit to the WW2 Lidice memorial with Pavel and Kamil Trgala was fitted in before it was time for our guests to be taken to the airport for their return to Scotland.

The visit was one of joy and blessing, the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the beginning of a possible new connection which, while not needing to be one that lasts 'for ever and ever', may be one, I believe, that will bring great blessing to both our congregations.

Daniel Molnár

(written for Souterrain, the Dejvice Church magazine, where the full article can be found;
adapted by David Sinclair)

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.

Czech Diaconia supporters help families and children. Briefly about shelters supported by the fundraiser Krabice od bot (shoe box)



At the end of last year, almost one million Czech crowns were donated by supporters of Czech Diaconia to fund support services for families and children. Thanks to that, the following diaconal projects will be better developed in 2020.

Shelter for mothers with children, Diaconia Litoměřice

Mothers living in a shelter find themselves in a poor financial situation. Usually, they cannot cover everyday costs of their children related to kindergarten and school. In the case of small children, this means mostly meals in the kindergartens, in the case of older children, it is mostly school supplies. But not only that – suitable shoes, glasses, payments for school trips or baby supplies also make up a considerable part of a tight family budget. The proceeds from the money raised will help the mothers and their children to afford a living similar to any other family.

Low-threshold Rubikon club, Diaconia Vsetín

This is an essential service in the city of Vsetin. It offers meaningful leisure time for children from Roma families, who were driven out of the city centre to inaccessible suburbs 14 years ago. Living in this modern ghetto has a detrimental effect on the children. The Rubikon club tackles this problem with a rich variety of activities. The funds from the collection will be used to equip the art workshop, pay for the music workshop lecturer, and help pay for a dance workshop.

Robinson Club of the Diaconal Christian Help Centre in Prague

This is aimed at children whose families are going through a period of crisis (divorce, poor financial situation, unmanageable problems of children in school, etc.). Regular cultural trips can provide children with therapeutic support and can work also with parents. The goal is to help families to overcome crises, enabling them to stay together.

Assistance to socially disadvantaged families of pupils of the Rolnička special school in Soběslav

The Diaconal School Rolnicka in Sobeslav is very popular. It provides pupils with complicated types of physical and mental disabilities with very varied, quality services. However, the poor economic background of some of the pupils' families causes them to be excluded from financially demanding yet popular school activities. For instance, one-week recovery retreats, summer camps with volunteers, dancing courses for students of special secondary schools, trips, excursions, theatre or cinema visits. Thanks to the collection, pupils from economically disadvantaged families are now included with the others.

Streetwork in Chat, Diaconia West

Nowadays, children and young people are looking not only for entertainment on the internet, but also for advice or assistance. This is tackled by the original project Streetwork of Diaconia West, operating in the wide vicinity of the city of Pilsen. Compared to regular e-counsellors, where it is up to the client to take the first step, in the case of the Streetwork in Chat project, it is a specially trained person who approaches people on social media, offers help, cultivates online communication and directs the users considerably to overcome their obstacles – either on their own or with an expert's help.

Adam Šůra

2019 News at Diaconia. Diaconia is Grateful for Its Foreign Support



Diaconia has decided to tackle its permanent lack of funding from the state by strengthening its fundraising activities. Several pilot-phase events took place in the course of 2019 and they were evaluated as successful and meaningful. They will therefore continue in 2020. Diaconia's foreign friends, especially Sewickley Presbyterian Church from Pennsylvania, have provided support for Diaconia's fundraising activities. Diaconia is also very grateful for all the other support it received from abroad. This concerns, for example, its long-term cooperation with the Italian Chiesa Valdese, which is a traditional supporter of Diaconia's aid in foreign countries (such as Ukraine), investments and innovations. This year, the funding from the Waldensians will be

used to cover the costs of the renovation of Diaconia's Rolnička centre, among other things. Thank you!

Adam Šůra

2020 Lent Collection: Diaconia Helping Abroad



Samer is ten years old. He and his family fled the Syrian war and ran to Lebanon. Like many other Syrians, they found refuge in a poor neighbourhood on the outskirts of Beirut. Samer's father, Ahman, suffered a war trauma that developed into epilepsy. He's been trying to work, but was unable to manage every day, which meant the family of five would often run short of money for rent and food. To help the family cope, Samer

started working in a barber's shop. He would make approximately two Dollars per morning. The small contribution into the family budget was a high price to pay for the fact that a ten-year old boy could not attend school.

Samer's mother contacted Tahaddi, a community centre she learned about from the women in the neighbourhood. Tahaddi runs a school and they had a place for Samer. However, the boy's renewed school attendance meant a hole in the family budget.

Yet the centre is ready for such situations. Samer is not the only child coming from a refugee family and facing the choice between making money and getting an education. His family received meal tickets and a contribution for buying a washing machine and a small heater. All of this was possible thanks to the aid provided by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaconia, which acts as the Ministry's mediator for distributing the aid in Lebanon.

Hope for the future

The change has definitely done Samer good. He likes his classmates, he is very excited about all the school trips and the variety of the school programme. He is planning to become a P.E. teacher one day, but he is a good student in all the other subjects as well. Samer's two sisters have also started to get some education. The older one attends a reading and writing course, the younger one is currently home-schooled with the help of the teachers from Tahaddi. The systematic help from Tahaddi and from the Czech Republic has brought a significant relief to the family. Thanks to the meal tickets, they no longer have to worry about whether they will have enough food to get through another day. Their future is now much brighter.

However, the overall situation in Lebanon is still very complicated. A country that is the size of a slightly larger Liberec-region now hosts over 1.5 million refugees, mostly from Syria, and the government is not administering the country well. Most Lebanese believe that the terrible economic situation is caused by corruption. This led to mass civic protests all over the country last autumn. One of the unintended results was the breakdown of the local banking system, which now poses a risk not only to freelancers, but also to organisations helping families like that of Samer.

For the little ones

This is why Diaconia has decided to donate the proceeds of this year's Lent Collection to another programme run by the Tahaddi community centre – a pre-school education centre. The community kindergarten is attended not only by children of refugees, but also of poor

Lebanese. The kids can play in safety, acquire the basic habits of hygiene and a healthy diet. They will learn colours, animals, letters and numbers. All of these are prerequisites for later being able to attend a normal state school – getting an education is always of fundamental importance in life. The kindergarten is also attended by children with special needs.

If the Lent Collection proves as successful as it has been in the past few years, funds will cover the wages of the kindergarten's staff for one year, which is an enormous support for an organisation like Tahaddi.

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.

A look back over the history of the Prague Theological Faculty, 100 years after its foundation



When the Protestant Theological Faculty was founded in 1919, it was the first opportunity for students to officially study Protestant theology in the Czech lands for centuries. Before the First World War, Bohemia had been part of Catholic Austria, and there had been many restrictions on Protestants. Candidates for the ministry had had to go to Vienna to study.

With the establishment of the new Czechoslovak state after the War came full religious freedom. Reformed and Lutheran Protestants united to form the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB), and one of the first things it did was to establish a Faculty of Protestant Theology so that its theology students and those from other churches could now be trained in Bohemia in the Czech language, with a study programme that took into account the specific Czech Protestant traditions of Jan Hus and the Czech Brethren. The Faculty (originally known as the Hus Czechoslovak Protestant Theological Faculty) was established as an independent institute of higher education by a law of the Czechoslovak Republic passed on 8 April 1919. Teaching started in October 1919 in modest surroundings in the sacristy of the Church of the Saviour in Prague, with only 14 students, but the Faculty soon moved to more suitable premises, and student numbers grew steadily. Women started studying at the Faculty in 1922; their number increased considerably after the Synod of the ECCB decided to ordain women to the ministry in 1953.

During the Nazi occupation in the 1940s the Faculty was closed down, along with most other institutes of higher education, but it resumed its activities when the Second World War was over. In 1950 the Communist state decided that the Faculty should be divided into two schools: the Hus Theological Faculty for students from the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, and the Comenius Protestant Theological Faculty for students from the ECCB and the smaller churches. Under the Communists the Comenius Faculty experienced many difficulties and the number of students dropped to below 100. For most of the 1950s and 1960s the Dean was the leading Czech Protestant theologian Josef Lukl Hromádka.

The fall of the Communist regime in 1989 meant new opportunities and many changes for the Comenius Faculty. In 1990 it was incorporated into Charles University and renamed the Protestant Theological Faculty. In 1995 it moved to larger premises on its present site in Černá Street. There was a tremendous increase in the number of students, meaning a move away from the earlier family atmosphere, and that some students now had no church background. An increasing emphasis was placed on research with a growth in the number of doctoral students. The opening of frontiers within Europe enabled the Faculty to intensify its international contacts and exchanges, so important for the small Czech Protestant community.

In the late 1990s new study programmes were opened up in Pastoral and Social Work and the Theology of Christian Traditions, and recently the Faculty has developed a successful Life-Long Learning programme for retired people and others interested in learning about theology. In 2019-20 there are some 550 students at the Faculty, including about 100 Life-Long Learning

students. In spite of the many changes it has undergone during the 100 years of its existence, the Faculty still strives to follow its original calling and train students to examine critically the challenges of their time in the light of God's Word and the Czech Protestant tradition.

Peter Stephens

The Protestant Theological Faculty celebrates its 100th anniversary



Immediately after the end of the First World War and the foundation of the new Czechoslovak state, the Lutheran and Reformed Christians in Czechoslovakia united to form the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. And one of the first things the new church did was to establish a Faculty of Protestant Theology so that its theology students could be trained in Bohemia in the Czech language.

100 years later, the Faculty is still going strong, and in November 2019 it celebrated the 100th anniversary of its foundation with a series of events of different types.

The prelude to the celebrations was the annual meeting of the Association of Friends of the Faculty on Friday and Saturday, 9-10 November. The members of the Association – which was itself celebrating its 20th anniversary – heard from a number of former students of the Faculty about what they are doing now and how their theology studies helped prepare them for it. There was a broad range of interesting contributions, not only from those now working in the church, but also from a university philosophy teacher, a lawyer, a writer, a government official, and a current student involved in activities protesting against the erosion of the rule of law in the country.

On Sunday evening, 11 November, there was a service in the Church of St Martin in the Wall in thanksgiving for the 100 years of the life of the Faculty, with the sermon preached by the doyen of the Faculty teachers, Prof. Petr Pokorný, who sadly died only 2 months later.

To mark the anniversary, Charles University decided to award an honorary doctorate to Manfred Oeming, Professor for Old Testament Studies at Heidelberg University. Prof. Oeming is an old friend of the Prague Faculty, with which he has cooperated in a number of joint projects over the last 20 years, including block seminars and recently archaeological excavations in Israel. The official ceremony of awarding the doctorate took place in the Large Aula in the central university building on Monday afternoon, 12 November before a large gathering including the Rector of Charles University, guests from other countries, representatives of other faculties of the university, other academic institutions and the churches, and the general public. The ceremony was then followed by a festive celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Faculty at which representatives of the churches and the academic community abroad said a few words of greeting and honorary medals were awarded to longstanding friends and supporters of the Faculty from the academic, ecclesiastical, and publishing fields.

The celebrations were rounded off by a symposium at the Faculty on Tuesday, 12 November. The main lecture hall was packed with guests who came to listen to a series of short lectures, some of them covering various aspects of the Faculty's history, while others cast a critical eye

on the Faculty's relationship with the university, the church, and society as a whole. It was generally agreed that the lectures, mostly given by younger members of the teaching staff, were thought-provoking and insightful, and promised well for the continuing development of the Faculty over the next 100 years.

Peter Stephens

Positive Energy for Society



On the 25th of February 2018, 70 years to the day since the Communists illegitimately took over power in Czechoslovakia, two students of the Protestant Theological Faculty of the Charles University, Mikuláš Minář and Benjamin Roll, founded an organisation with the aim of protecting democracy in the Czech Republic. Both felt that democracy was in jeopardy in our country, primarily because of the Czech Republic's Prime Minister Andrej Babiš.

Thus was established the petition called "A Million Moments for Democracy", with the main goal of bringing together the voices of those who considered the Prime Minister's behaviour unacceptable. The organisers of the campaign declared their respect for the results of the democratic elections and agreed with the fact that the PM should come from the winning party ANO, but they refused to accept that this person should be somebody who is charged with EU subsidy fraud and used to be an agent of the Communist secret police.

The number of signatures under the appeal called "The Moment to Resign" was rising at an unexpected speed. The appeal was signed by people throughout the whole society, including a large number of famous, influential people. As of 20 November 2018, 310 thousand people signed the petition and the number rose to over 340 thousand in May 2019 (note: the Czech Republic only has approx. 10.3 million inhabitants).

Protests in support of the campaign's requirements started taking place all over the country, and they were increasing in size. On Sunday 23 June 2019, over 280,000 people met in Prague. On 6 December 2019, protests took place in 220 Czech towns and cities. More demonstrations in regional cities are planned for the beginning of 2020, and another large protest is to take place in Prague on the 1st of March.

We asked one of the founders, Benjamin Roll, about their intentions for the future and whether any of their requirements have changed in the current turbulent times.

Your movement, with the main goal of protecting democracy, is very successful. It has hundreds of thousands of followers. How would you explain to people in Western Europe, the readers of the Bulletin, that our democracy is in jeopardy?

We have a Prime Minister whose position is a major conflict of interest (as confirmed, among others, by the European Commission). He has the largest media influence and, thanks to an excellent PR team, also an enormous influence on public opinion.

His party ANO has the largest number of members of parliament, but since they do not form a majority even together with their coalition partner, the socialist party ČSSD, they cooperate with the communist party KSČM and, unofficially, also with extremists from an islamophobic

party (SPD). This opens the door for dangerous social moods and helps bring to life and legitimize antidemocratic ideologies, enabling these to have a strong influence on Czech politics.

Another important problem is that people's trust in state institutions, public media and even democracy as such is gradually growing weaker, which is also one of the results of Babiš's propaganda. People are losing interest: they stop caring about and controlling politics. This trend is actively supported also by the pro-Kremlin President of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, whose presidential campaign was built on using the widespread fear of foreigners and immigrants.

You keep pointing out new threats to democracy, yet the fact that the Czech Prime Minister is charged with EU subsidy fraud remains one of your main topics. Why is that?

The conflict of interest is the clearest way of demonstrating that the PM holds too much power in his hands.

Andrej Babiš is the real owner of Agrofert, one of the largest Czech companies, which strongly benefits from the PM's position. The audit of the European Commission draws clear conclusions stating that Mr Babiš's companies do not have sufficient legal grounds for drawing subsidies.

Right now, there is a very realistic risk that we will have to be paying these companies from the state budget – and that will concern all of us. The Czech state administration has not reacted in an adequate way and hasn't taken the requested measures. At the moment, it seems that the state is serving Mr Babiš's interests rather than those of its citizens.

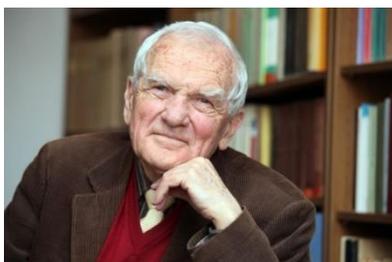
However, it should be noted that Andrej Babiš is not our only topic. We want to awaken and interconnect local civic society, because we consider it a fundamental part of democracy, which will remain in place once Babiš leaves politics. We would like to create an environment in which politicians like Babiš, Zeman and others will not have a chance of succeeding.

What do you consider the most fulfilling about your job?

We have met so many outstanding, active people all over the country; we've been formulating the fundamental values that democracy stands on. It is also a wonderful feeling to be giving hope and positive energy to society.

Ondřej Lukáš

Professor Petr Pokorný, 1933–2020



In the early morning of 18 January 2020, Petr Pokorný, Professor of New Testament Studies at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, died at the age of 86, surrounded by his family. In him the Faculty and the church have lost an outstanding and popular teacher, a perceptive researcher of international renown, and a tireless organiser of academic work, whose profound erudition in biblical studies, theology, philology, and philosophy was combined with the friendly and open certainty of a witness to the Christian faith.

Petr Pokorný was born in Brno on 21 April 1933. After studying theology at the Comenius Protestant Theological Faculty (today the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University) he was ordained as a preacher of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in 1958, and from then until 1967 he served in the Church as assistant pastor and pastor in congregations in Prague. During this period he also studied the Coptic language and Greek literature in Prague and Vienna, and spent one term carrying out postgraduate studies at Oxford. In 1963 he defended his doctoral dissertation and in 1967 his habilitation dissertation, in both cases after several years of delay on the part of the Communist authorities.

From 1968 onwards he taught New Testament Biblical Studies as the assistant and later successor of his teacher Josef Bohumil Souček at the Prague Protestant Theological Faculty, being appointed Professor in 1972. In the period 1996–1999 he held the office of Dean of the Faculty. He spent periods as visiting or guest professor at several foreign universities (Greifswald, Pittsburgh, Tübingen, St Petersburg), and was awarded honorary doctorates by the universities in Bonn, Budapest, and St Petersburg. He was an active member of a number of leading academic organisations, in particular the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas and the Learned Society of the Czech Republic, of both of which he was president. A major outcome of his endeavours to achieve cooperation in research is the Centre for Biblical Studies of Charles University and the Czech Academy of Sciences, which he founded in 1998 and was head of in 2001–2010.

Professor Pokorný's research interests were wide-ranging, including in broad terms the literary and theological interpretation of the New Testament writings and other contemporary texts, and more specifically the synoptic gospels and the Deutero-Pauline epistles, Gnosticism, and the person and significance of Jesus of Nazareth. He was a member of the team of translators that produced the Czech Ecumenical Translation of the Bible in the 1970s.

In his teaching and research work Petr Pokorný did not cease to be a practising theologian; he was not only an academic teacher, but also a preacher and thought-provoking interpreter of biblical texts, who lectured on theological, historical, and philosophical questions for church circles and the general public. In his own church he was a member of the theological committee and contributed to his church's hymnbook by composing the texts to several hymns.

When he retired some years ago, he viewed this as meaning retirement from managerial functions, not retirement from work. Right up to his death he played an active part in Faculty life, giving lectures and supervising several doctoral students; in November 2019 he preached the sermon at the festive service to mark the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Faculty.

He will be greatly missed by the Faculty, by his church, and of course by his family.

Daniela Ženatá