



Tusek Christian Mission to the Czech Republic, 2010-2014

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Executive Summary

We (Jaroslav and Sara) Tusek began planning our Christian mission to the Czech Republic as early as 2002. Since 1990, we'd been closely watching the political and economic developments in the Czech Republic while we delivered our *Executive Education Programs for Czech and Slovak Business Leaders* (1991-1996).

As we observed the Czech economy steadily improving, with substantial gains in political freedom, we started to wonder if there was any other way we could help the Czechs develop the civic society that former President Vaclav Havel was urging them to make a priority. That was when we decided to develop a mission to the Czech Republic.



From the beginning, we determined that we would not go to Czech Republic to preach, but to listen. We would not go to scold, but to heal and encourage. Once we arrived there, we found that our stay in Czech Republic placed us at the very center of some of the central conversations of our time: about fairness and justice, availability of jobs in the job market and/or unemployment issues, wealth and poverty, globalization, the role of women, environmental controls, smoking in restaurants and public spaces, the temptations of power, leadership, the role of civic organizations and the state of civic society, political transparency, and the role of Christian Church.

We can't comment on all these issues in this brief report but we at least mention one area where we spent most of our time, which was helping young adults to think about the purpose of life, to define the main values that govern their life, and to articulate their major interests, qualifications, accomplishments and career goals. We found that helping people examine their lives, define their values, write down their moral beliefs and thus discover what gives their life meaning and purpose was a very good way to introduce spiritual matters, often leading to some frank talks about the Christian faith and the Church.

This report will do three things: describe our motivation and plans; recount what actually happened; offer insights and lessons learned, for us and for the people to whom we ministered. We hope it will give readers some flavor of what we found on our Christian mission to the Czech Republic.

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Motivation and Initial Plans

We have been closely involved with the Czech Republic since 1989, offering American-based executive education programs to Czech and Slovak business leaders. These programs were well-received, but as time went by, we began to sense there was more we could do to help the Czechs rebuild their country after Nazi and Communist totalitarian rule.

In *Leaders to Follow (LTF)*, Summer 2002, we noted this:



“Thus after twelve productive and exciting years of focusing on the mission of assisting in the transformation of the post-communist countries of the former Soviet bloc by offering executive education programs for business and professional leaders, the Institute is at a major crossroad. Rather than “tweak” the mission as we have done every year at our Annual Planning Meeting . . . we are completely rethinking our mission as an Institute. By September 2002 we at the

Institute expect to be operating under our new mission. What it shall be, we do not know. We confidently hope and pray that our new mission will be as fascinating, inspirational and personally rewarding as the past twelve years have been.”

Then in the Summer 2005 *LTF*:

“We were becoming ever more certain that the spiritual side of life is at least as important as the economic or political. We agreed with the quote from American President Woodrow Wilson (who was a friend of T.G. Masaryk, first President of Czechoslovakia after WWI and was instrumental in the founding of Czechoslovakia after WWI):

‘Our civilization cannot survive materially unless it is redeemed spiritually.’ So it is with humility and some trepidation that we embark on a new leadership

adventure. To lead spiritually, we are finding, is an exercise in discovering our own weaknesses and frailties. We know that, as humans, we are very fallible spiritual leaders, and we will try to point the way to the One Who can lead, and does lead, without failure. This is our new leadership role in the Czech Republic.”



In December 2006, Jarda wrote in *LTF's President's Remarks*:

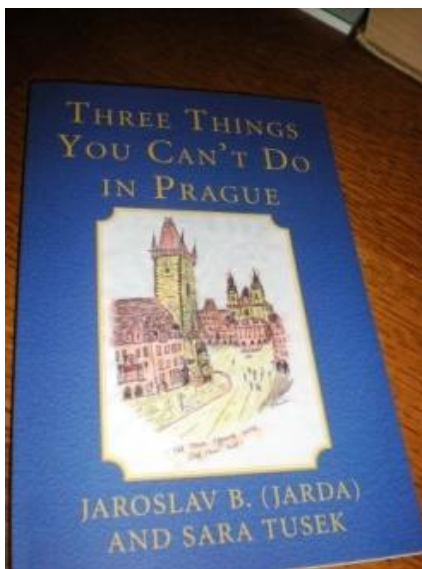
“Now we shift our focus to the spiritual rebuilding of these countries, beginning in the Czech Republic. Pope Benedict’s recent trip to Turkey, where he made generous overtures of respect and friendship towards both Muslim and Orthodox Christian leaders, illustrates the crucial need for reconciliation and spiritual leadership in a world where vastly different values, heritages and beliefs rub shoulders in tight proximity.



skeptical of, if not repelled by the organized Church.

The Czech nation has an unusually rich Christian heritage. Evangelized in the 9th century by Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Bohemia and Moravia were hotbeds of religious fervor throughout the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, some of this zeal was destructive, as in the Hussite wars and the Thirty Years’ war, followed by religious repression under the Hapsburg monarchy, leaving the average Czech

In the 20th century, Communism set out to destroy the Church in the Czech Republic not by forbidding it (which, as we see in China, usually causes it to flourish) but by discrediting it. The result is indifference toward religion which has emptied the mighty cathedrals of the Czech Republic, except for a few faithful believers, joined by tourists and musicians enjoying the beautiful buildings.



Obviously we are not the first people to notice a spiritual gap in the Czech Republic. In our book *Three Things You Can't Do in Prague*, the fictional Knut and Gudrun Peterson meet Olaf, a Norwegian Lutheran pastor and missionary in Ruzyně Airport. Their closest friend is Markus, a German missionary serving as pastor at Betlémská Kaple, the Czech Evangelical Brethren church in Knut and Gudrun’s neighborhood of Žižkov.

During my visits to the Czech Republic in 2006, I’ve met missionaries from many Christian denominations, coming from New Zealand, Canada, Norway, and Great Britain. Much hard work has been done already to revitalize the Christian church. This brings us to

the Institute's role in the spiritual revival taking place in the Czech Republic. In *Three Things You Can't Do in Prague*, Knut and Gudrun are full-time missionaries in the Czech Republic, part of a joint venture, supported by their home church and international communion, and are given the task of church planting, along with the necessary resources for taking on such a large administrative task. Not only are they sharing the Gospel with individuals, but Knut and Gudrun are also working as part of a team to fulfill the many legal and financial requirements for registering and operating a non-profit organization in the Czech Republic. These requirements are growing ever more rigorous as the European Union refines and increases its legal requirements for the member countries."

The March 2007 *LTF* reported on an address by Czech President Vaclav Havel:



"[Havel] spoke to more than 1200 students, faculty administrators and alumni of Columbia University in New York City last November 15, in an hour-long discussion with former US President Bill Clinton, Havel credited the Clinton administration of the 1990's with aiding the democratization of Czech society, both materially and psychologically. The reference here was to the process of recovery from forty years of communist rule, which was brought to

its knees in 1989 by ordinary Czech citizens, and the significant aid provided to the Czechs by Clinton's administration. The occasion was an address sponsored by the Kraft Family Fund for Interfaith and Intercultural Awareness, part of a series of presentations on topics of importance regarding human faith and friendship.

One of the more interesting aspects of Havel's comment is that he mentioned only two types of aid, the material and the psychological, leaving vast areas of human concern, such as the moral, the spiritual and the eternal, unexplored. Perhaps as a prod to further discussion, Havel was then asked if he believed that democracy is the political system best suited to human nature. He retorted,

'I believe that spirit is prior to matter, and I believe that certain human values like solidarity and civil rights are the most important things and that everything else in a society should be subordinate to these values.'

Jarda notes in the January 2009 *LTF's President's Remarks*

“Today I have a brief but urgent message about an important struggle which is going on right now. This struggle is happening an ocean away from us in the US, but it nevertheless touches every one of us who is involved in the Christian Church. Whether we know it or not, whether we want to accept it or not, this barely discernible struggle is like the ‘still, small voice’ of God that we know so well. We are forced to make a choice.

Not between supporting missions in the US or overseas. Not between being evangelical, sacramental, charismatic, contemplative, or supportive of social justice. Not between planting another new church in this place or that place. No, it involves a much harder choice, one that is worthy of the 21st century and the times that are upon us.

It's the choice between commitment and indifference, between the most urgent or the most important. The choice between doing what's right or leaving the right undone. It is the choice between helping the ailing, weak Christian church in Europe to awaken and be reborn or letting it simply die after some two thousand years of existence.



This choice is, I believe, even more important than the one that Americans faced prior to their decision to join the Allies in Europe in World War II in order to defeat the powers of evil as seen in the Axis. That decision turned the tide of the war and made it possible to defeat the Nazis and Fascists who were bent on destroying Europe and remaking it in their own twisted image.

Today's message is brief but urgent. The Bride of Christ in Europe needs your help now: *“Therefore choose what you will do, says the Lord. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord who called us”* (Joshua 24:15).”

With this kind of commitment to assisting the Christian church in the Czech Republic, and to assisting the individuals we would meet there to deepen their relationship with God, we planned our mission. It became clear in 2006 that we would not be planting churches for the communion in which Jarda was ordained in 2007, nor would we be, in fact, planting churches at all. Instead, we had two ways in which we hoped to reach people, one-by-one: through our business, ILI (specifically through English language instruction and career development programs) and through the British *Alpha* program, which conveys the essentials of Christian belief in a friendly, relaxed setting. What actually happened was not quite what we expected.

What We Did

With hopes high and a positive attitude intact, we moved our household and our business headquarters to Prague in August 2010. The neighborhood we chose was Vinohrady, a quiet district with trees and parks about 10 minutes from the city center. Close to Metro, tram and bus lines, our flat was convenient for moving around the city. We had no car, as driving and parking in Prague is tiring and unnecessary for anyone willing to walk a few blocks to public transportation.



Our first step was to legalize our stay. Jarda has dual Czech-US citizenship, but Sara had to apply for and received a 5-year long-term visa from the Foreign Police. This process took only two months, lightning speed for the former Hapsburg Empire city of Prague. We also looked for a church, attending a Hus' House or Husův sbor on nearby Dykova Street. This is a Czechoslovak Hussite Church (Czech: *Církev československá husitská*, *CČSH* or *CČH*) which separated from the Roman Catholic Church after World War I in former Czechoslovakia. It traces its tradition back to the Hussite reformers and acknowledges Jan Hus (John Huss) as its predecessor. It was well-supported by Czechoslovakia's first president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. When we went to the service, the building was impressive, but the congregation was just a handful of people. Prague empties out in August as people escape to the forests, the mountains or the sea, so the meager church attendance reflected this. In fact, even the pastor was on holiday. For different reasons, we agreed that this was not the church for us.

Alpha realities

Our next church visit was to the United Methodist Church on Ječná street. This church was founded by American missionaries in 1921 and is still an official mission church, though most of the staff and clergy are Czech and the services are in Czech. We attended this church for about six months and offered to lead *Alpha* here, only to find that the British *Alpha* course has not done so well in the Czech Republic due to cultural gaps and style differences. The Czechs substituted *Tři P* (Three P's), a shorter course aimed at young people. We started to see that running *Alpha* might not be so attractive for Czech-speaking congregations due to language issues. So we decided to try an English-speaking church to stir up some enthusiasm for *Alpha*.



English language programs

We then looked at the ten or so English-speaking congregations (all missions from Britain or the US) in Prague to see which we might work with for *Alpha* or another ministry. In the meantime, we'd made a friend at the UMC church, a South Korean missionary who'd been there for seven years. She led us into a wonderful relationship with the Korean community in Prague, through which we found outstanding students for our English language programs. We were able to assist these young people, some of whom were already Christian, some of whom had never heard of Abraham, in preparing for their entry to university and the world of work. This was one of our ministry goals, and we were pleased in all our dealings with Koreans in Prague. We also found Czech students for our English language programs.



In these programs, we focused on helping young people to improve their English language and communications skills in preparation for their careers. These English lessons gave us the chance to spend time with people, most of whom had no relationship with God. Many of them were South Koreans, whose materialistic outlook and drive to study hard and succeed in their careers often left no room for contemplation about God. Others were Czechs, whose lives in a secular society that emphasized material success seemed to put God off to the side or in the past, something for their grandmas.

Finding a church home

The church we settled into in March 2011 was the International Baptist Church in Prague (IBCP), a British mission church. This church was a great match for our ministry, with its welcoming attitude and youthful influence.



“We welcome people of all racial, ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds. We also welcome agnostics, unbelievers, seekers, the curious, sinners, doubters, the spiritually wounded, the lonely, the broken-hearted, the disillusioned, and those struggling with life. Dress is informal; simply, come as you are. Bring a friend with you. You will be glad you came. And when you leave, we pray that you’ll go with Jesus’ love, joy and peace.” IBCP website



At IBCP we made wonderful friends from many countries and continents. Although again we found little interest in *Alpha*, we were active participants in the weekly Bible study and an English summer camp for students at Bílý Potok, as well as other outreach programs that the church runs, including an extensive program for the homeless in Prague. Here we were able to join forces with other committed Christians to tackle some problems “as Jesus would,” and to lead people into a genuine encounter with Him.

Career development programs

ILI has been involved with career and leadership programs since it was established in 1985. Helping people to successfully navigate career transitions has been our pleasure in those years, whether we were assisting young people make the step from university to job or graduate school, guiding career changers toward finding to repackage their skills and accomplishments for a new career, encouraging almost-retirees to refashion their careers or giving hope to the underemployed, unemployed or precariously-employed.



In Prague, these seminars were an eye-opening ministry. Our participants included people from the Czech Republic, France, Russia, Korea, Britain, Germany and the US. Their ages ranged from 17 to 74, and their career interests spanned a gamut from design to theater to politics, from real estate to banking to business management, and from tourism to missionary work to Montessori education. We were educated by them on what it takes to get a job in a thriving intercultural city like Prague; in turn, we helped them to assess their life goals, values and spiritual lives as well as how to make living.

Although we had previously authored and published nine books in the field of career development, we soon realized how differently young people living in the Czech Republic (both Czechs and expats) think about their life's purpose or their professional career from young adults in America, and we found ourselves quickly developing new materials and reworking what we had already developed into formats that would enable us to be more helpful to those we worked with in Prague. We offered three different career development seminars, each designed to help participants at different points in their careers. Each seminar used our book *21st Century Jobs* as a workbook, to help participants evaluate what they might like to do in their career.



- *“Redirect,” an introductory program focusing on gaining self-knowledge and setting one important career goal.*
- *“Looking Ahead,” a comprehensive program involving self-analysis, graduate school and organizational research, preparation of resumes and cover letters, actively searching for a job or graduate school opportunity, and interview process.*
- *“Your Next Job,” a thorough analysis of the participants’ career to date and the creation of a plan to get the job they could like and do best as their next job.*

Each seminar was tailored to the particular needs and interests of its participants, giving us the opportunity to get to know these young people in some depth as we helped them prepare for the career of their dreams. In the process, we could talk about the need for a moral, ethical and spiritual dimension of life, opening the door to discussions of the Christian faith.

All in all, our 3.5 years of living in Prague brought us into contact with a wide range of people, some of whom were Christians and many not. We considered all our relationships to be opportunities to share the love of Christ, whether directly or indirectly.

Insights and Lessons Learned

We imagine that most people undertaking a mission in a foreign country about which they know very little will come with a full load of misconceptions, prejudices and misapprehensions. What startled us was how true this of us, who had major advantages, or so we thought. Jarda was born in the Czech Republic and lived there for his first 26 years, both studying and working. We had both visited the country many times since 1989, and had read innumerable books, articles and reports on the Czech economy, political scene, and religious developments. Yet we were quite wrong in so much of what we believed—not necessarily wrong factually, but wrong in much of our presuppositions, emphasis and analysis.

Here are a few of our misguided ideas, along with what we found to be true.

1. *Czech society is atheistic and secular*

This statement is simply wrong. The Czech lands were evangelized in the 9th century by Cyril and Methodius, Orthodox missionaries from Macedonia. Czechs took their Christianity so seriously that their national hero is a Christian martyr, Jan Hus (burned for heresy in 1415). The Czech lands were the center of the Central European religious wars of 1618-1648, battles to determine who was Roman Catholic, and who was Protestant. This deep Christian heritage is easily seen in the traditional ethical and moral codes of decency, service and honesty which still guide most Czechs today. This is not a heathen nation, riddled with witchcraft or pagan practices; it is a modern European nation, proud of its Christian heritage and more homogenous than the US in its Christian ethos.



2. *Czechs are materialistic and easily corrupted.*

A steady diet of journalistic stories about government and business scandals may give the impression that the Czechs are thieves of the first class, but the same is true about American journalism. News is about what's unusual, not what's everyday. The typical Czech is no more or less honest than the average American. As for materialism, it's the pot calling the kettle black for Americans to accuse anyone of materialism.

3. *Czechs have no interest in helping others, as Christians do.*



If you look at the hospitals, libraries, universities, charities, churches, cemeteries, convents, monasteries, historical and cultural sites, festivals, holidays, fairy tales, and mythology of the Czech peoples, you can't avoid seeing the overwhelming evidence of a society built on Christian principles.

Virtually all of these institutions have Christian roots, and many are still overtly connected to the Christian church. Hospitals, universities and libraries were established by the Christian church to care for people's bodies, minds and souls. The Czechs revere their religious heritage, making visits on holidays to the dozens of monasteries, cathedrals, convents, libraries and shrines built by the Christian

church over 11 centuries.

Many Czech state holidays honor Christian saints or martyrs; statues of these heroes dominate town squares all over the Czech lands. Plague columns and roadside shrines pop up on any trip around the countryside. Literally, the Christian past of the Czech lands, meticulously preserved and venerated, gives ample evidence of the roots of the culture.



4. *Czechs are not spiritually minded*

This statement is laughably untrue. Czechs have two main topics of conversation, politics and religion, just like Americans. The difference is that Czechs love to debate religious beliefs and practices, while Americans usually are more interested in defending their own beliefs against all questioners. The Czechs enjoy a good intellectual argument on just about any topic, and religion is especially fascinating.

You can be sure that most Czechs know the history of the many religious conflicts that shaped European history: the preeminence of the Roman Church, the bloody birth of Protestantism, the constant steadiness of



the Orthodox Church, and the hijinks of the American Conservative Evangelical Right. Religion is in the news daily, as the Christian churches seek to recover lands expropriated by the communist regime.

And if you still don't believe that Czechs treasure their Christian culture, just visit the castle complex—Hradčany. The centerpiece is St Vitus Cathedral; the first church on this site was built in 930.

5. *Very few Czechs go to church or make God part of their lives.*

This statement has some truth, if you only compare statistics. In the US, about 40% of people tell pollsters that they go to church regularly and up to 90% say they believe in God. In the Czech Republic, probably 12% are self-identified church-goers (most of these are Roman Catholic), and only 35% or so say they believe in God.

But if you consider the very different attitudes these cultures have toward declaring their beliefs in public, you may adjust your thinking. America is a market economy, and it's good marketing in many conservative communities to say you go to church and believe in God. It's American! Czechs, in contrast, remember 50 years of totalitarian governments in which declaring any beliefs at all could result in deportation to a prison workcamp, concentration camp or exile status. Who is asking these questions, a Czech will think, and why? When you talk with individuals, you may be surprised to learn of their deep belief in God, though that does not necessarily mean that all Czechs think the best way to demonstrate trust in God is by attending an organized church.



Our Lesson Learned

The greatest lesson is, without doubt, how little we knew about the country we came to help. We didn't have the kind of understanding that only living among people can produce. We were (sad to say) somewhat arrogant in

thinking we could offer the Czechs anything they really wanted or needed, since we didn't know what they wanted or needed.

But the people we met in Prague, Czechs and other expats from Africa, Asia and Europe, were mostly gracious in the face of our ignorance. We did listen and learn, and changed our views accordingly. What we have come away with is not earth-shattering, but very valuable nonetheless.

- People's dreams, goals and inner lives are not as different as may appear on the surface.
- It's easy to make friends if you are sincerely interested in other people's lives.
- The exciting new vistas of living abroad are mostly based on what we are willing to see.

You could say that these are lesson we could have learned in the US, simply by living among people unlike ourselves. Maybe, but then we would have missed out on the grandeur and sweep of a glorious 12-century old culture, the wonderful people we met who changed us for the good, and the certain knowledge that Christianity has the power to endure in spite of oppression, war, terrible weather, plague, revolution and all the evils that mankind and nature can dump on it.

Clearly, no 50-year-long totalitarian system is able to eradicate more than 1200 years of Christian life in God in just a few decades; the Czech culture has, indeed, deep and tenacious Christian roots. This is the best lesson of all, and one that we had to travel across an ocean and 6 times zones to see for ourselves.

