

Email from Becky Johnson – June 5, 2010  
(an excellent brief history of the ministry in Czech Republic)

Ken and I have enjoyed sending occasional email updates to people who pray for the missionary work in the Czech Republic. I've just revised my "Czech emails" list—please let me know if you prefer not to be on this list. However if you are inclined in this direction, I'd love to pass along stories about our visits, news from the Dennys, answers to prayer and prayer needs. In this update I really need to share a bit of perspective about God's workmanship the past 10 years.

Ken and I recently returned from the Czech Republic and are preparing to head back with a summer team at the end of June (whew!). We have been involved with gospel ministry in the Czech Republic for some years now—for me, more than a decade. God has worked mightily in our lives during this time, and many facets of His faithful work have swirled around the ministry in the Czech Republic.

Ken's daughter Alisa was the first in our family to go on a mission trip to the Czech Republic. Her dad followed her footsteps after he retired, in the summer of 2002. I did not go on that team, but my daughter did—it was her 2nd trip. The team leader was Marcus Denny, an intern at Faith Bible Church, whom I'd known since 2000 when Marcus and I were on our first summer team to the Czech Republic. In November of 2000 Marcus had returned to CZ for nine months to help missionaries Peter and Sonya Smith. This was a life-changing experience—all who know Marcus can attest to his passion for gospel ministry in the Czech Republic.

So in 2002 Marcus was leading the summer team, and Ken and my daughter Amie were among the team members. Two months after the team returned the Lord began drawing Marcus and Amie together through their common interest in ministry in the Czech Republic. They were married six months later, and in June of 2003 they were moving to California where Marcus would complete seminary in preparation for the mission field. The elders of Faith Bible Church brought Marcus and Amie before the congregation to lay hands on them, and Pastor John Smith recommended them to Cornerstone Bible Church in Orange County. This was because of Cornerstone's strong support for the ministry of missionaries Peter and Sonya Smith in the Czech Republic.

Cornerstone welcomed the Dennys, invested in them, and eventually offered Marcus a pastor role while he was attending seminary and preparing for ordination. In February of 2007 Marcus was ordained at Cornerstone, with Peter Smith traveling from the Czech Republic to be on his ordination council. God used Cornerstone Bible Church in significant ways in the Dennys lives, and they pursued God's will for Marcus following his ordination. This was an extended process which culminated as Marcus discerned afresh God's leading for them to go to the Czech Republic. As 2008 drew to a close, Cornerstone affirmed Marcus and Amie for this transition to the Czech mission field before the congregation. The timing was a clear testimony of God's faithfulness, for at this time Peter and Sonya Smith had discerned that God was leading them off the mission field to be present with their children in the season of their transition into college.

Ken and I have long observed the providence of God working in Marcus and Amie's lives. Initially we observed God's workmanship from separate vantage points, but during the Dennys' first year of marriage God surprised us by bringing our vantage points together. Over New Years 2004, Marcus and Amie led a team from Cornerstone to the Czech Republic to help with a winter outreach camp. Through Peter Smith's encouragement, four of us from Faith Bible Church became a part of this ministry. On New Years Eve God began showing Ken (with his resistance, at first) that he was to begin pursuing a relationship with me. This discovery brought about a major alteration in my life! Ken's experience of widowhood was approaching the four-year mark, but mine was almost 19 years!

Why is our story within this account of God's workmanship in the Dennys' lives? Because the theme of Czech missions has woven our path together with theirs in a way that reflects the mystery of God's sovereignty. In both their path and ours we've had to wait as God's sovereignty unfolds His plans. In both paths, our independent tendencies have been stamped with the need to abide in God's grace to work all things together for His purposes—in His timing, through His resources. Everything else ends up being chaff that blows away.

Marcus and Amie learned that at last their Czech visas had arrived on Easter Sunday 2009. They were celebrating Christ's resurrection with Marcus' parents in Vancouver. Ken and I were in the Czech Republic, hoping that they would arrive before we departed. John Smith's family was checking our mailbox daily, watching for the visas. Following the Easter service, the Smiths stopped by our house and lo and behold, propped against our front door was a large manila envelop containing 5 passports with visa stamps and \$900 in cash! It turned out that the Dennys had overpaid and were receiving a cash refund!! They hastily purchased tickets, and their flight landed on Czech soil just 3 days before Ken and I left. We were so thankful to be present as the Kladno church welcomed them.

Ken had established a pattern of helping with the Czech ministry twice a year, and in our marriage we've sought to maintain that pattern, going to the Czech Republic to help with outreach English classes, to encourage our friends in the Kladno and Usti churches and to arrange time with Czech friends who do not yet know the Lord. Now that three little granddaughters were settling into life in the Czech Republic, God had provided an even sweeter bait to travel there! But as the Dennys were preparing to leave for the mission field, the Lord was arranging for us a more formal bond with Czech ministry—Missionary Financial Services.

It is a bit complex to set the stage for this part of the story, but I'll try to be brief. In 2004 Faith Bible Church affirmed missions and equipping pastor John Smith to lead a church plant in the Spokane Valley. We were surprised that the Lord moved Ken, a lay elder at FBC, to go with John as a founding elder at Christ Our Hope Bible Church. From the beginning of the COHBC church plant, Ken has overseen its finances, but in November of 2008 he began personally handling the church accounts.

Let's move forward now, to a January 2009 Skype conversation between Ken and Peter Smith. Ken inquired what advice Peter was giving Marcus about a missions agency. Peter seemed not to want to respond to Ken's question. After a few awkward moments, Ken shared something that had been on his heart (which he had not shared with his wife), asking if Peter thought Ken could start a mission agency that could work with the Dennys. The idea which Ken had been mulling over was in precise alignment with Peter's thinking, however Peter had been warned (by his brother John) not to suggest it. John knew that Ken was extremely busy managing the Christ Our Hope's finances and payroll. But now Ken was initiating the idea of starting a missions agency, and Peter became very excited! Christ was in this!

Ken's idea hatched from a conviction—shared by Peter and John—that missionaries' sending churches could also function as the their shepherding churches (providing wisdom, encouragement, prayer support and accountability). It is a common practice for missions agencies to establish the framework that guides what missionaries do, and for this multi-faceted function, missions agencies often charge a fee of 15% or more of a missionary's support funding. If, however, the church closest to the missionaries would "own" the role of shepherding them in the field, an agency might only be needed for financial management (accounting of support monies, paying the missionary's salary and reimbursements and handling tax reporting). Ken reasoned that his fee for this service could be just 1% of Marcus' support funding.

With encouragement from Peter, John and Marcus, Ken arranged a meeting with attorney Dar Grewe, who is an elder at Faith Bible Church. Dar graciously donated his time to help get Missionary Financial Services (MFS) established. Incorporation in the State of Washington was an easy procedure, but getting 501(c)(3) status (non-profit status) with the IRS required considerable effort. My “administrative guru” husband waded through the 75-page application with an understanding that after filing, the process could take six months to complete. We were astonished to hear back from the IRS in just six weeks that MFS had been granted 501(c)(3) status!

So now we are officially tied to Czech missions through MFS, with Marcus and Peter as our two missionaries. Ken is blessed that the MFS Board of Directors includes representatives from the three churches who participated in discerning the Dennys’ call to the mission field: Elder Bob Han from Cornerstone Bible Church; Elder Larry Klock from Faith Bible Church; and Pastor John Smith from Christ Our Hope. I must say that this missions agency is a perfect ministry for my husband in retirement. Ken is an MBA/CPA whose career path was in financial management. To further affirm God’s leading in all this, the elders of Christ Our Hope decided a year ago to refocus Ken’s elder role. He continues to handle financial matters for our church, but now Ken oversees missions as well.

As I write this, the Dennys have been in the Czech Republic for over a year. The family of Peter and Sonya Smith were there until the end of July when they transitioned to the church Peter is pastoring in the Detroit area. When the Smiths left, the Dennys moved into their rental home, in the village of Lidice just outside of Kladno. The Smiths hosted a neighborhood event—an unfamiliar idea for Czechs—to welcome the Dennys to Lidice. Neighbors kept peering out their windows, not wanting to be the first to arrive. A blessing from the Lord is Daniel Adamovsky, a fairly new and very strong believer in Christ who lives with his father across the street from the Dennys. Daniel openly shared about Christ at this “welcome to the neighborhood” barbecue. Marcus has been so encouraged that Daniel wants to meet with him—on Thursdays at 6:00AM—to study Wayne Gruden’s Systematic Theology.

Gaining fluency in the Czech language has been a major focus for the Dennys this year. Ken and I can share that they have made great progress! In our recent visit we saw that almost all of their conversations in the church are now in Czech, and they are navigating through life speaking Czech rather than English. But both Marcus and Amie are quick to share that they have a long way to go to become fluent. It requires much effort for them to have conversations in the Czech language, and they do not always comprehend what people are saying to them. Marcus is very much looking forward to the day when he can preach in Czech—for now Marcus preaches in English and Daniel translates. Marcus receives pulpit assistance from Daniel (who preaches about once a month) and from the church at Usti nad Labem.

The Kladno congregation has graciously received the Denny family, showing sincere appreciation for all of them. The men are being knit together through a 5:30AM meeting with Marcus each week. Amie is now leading the women’s Bible study in Czech. God has allowed the Dennys to host some sweet fellowship times in their home—one such occasion was Easter dinner with the entire congregation present, following the Resurrection Day service. The Dennys also host a small outreach Bible study one night each week and a Bible study for young believers on another night of the week. Marcus has continued to teach an outreach English class for a group of Peter and Sonya’s English students.

God's faithfulness is so evident in relationships they've developed with their neighbors at Lidice! Lydia (5) has been learning to speak Czech at a scholka (preschool) in Kladno. But several Lidice neighbors have tried to help the Dennys get Lydia enrolled in the Lidice Scholka for fall of 2010. One neighbor who attends their outreach Bible study even wrote a strongly worded letter insisting that the school accept Lydia! Marcus confirmed her enrollment during our visit in May, which will help Amie develop a relationship with Lydia's teacher as well as with other moms and children. A neighbor who serves as an officer of the village community asked Amie to teach an English class for children starting next fall.

The Dennys have been blessed by two like-minded churches, one at Usti nad Labem and another at Roudnice nad Labem. These churches both have Czech pastors who are a tremendous encouragement for Marcus. The congregations have gathered together for Sunday worship three times this year, first in Kladno, then Roudnice, then Usti. Jarda Kernal, the pastor at Usti, is involved with publishing a monthly Christian journal; Milan Tacheci, the pastor at Roudnice, is involved with publishing gospel tracts. All three churches will have a presence at this summer's outreach camp.

Would you commit to praying for the Dennys? Praise God for His faithfulness in their first year! Please intercede for their Czech language acquisition, for their gospel ministry in Kladno and Lidice, and for the church Marcus pastors. Please pray for God's clearly leadership as Marcus prepares for the outreach English camp in July, coordinating with teams from Cornerstone and Christ Our Hope. Please pray that God would give Marcus clear guidance as he sets ministry priorities for the fall of 2010.

Your participation in this gospel ministry in the Czech Republic is a huge blessing to us and an even greater blessing to the Dennys!