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Witnessing in the Czech Republic: Not "Business as Usual"

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GOSPEL CHOIR: The church-run gospel choir, organized in 2007, has performed almost 100 times in both church and secular settings.

Witnessing in the Czech Republic *Not “business as usual”*

By PETR ČINČALA

How can you win people for Christ in a predominantly atheistic country where a lack of trust toward Christians prevails? It’s undoubtedly a challenge.

In the Czech Republic, however, amid the skepticism toward Christianity, I’ve also discovered a great spiritual hunger in the hearts of the people. They’re searching for meaning in their lives, for examples of positive values, and for “heroes.”

God placed a strong desire in my heart to share the gospel message with the Czech people, and that well-known statement of Ellen White came repeatedly to mind: “The Savior mingled with [men and women] as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”*

The message is clear, but not easy to put into action. Prior to 1989, religion-related outreach was not allowed in

the Czech Republic under the previous regime, and it continues to be a tremendous challenge because believers are so few in number and experience virtually no growth rate. But after much prayer, a team of four of us chose to trust in God and step out in faith.

In the Beginning

We started out by organizing various community activities and programs, mingling with people, and networking with other nonprofit organizations. Meeting the practical needs of the people was a priority. Eventually we decided it was time to evangelize and offered Bible studies and spiritually based presentations. But no one came. People expressed appreciation for our friendship and help, but they didn’t want us to “talk God into them.” *Jesus’ method of ministry doesn’t work*, we thought. We didn’t realize that we were actually laying the groundwork for future mission.

Although discouraged, we didn’t give up. We continued

to work the best we could in the community. Then one night in 2009 I asked God what more we should do to help the people to turn to Jesus. He said, “Pray more.” So we contacted as many church members as possible, even some overseas, and asked them to pray for us. The Lord answered those prayers, and the following year we had our first baptism—a woman who was a member of our gospel choir! And the baptisms have continued, increasing in number every year since.

Reflecting on the Process

Looking back, we reflected on the process and the way the Lord had led us to reach people for Him successfully.

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We had begun by creating a civic association, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), through which we established community groups and activities such as family center events, adult English classes, youth and health clubs, and a gospel choir. Before we could even begin to share the gospel, the community residents had to become accustomed to a pastor, someone who cared about them and prayed for them. These were the beginning phases of our ministry.

In later phases those who belonged to our community groups began cherishing the relationships they had developed and became more open to learning about God and experiencing spiritual healing—as long as it came about in a natural, culturally relevant manner. They may not have been receptive to evangelistic campaigns, but they looked forward to Christian concerts, festivals, choir rehearsals, art sessions, watching Christian movies, and listening to Christian stories.

It was amazing to see the transformation throughout the years of so-called atheists. The gospel choir had a particularly significant impact. One young woman named Kathy attended our English class and also was among the first gospel singers. Today she works as a court judge and continues to be actively involved in the choir as a conduc-

tor. As resistant as she was to “church,” she now expresses gratitude for the spiritual leadership we have provided.

“Being part of this group has shaped my life,” Kathy says.

Another person who joined the choir several years ago still claims to be an atheist, but she recently thanked us for the spirituality and loving warmth she has experienced.

“Atheist or not, I would be totally ignorant if I did not feel your spiritual leadership . . . [and I now] desire to be a better person,” she says. There are dozens of similar stories.

National Marriage Week

In 2007, during the initial phase of our ministry, we organized a National Marriage Week campaign in the Czech Republic to promote healthy marriages and highlight the importance of developing good relational skills. We launched it via a media press conference and involved local politicians and celebrities in Prague as well as other community centers, clubs, and churches.

Since then National Marriage Week has been promoted annually throughout the country and has grown in popularity. This successful campaign helped to strengthen our ministry and expanded our outreach to other nearby cities. We gained credibility and the confidence of local authorities and other influential people. All our community programs began to grow, eventually resulting in hearts won to Jesus and His church.

Success Comes by Patience

Jesus’ method truly does bring success, but it often requires much prayer, Bible study, time, and patience. Even though reaching hearts for Jesus in challenging regions may be a long-term process, it’s certainly worth it. By His grace souls are won for His kingdom.

May the Lord send forth even more laborers to His fields of service. ■

* Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 143.



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