**Mission as Service in the Czech Republic**

By Cristian Dumitrescu

(This interview took place in October 2007.)

**Cristian Dumitrescu**: Petr, tell us about yourself and how you became involved with The Generations Center project?

**Petr Cincala**: Upon finishing studies at Andrews in 2002 I returned with my family to the Czech Republic to be involved in reaching out to the Czech secular people. Soon upon our return I realized it was not possible to be employed as a pastor and do mission work at the same time. Because the local church organization did not have a structure for employing missionaries, I soon became a freelancer. Later —through circumstances that I believe have been providential—I had to limit my activities to the local church that I have loved very much. In 2004 there was a moment in my life when I sensed God asking me to bring all I received from him—education, passion, vision—to his feet and just give it up. When I did that, God took the development fully in his hands. In the fall of 2004, a small group with just a handful of people was initially formed, praying to God for preparing and involving them in his mission.

**CD**: I remember you have also been involved with the Institute for Revitalizing Czech Mission. Did that have any influence on starting The Generations Center?

**PC**: Yes, the Institute for Revitalizing Czech Mission started with a new fresh vision of reaching the Czech “atheist” nation through a mission revitalization movement. The mission of this institute was to look for ways to share God’s love and empower individuals, groups, families, and churches to develop positive connections and resources and thus create a healthier society.

The objectives have been (1) to advocate a deeper understanding of the Czech worldview and to follow up on the relevant issues of Czech religiosity in order to bridge the gap between society and the church, (2) to promote development of a healthy (psycho-social, spiritual) dynamic in the community, and (3) to sup-
port a revitalization movement that would foster holistic community outreach and multiplication of loving teams.

**CD:** How did you implement your objectives?

**PC:** When we prayed we had no clue about the place God had in mind for us. We did not even know what kind of ministry would be appropriate for fulfilling the goals stated above. At that time, there were various social projects going on but my concern was that our ministry be missionary in nature. It became obvious that a national project was more likely to start from a local one. But then the offer came. John, a member from our local church, and his business partner bought under very providential circumstances a building in downtown Liberec and expressed a desire to have part of the basement used for a mission project. The most relevant use of the space (4,000 square feet) in the initial stage was for a community development center.

**CD:** What is the philosophy behind this project?

**PC:** I found out that John had...
had one unfulfilled dream since shortly after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. His involvement in business postponed his dream, but his vision had been to create a center which would bring various generations (children, parents, and grandparents) closer together. Since he initiated the development of a community center, it did not take us too long to come up with the name, The Generations Center. Our idea was to bring together all facets of life that were being separated by the new freedom and rise of capitalism in the post-communist society, such as the disabled and healthy, the younger and older, the rich and poor, the politicians and common citizens, etc.

**CD**: What about your motto “Build healthy relationships, Foster personal growth, Live a better life?”

**PC**: Well, we did not start with that right from the beginning. As the various activities and programs began to develop and the unfulfilled needs of people coming to our center became obvious and tangible, in the fall of 2006 we summarized our call in the threefold phrase stated in your question. People seek ways to get better not only materially but also socially, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually too. Some people are motivated to come because at our center they find people who love them, listen to them, and care for them. Other people come because they, and their children, can learn new things in various areas of life—English courses, computers, arts, music, ethics—while others are attracted specifically by personal growth seminars.

**CD**: I remember your interest in the Czech society during your doctoral studies. Was this project also your dream or how did it all start? Tell us about the project’s development.

**PC**: As I already mentioned, my goal was to find ways to reach people. There were other people with their ideas, too, but it all started to take shape in June 2005 when the offer to rent the place downtown came from our businessmen friends. After a brief survey on how to best function organizationally, we proceeded to form a non-profit civic association.

For years, God has been teaching me and my wife very valuable lessons in how to have faith in him and how far we can go in trusting him. All that came into place as we were starting this project. It was very ambitious on one hand, with a $50,000 yearly budget, but very unrealistic from a human perspective, because it was based only on good will and faith, with $0 to start with.

In the Fall of 2005, a group of 5 people were already working hard on refurbishing and preparing the 8 available rooms. The first one was opened at the end of November with a public seminar on communication.
The most dynamic development took place in the early days of 2006 when families, especially mothers, started to come to the Center to spend time with their children. This type of family day care was named “The Little Mole” according to a beautiful picture on one of our walls. As the kids played, moms spent time talking together. Part of the morning was designed for both children and adults to have a different type of creative/educational activity each day of the week: one day children sang, the next day they drew pictures, then watched dramas, etc.

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**CD:** I have heard you say that 2006 was a turning point for the project. What happened?

**PC:** In 2006 we moved from plans and visions to actually running the Center on a daily basis, providing services for people on a significant scale. Although there was still a range of possibilities before us, we continued with optimism anticipating successful development of our program and goals with the help of the current team and a continually expanding group of volunteers and patrons. In April
2006 the Center was officially inaugurated and all rooms started to be used. Along with The Little Mole (Krteček), various leisure activities evolved, from physical exercises to singing and art bees. Also, special one day events around Christmas, Easter, and Children’s Day were organized for families and the public.

Since then God has really blessed us despite all the difficulties and many sacrifices. Often exhausted, often facing a lack of money and people as from time to time some of the volunteers and employees were about to end their involvement and leave, yet we have been moving forward.

**CD:** What is the future direction of the project? Are there any further steps needed to encourage spiritual relationships?

**PC:** The school year 2006-2007 was significant for me for at least two reasons. First, remember my heartbeat all along was for mission. The official opening of the Center in April did not stop me from thinking how to bring this social project closer to a spiritual mission. I knew that we had to seriously think about creating a spiritual home base for the potential new believers who would otherwise not join the existing churches. So, in the middle of July 2006 I called a group of friends who were either new believers or were not really belonging to any local church. We spent a day together envisioning a new spiritual fellowship called “Faith Generation.” Later on, the mission statement for our church plant was born along with values and goals, which reads: Reviving faith in God, inviting people to follow Jesus, living out God’s love, and seeing his kingdom spread. Throughout the following year, we were meeting, praying together, getting to know each other, and forming the core of the group. Since nothing good begins easily, out of this group have gradually emerged those who are really serious about starting a new fellowship and who continue to be involved. In October 2007, our friends we know from the Center showed up for our small group worship services in the Center and others are open to come and join.

**CD:** What about the second significant factor of the 2006-2007 school year?

**PC:** In the fall of 2006 we opened an English class for adults, with their children taken care of in the next room of the Center. About 9 moms and 2 grandmas enrolled in two classes. Initially I thought it was not really my priority to teach English (besides running the center, working on a church plant, and working to meet my family's financial demands, too). However, until finding a volunteer to teach English I decided to teach the class myself. Now I am glad I did because the class turned out to be more than just a regular class. During the first couple of months
we built good community and the moms became interested in things other than just English. With a couple of them who call themselves atheists we started to sing gospel songs. That gave birth to a Generations Gospel Choir. Some were inspired by movies like “Sister Act” so singing English gospel songs was the best spiritual thing for them as God and church are not very popular in the Czech Republic. Singing was another natural step after hanging out together with the families in nature and around campfires. Presently there are new people joining our singing group and the gospel junior choir started rehearsals. Although “church” is still a word that scares people and God is not discussed openly, testimonies here and there are shared, seeds of faith are sown, and remember, at each rehearsal and concert our atheist group is loudly singing praises to God, and they know it.

**CD**: What are your plans for the future?

**PC**: We plan to continue building bridges with people and expanding what is already working well, at the same time not
getting discouraged because of failures. We will continue to look for new ways to throw the net on the other side of the boat as Jesus told his disciples after they had been fishing without any success for the whole night.

What keeps me excited is the fact that, by God’s grace, the idea of a national movement goes along with our center as well, although the mission element is yet to be unfolded. Our center has become an official sponsor of the National Marriage Week (NMW) in the Czech Republic. National marriage week started in England ten years ago (http://www.nmw.org.uk) and has happened every year in February. The Czech Republic was the first to join this activity outside of the UK. NMW is organized in such a way to make it a national movement with the purpose to encourage people to take relationships more seriously and provide them with ideas and tools to grow in love with their spouses. This has provided the Center with a great opportunity. In its first year (February 2007) in the Czech Republic, it was followed by the national media, politicians, celebrities, various community centers, and also by many churches from various denominations.

God has ways to encourage us when we are discouraged and strengthen us when we are weak. The 2007-2008 school year started as an encouragement. The number of English students tripled, new volunteers joined the project, the programs multiplied, new grant proposals were signed and submitted, and so it seems that, in God’s hands, The Generations Center has a bright future. However, we are still a faith project, generated by
faith to generate faith. Thanks for your prayers and support.

**CD:** How did people react to the spiritual and religious aspects of the project?

**PC:** We have learned that reaching people means so much more than just telling them about church doctrines. Embracing people into God’s kingdom in the context of the Czech society—with its history and fears—is a long-term project and includes the whole of life. Spirituality is received by “unbelieving” people as part of the package, provided it is not overemphasized, and, sorry to say, if it is not overly connected with organized religion. I say overly because people know we are Christians and they do not mind. However, from time to time they are concerned if our center is a church project. When we tell them this is not a project run by any church, we can see relief in their eyes.

**CD:** What is the reaction of and relationship with the Adventist Church?

**PC:** This was very difficult for the church administrators to understand initially, so we were left on our own. However, every time there was a chance, I thanked God for the SDA Church as it was instrumental in my spiritual growth and preparation for ministry. I cannot imagine where I would be if there were no church and church institutions involved in my growing up. On the other hand, after researching and understanding the Czech worldview, I was able to walk in the shoes of the unchurched people and see their confusion, fears, and spiritual search. As a result, the need to redefine the role of the church so that God’s kingdom can grow more efficiently became very clear.

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The Generations Center’s major contribution is not the special activities or what it does compared to other church-operated centers, but in being where the people are. There are many who come and go. But there are some who come again and again for we are a community and belong together. With us they do not have to be afraid of church because they are the church. Their fears become our fears, our faith becomes their faith. As one member of the Generations Gospel Choir stated in a recent e-mail: “You know, although I am not believing in God, I believe in
something, I just do not know in what.” We are where the people are to help them experience God’s love and grow in the Spirit who will, in time, lead them to the faith community and to the truth. That is the hope for our new “church” plant.

I have to say it took some time of observation and examination on the side of the church administrators, and a new administrative team as well, before we recently agreed on a common vision—winning lost people for Jesus Christ. We embrace the SDA lifestyle and our philosophy comes from the SDA belief system, only our work with people is different. Thank God, mutual confidence was established. A group of leaders from both the local conference and union met in our center to discuss the aim of The Generations Center and also our relationship with the church.

Our meeting ended with the belief that God has many ways of reaching people and we all may be part of that process.

**CD:** Petr, how could people interested in The Generations Center project help?

**PC:** If you want to connect, e-mail us at info@centrumgenerace.cz. If you want to help, come and see us. Our address is: Palachova 504/7, 460 01 Liberec, Czech Republic. And if you want to support the project, pray for us. You can also send your tax-deductible donations to: The Czech Project, Global Humanitarian Outreach, Inc., P.O. Box 329, Berrien Springs, MI 49103, USA.

**CD:** Thanks, Petr, for sharing your experience with the readers of JAMS. May God bless you and your friends abundantly.