



### **Czech English Camp and Background (from 2019 Illuminations article)**

The point of a “mission trip” is to join the Lord in the work He is doing in the world. That could mean building a clinic in Uganda or planting a church in Tibet. It could require you to go help rebuild a neighborhood after a hurricane, or work in a poor Appalachian community. Most often mission work is envisioned as happening in developing countries or impoverished area, but sometimes there’s a different kind of building that needs doing in the world.

About 17 years ago, Jan Dus, a pastor from Polička, Czech Republic, and Tom Schacher, then the pastor at First Presbyterian of Ponca City, Oklahoma, met when Jan came to serve as an associate pastor. Towards the end of Jan’s time in Oklahoma, they decided to put together a mission trip to introduce the members of their churches to one another and grow this new relationship. But there was a great distrust of the Church in this post-communist county and they needed a way to get people to step foot inside the church. Tom and Jan thought they could build a bridge between their churches with an English camp, that could also bridge the gap between the church and its mistrusting community.

Patterned after an American VBS, including elements from the Montreat youth conferences, and planned jointly by Czech and American teams, the camp allows the children, ages 6-16, to use the English they’re learning in school in a non-threatening and fun environment. They get to know us as we share lives and our faith with them. This year’s theme was Open – open your eyes, open your ears, open your mind, open your heart, and open the door, and was illustrated by Bible stories and skits. 104 campers participated along with about 30 volunteers, most of whom were former campers who came back to help. The church is now known in Polička as the church with all the children who come to visit. So, we do come to build something but it’s not a building, or to fix a roof, but rather to build relationships between people and communities. 1 John 3:18 tells us, “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” This camp has now brought people into the church who would otherwise never have stepped foot inside.

So again, why a mission trip to the Czech Republic? It’s because they have asked for our help, they need our continued help, and they have seen and continue to see the benefits of our involvement. This mission is now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year and is changing lives and building bridges between people, our churches, our towns, and our countries. To date, 16 members of MPC have participated in this “mission trip”, along with our Czech and American brothers and sisters. We look forward to continuing to join the Lord in the work He is doing in the Czech Republic.