

METHODISM
IN
CZECHOSLOVAKIA

by

Vilém D. Schneeberger

Translated by Rudolph Benesh

Edited by Karen L. and Richard P. Heitzenrater

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FOREWORD

Most of these chapters were written about a decade ago as a means of preserving the early history of the Methodist tradition in Czechoslovakia. They were published under the title „Metodismus v Československu“ as study material for Czech students.

The first edition of the English version was edited by Karen L. and Richard P. Heitzenrater and published by the Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church to coincide with a conference on Methodism in Eastern Europe, held in Vienna in May 1991.

The translation of the original work into English was done by Rev. Rudolph Benesh, who left Czechoslovakia in 1948 shortly after the Communists took over the government. He served in the U.S. as a minister and spent 1966/71 as a missionary in Vienna, serving the Czech Methodist Church there.

Since there is no material about the Czechoslovak Methodist history in English and visitors who would like to know more ask about material, the Study Department of the U.M.C. of the Annual Conference in the Czech and Slovak Republics decided to reprint this introduction to the history of Methodism in Czechoslovakia.

In the publication appears the name Evangelical Methodist Church. It is the Czech and Slovak version of the today used English name United Methodist Church. The work in Czechoslovakia always has been part of the American mother church and of the General Conference. The name was used in the Roman Catholic setting in Czechoslovakia to show that we are a branch of the Protestant family of churches. After the uniting conference 1968 the Methodist Church in Germany and Switzerland accepted the same name.

May this publication contribute to a better understanding of the service and struggles of the Methodists in our part of the world.

PREFACE TO THE CZECH EDITION

The first generation of the founders of the United Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia is gradually departing, and with them are disappearing the witnesses to the beginnings of our work. The new generation of the church, especially the most recent, knows practically nothing of the origins of Methodism in our country. Even the older living generation knows nothing about how Methodism developed here. Therefore many people within the church, as well as those outside the church, now inquire about these beginnings, about the motives which led to the founding of the Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia. So it seems that the time has come to look for the road that was travelled by Methodism in our country.

If we search for the basic source material, we find it primarily in the archives of the headquarters of the United Methodist Church in Prague. There we find minutes of Annual Meetings of the Methodist Mission and later of the Annual Conferences, which have been published regularly since 1922. In them are official documents of the highest church leadership in Czechoslovakia. Valuable material is found in the church monthly magazine, *Křesťanský buditel* (*The Christian Advocate*), which was published from 1923 to 1952 (with the exception of September 1941 to the end of 1945). Church workers wrote about congregational life; there we find much material about lay activities, meditations and studies that document the spiritual profile of the church. When this monthly was stopped in 1953, the

function of this magazine was taken up by the Protestant weekly, *Kostnické jiskry* (*The Sparkles of Constance*), where we can read especially about Annual Conferences, congregational anniversary celebrations, and of co-workers, and where we find also obituaries of our church workers. To inform its members, our church published a mimeographed paper, “*Metodista*” (“*The Methodist*”), in 1958-62, and from 1968 “*Oběžník*” (“*Circular Letter*”) was its successor as a needed publication. In these publications one may find information about the congregational life and events in the church.

The history of the United Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia has not been written. Josef Dobeš was one of the first who tried to capture the beginnings of our work in a series of reminiscences. He wrote them every ten years in 1930, 1940, and 1950, and they were published in the Czech *Christian Advocate*. For the tenth anniversary, the headquarters of the church published an extended edition of the *Christian Advocate* (1931, No. 1.) with a rich pictorial supplement that described the beginnings of congregations and of church organizations. For the fiftieth anniversary of the church, pastor Václav Našinec prepared the *Kronika Evangelické církve metodistické* (*Chronicle of the United Methodist Church*, Prague 1972, single space typed) in which he collected (after many years of work) more additional important material. This *Chronicle* is an excellent concordant help for finding further source materials. The future historian will find in it much valuable information, gathered by one who wrote as a witness to many events. The editorial board asked for publication of the history of Methodism in Czechoslovakia in the Czech weekly *The Sparkles of Constance* (from No. 41, 1981), which we are here presenting in a somewhat extended form as a study script. This is the first modest attempt to describe the road upon which God led our church in our country.

In order to catch the meaning of events, we need to maintain historical distance to evaluate the events. Therefore I limited myself predominantly to the first thirty years of the church's history, roughly up to the time the church laws were published in 1949. I attempted to discover and identify the more important events and motives that influenced the whole church work. We cannot give to individual congregations the attention that they deserve. The scope of this work does not allow us to deal with all the precious personalities whom God in the flow of years gave to our church. Some are mentioned, but many more formed the profile of the church of today. The church had among her preachers and lay workers and members some outstanding and original personalities. While working on this brief history of the church, I became aware of how meaningful they were and what contributions they themselves made in our church. I hope that soon a historian will appear who will conceive the history of our church in a broader scope and thus will be able to honour these outstanding men and women.

The work that is presented here is meant to be only the first, modest survey and collection of information. Because the primary material is not easily available and hardly known, I tried to quote it as much as possible in order to draw attention to it and to bring out the spirit and environment of the time. And as far as the picture and totality of events, I am grateful for our church - with all the mistakes and shortcomings - in our country. I am grateful also for the blessings the writer of these lines was allowed to receive through the church and her witnesses.

Vilém D.Schneeberger

Prague, 1982

PRELUDE

Methodism originated during the eighteenth century in England and spread mostly in English-speaking countries. John Wesley and his followers did not have in mind to develop missions outside England; they wanted primarily to revive their own Anglican church. In spite of this limited goal, relatively soon Methodist congregations came into being in various countries. The work usually was started by a Methodist who happened to come to that country, where he then began to gather people to hear the Word of God. Or someone from another country would come to England or America and be converted in a Methodist congregation and then upon return home would share his experience of faith and thus begin to gather around himself people whom he served with the Word of God.

In the German "Brief History of Methodism from its Beginnings to the Present Times," we read about the beginnings of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Bohemia:

During the years of 1885 to 1895 we had a mission work in Kladno, in Bohemia, which at that time was part of Austro-Hungary. Prior to these years from time to time, working men from Bohemia were attending our worship services in Nuremberg, and some had even a conversion experience. These happenings made us to be longing to extend our work to Bohemia. For a long time this was not possible, but when a certain theatrical director found forgiveness of his sins, became a new man and everywhere was giving testimonies about his Saviour, Mr. Barrat employed him for several years as an evangelist. ... Unfortunately we lacked people who knew the Czech language and also the financial resources in order to continue in our mission, and it became necessary to turn the work to the Free Reformed Church, which had better possibilities to continue in the work than the Methodists!¹

The theatrical director in this account was Václav Pázdral (1845 - 1919), a unique personality of Czech protestantism. He was born on April 24, 1845 in Stěžery, near the city of Hradec Králové. He studied in Lower Gymnasium in Hradec Králové. His predisposition for an adventurous life style led him to the theatre, and he joined the administration of the Nobility Theatre in Prague. Later he organized his own patriotic theatrical company, for which he wrote several plays such as "Miraculous elixir", "Montenegriners", and many others. He travelled with this company from town to town.

And once on such move sometime around 1870 he came with his company to the city of Náchod. Here he heard about a certain weaver who was preaching in Horní Radechová. He became very curious about this "priest" who, lacking required education, was preaching without liturgy and robes, and he went to visit him. The Holy Spirit started its work, and Pázdral was overcome by the Gospel. That strange weaver and preacher was Jan Balcar, and they established a true friendship. This first opposition that Pázdral encountered was from his family. His wife, a faithful Catholic, opposed his new friend very vehemently and resolutely refused Balcar's visit. She threatened that she would rather leave her husband than to meet

¹ J. L. Nuelsen, Thomas Mann, J. J. Sommer: Kurzgefasste Geschichte des Methodismus von seinen Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, Bremen, 1920, p.572s. See also V. D. Schneeberger: První český metodistický sbor (First Czech Methodist Congregation), Kostnické jiskry (Sparkles of Constance), 1975, No.15. Most of the sources cited in this work are in Czech, though the titles have been translated.

*Balcar in her own house. And so for the time being, Pázdral had to limit himself to occasional visits, once or twice a year, to Balcar's congregation, where he was very much liked.*²

Jan Balcar (1832-1888), born in Horní Radechová, became awakened through the reading of the Holy Scriptures, upon which he left the Roman Catholic Church. With several others, he joined the Evangelical Reformed Church in Klášter nad Dědinou. He worshipped, however, in Stroužné, which was closer to his home and where Pastor Jindřich (Henry) Vilém Kurz was serving. After the pastor went over to the Free Reformed Church of Breslau and preached in Chudoba, ardent believers from the "Czech side" followed him there. The successor of Kurz there advised this Czech group that they should organize their own congregation of the Free Reformed church and that they should choose from their midst a preacher. In 1868, forty members of the congregation in Klášter separated themselves from the Reformed Church and created the Free Czech Evangelical church in Horní Radechová. Two years later, Jan Balcar was elected as their preacher. He was then ordained in Germany. The congregation in 1880 moved from Horní Radechová to Bystré, where they erected their own prayer hall.³

Zelinka also indicates that after Pázdral became a believer, he decided to give himself fully to the service of the Gospel. "The congregation of the Free Czech Evangelical church in Bystrá was not strong enough to support a second preacher besides Jan Balcar, and therefore Václav Pázdral turned to the Methodist Church in Württemberg (Germany). He entered the seminary in Waiblingen, near Stuttgart. There he was ordained and was then sent (by the American Board) as a Methodist preacher to Bohemia."⁴ So far it is not explained why Pázdral turned to the Wesleyans in Württemberg, a mission of the British Methodist Church, when at that time there was in Germany a much stronger work of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which had congregations much closer to Bohemia.

In the archives of the United Methodist Church in Prague is a record written by Pázdral in his own handwriting, in which he gives us a glimpse of his own life.

*On June 1, 1877, I, my wife, and our son Method started on a journey to Württemberg to the Wesleyan Methodists. On June 15 (the Day of St. Vitus, the Martyr) my son found peace in God. On June 29th, I and my wife received the Holy Communion, both substances, bread and wine, served by brother Funk (on the Day of St. Peter and Paul). On September 15th, I made a covenant with my good God. On December 19, we returned home from Württemberg.... On April 15th, 1879, I, my wife, and sons Method and George joined the Wesleyan Methodist Church, which was not recognized by the State.*⁵

Thus Pázdral became the first Methodist in Bohemia, and later also the first Czech Methodist preacher.

We must understand this step of his as a new consecration to Christ, as the beginning of a new important part of his life. Also his first communion at the Wesleyan Methodist Church was clearly meant as his „first“ communion at the table of the Lord with the Wesleyans. It is hard to imagine that he would not have done so earlier at the Balcar's congregation. Pázdral arrived

² T. Č. Zelinka, Václav Pázdral: Kalendář Mír (*Calendar Peace*), Prague, 1949, p. 25

³ T. Č. Zelinka: Sto let ve službě evangelia (*Hundred Years in the service of the Gospel*), Prague, 1981, p. 178

⁴ T. Č. Zelinka: Sto let (*Hundred Years*), p. 211

⁵ V. D. Schneeberger: V. Pázdral o sobě (*V. Pázdral About Himself*), Kostnické jiskry (*Sparkles of Constance*), 1979, No.15

in Kladno with his family in December 1883 and started his work there. He was an outstanding preacher-orator, and he had outstanding organizational abilities. He was supervised by the Wesleyan preacher in Vienna, who regularly visited the congregation in Kladno and supervised it. Pastor Friedrich Rösch, who worked in Vienna after September 1888, recorded for us (in his booklet *Erinnerungen an Wien*) several experiences from those visits. He said clearly that Pázdrál was only accepted on trial; he did not study the prescribed subjects and therefore was not authorized to serve the Holy Communion. Superintendent Barrat employed him only as an evangelist. Therefore, from time to time, an ordained pastor had to come to Kladno to serve the Sacrament in the young congregation. Rösch wrote about the impression that Pázdrál's preaching made on him: „He had a powerful sermon of which we could not, of course, understand one word. But the congregation was strongly moved; they cried loudly and sobbed.“ He characterized him as a very able and many-sided man: a poet, painter-artist, actor, and artist, as well as a musician and composer. One popular melody of Pázdrál was in the former hymnal of the Wesleyan Church, *Harp of Zion*.⁶ Some of Pázdrál's manners were, because of his former lifestyle, contrary and abrasive. Pázdrál for example was a heavy smoker, and Rösch mentions, with certain disgust, that he smoked his long pipe before worship services and then again after the services; he interrupted his smoking only during the dinner. Others may have objected also. Anyway, in his account written in his own hand, we find that „On May 22, 1888 I made a solemn promise to the triune God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, never again to drink beer, dip snuff, or smoke tobacco, and trusting in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, it was done.“⁷ It is not known whether he received any help from abroad for his Kladno work.

*From the Bystré mission board he received regular support, which however did not cover his living expenses, and therefore he had to seek some other means of income. He started a photography studio and later he opened a clothing store with his wife. Because of these additional occupations, not much time was left for work in the congregation, which was spiritually not stable and which began to fall apart!*⁸

The Czech congregation in Kladno was at that time the only Czech Methodist church. The Czech Methodist church in Vienna came into existence much later, and it had no direct influence on our ecclesiastical situation in Bohemia. The church in Kladno was too isolated; the supervision from Vienna was too expensive. Therefore, in 1892, the Wesleyan Church decided to turn the congregation and the preacher over to the Free Reformed Church (today's Church of the Brethren). Pázdrál was moved to the Free Reformed Church congregation in Tábor, and the Kladno congregation, where he no doubt did great work, was turned over to preacher Josef Ptáček, a strict, kind, modest disciple of Jan Balcar.

After one year of service in Tábor, Pázdrál left for America, unhappy with church conditions at home. In 1894 he founded a German Reformed church in Fayetteville, Texas. Several immigrant families from Vsetín and Frenštát in Moravia joined this congregation, and he preached to them in the Czech language. He served as a dedicated pastor and writer for Czech magazines. M. Košťál has identified about twenty stories which Pázdrál had written, only three of them from American life situations; the rest of them were from the local Czech home

⁶ Friedrich Rösch: *Erinnerungen an Wien*, Bremen, 1931

⁷ V. D. Schneeberger: V. Pázdrál o sobě, *Kostnické jiskry (Sparkles of Constance)*, 1979, No.15

⁸ T. Č. Zelinka: Převzetí a ustanovení nových sborů (*Takeover and Founding of New Congregations*), *Kostnické jiskry (Sparkles of Constance)*, 1980, No. 21

country in the Old World.⁹ Later Pázdral worked in Chicago, Illinois, and in West, Texas, where he died on September 28, 1919.

In an obituary that was published in the magazine Světlo (A. Adolf, editor), the author revealed some of Pázdral's other characteristics.

He was outstanding as orator in political meetings. Because of his efforts Count Kounic won in elections. When in 1892 we celebrated the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Jan Amos Comenius, he electrified the whole meeting by his speech. His acting abilities continued to stay with him. Because of his mystical-theosophical beliefs which bordered on spiritism, his experiments with hypnotism, his inclinations toward realms of mysteriousness, dreams, and visions, and also his tavern-like behaviour as well as the habits that he continued from his acting career, people did not exactly trust or have confidence in him. When at one church conference session he clashed with brother Vališ about these matters, many felt that it would be best to agree to his departing for America, where he became a writer of beautiful articles. Afterwards he remained silent... I recall gladly some moments with him. About his work and spiritual life in America we have not read anything. I hope that he abandoned his inclinations toward Swedenborgianism, which he actually introduced to Bohemia.¹⁰

With the departure of Václav Pázdral from Kladno the name of the Methodist Church disappeared from Bohemia.

PREPARATIONS

Long before the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had started its work in Czechoslovakia, God Almighty was preparing in America workers for this work. The man whom God was using as an intermediary in this time of preparation was Václav Cejnar (1892-1940), born on December 14, 1862 in Svinary, in a small village near Hradec Králové. He attended the Evangelical school in Velká Bělča, and for confirmation classes he went to Černilov. He was a shoemaker apprentice and then worked as a journeyman in Nepasice. In 1879 he left "on wander", reached Saxony in Germany to improve his German, and accepted work in Břeclav. There he became active in the Evangelical Church and taught in Sunday School.

Since he was eleven years old he was under the spiritual influence of Mr. Ptáček and his family, whom preacher Balcar frequently used to visit and there he conducted family devotions. Young Cejnar was influenced by the Holy Spirit early in his life and brought to a spiritual awakening; for a full experience of salvation in the grace of Jesus Christ he came into the congregation of the Free Church in Breslau.¹¹

In the fall of 1881 in Breslau a conference of the Free Presbyterian Church was meeting, and Jan Balcar was also present. It was Balcar who had such a deep influence on Václav Pázdral. Cejnar made a decision to become a missionary. In order to gain the necessary education, he

⁹ V. D. Schneeberger: Duchovní profil kazatele Václava Pázdrala (*Spiritual Profile of Preacher Václav Pázdral*), Kostnické jiskry (*Sparkles of Constance*), 1976, No.10

¹⁰ Světlo; Listy Jednoty českobratrské (*Light; Newsletter of the Unity of Czech Brethren*) 3, No. 1, p. 12.

¹¹ T. Č. Zelinka: Sto let ve službě evangelia (*Hundred Years in the Service of the Gospel*), p. 182

entered in 1886 the Missionary Institute in Neukirchen in Rhineland, Germany. Later he studied in Glasgow in Scotland. After his return to Bohemia he was ordained in 1891 and was accepted by the vote of the conference into the ministry of the Free Evangelical Church, which was founded by Jan Balcar in Bystrá near Nové Město nad Metují. When after the death of Balcar there occurred a rift in the congregation and when Josef Kostomlatský resumed the service in the reunited congregation, preacher Cejnar undertook a pioneering work by founding a congregation of the Free Reformed Church. At that time, he was married to Anna Barták, daughter of the miller Anton Barták and the oldest sister of J. P. Barták, who later became superintendent of the Czechoslovak Methodist Church. Preacher Cejnar served later in Plzeň and in Graz, Austria, and from there he was called to organize a congregation among Vienna Czechs. Because there were no financial means for this work, he wrote to Count Bylandt in Holland for help. He came to Vienna in the autumn of 1896. Again with the help of rich friends he built here a church building. Among those who were converted in the congregation of preacher Cejnar was also Josef Dobeš, who later became a pioneer of Methodism in Czechoslovakia. During the nine years of devoted work, Václav Cejnar developed into a prominent and outstanding personality.

In 1905 he received an invitation from the Mission Board of the Pittsburgh Presbytery to assume work among new immigrants in America. His first field work was in Pittsburgh where he was co-worker of Dr. Los, a Presbyterian minister. From there he was invited to serve in the Bethlehem Chapel in Chicago, a congregation started by Dr. Edwin Augustus Adams. In that Congregational Church he worked among Czechs while Dr. Adams worked among the Americans. He was there until 1907, when he received an offer from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to work among Czech farmers in Texas, and to teach Czech language at the Southwestern University. Originally, when Dr. Adams left the Bethlehem church, Cejnar was supposed to take over the Congregational Church in Chicago. But when three substantial points in the oral Agreement were changed, with which he could not agree, he decided to accept the invitation to go to Texas.

Sometime in August 1907, Dr. John Nelson, the secretary of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, came to visit Cejnar in Chicago. Václav Cejnar wrote about him in his memoirs: "I found him to be a converted man and to have a deep interest in the evangelistic work among Czechs in Texas." They had a long discussion about church organization and articles of faith. Cejnar was not keen on organizational matters but was more interested in men who were backing him. He wrote:

*A Methodist bishop may be more democratic than a secretary in the Congregational Church, and a secretary or a district superintendent in a church with a democratic constitution may be, in his area of work, a bigger Pope than the one in Rome. Such little popes can make lives of their co-workers more bitter. No organization is perfect. It is a human creation. What truly matters is and will be the fire of the spirit. So far a substitute for it has not been found!*¹²

In early November he moved to Georgetown in Texas. He took with him also two young men, who after finishing education at the Southwestern University he hoped would engage in mission work. One of them was his brother-in-law Josef Pavel Barták, who had come to Chicago to be with him; the second one was Gustav Chval, who experienced a spiritual conversion in his church. Later he also helped Josef Dobeš to get a position as an evangelist among the Czechs in Texas. "The secretary of our Annual Conference told me to keep

¹² Václav Cejnar: Na Božích cestách (*On God's Ways*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1948, p. 112

opening the doors and to enlist workers, and they will get the money. When I was asked to recommend a mission worker for the Texas Conference, I submitted the name of brother Josef Dobeš.¹³ Years later, J. P. Barták wrote:

Thus the two first Methodist preachers in Czechoslovakia came in contact with the Methodist Church for the first time, How incredible are the ways of God! The original intention to start at least several Czech Methodist churches in Texas did not succeed, but it looks like God had rather different plans in the southeastern regions; later, evangelistic work in Czechoslovakia was made possible.¹⁴

In Texas, Czechs settled down first in the southeastern regions, but by the time Cejnar had come to Texas, Czech settlements were in all parts of the state. Cejnar taught the Czech language during the week to the sons and daughters of Czech farmers. On Saturdays he left for some other Czech settlement in order to lecture or conduct worship services on Sunday.

Cejnar had his own convictions on how the mission work among the Czechs should be conducted, and he did not agree that Czech preachers should only be assistants in American congregations. Therefore he decided to give up his work in Texas, and in 1913 he left for South Dakota, where he began working among German immigrants from Russia. Spiritual work among these people he regarded as a highlight of his ministry. During a short period of time, many people had conversion experiences. From this German congregation he was called in the spring of 1914 to a Czech Presbyterian Church in Omaha, Nebraska. After several years of successful ministry he retired. He died on May 28, 1940 in Council Bluffs, Iowa.¹⁵

In an obituary, J. P. Barták evaluated V. Cejnar's life work in these words:

What a varied and significant life, filled with unselfish service to fellow man! How many lives were moistened by that dew of blessing of the Word of God, which he sowed. This man of God did his work in many languages, in many countries and continents. How many people are grateful to him not only for a spiritual uplift to a new life, but also for direction of their way of life. Our whole family remains bound to him with great gratitude, especially the writer of these lines, on whom his spiritual influence was so decisive.¹⁶

Cejnar's work in the Methodist church lasted only six years, and during these years this outstanding evangelist did not form even one congregation. His significance for the Methodist work in Czechoslovakia is that he awakened an interest in the Czech mission and that he prepared workers, who after the end of World War I, returned to their native land. Only as we look back can we see that God Himself used this blessed man as his instrument in this work.

BEGINNINGS

¹³ Ibid., p. 126

¹⁴ J. P. Barták: Za bratrem Václavem Cejnarem (*In Memory of Brother Václav Cejnar*) Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1940, p. 91

¹⁵ V. Cejnar: Na Božích cestách (*On God's Ways*), memoirs published serially in Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1941-49

¹⁶ J. P. Barták: Za bratrem kazatelem Václavem Cejnarem (*In Memory of V. Cejnar*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1940, p. 91

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, began work among Czechs in Texas at the end of 1907. In 1912 four young preachers were employed, and several young men were studying at Southwestern University to prepare themselves for the ministry. In his memoirs, Václav Cejnar names (besides J. P. Barták) Gustav Chval and Josef Dobeš, as well as Vondráček, Vilt, and Kupec.¹⁷

In June 1912, Czech preachers and ministerial students gathered for a conference about their work. They petitioned the Mission Board in Nashville, Tennessee, asking the Board not to forget their native countries, Bohemia and Moravia, as a mission field. Josef Dobeš recalled: "From the day of our arrival in America in 1907 we have not forgotten our native country, and we have kept praying with those who there, in the native country, were praying for spiritual awakening."¹⁸

Laying behind this petition and of several letters that followed was the fact that Methodism owes a special debt to the Czech lands, which were very much the cradle of the *Unitas Fratrum*: John Wesley was led to his heartwarming experience through the work of Herrnhut missionaries, and Methodism should repay its old debt. This spiritual connection among Czech Methodist workers in America was very much alive, but the Board of Missions replied that at that time the work in those countries was not possible.

When World War I ended, American Methodists planned the celebrations of the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Methodist Board of Missions in 1819. The activities in all mission fields were to be strengthened, and in some other places new work was to be started. Methodism in America received plenty of information about church conditions in the world and was challenged to support the mission work. The Northern and Southern branches of Methodism created special commissions that began to raise money for this jubilee activity. Enthusiasm was so great that during eight years, fifty million dollars were raised.

Josef Dobeš reminded the Board of Missions in several letters about the need for evangelism in the newly created Czechoslovakia where since the end of the war a powerful longing for the faith of ancestors was felt. He offered to start this work himself. The defeat of the Habsburgs shattered the position of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia. The tight connection of the Church with the Habsburgs had alienated the Czech people from this church, and they had turned away from her:

*The influence of anti-religious thinking and the anti-religious tendencies in the anti-Catholic movement culminated when early in 1921 a national census was being prepared. The census form contained also a place for religious affiliation. A very effective agitation was started: "Czechs! Will you answer this question truthfully according to your conscience? Are you still a Roman Catholic? Can you as such remain a conscientious Czech? Prove your truthfulness and your love of truth and therefore part your ways wit the church, in which you have not really belonged for long time."*¹⁹

At that time 900,000 persons left the church and decided to be listed as persons without religious (and church) affiliation. Others, almost 800,000, joined the newly formed

¹⁷ Na cestách Božích (*On God's Ways*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1948, p. 126

¹⁸ J. Dobeš: Slovo na rozloučenou (*Farewell Address*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1940, p. 3

¹⁹ R. Řičan: Od úsvitu reformace k dnešku (*From the Dawn of the Reformation to Our Times*), Prague, 1947, p. 364

Czechoslovak Church, which was founded at the beginning of 1920. Others joined the Czech Brethren Church and other Protestant denominations.

The committees in both branches of Methodism in America, the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, agreed to work in European countries where there was no Methodist work. The Northern church at that time was already working in seventeen European countries and was dedicated to strengthen this work. The Southern church had no mission in Europe and, therefore, after an agreement with the Northern church, turned to countries where Methodism was not yet anchored: to Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Originally the intention was also to start a mission in southern Russia, but the political developments in that country spoiled the plan.

In 1919 both churches sent to Europe a commission to study the social and religious conditions. After their return Dr. W. W. Pinson, secretary for overseas missions wrote to Josef Dobeš:

God leads in mysterious ways. We went to Europe to study conditions in France and Belgium; through strange providence we received information about conditions in Poland and Czechoslovakia. The Commission decided to direct our church to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Southern Russia. This will mean that we were led for what you were praying. I may say even now, that your prayers may be turned into thanks.²⁰

Later the mission to Belgium came into existence.

In March 1920 the Board of Mission invited Josef Dobeš to go to Czechoslovakia. He arrived in Prague on May 4 and described the ecumenical atmosphere this way:

In July in the same year, bishop James Atkins, Dr. W. W. Pinson, Dr. W. B. Beauchamp, Dr. D. A. Sloan, and Dr. C. C. Jarrell visited Czechoslovakia in order to prepare a plan for the work. A banquet was arranged in one restaurant in Žofín to which were also invited Protestant ministers of Prague and faculty members of the Hus School of Theology. After the banquet, representatives of other Protestant churches spoke for their denominations. For the Methodist Church, bishop Atkins said: "Gentlemen, if you become convinced that our church would fit into your state, then say so and we will come."

After the bishop spoke, Rev. J. S. Porter, minister of the Unity of Czech Brethren, said, among other things, the following:

"Gentlemen, when we came to this country, we were told that it is a Christian country and therefore it is superfluous to send missionaries here and to do missionary work here. But soon we discovered that there is plenty of work for us here. I welcome the Methodist Church in our country. I believe that there is plenty of work for her here."

Several days later this commission visited the city of Brno where it was introduced to Dr. Ferdinand Císař, superintendent of the Czech Brethren Church, and to some other ministers. At the evening worship service held in a Protestant chapel, Bishop Atkins and Dr. Císař invited the representatives of the Methodist Church to come to Czechoslovakia and to help awaken the nation, which during the last three hundred years had been spiritually asleep.²¹

²⁰ J. Dobeš: Přípravy k práci metodistické církve v Československu (*Preparations for the Work of the Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1930, p. 23

²¹ Ibid., p. 23n. See also Poselství angloamerických církví národu Husovu (*Message of Anglo-American Churches to the Nation of Hus*), Kostnické jiskry, (*Sparkles of Constance*), 1920, No. 28

On the next day (Sunday), Bishop Atkins travelled with superintendent Císař to the city of Olomouc to be present at the festive dedication of a new church. Dr. Jarrell and myself remained in Brno, and we visited the well-known minister of the Unity of Czech Brethren, J. Štifter. We stopped at the police station and asked for permission to give a biblical lecture the next day (Sunday) on the town square. The permission was promptly given. Brother Štifter ordered a wagon, which was moved to the western part of the square and which served us as a pulpit. The choir of the Unity of Czech Brethren sang several hymns, and a large crowd of people who were promenading on the square gathered around us. Dr. Jarrell and I preached and called the people to the Lord Jesus. This was at two o'clock in the afternoon. Afterwards, we went to a park where a musical group of the Unity gave a concert, and here too we spoke to a large gathering. This was the beginning of my "preaching in the open" in Czechoslovakia.²²

Preceding the coming of Dr. Dobeš, C. T. Collyer, a former missionary in China, came to Prague in order to start a widespread colportage activity there. In 1920, Richard Clements also came. He was an English Quaker, who was in charge of the Methodist social work.

THE FIRST TENT

After he was welcomed by a number of Protestant Churches, Bishop Atkins decided to start evangelization in Czechoslovakia. The question was, how to start? The Methodist Church had no members and no buildings in Czechoslovakia. The memorable decision was made in one room of the hotel "Passage" on Wenceslas Square in Prague:

On Monday, Bishop Atkins returned to Prague and called us together for consultation and prayer. He said: "I discovered that we are needed here. From some circles we may expect resistance; but it will be necessary to let the Lord lead us forward, step by step." We knelt and asked the Lord for guidance and wisdom. After the prayer I said: "Brother Bishop, in Texas I used to preach in a tent. Help me to buy a tent, and I will preach in a tent like I used to do in Texas."²³

In 1910 when he had worked as a preacher in three small churches in Shiner, Moulton, and Swethome (Texas), Dobeš had been entrusted to evangelize in a tent. His experiences in that work helped him now in Prague.

Joseph Dobeš (1876-1960) was born on June 5, 1876 in Bohumilice near the city of Brno to a family of a farmer. After he finished elementary school, he learned the trade of an upholsterer and went to Vienna, Austria. There he joined the Czech YMCA and gained Christian faith. He soon became chairman of the Association, which at that time was part of the Free Reformed Church. The preacher of the congregation, Václav Cejnar, recognized the spiritual gifts of the young Dobeš and asked him to study theology. After careful consideration, Dobeš left for the Mission School in Neukirchen in Rhineland, Germany, in 1901, and in 1906 he went to London for one year. When he returned to his homeland, he got married. He wanted to become a missionary either in Africa or in the island Jawa. Preacher Cejnar, who in the meantime had left Vienna and had gone to America, suggested to him to accept an invitation from the Congregational Church in Ansonia, Connecticut. There he was ordained and worked for more than a year among the Germans. But he wanted to serve his own countrymen and therefore accepted the invitation of a Methodist superintendent in Texas. In 1900 he went to Texas, where he served in Jokum. The

²² J. Dobeš: *(Our Attempts to Serve the Czechoslovak Nation)*, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1950, p. 77

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 77

following year he was sent to Shiner where he served three small English-speaking congregations and evangelized among local Czechs. In 1912 he was sent to Bryan and for years later to Temple. The work among Czechs was difficult because Czech farmers were scattered over the area. While serving the churches, he studied at the Methodist university in Georgetown, which granted him an honorary D.D. degree in 1923. From 1920 to 1940 he worked in Czechoslovakia as a preacher and district superintendent. In June 1940 he retired and left for the U.S.A. to live with his sons. He died on June 6, 1960 in Texas.

Dobeš' tent was bought from the Sokol gymnastic organization. They sold the tent after having used it during their quadrennial national meeting. It was large (twelve by twenty-eight meters) and could hold several hundred people. Josef Dobeš was advised by A. Adlof, with whom he shared his intentions, to erect the tent somewhere in the inner part of Prague, somewhere in an open space near the river Vltava (Moldau), but the police denied him permission. Finally, the Commercial Bank gave him permission to erect the tent without any charge on their own land in Vinohrady, not far from the Olšany Cemetery. The tent was erected on August 4, 1920. Because his helpers, the brothers Pařízek, could not find him, preacher Dobeš erected the tent himself. School children who were playing in the vicinity assisted him and then distributed invitations throughout the whole neighbourhood. The first worship service was in the evening, and on this first evening the tent was filled to capacity. Josef Dobeš had chosen a slogan for the evening: "Czech nation, return to Christ." Characteristically for the times, Christ's gospel was connected to an appeal to national pride. In the following days the interest in the meetings increased so much that the tent could not contain all the visitors. Some came because they were curious, others because of true spiritual interest.

My daily topic was Jesus Christ – crucified and risen, Saviour and also Judge, to whom we have an access everywhere through penitence and faith. The tent was full daily, even packed... without exaggeration we state that on Sundays, eight hundred to a thousand people were present in the tent and around it. The Spirit of God acted with power.²⁴

For three full weeks, until August 24, the tent stood there, and probably not a day went by that someone did not make a decision to follow Christ.

Several days later, preacher Dobeš gave those who believed an opportunity to give a testimony. There were of course also some who used this opportunity to propagate their own opinions. Thus once a spiritist asked for a work. At other times people who intended to break up the meeting asked to say a word. There were also confrontations between these people and the police. A policeman with a revolver in hand took about twelve people to the police station. On intercession of brother Dobeš, nobody was punished with the exception of one man, who received a suspended sentence – later, he was converted at the Salvation Army.

Our beginnings were not without struggles and difficulties. Worship services were often disturbed by the shouts and laughter of a mob that was walking around the tent. Those who objected to our work threw rocks into the tent. They stuck needles into those who touched the tent with their bodies inside the tent, they cut the tent with knife, they threatened the worshipers with beating, and they disturbed our meetings in many other ways. We need

²⁴ J. Dobeš: (*Farewell Address*), p. 4

*courage, faith, love, and patience. With these alone we could be victorious, and the Lord helped us.*²⁵

Brother Dobeš was helped by several workers from other churches: preacher Marek from the Unity of Czech Brethren, preacher Knobloch from the Unity of Brethren of Chelčický (Baptist), and later preacher Kubát from the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church (Presbyterian). Members of the Unity of Czech Brethren and Unity of Brethren of Chelčický (Baptist) supported our work with attendance, interest, and singing. Those who made a profession of faith were advised by preacher Dobeš to join some church. Many people really joined other Protestant churches. Ten years later, Josef Dobeš remembered how many members of other churches had told him that ten years earlier they had come to believe in a tent, and how they were happy that we had come here with a message to lead them out of the spiritual darkness, superstition, and unbelief, and that they were led to the gospel.²⁶

The first members of our church were actually received on their own request. Brother Dobeš testifies:

*I did not call anybody into the Methodist Church, but speaking for myself, I confessed that I was a Methodist. Those who made a decision for Christ, I advised to enter any Protestant church, any of their preference. One day a certain man stood up and said: "Why do you not invite us to join your church? Nobody cared about us when we were living in darkness. Now we have come to believe through you and therefore we wish to become members of your church. We want you to stay in our country and to become our pastor." I regarded this as another sign from God and I opened the doors into the Methodist Church. Some churches at that time became envious of us; other supported us.*²⁷

During three weeks of tent evangelism, over 150 persons confessed faith in Christ; about fifty of these joined other Protestant churches, and 106 persons, including children, joined the Methodist Church.

The Methodist Church made the decision officially to organize this congregation into Methodism much later. On August 25, 1921, leading workers of the Methodist mission in Europe met under the leadership of Bishop U. V. W. Darlington and issued the following proclamation:

*In harmony with the program of the General Board of Missions of our Church and with the sincere desire to work with all other Christian organizations of this country, the bishops and administrative secretaries believe that the time is here when we should organize congregations in Czechoslovakia under the supervision of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in order to preserve the fruits of the evangelistic campaign and in order best to assist the existing religious organizations in the republic and to elevate the ideals of evangelical Protestantism as much as possible.*²⁸

At the end of three weeks, Josef Dobeš had to interrupt his evangelistic preaching on the advice of a physician because he became physically exhausted and had to cure his tired vocal

²⁵ J. Dobeš: K desetiletému jubileu (*To the Tenth Anniversary*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1931, p.3

²⁶ Ibid., p. 2

²⁷ J. Dobeš, (Farewell Address). pp. 4f

²⁸ (*Minutes of the First Meeting of the Czechoslovak Mission, 1922*) Prague, 1923, p. 29

chords. But on September 5, 1920, he erected the tent again, this time on the dividing line between Vinohrady and Vršovice, on the place named “Na Šafránci”, where there was a field at that time.

PRAGUE CONGREGATIONS

The tent stood there from September 5 to November 1, as long as weather permitted. Vršovice at that time had 33,000 inhabitants and besides one Catholic church, there was no Protestant church there, or even a prayer hall. Worship services were held in the tent every evening and up to three times on Sunday. There was more than enough work and a need for more workers. With the approval of pastor Porter from the Unity of Czech Brethren, John Leidorf (1881-1953), who was a colporter²⁹ in the Unity, was taken into the Methodist work. This “experienced and diligent worker” as characterized by J. Dobeš, became a great asset in organization and leadership of the newly formed congregation. Others came – Karel Drahorád, Jan Kotouč, and Václav Huňatý. They helped in the work with children and youth, in pastoral work, and in administration. During the evangelization, many more people joined the church, and their number surpassed five hundred. All those who joined were received on trial. It was necessary to nurture them to a deeper understanding of the Scriptures, especially to a fuller acceptance of salvation in Jesus Christ and of sanctification. They were, after all, coming from an environment that was completely different. Only after a certain preparation were they accepted into full church membership.

The atmosphere of the tent evangelism was described for us in an interesting way by L. Kubát, a former Catholic monk:

In Vršovice, near Prague, Josef Dobeš, a Methodist preacher, set up a tent, and in this tent he conducts daily preaching services – on Sundays three times. Every time, the tent is filled to capacity even though this mission has lasted now several weeks. But what is most important is that people are departing not just as spectators, but they are receiving Christ daily.

After the sermon, preacher Dobeš invites those present, those who would make a decision for Christ with their whole heart in life and in death to follow Him, and who would truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, to extend their hand to Him. There is silence for a few minutes – the preacher waits. First one comes forward, then a second, and after them a number of Catholics, declaring that they will follow Christ with their whole heart. The preacher gives them a certificate for termination of their membership in the Catholic Church. He makes further contacts with them, and they become members of the congregation of Methodists.

It is interesting to listen to the conversations of participants: “It is the Law of God that he is proclaiming to us,” states a woman from the crowd. Another says that the Lord God sent him to Vršovice. Altogether, the people are happy that they heard the truth of God. Although there is no cross or altar in the tent and the preacher preaches in a coat rather than a gown, no one among the many Catholics present seems to miss these objects here. The preacher in his own way knows how to captivate his listeners so that they are fully absorbed in hearing the words of the Gospel. And how joyfully the congregation sings, and what order and discipline – no trace of the disturbances by unbelievers that are often customary in gatherings of the Salvation Army. Many Bibles are being sold daily. I saw a poor seamstress buy a Bible for 30 crowns and take it home with joy.

²⁹ A Bible salesman, who was always able to explain Bible passages. R. B.

Because the tent has no windows and it is almost completely closed in, the air is heavy in there, so that one wonders how it is possible to preach three times a day in such atmosphere and how people can endure such air for two hours every day. But not only do adults come there with joy and longing, but also a great number of children silently sit there. They sing, recite poems, and crowd around the preacher like children gathering around their father.

There has never been such a mission before in Prague. And the Roman Catholic priests are so frightened that their skin is covered in gooseflesh. The parson in Vinohrady, Father Škarda at the Church of St. Alois, declared three days of reconciliation devotions to undo the great blasphemies in the tent. He perhaps imagines that the very brother-in-law of Satan is preaching there.

The tent evangelism in Vršovice is proof that there is great longing in the Czech people for the truth of the Gospel. One must go among the people, get out of church buildings, into the streets, into halls, into tents. Go and preach, not in preaching gowns, but in the spirit and power of Christ, and the nation will follow you, as Vršovice is following Dobeš. Dobeš showed us how we must work among people, simply, on their level, enthusiastically, devoutly. And above all, be clothed with power from above. The Holy Spirit is blowing; Lord Jesus is calling us to His work. If today we do not understand His calling, then, we shall never understand it.

The lively Unity of Brethren (Free Reformed Church) and the Baptists are distributing invitations to their meetings, and members of these churches willingly help in the work. It would not hurt our Czech Brethren Church and our members could use more of such mission spirit.³⁰

The commentaries on the Methodists' work were not always so positive. In the weekly magazine, *Kostnické jiskry*, an article appeared commenting on the report of Bishop Atkins in the *Texas Christian Advocate*, in which he told about his visit in Czechoslovakia.

From this article it is clear that Methodists intend to start their own work in our country and to establish an independent Methodist Church, and this is already happening in Vršovice near Prague, where Rev. Dobeš is organizing people whom he won during the revival. He is organizing a congregation and also teaching religion; the success of this tent mission is at least outwardly substantial, and it shows us what we who were so absorbed in our parish work have neglected to do. But whether Methodism is a suitable denominational form for the Czech people as Bishop Atkins seems to believe, we must let the future decide.³¹

There were, nevertheless, instances of open attacks. Already in 1922, V. Oliva had published in a series of articles ("Defense of the Faith") a two-part work on the "Methodists" in which he attacked unscrupulously the Methodists, who "in recent years have cleverly spread their nets in the state of Czechoslovakia and especially in Bohemia." This is not the place to come to terms with all the excesses of this so-called "study". One quotation should be enough to catch its spirit: "Methodism put all its emphasis on the inner show of piety, bordering on

³⁰ L. Kubát: *Náboženské hnutí v Praze (Religious Movement in Prague)*, (*Czech Brethren Voices* 8) No. 37-38, Oct. 14, 1920: 6-7; quoted in *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1930, p. 55; see also *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)* 1950, p. 142, where it is mistakenly quoted from *Kostnické jiskry (Sparkles of Constance)*.

³¹ *Metodism do Evropy (Methodism to Europe)*, *Kostnické jiskry (Sparkles of Constance)* Oct. 21, 1920, No. 41. The quotation comes from *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)* of Sept. 16.

nonsense and insanity, but the heart and the inner spirit is left desolate, cold, and empty. This is indeed the most characteristic of the modern Methodist heresy...”³² How contrary is this to the testimonies of the people in the tents!

In October it became too cold to use the tent. Therefore preacher Dobeš petitioned the administration of the undergraduate Technical College in Vršovice for permission to hold meetings in the art hall of the institution. The petition had to be forwarded to the State Department of Education, which finally granted him the permission. Although the hall was big, it could not take in all the worshipers. Therefore it became necessary to rent from time to time a hall in an inn of Mr. Červenka.

Then, on November 21 the first congregation of the Evangelical Methodist Church was organized in Vršovice, Czechoslovakia – about two hundred charter members made membership pledges and were received, and the work of the church began in accord with the Discipline: the governing Board was elected, the Committee on Social Work, the Sunday School, and the choir were organized. The Police Headquarters and the Ministry of Education and National Culture were notified that the congregation had been organized and were given the names of the Rev. Josef Dobeš and the members of the Board of Elders.

A great event for the new congregation was the first service of the Holy Communion of our Lord, served with wine and bread on May 15, 1921, in the old downtown church of the St. Martin-in-the-Wall. Josef Dobeš gives us his account.

Our first members either came from the Catholic Church or were non-confessionals (unchurched). They prepared themselves with much prayer. Before, they had received only bread; now they also received wine.³³ Our Mission Headquarters (with permission of the City Council) renovated and equipped with pews the church, which was a neglected and abandoned Protestant church of St. Martin-in-the-Wall, and worship services in Czech and English languages were held there. We asked for permission to hold the first Holy Communion service there. The subject of my sermon was “Pentecost in Jerusalem and our Pentecost” (Acts 2). The church was filled to the last seat. Many hearts were greatly touched and many eyes were filled with tears moved by the Gospel and joy. For us it was a great happening.³⁴

More than two hundred members of the congregation attended.

In July the tent was again erected in “Na Šafrance”. The congregation grew very significantly in members, and we had to look for a permanent location. At the time, the “People’s Home” owned by a certain Mr. Červenka was for sale. It was an inn with two large halls and a nice garden. The Methodist Church bought it in September 1921.

The sale of this property for religious use upset many people in Vršovice. The two halls in this inn were the only large halls suitable for entertainments in Vršovice. On the other hand, other

³² Václav Oliva: *Methodisté (The Methodists): (An Historical Religious Essay about their Origin, History, Teachings, and Activities)*, 2 Parts, Prague, 1922-23, 1:5, 2:41. He also cites V. O. Hložina: *O sektě Methodistů (About the Sect of Methodists)*, 1920.

³³ The Church of St. Martin in the Wall was the first Protestant church in the Kingdom of Bohemia where the Lord’s Supper was served with both bread and wine. The Czech Protestants were called Utraquists (Under both substances) and they used the chalice as their symbol instead of the cross. The pastor of the church was Jakoubek ze Stříbra; R. B.

³⁴ J. Dobeš: *Počátek stanové evangelisace ve Vršovicích (Beginnings of Tent Evangelization in Vršovice)*, *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1941, p. 8

*people rejoiced because there would be a better atmosphere in the area and because the halls that served until now for dances and drinking parties would be changed for more noble uses. It was something of a curiosity, and quite unheard of, to use such hall for worship. Indeed since that time many souls found peace, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life in Christ Jesus through proclaimed Gospel in those halls.*³⁵

At that time, the congregation had 1,583 members.

Many people from nearby Strašnice and Záběhllice came to Vršovice and invited the preacher to come and start preaching in their towns. In February 1921, Josef Dobeš rented a hall in the inn “U Trmalů” in Strašnice, and there he delivered biblical lectures. He did the same in Záběhllice. Members from Vršovice accompanied their preacher, distributed invitations, and witnessed with testimonies and singing. In April a tent was set up in Strašnice, and preacher Josef Dobeš and Jan Leidorf preached there during the whole month. In the same month the congregation became independent as the second congregation in Czechoslovakia. It got its own preacher and started to develop on its own.

In April 1924 the cornerstone for the Chapel in Vilová (Vila Street) was laid, and on August 31 of the same year the congregation celebrated its first worship service in the new chapel.

The Central Methodist Church (in Prague II). has its roots in Lucerna Hall. In the summer of 1921, the Methodist Church started evangelization in the large hall of Lucerna in Štěpánská Street in Prague. Meetings were held every evening from August 4-14. Among other speakers was Oscar Elmo Goddard, Secretary for Home Missions of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, who later became Secretary of Overseas Missions. Evening after evening, the 3,000-seat hall was filled. When invited to make a decision for Christ, several hundred people came forward. They joined several Protestant churches, and thirty-nine came into the Methodist Church. When leading workers of the European mission met at the end of August under the leadership of Bishop Darlington, they made a decision about this congregation.

*At this meeting the work was assigned to all members of the Methodist Mission, and bishop Darlington appointed J. P. Barták to be the first pastor of the Central Methodist Church. The congregation was supposed to be organized as soon as a suitable meeting place for worship services could be found. At the beginning of November 1921, the Methodist Mission succeeded in purchasing a house in Prague II, Ječná Street 17. Only a few rooms were available to be used by our mission. During the day they were used as offices for our extension board of social care as well as of our colportage work, and in the evening they were re-arranged for biblical lectures and evangelistic meetings. The first of these meetings was held on Sunday evening, November 13, 1921. Brother Barták preached on the text “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. The two adjoining rooms were filled with people longing to hear the message of the Gospel.*³⁶

But these rooms were not adequate for their needs, and therefore the congregation rented the Marble Hall in Lucerna for a meeting room. The Holy Communion was first celebrated on Easter Sunday, April 16, 1922, and was attended by eighty-six persons, forty-four of whom took the membership pledge; they were the first group admitted to full membership. On July

³⁵ Ibid., 1930, p. 70

³⁶ J. P. Barták: *Náš ústřední sbor v Praze (Our Central Methodist Church in Prague)*, *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1924, p. 10. During W.W.II, the house number was changed from No. 17 to No. 19.

4, 1926, the new meeting house, which has served to the present day as Headquarters of the Church in Czechoslovakia, was opened with festivities in Malá Štěpánská Street.

Josef Pavel Barták (1887-1964), the first pastor of the congregation, was born the son of a scribe and miller on December 25, 1887, in Sedloňov, near Bystrá in Novoměstsko nad Metují. He grew up under the influence of his step-grandfather, Jan Balcar, who was a leader of awakened Christians in Eastern Bohemia. After the death of his father, he and his mother moved from place to place until they finally settled in Pilsen, where young Paul was supposed to learn the trade of a store salesman. Meanwhile, preacher Václav Cejnar married one of Barták's sisters and they departed for America. In 1907 Barták followed him and was hired in Chicago as a colporter among Slovak immigrants. Then, together with Cejnar, they left Chicago and travelled to Georgetown, Texas, where after five years he graduated with a B. A. degree. Two years later at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, he received a B. D. degree. From 1914 to 1921 he was the pastor of the Czech congregation in Chicago and at the same time studied at the University of Chicago, where he earned the M. A. degree. The university in Georgetown honoured him with a D. D. degree. On July 29, 1921 he returned to Czechoslovakia and there at Christmas time he married Miss Marian Draper, who worked in the Methodist headquarters. In Czechoslovakia he was active as District Superintendent and for many years as secretary in the Union of Protestant Churches. During the Munich times he helped prepare the "Appeal to the Conscience of All Mankind" and also sent an open letter to Lord Runciman. During the war, the Germans put him in an internment camp. He was then exchanged for a German-American and returned to America. After the war, when he returned to Czechoslovakia, the President of the Republic decorated him with the Medallion of Merit, first class. In 1950, he had to leave the territory of the state. He then served as pastor in the Czech Methodist Church in Vienna, Austria, until his retirement. He died on September 60, 1964, while living in America with his daughter in Georgia. Dr. Barták is the author of an English book, "John Hus in Constance", which was published in 1935 in Nashville, Tennessee.

FIRST CONGREGATIONS OUTSIDE PRAGUE

People from other places outside Prague, while visiting Prague and happening to attend meetings of some Prague congregation, often invited Methodist preachers to come to their homes. Thus, as soon as 1921, Methodist preachers went to some towns outside Prague. It is not without interest that these first places were former Hussite cities, where other Protestant churches at that time were not active. The Methodist Church adhered to a resolution that was included in the first conference minutes: "We should not organize a congregation where, in the opinion of the bishop, representatives of the Mission Board, and local workers, a Protestant congregation already exists and is capable of serving adequately the people or which could serve them if it were strengthened."³⁷

From April 18 to 24, Josef Dobeš lectured in Bechyně in a hall called "Protivínka".

At the beginning of April, I was invited to preach in Malešice, near Tábor. The longing for the Gospel was great, but because a congregation of the Czechoslovak Church was established there, my friends drew my attention to Bechyně. The next day, I travelled there. The romantic surroundings of Bechyně and discussions on religious matters with some people in this pilgrimage city made a deep impression on me. I asked the Lord to open the door and hearts for his gospel, and immediately I started to look for a hall for worship services.³⁸

³⁷ (*Minutes of the First Meeting of the Czechoslovak Mission of the M. E. Church, South*), Prague, 1923, p. 28

³⁸ J. Dobeš: Počátek stanové evangelisace ve Vršovicích (*Beginnings of the tent mission in Vršovice*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1941, p. 8

Excitement was great. At the beginning of May, Josef Dobeš and Karel Drahorád, his assistant in the Vršovice congregation, preached on the square in Bechyně. The congregation, which had in a short time reached over 100 members, met first in the Ceramic school and then in the High School. Later the Methodists bought a house in which a prayer hall and an apartment for the preacher were provided. But soon opposition was raised, congregational growth was stopped, and the congregation diminished. Some members moved out, seeking employment elsewhere; others who were wavering returned to the Roman Catholic Church.

*Many would like to join us, but they are afraid that they could lose some privileges, because they are dependent on the authorities of large farms and of the local monastery. An outstanding example is the case of one brother who served the authorities of a large farm almost twenty-five years, but after he accepted the Gospel and joined us, he was immediately fired without any compensation, so that now he lives in poverty. Many are afraid that they could suffer the same.*³⁹

In June 1921, Josef Dobeš came to Litoměřice and lectured in a hall at Šurman's and in the YMCA. From this activity a congregation came in existence under the leadership of Jan Leidorf. It met regularly in the Citizen's Club house and then, after December, in the Real Gymnasium. But soon the school rooms were too small for morning and afternoon services. Finally a three story house was purchased in Sedlská street, the first floor of which used to be a tavern of ill repute. Here a meeting hall was created, and the first worship service was held on March 15, 1923. The rearranged tavern could not contain the whole congregation, so that later it was extended to an adjoining store. For the growth of the congregation in Litoměřice, greatest credit goes to preacher Josef Kulich (1881-1928). He was born in Netřebice, near Nymburk, where his parents, descendants of old Protestants, had a small farm. "It was a large family, in whose life the good seed of the Word of God fell, spread by preacher Adlof, well known at that time. The seed germinated and the whole family was reborn."⁴⁰ After finishing the required school education, Josef went to Germany, where he had a construction company in Delmenhorst. At that time he was very active as a layman among his countrymen.

After World War I, he left everything there in order to dedicate himself to preaching. He was active in Litoměřice from 1923 to 1927. He caught a cold while serving and became ill of pleurisy and pneumonia. From Litoměřice, he was transferred for a short time to Prague-Strašnice. On November 30, 1928, he died prematurely due to his previous illnesses at the age of forty-seven years, the first of our preachers. Under his leadership, preaching stations of the Litoměřice parish were started in Křešice, Ústí nad Labem, Ploskovice, Terezín, Mlékojedy and Lovosice.

In October 1921, tent meetings were held in Slaný. The tent stood on a city park near the district hospital. Members of the assembled congregation then began meeting in a hall of the Elsnic Hotel and later in the church of the Virgin Mary on the town square. The church building with a gymnasium had been purchased at the end of the last century by the town of Slaný from the Order of Piarists. But the church, in which the Roman Catholic, Czechoslovak, Czech Brethren, and Methodist churches held services, had no heat. Therefore the Methodist congregation preferred to meet in a school.

In 1924 the Methodists bought an apartment house, and two rooms were rearranged for worship services. But the maintenance of the house became so expensive that the Methodist

³⁹ A. H.: Bechyně, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1925, p. 6

⁴⁰ Pietní vzpomínka na zemřelého kazatele br. Josefa Kulicha (*Memorial on Departed Preacher, brother Josef Kulich*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1929, p. 103

headquarters decided to sell the house and to build a church with an apartment for the preacher. In the spring of 1929, construction began, and on July 6 the Hus House was solemnly opened. The congregation in Slaný also had a preaching station in Zlonice, where in July 1924 a tent was set up on the market place. The work here was cultivated largely by Josef Kocourek, one of the colporters of the church.

In November, revival meetings were held in Týn nad Vltavou. During the summer, many people had accompanied the Methodist preacher from Bechyně to Koloděje near Týn in order to participate in spreading the Gospel in the garden of one inn. In Týn at the beginning of the work, a relatively large number of people joined the Methodists. In just a few years, the congregation had almost three hundred members, including children and associate members. This congregation also suffered the same difficulties as many South Bohemian congregations. At that time there were not enough jobs available, and many members had to move somewhere else. Koloděje was joined to Týn with the idea that Týn would become the residence of the preacher. Therefore, in 1928, the Hus Chapel was built with an apartment for the preacher. The Methodist Church is the only Protestant church in this community. Methodist work was also started in Chrást'any but had to be stopped as early as 1925. This was the first place where the Methodist Church had to terminate her work.

In the spring of 1922, the Council on Evangelism met, presided over by the superintendent, J. L. Neill. The work was divided into two districts: in Northern Bohemia the work was entrusted to Josef Dobeš, in southern Bohemia to J. P. Barták.

In April 1922, Josef Dobeš gave a number of lectures in Velvary in the Adamec Inn. He erected a big tent in the city in September. In this tent evangelism, he was helped first by co-workers primarily from Vršovice (J. Leidorf, J. Kotouč, F. Wagner, and J. Drahorád). At Christmas time, thirty-two people took part in the Lord's Supper and were also received as full members. In July 1923, the cornerstone was laid for the Hus Church, and in May of the following year the church was ceremoniously opened. The parsonage was built in 1928.

In August, Josef Dobeš started the work in Smečno near Slaný. Smečno was the seat of Jaroslav Bořita of Martinice, an archenemy of the Utraquists during the reign of Ferdinand II. After W.W.I, about half of Smečno's population had left the Roman Catholic Church and had joined no other church. Now, the rented hall was crowded and lively.

When brother Dobeš started and closed the meetings with prayer, many present laughed. During the lecture many interrupted him with shouts and challenged his points. But he courteously and patiently asked for quit and promised that after the conclusion of the lecture, there would be an open discussion. This happened. After the lecture, the discussion lasted almost to midnight. It seemed that this was a very hard place to work. People disappointed by Rome did not trust the Protestants either because they did not know them. We did not blame them for it but prayed for them. On about the fourth evening, when brother Dobeš and brother Belada returned to the inn where they were staying, three young men followed them. Brother Dobeš and brother Belada stopped, and when the young men reached them, they started a discussion. The young men wanted to join the Methodist Church but were afraid to do so publicly because they might face many difficulties. Brother Dobeš invited them into his room in the inn and talked with them about the salvation of their souls.⁴¹

In spite of these and other difficulties from that time until 1931, when Smečno was combined with Slaný, over two hundred people joined the church.

⁴¹ Smečno, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1931, p. 19

In Mukařov near Říčany, Karel Drahorád lectured from June 15 to 17, 1922, in a school classroom in Budy. Some members who joined lived in small scattered villages more than two hours' walk away. Later, meetings were started in Vyžlovka, Doubek, and Radešovice.

In the summer, besides preaching in tents, we preached in open meetings in village squares. This work had beautiful results! At that time, these villages are full of Prague vacationers, and they too came to hear the Word of God. These meetings do not always go smoothly. People stung by the Word of God, or those opposed to our work, sometimes disturb us. But it happened that exactly such people became the first Methodists!⁴²

Karel Drahorád started the work in Mýto near Rokycany with lectures in the Old Town Hall Hotel. The work was continued by Jan Kotouč, who in the following year set up a tent on the town square. The evangelistic meetings were extended into the surrounding areas of Sloha, Svatá Dobrotivá, and Malá Víska. But the congregation never had its own meeting hall, and in 1929 it became a station of the Pilsen Church.

The work in Southern Bohemia was started by J. P. Barták on June 12, 1922, in Protivín. He went there with J. Kotouč, V. Huňatý, and J. Zákoucký. For a week, they spoke every evening at the memorial monument for the soldiers killed in World War I. Next, meetings were held in the yard of one of the Methodists' friend, then in a rented room, and finally in a tent at the old cemetery. Karel Drahorád was named preacher in the congregation, a building was bought, and in November of the same year it was dedicated. On February 25, 1923, at the first Lord's Supper service, 126 persons were received into full membership.

One week after the start of the work in Protivín, J. P. Barták started to lecture in Třeboň, in the Citizens Fellowship House (for those who had the right to brew beer).⁴³ He took along J. Kotouč as his assistant. On Saturday, June 24, the newspaper *Jihočeský Obzor* announced that on Sunday the first Hussite services would be held since 1620. This of course awakened great interest and many people came. They came both to an open air mass meeting on the town square and to the Hus celebration. But the Methodist work was not without opposition.

As soon as this new group of the children of God showed up on the horizon, the Jesuits from the Schwarzenberg monastery, as well as the clericals, started all their actions to prevent the spread of our influence in Třeboň. One post office clerk, a member of our church, was suddenly transferred to Budějovice; one gardener in the service of the Schwarzenbergs lost his job, and some others also lost their jobs. But in spite of this, we grew in numbers, and our influence was visible in the whole area.⁴⁴

The congregation had no meeting place – it met in the Citizen's Fellowship House and in "The New World" inn. Methodists had difficulties purchasing a lot. "The city promises to make a lot available for us for our building, and although the city council tried, their efforts were hindered by Roman Catholic enemies. Another place (property of the Schwarzenbergs) was recommended, but they refused to sell. Therefore we petitioned the State Expropriation

⁴² Mukařov, Křest'anský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1931, p. 19

⁴³ The building was originally founded by prominent citizens; only those who had a house in the inner city had the right to brew beer. Later it was enough to own the gate to a house in the inner city in order to obtain this privilege. During the time of the First Republic (1918-48, this place was a civic center of the middle class – workers had their own Workers' Houses (called "Red House" by others). R. B.

⁴⁴ (*Minutes of the Second Conference of the Czechoslovak Mission, 1923*), Prague, 1924, p. 19

Commission to grant us this lot.”⁴⁵ The congregation finally acquired it and on May 1, 1926, the Hus Church was dedicated. It was designated to become the seat of the South Bohemian district superintendent.

In June, J. P. Barták spoke on Jan Hus in Stráž nad Nežárrou in the hall of the New House. His lectures were announced daily by a policemen with a drum. Then opposition began.

*Local priests preached against us, accusing us of foreign propaganda, bolshevism, spreading rumors that we were spies of American capitalism. But the more they opposed us, the more people listened. They wanted to hear about our mission and to be convinced about its truth. Some joined us, mostly poor people, but they strengthened our position in the city with their convictions and enthusiasm.*⁴⁶

Here too a congregation was organized, and on October 28, 1923 opened an own Hus Church, the first Methodist church building in Czechoslovakia; other congregations had only meeting halls, although in Velvary another church building was nearly finished. Preaching stations were started in Plavsko, Pístina, Lhota, Příbraz, Lásenice, and other places.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE INSTUTUTED

During August 3-7, 1922, the first Annual Conference of the Czechoslovak Mission met in Ječná Street, Prague. It has met regularly every year since then to review the previous year and to plan the next year and assign all co-workers. The conference was called by Bishop W. B. Beauchamp (1869-1931). The 1922 General Conference elected him bishop, and he was assigned to oversee the work in Europe. He served in this capacity until 1926. The clerical members of the conference were the ordained elders, J. Dobeš, and C. T. Collyer (who came to Czechoslovakia in 1920), J. L. Neill, J. P. Barták (who came in 1921), and the newly arrived Václav Vančura.

Václav Vančura (1883-1972) was born on April 19, 1883, in Čermná, son of a Protestant teacher who later became the first bishop of the Unitas Fratrum (Moravian Church) in Czechoslovakia. He learned the trade of a salesman and graduated from a business school in Prague. In 1905, he accepted a position as a commercial clerk in Paramaribo in Dutch Guyana. From Latin America he went to the United States, where he studied theology in the Moravian Church colleges in Oberlin and Bethlehem to prepare himself for ministry. In New York he met and married Martha, a Czech-American. In 1915-18, he served the Czech Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. At the end of World War I, the YMCA sent him to serve Czech soldiers in Siberia. In Prague, on his return from Siberia, he met J. L. Neill and C. T. Collyer, who were members of the Methodist Mission. They won him over to the Methodist Church. One day before the start of the Annual Conference of the Czechoslovak Mission, he joined the Methodist Church. He served in many congregations, and from 1923 was a district superintendent. During World War II and from 1949 to his retirement in 1960, he was the leading representative of the Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia. In 1963 Bethlehem University granted him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree (D.D). He died on April 5, 1972, in Prague.

The Conference minutes make first mention of the Czech preachers whom Joseph Dobeš introduced as his assistants: J. Leidorf, J. Kotouč, V. Huňatý, K. Drahorád, J. Zákoucký, F. Belada, and K. Ondrák. They were the first who were granted a license to preach and received into the conference on trial. They were also assigned to districts (here still called “counties”). The North Bohemia district was entrusted to J. Dobeš, South Bohemia to J. P. Barták, the

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 20

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 21

Slovak area was formally in the care of C. T. Collyer, but “parishes” Bratislava, Prešov, and Zvolen, were left without preachers. Besides the superintendents, only V. Vančura and J. Leidorf were named full-time preachers in congregations; the others were recorded as assistants of the preachers. Jan Leidorf was older than other workers – at the time of the first conference he was more than forty years old. At the second Annual Conference in 1923, he was ordained deacon. The statistical record shows twenty-two congregations, fourteen preaching stations, 964 members, and 2,975 preparatory members. This is a rapid growth during a relatively short time, and probably not all who responded to the call of the church and were received into it were fully clear in matters of faith. The Methodist Church at that time concentrated primarily on evangelism and less on edification of members. The situation was evaluated by J. Dobeš at the second annual conference.

We are grateful to God for everything that He has done through the preaching of the Gospel. In this great religious movement, we cannot say about every member that he or she was converted or that everyone had an experience of personal salvation. But all of these people are longing for the Bread of Life, they are willing to serve the Lord and are willing to give up their sins. We saw people who had accepted Christ as their Saviour repenting and rejoicing in the experience of true salvation. Such people are the cornerstone of our work.⁴⁷

In the summer of 1923, the Methodist work was extended into other places. At the 1923 Annual Conference, Joseph Dobeš reported that the work was started in Svatá Dobrotivá near Mýto, in Kamenomost near Velvary, in Pilsen, and in Ústí nad Labem. In August, he began with lectures in Citizen’s Fellowship House in Pilsen. Posters had the following statements: “You must be born again,” and “Czech nation, return to Christ!” Brother Dobeš was assisted by J. Kotouč, who worked in the nearby Mýto and who also became the first preacher of the Pilsen congregation. After the war, a great movement was in progress in Pilsen. People were leaving the Catholic Church, and there was no need to worry about competition with other Protestant churches because the city was large. After the Methodist lectures were finished in the Citizen’s Fellowship House, the city council consented for them to set up a tent on a city square. The congregation met on Sunday evenings in the meeting hall of the Unity of Czech Brethren Church and during the week in the school chapel in Jungmann Street. After one year, the congregation had over seven hundred members. Therefore a lot was purchased, and on July 6, 1927, a dedication service was held on Tyl Square, and the Bethlehem Chapel was opened across from the Municipal Theatre.

The work in Ústí nad Labem was started by J. Dobeš and then handed over to J. Kulich in Litoměřice. When Kulich became ill, the congregation in Ústí was made a station, and Křešice and Lovosice (where J. Dobeš preached in tents) were added to it as preaching stations. In these frontier towns, which at that time had a majority of German population, Methodist work suffered because of nationalistic tensions. In Ústí, there was only one Czech public building, the National House. Especially during the winter, this house was used by many organizations, so that the preacher had to wait patiently in the corridor with children for his assigned room to be vacated. Then it was necessary to air the room to get rid of the smell of the alcohol and smoke, to rearrange the room, and to prepare it for the meeting. The congregation in Ústí never had its own meeting hall, and therefore Methodist work there suffered very much. Members lived in a widely scattered area, and therefore prayer meetings were held in their apartments.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 11

At the 1923 Annual Conference, J. P. Barták announced four new congregations: Jihlava, Sedlec-Prčice, Bernartice, and Lomnice nad Lužnicí. In Jihlava he lectured from July 12 to August 5 in the Elite movie theatre at the National Guard House, and on the August 5 the first congregation in Moravia was founded. Prior to this, as early as 1921, the Methodists held a series of lectures on the Bible in the Fellowship House in Brno with Dr. Goddard, J. Dobeš, and J. P. Barták.

But because at that time we did not have enough preachers for permanent service in new congregations, we gave up organizing congregations, and those who responded were asked to join other Protestant churches. Now, two years Later, when God multiplied the number of our co-workers, we were led again to Moravia.⁴⁸

At that time, the congregation had 108 members, and others soon joined. In 1924, with the help of headquarters, the Methodists bought a villa in Důlky, and thus gained rooms for meetings and an apartment for the preacher. At about the same time, J. P. Barták came to Sedlec.

In 1923, Mrs. Marek, wife of the preacher of the Unity of Czech Brethren in Prague, Vinohrady, was in the hospital in Prčice. When the Cultural Committee of the Sedlec Sokol⁴⁹ heard about her, they decided to ask her husband, Pastor Marek, to give a lecture at the celebration of Jan Hus. But pastor Marek could not come. Mrs. Marek recommended the district superintendent, Dr. J. P. Barták, and he lectured on the hill called "Porostla".⁵⁰

The lecture was well received, and therefore Dr. Barták decided to set up a tent at the end of August and to start with evangelization. In spite of the opposition from Catholic circles, the congregation was organized and they met in a movie theatre until 1924, when their own Bethlehem Chapel was built on the border between Sedlec and Prčice. It suffered the same difficulties as other South Bohemia congregations.

The congregation went through several difficulties. One of them was the migration of the local population. Because the area is poor and without any industry, many people here sought employment and means for existence in big cities; this of course had devastating effects on the size of our congregation. From 1923 to 1930, our congregation thus lost 112 members who moved out.⁵¹

On July 22, preachers J. Zákoucký and Ladislav Schneider began evangelization in Bernartice in a tent that they had set up on a market place. The interest in evangelism was so great that the tent remained there until August 26. After these meetings, regular worship services were held in a rented room. "The enemies of the truth created obstacles to the work of God and the

⁴⁸ J. P. Barták: *Náš první církevní sbor na Moravě (Our First Congregation in Moravia)*, *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1923, no. 5.

⁴⁹ Sokol was a national gymnastic organization, a liberal, middle class, highly nationalistic, family centered, and democratic organization. The Nazis and Communists both closed it. R. B.

⁵⁰ *Sedlec na dr. Wilsonově (Sedlec on the Wilson Railway)*, *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1931, p. 21

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

congregation began to long for its own place.”⁵² Finally, Hus Chapel was built; it was dedicated on August 7, 1927. Evangelistic meetings were also held in the immediate area. The tent was erected in the garden of the Club House in Milevsko, because the Methodists were denied permission to have it on the town square. A preaching station was started here, but by 1931, it had been given up.

In Lomnice nad Lužnicí the work was started by Václav Vančura, who was sent to Třeboň as preacher. While travelling in a train, he met sister A. Bláha from Lomnice, who kept begging him to make an attempt to start evangelism in Lomnice.

*Her Hopes were fulfilled on August 16, 1923, when brothers and sisters from Třeboň, having travelled during the afternoon hours in an open van, arrived in Lomnice with their preacher. In the evening, an evangelistic meeting was started in the hall of the inn “At the Sun”. Out of this event, a great revival movement sprang out in the whole area during the next few days. In spite of a great deal of persecution by enemies, and in spite of many disappointments (such as when we were told to leave the tavern because customers quit coming on account of us), the longing for revival did not cease.*⁵³

V. Vančura was evicted also from the school gymnasium on the very first day, before he could make a start. Therefore he sent a telegram to Prague ordering a tent. He erected it on the grounds of the Sokol organization. In seven weeks of evangelism, over 530 people asked to be received into the church. At the end of the year when cold weather came, we had to fold up the tent.

*When our enemies thought that this would be the end of our activities, because there was not a suitable place anywhere, suddenly we found an opportunity to continue our revivals in an large old stable not far from the square on which stands the little church of St. Wenzeslas, a former Hussite church. In this abandoned stable, our congregation met for nearly three long years. Here, as once in Roman catacombs, brothers and sisters of faith gathered; its walls witnessed the conversion of many souls. It was here that the first members were received into full membership of our church and here the first Lord’s Supper was served. Here also Bishop Beauchamp spoke during his episcopal visitation.*⁵⁴

At the 1923 Annual Conference, Southern Bohemia was divided into a Central and Southern district, with Třeboň and Moravia. These were entrusted to district superintendent V. Vančura. Together with Northern Bohemia and Slovakia, the church had now four districts.

ENLARGEMENT OF THE WORK

Until 1924, Methodist evangelism spread in southern, western, and northern Bohemia. The Methodists avoided eastern Bohemia because there were enough Protestant churches there. In 1924, Methodism was also founded in Slovakia. At the previous Annual Conference, C. T. Collyer, who had been sent into that area, reported that meetings had been held in twenty-one

⁵² Bernartice u Tábora (*Bernartice near Tábor*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1931, p. 23

⁵³ Lomnice nad Lužnicí (Lomnice on the Lužnice River), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1931, p. 24

⁵⁴ Ibid.

places, but that the church had no members there. The work was done by hired colporters. Because preacher Collyer returned to America, at the 1924 Annual Conference, D. P. Melson was sent as superintendent.

Davis Percival Melson (1892-) was born in Jonesboro, Georgia. He grew up on a farm, and his mother died when he was young. When he was a pupil in the Sunday School, he had a conversion experience. After high school, he went to Emory University in Atlanta and for one year to Harvard University in Massachusetts. In 1916-17, he became principal of a high school in Ocilla, Georgia, and there he felt a call to the ministry. He started to serve in various congregations in southern and northern Georgia and studied theology at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. After finishing his studies and graduating with a B. D. degree, he came in January 1923 to Prague. He began immediately to study the Czech language and was the only American worker who could adequately communicate in Czech. After the departure of superintendent Neill, he was head of the central office and treasurer of the Mission. In 1928, he married the daughter of the first U. S. General Consul in Prague. At the close of the Annual Conference in August 1933, he returned to America.

The only preacher who was assigned to D. P. Melson was Jan Leidorf, and he was transferred from Bratislava, Slovakia, to Ushgorod, Sub-Carpathian Russia. There was a large number of children from Czech families in Sunday school there, and preacher Leidorf started a tent mission. A congregation had been organized in August 1925 with fifty-five members who lived scattered over the whole of SubCarpathian Russia as far as the city of Mukačevo. But he could not gain one Ruthene.⁵⁵ This proved to be an handicap for the congregation.

*The rapid growth of this congregation is made difficult because the Czechs who work here in state administration are frequently moved. On the other hand, this is good, because members who moved brought rays of light into other places where there was darkness and superstition.*⁵⁶

Czechoslovakians were employed as administrators and military personnel. In Ushgorod, the church bought a garden villa to provide for worship services and an office. In Mukačevo, a tent mission was held, and it became a preaching station.

In Bratislava, a four-week revival started on June 16, 1924. J. Dobeš preached in Reduta Hall, and after the revival he organized a congregation of twenty Czechs and ten Slovaks. J. Leidorf was appointed preacher of the congregation. The congregation had no permanent place for some time and moved from school to school. At various times, they were in a basement room, a car garage, and the YMCA.

*This congregation could not develop its work (as much as they hoped to) because it did not have its own quarters. From some time they met in a Commercial Academy (college), but there they had to limit the work to the members only because they were not allowed to appeal to the general public.*⁵⁷

Several years during the summer, a tent revival was held. The congregation acquired its own quarters after W.W.II.

⁵⁵ In 1918 the formerly Hungarian city of Ushgorod became part of Czechoslovakia, in the Free Ruthenian Republic; it was annexed to Hungary in 1939 and then the Soviet Union in 1945. R. B.

⁵⁶ J. Dobeš: *Z cesty Slovenskem a Karpatskou Rusí (From the Journey through Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Russia)*, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1925, p. 20

⁵⁷ Ibid.

On July 10, 1924 the tent was set up on the soccer field in Vrútky. The main speaker was Josef Dobeš. Many more people professed Christ than finally joined the church. Those that did join were mostly Slovaks, contrary to the situation in other congregations. In Slovakia the work was much more difficult than in Czech lands because there the influence of the Catholic Church was stronger. Especially in smaller towns, people were worried about difficulties from the Catholic Church. In Bratislava and in Vrútky, Slovaks assisted in evangelism, especially Jan Galád and Michal Roháček, who had previously worked as a colporter in the area near Košice. On August 20, the tent was set up in Trnava, “the fortress of Catholic bigotry, the city called Slovak Rome... Hlinka, leader of the People’s Party, travelled through Slovakia, starting in Ružomberok. He aroused people against us; a confrontation occurred on the town square at which several people were hurt.”⁵⁸

In 1925 Eduard Szabo-Slávík walked from Trnava to Sereď selling Bibles; he then moved to Sereď. Soon after, in 1926, a tent was set up in Sereď, and Josef Dobeš, V. Vančura, and the Slovaks, E. Szabo and V. Martinček preached.

*During the evangelization in Sereď, the Roman Catholic priest called people into the church. There he first cursed us and then sent hate-filled people out to destroy our tent. They cut the tent to pieces and their hate increased so that not even the state police, who was sent for in the meantime, could quiet the people who otherwise were good folks. On that critical day, brothers Martinček and Szabo were in danger of their lives, but exactly such animosities gained us many members who saw the possibility of internal and external development through such vexatiousness.*⁵⁹

The meetings continued on the town square, although stones flew above the heads of the preachers. At the end of 1926, when a house with a meeting hall and an apartment for the preacher was bought, the congregation met in the apartment of brother Szabo.

In Bohemia, Josef Dobeš started evangelization on August 28, 1926, in Liberec with lectures in the National House. A small group of twelve members began to meet in the YMCA, where they were given one room. Bible study hours were held in apartments of the members. In summer of the following year, J. Huňatý was supposed to start evangelization in Horní Růžodol.

*There was a great interest in evangelization in Horní Růžodol and vicinity. Evangelization was held during Hus Week and many came to hear the Word of God. But on the second day police headquarters forbade further lectures and worship services in the tent. The congregation was very surprised by this prohibition. Members could not believe that something like this could happen in the free republic. We had to accept it and we did not doubt that its originators were well-known enemies of the efforts of our church in Czechoslovakia. In spite of all these difficulties and oppositions, the membership of the congregation more than doubled in one year. The spiritual life deepened more and more.*⁶⁰

In 1924, evangelization was increasingly entrusted to preachers who were converted in Czechoslovakia. On August 8, Ferdinand Wagner and Rudolf Hromádka raised a tent on the

⁵⁸ (*Minutes of the Third Annual Conference of the Czechoslovak Mission, 1924*), Prague, 1925, p. 16. Evangelization went on for the whole month, but no congregation was organized.

⁵⁹ (*Minutes of the Sixth Annual Conference, 1927*), Prague, 1928, p. 13

⁶⁰ Liberec, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1931, p. 26

soccer field of a sport club in Most. The attitude toward tent missions began to change slowly; at first, people were in no hurry to come into the tent.

When they started with preaching... very few people came to hear the Word of God. Many stood around the tent; nobody wanted to come in... But on the second day, the attendance was better. Some came with longing to hear the message of the Word of God, others came only out of curiosity. The Lord heard the prayers of his servants, and the tent was filled more and more by those longing for the fountain of the living water.⁶¹

Finally 250 people joined the church, and a congregation was founded in the city. It met in the Czech elementary school under the leadership of preacher Wagner. After 1930, it met in a room made available by sister Hloušková. In 1927, the congregation bought a lot for the future Prayer Hall, but no building was erected.

In 1925, the pace of organizing new congregations slowed. Lack of necessary financial sources led the leadership of the church to consider whether it was advisable to start new congregations, or whether it would be better to build up existing congregations. Finally it was decided to finance evangelization in only one locality during that year. Sedlčany was selected, and J. P. Barták was entrusted with starting the work there. The desire to go to Sedlčany originated in nearby Sedlec.

For two years, we received invitations to come to Sedlčany to start the same work as in Sedlec on the Wilson Railway, but we were unable to fulfill their wish because of other tasks. But this year we finally began because nothing was starting anywhere else; namely, all other efforts were aimed at strengthening existing congregations.⁶²

The tent was set up on the town square from June 21 to August 1, and daily meetings were favoured by great interest. “We had evangelistic meetings in many places, but nowhere could we enjoy a better reception than in Sedlčany.”⁶³ The congregation was then meeting in the gymnasium of the Sokol and on July 6, 1930, it moved into its own “Master Jan Hus” meeting Hall.

In 1926, the Annual Conference decided that a new congregation should be started in every district; at that time there were three. Starting on July 2, a tent stood in České Budějovice for six weeks. The city population was forty-five thousand. Until the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, the city had been very clerical. After the war, seventeen thousand people left the Catholic Church. Most of them joined the Czechoslovak Church; others the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church, or the Unity of Czech Brethren. Many belonged to no church. People who for many years had never attended any church went day after day to the tent. Brother Dobeš, district superintendent of the South Bohemia district, was assisted in other places as before by his wife Emilie, who was active especially in the work among women. The congregation, which was organized by August 8, began to assemble in the Women’s High School.

We are proud that our young congregation, in spite of all the difficulties and adversities that it had to endure, has a good reputation, in České Budějovice as in the vicinity. Many brothers

⁶¹ Most, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1931, pp. 25f

⁶² J. P. Barták: Evangelisace v Sedlčanech (*Evangelization in Sedlčany*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1925, p. 92

⁶³ Ibid.

*and sisters from the Unity of Czech Brethren, the Czech Brethren Church, and the Czechoslovak Church attend our meetings. Many admitted that they found among us what they had been seeking for a long time.*⁶⁴

J. P. Barták, district superintendent of the northwestern District, started the work in Klatovy. At first he lectured in the city lecture hall, then later in a tent.

*Even now, people talk about the tent as the “rag church”. When the worship services started, people halted and listened to our beautiful hymns. Many at first were ashamed to enter the tent. Many walked around for a long time before they decided to enter. First they stopped at the entrance, then they took a seat in the back rows, until finally they gained courage and proceeded forward.*⁶⁵

A congregation was formed in the city, strengthened during the following year through revivals conducted in open places or in a tent.

At the end of July, Václav Vančura, district superintendent of the Eastern District, erected a tent on the Square of the Republic in Moravská Ostrava.

*On Wednesday July 28 at 8:00 p.m., we started evangelization with the opening lecture. The tent, which can hold 600 to 800 people, was half full. Men, women, and children were on one side. Preachers, with a colporter and the watchman of the tent, were on the other side. They were in such a configuration as if to ask one another how all this will end? At our simple pulpit we felt great responsibility towards those who came to hear what we had to offer. What should we actually offer them? And how will they accept it? Such thoughts followed us, one by one. As for one thing we were quite clear, namely, that we could not offer them anything else but what our kind Heavenly Father had given us. Day by day the throng multiplied with those who came to hear our message. Some came longing for the clear truth of the Gospel, others from curiosity, and many in order to attack us (because of their ignorance of our mission).*⁶⁶

Then, one day a strong storm hit the tent, uprooted it (including the pikes), and knocked it down so that it was hardly recognizable. Among the enemies of the revival, many rejoiced, hoping that these Methodists would finally go away. But the tent was set up again. “From that moment, our worship services included an observably larger number of friends and participants, who had seen in our bravery and perseverance the seriousness of our mission, in which we came to them with the proclamation of Christ Jesus.”⁶⁷ The congregation was organized on September 12 and met in the former military wooden chapel. Soon, on October 28, 1931 (during the depression), the new prayer hall was opened.

By the year 1927, the revival movement that had created new congregations and lasted several years was substantially finished. The Methodist Mission had taken advantage of the ferment of the post war period. This era was now ending. In his report to the 1927 Annual Conference, J. P. Barták wrote:

⁶⁴ V. T.: Z Českých Budějovic (*From Czech Budějovice*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1926, p. 19

⁶⁵ Klatovy, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1931, p. 27

⁶⁶ V. Pražský (i.e., V. Vančura), Evangelisace v Moravské Ostravě (*Evangelization in Moravská Ostrava*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1926, p. 150

⁶⁷ Ibid.

*We tried to evangelize in all our congregations. But we also discovered that the public was no longer accessible to our evangelistic efforts as in the first post-war years. Other denominations also have had similar experiences. Nevertheless, we succeeded to win several faithful souls for the Kingdom of Christ.*⁶⁸

Statistics for that year show that Methodists had thirty-one parishes with preachers and thirty-eight preaching stations. The number of parishes would remain constant although the number of stations would change slightly. Methodists created new stations and congregations under the influence of political events surrounding the Second World War. The number of members surpassed the ten thousand mark in the previous year. J. L. Neill announced as early as at the 1925 Annual Conference that the work in Czechoslovakia “in terms of membership, stands in third place among all missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, behind China and Korea.”⁶⁹ According to the statistics, the church in Czechoslovakia had more theological students than any other mission. The growth in membership was caused by the great effort of all workers, and unquestionably by the fact that the church – not having churches and prayer halls – had to go into the streets among the people.

SOCIAL WORK

Methodist work in European countries was aimed at an effort to render social help to areas that suffered because of the war. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, entrusted the leadership in social work in Czechoslovakia to a young English Quaker, Richard Clements, who came to Prague before Josef Dobeš. Brother Dobeš once moaned that this man was not very favourable toward evangelism and caused much unpleasantness in other Protestant churches because he made unauthorized promises. He interfered in church affairs that were the responsibility of other workers.⁷⁰ In 1921 he was replaced by John C. Wilkinson, who was contracted and sent out by the Mission Board. He worked as “Superintendent of Social Welfare” but with no pastoral duties. In the 1923 records, his name is not mentioned. He finished his work in May 1923 when the department of social work (which he had lead until that time) was terminated. In the early days of the Methodist work, there were differences of opinion as to what the primary task was. In the program for church work in Europe, the Mission Board declared, “We should not be misled to give social education, the discipline of the church, or other areas of our work primacy in our program. These must be secondary and should help the primary goal of spiritual service, which is the only purpose that can conquer the deadly influence of formalism and rationalism.”⁷¹ After consulting with the Czechoslovakian Red Cross, Methodist workers began social service among the poorest Prague children and Russian refugees. The Russian refugees numbered several thousand in Prague. They lacked basic means, and the Red Cross was unable to help all of them. The church employed V. Mašek, M.D., to provide medical service for them. During 1920 and 1921, many thousand crowns were spent for medication, hospitalization, and clothing. A cafeteria was opened on Malta Square. Later it was moved to Smíchov.

⁶⁸ (*Minutes, 1927*), p. 18

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ J. Dobeš: Přípravy k práci metodistické církve v ČSR (*Preparations for the Work of the Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1930, p. 24

⁷¹ (*Minutes, 1922*), p. 28

From July 1921 to July 1922, 173,000 lunches and suppers were served, with an average of 475 boarders. In the student dormitory Na Slupi a tuberculosis ward for students was opened; in Salmovská street, a dental clinic was started; and in the House for Single Men in Strašnice, four reading rooms were provided, with personnel and equipment. When the social conditions of the refugees improved, the social work was discontinued. At the end of 1924, the cafeteria, the reading rooms, and the dental clinic were closed. Only in Ječná Street, the Methodist headquarters, was a reading room continued.

Our reading room consists of five large rooms where students have a rare opportunity to prepare themselves for examinations. In our reading room we have magazines in Czech, French, German, Ukrainian, and Russian languages, and many English, French, and Russian monthly magazines. Christian literature in different languages is laid out on tables. We make note paper available to them, and we are helping them with various translations from foreign languages. Our reading room is frequented by Czech, Ukrainian, Russian, and German students.⁷²

This work was supervised by Mrs. Věra Lubošínková. At the end of 1926, even this reading room was closed.

During the war many people suffered from malnutrition. Therefore the Methodist Mission created a summer camp for children in Hlubočepy, where 180 children were fed for two years. The children gained weight, and during the summer, several hundred were in residence. In October 1921, a castle in Horní Počernice near Prague was purchased. It had three buildings and a large park where for several years summer camps for poor children were held. The church supported it financially through its Social Commission. The Methodist Mission also supported other Protestant churches that helped people of this country. Besides a contribution to reduce the debt on Hus House, another for the church in Prague-Libeň, and another for the Czech Brethren Church in Brno, the Mission gave almost 15,000 crowns to Czech Deaconess work in Prague. The church gave over 67,000 crowns to the orphanage of the Unity of Czech Brethren in Chvaly. These were projects of solidarity and good will.

On May 1, 1923, the Social Department of the Mission was liquidated, and its work was taken over by the Annual Conference, which created a Commission for the work among students and orphans. The Commission on Student Work was asked to reduce its concern for the material needs of students and to start more concentrated religious work.⁷³ The work was done mostly among Ukrainian and Czech students. Except for the reading room in Ječná Street, the work was not successful. The Orphanage Committee was asked by the State Political Department to establish a constitution and by-laws.

At the 1924 Annual Conference, on August 24, a Society for the Care of Orphans was established. Membership was not limited to church members. It welcomed into its midst all people of good will, of any political or religious orientation. Acceptance of children into the institution was also uninhibited. During the first ten years, children of nine church denominations (as well as children of no church affiliation) were accepted. Children were brought up in the spirit of Christ's gospel and were led to tolerance and respect for the religious convictions of others. The first chairman of the society was E. Ondrák. In 1925, Josef Dobeš was elected, and after 1926, J. P. Barták was chairman. Among its friends and financial supporters, the society counted several important persons of the political and economic life in the first republic. The symbol of the society was designed by a renowned

⁷² (*Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Annual Conference, 1925*), Prague, 1926, p. 32

⁷³ (*Minutes, 1923*), p. 36

artist, Professor Alfons Mucha, who was elected an honorary member of the Society. He designed a pen drawing of an orphan child leaning over the grave of his loved ones, a wreath in his hands, with cross (symbol of suffering and Christian hope) in the background. The Society had three categories of membership: founding members paid a thousand crowns, active members contributed twenty crowns yearly, and contributing members gave ten crowns yearly. Later a corporate membership was introduced asking for fifty crowns yearly. In 1930 the society had seven founding, 280 active, and 133 contributing members.

This Society took over the castle in Horní Počernice, and after some repairs, established an orphanage there. The interior was finished by 1924, but because of some necessary formalities at the state political authority, the orphanage could not be put to operation. Meanwhile, in August a children's summer camp was opened. Brother Karel Procházka, moved in as the first worker and also became the manager of the buildings. He became a believer during the tent revival in Vršovice and he came to Počernice after helping in tent revivals in Zlonice and Most. The orphanage there was opened on April 5, 1925, with two children, eight year old Josef and ten year old František Kilián from Svatá Dobrotivá. They were cared for by a deaconess, sister Blažena Makovičová. Josef Zloch became the manager of the orphanage.

Josef Zloch (1884-1965) came in contact with Methodism before World War I at a wedding of a friend, a Methodist in Vienna. During the tent revival in Vršovice, he became acquainted with J. Dobeš. He joined the church in 1921 in Týn nad Vltavou, and because of the shortage of preachers, he helped out by conducting Bible classes. When the Society for the Care of Orphans was founded, he desired to take part in the social work of the church. He joined the Methodist mission and at first was active as a colporter (book-seller) in Prague-Vršovice. Every Sunday he travelled to Horní Počernice to hold meetings and to help the management of the institution. Afterwards he was appointed as a substitute preacher in Slaný and Smečno and later attended the Biblical Seminary in Prague. In 1926, after a year in Slaný, he was appointed as manager of the Orphanage. Later he was ordained a deacon and an elder. He was director of the orphanage until 1947 when he entered retirement.

The Orphanage had forty children during the first five years (later as many as fifty). This work was supported, besides contributions of members of the Society, by voluntary material gifts from the congregations. The deficits were covered from the budget of the Mission. By the rules of admission, the orphanage could also ask for support from relatives or from the community where the child was born, if this was possible. Besides the orphanage in Horní Počernice, a Home for the Elderly was established on April 1, 1932. A congregation was also developed at these institutions.

In July 1937 an additional social project was opened in the castle in Týnec near Klatovy. The baroque-style castle had been built 1721 most probably by the well known builder Dientzenhofer. Until the time of the land reform, the castle and the community of Týnec belonged to the counts of Kolovrat-Krakov. After the land reform, a hotel was established there, and the church bought it as such. Twenty children were transferred there from Horní Počernice, and one wing was arranged for summer guests. The director of the new institution became the director of the orphanage in Horní Počernice, and during the following thirteen years, 170 children found a home there. At the end of 1940, all the children were transferred from Počernice to Týnec. The castle in Počernice was rented to a school and later, in 1958, was taken over by the State (with the exception of the building with the present Methodist meeting hall). Besides being the site of recreational activities, Týnec was the location for all state conventions of youth and summer schools from 1938 to 1948. The ownership of the castle in Týnec was then also taken over by the state. At a special general assembly held on March 15, 1951, the Society for the Care of Orphans voluntarily dissolved and turned its assets over to the Methodist Church.

Besides these organizations already mentioned, there was one more – the Hermitage (Poušť) at Bechyně. The Society bought this real estate, located on the territory of the community Radětice, in 1929. On this land is a small old chapel with a former hermitage (“Poušť” named after it) that was built in 1676 by order of Lord John Herbert of Šternberk. The little chapel was dedicated to John the Baptist. It was built by Martin Rimer, builder and burgher of the New City of Prague. In the chapel outside the main sanctuary hall were two smaller rooms where the Lord of Šternberk liked to stay. Adjacent to them was a “black kitchen” which later became a dwelling place of the hermit. Hermits lived here from 1678 to 1793. The first hermit was Thomas Partl, who used to receive from the nearby farm a share of beer, fish, and other foods, and twenty gold coins for clothing. After the death of the last hermit in 1793, the hermitage was destroyed and the furnishings of the church removed. The altar was taken to Sodoměř and then later to Bechyně, where it is used as an altar in the patronage of local craftsmen. The painting, “Execution of John the Baptist”, was placed in a house (“White Bell”) in Bechyně. The church bell was stolen, later recovered, and during World War I confiscated for war purposes. But thanks to one citizen of Bechyně, it was recovered. Until 1864, the little church was used as a storage place for beer that was served to pilgrims. Later it was empty and unused; it started to deteriorate. From the original chapel, only the doors were saved, with the family coat of arms of the Lords of Šternberk (a star) and of the Lords of Říčany (triple leaf), John Šternberk’s mother’s family.

The Society for the Care of Orphans created a summer camp for children at the Hermitage. They repaired the little church, which was badly neglected, rebuilt two railroad cars and placed them in the forest for sleeping purposes, and erected two wooden log cabins. They held the first camp in July 1932. Originally, the Society had planned to hold courses there for teachers of Sunday schools and for leading youth workers during summer vacations. They also held children’s camps yearly until 1950. Preacher Josef Kocourek was in charge of these physical facilities. In the 1950s and 1960s, the camp was used for recreation. Since that time, it has served as a place for holding education courses for church workers.

COLPORTAGE ACTIVITIES

Besides evangelization (which was the natural focus of the whole movement), the Methodist Mission in Czechoslovakia concentrated from the beginning on social and colportage activities. After World War I, there were not enough Bibles, and the Czech Catholics were ignorant of it. Whenever foreigners inquired about the greatest need in Czech lands, they were told that it was the shortage of Christian literature. For this reason, Bible distribution was especially important during the mass exodus of Catholics who were leaving their church. In Prague a branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society did actually exist, but it faced many difficulties prior the creation of Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1918. In 1869, it received permission to operate, but soon it had to leave Václavské náměstí (*Wenzeslas Square*) and relocate in remote Spálená Street. After 1918, Bibles were stored in the private apartment of colporter Henry Špaček who was promoted to the Director of the Independent Czechoslovak branch of the British Bible Society in 1920.

But the work was still modest. In No. 15 Soukenická Street, it gained access to a remote corner space in the house of the Unity of Czech Brethren, from which storage as well as shipping were carried on. Only in 1927 was a street front store opened.⁷⁴

The leadership of the Methodist colportage activity was entrusted to C. T. Collyer; his title was superintendent of colportage work.

C. T. Collyer was the oldest American worker, and until the arrival of J. L. Neill he was the leader of the Methodist Mission. A member of the Annual Conference in West Virginia, he was ordained as an elder in 1898. Before coming to Czechoslovakia in November 1920, he worked as a missionary in Korea. Besides colportage work, he was in charge of Methodist work in Slovakia after 1922. He returned to America after the Conference at the end of 1923.

Immediately after his arrival in Prague in 1920, he contacted representatives of Protestant churches and offered them his services. In the weekly, *The Sparkles of Constance*, advertisements for Bibles appeared regularly after 1921. He rented an office in Hus House in No. 15 Jungmann Street, where J. C. Wilkinson, who worked in social services, also had an office. Headquarters of the Methodist Mission were in Hus House until November 1921 when the church bought a house in Ječná Street, where all offices were moved.

The Methodist Mission employed colporters who offered Bibles and other suitable literature for sale. For this purpose, 25,000 New Testaments with Psalms were printed in 1921. Additional Bibles were ordered from the American Bible Society in New York. From its beginning, this work was interdenominational. During 1920 and 1921, when people were leaving the Roman Catholic Church in masses, the Methodist Church had nineteen colporters who served various denominations: Czech Brethren Evangelical Church (five colporters), Moravians (four), Czechoslovak Church (one), Unity of Czech Brethren (two), and seven for the Methodist Church.

At the first Conference in 1922, C. T. Collyer reported that from July 1, 1921, to June 30, 1922, they had sold 5,863 Bibles, 11,638 New Testaments, and 12,540 Gospels. In his report he also explained the motives of the colportage work and some existing problems:

When we started colportage work in November, 1920, we thought that we were the only organization doing this work. But the situation soon changed. The British and Foreign Bible Society is very active in its Prague branch. The National Bible Society of Scotland organized a branch here and supplies its colporters and takes care of them through a local committee. Since colporters are maintained by these organizations, and since they are being supplied adequately with Bibles and being supported financially, there is no need for the Methodist church to take care of colporters of other denominations.⁷⁵

Delegates of all Protestant churches with the exception of Methodists were on the colportage committee of the Scottish Bible Society, which was organized at that time. "Further we discovered, that the work of Methodists was not favourably considered because we were doing the same work that the above mentioned committee was doing."⁷⁶ In order not to compete, the Methodist committee decided to ask the Czechoslovak Colportage Committee to

⁷⁴ Blahoslav Černohorský: *Střípky z dějin Biblické společnosti u nás (From the History of the Czech Bible Society)*, lithographed, p. 9.

⁷⁵ (*Minutes of the First Meeting of the Czechoslovak Mission, 1922*), Prague, 1923, p. 15

⁷⁶ (*Minutes of the Second Annual Conference, 1923*), Prague, 1924, p. 33

support all colporters who were not Methodists, and on December 31, 1922, the Methodists released all non-Methodist colporters.

We also announced that after the New Year, January 1, 1923, we are not going to pay them, but that we would like to cooperate with the Czechoslovak Colportage Committee as much as we would consider good. The Scottish Committee answered us that it could not accept the support of Methodist colporters and from their letter it became quite clear that they were not interested in cooperating with us. This also became clear to us later when we were visited by the Rev. R. H. Falconer, executive secretary of the Scottish Bible Society, who arrived early in spring in 1923 and asked us to give him the budget for our colportage work. We told him in response that we were not asked to work with the Czechoslovak Colportage Committee and that we are solely responsible for our funds.⁷⁷

From that time, Methodist colportage work was directed more toward Methodist people.

We carefully studied the situation of our colportage work in those times. We found, among other things, that more of our colportage work was done outside our church, namely in other Protestant churches. The work that was done until now was successful but our committee decided, that more colportage work should be done in our own church by brothers who were converted through our influence.⁷⁸

After 1923, six Methodist colporters remained (V. Hlaváček, V. Hochman, Z. Rosenheck, J. Hora, R. Malinger, J. Příhonský) and one colporter each from the Moravians (F. Šindelář) and the Czechoslovak Church (J. Slaměna).

The work of colporters was very meaningful for the Methodists. The church was aware of this and requested reports from them during the Annual Conference. Very often it was precisely through the colporters that the grounds for evangelization were being prepared. From the colporters came candidates for ministry; some colporters enrolled in the Methodist seminary and became preachers. Later a rule was actually established that nobody would get a license to preach who had no experience as a colporter. Later, when there was a shortage of colporters, congregations were asked to create colportage committees in the congregations. In spite of difficulties, the colportage work was widespread. At the conference in 1926, D. P. Melson announced:

Not long ago, a representative of the British and Foreign Bible Society told me that the Methodist Church is selling more Bibles and New Testaments than any other church in the whole republic. During the conference year we sold 2,616 Bibles and New Testaments for 49,785 Czechoslovak crowns. We distributed 25,120 pieces of various free literature.⁷⁹

Methodist publishing work developed from the colportage. As early as 1922, it was proposed at the Conference to publish leaflets and tracts not only in Czech and Slovak but also in Russian and Ukrainian languages. Recommended topics included conversion, regeneration, the true Christian life, an understanding of the Bible and of the Church, as well as instructional topics such as the requirements and tasks of church members, evangelization,

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 32

⁷⁹ (*Minutes of the Fifth Annual Conference*), Prague, 1926, pp. 8f

testimony, Christian service, missions, etc. In the following years a number of leaflets were published.

A church hymnal was being used in worship services, published first in 1908 in Chicago for Czech Methodist churches in America. The 14th edition of December, 1921, was used in Czechoslovakia. In the foreword, the Committee of Methodist pastors wrote that this hymnal is “according to many brethren who became acquainted with it, the best that was ever published in the U.S.A.”. In 1925, a hymnal (with words only) was published in Prague. Twenty hymns were added from the hymnbook of the Unity of Czech Brethren, for a total of 288 hymns. That hymnal was in use until 1956, when a new hymnal was published with a total of 450 hymns with music. The Rev. G. J. Maláč was its editor and great contributor.⁸⁰ A songbook for children was published, “Hallelujah”, prepared for printing by Dr. T. Č. Zelinka. The hymnal of 1925 also contained an order for public worship services, a ritual for baptism of infants, children, youth, and adults, a service for admission of children and of adults into the membership of the church, the ritual of the Lord’s Supper, a marriage ceremony, and the funeral service.

After January 1923, Bible-centered Sunday School literature was begun for three groups of pupils: for little ones, for ten to fourteen year olds, for youth and adults. The writer for youth and adults was Rev. B. Vališ, from the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church. Subscribers were not only Methodist congregations, but also congregations of other churches.

After May 1923, the Methodists started publishing their own monthly *Křesťanský buditel* (*Christian Advocate*) which contained reports from the church but also had an outspoken evangelical character. This monthly publication had a circulation of about two thousand, but its numbers were reduced a bit when the colportage activities diminished. The first editor was Josef Dobeš, from 1932 to 1941. Publications of the magazine was interrupted during W. W. II and then restarted beginning in January 1946. The editions from 1946 to 1952 (when the magazine finally ceased publication) were edited by Ladislav Schneider. As a substitute for the *Christian Advocate* in the 1950s, the church published a mimeographed newsletter named *Metodista* (*The Methodist*, 1958-62), and since 1970, *Oběžník* (*A Circular*).

The publications were especially useful for the church’s diaspora, which was growing as the population was constantly moving. The colportage division of the church headquarters assisted during all those years by shipping literature. The hopes of church members for their own store-front church bookstore were raised already during the early Annual Conferences.

The colportage work after 1929 was supervised very faithfully by Václav Našinec.

Václav Našinec (1899-1980) joined the Methodist Church in 1926 in Týn nad Vltavou. While working in the colportage department and in administration of the *Christian Advocate*, he studied conference preachers’ courses, then gymnasium, and finally in John Hus theological seminary. After ordination he served in many churches: in Prague, in the Říčany area, and after the war in Most, where he travelled from Prague weekly. In 1952, he had to retire after an injury, and he devoted his time to writing “A Chronicle of our Church”.

The colportage department was liquidated as a distributing agency in 1957.

BIBLICAL SEMINARY

The expanding work was in need of many co-workers. The missionaries who came from America were aware of the fact that they would have to recruit co-workers among those who became believers in the newly created congregations. Therefore they searched for young men

⁸⁰ (*Hymnal of the Evangelical Methodist Church*), Prague, 1956

and founded a biblical seminary for their preparation for full time ministerial leadership. The seminary was opened in 1922 in the church headquarters in Ječná Street. The organizing committee had reported the need earlier that year.

*Because our church in Czechoslovakia urgently needs an adequate number of trained workers, preachers, teachers in Sunday schools and other additional workers, we should not postpone the opening of the biblical seminary. The Committee therefore decided to open on October 3 the biblical seminary, which would consider the special tasks our candidates for preacher's office should expect.*⁸¹

According to original plans, the seminary was supposed to offer education not only to men but also to women, which was never realized. The school had three departments: the theological department, the English language department, and a department of public Bible classes. In the first department, future preachers were educated; in the second were primarily university students, men and women, who wanted to improve in the English language. The third one had two sections, English and Czech. In 1922, in all three departments, there were 316 students enrolled, of which sixteen were students of theology. Only ten finished the first year satisfactorily. The faculty consisted of district superintendents – J. P. Barták, J. Dobeš, D. P. Melson, J. L. Neill, and V. Vančura. Later contracted teachers were Prof. Dr. Břetislav Vyskočil, pastor Jindřich Schiller from the Moravians, and after 1925 pastor Benjamin Vališ and František Kučera from the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church. The director of the Seminary was J. L. Neill, followed (after his departure to America) by D. P. Melson.

John Lambert Neill (1882-1972) was born on January 17, 1882, in Montrose, Mississippi. He studied in Millsaps College where he graduated in 1906 with a B.S. degree. He became a member of the Mississippi Annual Conference and served as a pastor in several congregations. Prior to his coming to Czechoslovakia, he was from 1915-21 conference secretary of Sunday Schools and education of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. During that time in America he studied the systems of Bible schools and theological schools. In Czechoslovakia he was the chief superintendent of the whole Mission, as well as its treasurer. After October 1925, he was in the United States to lecture about the mission work in Czechoslovakia and he raised money for it. He returned with a message that the church in America was interested in Czechoslovakia more than in any other country. He returned permanently to the United States after the Conference in 1925. He requested it himself and explained his decision in his last report: "I concluded that Czechs must carry this work by themselves, and I have felt for some time as I feel now, that it is not proper to call too many Americans, but that God will call enough young Czechs from the ranks of those who daily come to salvation, and they will do the work. My reasoning was soon fulfilled" (*Minutes of the Fourth Annual Conference 1925, p.15*). After returning to the United States, he served as pastor in several churches and in 1942-47 as district superintendent. His last appointment was at the First Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Mississippi, from which he retired in 1954. He then lived in Decatur, Mississippi, where he died in 1972.

To finish the seminary studies took four years. The program included Old and New Testament studies, dogmatics, church history, evangelization, practical theology, church music, and modern languages. There were three ten week trimesters; the last week of each trimester was reserved for exams.

The original plan for a large theological and language school did not survive the first year. In the second year, only the theological department was opened with twenty students. But even at that time, there appeared difficulties. In 1924, a first year class was not started because there was a shortage of instructors and there were no available classrooms or dormitory rooms for students. Only after the central building was built was the situation somewhat improved, so

⁸¹ Zpráva výboru biblického semináře (*Report of the Committee of the Biblical Seminary*), (*Minutes of First Meeting of the Czechoslovak Mission, 1922*), pp. 14f

that all students could be housed together. The church also intended to build a dining room for them, but because the number of students was small, the dining facilities proved unprofitable and soon had to be discontinued. While full time in school, students were also fully engaged in congregations to which they were assigned. And during school vacations, they were engaged in direct, practical evangelization. Therefore classes were held from Tuesday to Friday. During the weekend, students were in churches. These arrangements were dictated by needs rather than by a desire to give students practical experiences in congregational work. The newly created congregations had to be served and the church had no other preachers. That this solution was not the happiest one became apparent later as the early enthusiasm faded. The students lacked pastoral wisdom and experience, and also often lacked an understanding of Protestant congregations. Many students came from a totally different environment. Moreover, this necessary parish work interfered with the school work.

The seminary also struggled with difficulties regarding study materials. The curriculum was patterned upon American Methodist theological schools, and all the literature had to be translated and mimeographed hurriedly. On those printings, the pressure of time and haste are detectable. Most of the instructors had no experience in teaching. In spite of all these conditions, enthusiasm in those days was great. J. L. Neill evaluated the seminar very positively, and before his departure from Czechoslovakia he stated: "Without any doubt, the Biblical seminary is the most important aspect of our whole program in Czechoslovakia. Evangelization is very important, but cannot be successful without a seminary."⁸²

The first graduation exercise was held in 1926 when the first three students (out of sixteen) completed the requirements. They were Jan Kotouč, Ferdinand Wagner, and Josef Zákoutský, all of whom had enrolled in 1922. In the following year there were ten graduates, of whom three were from the Moravians. Josef Kulich finished in 1928. In 1929, nine students graduated. At that time about twenty students were enrolled, but in 1930 the seminary had only five students. The seminary was mentioned for the last time at the Annual Conference in 1931, and four young men finished the four-year program with good grades.

During the depression in the early 1930s, when financial crises oppressed the church, the church was unable to maintain the seminary. The Annual Conference in 1932 recommended only postponement of the seminary opening; two years later it gave up the thought of reopening the seminary in the future. Prospective theological students were then advised to get an undergraduate education and to enroll in the university department of theology.

At that time, the Methodists had only one student in the Hus Seminary (Jiří Novotný, who during his studies joined the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church). Josef Polák was sent to Bible School in St. Chrischona, in Switzerland; Gustav Maláč (1891-1972) entered the conference as a graduate of the Methodist Seminary in Frankfurt am Main. He transferred from the Methodist Episcopal Church (North). He was born in Heršpice in Moravia and while living in Berlin, Germany, he joined the Methodist Church. He decided to enter the ministry, and after graduating from the seminary and service in the Austrian army during World War I, he served as pastor from 1920-28 to the Czech Methodist congregation in Vienna, Austria. When his children became of school age, he requested transfer to the Czechoslovak Annual Conference, starting January 1, 1929.

The seminary became a correspondence school. Students were given assignments from seminary lectures, which they had to study during their four years, and had to pass exams to prove their knowledge. Examinations were given by district superintendents and pastors, G. J. Maláč and J. M. Erlebach. Examinations were given twice a year, in February and June. Each exam was closed-book: the students' only book was the Bible. Preceding the exams was the

⁸² Ibid., p. 10

so-called Preachers' Institute, where the subjects were reviewed. The candidate was helped to get the full meaning of the lessons and to integrate them in his mind. Every year he had to write sermons on the following themes: repentance, justification by faith, the witness of the Holy Spirit, regeneration. He had to present a transcript of grades from the Masaryk Peoples' Institute for courses in Czech language and literature.

A number of preachers passed this type of education: J. Černý, V. Kraus, J. Matěna, V. Našinec (who after W. W. II graduated from Hus Seminary). After World War II, Methodist students studied at the former Hus School of Theology, which in 1950 was divided into two schools. From its beginning, Comenius School accepted Methodist students as accredited students, followed in the early 1970s by the Hus School, which had an undergraduate preparatory department. Many active preachers in Czechoslovakia today are graduates of these schools.

The church also provides continuing education for pastors and lay co-workers in courses that are organized from time to time. The first one for preachers and colporters from the whole republic was held in October 1927 in Prague.

ORGANIZATION

In early records, the status of the Czechoslovak work is described as the "Annual Meeting of the Mission", which had the character of an "Annual Conference".⁸³ This status, which was prescribed for the Czech work by the General Conference, meeting at Hot Springs, tied the whole work closely to the General Church. But because the work during the 1920s expanded, in 1925 the Czechoslovak Conference sent to the General Conference which met in 1926 in Memphis, Tennessee, a petition that concluded,

*It is the opinion of us all, that our organization would be more suitable and our work more successful, if we would become a Mission Annual Conference. We therefore petition the General Conference to create the Czechoslovak Mission Annual Conference, which would include all our work in the republic of Czechoslovakia.*⁸⁴

The General Conference arrived at the conclusion that work in mission fields should be made independent and approved the petition. On July 8, 1927, the Annual Conference in Czechoslovakia was established.⁸⁵ "The presiding bishop, U. V. W. Darlington, established the Annual Mission Conference on the basic principles of the Book of Discipline of 1926, after consultation with church authorities, and also after explaining the principles and order of

⁸³ (*Minutes of the First Meeting of the Czechoslovak Mission, 1922,*) pp. 5f

⁸⁴ (*Minutes of the Fourth Annual Conference, 1925,*) p. 8

⁸⁵ The minutes before that time were irregularly numbered and titled as: *Minutes of the First Meeting of the Czechoslovak Mission, M. E. C., South, 1922; Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Czechoslovak Mission, M. E. C., South, 1923; Minutes of the Third Annual Conference of the Czechoslovak Mission, M. E. C., South, 1924; Minutes of the Fourth Annual Conference in Czechoslovakia, 1925; Minutes of the Fifth Annual Conference in Czechoslovakia, 1926; Minutes of the Sixth Annual Conference in Czechoslovakia, 1927.* Beginning with the organization of the Annual Conference in Czechoslovakia in 1928, the numbering of the Conferences begins anew; in order to avoid confusion, therefore, the citations indicate the year the Conference took place.

an Annual Mission Conference by which the Czechoslovak Mission Conference was transformed into the Annual Mission Conference.”⁸⁶

The status of the Annual Conference gave larger rights but demanded also larger responsibilities. It was a step toward more independent self-direction and development of church work, and that had to proceed toward economic self-support. A step toward independence was manifested already at the Conference in 1927 when the first Czech preachers – graduates of the Bible Seminary – were received into the Conference membership: J. Kotouč, F. Wagner, and J. Zákoucký. As early as 1925, some seminary students had been ordained deacons, and in June 1929, seven Czechoslovak preachers were ordained elders.

The work continued to be led by a bishop who presided at Annual Conferences. After bishop J. Atkins and bishop W. B. Beauchamp (1922-26), it was bishop U. V. W. Darlington (1926-34), bishop J. A. Moore (1934-40), and after the war, bishop P. N. Garber. During the interim between conferences, the work was led by committees. From 1922 it was the Executive Committee, whose only members were the superintendents. The chairman was J. L. Neill (1922-25), D. P. Melson (1925-27), and J. P. Barták (1928-35). In 1935 an Advisory Committee was established; the bishop nominated three superintendents for it, and three members were elected by the Annual Conference. The three elected preachers on the first Advisory Committee were J. Leidorf, L. Schneider, and F. Wagner. In the following years, superintendents were permanent members, while the preachers changed. J. P. Barták presided over the Advisory Committee 1935-41 and V. Vančura from 1941. In 1946 a Church Council was created into which five preachers were elected. After 1955, when the new Church Rules were accepted, the Church Council consisted besides the superintendent of three clergymen and three laymen elected by the Annual Conference.

The parishes were led by preachers and elected stewards. Immediately after organizing the congregation, parishes held regular quarterly conferences (with district superintendents presiding), at which the stewards were elected and decisions about the work of the congregation were made. The dates of these quarterly conferences were announced in the *Christian Advocate*.

Various segments of the congregational work also started very soon, such as Sunday Schools for children. The church provided courses and published literature, graded and dated, for its workers. The first such course was held on November 4-5, 1930, in Prague. The youth also met in their group, called the Epworth League (later M. Y. F.). From time to time, the youth organization held district and state meetings. The first of the ten all-national meetings was held in 1930 in Prague. Women met in the Woman’s Missionary Society (later in W.S.C.S.). Their task was to do social work (support the orphanage), to collect offerings for missions, to meet for Bible study and prayer, and to fight against alcohol.⁸⁷ Also these societies had their all-national meetings, the first one was in 1930 in Prague. In 1928 an attempt was made to organize the Wesleyan Brotherhood for men in Sedlčany (later in Bernartice, in Bechyně, and Třeboň). But this type of work did not succeed in Czechoslovakia.

Laymen appeared at the Conference as early as 1922, although at that time only Vršovice and Central Methodist churches were represented. At the following Conference, they came from the Central and Southern districts, and in 1924 all other congregations were represented. This conference also elected a Committee for Lay Activities, which included all lay delegates of the Conference. The committee elected František Popelka from Jihlava as Conference lay leader and in its report described the work of the layman in the church:

⁸⁶ (*Minutes, Sixth Annual Conference, 1927*), p. 39

⁸⁷ (*Minutes, Third Annual Conference, 1924*), p. 27. Detailed instructions for the work in Women’s Mission Society is contained in *Minutes, Fourth Annual Conference, 1925*, pp. 26f.

The layman's role should be expressed in teaching and exhorting all with whom he has any contact: to be a teacher of divine truths in family, Sunday School, Bible hours, and prayer hours. He should support the distribution of Christian literature. He should be vitally active in evangelization. For a Christian it is not enough to hold the revealed truth, but he must relate it to others. Let our light shine! Every layman must insist that in every family the Bible be read, because the Bible clearly teaches that faith in Christ is the ground of salvation, but that good deeds are the measure of our reward. The congregation must be led to independence also in financial matters. In every congregation, the love of congregation should be cultivated. Therefore we are asking every congregation to promote the education of laymen: to elect a lay leader who together with the preacher would lead members to spiritual life. We want to work today. Every layman should be concerned with the growth of every congregation, that the lay work should not be only created, but that it should grow – that everyone should become a steward of this entrusted treasure and work toward a symbiosis of earthly and spiritual matters. We should be aware that the Kingdom of God is not coming without obstacles, but let us continue in the work with great faith in God, and then the victory will be sure.⁸⁸

At the conference in 1925 this committee was renamed the “Committee for Evangelization and Lay Activities.” In the report, the preachers were urged to select suitable brothers who possess the gifts for service, to educate them and entrust them with participation in Bible hours and other festive times. This request was made at the following conferences also. While the work in Czechoslovakia was organized as a mission, it was supported more generously by the mother church. This support enabled a quick acquisition of buildings enabled Methodists to continue in the work, especially in areas where the Catholic Church had strong influence and was arousing people against “the new teaching”. The conference spoke to the need in 1923:

In order that our work not be at a standstill, but progress as fast as up to now, it will be necessary to give sacrificially for general evangelization, that is, for the purchase and maintenance of tents, for support of new missionaries and colporters, for publications and new projects, and for renting of new halls, so that our mission work would spread.⁸⁹

The need for new church buildings appeared regularly in reports of district superintendents. Members of the Methodist Church came mostly from poorer circles. Their income was small and they were often unemployed. The church asked them from the early times at least to take care of the rent and the maintenance of buildings, and to pay the travel expenses of the preachers. In the congregations, members were asked to make regular contributions during offerings, often with envelopes in which they put their regular gifts. The conference in 1923 accepted a rule to create budgets in which there would be an item for the support of the preacher. And as early as 1924, the Conference suggested that the financial goal of the church be financial independence. A booklet entitled “How Much Should I Give for the Kingdom of God?” emphasized that a Christian should tithe and that such an approach is scriptural.⁹⁰ But

⁸⁸ (*Minutes, Third Annual Conference, 1923*), pp. 23 f.

⁸⁹ (*Minutes, Second Conference, 1923*), p. 28.

⁹⁰ *Kolik mám věnovati na království Boží? (How Much Should I Give for the Kingdom of God?)* Published by the Methodist Mission Committee on Literature, for free distribution. Prague, 1922.

the church never made tithing mandatory. From year to year the amount that congregations contributed to salaries of preachers grew, and all congregations joined this movement. But not one congregation succeeded in paying the full salary of their preacher. In 1927, for example, the congregation in Plzeň (Pilsen) was highest in providing 22% of the salary. The depression at the beginning of the 1930s slowed down this progress toward independence for a time. In his report to the Annual Conference in 1935, V. Vančura complained sadly: "During my visits, the most difficult task was to talk to our poor people about money and ask for increased offerings. And yet it cannot be avoided now or in the future! But even in this, I found great understanding in our members."⁹¹

In the 1930s, the situation got better. The Litoměřice-Ústí-Lovosice-Most circuit decided that they would pay their preacher the full salary. This was perhaps made possible also because pastor J. M. Erlebach (who was appointed to the circuit at that time) was a single man and had no family obligations. He himself suggested it and explained his motivations saying that "only the church independent from overseas financial help will endure in difficult times and in tasks demanded by Christ and our times."⁹² This step was made after prayerful meditation in November, 1935. J. P. Barták added to the decisions of the Administrative Board in Litoměřice: "The congregation in Litoměřice suggests for us a way which sooner or later all congregations will have to go, in our or in other Protestant churches, if they are truly concerned about the needed changes in the world and about building the Kingdom of God on earth."⁹³ The other parishes were encouraged by this decision, and they began to contribute to the salaries of preachers. Membership cards were printed which it was hoped would encourage members to make regular contributions. The stewardship committee, which was started at the 1935 Annual Conference, defined the whole financial independence problem as having a spiritual foundation.

*"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." We are arriving at an inner conviction that the church must exert a greater effort to lead souls to Jesus Christ and to a rebirth that would change the hearts of men, and only thus it becomes a source of love.*⁹⁴

The committee worked out a number of practical guidelines on how to arrive at financial independence, which was becoming a focal point in the Church. The Nazi occupation later mortally wounded this effort. After 1949, the State began to finance the salaries of preachers, as was done in all state-approved churches.

Now the United Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia is integrated as an Annual Conference in the Central Conference for Central and Southern Europe and in the General Conference to which it sends elected delegates. The bishops of the Central Conference, who are members of the Council of Bishops, were Ferdinand Sigg (1954-65). Franz Schäfer (1966-1989), and now Heinrich Bolleter (1989-); all were residing in Zurich, Switzerland.

DEPRESSION

⁹¹ (*Minutes, Ninth Annual Conference, 1935*), p. 17.

⁹² J. P. Barták: *Velký krok víry (Great Step of Faith)*, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1936, p.9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ (*Minutes, Ninth Annual Conference, 1935*), p.22.

In early 1930s the work of the Methodist Church was seriously hurt by the depression. On October 24, 1929, on the notorious “black Friday” the stocks at the New York Stock Exchange collapsed; thus started a crisis that gradually embraced the whole world. In the United States, industrial production went down 54%; in 1932, unemployment in the country was seventeen million. The budget of our mother church in America had to be reduced by sixty percent. This of course affected the mission fields. On November 30, 1931, the Methodist headquarters in Prague received a cablegram from the Mission Board in Nashville stating that “salaries may be lowered and eventually service contracts may be discontinued.” This message and the letter that followed “created chaos.”⁹⁵ On December 29, 1931, the district superintendents sent a letter to all employees of the church stating:

*The Board of Missions has related to us, that because of difficulties connected with the depression and especially because of our own financial situation, the Board will not be able to make current contributions to our church in Czechoslovakia. Because these contributions are used to supplement the income of employees of the church, we were advised to prepare ourselves for this situation, even by using our right to terminate services. We feel morally obligated to make you aware that your financial condition is thus threatened and because we have no means of our own, we are forced to give you an opportunity to look for a new job. To make it a bit easier, we are terminating your ministry on March 31, 1932. On that day your pay that came from the Board of Missions will be stopped. We want to assure you that we are doing this only with great regret, but due to circumstances, we cannot do otherwise.*⁹⁶

Although on January 19, 1932, this termination was rescinded, the problem was not solved. In February 1932, bishop U. V. W. Darlington arrived in Prague and assured the representatives of the church that the Board of Missions had no intention of liquidating its work in Czechoslovakia. Their willingness to support the work of the Church did not diminish, but unemployment and the rapid decline in the value of the dollar forced these measures. One of the cost-cutting measures was, for example, that D. P. Melson, a worker who laboured for many years in Czechoslovakia was called back to America by the Board of Missions during the session of the Annual Conference in 1933. The Conference adopted a resolution in which it was stated that

*It is regretfully accepted that the present financial restrictions are forcing the Board of Missions in America to recall a number of American missionaries and that among them is the Rev. D. P. Melson, who worked among us ten and one-half years... Brother Melson, as the only missionary of American birth, learned to speak our language and identified himself with us to such measure that he was able to understand all our problems... His kind nature, his deliberation and wisdom, as well as his invincible optimism gained him our sincere love.*⁹⁷

By March 31, 1932, the services of five preachers (who left on their own request) were terminated: V. Hora, J. Kučera, J. Matějka, J. Zákoutský and O. Rumpel. But Ondrej Rumpel did not leave the church. He continued to serve the congregation in Vrútky although he did not receive a salary. Preacher Kučera, with the whole congregation in Sedlec-Prčice, transferred into the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church. Preacher Zákoutský took a majority of the

⁹⁵ J. P. Barták: *Bouře nad naším Sionem (Storm over our Zion)*, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1932, p. 88.

⁹⁶ V. Našinec: *Kronika ECM (Chronicle of the Evangelical Methodist Church)*, typed, p. 757.

⁹⁷ (*Minutes, Seventh Annual Conference, 1933*), p. 14.

congregation in Sedlčany into the same denomination. “The reason for this action was the announcement concerning termination of preachers’ services, which was done because of financial difficulties of our mother church in America.”⁹⁸ So it was said in the official explanation. In the Methodist congregation in Sedlčany only nineteen members were left; they were added to the parish of Prague-Strašnice. In these two congregations, the church lost 230 full members and 419 preparatory members. “Hostile and false reports in some daily newspapers had a destructive effect on departing congregations, as well as on many members in other congregations.”⁹⁹ And how did the church reconcile herself with all this? In the August *Christian Advocate*, J. P. Barták wrote an article in which he mentioned the following facts:

It is not up to us to judge those who staggered. Let us admit that more or less we all staggered. We differed only in the form of our despair. It is not up to us to judge other denominations for their exaggerated haste by which they were trying to help the seemingly disintegrating congregations. Let us give them the benefit of other positive motives, and also recognize the fact that their interference in our inner-denominational affairs stemmed from other motives, also perhaps from an interest in the Kingdom of God. We all were aware that one day our faith would be tested, that the day of confrontation would come, because the Church of God can ascend to higher goals only if she would prove herself in the fire of suffering and tests. And this was our first test. We were surprised only by the form in which the test came... The test of faith consisted not in whether it is better that one should belong to this or that of our Protestant churches, because God reveals His spirit in all these churches. The test of faith rested rather in how we are going to act in the critical moment: are we going to keep our faith that the Church is God’s church and that it will be preserved to the ends of time to the service of Him and to the proclamation of His Word, to the administration of His sacraments, to the maintenance of Christian fellowship and discipline, edification of believers, and the conversion of the world? Or are we trying to save this Gibraltar by covering it quickly with the robe of some other denomination? In other words, are we going to have spiritual and moral strength to wait for God’s guidance so that everything will be done in harmony, good will, and brotherly love knowing that “in everything God works for good with those who love him” (Romans 8:28) or that we shall take church affairs into our own human hands as if God could not handle it?... With heavy hearts, but nevertheless with love, we are shaking hands in spirit with brothers and sisters over denominational borders which they have crossed. We are asking the Lord to heal all wounds and sorrows, and that He Himself guide all steps leading to final establishment of our mutual relationships. May the matters of prestige of our worldly organizations give way to broader interests of the Kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus be glorified and His name be praised!¹⁰⁰

These words were written by the man to whom the church entrusted the solution of complicated questions related to the departure of these two congregations.

Other congregations reacted to these difficulties so that their spirit of stewardship increased. At the 1932 Annual Conference, all three district superintendents reported that the financial difficulties had moved members of the church to greater sacrifices to support the preachers. The previous year, the conference had resolved that congregations must pay at least five percent of preachers’ salaries. This requirement was surpassed. “The preachers and members,

⁹⁸ (*Minutes, Sixth Annual Conference, 1932*), p. 25.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁰ J. P. Barták: *Bouře nad naším Sionem (Storm Over Our Zion)*, p. 88.

grasping the seriousness of the situation, decided to remain faithful to our church, even if they would have to bring greater sacrifices.”¹⁰¹ And this happened at a time when, as V. Vančura reminded everyone, two hundred factories were shut down in the northwestern area of Czechoslovakia alone.

But the difficulties did not end with this. In America, the salaries of preachers were lowered by fifty percent, and in Czechoslovakia the salaries went down first by ten percent and then by twenty; after January, 1934, they were lowered by half. Every time the salaries were reduced, the preachers were asked for consent in writing and the congregations were asked to supplement it if they could. In every case, the preachers had to economize drastically. The executive Committee of the church sought volunteers who would be willing to give up their preaching position at the end of October 1933, and offered them remuneration of one thousand Czechoslovak crowns for every year served in the church. This offer was accepted by preachers V. Hejlek, R. Hromádko, K. Niček, and E. Szabo-Slávík. The latter however continued to serve in Sered’ as a volunteer preacher. The remaining preachers stayed in the service although they lived in uncertainty how to meet their needs. In addition they served congregations that had lost their preachers. The church tried to cover the deficits by renting out rooms in church buildings and by selling land parcels that were not urgently needed.

The crisis was reflected also in the number of parishes and in the number of members. The number of parishes which reached its peak of thirty-one in 1927 and 1928, levelled itself to nineteen in 1934. Therefore, although the Church did not abandon those places that had lost their preachers, it designated them as preaching stations and attached them to the nearest church. The number of members, which had had reached 10,200, began to diminish gradually after 1929 to 7,000 in 1936. From 1931 to 1934, the church lost two thousand preparatory members. In these statistics it is interesting to note that the number of full members shows very small changes, going only from 2,900 in 1929 to 2,500 in 1936.

After the departure of preachers who accepted termination of service, twenty-one preachers remained in the service of the church. At the Annual Conference in 1934, Dr. Barták (after the departure of D. P. Melson) became the representative of the Board of Missions, whose duty it became to administer the church’s property in Czechoslovakia and to administer the salaries of preachers and church workers:

This past year has been perhaps the most critical year in our church in Czechoslovakia. The rapid reduction of budgetary support from our Board of Missions, and alongside of it the diminishing exchange value of the American dollar, forced us to grasp some very radical means to save the situation... It is understandable that these radical ways created an atmosphere of uncertainty. We feel that our church in Czechoslovakia, and especially our preachers, went through the fire of a great test... even now arose Sanballats, Tobiahs, and Geshems, who tried to wear out the hearts of builders. We have testimonies of preachers and of members of administrative boards who were visited by representatives of another denomination and argued that because Methodists will not be able to overcome their difficulties they would do best to come over to them. We have already answered such attempts last year in our Declaration on Church Union.¹⁰²

This declaration, also accepted at the Annual Conference, said that the church rejects the idea of union “as long as it is motivated by an economic motive that has its origin in the present

¹⁰¹ (Minutes, Sixth Annual Conference, 1932), p. 26.

¹⁰² (Minutes, Eighth Annual Conference, 1934), pp. 26 f.

world economic crisis because we see in it a lack of faith in God.”¹⁰³ The press reported that the Methodist Church was selling churches and negotiating with another denomination for union. The Methodist leadership officially denounced these reports. In the magazine *Český bratr* (*Czech Brother*), Dr. Antonín Boháč, ministerial councillor in the Federal Statistical Office reported, concerning changes in church membership in Prague, that from January to June 1934, the Methodist church had lost thirty-two members to the Catholic Church and thirteen to the Czechoslovak Church, and that “the work of the Methodist Church was in our country founded falsely and it should be changed radically.”¹⁰⁴ Dr. Barták accepted this admission and in the *Christian Advocate* answered:

*This tells us again that every soul must be won for the Kingdom of God through the true new birth, inner rebirth, and only then be added to the fellowship of believers. Therefore we gladly accept words of admonition when we are told that a radical change should be made among us. It will mean for us a return to the original methods of Methodism. We shall forget our personal and denominational prestige; we shall throw ourselves earnestly into the struggle for Christ and His Kingdom and for the salvation of dying souls; our rows will be cleaned like wheat, and although the statistics about numbers of our members might suffer for some time, finally Christ and His Church will be victorious.*¹⁰⁵

ECUMENICAL OPENNESS

Methodism is basically ecumenical. This is visible on the world level, where it is open to various unions, and it is obvious in Czechoslovakia also. From its beginnings, during evangelization, in social work and in the work of colportage, the Methodist Church offered and practised cooperation with other denominations. Methodism wants to share the gifts with which the Lord entrusted it, being faithful to its founder John Wesley and to the principles contained in his *Character of a Methodist*. Therefore the official cooperation as it was offered in the Union of Evangelical Churches in Czechoslovakia was taken as a matter of fact. The Union “was the outgrowth of the first assembly of Czechoslovak evangelicals (1923). The preparatory works were entrusted to the Union of Constance and its Preparatory Committee after dragging negotiations managed to establish it (originally the name was “Federation” not until 1927). In contrary to the Union of Constance, its members are not individuals, but denominations, united in the federative way.”¹⁰⁶

At the organizing meeting, whose main theme was to deepen the spiritual unity of Protestant churches, the Methodist church was represented by its delegates. J. P. Barták presented to the Annual Conference in August, 1924 the proposed principles of the federation.

¹⁰³ Resoluce o slučování církví (*Resolution on the Unification of Churches*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1933, p. 89.

¹⁰⁴ *Český bratr* (*Czech Brother*), December 1934, quoted in Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1935, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ J. P. Barták: Byla práce církve metodistické u nás “falešně” založena? (*Was the Work of the Methodist Church in our Country founded 'Falsely'?*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1935, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ P. Filipi: Léta 1848-1938. Český ekumenismus (*Czech Ecumenism, 1848-1938*), Prague, 1976, p. 156.

*It was stated that these principles guarantee full freedom to all denominations altering the Union of Protestant churches in Czechoslovakia and at the same time enabling them closest working cooperation, relationships and mutual understanding of brothers and sisters of all Protestant churches!*¹⁰⁷

The proposal for the Methodists to join this federation was “unanimously and enthusiastically accepted.” As delegates were elected - Rev. J. P. Barták, J. Dobeš, V. Vančura, and laymen, František Novotný, Dominik Svitálek and Jan Mašek.

*By this vote the Methodist church, although the youngest in the republic, became the first of all Protestant churches which joined the “Union”. The cooperation of all Protestant churches will be great, exhausting, will require many sacrifices. But the results which this effort will bring will be far reaching, and beneficial to all federated churches. Let us pray and work, and God will bless us.*¹⁰⁸

The actual founding of the Union happened on February 2, 1927 in the Hus House in Prague. The invitation to membership was given to all Protestant churches in Czechoslovakia and the following six accepted: the Baptists, the Methodist Church, the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church (Presbyterians), the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Lutheran) in Eastern Silesia, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Lutheran) in Slovakia, the Moravians. The Union was not joined by the German Evangelical Church, the Reformed Church in Slovakia, and the Unity of Czech Brethren (Congregational), which applied for membership in 1936 and thus raised the membership to seven). The Slovak Bishop Samuel Zoch was elected chairman of the union; J. P. Barták was elected as member of the Executive Committee. D. P. Melson characterized the Union at the Annual Conference, saying that “it is a step toward closer friendship among churches enabling all Protestant Churches to create a united front in matters of morals and against a common enemy.”¹⁰⁹ He recommended electing two delegates every year who would serve three years, so that the church would have three ministers and three laymen representatives in the Union. In 1927 two laymen were elected, Emil Ondrák and Jaroslav Hencl; in 1929, Rev. J. Kotouč and Rev. V. Huňatý; in 1930, E. Ondrák and J. Hencl again; and in 1931, Rev. V. Vančura and J. P. Barták. Besides regular meetings of the representatives, the Union organized activities such as the first convention of Czechoslovak Protestants on July 4-6, 1928, in Bratislava. The second convention, planned for September 1938 in Prague, was not held because of the development of political events. On September 23, mobilization was declared, and in early October, Hitler started to occupy the former Sudetenland. At the first assembly, the church was represented by V. Vančura. This assembly “was to manifest the inner links of all Protestant distinctions as well as an awareness of mutual co-existence and cooperation.”¹¹⁰

Professor Filipi characterized this fellowship of churches in the following manner:

¹⁰⁷ Účast metodistické církve na federaci evangelikálních církví v čsl. republice (*Participation of the Methodist Church in the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the Czechoslovak Republic*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1924, p. 77.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ (*Minutes, Sixth Annual Conference, 1927*), p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Sjezd evangelických církví v Bratislavě (*Congress of Evangelical Churches in Bratislava*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1928, p. 100.

In the Union there was no idea of a “Super-Church”. There was not even an idea of a communion of churches. Therefore it is understandable that the church representatives, after consultation with Schoenfeld..., decided to organize a different unit, The Ecumenical Council. From the formal point of view, the Ecumenical Council is no alternative to the Union; both are rooted in the idea of federation. But it was clearly felt at that time that the shallow categories of Protestantism could not be adequate. The Ecumenical Council wants to be a fellowship of churches to enable their mutual dialogue. The meaning, the characterization of Protestantism, which was after all always defined unclearly and ad hoc, ceased to be satisfactory also because it failed to motivate theological reflection, in which the churches would list their special gifts. With the rise of a new generation, this reflection, which was leading to new attempts at a self-understanding of the church, began to arouse new and more basic ideas, which started to penetrate the Union as well. This was revealed at the Přerov meeting in 1936 in the theme of the report by J. L. Hromádka concerning the mission of the church: This mission is unique because and only because the church did not give it itself.¹¹¹

At this Přerov meeting of the Executive Committee, J. P. Barták was elected to succeed J. L. Hromádka as secretary of the Union. V. Vančura became member of the Executive Committee. The Headquarters of the Union were located in the Headquarters of the Methodist Church.

Although the Union had no intention of stimulating the merger of churches, yet this idea had to emerge sooner or later on its own. The idea was expressed for the first time during the economic crisis when many started to consider the desirability of a merger for economic reasons. At the 1933 Annual Conference, a resolution proposing the unification of churches, as worked out and reported by J. P. Barták, was unanimously accepted. The idea of unification for economic reasons was rejected. On the other hand, a hope was expressed “not only for a closer cooperation, but also for a merger with all those who love that glorious appearing of Him... when we all will attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God (2 Tim. 4:8 and Eph. 4:13).”¹¹² A committee was elected (J. P. Barták, V. Vančura, J. Erlebach and Jiří Procházka) which was empowered to negotiate this matter with similar commissions elected by the highest authorities of other Protestant churches in Czechoslovakia. The commission actually started to work, but at the next Annual Conference admitted disappointingly

that other denominations did not react, and that (so far as we have learned) no other denomination in Czechoslovakia had elected a committee similar to ours so that our committee had no opportunity to negotiate in the matter entrusted to it.¹¹³

But the attempts for unification were not buried. At the Annual Conference in 1938, J. P. Barták reported as chairman of the commission for church unification in Czechoslovakia and the presiding bishop commented: “I am for the Christian union of churches.”¹¹⁴ The report said that consultations were carried on with representatives of the Czech Brethren Evangelical church, the Moravians, and the Baptists. The result was no concrete agreement but at least an assurance: “We are longing for closest cooperation with all churches, with which we are in

¹¹¹ P. Filipi: *Český ekumenismus (Czech Ecumenism)*, pp. 158 f.

¹¹² Resoluce o slučování církví (*Resolution on Unification of Churches*), *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1933, p. 89.

¹¹³ (*Minutes, Eighth Annual Conference, 1934*) p. 17.

¹¹⁴ (*Minutes, Twelfth Annual Conference, 1938*), p. 13.

fellowship in the Union of Evangelical churches in Czechoslovakia.” Further it was stated: “Not only concrete, but also noble brotherly and friendly and warm interdenominational contacts are a condition of any further negotiations and mergers of churches... organic merger must be preceded by spiritual union.”¹¹⁵

The discussions about the unification of churches were then intensified and were geared toward concrete objectives. The problem was in the fact that denominations are part of worldwide organizations from which they originated. As J. P. Barták commented,

*these contacts and close relationships of our Protestant churches with World Protestantism should not be underestimated. They represent spiritual values (talents) suitable not to be buried, but to be used for building the Kingdom of God and for the spiritual benefit of the nation.*¹¹⁶

In this same article, J. P. Barták presented a concrete proposal, noting that just as the Presbyterian, Congregational, and the Methodist Churches in Canada had united in 1925, so one may assume that some day the same churches will unite in the United States. The Methodist view was, “Why could not Protestant churches here achieve this unification earlier by becoming autonomous members of this church?”¹¹⁷ The united church would be strong enough to elect a bishop and as such would have autonomy, and yet through the General Conference would have participation on the highest church level and on a worldwide level.

Barták’s article was also published in the New Year’s number of *Kostnické jiskry (Sparkles of Constance)* in 1940 and started great discussion in this weekly and in the periodicals of other denominations. The unification of churches was the subject of discussions also at the Executive Committee of the Union of Protestant Churches. Dr. Barták, as editor of the *Christian Advocate*, published and commented upon these discussions.¹¹⁸ Various other proposals for eventual unification began to crystallize, such as to create independent districts within the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church from the individual churches. The Unity of Czech Brethren discovered that the majority of its members (in all churches voting on this question) were against any merger. Although it looked like that there were no theological objections, it was generally agreed that there needed to be more and deeper preparations before the actual unification could be realized.

In 1943, when these multilateral discussions had not led to concrete results, bilateral discussions were started. On July 25, 1943, at a meeting in Železný Brod between authorized representatives of the Methodist Evangelical Church (V. Vančura, J. Kotouč, V. Načinec, L. Schneider) and representatives of the Moravians, the following Joint Declaration was adopted:

The Evangelical Methodist Church and the Moravian Church agree with God’s help to create, either alone or with other denominations who would agree with our program, a United Church that will stand on the foundations of the Old Unity of Brethren in doctrines as well as church organization: it will assume its name and its bishop’s ordination, and it will become part of the Unitas Fratrum, in which it sees its successor at the present time, so that we could more successfully spread the faith of the Lamb, as we have done previously through

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹⁶ J. P. Barták: Stanovisko církve metodistické k otázce sjednocení evangelických církví (*The Standpoint of the Methodist Church to the Unification of Evangelical Churches*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1940, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1940, pp. 28-32, 47-49.

*our evangelistic and missionary efforts, and through these also establish the dominion of our great King, Jesus Christ, in the land of our forefathers as well as in most remote lands.*¹¹⁹

The validity of this proclamation was contingent upon the approval of World Headquarters of both churches. Concrete agreement was reached for cooperation in the field of Christian Education in Sunday Schools, creation of a joint seminary, and exchange of publications.

On June 20, 1955, after the Second General Assembly of the World Council of Churches the previous year in Evanston, Illinois, the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Czechoslovakia was founded. The founding members were member churches of the W.C.C.: Czech Brethren Evangelical Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church (Augsburg Confession), the Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia. These then accepted as members the Silesian Evangelical Church (Augsburg Confession), the Unity of Czech Brethren, the Evangelical Methodist Church, the Moravians, and a half year later, the Baptists. This Council ceased to function when Czechoslovakia was reorganized into a federative state in 1968, and on December 15, 1970, an Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic was created, in which the Evangelical Methodist Church was one of the nine founding churches. Since 1970, the Methodist Church has also been a member of the European Conference of Churches.

OCCUPATION

The second great crisis in the history of Methodism in Czechoslovakia, after the economic problems, happened during the time of Fascist expansion in Europe and the occupation of Czechoslovakia. No denomination was excluded from painful losses during the takeover of border areas of our fatherland in October 1938. From Litoměřice the Czechs moved out into the interior and during the war met with German Methodists in their sanctuary. For some time after the Sudetenland was occupied, pastor Erlebach remained in Litoměřice in order to visit the remaining members. At the beginning of 1939, he was moved, but in January 1940 he endeavoured to visit church members in Litoměřice, Most, and other localities. About the possibilities of working among the Czechs, he still wrote very optimistically:

*In Most, we had worship services at the home of brother Hrdina, and we found a number of Czech seeking souls. We also found a commercial hall that we could arrange into a sanctuary. There we could (as well as anywhere else) hold worship services alternately in Czech and German languages. By this method, which is already practised in Litoměřice, much could be done for the cooperation between Czechs and Germans.*¹²⁰

But shortly afterward, even these visits were not possible. With the loss of Litoměřice, all other preaching stations were lost: Ústí nad Labem, Most, Lovosice, Duchcov, and Křešice. The seat of the parish was then first made in Terezín. In 1940, a major financial campaign was projected to build a church in Terezín, but even this plan had to be abandoned. When the Germans made a Jewish ghetto in Terezín and established a concentration camp there, the seat

¹¹⁹ V. Našinec: Kronika ECM (*Chronicle of the Meth. Church*), p. 860.

¹²⁰ J. M. Erlebach, *Cesta sudetským krajem (Travelling through Sudetenland)*, Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1940, p. 44.

of the parish was transferred to Roundnice nad Labem where a new congregation had to be organized. But there the church had no church building of its own.

In Liberec, pastor Leidorf led the last worship service early in October 1938 in the YMCA. Afterwards the building was confiscated and the members moved inland. As pastor Leidorf recalled,

On Sunday morning, October 9, I went to the YMCA where we used to have worship services. But I found it closed. I went to visit brother Sklenka in Maffersdorf and we spent the morning in reading the Word of God and in prayer. We prayed the Lord to lead us and our dispersed members further. On the October 10, I wandered through Liberec and Horní Růžodol and tried to find how many members were left. In Liberec I found one sister and in Horní Růžodol one brother and two sisters. I was saddened when, instead of kind brothers and sisters, I found empty apartments and abandoned houses.¹²¹

With the departure of the pastor, the work in Chrastava was also abandoned. Pastor V. Kraus visited the Sudetenland from Horní Počernice and called upon abandoned members of the Methodist Church. And when later it became impossible to serve in this way, church members tried to serve themselves as laity.

After the creation of the so-called Slovak State in March 1939, the Church lost congregations in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Russia. In Bratislava, pastor Korf stayed until 1940. In September 1940, state authorities stopped public church work and evicted the pastor. The congregation met in small numbers during the war in a private apartment. Similar conditions existed in Sereď. However, lay preacher Szabo-Slávík could remain there because he was of Slovak nationality. Ushgorod and Mukačevo were occupied by the Hungarian army.

Our Czech members in Ushgorod and in other cities of the former Sub-Carpathian Russia twice underwent the horrors and conditions of sudden war evacuation. All Czech members were forced to leave their homes and their property in Sub-Carpathian Russia to save their lives. Now they are scattered throughout whole of Moravia and Bohemia. Up to now, only a few told us their new address.¹²²

The Ruthenian and Slovak members who did not have to move were served by Hungarian Methodists under the leadership of the District Superintendent, J. Tessenyi, who even appointed a preacher there. In a report to the Annual Conference in 1939, Josef Dobeš mentioned that he visited those members together with superintendent Tessenyi.

According to the roll of preachers with appointments in 1937, there were twenty parishes. This number was reduced because of the occupation. It is estimated that the Methodists lost more than 1,100 members. Through new scattering of the population, the diaspora, which was already disproportionately large, again increased. In July 1939, V. Vančura reported to the Annual Conference concerning the situation in Northern Bohemia:

About ninety percent of our members left their former homes and moved into inner Bohemia. We came in permanent contact again with some, but many disappeared from our church horizon, and only gradually are we getting their new addresses. In spite of these enormous

¹²¹ J. Leidorf, Z Liberce (*From Liberec*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1939, p. 35.

¹²² (*Minutes, Thirteenth Annual Conference, 1939*), p. 20.

*losses, in members and finances, we have not given up our preaching activities in these places*¹²³.

But this was not the end of the difficulties. In České Budějovice, for example, the congregation was denied its sanctuary. As soon as the invaders got into the city, the congregation was evicted from its sanctuary and had to meet in homes. Later, they found another room and although the members were threatened, they were allowed to keep it until the end of the war.

The church in those hard times was not silent, but protested the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Superintendent Barták, in the capacity of a secretary of the Union of Protestant Churches, signed “*An Appeal to the Conscience of Mankind*,” which was addressed to Christians in the whole world.¹²⁴ And on October 15, 1938, he himself wrote an open letter to Lord Runciman in which he expressed his protest against the occupation of border areas of the republic, where Czechs were living.

*It will perhaps be obvious that sacrifices imposed on our country by the Munich agreement were burdensome by themselves and that this additional occupation of territories, settled predominantly by Czech population, is creating an unbearable situation. What was meant as a sacrifice for saving peace in Central Europe and the world, has turned into a new lawlessness, which people with a sense of justice will be not inclined to tolerate passively. You surely will allow me to express our view of this matter (by pointing to heavy bows which affected our country and to the moral problem resulting from the faithlessness of our friends in times of the greatest crisis), even if it in some respects might cause displeasure.*¹²⁵

Lord Runciman answered Dr. Barták by trying to explain that he had succeeded in preventing a war.¹²⁶ The future led him in a horrible way to see his mistake.

The evacuation of the “frontiersmen”, created a need for effective help. The church became aware of this need, and its program of assistance was carried out through the Society for the Care of Orphans. It had two goals: to rescue children from the danger of malnutrition, and to assist parents who had difficult times in new circumstances. For this social service, the Methodist Church established four temporary recovery places. Two were in church institutions in Horní Počernice and Týnec near Klatovy, and two were in churches in Sedlčany and Týn nad Vltavou. Over one hundred children were helped in these recovery places. The action was made possible by a gift from abroad, but was mostly implemented by provisions donated by the members of the church. The program was stopped in October 1939 after all financial means were exhausted.

During the war, all kinds of actions were directed against the Methodists. After the attack on Pearl Harbour (December 7, 1941), the United States declared war on Germany.

¹²³ Ibid., p.16

¹²⁴ “An Appeal to the Conscience of Mankind from the Land of John Hus and of the Moravian Brethren,” published in *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1938, p. 77-78. See also J. P. Barták: *Ohlas z ciziny k našemu apelu na svědomí lidstva (Response from Foreign Lands to our Appeal to the Conscience of Mankind)*, *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1938, pp. 113 f.

¹²⁵ J. P. Barták: *Otevřený dopis lordu Runcimanovi (An Open Letter to Lord Runciman)*, *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1938, p. 126.

¹²⁶ *Odpověď lorda Runcimana (Reply of Lord Runciman)*, supplement in *Křesťanský buditel (Christian Advocate)*, 1938, No. 11.

Superintendent Barták was arrested by the Gestapo on December 11 because he was a United States citizen. He was imprisoned at the prison in Pankrác and later sent to the internment camp in Laufen in Upper Bavaria near the Austrian border. He was finally exchanged for an American German. He later reflected upon his last Conference in Czechoslovakia:

The last Annual Conference at which I could take part met in 1941 under the pressure of war and under very difficult circumstances. It had to be organized under the provisions of our church discipline for when the bishop could not be present. The delegates asked me by vote to preside, and when the moment came for me to read my report, brother Vančura, like Agabus in case of Paul, had an inclination, which was shared also by others, that I was standing in immediate danger of arrest by the Gestapo. Therefore, the Annual Conference was changed into a prayer meeting, in which sincere prayers were made to the throne of God's grace for me, as we also read in Acts 20:36-38.¹²⁷

Superintendent V. Vančura, to whom, at the Conference in 1941, J. P. Barták turned over all functions that he was performing, was under constant surveillance of the Gestapo, because the Methodist Church as an “American Church” was under continuous Suspicion of being engaged in underground activities. Brother Vančura tried to assist as much as he could, so he helped a number of Jews to get out of the country and thus saved their lives. Church workers and members were arrested and imprisoned either for their underground activities or because they were of Jewish origin. A number of co-workers did not return from Nazi prisons. Among the pastors, Ladislav Schneider was arrested on January 25, 1945, for his part in underground activities. The record of the 1946 Annual Conference provides a long list of members who were executed and tortured to death. The Conference honoured and remembered them and others who made untold sacrifices. First named on the list was František Řehák, executed on April 3, 1944, in Pankrác prison in Prague. He was a member of the Administrative Board and lay co-worker in Liberec. His underground activities were betrayed and thus he fell into the clutches of the Gestapo. Among the victims who were of Jewish origin was, for example, Hanička Stránská, an active member of the congregation in Prague-Vršovice.

The church also suffered persecution in an economic sense. Because the church was cut off from the mother church in America, it could not receive any assistance from there. This time, pastors were not fired. Their salaries were paid because members increased their givings. Money that was still lacking, the Headquarters supplemented from loans from various members and friends. The Methodist leadership thus expressed a certainty that the “thousand year Reich” would hardly last very long, and that at the end of the war it would be able to pay back the loans – and that also was done.

After the war, the work was renewed in several places in the original buildings and partially with members who returned to their old homes. This was the case especially in Litoměřice where the German congregation even preserved Czech Bible verses on the walls by covering them up with panels that contained German Bible verses. The introduction of Czech and German worship services became a prophetic innovation. In Most, worship services were reinstated in the former Lutheran church with a few members who returned there. In Duchcov and Ústí, Methodists did not succeed in starting services again, as was also the case in Terezín, which remained unpopulated. In Bratislava, a house for the congregation was finally purchased, and on April 3, 1949, a sanctuary was created by combining three rooms. Sub-Carpathian Russia was ceded to the Soviet Union. In those few places where the work

¹²⁷ J. P. Barták: Vězením Gestapa a Amerikou (*Through Gestapo Prison and America*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1946, p. 106.

could be renewed, it actually had to be started as completely new work. By and large, very few members returned to their original places; the new members came from the inflow of people who arrived from all corners of the republic.

POST WAR TIMES

After World War II, the geography of the Methodist Church was again changed in many ways. People were on the move again, and many church members moved outside existing parishes, thus increasing the diaspora. Sometimes, but not always, these people joined other denominations. Contact was completely lost with many. In Jenkovce, a small community of 750 people adjacent to the present East Slovak borders (about two miles from Ushgorod), the work had already started by 1935, when pastor J. Černý was appointed to Ushgorod. Sister Bánová met brother Černý and invited him to Jenkovce.

*Brother Černý arrived on a motorcycle and needed a repairman... Brother Bán became suspicious and concluded that this could be the preacher from Ushgorod where his wife was going. Then the sister invited brother Černý to enter the house, but he hesitated; in the meantime brother Bán had invited him also. Thus brother Černý entered their house. From that time, brother Černý began to go to Jenkovce and to work there, especially with brother Bán. They often spent the whole night on their knees in prayer. This went on until the Spirit of God finally conquered brother Bán and let him know his misery and sinfulness, and the brother received grace and came to believe. With this event the work started fully...*¹²⁸

After pastor Černý was forced to leave Sub-Carpathian Russia and this part of the territory was annexed to Hungary, Jenkovce and Ushgorod were served by Hungarian Methodist pastors – first by pastor Markus from Nyiregyhaza and finally by preacher Jan Hasič, who remained in Užhorod even after Sub-Carpathian Russia was ceded to the Soviet Union.

In March 1946 after the war was over, preacher Černý (together with superintendent Vančura) organized the parish in Jenkovce. Meetings were first held in the Bán home, and after 1950 with the Semač family. In 1967 a congregational house with an apartment for the preacher was finally bought with the help of foreign friends. Meanwhile, other places for preaching and worship were added: Sobrance, Vysoká, Svätuš. In Sobrance a lot was bought but later sold.

An attempt was made to incorporate Liberec into the parish of Litomeřice in order to renew the work. The meetings were again held in the YMCA as they used to be before the war. When the YMCA was closed, the congregation had no place to meet. Several members of the dispersed church lived in the bordering region; meetings were therefore started in Jablonec during the 1950s, first in a private apartment, later in the Baptist church. In 1952 a preacher was sent to Jablonec, and thus the work of the former Liberec parish was officially reopened. In 1970 the congregation obtained its own building for meetings. It was widely dispersed; the preacher for many years served in many localities around Liberec and as far westward as Česká Lípa.

In 1946 the Annual Conference received a letter from the Czech Methodist congregation in Vienna, Austria, asking to be included in the Czechoslovak Annual Conference. The reason for this request was that they shared the Czech language. The presiding bishop, Paul N. Garber, remarked that the proposal was not workable because the area of the Annual Conference is determined by state boundaries and not by language. The Czech congregation in

¹²⁸ Kronika jenkovského zboru (*Chronicle of the Congregation in Jenkovce*), handwritten.

Vienna had originated in 1894, when several Czechs who were attending the German-speaking church began to hold Czech meetings. This group was served mainly by František Havránek. Before World War II, brethren preached from time to time in Morůvky and Klobouky in Southern Moravia. Then the congregation acquired its own place of worship in the sixteenth district. When pastor Maláč petitioned for transfer to Czechoslovakia, the Vienna congregation was served by lay preachers, especially František Vrba. After the war, the membership diminished – some Czechs returned to their native country, and the immigration from Czechoslovakia ceased completely. In the 1950s, the congregation received Czech preachers in the persons of J. P. Barták and later in Rudolf Beneš. But during that time, the main worship services were held in German. After the death of F. Vrba in 1972, the Czech Methodist congregation in Vienna ceased to exist.

On June 8, 1947, St. Luke's Church, located on the Castle Hill (above the Colonnade) in Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) was officially opened. This former Anglican Church, built in new English Gothic style, had been erected in 1877 according to plans of Dr. Mothes from Leipzig. English worship services had been held in Karlovy Vary as early as 1856 in rooms which the city government made available until 1863, when a temporary small wooden church was built. Worship services were held by pastors from England for English-speaking spa guests. The brick church of St. Luke had been deteriorating for twenty years and required extensive repairs – new insulation, drying shafts, insulation with cork plates, hot air heating, and a wooden choir loft in addition. When the work was finished, the British royal family visited the church. The church was turned over to the Evangelical Methodist Church. Pastor J. M. Erlebach came to Karlovy Vary on Sundays. He later settled there. For several years, worship services were also held in Mariánské Lázně in an Anglican church. But it was necessary constantly to repair this church, and the Methodists had to give up its use for regular worship services.

Another parish that was established not long after World War II was in Mikulov in Moravia. In December 1949 and in May 1950, several hundred Czech immigrants from Bulgaria returned to their native country. Most of them were Methodists. In 1900, Czech families had gone to Vojvodov when, after the war between Russia and Turkey, many Turks left the Bulgarian territory and the government of the newly created state offered free land to newcomers if they intended to settle there. After a difficult search for good soil in Mrtvice, Boja Deran, Jasenov, and Sasek, Czech and Slovak immigrants finally settled down in those places around Mikulov. In Mrtvice and in other places they attended Methodist congregations. The Methodist Church started to send a preacher to Vojvodov, and a Czech Methodist congregation was then organized with its own building. In 1905, Martin Roháček (born in 1879), who had previously served in Vienna, had come to the area. He was an eloquent preacher, good organizer, and able administrator. He had established a church cemetery and had started a credit union that made low-interest loans to economically weak members. But after the war, his marriage fell apart, which caused a division in the congregation. Tensions culminated in 1925 when one half of the congregation organized a free Darby congregation. Roháček was dismissed from church service, but the congregation did not stay together. The Methodist congregation was served by a Hungarian preacher, Josef Harman, who succeeded in starting a Czech school, which was opened in 1926 with almost one hundred children. The Czech Methodist Church was then taken care of by Bulgarian preacher Simeon Popoff. In 1950, these returnees were settled in villages and small towns around Mikulov and regular meetings were held in Mikulov, Valtice, Březí, Nový Přerov (where members erected their own little church), and Dolní Dunajovice, Drnholec. The first preacher of this circuit was J. B. Štifter, whom the Unity of Czech Brethren loaned to the Methodists for some time, because at that time they had no available preacher.

Slovak Methodists from Hungary returned to their native land from the city of Nyeregyhaza under the leadership of preacher Markuš. They settled in the vicinity of Levice. However, the overwhelming majority of them did not join the Evangelical Methodist Church, but rather created an independent congregation of the Unity of Czech Brethren.

After the war, a widespread spiritual awakening occurred, especially among the young generation in the church, which then became active in the Methodist Youth Fellowship. In congregations MYFs were organized, a mimeographed magazine was published and a fund for evangelization was started. The youth created an evangelism group named “Wing” and served in many congregations. From the awakened young people, a number decided to study theology. They created a new generation of pastors. This was also a new generation in spirit, since the patriotic feelings of the post World War I exodus from the Catholic church had been silent for many decades. Biblical motives now moved into the forefront, as was then quite common in other Protestant churches in Czechoslovakia.

UNDER COMMUNIST RULE

A third great crisis came when the communists took over the power in the state in the year 1948. On October 14, 1949, new laws regulating relationships between the state and churches were published. But even earlier, the Methodist Church had asked on May 25, 1948, to be registered by the state. Until that time, Methodism was not supported by the state as were state-recognized churches, which received state support for the salaries of their clergy (so called congrua) and support for their administration. L. Schneider, editor of the *Christian Advocate* at that time, wrote an article printed on the first page of the November issue:

By these new laws we are entering in a new era in the lives of our churches and congregations. The state guarantees all churches and religious societies equality and puts them on the same level, regardless of the size of their membership and the differences in creeds or liturgies. It is offering them all equal rights to religious functions and the same right to teach religion in schools, as well as it is assuming the provision of support for the clergy and for the economic needs of churches... We welcome this new, indeed grandiose arrangement of church affairs, correcting old injustices and removing unnatural differences among religious societies, and we express a conviction that these new church laws will lead to a just arrangement of all church problems in our republic, and that they will contribute to a peaceful and healthy development in the realm of religious life of our churches as well as the efforts and building on our way to socialism.¹²⁹

The new church laws also had a negative impact in many ways. The financial support by the state was good, but the church in Czechoslovakia was totally isolated from those in other countries. Only after many years and with many difficulties, could delegates attend the World Methodist Conference (1961 Oslo), the General Conference (1964 Pittsburgh), the Central Conference for Central and Southern Europe (1964 Strassbourg). For a period of twenty years, no Methodist bishop could come and act officially as bishop of the church. The Annual Conferences were always presided over by the superintendents.

The state paid the salaries of the ministers in all registered churches but (a) the churches could not enlarge the agreed number of ministers and parishes; in fact, the state tried to reduce the

¹²⁹ L. Schneider: Ústavní zásada o náboženské svobodě skutkem (*Constitutional Principle about Religious Freedom a Reality*), Křesťanský buditel (*Christian Advocate*), 1949, p. 121.

number; (b) before a minister was sent into a congregation, the church needed official approval for him from the government; (c) the state had the right to refuse approval even when a minister was transferred from one congregation to another; this made the system of transferring ministers very difficult; (d) the state could dismiss a minister, and the churches could not do much to oppose this decision; (e) the salary paid by the state was reasonable in the first years, but it was not raised for more than thirty years, and the churches were not allowed to add anything to the salary; young men and women were discouraged from entering into the ministry because of this very low salary; (f) vacant ministerial positions in the congregations had to be filled in thirty days; otherwise the state could refuse to accept a new minister.

Besides these regulations, the state controlled all the finances of the churches. The church collections remained in the congregations, but the state approved the budget and controlled the expenses. The churches had to submit their financial reports to the state authorities for approval. It was almost impossible to buy new properties for the use of the church.

The government created church secretaries on the state, area, and county level. The church secretaries were members of the Communist Party who had to watch over the church activities and to control them. Also, the Central Committee of the Communist Party had a secretariat for church affairs where the policy of the state regarding the churches was ideologically prepared. The Secret Police had a similar apparatus with workers who were responsible for the control of the churches. The Secret Police made the decisive basic decisions concerning the church life and church co-workers.

In these years the United Methodist Church lost all its social work, the homes for orphans and aged people. Children were not allowed to come together in the summer camp in South Bohemia. In the congregations there were Sunday Schools for children, but many parents feared difficulties for the children in the state schools and in their later life and did not bring or send the children to Sunday School. The Methodist Youth Fellowship had to stop its activities; the only youth organisation permitted was the official party-led state organization.

Also, the publishing work almost ceased. In 1953, at the direction of the state authorities, the monthly "*Křesťanský buditel*" (*Christian Advocate*) was forbidden, after thirty years of existence. The church had no magazine. The only publications printed during the first twenty years after 1949 was a *Methodist Hymnal* (Prague 1952) with 450 hymns of which one third were Czech hymns, one third were translated from Anglo-American hymnbooks, and one third came from the German Methodist Hymnbook.

The plan of the Communist state was that the churches would disappear from the public life in few years. Therefore it applied pressure for people to leave the churches. In the first years, about ten to twenty percent of the members left the churches. But according to statistical records, the finances of the churches grew and were ten to twenty percent higher than before. This was a sign that the churches became smaller in membership but more active.

In 1968, during the political Prague Spring, there was a short time when the church could work again freely without being controlled by the state. But that freedom lasted only to the fall of 1969. Then the pressure was almost the same as before. It was not exactly to the same extent, however, because the power of Communism was shaken, and the Communist Party lost much of its credibility as a result of the occupation of the country by the Red Army on August 21, 1968. The contacts between state and church were more open, but even so, there were problems.

In the 1970s, the United Methodist Church, after almost twenty years, again received students of theology, many of whom grew into leading positions in the ministry. They studied at the Comenius Theological faculty and at the Hus Theological Faculty in Prague. The church started to organize conference studies for these students, for lay workers, and also for

ministers who had no theological training. Part of this education consisted of courses in the summer camp at Poušť in South Bohemia. Those courses started in the early 1970s and were later attended by 150 people, mostly young people, in three one-week courses. Also, the youth work began to be organized again. In recent years, there have been youth rallies in different congregations.

In 1984, a new church magazine was printed under the name “*Slovo a život*” (*Word and Life*). The church was not allowed to publish it regularly, but even so, four to five issues were printed every year. Some other materials were published as well: a daily Bible reading, an abridged *Journal* and selected *Sermons* by John Wesley, some Bible commentaries, and other books.

Since 1968, the Bishop of the Geneva Area (Central Conference for Central and Southern Europe, to which the Czechoslovak Annual Conference belongs) was allowed to attend the meetings of the Annual Conference. Bishop Franz Schäfer came regularly, and even though he could not preside, he attended all the sessions, spoke to all the issues, preached, and ordained candidates for the ministry. Church life began slowly to return to normal conditions.

AFTER 1989

The revolution in November 1989 that put an end to Communist rule in Czechoslovakia created a totally new situation. The dictatorship of the Communist Party was removed, and a new democratic order was created. In the sphere of the churches, this meant the total removal of state control. The church laws of 1949 that in many ways had discriminated against the churches are now invalid. New church laws are in preparation.

Only one thing remains the same: the state still pays the salaries of the ministers. These salaries are not paid by the state directly to the ministers but through the church headquarters. Now the church leaders decide what amount the ministers receive. In the old system, the church leaders had no possibility of influencing the designated amount. The salaries have been raised so that the ministers got about the average of high school teachers. The state support will be only temporary – in the future, the churches will have to pay all the expenses by themselves.

The churches now get back properties that were taken away by the state. The United Methodist Church lost three buildings – the church in Plzeň (Pilsen), the castle in Prague – Horní Počernice and the castle in Týnec near the West German border. The congregation in Plzeň is again using its church and will recover it. The same is true in Horní Počernice. The castle in Týnec, where the church had its social institutions, is lost.

The new situation in the country opened new ways for the evangelization. It is now possible to go into the streets and public halls and invite people into the worship services. The German Methodist Tent Mission lends tents for evangelistic meetings that are held in many places. A newly organized Tract Society prints many tracts that are distributed among people. In many places the Methodist congregations are getting new members and new congregations are organized. The fastest growing church is in Plzeň where, in the last four years, the active membership has grown from about ten people to more than three hundred. Those members are mostly young people who have been raised up in the Communist system in atheistic schools.

The United Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia today has twenty charges with the same number of full-time ministers. In the last years, new preaching points have been opened so that there are regular services in more than forty places. In some places, new fields of work such as ministering to prisoners have been opened. The ministers are called to instruct children in schools. Also the publishing activity is growing. Not only does the church at large

have a publishing program, but even congregations publish some small books. There is no censorship.

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On January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia was divided into two states, the Czech and the Slovak Republics. Czechoslovakia after almost 75 years of existence ceased to exist. That of course also had an impact on the life of the Methodist Church. The church life and organisation had to be adjusted to the new conditions and the work had to become in both states more independent. But even so it was decided not to divide the work but to stay together in one Annual Conference with two districts.

The church is looking into the future with optimism. After seventy years of the church's existence (with many difficulties!) God has opened up in 1989 new possibilities and given a new beginning. We pray that the church may fulfil her task "to serve the present age".