

## **Church Partnership: ECCB Letohrad & FPC Annapolis (since 1998)**

### **1) Partnership Between Two Congregations – How Did This Story Begin?**

- Our collaboration began after our pastor, Pavel Ruml, met Betty McGinnis in Baltimore, who was responsible for international relations in the Baltimore Presbytery. Partnership was established between Betty's home congregation in Annapolis and our congregation in Letohrad.
- Members from Annapolis helped with the construction of our church building, and during that time several groups of American volunteers came to assist. Likewise, several members of our congregation visited the church in Annapolis.
- In 1998, we signed a formal written partnership agreement.
- After the church construction was completed, we looked for ways to continue the partnership. Our American partners proposed helping us with English language learning. The first group of volunteer teachers came, giving up their vacation to teach English for a week in Letohrad. Teachers typically stayed for two weeks—one week teaching, and one week getting to know our country and congregation. Over time, however, interest declined as English became widely taught in schools and companies, and we started looking for new ways to continue.

### **2) Other Joint Activities**

- In the opposite direction, young people from our congregation have traveled to Annapolis to spend several weeks there. They stay with host families, participate in church activities, and help with Vacation Bible School. They can experience a different side of America than what they see in the media or films.
- In 2007, a group of 11 members from our congregation visited Annapolis for two weeks. During their stay, they organized a "Czech Sunday," where our American friends could sample Czech cuisine, learn about our history and culture and they also decorated Easter eggs. This was our largest group visit to date.
- Once we also experienced a six-month visit of Ed and BJ Skinner who taught regularly at two schools, they had lectures on various aspects of life in the USA for the public and many other activities.

### 3) Summer Day Camp “English to the Church”

- In 2011 was established a “legendary” summer camp called English to the church. It takes place every summer. A group of 3 or 4 youth and 2 adults from Annapolis come to lead activities for children between ages 6 to 12. The camp can host up to 60 participants, and it is usually full within two weeks of registration opening. Czech volunteers (mostly young people) join as translators and group leaders. For many of the young Americans, this is their first opportunity to experience life outside the United States.
- This year we celebrate our 15th anniversary. On Saturday, August 1, we will hold a “reunion party,” with not only this year’s six-member team but also with 10–15 additional friends from Annapolis who have previously served as leaders or are otherwise connected to the camp. All czech helpers and translators are also invited.
- This joint activity has high impact on the public on our side, for most children and their parents this is the only contact with the church and the impression is positive.

### 4) Future Opportunities and Challenges

- After many years of running the summer camp, we felt the need to refresh and strengthen the partnership so that it would not focus on just one activity.
- **Vacation Bible School in Annapolis:** At the request of camp leader, we sent a group of youth volunteers in summer 2025 to actively participate and help organize VBS. Interest was high, and five volunteers went, preparing an entire block of games, presenting the Czech Republic, and enriching the camp with an international dimension. This year, three volunteers will travel again, focusing mainly on music and religious education. We hope this reciprocal support will be as beneficial in Annapolis as it has been for us.
- **English for Adults:** This April, we organized our first “English for Adults” course in a new format. Since people today have broad access to English, we combined presentations, discussions, and interactive activities such as singing, dancing, crafts, and cooking. For the first time, we were also joined by Rev. Mihee Kim-Kort from Annapolis and five additional volunteers. The event was successful, though attendance could have been higher. We agreed that we need to organize more sessions so people can become familiar with the program and feel encouraged to join.

## **5) Why Has This Partnership Lasted So Long?**

- The greatest credit undoubtedly belongs to the original initiators, Betty McGinnis and Pavel Ruml, who is not our pastor many years. But Betty continues to care for this partnership with tireless energy and has dedicated a significant part of her life to it.
- On both sides, there are always people who bring new ideas, actively participate, and take responsibility for making things happen.
- Strong personal friendships have developed to such an extent that even if the official partnership were to end, these relationships would remain. We see the importance of personal ties that hold partnership together even across generations. It is important to get to know each other personally and maintain these contacts informally and also between joint activities.

## **7) What Does This Partnership Mean to Our Congregation?**

- This partnership is living proof that with willingness, commitment, and a readiness to give of oneself, long-term cooperation is possible. Some members of our congregation have maintained friendships for more than 30 years – through emails, sharing photos, and exchanging experiences. Some regularly open their homes as host families; others cook or bake, others help with cleaning. All do this willingly, with care, and without expecting any reward. The reward is the partnership itself - new friendships, experiences, and the ongoing opportunity to use and improve a foreign language.
- During planning and cooperation, we also get to know each other within our church. This is especially important in times of divided society.
- We also support one another in difficult times - when we are without a pastor, when someone close passes away, or during challenging political situations in our country. Our congregations are vibrant and active, which encourages us to stay engaged and avoid routine.
- Today, as a new generation emerges on both sides, we are looking for ways to sustain and deepen this relationship. The partnership has strengthened our sense of belonging to a global church, supported cooperation within and between our congregations, connected generations, and opened opportunities to serve the broader community.
- We are deeply grateful for this partnership. It is something unique—not everyone has the chance to experience it. We are committed to continuing, developing, and strengthening it. Thank you to everyone who has helped make it possible!