

Beginnings

Summer 2020

It is good to go back to the beginnings. I think that for our partnership a very tangible beginning dates back to 1992 when a group from the PC USA and a group from the ECCB came together to Klobouky near Brno. They stayed at the manor of Klobouky working together on a project of Diaconia, the outreach of the ECCB, hoping to turn the old house, in some time, into a home for the disabled. The inter- generation Czech/American group worked side by side for nine days there.



Painting the iron fence at Klobouky, 1992, beginning of PCUSA-ECCB partnership



The manor of Klobouky in the eighties when it was returned to the Church and the beginning of „Bethlehem“ when our residents came after the reconstructions

Let's jump to the present now with an interview with the director of the Betlém (Bethlehem) home, Petr Hejl, who has been associated with Diaconia for almost 30 years.

For more than a year now, Petr Hejl has devoted himself wholeheartedly to the construction of the New Bethlehem Home in Klobouky, intended for adults with severe disabilities, which recently opened its gates to the first visitors.



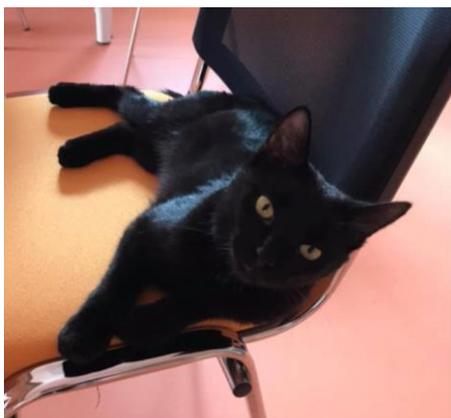
Petr Hejl



New Bethlehem home



New beginning



Newly settled

Peter, we are standing in front of the building of the new Bethlehem Home. How do you feel when you see what you have managed to build?

Home Bethlehem is a materialized vision for me. It is extremely pleasant to watch how what you dream takes on a concrete form. I am grateful to all those who contributed to the construction and enabled us to build the Bethlehem Home. However, we have not yet paid all the receivables, so we still gratefully accept financial donations. Without them, the Home of Bethlehem would never have become a reality. But we do not rest on our laurels, and we continue to plan further. I deliberately use the word "we" because I am not the only bearer of the ideas and dreams of the Bethlehem Center. The vision generator is the board of directors composed of colleagues who have been working at Diakonia for years. Many of

them started, like me, in direct care, so they first touched the work with their own hands and with their own hearts, and only then went into leadership positions.

So what are your next visions and plans? One would say that you may want to rest a little now.

I will definitely rest. I would like to take a longer vacation to recharge the energy for further work. Immediately afterwards, I will throw myself into the realization of one of our immediate visions. We recently opened a branch of social therapy workshops in Hustopeče. However, we found that the space provided by the city is quite tight. In addition, the number of people interested in this service is greater than we can satisfy. But there is a very spacious and nice house near the workshops, which we would like to buy and move the workshop there. If we manage to get the house, then in addition to social therapy workshops, we will also create a social enterprise in which we will employ some of our clients.

And what would such a social enterprise look like?

We would use the hostel that operates in the house and which we would like to partially maintain. We have the idea that people with mild disabilities will participate in its operation by preparing rooms for tourist guests, washing clothes, changing beds, or selling products that are created in social therapy workshops. Our next big wish is to create sheltered housing in Hustopeče. We have received feedback from our clients, as well as their parents, that they would welcome something like this. Of course, parents think about what will happen to their children when they cannot take care of them. Some of our clients themselves are thinking about it. And so we would like to meet their needs and create a home for them, where they could, with the assistance of workers, participate in the running of the household and live more independently.

What is the main obstacle to fulfilling these plans of yours?

It's definitely money. When we manage to repay the debt for the New Bethlehem Home, we will be able to dare to apply for a mortgage. This will give us the opportunity to buy a house, where we will place social therapy workshops and perhaps even start a social enterprise. So far, we have calculated that we will need 12 to 15 million. As far as sheltered housing is concerned, we are waiting for a new programming window of European funds, from where we could hopefully get some money. And, of course, we will ask for the help of individual donors. For all this, we will also need God's blessing. Because without God's blessing, all human effort is in vain. And we are convinced today and every day that when a person believes that he is not alone, the Lord God will help him to solve enough problems.

Imagine having a magic wand and giving the Bethlehem Center any service, building or anything. What would that be?

If I had a magic wand, I would swing it until there were six sheltered housing in the South Moravian Region. There are enough people interested in this service. Often it is people with mental illness who cannot live completely alone, but at the same time want to leave their parents and become independent. Unfortunately, they have nowhere to go. And if I could keep swinging, then I would conjure up enough employees who have a willing heart and professional competence to provide this type of service in terms of personnel. We know that the development of our services is tied to the region's ability to provide suitable staff, but as a wizard with a magic wand, I would not have taken it into account.

You can see a short video in Czech:

<https://www.facebook.com/diakoniecce/videos/1404839899717975/?v=1404839899717975>

Conveying best wishes from Diaconia ECCB,

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