



THE NEED

The Czech Republic is a post communist atheistic society. There are currently less than 1% Evangelical Christians. There is a small group of people who identify as catholic but that is mostly in name, not in practice or church attendance. A majority of people in the country are atheist.

<https://joshuaproject.net/countries/ez>

OUR JOB & GOAL

Our primary job here is church planting but we also have leadership roles with our mission organization (TEAM) as well as were heavily involved in refugee ministry during the start of the Ukraine war. We have been in the Czech for 12 total years and are currently working on our third church plant (Network) that is located downtown Prague. The previous two were south of Prague (Revnice) and in the North district of Prague (Ladvi.)

The reason we want to be involved in church planting is because we want to be a part of something bigger than just ourselves. By helping establish churches that are active in disciple making and gospel witness, we can be a part of something that reaches much further than we could on our own as well as lasts longer than we will. We also believe that this entire work is a partnership between our sending churches, supporters, us, and the church plant we are involved with. It is God's global church working together to grow His kingdom on this earth. So thank you again for your help in this!

WHAT IS CHURCH PLANTING FOR US?

When we say "church-planting", we mean that we are trying to help establish new Czech churches that are lead by Czech people. In the start we are heavily involved by doing most roles but over time we train people up and hand things over to them. This means preaching (Matt), discipleship, training leaders, evangelism, administrative & organization of services/ events, kids ministry, etc. We wear many hats based on the needs and they change as the church progresses. Essentially, we are trying to work ourselves out of the job by helping establish Czech elders, pastor, and key leaders, and then we move on to the next church plant.

We are currently partnered with a Czech pastor at the Network Prague Church plant and are involved in all of the things I just mentioned. The pastor, myself (Matt), and one other are the preaching/teaching rotation. The fact that we are partnered with a Czech Pastor already is a small miracle. Getting/raising up a pastor is often the hardest part of the church planting

process here simply because there are so few. And unfortunately there are even fewer who have a heart for outreach and planting new churches.

CHURCH PLANT BIG PICTURE “One Church in many places”

Our church plant is a daughter of Kostelna church. This church was also planted by TEAM missionaries and currently has six daughter church plants! While each church plant has its own identity, we consider ourselves “one church in many places.” We have a team of elders over the entire church, sometimes help each other with projects, outreaches, etc. Sara and I have helped at many of these church plants with different things over the years. We helped establish the Ladvi daughter church plant during our first term of ministry and then moved on to our current location at Network. We are part of a Czech denomination known as CB. It is the biggest of the protestant denominations and respected in the Czech culture as “not being a cult.” Many new churches are considered cults. As of the start of 2023, we had 124 total members and 50 children of members in our whole church. There are of course guests attending the services as well as seekers attending the many outreach events that each church puts on. We are the second fastest growing church in our entire denomination! And it is encouraging that almost all of our growth is “new believer growth.” We usually see between 3-7 baptisms a year.

OUR CURRENT PRIMARY CHURCH PLANT

I will focus a bit more on the Network Church plant as that is where our primary work is. We are targeting younger people (college and recent grads) and working professionals. We see this as strategic because this age range is more open to the idea of God and they are searching for community. They are also key for long-term growth/health of the church. Network church ministry is broken up into three main event categories: Sunday service, Sunday Community meetings, and discipleship triads.

Every week we meet for a Sunday gathering. These gatherings alternate between a traditional Sunday service and Community meetings. The traditional Sunday service involves preaching, worship, communion, etc. It is meant for believers to worship together. The Community meetings are meant to be more open to unbelievers/seekers. We eat a meal together (potluck style) and then have a themed discussion or presentation on a topic. These meetings are meant to be more interactive and welcoming to new people. Often these meetings draw more people than the worship services (examples of two recent meetings being 46 and 49 people.) In the Czech, if a person starts to be interested in God they often are still very reluctant to step into a church (there is a lot of cultural history and baggage here.) But they are very likely to come to a themed meeting or discussion. Attendance averages to Sunday meetings has been: 2021/2022: 21, 2022/2023: 28, 2023/2024 (so far): 31. A note about this attendance is that the number of people who consider us our church home is higher. I will explain more below.

We also have discipleship triads. These are weekly/bi-weekly groups of three (sometimes more than three are in a group) people meeting and focused on discipleship. This is a priority for us as a church and we have seen wonderful results with it. We have 7-10 of these groups going on at any one time this year (currently 8 but we are still working on getting more going.) Last year we had 6-8 and the year before that was 4-6.

An interesting thing about attendance is that we see different groups of people attending the different meeting types. There is a core group that attends all the meetings but there is a big group of people that chooses one thing to primarily come to. So, a seeker might only come to Community meetings or discipleship triad but less likely to come to a Worship service. A lot of people also travel outside of Prague for the weekends (this is a huge cultural thing here) but consider us their church home. So they come less frequently to Sunday meetings. They might

be faithful in discipleship triads but not as much to Sundays. This reflects some of the differences in Christian culture and importance of attending a church than we are used to in the States. When we think of total people who are a part of our church plant and think of all of these meetings together, the total number of people who either say that Network is their church home and regular attending seekers are more like: 2021/2022: 35, 2022/2023: 50, 2023/2024(so far): 55.

One of the goals of Network church that is different than the other daughter churches of Kostelna is that Network is not only hoping to grow to be self sufficient but also strong enough to become another “mother church” that is able to plant additional churches. That is the hope and desire of us on the leadership as well as the Czech pastor we are working with. Because of this, we may work longer at the Network church plant than we did at the previous ones as the goal/vision for the future growth and multiplication is bigger.

HOW CZECHS RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL

Czechs generally keep to themselves. They are considered as “grumpy” and “cold” towards others. This is rooted in years of occupation and communism where you didn’t know who you could trust so you kept few friends. It can be hard to break past this barrier. And this barrier isn’t just with non-Christians allowing you into their life but the same barrier hinders Christians from stepping out of their comfort zones to reach others for the gospel. Training/encouraging Christians to be able to share the Gospel is important work when we do discipleship. While most Czechs are atheists, they are not aggressive towards Christianity. But most of them are also unaware of ever knowing someone who is a Christian. Communism did a good job of wiping out all religion in the Czech. We often get told by people that they have heard of Christians but we are the first they have ever met. The culture here is very open to learning and debate, so this helps initial conversations about the gospel to be very encouraging. People will ask questions and show a lot of curiosity. But getting past the Gospel and Christianity being more than a “historical fable” is the hard step. Bibles are sold in bookstores in the fairy tale section and classic literature. And even when people start to show interest in the Gospel, they still are often hesitant to go to a church. There is a general deep mistrust of the Church because of how the old Czech Catholic Church mistreated people. The church is also associated with war, because of many “Christian” religious wars here in their history. This is part of why we are trying to “do church” a bit differently by making it welcoming for people to be “re-introduced” to Church via discipleship groups and Sunday Community meetings. Most people who end up become Christians take years to do so here.

We see the gospel shared to unbelievers: at Sunday Community meetings with regular guests coming, in discipleship triads (often times seekers feel more comfortable attending a triad than attending a Sunday Worship service), by individuals in our church reaching out to those around them, and by us personally sharing with people. Ironically it is easier for us to initially share the gospel with others than for Czech believers to do so because when people get to know us they always ask, “Why are you here working in the Czech Republic? People usually try to leave the Czech Republic to go to America.” And this gives us a chance to share the gospel each time. Because of our kids going to Czech schools, it also gives us many opportunities to connect with other families.

It is a long and hard work here in the Czech Republic. But we are extremely encouraged by the growth we have personally seen and what we know God will continue to do. Thank you again for being a part of this.