



Lea and Petra Williams

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Location: Czech Republic



What we do: Leading the Anglican congregation in Brno and developing a vibrant Christian community where people can meet Jesus and grow as disciples.

Dear friends,

We hope that you are still in the Easter afterglow. Christ is risen! Sin and death have been defeated. Christ has won!

In the Czech Republic, Easter is mostly dominated by a mix of Christian and folk (originally Pagan) traditions, rituals and customs. Trees are decorated with colourful ribbons, eggs are painted and, in an unusual tradition on Easter Monday, men and boys cut willow branches and braid them into decorative whips to “whip” girls to “help them stay healthy”. This tradition is a dramatic spectacle in which no one gets hurt, and the women give out a treat, usually sweets or alcohol.

While these traditions have little to do with the passion narrative, they do bring people together, and we’ve had opportunities to share the importance of Easter and how we celebrate together as a church community. The colourful decorations also bring some joy and the promise of better weather. After the cold and dark months of winter – doing the school run in -15 degrees is not much fun – this is welcome.

After Easter, we returned to the UK for a short but full trip to attend the CMS Southern Conference and visit supporting churches. The conference’s theme was “The Challenges of Refugees – Loving our Neighbours”. We were joined by Phil and Sylvie Good, who until recently lived in Lebanon and developed a new building for a school providing education to Syrian refugees. We were able to share our experience of the challenges and joys of sharing life with Ukrainians here in Brno. It was a rich time of reflection and conversation. Thank you again to those who hosted us during our stay and to the churches that made us so welcome.

In our last prayer letter, we asked that you might pray with us for Vesna, the humanitarian NGO that Petra gives much of her time to. In a short period of time, it has developed into one of the largest humanitarian charities in the region and continues to support hundreds of families in need. Extra volunteers are always needed to help meet the need, both in distributing material goods and in providing education and emotional support. We’re pleased to say that many new volunteers have joined the team in various capacities in recent months. In fact, a few months ago Vesna received the 2023 Volunteering Award, which was awarded to organisations from individual regions by the Ministry of the Interior. Around the same time, as a church community, we successfully applied for additional funding from the Diocese in Europe’s Lent appeal, which is administered by USPG, to support Vesna through the winter period.

Easter Sunday marked our two-year anniversary of holding services in Brno. While these gatherings are still



Petra receiving an award from the Ministry of the Interior on behalf of Vesna.

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**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



the cornerstone of our life together, we have also been finding other ways of strengthening friendships and our common life. In recent weeks, we've enjoyed games nights, a mini "pilgrimage" during Holy Week and a trip to Prague to join in worship with our Mother Church, St Clement's. Even when we were away in England, members of our church attended a large event welcoming newcomers to Brno as part of an ecumenical team. A large banner greeted visitors with the question "How do you care for your spiritual life?", and many people asked for prayer. Please pray that we would deepen our discipleship and commitment to Jesus as we worship and serve him together. Also, for those taking exams and preparing to leave Brno, that their time in

Brno will have nurtured and equipped them for the future, and for those preparing to enter university in September, that they would find friendship and a welcoming spiritual home among us.

We continue to lead Bible studies at a local university. This term we've been working through Paul's letter to the Philippians and asking the question "How can we experience purpose and joy, even in times of trial and suffering?". Please continue to pray for these studies, that the Spirit would open our eyes to the goodness and grace of God, and for a greater Christian presence within the universities of this city.

And finally, our children, Olivia and Ted, attend a Czech Montessori school but receive additional help from an English-speaking teacher. They are happy at the school and have many friends. They couldn't wait to return after our trip to England! However, the school is planning to reduce the use of English and will no longer employ such a teacher from September. Olivia should be fine with this (she is being taught mostly in Czech), but we are concerned for Ted. Please pray for them in their learning, and for us as we decide the best way to proceed.

As the summer approaches, we look forward to spending time as a family. Please pray for times of refreshment and fun and that we would know the Lord's guidance as we plan and look ahead to the new academic year.

Thank you once again for joining us in prayer. We are so thankful for your partnership. As ever, if there are opportunities that we can participate in via Zoom – whether a home group, mission committee or Sunday morning service – please let us know.

In Him,
Lea and Petra



Photos from top to bottom: Our first games night; In March we hosted Jen, who is participating in the Church of England's Ministry Experience Scheme (MES). She was a blessing to our community. We're pictured during a rest day in the beautiful town of Litomyšl.; Traditionally decorated eggs and pomlázky; A homemade Easter Lamb cake ready to enjoy after our service on Easter Day. For those who enjoyed baking the Christmas biscuits last year, perhaps this could be your next challenge!



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