**Profile of the Czech region of IEF**

**Aims**

The aim of the Czech region of IEF according to its constitution is to work towards achieving the visible unity of the Christian churches by means that are based on European Christian traditions, especially prayer together, study, and activities that reinforce understanding and friendship among people. International IEF, with its many years of experience in Europe as a whole, is a help and inspiration to us in this, especially its emphasis on "living today the church of tomorrow".

**History**

The beginnings of the Czech region can be traced back to a group of Christians from several different denominations living in the Berounka valley near Prague, who in communist times used to meet secretly every week in each other's homes for prayer and fellowship.

In 1992, Květa Oxley, a Czech living in Britain and a member of the British IEF region, contacted the Ursuline sisters in Prague to ask if they could find someone to go to the IEF conference in Seggau. Jitka Hesová and Pavel and Helena Blaženínovi from the Berounka valley group participated in the conference. In subsequent years a growing number of Czechs attended international IEF conferences. With the support of the German and British IEF regions in particular, preparations were made to establish a Czech-Slovak region and in 1997 it was formally registered as a civic association. In 1999, as the number of Slovak members increased, it was decided to divide the Czech-Slovak region into two separate regions, Czech and Slovak.

The Czech region has organised three international conferences, each with several hundred participants from different churches and countries: in Prague in 2001 with the theme “Hope”, in Písek in 2007 with the theme “On the Road”, and again in Prague in 2015, to mark the 600th anniversary of the Czech Reformer Jan Hus, with theme being “Living the Truth”.

**The Present**

The Czech region currently has about 25 members from several different churches, mostly from the three largest Czech churches (Roman Catholic, Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, and Czechoslovak Hussite Church). They are all actively involved in various informal or official ecumenical activities and the Czech region maintains links with other ecumenical groups and organisations. Our IEF family gives us the strength and support to carry out these activities.

Apart from our annual general meeting and other “business” or social meetings, the main regular specifically IEF activities are the “ecumenical goulashes” which take place several times a year at the Blaženín family home in Všenory just outside Prague. Everybody brings a contribution in the form of a goulash they have made, and all the goulashes are then mixed together to form a unique and delicious “ecumenical goulash”, thus symbolising how each individual and each Christian denomination has its own special “flavour” to contribute to the ecumenical whole. It also reflects the practice recorded in the seventh-century *Ordo Romanus Primus*, when the deacons collected wine from the congregation which was then mixed together for use in the Eucharist. Sometimes we invite people to speak to us on different topics, but the “ecumenical goulashes” are above all a time of fellowship, where we draw strength for our other ecumenical activities, make plans, and share news about international IEF and other ecumenical events.

We believe that true ecumenism comes from the grass roots and is based on ordinary people from different churches getting to know each other, praying and working together, and learning from each other's traditions. We feel that what unites us is stronger, more important, than what divides us. We have our common basis in Jesus Christ and rejoice that each one of us can serve the others using the gifts that were bestowed on us, in the way we are invited to serve. We pray that unity in diversity will attract people and challenge them to new ways of serving the needy.