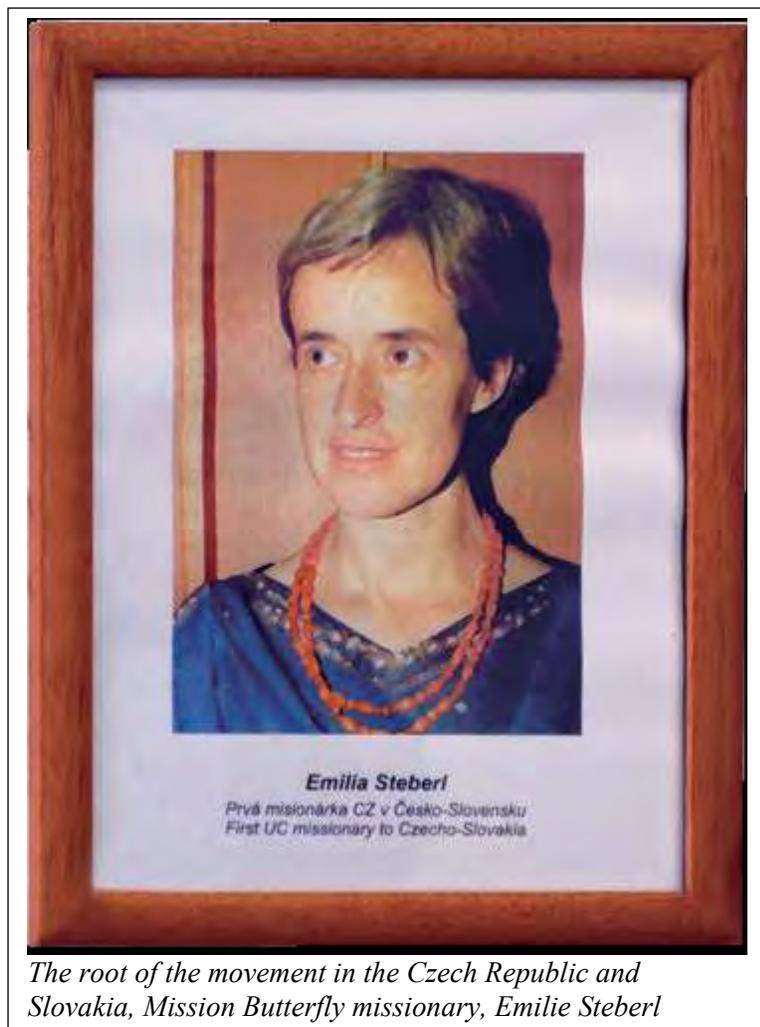


## Czechoslovak Early Members Reflect On Member's Persecution In the 1970s

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*The root of the movement in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Mission Butterfly missionary, Emilie Steberl*

That half a century has already passed from the moment the first missionary crossed the border from Austria to the former communist Czechoslovakia is unbelievable.

On the occasion of this anniversary, FFWPU Slovakia held a special celebration to remember this important event as a part of the national Unification Family Meeting in Dunajská Lužná, near the capital of Slovakia, Bratislava, on October 6. The celebration had a rich, intense and colorful program. We had speakers, video messages and written greetings. A full hall of over a hundred people included members from both Slovakia and the Czech Republic, which when our national churches began were one church in one country, Czechoslovakia.

Rev. Miroslav Rybár, national leader of Slovakia, began the celebrations. The MC was Mr. Miloš Klas. Dr. Dieter and Ana Schmidt, the sub-regional presidents, participated and delivered an inspiring speech. Dr. Schmidt compared human life and the different generations to a tree. Each

tree has roots, trunk, branches and leaves. Each of these parts has its own function and role so that the tree can exist. All these parts of the tree have to cooperate. The tree without roots will decay soon. On the other hand, we cannot expect that the trunk has the same role as the leaves. We should never forget our roots.

A strong factor was the presence of the first national leader of Czechoslovakia Alžbeta Danišková who during the persecution in the 1970s spent four years and four months in prison. She spoke about the first years when she joined the movement as a twenty-one-year-old student and soon became national leader, without any prior experience. Until now, despite many physical and health difficulties, she is loyal to True Parents



*Dr. Young-ho Yun's message helped put their history in perspective*

### Distant participation

In a video message, Mrs. Martine Masnerová, national leader of the Czech Republic, greeted the

participants, wishing them a joyful celebration. Mrs. Christel Werner the wife of Paul Werner, who sent the first missionary (Emilie Steberl) to Czechoslovakia, wrote about how Rev. Werner was hesitant to send Emi into a dangerous environment (at the time, Soviet-led troops were occupying Czechoslovakia). But Emi was determined to follow her calling and bring salvation to Eastern Europe. Paul brought her to the border. He later wrote, "As I saw her disappear, tears came to my eyes and I prayed to Heavenly Father for her protection and guidance."

Gertrud Koch, national Messiah to Slovakia, greeted the participants and wished that we maintain our pioneering spirit. She wrote about the blessing of the first members in 1982, who were unable to participate in the ceremony in Korea. Her husband Peter Koch held a Holy wine ceremony with them in a secret place in Brno, today the second largest city in the Czech Republic.

Mr. Julian Gray sent a video message from the FFWPU International Headquarters; he has compiled a book about the Czechoslovak mission [see page 22]. A few years ago, True Mother appointed him to collect and record the testimonies of the earliest members. This text is a good reference for the history of the Czechoslovak mission.

Mrs. Brunhilde d'Alberti, a missionary who visited several times from Germany after Emi Steberl had to leave Czechoslovakia in 1971, expressed her surprise at how the young Czechoslovak people at that time were eager for truth and love. They had a great desire to bring about change. It was love that brought them to True Parents.

Dr. Michael Balcomb sent a video message from Kosovo, where he was participating in the Peace Road activity. He mentioned that True Mother deeply thinks about the sacrifice and hard work of all those from Europe and especially Eastern Europe and how they worked in the old days. She said that those members' blood, tears and sweat and their love for True Parents have protected Europe. The next few years are important, and if we unite with True Mother, everything is possible; this was his conclusion.

Dr. Young-ho Yun, secretary-general of the FFWPU International Headquarters sent an important message, saying that True Father was the first missionary to the communist world, in 1946. Communists persecuted and tortured him. Even though the first members in Czechoslovakia had no chance to meet True Parents, they overcame their difficulties and went out onto the streets to witness and bring God's love to the people. Dr. Yun expressed his hope that we succeed in fulfilling Vision 2020.



*Center-front: Dr. Dieter and Ana Schmidt, the sub-regional presidents. Foreground: Betka Danišková, whom, upon her leaving, Emilie Steberl appointed the central figure. After visiting missionaries in December 1972, Betka was in a car accident that left her immobile. Maria Zivna cared for her. The two were arrested together and imprisoned*

### **Local speakers**

Dr. Lubomír Morbacher, an ambassador for peace and a special advisor and researcher, spoke about the persecution of people and groups under communist regimes. He mentioned the case of the "Principled People" (as the police called the members of our unification movement) as the biggest case conducted by the communist secret police, for they sentenced such a large number of people to prison terms. He mentioned that, at that time, the secret police were upset that it took them two years to discover our movement.

After his speech, Mrs. Alžbeta Danišková received a letter of apology from the president of Comenius University in Bratislava. In the early 1970s, due to her activities with the movement, the university expelled her. Other brothers and sisters whom the university expelled received similar letters.



*Members today of FFWPU in Slovakia and the Czech Republic recognized fifty years of faith and perseverance*

### **Local voices**

As one of the first members, I gave a short history of the movement. I described the events of 1968 when the Prague Spring started as a reformation movement in the country, which prepared the way for the first missionary to come. I pointed out the courage of Emi Steberl, who came in spite of the fact that Soviet troops then occupied the country. After five years of quick development, the persecution started and twenty-five members were sent to prison. We had twenty-four church centers and altogether we were witnessing every day to four hundred to five hundred people. After our prison terms ended, few members remained with the church, and we had to work underground.

Anton Uhnák, another of the first members spoke about the members' determination to bring about change in society. The truth of the Principle was strong and inspiring, so that the first members were ready to sacrifice everything. We should have this spirit even now to build up Heavenly Slovakia, Heavenly Czech Republic and Heavenly Europe.

Then we heard three more testimonies of the first members. Dorota Šimeková and Erika Lajdová shared their motivation for joining the movement. Štefan Jakubáč explained some historical parallels in the past fifty years. Finally, our brother, Martin Slezák, who joined the movement in the early 1990s, shared his inspiration from reading the historical compiled by Julian Gray.

The celebration was successful and could bring the older and younger members and second-generation members together. It brought back the spirit of the early years and inspiration for the future to fulfill Vision 2020.