

Czechoslovakian Province

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History: The year 1883 comes to mind when we ask about the roots of our Czechoslovakian province. On October 2, 1883, three sisters from the Silesian Province began their richly blessed work in Austerlitz near Brunn (Slakov u Brna) in Moravia. The mayor of Austerlitz, Antonin Prikryl, had requested sisters from the motherhouse in Weisswasser (the motherhouse of the Silesian province during the Kulturkampf and now known as Bila' Voda). With courage and enthusiasm, the sisters overcame the barriers of language and culture and began teaching needlework already during the first year. On August 3, 1884, an elementary school, needlework school, and boarding school were recognized by the state. God blessed the work of the sisters. After only a year, candidates arrived, and soon the sisters could open kindergartens, a middle school, and a home economics school.

The following years brought joy and suffering and demanded openness and readiness for change. After World War I, new boundaries were drawn on the map of Europe, and Czechoslovakia became an independent state. The political changes also had an effect on the history of our congregation. Our chronicle states:

By virtue of Decree No. 2579, dated April 17, 1923, and based on Apostolic Faculty No. 1508, dated April 6, 1923 (Sacred Congregation of Religious), his Eminence, Cardinal Adolf Bertram, Bishop of Breslau (Wroclaw), separated the following convents from the Silesian province of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame-Javornik, Zlate' Hory, Bila' Voda, Karvina {Polish school and children's home}, Novy' Bohumin, Krnov, Velke' Heraltice, and Slavkov – and declared that these and any future houses of the same congregation in the territory of the Czechoslovakian Republic will form the Czechoslovakian province of the same congregation with a provincial motherhouse and novitiate in Slavkov, Moravia.

Sr. M. Vojtecha Honova (3/2002)

Building Bridges: The Czechoslovakian Province ? We have a Czech Republic and a Slovakian Republic now, but we kept the name because sisters from both republics belong to our province, as was always the case. The provincialate is in Bila' Voda near Javornika, where 14 sisters live, most of them retired. We also have two missions with three sisters each, Bruntal and Opava. In Bruntal, the sisters live in a house belonging to the parish. In Opava we have our own house. In all the communities some sisters teach religion or German, work with youth, or offer the elderly opportunities for social gatherings with a spiritual program in their home, e.g., in Bruntal.

Our concerns for the future? We are now building a new motherhouse in Slavkov near Brna where our motherhouse was until 1950. We have received this building back from the state, but we cannot use it in its present condition. Everything is in God's hands, but with this building we are hoping for a new opportunity to come into contact with young people. To begin anew in our country after 40 years of communism is really very difficult for us, but we are not giving up. Our trust-filled expectation is that we will attain everything through Jesus' blessing and Mary's protection, and with the intercession of Mother Theresa. (6/1995)

Apostolic Ministry: Our province apostolate is not extensive. We endeavor to respond to the needs of the local church and respond to the signs of the times in the spirit of our charism. The sisters teach religion in schools and parishes. They not only teach children but also prepare adults for the reception of the sacraments. They direct various youth groups, help in organizing meetings at the deanery, diocesan, and district levels, lead days of reflection, outings, etc. Youth in their free time-here, too, is a great field of work. We offer the young people space in our buildings where they can come together for play and for various programs. They practice drama and music programs, but they also like to go outside together. We also direct them toward a more active integration into the parish community by preparing liturgical singing, producing posted bulletins, and publishing a parish newspaper. Besides helping with cleaning the church, they also visit the sick and elderly.

Most of the sisters of our province offer their apostolate of prayer and sacrifice to God, and thus take part in the ministry of the congregation and of the entire church. (12/1995)

Personal Testimony: The communist government closed all the convents in the republic in 1950. Our sisters were taken together to some places where they had to live in difficult conditions. In 1951 we were divided according to age. The sisters under 30 were taken off to various places of employment. Instead of beginning college work after the novitiate, God called those sisters to a higher school of life. At first they tried to win us over by giving us good paying jobs in the company of young people, hoping that we would leave the congregation. When none of us had left after six months, and the young women were beginning to go to church with us instead, we were transferred to another place. Here we had to do hard labor in great heat and humidity or in a very dirty room. When we cleaned the machines, for example, who or what we were, was unrecognizable-was it a ghost or a sister? When we came to the dining hall for the midday meal for the first time in this place, we were assigned the middle row of tables. Even though we were a little afraid among the workers, we began singing, "Why shouldn't we be happy? God loves us and gives us everything in this world, and heaven after we die." Everyone around us was amazed; they had never expected such a thing. During the very simple evening meal in our rooms, we conversed

and encouraged one another. Then we prayed together and gained new strength for further sacrifices. We celebrated Eucharist each evening. We always felt that the loving God was on our side. During that time, prayer was the only bridge to our sisters in the other provinces. Knowing that we belonged to our international congregation gave us strength and enthusiasm. And now? We give heart-felt gratitude to the loving God for the bridges that we are building together.

(5/1996)

Personal Testimony: We would like to tell you about the witness given through the life of one of our sisters who entered the congregation in secret during the communist regime. She is working now as a doctor in *Karlova Studanka*, a health resort. One of her patients wrote to her, "I know that there is not much to expect at my age and with my diagnosis, but I am convinced that you have done everything possible for me. I also had the impression that you saw in me not only a patient, a case, but a person instead. I am grateful for your care...At the close of my letter I would also like to say that although I am an atheist, you have freed me from the long-standing aversion for women religious which I have had since 1945..."