

Meeting People Where They Are *Czech Republic*

When the Communist era in Central and Eastern Europe came to an end, the tiny Silesian Church faced a great opportunity and a tremendous challenge in the Czech Republic, where only 30 percent of the population has any affiliation with Christianity. Christians have often been viewed as unusual. How could a church begin to fulfill Christ's command to love another when so much of society seemed to be beyond the church's reach?



“Christians are viewed with suspicion in our secularized society,” says former bishop Vladislav Volny. “The average person will not meet us where we Christians are—in our church buildings. So we must meet people where they are. They will come to recognize Christ through our acts of love and compassion for the poorest of the poor and for those in greatest need.”

Did you know?

Lutheran churches in Eastern Europe flourished for centuries until communism disrupted the practice of the Christian faith.

This tiny denomination, numbering only 35,000 members, set out to do just that. In 1990, it had no social service institutions and no social ministry personnel. Today, Silesian Diakonia, the social ministry arm of the church, has 43 service institu-

tions, including centers for the disabled, orphanages, after school programs, and elder care facilities. Its workers and volunteers indeed meet people where they are.

The Silesian Church and other centuries-old Lutheran churches in Eastern Europe are busy rebuilding and expanding their ministries for a new era. Grants and scholarships from the ELCA are helping them grow in their capacity for social service, advocacy, and global mission.

For more Stories of Faith in Action, visit www.elca.org/stewardship/interpreting.html.



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