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News from Slovakia

Prajeme vám pekné a požehnané veľkonočné sviatky.
(We wish you a nice and blessed Easter holiday.)

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Easter greetings from Slovakia!

Dear Mission Supporters, Friends, and Loved Ones,

During the coming week Christians the world over will celebrate the high point of our church year. Once again during Holy Week we will remember the last days of Jesus' life on this earth. We will remember on Good Friday how he went to the cross to come close to us in our suffering and deliver us from our sin. We will celebrate on Easter Sunday how he rose from the dead to conquer death and bring hope to humanity in all times and places.

Here in Slovakia, like you, we are also preparing for this great celebration. Christians will gather in churches to hear again the joyous message of Good Friday and Easter, and to celebrate its meaning in their lives. In our International Congregation we will meet for worship on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Since so many of our members are living hundreds or even thousands of miles from loved ones, we plan also to enjoy an Easter lunch together at the church after our Sunday morning worship service.

In the Slovak language Easter itself is referred to as Velka Noc, which means "big night." Our fellow Christians in Slovak churches will meet not only for the traditional worship services during Holy Week, but also gather for services on Easter Monday, which is an important part of their Easter observance.

Whatever your traditions may be, we wish you God's richest blessings during this holy season, peace in your lives, and the joy of the resurrection in all that you do.

*Your Partners in Mission,
Carla and David*

Šibat' and Oblievat'

In Slovak society a number of unusual folk traditions that originated in pre-Christian times continue to be observed on Easter Monday. Early in the morning bands of young men and boys set out to win chocolate and money by whipping - šibat' - and pouring water - oblievat' - on young Slovak women. The men come to a young woman's home, compel her to come outside, douse her with buckets of water, and whip her with wicker sticks. In response, tradition requires that the young woman give the boys dyed hard-boiled eggs and candy, and tie a ribbon around their whips. The girl's father will reward the young men with money and a drink. The customs, once believed to purify the soul and body, are the remnants of a complex system of Slovak folk traditions based around the seasons of the year. The whipping and water were employed to ensure a young woman's fertility and beauty.

These traditions are still widely practiced in Slovak villages and small towns. Even in larger cities like Bratislava the traditions continue on a smaller scale. Cheap perfume or small amounts of water may be squirted on girls as a substitute for complete drenchings.

How do the women feel about all this? Each year David surveys his students about this in his classes at the Evangelical Lyceum. The boys seem to think it's a funny tradition and enjoy it for the most part. The response of the girls ranges from mild amusement to genuine annoyance.

Financial Crisis at Home and Abroad

Although we live so far away, we are acutely aware of the ongoing financial crisis back home in the US. The internet and television news programs remind us daily of the problems that America faces with the bankruptcy of long-established companies, layoffs, and home foreclosures. No family seems untouched by these difficulties (including ours).

Slovakia, along with the rest of the world, has not been exempt from the snowballing affect of the declining U.S. economy, and unemployment is steeply rising here as well. Bratislava, the city where we live, had benefited from a post-communist era building boom for several years. This has now been severely impacted by the financial crisis, with falling real estate prices and a decline in investments from home and abroad.

Around the world, churches and non-profits have been especially affected by this downturn. In light of the financial difficulties that everyone faces at this time, we want to express our most sincere gratitude for your support for the work of Global Mission in Slovakia. Your commitment to the mission work of the church is more critical than ever. We continue to value your prayers, financial support, and friendship as we and other mission personnel carry on this vital work. Please know that we are also praying for you, your congregations, and your families as we all struggle to deal with these challenging times.