



**END OF YEAR HOME MINISTRY REPORT  
2024. DEAR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS OF  
THE REACH BEYOND MINISTRY  
TO THE PEOPLES OF CZECHIA  
AND SLOVAKIA**

***"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."  
(John 5:25-29)***

**TRADITIONS, REFLECTIONS,  
AND MILESTONES**

The Anglo-Saxon holiday Halloween comes from "All-Hallows-Eve," meaning the eve of All Saints' Day. The tradition of honoring the dead developed among the Celts and Slavs of Central Europe. For the Celts, it marked the end of the agricultural year and the festival of Samhain, celebrated since the 8th century. They believed that the souls of the dead returned that night to visit their loved ones. To guide them, people lit lanterns carved from turnips, wore ragged or ghostly costumes, and painted their faces to confuse evil spirits. The commemoration of the faithful departed began in Christian monasteries of the Roman Empire, with the Feast of All Saints in Rome in the 9th century. This day honored those, who had

attained eternal bliss and was marked by pilgrimages in many places.

Beginning in 1915, Pope Benedict XV allowed all priests to celebrate three Masses on All Souls' Day. One was for all the dead, the second for the souls in purgatory, and the third for the Pope's intentions, which often included prayers for peace and remembrance of the victims of war, especially during World War I.

Families regardless their faith or believes come together to tidy the graves of their loved ones, light candles and lay flowers or wreaths. In many families, the holiday also becomes an opportunity to talk about family history and traditions, which helps to preserve the memory of ancestors for future generations. All Saints' Day also became part of the six-week Advent fast.

While the remembrance of the dead have similar origins, the traditions still vary by region, religion, and culture. In Roman Catholic countries, All Souls' Day, officially known as Memorial of All the Faithful Departed, is a tradition that honors those in Purgatory who have not yet attained eternal bliss. On the eve of All Souls' Day, it is believed that souls emerge from purgatory to atone for their sins and reconnect with their loved ones. Prayers are said to guide them to peace. The Roman Church allows the faithful to obtain indulgences during this time - either partial or complete - thus shortening the time in Purgatory for loved ones or themselves. This practice, associated with the sacrament of reconciliation, is common in churches that recognize papal primacy.

Above all, **Halloween** is more or less about decoration and a gathering of the living with the living, shared joys, and traditions such as costumes, pumpkins, and trick-or-treating. Halloween, with all its traditions and symbols, has gradually become domesticated in Europe.

Halloween is followed by Thanksgiving, a holiday celebrating gratitude for family, friends, and abundance. However, Thanksgiving has yet to take root in our country. It

serves as a reminder of the importance of gratitude, unity, and shared values.

### TURKEY OR GOOSE?

The pan-European feast of St. Martin, celebrated on November 11, comes before American Thanksgiving Day. It marks the arrival of winter, traditionally accompanied by the first wine tasting. In our region, roast goose or duck is served on this occasion.

Thanksgiving and the roasted turkey originated in America. The first settlers thanked God for their survival and the harvest of unfamiliar crops. These included corn, squash, beans, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, cacao, tobacco, peanuts, sunflowers, cranberries, and the North American turkey, which arrived in Europe in the mid-16th century and became a luxury dish for the nobility.

New crops from the Americas changed European diets and customs. The main food sources in Europe were bread made from wheat, rye, or barley, buckwheat, millet, legumes, cabbage, kale, beets, carrots, parsley, cucumbers, apples, pears, cherries, pork, dairy products, honey, cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, and fish.

### ST. MARTIN AND ST. NICHOLAS

**St. Martin** arrives on a white horse, bringing snow and symbolically announcing the arrival of winter. A month later, on December 5, is the feast of St. Nicholas. He does not arrive on a sleigh like the American Santa Claus, nor does he have anything in common with the Russian Grandpa Frost. St. Nicholas comes on foot, accompanied by two figures:

- **An angel in white** protects and cares for the children.
- **The devil**, a black hairy scarecrow with horns, tail and chain, haunts the children and reminds them of their disobedience.

A trio of adults visited the children at home. St. Nicholas spoke kindly to them, examined their behavior, and the children waited to see what was left for them in the stocking outside the window. Naughty children usually found coal or potatoes. The naughty children were afraid that the devil

would take them to hell. Although the devil in fairy tales is based on the demonic figures of the Christian tradition, he is one of the most prominent and popular characters, not only punishing the miserly, the cunning cheats and the sinners, but also becoming the executor of justice and sometimes the helper of the brave hero. In Czech fairy tales, he is portrayed as a foolish, fearful anti-hero, which makes him a source of humor in the eyes of children.

### BACK TO TRADITIONS

Advent wreaths and Christmas concerts provide festive opportunities for families and friends to gather, but they require careful preparation. Public Christmas trees are accompanied by Christmas markets offering all kinds of homemade gifts, decorations, and traditional food and drink. In the past, **Christmas trees** in homes were decorated in a formal room, hidden from children until after dinner, after carols were sung and presents magically appeared under the tree. In the past, gifts were only given on St. Nicholas Day. **Christmas Eve** is the last day of Advent and the eve of the Feast of the Nativity.

Traditionally, therefore, no meat could be served; instead, the meal included fish, a symbol associated with one of Christ's miracles. The superstition that whoever breaks the fast on Christmas Eve will see a golden piglet was associated with a test of strong will. However, the golden piglet is an ancient symbol of abundance, happiness and wealth.

The traditional Christmas Eve menu includes **fish soup**, fried breaded carp and potato salad, followed by Christmas sweets, fruits and nuts, which not only complete the festive table but also recall the ancient customs and symbolism of abundance and hospitality.

**Christmas Day** is a day for family gatherings and a festive dinner, usually featuring roast goose or duck with dumplings and cabbage. This meal marks the transition from fasting to feasting.

A significant part of the Christmas atmosphere is the display of **Nativity scenes**, which are traditionally placed in churches and other public spaces until the New Year. These nativity scenes, often depicting the birth of Christ with Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Three Kings, come in various sizes. Some are even **life-sized**, creating an immersive experience for visitors.

The Christmas celebrations extend beyond the New Year with the **Three Kings Ride**. This lively tradition includes a **parade of costumed characters**, representing the Three Kings, sometimes accompanied by live camels. The event symbolizes the journey of the Magi to visit the newborn Jesus and is a joyful way to conclude the festive season.

### **SYLVESTER – NEW YEAR'S EVE**

Tradition dates back to the Christianization of Europe. The New Year celebration is closely associated with a variety of open-faced sandwiches, a unique specialty not found in neighboring countries. The classic version consists of a diagonally sliced baguette topped with mayonnaise-based potato salad, a slice of ham, an egg, a pickled cucumber and an unlimited number of tasty options. But the sky's the limit - experiment with different spreads, toppings and garnishes to create your own delicious and visually appealing variations. Try to make your New Year's Eve table more colorful this year; we have included a visual inspiration for your reference:

<https://www.toprecepty.cz/kategorie/36-studena-kuchyne/99-chlebicky/>

### **CHALLENGES OF OUR DAYS**

Not only the Czechoslovak Republic, but also other Central and Eastern European nations have undergone profound changes in recent decades. However, 35 years after the fall of communism, we find ourselves in the midst of global challenges and threats - not only from without, but also from within. We live in a time of information overload, where real information is mixed with disinformation, where populism is undermining trust in democratic institutions, as we face challenges such as the

Green Deal, the energy crisis, emissions trading, economic and environmental insecurity, waves of immigration, terrorist attacks and war. This year has been full of natural disasters, fires, huge floods in large populated areas, landslides, tornadoes, hurricanes, leaving human and economic devastation similar to that of war.

**On November 18 we commemorated 1,000 days of war in Ukraine.** A thousand days of war is like a millennium in the life of an individual - a long period of suffering, loss and uncertainty. The future of the world remains unpredictable. Today's problems are compounded by the danger of other utopian ideologies that promise to build a "heaven on earth," but without God. However, history has clearly shown that these experiments have not and will not bring any good to humanity.

The future of the world is still determined by the power interests of the great powers, but even they do not provide clear answers to the questions of how to face the current challenges. The whole world is waiting to see how America will face the current challenges. The main challenge is and will be the attitude of the electorate, not only in America but also in Europe.

### **WORDS OF HOPE**

The Christian's hope rests in God, who, unlike men, powers and rulers, has everything firmly in His hands. The truth to our commentary was well expressed by Emir Caner, president of Truett McConnell University in Cleveland, Georgia: A warning to this generation: *"You can vote your way into socialism, but you will have to fight your way out of it."*

### **WORD OF WISDOM FOR CHANGING TIMES**

"Scripture provides support for choosing the 'lesser of two evils,' or the option that will do the most good and the least harm. God Himself does this. He also sometimes gives believers a choice of punishments for their sins. Voting for a candidate who will do far less harm and some good than another is not

a sinful act. It is a responsible exercise of choice, given the limited options available to people in a world of sin. It is a righteous act because it brings about the greater good, even though that good is still mixed with sin, in anticipation of the coming kingdom of God. There is literally no advantage in letting unbelievers choose the worse candidate."

Robert Gagnon

<https://christoverall.com/article/concise/encore-voting-for-the-greater-good-a-biblical-perspective/>

### JUST DAYS TO GO BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR

As the mailing deadline approaches, we are combining November and December into one message of best wishes. This year has brought many changes, surprises, moments of joy and times of sorrow:

- **Draft translations** and editing of Pavel's book into Polish and English are complete. Next steps include layout design, finding a publisher, and finalizing the printing and project schedule. The next year will be challenging. We are deeply grateful to Becky Johnson of Spokane for her editing and to the many proofreaders who contributed.
- **Pavel** was admitted to the cardiac unit a year ago. The post-operative results are good, his heart is stable again, for which we are very grateful.
- Unfortunately, the health of **Pavel's brother Ivan** remains unchanged. The only change is the location and name of the facility where he is hospitalized. After being moved from the Intensive Care Unit to the Post Intensive Care Unit (PICU), he has now been moved to the **Long Term Intensive Care Unit (LTICU)**. While the first two facilities were in Prague, Ivan has now been moved to a center an hour's drive outside of Prague. Ivan often remains in a low level of consciousness and sometimes does not respond to the caregivers' suggestions. These visits are challenging and sometimes we end up making the long

drive back without being able to contact him.

- In May we were able to attend the wedding of our first grandson. We recently received the happy news that the expected birth of a **great-grandson or great-granddaughter** should be around the first wedding anniversary.
- The time in October when we celebrated Klara's birthday with **Vitek** was joyful, blessed and full of gratitude.

### CHRISTMAS INVITATION

- This year, our long-time non-believing friends invited us to Kraslice, a town on the border with Germany, to spend **three days** with their family for Christmas. We were hesitant at first, but their faithfulness and kindness to us always speaks deeply to us. Every year, Daniela prepares a **box of Christmas cookies** for us, and a beautifully decorated **Advent wreath** with electric lights and candles is delivered. May this time be above all an opportunity for sharing, for spiritual enrichment, and for celebrating God's glory together.

We are truly grateful to have you as faithful partners. We wish you a Thanksgiving filled with love, happiness and cherished memories, and a Merry Christmas!

*Thank you for your prayers, support and participation in our life and in the Czech and Slovak ministries.  
In His sovereign grace*

Pavel and Klara Steiger  
[pavel.steiger@gmail.com](mailto:pavel.steiger@gmail.com)

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