

## Update on Steve & Cari Wendel in Czech Republic

# Wendel Watch

The Wendel Family, Church-Planters in the Czech Republic



***“Last year my parents kicked me out of their home and told me I must fully support myself. They did not agree with the choices I was making.” -M***

It's not an unusual tale for many American families dealing with adult-aged children who are slow to adapt to the responsibilities of life. In Czech Republic however, I'd never actually heard of parents pushing their children out of the nest. It's normative for children to live with parents until they get married in their late 20's or move away for a job offer. There are numerous cultural reasons for this, not the least of which is an extreme version of frugality to which most Czechs subscribe.

So what might cause such a rift between Czech parent and child to compel them to sever parental support? In this case it was their daughter's desire to serve in full-time ministry as a home missionary. Given that most Czechs are fundamentally irreligious, it might make sense that a secular family would be displeased with such a direction in life. However, this was not the case as it was a Christian family. Not only was it a Christian family, but the father is a pastor. Not only was it a pastor's family, the parents themselves are Czech missionaries serving with a U.S.-based organization. Why wouldn't they want their own daughter to likewise fully surrender her life to serving the Lord as a missionary? Was she unqualified? Did they think she lacked spiritual maturity? No. As a paraphrase of the conversation from the daughter's point of view: They thought that their daughter was too authentic and honest to be a missionary. To be a Czech missionary you need to be able to schmooze and manipulate Americans to part with their money. Czech churches certainly won't support missionaries. If their daughter was going to entertain such foolhardy delusions about her own abilities to raise money, she would need to feel the full brunt of her foolishness to reform her dreams.



As Cari and I served at Word of Life camp for the past 3 weeks we were graced with the opportunity to enter into mentoring relationships with several of the leaders and volunteer staff. I was so blessed to spend time with several young men who demonstrated mature leadership and ministry giftings. When meeting with one young man in whom I recognized particular gifting, I broached the subject of God's calling in his life toward full-time ministry. I was shocked to hear that no one had ever told him that they saw this potential in him. This was a young man who was skillfully and humbly leading worship, overseeing the daily camp program, seamlessly managing and shepherding people accountable to him, and leading devotions among his crew. The notion that no one had ever encouraged him in the direction of vocational ministry was astounding to me. While our Czech churches are suffering for lack of both lay and vocational leadership, to have such a gifted young man in the midst of a church membership and not even be recognized as a potential future leader made my stomach upset. As I inquired further into this phenomena with others I heard a familiar refrain: Many pastors actively discourage emerging leaders from vocational ministry.

We have always intuitively known this to be true, yet to hear it directly from those who had experienced not only discouragement, but outright opposition to serving in ministry was a hard pill to swallow. A whole new realm of ministry need opened before our eyes. Who will come alongside and encourage and equip young leaders in our

churches? How can we change the culture of our fellowships that discourage those who sense God's call into ministry? These are questions lying heavy on our hearts right now.

The past several weeks at camp were a blessed time, not only in getting to know and shepherd young leaders, but to see the Holy Spirit at work in the hearts and lives of so many campers. In the first week of camp over 30 youth came forward at the invitation. In the second week there were 3 teens that made confessions of faith, and in week 3 there were so many that no one got an accurate count, but similar to week 1!



It's truly been a time of family ministry this Summer. Erica, Claire, and Elisha all served as camp staff working in the kitchen and snack bar, teaching English, coaching baseball, and leading games among a myriad of other things. Sometimes amidst the hustle and bustle it's nice to pause and embrace how blessed we are to serve alongside our own children in these ministries.



It was likewise an encouragement to reflect on how blessed we are to have the opportunity and freedom to minister in the midst of the pandemic that has halted and hindered many of these types of ministries around the world. Czech Republic eased some key restrictions just in time to allow facilitation of Summer ministries with the condition of maintaining multiple stringent hygiene and sterilization protocols. Many camps had already made the difficult decision to cancel programs for the Summer. In view of the fact that we were one of only a few camps who were able to redirect and re-organize quickly, we anticipated that we might be an easy target for a health department inspection. This anticipation materialized during the second week of camp. We passed the inspection without a single point of correction, which has never even happened during normal camp years! The same week that we were inspected we heard of multiple other camps being shut down by the health department.

We thank God that in this precarious window of opportunity, much fruit was harvested and perhaps in the unlikeliest of orchards. We rejoice that despite her 'foolishness', M is a vital laborer in this harvest. Please continue

to pray with us for our Czech brothers and sisters whose spiritual struggles are deep and complex. Pray that our Father would make us an encouragement to them, and fruitful in evangelistic efforts.