



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I send you greetings from the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) during these very challenging times of the coronavirus pandemic and wish you a blessed Pentecost.

It is the first time since 1999 that you won't get a print version of our Newsletter, but rather a digital pdf file version. When it became obvious that the coronavirus pandemic is a worldwide crisis affecting all of us, it became clear that we had to rethink the whole concept of this year's Newsletter.

The lockdowns in most of our countries are a challenge not only for our economies and social structures, but also for us as Christian congregations and for the spiritual life in our congregations.

In this Newsletter you will find examples how EKHN is trying to deal with these challenges and to keep contact in times of closed churches and social distancing. We are gathering web experience and learning to apply new methods such as webinars and videoconferencing. Theological questions, including the possibility of commemorating communion via television or the Internet, are also being discussed.

We hope that this will provide you with some helpful guidelines that you can use for your own work, and we also hope to be back with a print version next year! May God's Spirit strengthen our ecumenical fellowship!

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Detlev Knoche



### TOGETHER - A World in Prayer

The corona pandemic confronts us all with unexpected challenges. From you – our partner churches and international dialogue partners around the world – we received signs of solidarity and encouraging emails: "Together we will get through this!" "Together we bring our worries and hopes before God!" "Let's stay together – God is with us!" This has inspired us to initiate a campaign with the Protestant Church of the Palatinate: **TOGETHER – A World in Prayer**. This prayer is available in 30 different languages (<https://bit.ly/3fuSN7d>).

We pray it every evening at 7:30 p.m. when the church bells ring in Germany, and we light a candle, put it in the window, think of the people worldwide who are suffering from this crisis and fear for their existence. We send the prayer out into the world to all of you asking that you join us in this campaign: **We may be separated spatially, but we are spiritually united.** (dk)

### News Items

The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) has set up a **Coronavirus Relief Fund** for its international partners. It is intended to also support local social work projects during the global crisis. The ecumenical partner churches and partner organizations in Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA are financed almost exclusively by collections and donations from their members. Due to the worldwide contact bans and curfews, these revenues have dried up almost completely. (dk)

Due to the **corona pandemic**, all major events have been cancelled since March. Committee meetings can only take place if the appropriate safety distance and hygiene guidelines can be maintained. The spring meeting of EKHN's Synod – its highest parliamentary decision-making body – had to be rescheduled for late summer. This means that important legislative projects and decisions on the future work of the Church are on hold for now. (dk)

As hosts of the **Third Ecumenical Church Convention** (Ökumenischer Kirchentag –ÖKT) in 2021, EKHN and the Diocese of Limburg extend an invitation to you to attend this event in Frankfurt am Main

from May 12-16, 2021. Preparations for this are in full swing, and we hope that the ÖKT can take place despite the coronavirus pandemic. It is expected that this event will attract 200,000 visitors, including representatives from EKHN's partner churches. (dk)

**Reverend Annegret Puttkammer, Provost for North Nassau**, will be leaving EKHN as of December 1 this year to become director of the Neukirchener Erziehungsverein in Neukirchen-Vluyn near Düsseldorf, where she will be responsible for 2000 employees. As provost, she built up relationships with the partner churches in Tanzania and on the island of Sumatra. Her succession in North Nassau has yet to be decided as the Synod, scheduled for spring this year, had to be cancelled. (dk)

Imprint: Published by the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau, Ecumenical Desk Rev. Detlev Knoche Paulusplatz 1, D-64285 Darmstadt, [www.ekhn.de](http://www.ekhn.de) Editing: Detlev Knoche (dk), Andrea Seeger, Martin Reinel, Evangelische Sonntagszeitung (esz); Translation: Katrin Lindroth Planz DTP: Medienhaus der Evangelischen Kirchen in Hessen und Nassau GmbH, HJ Manigel Print: flyeralarm GmbH; Photos: EÖA (page 1), private (pages 2+3), Peter Bongard (page 3), Detlev Knoche (page 4)



# news letter

## Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

By Church President Dr. Volker Jung

The coronavirus pandemic has placed everyone worldwide in an unprecedented exceptional situation. Everyone's health is at stake, and for many it is a matter of life and death. Necessary restrictions precipitate concerns about its continued impact on economic and social developments. More than a few are fearful for their future livelihoods. We are experiencing the reappearance of boundaries throughout the world which make person-to-person encounters impossible. We struggle with isolation and loneliness. And we are searching for a sense of community. During all of this many people look for support, comfort and orientation.

The situation is continuously changing. How things may continue tomorrow has suddenly become uncertain. In Germany and Europe we experience that public life is restricted in a way that we never could have come close to imagining in the past. During the Holy Week and at Easter our congregations underwent a particularly painful experience, we were not able to gather and celebrate worship services together in our churches. No assemblies or worship services were allowed in churches. Even funerals are only permitted with closest family members in attendance. We had to and continue to have to keep distance. How will it be at Pentecost?

Nevertheless I am happy and quite grateful for the imagination and energy that people bring into their church and social welfare work. The Gospel is proclaimed creatively, and community is lived without getting too close physically. EKHN and their congregations send greetings to their members in manifold ways, and they write cards and letters. Many phone calls are made – also to people who are lonely and sick. Internet sites and digital communications convey devotions and church music, conversations take place in chats. Many of the initiatives also provide direct and dynamic support to people who need help. For example, volunteers take care of shopping for those who are alone and may no longer leave their homes.

Together we emphasize the power of prayer in particular during these times. Many are now rediscovering prayer as a place of refuge and as a source of strength. The Christian message provides the courage to keep hope alive despite all threats. It is good if we continue to pray regularly for others and for ourselves. This as



prayer can remove our fears, and replace these with strength and love.

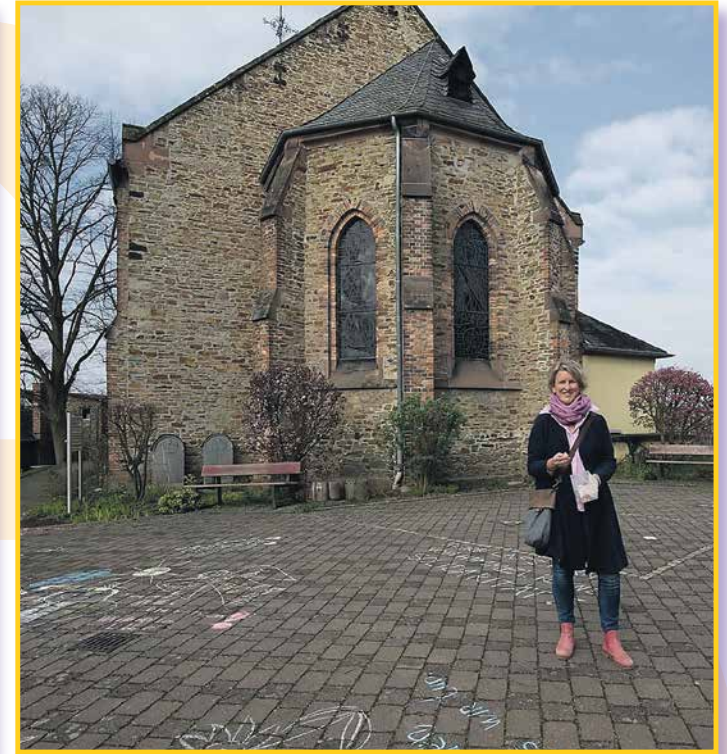
It is very moving for me to see how closely we remain connected, ecumenically and worldwide, despite all physical distancing restrictions. I am thankful for the campaign "TOGETHER – A World in Prayer" which unites us with our partners throughout the world via our Ecumenical Center. We pray this prayer every evening at 7:30 p.m., when the church bells ring in all of Germany. Many of us then light a candle and place it in a window while we think of the people throughout the world who are suffering from this crisis and who are anxious about their futures, and we pray for and with them. We are separated physically, but are joined together spiritually and in Christ.

I write these lines during the Easter holidays. The message that God's strength and love is stronger than death gives me hope, especially during these trying times. For me, the hope of life after death as well as for life in the here and now belong together. The faith that life, as given to us by God, is much larger than that which we experience here on Earth gives me strength over and over again. It gives us strength not to despair even if death barges into the midst of life – as we are now experiencing during this coronavirus pandemic. May God's spirit continuously replenish us with faith, with hope and with love.

Be protected. Be blessed!  
Yours very truly, Volker Jung (Church President)



# Creative Congregations during Corona Times



Children and confirmation candidates painted the fish symbol on these stones, and they place them in front of entrance doors, at bus stops and at the corners of houses. They do this to show closeness.

Rev. Henriette Crüwell hung roses and prayers in front of her church for passers-by – as a sign of encouragement.

Rev. Martin Vorländer hangs notes with prayers and words of wisdom on a clothesline at his home. Passers-by may help themselves to this nourishment for the soul.

Rev. Monika Christ writes Bible verses, wishes and greetings in chalk on the pavement in front of her rural church.

Joint church worship services are cancelled. “If we are not able to slow down the spread of the coronavirus, then we must prepare ourselves for thousands of deaths. It would be impossible for Christians to live with that. This is why we, for reasons of brotherly love and yet with heavy hearts, forgo gathering for worship services,” says Rev. Annegret Puttkammer, Provost for North Nassau. She encourages creativity: “We celebrate church services in our homes, socially distant yet joined in spirit. The congregations provide inspirations for home worship services that can be celebrated by families, couples and singles in their homes. Thus at the usual worship service time there is not a personal meeting in church, but it is clear that all follow the same liturgy in their living rooms and kitchens, they read the same sermon, they pray together.” In addition, pastors and church volunteers are available to take phone calls.

All are invited to participate in worship services and devotions from home, which

are then broadcast via radio, television and also over the Internet. Some remain available to receive calls. Several congregations have set up virtual communications channels and offer their worship services and devotions via live stream, usually on YouTube. Other offers also encourage participation. Here prayers of intercession can be submitted via the Internet.

Ideas are created everywhere. In the Höhr-Grenzhausen congregation, in the Westerwald region, Rev. Monika Christ and Viola Minge, a Pastor in training, chalk a Psalm in front of the church and invite others to leave their thoughts in the form of chalk pictures. Many have accepted the offer and write a few lines, which provide encouragement to others and to themselves. For Viola Minge the chalked phrases are like ‘written conversations’: “Here they can leave chalked comments which provide strength to others, too. Hearts remain open even if everything around us closes.” One leaves a message for another. “Naturally the

campaign is not meant as a call for all to gather in front of the church to draw,” she emphasizes.

Many churches ring their bells several times a day. This is done to proclaim a message of assurance, and to promote an interreligious community of prayer. People throughout the EKHN take a moment to reflect, to light a candle and to say a prayer.

Young Protestants in rural church communities reach out to people who are important to them, to their loved ones, with “fish-stones.”

The fish, as an ancient Christian symbol, is appropriate for the situation now. About 2000 years ago it served as a token for Christians, to show them that they were not alone.

In the Roman Empire, during the time when Christians were not welcomed and when being a Christian could even prove to be dangerous, some sketched this

symbol on house walls or etched it on stones. Now these disclosures are found in front of entrance doors, at bus stops, on house corners or in front of churches. The fish silhouette is decorated with colored lines, dots or other patterns. They are painted by children and confirmation candidates who, in many cases, cannot visit their friends and grandparents at this time because of the corona pandemic, but they want to show them that they feel close to them.

Of course, painting and decorating the stones together is not possible during these corona times. Therefore the pastor wrote to the Sunday school children: “We cannot meet together in these times. But, if someone colors a fish stone and passes it on, and another finds it, then it is still two people who are assembled in His name. And this brings Jesus Christ into our midst.”

At the Vogelsberg deanery, Christoph Euler and Ulrich Beyenbach unpack their trombones every evening at 6 o’clock,

position themselves an appropriate distance apart on the traffic island near their homes in the new housing area in Altenburg, and play chorales or hymns.

“We responded to the Hessian music association’s call for ‘Musicians for Germany,’” the two instrumentalists, who play together in a trombone band, reported. All musicians were asked to play the *Ode to Joy* from their windows or balconies as a symbol of European unity: “And, as we wanted to play with two musical voices, we decided to meet at the traffic island.”

They and their neighbors enjoyed this so much that they decided to repeat this every evening. Meanwhile it has turned into a small, established fixture in the daily routine, which certainly doesn’t include many highlights during these times of contact restrictions. People listen to them from their windows or over the fence or otherwise according to physical distancing rules. They also accept requests from their listeners. Although everyone genuinely hopes that the corona curve

will level off, this special musical gesture will likely be very much missed later.

Rev. Henriette Crüwell, minister of a congregation near Frankfurt, has hung up a clothesline with spiritual impulses. “It has been well accepted.” Rev. Martin Vorländer of the Bermersheim congregation in Rheinhessen does this, too. He has pulled a clothesline along his house. Passers-by take a spiritual saying along – as an inner reserve for hard times.

It is also possible to provide practical assistance: Rev. Henriette Crüwell has established a support network together with young men and women who have expressed their willingness to help and deliver urgently needed items to older people and to those with health challenges. Contact is made via a phone call to her or the church office, and payment is made by way of an envelope in front of the door in order to insure that social distancing is upheld.

(esz)