



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,  
In the second year of the pandemic I send you greetings from the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN), and wish you a blessed Pentecost. We are still learning to deal with home office and video conferencing, hygiene rules and the limitation of close contact. We stream events and continue to practice social distancing. We miss meeting you. Our thoughts and prayers are with all the people around the world who suffer and mourn, who go beyond their limits and who reach out to others. It is the second time that you will not get a printed version of our Newsletter, but rather a digital pdf file. This is because the Corona pandemic is still severely affecting our workflows and our finances. We hope to return to a printed version by next year. In this Newsletter you will find examples of how EKHN is trying to deal with these challenges and to keep contact in times of no partnership visits, of social distancing, of limitations for our worship services and with regard to the meetings of our decision making bodies. In April this year we had our second digital general synod. Now we must begin discussions about what we will keep when the pandemic is over.

May God's Spirit strengthen our ecumenical fellowship

Yours in Christ,

*Detlev Knoche*  
Rev. Detlev Knoche

## #respectively – Judaism and Christianity: Closer than You Think

Together with the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), Catholic dioceses and the Jewish community we initiated the campaign “#respectively – Judaism and Christianity: Closer than You Think”. In this campaign we would like to encourage people to perceive the close ties between the two religions. Especially in view of their festivals, Christianity's roots in Judaism become clear. With the keyword “respectively”, the perspective is to be directed towards the currently lived Jewish practice in its various manifestations. The campaign is also a contribution to the celebration of 1,700 years of Jewish life in Germany. Here 12 posters – one for each month – express the relationship between a Jewish and a Christian festival. During the month of May, for example: Shavuot and Pentecost. Shavuot celebrates the life-giving spirit of the Ten Commandments. On Pentecost, the power of God's Spirit stirs those who are discouraged. (dk)



## News Items

From its **Coronavirus Relief Fund**, the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) was able to support ecumenical partner churches and partner organizations in Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA with the amount of more than EUR 360,000. This helps EKHN's partners at least a bit, as they are financed almost exclusively by collections and donations from their members and are suffering due to the contact restrictions and worship service cancellations. (dk)

EKHN's General Synod elected **Rev. Sabine Bertram-Schäfer** as Provost for North Nassau. As a former dean of the “Büdingen Land” deanery, she was deeply involved in the partnership with the East Kerala Diocese (Church of South India). Now she will accompany the relationships with the partner churches in Tanzania and on the island of Sumatra. Following the retirement of Rev. Karin Held as Provost for Starkenburg, Rev. Stephan Arras will be her successor. Some of the deaneries in Starkenburg are related to the Moravian Churches in South Africa and Tanzania. (dk)

**Fifty years ago**, in December 1970, the EKHN Synod passed an ecclesiastical law establishing comprehensive legal equality for women and men in the pastoral ministry. This was a milestone not only in the history of EKHN, but also for the implementation of

Article 3 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany: “(1) All persons shall be equal before the law. (2) Men and women shall have equal rights.” For the first time in a civil service law, women and men were treated equally in all rights and duties. This meant, for example, that women as well as men could take leave for family obligations or were able to reduce their work hours. (dk)

EKHN, as host of the third **Ecumenical Church Congress** in Frankfurt, would have been very glad to welcome representatives from its partner churches. But because of the corona pandemic many planned events had to be cancelled and had to be reduced to a few digital offers, including a webinar in which representatives of partner churches talked about human rights violations and where we, as churches, were called upon to take a closer look at and lobby for human rights. (dk)

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# news letter

## The Coronavirus Pandemic Burdens Everyday Life in the Church and in Society

*Considerable Uncertainty Remains, Yet Hope Grows*

“Experiencing the Coronavirus pandemic is quite burdensome.” This is how Church President Volker Jung describes the mood in the congregations of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau as well as beyond, throughout all of German society. Families can only meet in small groups. Hardly any cultural events take place, many stores remain closed and regular school education is severely limited. Worship services have strict limitations and many are celebrated only in digital formats. In a letter to the congregations Church President Volker Jung wrote, “Times are very difficult now. Inner tensions are running high and it is difficult to endure even longer. The burdens are very big – for children and young people, for families.” He reminds us of those who serve others every day, those who work in hospitals, care homes, kindergartens or schools: “They must bear a lot of pressure.” Times are particularly difficult for all who have lost a loved one – be it due to the coronavirus or for a different reason: “Sometimes there was no opportunity to say goodbye.” But there is also hope. More and more people in Germany are vaccinated. It began slowly but is now gaining speed. In church sponsored nursing homes, the oldest and most vulnerable residents have been vaccinated. Now it is younger peoples' turn. Other instruments, such as quick- and self-tests, help counter the spread of the virus. It is also obvious that a more equitable distribution of vaccines is needed worldwide. In order to achieve this, it should be examined whether vaccine patent rights shouldn't be suspended. Despite all difficulties, the Church is discovering much that is positive during these times. “I am most thankful for the many various activities during the pandemic: That vulnerable people, especially, are being looked after and that much support is provided by neighborhood cooperation, and also for the work done in our congregations and institutions. Much has evolved that is new and valuable – both in personal and in digital communications. Digital technologies are used in education, in conferences and in worship services. For many this meant they had to acquire new skills,” says Church President Jung. At EKHN video streamed prayers, synod



The young people are very glad to finally be able to sing together again.

nod meetings held via Zoom, and digital sermons and faith communication in social media channels are now part of everyday life.

The pandemic demands much – even from our faith. This as it touches on fundamental questions about God, about God's works and God's justice. Some “whys” remain unfathomable according to Church President Jung. “But faith supports us and gives us strength, especially in view of the path taken by Jesus Christ in this world with his life dedicated to others, his suffering and his death. It is the victory of the Resurrection over the power of death. And it is the hope for the presence of God in the here and now which always provides new strength – and, especially, endurance,” he adds.

It is important to rediscover endurance as a spiritual blessing and virtue, as described by Apostle Paul: “We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5:3-5 NRSV) (mkr)





# Digital Lessons Learned in the Corona Crisis

Worship services, pastoral care, teaching methods, parish council meetings or communications via social media – much is now digital. The Church in Hessen and Nassau is moving ahead. The “BarCamp Digital Education” initiated this kickoff last year. All who are involved in education are adjusting to new learning environments. A BarCamp is an open convention with open workshops, whose contents and procedures are jointly determined at the beginning of the convention by the participants, and which are further structured during its continuation. It offers opportunities to share experiences, to test ideas or to ask questions. In an additional BarCamp, “social media + gospel”, pastors exchanged their tips and experiences in dealing with Instagram, online worship services and open discussions on social media platforms. How can hope successfully be communicated in “hope speech” using these platforms – this is one of the main challenges. Digitalization dives deep into questions of



meaningfulness, and it radically changes the organization of work. EKH’s Head of Digital Strategy recommends starting with small projects and networking with others in order to promote mutual learning. An example for this is the streaming of worship services. Work with confirmation candidates is changing, too. Closeness, educational encounters, action, fun, personal experiences are not limited only to an analog form. There are other methods. Video conferences with confirmation candidates can be fun, they can give

*During EKH’s Digital Day, Protestant Church employees exchanged ideas about innovations and practical experiences.*

space to emotions and foster learning by experience. Fundraising increasingly focuses on online tools. It is the Corona pandemic that demonstrates that online payment systems are a helpful complement to traditional donation and offering collection channels. (as)



# Celebrating Christmas – Somehow

Holidays are just like all other days: We are at home, only meet few people from the immediate family, communicate via our cell phones and get together with others via computer video services. One day it was only us “old and older” people together, four people with an average age of 73 years. The next day two children and an aunt came by. We all sat in front of the TV for the Christmas worship service. It was “quite ok”. But the day was missing its usual rhythm, its ceremony. A genuine Christmas celebration looks and feels different. (mkr)

On Christmas Eve it is not only preparing dinner together with our children that we look forward to, but also to attending our worship service. In order to get good seats, one must be at the church early. But not in 2020. An outdoor church service on the square in front of the church, attendance only for those with advance reservations, a limited number of people and lots of space in between. The weather was uncomfortable, wet and cold. We stood under an umbrella. The choir soloists gave their best efforts, but their voices faded away in the out-of-doors. A genuine Christmas spirit simply could not emerge. Now all of us are looking forward to a close and special atmosphere at Christmas this year. (dk)



*Christmas procedures during Corona times – lightweight and floating. Even the nativity scene was different last year: For this the organizers first made sketches of the movement patterns. Next they positioned the children individually on a white sheet in the church according to the sketches. They then photographed them, cut out the figures, pasted the cut-outs onto a large poster and embellished them. In a final step they photographed the poster.*

## And Easter?

An Easter evening outside is not unusual – people celebrate either outside or digitally. But all worship services nowadays have one thing in common: They are shorter than usual. Baptisms and communions are not held in order to more easily conform to social distancing rules. “Do not be afraid!” This message from the angels to the shepherds in the fields and the women at the empty grave connect Christmas and Easter. Following a year of

the pandemic and a continuing crisis, feelings of fear and hope were addressed in the worship services. Unfortunately Easter breakfast had to be cancelled. Many congregations distributed little bags to take along – with words and cards of comfort and blessing. And, of course, there were radio and TV worship services. The Easter spark did not readily let itself be lit. But Easter will come again soon – then, hopefully, without any danger of contagion. (as)



## Pastoral Care in Protective Clothing

Annette Röder is an experienced hospital and hospice pastoral caregiver. She works in a district south of Frankfurt.

The Corona pandemic pushes her to her limits though. Prior to visiting a sick bed she needs to change clothes. Into the protective suit she goes, together with gloves and visor. “Much is communicated via the voice,” Annette Röder points out. And she takes a photo of herself along to give to patients she visits who have not yet met her. She used to go from one bed to the next, but now her pastoral care has doubled.

This works as follows: A family member gives her a call to request her help. She then goes to the patient and checks how she or he is feeling. Afterwards Röder returns to her room and calls the family to let them know how their loved one is doing. She also serves as a translator. Annette Röder offers the following example, “One woman was admitted with a stroke. She could not speak, she could only com-

municate with her eyes.” Her family was spread throughout the country. Annette Röder sat at the patient’s bedside and turned on the phone’s loudspeaker. Then the patient’s daughter spoke with her mother, and Röder described the mother’s reactions to her daughter’s words. “The family sent some pictures and I had enlarged prints made, which I taped to the patient’s infusion stand.” The

patient was transferred without Röder’s prior knowledge. “But the team took everything along for the patient, including the candle and the family pictures, without our having discussed this in advance,” the caregiver is pleased to note. This shows a difference compared to how things were handled in the past. “Together all of us make certain that the patients are cared for as well as circumstances permit.”

Meanwhile she has also learned to tend to the souls of those entrusted to her care via video. Annette Röder also works in the field of psychiatry. This often leads to lengthy processes. She frequently takes her patients out on walks. “It is while walking that I gain a sense for how my charges are doing,” she says. Some of these newly acquired skills will remain with her and accompany her beyond Corona times. (as)