

Editorial



(Photo: Dagmar Brunk)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
This year our greetings are being sent to you under a new layout, for the first time together as the Protestant Churches in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) and of Kurhessen-Waldeck (EKKW). We wish you a blessed Pentecost.

Both of our churches have a common Ecumenical Center in Frankfurt since 2015 and, following changes in the Newsletter editorial team, we decided to publish it jointly from now on. Heartfelt thanks to Andrea Seeger and Martin Reinel who have been the heart of the editorial team since the first edition. Martin Reinel retired and Andrea Seeger decided to focus on new areas. Thank you very much for all their commitment! A warm welcome to Bernd Müller as representative for the ecumenical partnership relations of EKKW in the editorial team.

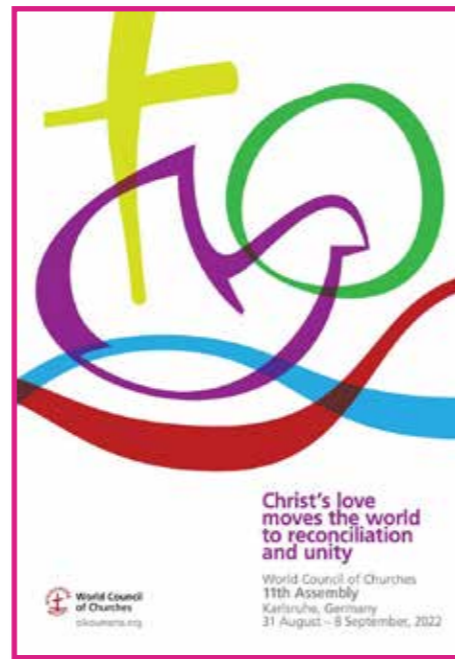
We celebrate Pentecost in this third year of the pandemic and in the midst of Russia's war against the Ukraine, which violates international law. War and war crimes again in Europe – unimaginable for us until now. In the face of suffering, death and people fleeing we decided to share with you, as our ecumenical partners, our present discussions about peace ethics and welcoming the refugees from the Ukraine and other places in the world who are fleeing war and seeking peaceful places to live. May God's Spirit strengthen our ecumenical fellowship!

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Claudia Brinkmann-Weiß
Rev. Detlev Knoche

General Assembly of the World Council of Churches – Welcome to Karlsruhe

The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches will take place in Karlsruhe, Germany, from August 31 to September 8, 2022, under the theme "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity". The Assembly is the highest governing body of the WCC, and normally meets every eight years. It is the only time when the entire fellowship of member churches comes together in one place for prayer and celebration.

"We are very hopeful – if not more hopeful than ever – that the assembly will take place in Karlsruhe," said Dr Agnes Abuom, WCC central committee moderator, in February. From 1,000 to 5,000 or more people will gather for the assembly, depending on the COVID-19 situation. For those unable to attend the assembly in person, the WCC has pledged to make as many events as possible available online. (dk)



News Items

EKHN – Rev. Stephan Arras was inducted as Provost for Starkenburg as of December 3, 2021. Some of the deaneries in Starkenburg are related to the Moravian Churches in South Africa and Tanzania. EKHN's General Synod elected Rev. Henriette Crüwell as Provost for Rheinhessen, succeeding Klaus-Volker Schütz who will retire in September 2022. The deaneries of Rheinhessen have a long-standing partnership with the GMIM – the Protestant Church on the island of North Sulawesi, Indonesia. (dk)

EKKW – On January 31, 2022, prelate Rev. Bernd Böttner retired and Rev. Burkhard zur Nieden was inducted as his successor. Rev. zur Nieden is familiar with some of the partnership relations of his former deanery Marburg. The prelate of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck is the theological deputy to the bishop. At the same time, he is the department head responsible for theological personnel and congregational development. (bm)

EKHN – EKKW: In spring, the synods of the two churches reconstituted themselves. Key decisions concerning the future will be made in the coming years in both churches, and the synods, who hold outstanding competencies, are to make the

final decisions in all church matters. They pass laws, adopt the budget, and thus create the basis for the legal foundation of the churches. (dk)

EKHN – In September, the EKHN celebrates its 75th birthday. It was founded in 1947 when three regional churches, of Nassau, Hesse and Frankfurt, were consolidated. It brought different denominations and faiths together: United, Reformed, Lutheran and Pietism. (dk)

EKKW – A new partnership with the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania has been established. During the inaugural visit of Bishop Beate Hofmann to Sibiu shortly before Easter 2022, a partnership agreement was ratified between the EKKW and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania. This agreement was based on a resolution adopted by the regional synod in the autumn of 2021, in the presence of the Romanian Bishop Reinhart Guib. (bm)

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news letter

War in the Middle of Europe

On February 24, 2022, Russia attacked the Ukraine in violation of international law. There is a linear distance of 1,200 kilometers between Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, and Hesse. Many people in Germany are frightened by this war. Will it come here? What decisions are politically appropriate? Germany is supplying the Ukraine with weapons. The federal budget is to be increased enormously for military security.

"According to God's will, there must be no war," the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches said in Amsterdam in 1948. Many Christians are shocked. Has the end of diplomacy, treaties and agreements now been reached? Were we naive? And what about the potential for peace in religions? Christians are killing other Christians in this war.

Prayers for peace have been held in the EKHN and EKKW parishes since the beginning of the war. As Church President Dr. Volker Jung put it: "People open their hearts before God in prayer, bringing forth that which moves them, horrifies them, disturbs them, and that which causes them worry and fear. And they convey their longing for help, for justice and peace before the Lord. Prayer provides people with the strength of God's power." Bishop Hofmann said it like this at a rally, "Peace depends on us! We need conciliation. God is the power that overcomes hatred and violence." At the Center for Ecumenism we, together with our partner churches, sense this power in our international ecumenical prayers for peace. In them Christ's promise comes alive: "You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit and will be my witnesses."

Prayer is one thing. The other is active help. The volume of donations for humanitarian aid in the Ukraine is very high. The social service sections of EKHN and EKKW provide emergency relief together with partner organizations, and offer protection and help to those directly affected and in neighboring countries. Both church synods, of EKHN and EKKW, have made special funds available in order to assist refugees upon their arrival. It is mainly women and children who are coming currently. They need housing, food, schools, employment and healthcare. Parish halls and other church properties are also being made available to them.



Photo: via Canva

Our relationships with the partner churches in Romania, Estonia and Poland are valuable nowadays. In a video address to the EKHN synod, Jerzy Samiec, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Poland, clearly pointed out that the people in the Ukraine need support for their defense and that they hope that this will be forthcoming. Here the weight of the ethical dilemma becomes clear: not supporting the Ukrainians means shouldering the blame as well.

The Church Conference of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), i.e., the leading clergy and the leading lawyers of all Protestant Churches in Germany, say: "Based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are deeply convinced that peace cannot ultimately be achieved by armed force. Peace is more than the absence of war. Without trust, justice and personal contacts between the peoples of all nations, peace is not possible."

Our view of the attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church is a critical one. Its patriarch, Kirill I, repeatedly justified the Russian attack on the Ukraine. This issue will likely be a topic at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, scheduled for late August 2022. May God's Spirit lead us to unity and peace! (sml)

Accommodations for Ukrainian Refugees

The regional churches and parishes of Kurhessen-Waldeck and Hessen and Nassau responded to the influx of Ukrainian refugees with a great readiness to help. Both offered vacant church properties and apartments in several towns and cities, usually via municipal organizations. The organizations rent the property to the town or city without charge, and they take care of any maintenance required. Thus, as an example, 200 women, children and elderly people found refuge in a church-run educational facility in Kassel-Wilhelmshöhe. Recreational centers can also accommodate several hundred people. And conference centers also provide temporary space for refugees.

The good cooperation between the churches and municipal administrations, the mayors and city councils as well as with spontaneous action groups and associations is exemplary, and it is praised by all. All want to be able to provide help quickly, without unnecessary red tape. The parishes of both regional churches support campaigns in cooperation with local



Prayers for Peace on Fridays in Oberkaufungen (Photo: Church Congregation Kaufungen)

Christian churches and hold weekly peace vigils, prayers for peace and chains of lights for example, as is practiced in Oberkaufungen on Fridays.

The events are popular and help counteract the helplessness felt in the

face of the war and its consequences, and to take a stand. In addition, these regular peace meetings also serve to network the Ukrainians who have arrived, and to connect their needs with the offers for assistance from the communities. (bm)

International Prayers for Peace

Loving God, we pray for the people of the Ukraine who are threatened by missiles and violence, and who have to watch and witness the atrocities committed against their fellow human beings. Be with them and comfort them.

Heavenly Father, we pray for all people who have to hold out in the air-raid shelters and do not know whether and where there will be a future for them. Give them strength and confidence!

Merciful God, we pray for the people from Ukraine who have fled their homeland and are afraid that they will not see their family members again. Comfort and strengthen them!

Let us be sensitive to the plight of refugees and their needs. Give us a compassionate heart and show us where we can help.

Lord forgive, where we and those in politics only seek the good of our own



International Peace Prayers on ZOOM (Photo: Zentrum Oekumene)

country and overlook the needs of others. Give us the willingness to make sacrifices so that we can alleviate their suffering.

Lord, we also pray for the people in Russia and Belarus who are courageously protesting against the war despite the danger. Protect them from punishment and imprisonment.

God of all nations, we pray for people in other war-torn areas in the world like Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria, Ethiopia, the Tigray region, Yemen and all the other regions of conflict. Give them peace Lord. (hr)

Has Putin's war against the Ukraine proven that pacifism is ineffective as a political strategy?



Sabine Müller-Langsdorf at a peace demonstration against the attack on the Ukraine. The pastor is the representative for peace work at the Center for Ecumenism of the Churches in Hesse and Nassau and of Kurhessen-Waldeck. (Photo: Rolf Oeser)

No, says Pastor Sabine Müller-Langsdorf in an interview.

Rev. Müller-Langsdorf, were you surprised by Vladimir Putin's war of aggression against the Ukraine? It horrified me, but it didn't necessarily surprise me. ... Prior to the beginning of this war a long history of missed opportunities, broken promises and lost trust already existed. Disarmament and control treaties had been broken for decades by both sides. An opportunity for breaking up the two major military blocs was squandered.

However, an acute new situation has now arisen which calls for action. Is it correct that Germany and the European Union have decided not only to impose economic sanctions, but also to provide the Ukraine with

weapons? This is truly a painful experience for all peace activists and pacifists. And it frightens many people. It is brought to our attention here at the Center by the increasing amount of inquiries we receive concerning conscientious objection. Yet I also understand the arms deliveries in this situation. The German government is under great public and international pressure.

Even with a man like Putin? Many say that pacifism cannot work with aggressors who wield their power so mercilessly and threaten the use of nuclear weapons. I disagree. Pacifism is a great force that chooses non-violent methods for conflict resolution. There are many examples in history of how civil resistance and non-violent means fundamentally changed

great suffering in, for example, overcoming slavery, colonialism and more. Pacifism is a force that has the objective of ensuring that the world remains a place where people can live in safety and in peace. ...

Nonetheless, a motto like "swords to plowshares" reaches its limits when there is no one on the other side with whom you can communicate rationally. The biblical image "swords to plowshares" describes a path leading from war to peace. This can only be achieved by systematic and controlled disarmament, clear regulations and with firm legislation. As long as the might of the strongest prevails, there can be no peace.

A Christian command says that you should love not only your friends but also your enemies. Does that also apply to someone like Putin? Of course it must be pointed out that this was an attack on the Ukraine in violation of international law, that the civilian population is being bombed and that Putin is also suppressing resistance in his own country. But all of this must be resolved in courts as necessary, according to the codes of international law. In the Bible there are many examples of grievances against enemies and tyrants as, for instance, in Psalm 64. People bemoan what happens to them and rely on God's justice. But our task as Christians can only be to choose a differentiated language, even in the face of hostility. For example, we should not say, as some people

are now doing, that "Russians are our enemy". That is not true. There is resistance to Putin in Russia, there are courageous people who advocate peace. **What else can the churches do?** There are voices from the churches in the Ukraine, Belarus and also in Russia that call for peace and reconciliation. The churches could use their international relations and contacts to promote understanding. But I also think that the language of prayer in church services has a quality of its own when it comes to picking up on people's concerns and emotions, providing orientation, offering comfort. This can work very well with prayer. (efo)