

Celebrating 50 years of Leuenberg Communion



(Photo: Dagmar Brunk)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, this year we are sending you greetings once again from both of our churches, the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) and of Kurhessen-Waldeck (EKKW). We wish you a blessed Pentecost.

We have a common Ecumenical Center in Frankfurt since 2015, and after changes to the editorial team, we decided to publish a common Newsletter. Many thanks to Rev. Christina Schnepel (responsible for our relationships with European and US partner churches and the "Hoffnung für Osteuropa" – Hope for Eastern Europe initiative) and Rev. Ulrike Schweiger Sepúlveda (responsible for the church partnership relationships in the southern part of EKKW) for joining the editorial team this year.

We are celebrating Pentecost in the first year after the pandemic, in the midst of Russia's war against Ukraine and with our thoughts turning to people dying in the Mediterranean Sea on their way to Europe. In our thoughts and prayers, we are with all who suffer and mourn, who are fleeing, who must go beyond their borders and who are there for others. In these difficult times, our churches are also facing new challenges. Shrinking membership and declining income demand fundamental reforms. To this end, both churches have initiated important reform processes. We want to report on this in our newsletter this year.

May God's Spirit strengthen our ecumenical fellowship! Yours in Christ,

Rev. Claudia Claudia Brinkmann-Weiß
Rev. Detlev Knoche

Disunity and even fragmentation of the church are also concerns of ours as churches of the reformation. An important step on the way to church fellowship in Europe was the Leuenberg Agreement, which celebrated its 50th anniversary this year. On 16 March 1973 in Leuenberg, Lutheran, reformed and united theologians unanimously adopted a document that aimed to end the long split between the confessions of the Reformation. This agreement was a way of ensuring full church fellowship. Sacraments, offices and lawful preaching are mutually recognised. Still today, more than ninety churches from almost all European and some South American nations make up the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) on the basis of the Agreement. The Leuenberg idea applies to fellowship not only between reformed churches, but also interconfessionally. This is demonstrated by the decision made at the Eighth General Assembly of the CPCE in Basel to enter into an official dialogue with Rome about the understanding of church and church fellowship. (uss)



Photo: Detlev Knoche

News Items

EKHN – As successor to Provost Matthias Schmidt, the EKHN synod has elected Rev. Anke Spory as the new Provost for Oberhessen. Her six years term will start by September this year. The deaneries in Oberhessen are related to the Church of South India's Dioceses of East Kerala and Krishna Godavari and the Church of North India's Diocese of Amritsar. (dk)

EKKW – The Bishop, Dr Beate Hofmann, met with the leading clergy of the EKKW's partner churches in Estonia in May 2022. The talks were hosted by the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELK) with Archbishop Urmas Viilma. The Estonian and German representatives were joined in Tallinn by those from Namibia, Kyrgyzstan, India and Romania. The South African delegation joined in digitally for some parts. (medion)

The synods of **EKKW** and **EKHN** have each set up an innovation fund. The funds will be used to support innovative projects by church congregations, church districts, deaneries, church and diaconal institutions that are related to each church in terms of content, location or organization. (dk)

EKHN – A delegation including church president Dr. Volker Jung visited the Indonesian partner church GMIM (Evangelical Church in Minahasa | Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa) in North Sulawesi. In addition to visits to congregations and church institutions and discussions with the church leadership, the focus of the 3-day talks in Manado was on the churches' relationship to politics, the state, and the economy. (dk)

EKKW – In September 2022, pastors from EKKW and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (ELCSA) were invited to a joint pastors' conference in South Africa. On the agenda were discussions on the theme of 'Intercultural Insights for the Future of Our Churches', considering current challenges and future visions of the church. The conference included visits to ELCSA congregations and joint trips to historical sites associated with apartheid and colonial history. (uss)

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news letter

Becoming the church of the future

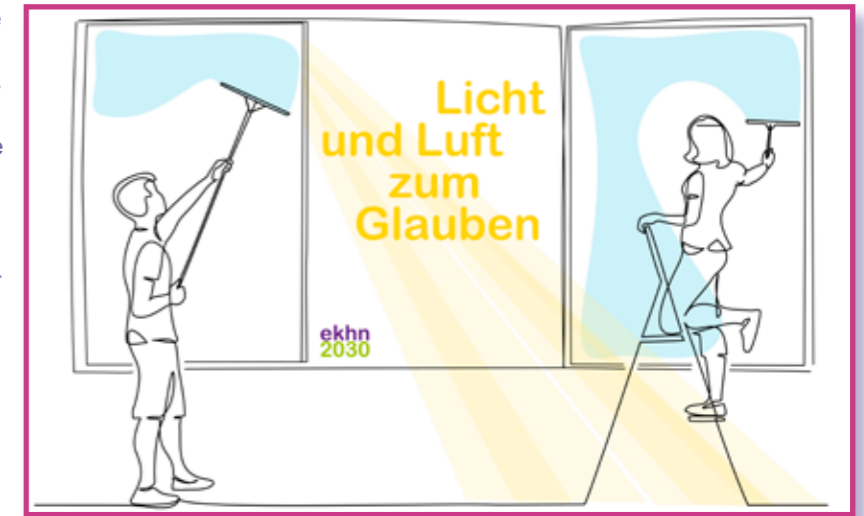
As churches of the Reformation, we continually face change processes. We've always reformed and renewed, right from the start. We also associate this with the spiritual aspiration expressed by the well-known tenet, 'ecclesia semper est reformanda' – the church must always reform itself.

One of the current challenges the churches are facing is that lots of people no longer feel the need to belong to a church. In addition, many people no longer appreciate how valuable faith and church could be for their own life and for society. Another aspect is the demographic development that is leading to an aging population in Germany. This is why we must assume that the number of church members will continue to decline, and that we will have fewer financial resources. We are nonetheless convinced that there is a future for our churches, and that they can support and strengthen people in their faith and their lives, and that they have much to contribute to good, fair and peaceful co-existence in our country and in the world.

In this context, the synods of the Protestant Church of Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) and the Protestant Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck (EKKW) have, in recent years, triggered future-oriented processes intended to guide us safely beyond 2030. These processes focus on both the future situations facing society, and the development of our membership and its consequences. In this sense, our churches are in an ongoing process of change and renewal, ensuring that we remain well equipped to pursue our mission. That mission is to open the doors and windows in the house of God, so that faith receives plenty of light and fresh air.

'In our reform process, we're working on future-proof structures for the work of our churches. As a first step, we have created cooperation spaces for several congregations in the same region,' says Bishop Beate Hofmann, describing the current process for the EKKW. She adds, 'We are adjusting to having fewer financial resources; we are thinking about how church work is seen, and by whom, when every fourth minister position can no longer be filled because we don't have enough staff.'

Volker Jung, church president of the EKHN, states that 'one answer is to develop multi-professional teams and promote other church professions and voluntary roles.' He adds that, 'We are discussing which



„Clean and open the windows so that light and air can come in to refresh our believe“ Photo: ekhn

church buildings, church halls or parsonages we can renovate to improve energy efficiency and continue to use, and where we need to look for other uses for the buildings or even sell them.'

In the coming years, the goals of this reform process will be:

- To renew our churches both financially and structurally, so they can provide a home for many and continue to perform their duties well into the next generation.
- To be so attractive that many people will want to join us in shaping our churches, including in full-time or voluntary roles.
- To own fewer buildings, but make those we do have even livelier and more beautiful.
- To act sustainably and make use of the opportunities offered by digitalisation.
- To join with others in the region and in society.
- To open up spaces where people can encounter the life-giving gospel in a totally new way.
- To accompany people on their life's journey and strengthen their faith.

This transformation brings uncertainty along with the pain of letting go. But it is essential so that the church can continue to maintain awareness of the gospel in all its radiance. It is a great spiritual challenge in which we can learn from our ecumenical partners and their experiences. (dk)

Out and about with the Coffee-Bike

The new 'coffee bike' belonging to the Protestant Congregation of St Mary Magdalene in Mainz has stopped at a playground in the area served by the church. Along for the ride is the church's 'Family in Focus' team. They share information about meet-ups, courses and support services, especially for mothers, fathers and children up to the age of three. Focusing on families is one of the congregation's central aims. This also includes the Lerchen-Café, which provides a location and framework for meetings and dialogue in small groups.

The coffee bike is there for everyone. Everyone's invited for a cup of coffee: at the parents' café, after services or at congregational gatherings. And in addition, the bike goes out to the people. The coffee bike will continue to be out and about in the coming months, stopping at playgrounds in Lerchenberg to reach people with very different beliefs and ways of life. 'It's important to us as a congregation to go beyond the church, to be active in a social context and open to everyone,' says Reverend



Coffee-Bike on Tour (Photo: Maria-Magdalena-Gemeinde, Mainz)

Christoph Kiworr. In the future, too, information about activities and offerings will be shared over a cup of fresh coffee. In addition to the free activities the team will give an overview of other institutions and courses. A new voucher system enables families with children

up to three years to make use of additional advisory and meet-up services in the city of Mainz free of charge. (dk)

'Pax & People': Taking New Path Together

Frankfurt's Europaviertel, or European District, is a very recent addition. It has come into being in the last few years and gives home mainly to young people from all different countries. The average age is 33, there are many single

households and the majority are high earners. There's a high level of fluctuation in the residential area. Since 2018, the Catholic and Protestant churches have been following a new, joint path in this multi-ethnic district.



Their new ecumenical centre, 'Pax & People', is a dependable meeting point for the district's residents. The name 'Pax & People' comes from the district itself. It came about through surveys in businesses, cafés and restaurants. Although many of those asked had no connection with the church, they wanted to have a shared meeting point in the district where

you can get to know people and talk. The centre is on the ground floor of a residential building. It's open, inviting and easy to find. The core of the concept is being open to people regardless of their faith, or where they come from or how long they want to stay. The large, ground-level glass frontage represents transparency. There's free coffee and Wi-Fi. You can work undisturbed or find an opportunity to chat. Regular activities include theme evenings with music, films, art or literature. In the middle of the premises there's a 'light room' that invites to prayer, silence and meditation. Catholic and Protestant pastoral workers are on hand to advise on questions of life and faith.

Testing out what the church can offer people here; being there to provide what they need – in doing this, both churches are taking a new path.

(photo | text: dk)

Cooperation with International Congregations

The Protestant Congregation Hoffnungskirche (Church of Hope) in Kassel and the Divine Impact Church of God (DICG) have been working together in new ways since last year. They honoured this collaboration in a celebratory service. In the future, DICG will hold its services in the Hoffnungskirche church, and once a month the two congregations will hold a joint service. **Stefan Nadolny (S.N.)**, reverend of the Hoffnungskirche, talks to **Steve Ogedegbe (S.O.)**, pastor of DICG.

S.N.: *Your congregation is called DICG, the Divine Impact Church of God. Why is that so important to you?*

S.O.: This is how the name came about: I was on a flight to Africa and was planning to invest something as a provision for my retirement. I wanted to build a hotel. Then, on the plane, I spoke to a man from Spain who wanted to help in Africa. Just then I really felt God's impact, and I said to myself, 'Why should I invest in a hotel if help is needed right now?' I decided to build a school. It's about these nudges from God for our world.

S.N.: *What made you decide to enter into this cooperation process with our congregation?*

S.O.: We've been doing things together for a long time; we've also appeared in town with you, Stefan. I saw that we could really make something happen together.

S.N.: *What would you like us to achieve together?*

S.O.: I'd like us to be able to experience the story of the apostles once again, that people come out of their houses and the gospel goes into every place.

S.N.: *How do you balance your work as the managing director of the intercultural youth centre Himmelsfels in Spangenberg with your congregation in Kassel?*

S.O.: A mentor of mine once said, if you really find joy in what you do, then you'll always have the energy for it. And both of those roles are important to me. At Himmelsfels we get young people excited about worship. I'd like to live that on Sundays, too.



Stefan Nadolny, Augusta und Steve Ogedegbe (Photo: Hoffnungskirchengemeinde, Kassel)

S.N.: *What's important to you when it comes to faith? What does Jesus mean in your life?*

S.O.: There's a song by the singer Sinach that goes, Jesus is a way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness [<https://genius.com/Sinach-way-maker-live-lyrics>]. Jesus is everything to me, and I want to follow His path'. (<https://hoffnungskirchengemeinde.de>)

Taking Action To Protect the Climate

'7 years – 700,000 trees': This motto sums up the Protestant Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck's (EKKW's) aim to help grow around 700,000 new trees by 2030. The campaign aims to give people a new awareness of the importance of the forest. EKKW wants to make a sustainable contribution protecting the climate and preserving the integrity of creation.

The Protestant Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck already has the forest (Wald) as part of its name. The church congregations and diocese themselves own nearly 1,200 hectares of forest – about the same surface area as the Edersee reservoir. People here live in, next to, from and with the forest. They experience it as a habitat for plants and animals, a place of recreation, an air filter and wood supplier, and they feel how much it's suffering as a result of the climate crisis. How can we preserve the diversity of the

forest as a part of God's creation for the generations to come? How can we mobilise the people of the region to actively protect the forest? These questions form

the basis of the '7 years – 700,000 trees' project, which aims to increase awareness of the forest.

(photo | text: medio.tv/Baumgart)



Bischof Dr. Beate Hofmann (l.), Lorenz Faßhauer (forest interest), Vice President Dr. Katharina Apel (r.)