



(Photo: Dagmar Brunk | Christian Schauderna /medio)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

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

We are celebrating Pentecost in times when hope is needed. People are seeking for peace all around the world, seeking for social and food security, for sustainable and just development and for strategies responding to the climate change.

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 times we appreciate our companionship with you as our ecumenical partners in Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States. We share our life concerns, pray for each other and search for common action and solidarity. This is our common mission to God's world to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have (1 Peter 3,15).

May God's Spirit strengthen our ecumenical fellowship!

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Detlev Knoche
Rev. Dr. Diethelm Meißner

Every year, the festival of the federal state of Hesse takes place in a town in Hesse, this year in Fritzlar in the north of the federal state. From 24 May to 2 June 2024 the "Hessentag" will also be a place for spiritual encounters. EKKW, EKHN and the Diakonia are presenting ERLEBNIS:KIRCHE, which wants to get hearts and legs moving with a rousing dance performance.

Dancing as an expression of living faith has deep biblical roots. From Miriam's joyful dance in the Exodus story to King David's enthusiastic movement when he carried the Ark of the Covenant - the Bible is rich in dance stories.

The song 'Heaven on Earth' was specially composed for this festival. People around the world can film and send in their own dance performance to the song. The best submissions will be integrated into the show and made visible to all visitors.

Yet the focus is not only on dance, but also on blessing and community. The church garden becomes a place for special moments of blessings. Weddings, anniversaries and baptisms find a worthy setting here.

ERLEBNIS:KIRCHE at the "Hessentag" promises a unique experience that brings faith to life in a lively and inspiring way: www.erlebnis-kirche.de



News Items

EKHN – The solemnly signed friendship between the EKHN and the diocese of Västerås in Sweden sends a strong signal for being church together in Europe. This friendship is to be lived in Christian discipleship and is in favour of an open, lively and sustainable society in Europe. The church friendship that has begun is orientated towards conviviality: towards a deep, spiritual and also cheerful togetherness in respect for the future and for our fellow creatures. (cs)

EKKW – The EKKW has extended its partnership with the „Church of South India - Karnataka Northern Diocese“ for a further four years. A partnership agreement was signed on 10 January 2024 by Bishop Martin Borgai and General Secretary Vijaykumar Dandin as well as Bishop Dr Beate Hofmann and Dr Diethelm Meißner. The partnership, which thrives on mutual exchange, encounters and support, has existed for over 50 years. (dk)

EKHN – At its spring meeting, the Synod of EKHN adopted a resolution in favour of democracy, diversity and human dignity - against right-wing populism. It welcomes the diverse activities in favour of a free and democratic society. The threat to democracy and especially to disadvantaged groups

that has recently become apparent requires a committed and sustained effort. The resolution states, among other things: "We are guided by the commandment to love our neighbour and the biblical mandate. We stand up for justice and a life of diversity and peace. Racist nationalism is not compatible with our Christian view of God and humanity." (dk)

EKKW – Over 2.000 singers are expected to attend the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELK) singing festival in June. In addition to choirs from Estonian parishes, partnership groups from the EKKW will be taking part. Around 60 singers from the Hofgeismar-Wolfhagen church district will also take part in the opening concert. A project choir with 15 singers from the Spangenberg parish will take part in the singing festival. Both choirs will visit their partners in the Järva presbytery and in the Rāpina parish. (ms)

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news letter

Partnership as Companionship

Our two Churches, EKHN and EKKW, are in direct partnership relations with Churches in Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States of America, in some cases for more than 50 years. We share our solidarity and resources. We learn from each other what it means to live as Christians in our different cultural and religious contexts. We share our spiritual and liturgical traditions and richness. We are committed to peaceful and respectful dialogues and to create a just world. In some of our partnerships, especially with Churches in Africa and Asia, we are looking back on a long mission history. This history shows us that our Christian faith is always renewing through inculturation and is always trying to overcome denominational borders! "That they all may be one" is a strong commitment till today!

It's all about participating in God's mission to the world!

It wasn't until 1952 that we developed a common understanding of mission at eye level. It was in Willingen – a small village in the Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck – during the International Missionary Council where all the member churches agreed that church mission is no longer in terms of the "elder" churches helping the "younger" churches by giving financial support, but must be changed in terms of participating in the Missio Dei. The theological meaning is that mission must be in terms of "participating in God's mission" in the world.

In all the years that we have been walking together and striving for a responsible witnessing with each other and for this world, we have also not avoided the dangers that lie in the imbalances of giving and receiving, especially when it comes to financial resources. We must ask ourselves again and again whether we are treating each other as equals and with respect. "We are developing a concept of 'sharing' as an alternative", said Bishop Dr. Beate Hofmann (EKKW) after returning from a visit this year to the partners in India. Ecumenical sharing in our relationships and in our mission for this world goes far beyond the financial aspect. It means participating in the joys and sorrows of others and sharing of our life concerns. It is about sharing theological, spiritual, and



Photo: Detlev Knoche

cultural experiences, an exchange about living conditions, difficulties, problems, challenges and attempts towards mutual accepted solutions. Only if we are open and honest with each other, our testimony, our mission and partnership in and for this world can be credible. "During my time as Church President I met many of our ecumenical partners. And I learned that our encounters and mutual visits, exchange programs and volunteer services are of central importance for practicing 'ecumenical sharing'", sums up Dr. Volker Jung (EKHN) at the end of his term of office. We are increasingly discovering that this also requires creative new forms in light of the consequences of climate change and all the debates about sustainability. Options of digital communication and video conferencing are increasingly offering us these opportunities.

Not all is well yet. As a result of global economic injustices, there are significant differences between our churches. But we are on a path of shared responsibilities. Perhaps instead of „partnership“ we need to look for a new term for our togetherness in an inclusive and equal relationship. Some now speak of a "companionship" (Weggemeinschaft) in which members bear each other's burdens, learn together and journey together in joy and sorrow.

(dk)

Courage and Hope for a common Europe

Every five years, the citizens of the European Union elect the members of the European Parliament (MEP), the only directly elected transnational assembly in the world. In June 2024, a total of 720 members from 27 member states will be elected.

MEPs have the task of shaping and passing laws. These laws affect important areas of life in the European Union, from supporting the economy, agriculture and fight against poverty to the climate crisis and security. In this respect, the European Parliament determines large parts of national policy and legislation. As Protestant Churches in Hesse and Nassau and Kurhessen-Waldeck, we are in partnership and friendship with a large number of churches in Europe. Together, we are currently facing major challenges in the EU: growing populism, increasing social inequalities, the climate crisis and war in Europe. Together, we stand for a peaceful, democratic and social Europe. To give courage and hope for a common Europe, we have asked the

Bishops and Presidents of the churches with which we are connected to make a statement that shows our Christian commitment to peace and community. (cs)

Here are some examples:

"I vote for Europe because it stands for freedom, tolerance and community and the future is only possible in community!"
Bishop Reinhart Guib, Bishop of the Evangelical Church A. B. Rumania



"I vote for Europe because it is my own responsibility today to be committed in the dream of a supportive, open, peaceful citizenship that the generations who had to face the horror of wars and holocaust passed on."

Deacon Alessandra Trotta, Moderator of the Waldensian Board



QR leads you to all statements

"See how good and how pleasing it is for brothers and sisters to be living together in peace"

"See how good and how pleasing it is for brothers and sisters to be living together in peace."

With these words from Psalm 133:1, I greet you warmly. My name is Diethelm Meissner, and I have been Head of Diaconia and Ecumenism at the regional church office in Kassel since 1 November 2023.

I am 62 years old, married and the father of three grown-up children.

I am delighted to be able to play a responsible role in shaping the future development of diaconia and ecumenism in our church. Both fields are matters close to my heart: I see diakonia as the practical side of our faith. And for me, ecumenism is the bond with Christians in other churches: Christian life is very diverse - and yet united by one spirit (as in Psalm 133).

My diaconal experience comes primarily from seven years as a pastor in a parish in a socially deprived area in a small

town. I was able to gain ecumenical experience in a variety of contexts: a year of study in Jerusalem, a longer stay in Central America or a doctorate in missiology on the „Church of the Poor in El Salvador“ and many ecumenical encounters as a study leader in the further training of pastors.

Besides diaconia and ecumenism, I have considerable experience in adult education: for twelve years, I organized further training courses for pastors at the Protestant Seminary for Advanced Studies in Hofgeismar – with many visits to our partner churches and the shaping of ecumenical meetings in Kurhessen-Waldeck.

I look forward to meeting you in the coming months and years - and to experiencing together how wonderful it is when sisters and brothers live peacefully together. (dm)



Diethelm Meißner following Claudia Brinkmann-Weiß as Officer of Diaconia and Ecumenism of EKKW. Bishop Beate Hofmann (right) (Photo: Christian Schauderna/medio)

We are united in Christ and referred to one another



International Partnership Consultation, Arnoldshain 2017 (Photo: EKHN)

During your time as Church President, you have always pointed out that living ecumenism is an essential part of the church for you. The new church president will be inaugurated in January 2025 with an international partnership

consultation. That is a strong sign of global fellowship. What is so important for you about ecumenism?

This is linked to my basic theological conviction, which the author of the Gospel of John describes as follows:

"That they all may be one!" (17:21) This phrase forms the basis of several ecumenical movements, united and uniting denominational traditions and of my own church, the EKHN. It is also the official motto of one of our partner churches, the Church of South India, the first church which brought together different denominational traditions under one roof. In Germany we have two main denominations: Protestants and Catholics. For sure there are theological and organizational differences between our denominations as well in some ethical positions. Nevertheless, separation is not the right path in ecumenism. The deepest reason for this is that we are convinced together that we are united in Christ through baptism. Even if we organize our lives differently as churches, we are still referred to one another and commissioned to witness together to the one faith in Christ in this world. 'We no longer want to be church without dialogue with you.' This is the

Interview with Church President Dr. Dr. h. c. Volker Jung

central sentence of a new ecumenical document from the German Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Protestant Church in Germany.

In our churches in Germany, we are undergoing a transformation process that we could not have imagined at this speed when you took office in 2009. What do you find inspiring in our Ecumenical Contacts for our church development?

We are indeed facing major challenges and changes. We find it difficult because we experience it as a loss and a shrinking. We have to close buildings with which people feel closely connected. We will have fewer pastors and will have to merge parishes. But we want to look to the future and seek new ways to bear credible witness to the Gospel. During my time in office, I have been able to visit many of our partner churches. During the Covid-pandemic, these contacts have become

even more intensive thanks to the new possibilities of video conferencing. I am always deeply impressed by the energy and joy with which people in our partner churches organize their everyday life in the congregations and face the challenges in their church. These challenges are often much greater than ours. This has become particularly clear during the pandemic. During the lockdown, there were no church services and therefore no collections - often the only source of income in our partner churches.

Of course, we don't want to rank the ecumenical partnerships, but what special encounters do you remember?

When I took over as church president 16 years ago, we developed a new concept for our contacts with our 16 partner churches and their districts in Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA. The aim was not to visit every single partner church, but to come together for regional thematic conferences.

I fondly remember the two consultations in Tanzania on the issue of charismatic movements and in South Africa on the responsibility of the church towards refugees. Together with representatives from the other African partner churches, we exchanged ideas and discussed our church images and our responsibility in society. With representatives from our Asian partner churches, we discussed concepts of mission in Northern India and the proximity and distance between church and state on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. With our European partners, I particularly remember joint campaigns on migration and this year's European elections. I cannot and do not want to rank. The partnerships were all characterized by great fraternity and wonderful encounters.

The questions were asked by Christina Schnepel