

## The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) is Part of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation

The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) of the World Council of churches in Kingston (Jamaica), to be held in May 2011, will be a "harvest festival", celebrating the achievements of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) which began in 2001. At the same time it will encourage individuals and churches to renew their commitment to nonviolence, peace, and justice. The DOV has given us in the EKHN a host of challenges, opening new fields of action for the furtherance of peace in everyday life and for bearing witness in the church. We have encouraged new projects, including incentives to prevent violence and to manage conflict in schools and kindergartens by providing training for school counselors and mediators. We have launched interreligious

encounters between Muslims and Christians. Within the context of a touring exhibition parishes in a number of cities have examined closely the causes and consequences of "domestic violence". In ecumenical services and joint prayers for peace people discovered anew the rich treasure, which is available to them in our religious repository. We have organized seminars devoted to the study of violence and ways and means to disrupt the vicious circles. In Kingston the delegates of the EKHN will report on all of these experiences.

Together with the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad (India) the Ecumenical Center of EKHN will provide a workshop in Kingston on the theme "Peace between Religions – a small plant". (dk)

### News Items

**Synod elects Annegret Puttkammer as Provost of the District of Northern Nassau.** The Synod of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) has elected the Rev. Annegret Puttkammer as the new Provost of the church district of Northern Nassau. She succeeds the Provost Michael Karg who will go into retirement on June 1 of this year. The term of office has a duration of six years. Re-election is possible. The church district of Northern Nassau cultivates intensive partnerships with the Lutheran Church in Tanzania and the Simalungun BATAK Protestant Christian Church on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. The provosts advise parishes when new ministers are to be installed. In addition they familiarize these with the sphere of activities that awaits them. They also ordain ministers-to-be. They make visitations in parishes. And they are responsible for the supervision of the deans. They have a seat and suffrage in the church administration. (dk)

**The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) assumes Responsibility in the Ecumenical Committee of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).** Church President Dr. Volker Jung was charged with the team leadership of the EKD's Advisory Commission for Migration and Integration. This body's central concerns are, among others, the themes: European asylum systems, solidarity with migrants, as well as their integration into German society.

Cordelia Kopsch, deputy of the Church President, was put in charge of the management of the EKD's Advisory Commission for Worldwide Ecumenical Affairs, which deals with fundamental questions, having to do with theological and structural matters in the worldwide ecumenical relationships sustained by the German churches. (dk)

**Solidarity with the Victims of the Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster in Japan.** Parishes and other facilities of the church held services and prayer meetings and took offerings for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Many young people participated. As a sign of solidarity they folded sheets of paper into cranes; these being the symbol of the Japanese anti-nuclear movement. The consequences of the nuclear disaster, which are even today incalculable, have strengthened representatives of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) in their demand to quit using nuclear power. It is sheer irresponsibility to rely on this kind of energy, which has such a potential for destruction. (dk)

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I'm sending you greetings from the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN), wishing you a blessed Pentecost. "They were all with one accord in one place." (Acts 2:1) On the occasion of Pentecost this vision unites Christians all over the world, transcending confessional and theological barriers.

Very different themes preoccupied us within the ecumenical movement during the past year. The end of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), which had been sponsored by the Ecumenical Council of Churches, motivated us to hold international consultations. We discussed with representatives of the Fellowship of Protestant Churches in Europe our understanding of ecclesiastical community. The nationwide 53rd relief operation "Brot für die Welt" ("Bread for the World") was launched on the first Sunday of Advent in one of our churches. In order that a wide public becomes aware of all issues related to this program, professional communication efforts are called for. How these are organized in our church, I'd like to share with you in this year's newsletter.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Detlev Knoche



## Church in the Media

### The Aim: Winning People for the Church

In Germany just about all young people from 10 to 18 years of age go at least once a day into the internet. Women and men over fifty watch TV for at least four hours per day according to independent surveys. And more than 70% of all adults read a daily newspaper on a regular basis. Germany is a "media society". What does this mean for the church? What possibilities for spreading the Gospel are offered by traditional and modern media? Most office holders in the Protestant Church in Germany are firmly convinced that communications and journalism are important task areas. For this very reason all churches have offered a wide range of media products. Their declared aim is to stimulate interest and to win people for the church.

Being part of the media society, the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) is also very much interested in spreading the word of God in an up-to-date form. For it is the nature of the church to be open to the public. Jesus preached and performed in public; his teachings applied at all times to all of man- and womankind. He charged his disciples with spreading the Word: "Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15)

To fulfill this mission, the EKHN has developed a tight net of communication-offices and media products, own publications and press releases. Presently there is an intense debate in the synod, concerning new concepts of communication efforts.

Part of the EKHN net of communication is, for instance, the "Evangelische Sonntags-Zeitung" (Protestant Sunday News). This traditional communication on paper is a church weekly. Additionally the internet site www.ekhn.de is prepared in the EKHN Media Center in Frankfurt. The editorial offices of "epd", the news service of the Protestant Church, are located in the same building. A related enterprise is "pak", Privatfunkagentur (Private Radio Agency); it prepares broadcasts for private radio stations.

The communication department in the church administration in Darmstadt is of central importance in the communication net of the EKHN. Here as press officer the Rev. Stephan Krebs supplies newspapers and press agencies with official church statements on current issues. The communication department is also responsible for communication within the church.

It keeps congregations and personnel up-to-date. Fliers, handouts and posters are produced. In addition it organizes special communication projects. Head of the department is the Rev. Dr. Joachim Schmidt. He stresses that communication efforts of the Protestant Church must also reach people, in whose day to day life the church plays no important role. He says:

"The outlook of the people is determined up to 80% by the media, not by personal experience. For this very reason the church is in need of high standard communication. It has to find a mode of expression, which will be understood by as many as possible. For the Gospel of Jesus Christ applies to all people."

Regional communication offices are also well established within the EKHN. They provide support for church districts and parishes and see to it that public appearances take place in an appropriate and convincing way. Close contact and well organized cooperation with staff members of the public and private media is a must. Work for the EKHN in this field is left to trained professionals: Journalists who are familiar with the EKHN and pastors experienced in communications. They are to make sure that the projected image in the media society will be professional, reputable and up-to-date. All church communications aim to improve the public acceptance of the Protestant Church, bolstering trust in the institution. The mission statement is: "We say and demonstrate clearly and understandably what we in the Protestant Church have in mind and what we do. For people should take note of us and see the good that we are doing." (mkr)



The Light Church at the Hessian Horticultural Show cast its spell on many people

## Church Reaches Out

The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) doesn't lock itself into its four walls, much rather it goes out, in order to establish contact with the public. Doing so, it opens new approaches to the good tidings of the Gospel and takes a stance on social issues.

The person entrusted with innovative projects in the EKHN is Wolfgang H. Weinrich. He and his team of co-workers were responsible for arranging the Church of Roses and the Church of Light. During the hubbub of the biggest folk festival in Hesse he was inspired by the motto "Lebens-Art" (the art of living) to change church environments into wonderful spiritual oases.

The "Church of Roses", for example, was decorated with about 6 000 beautiful fragrant roses. It attracted thousands of people; the church became a crowd puller. Hence, it provided for many visitors new avenues to religion and spirituality.

Other women and men of the church also reach out, seeking people in their everyday life. There is, for instance, the event "Himmlich nah" ("heavenly close"). In it the Protestant and Catholic Churches work closely together. Jointly they utilize the central stage of the biggest market square in the region to present the theme of Advent.

On the "heavenly close" stage one can hear groups of children singing, Gospel choirs, as well as musicians from all over the world. Every one can get the "heavenly close" song text on a maxi-postcard or will be handed a small card with blessed words. One can nibble on chocolate bishops. And anyone who is thirsty can drink a "hot Mexican". Living up to the motto of its sales stall, which is: "Fair Gifts", the church only sells products obtained by means of fair trade.

Moreover, the church also sets boundaries for the economy. In connection with this the efforts of the Bergstraße church district is worth mentioning. It agitates for the observance of Sunday as a day of rest. Protestants plead that businesses remain closed on the Lord's day, so that people have time for themselves and their families. Very many people participated in the "My Sunday" photo competition, submitting photographs, depicting what a Sunday without work means to them. Among other things a selection of these photos was used to make a calendar for the current year. Dean Ulrike Scharf says, "by no means do we want to be spoilsports when we take a stance against



*Enticing fragrance: With the splendor of 6000 roses, the Markuskirche in Butzbach turned into a „Church of Roses“*

open stores on Sunday. Quite the contrary! Our intention is to show how important Sunday is for contemplation, regeneration and for family and friends getting together."

## Substantial Web Appearance

More than 400 congregations of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) give on the internet an overview of programs and services they provide, as well as of local parish life. Especially young people and young families search the internet for facilities like nursery schools, event announcements like concerts or information about how they can get involved in volunteer work. Most websites are clearly laid out, inviting the user to surf around. However, there are others that have to be relaunched. That was the case in the congregation in Wölfersheim, where Silke Westphal is the parish secretary. It had inherited an old web site and nobody knew how to re-design and update it. Hence, the parish council decided: We will set up a completely new web site!

Silke Westphal gleefully notes, "the parish as a whole chose the EKHN on-line toolkit. Computation and upkeep are quite practicable: I just need half an hour per week to update the parish web site." With her experience as a banking clerk, Ms. Westphal has a certain affinity to the internet. Software and consistent services are provided by the online agency of media center of the EKHN. With their

system just one mouse click is required to make and update a web site. It provides a bigger selection of layouts; under the heading "Corporate Identity" they all signal that the parish or whatever

facility is part of the EKHN. "Aside from that it is important for us that the system is inexpensive. Hence, the price of the basic toolkit was a strong argument when we made our choice," says parish secretary Silke Westphal. "Moreover, the system is very sturdy. No need to be afraid of ruining anything," she smirks. Once the decision has been made, it is quite easy to put it into practice. The participants have to make a choice regarding the website content. In addition they have to assemble the most important texts, pictures, and addresses. And they have to reach



an agreement with the service supplier. Now the creation of the website can begin. When configuration is completed, it's time for a practical test. A person who is not at all familiar with the project is required to search for some specific information on the site. If this test person manages to find the information, the configuration is successful and is ready for use. If not, the persons involved have to make another optimization attempt. They can get advice from the cooperative staff members of the online agency. (rd)

## Quick and Reliable News

Interview with Wolfgang Weissgerber, editor-in-chief of the Evangelische Sonntags-Zeitung (Protestant Sunday News) and the Hesse bureau of the epd (Protestant News Agency). The editorial staff consists of eleven people. They disseminate news items on a daily basis and publish a weekly newspaper. Both editorial departments work closely together.

*What kind of news is disseminated by the Evangelische Sonntags-Zeitung (ESZ) and how comprehensive is it?*

You'll find on 20 to 36 pages – depending on the amount of available news – everything important of what is happening in the Protestant Church. Our bulletins, features, interviews and news items – in conjunction with a large staff of free-lance

journalists in the various regions our editorial staff provides quick and reliable news out of the parishes and church districts, out of the region of Hesse and Nassau, Germany and the world. We also cooperate with the neighboring Protestant churches.

*What in particular is the Protestant component in the newspaper?*

The devotional column is a feature in every edition. A set of beliefs is very important to the ESZ; the paper tries to expound the specific Protestant point of view. At the same time it is quite sincere about dialog with other religions, as it is about ecumenical matters. It tunes in on the theological debates and tries to make them more understandable. Furthermore



*Wolfgang Weissgerber, editor-in-chief (center), with his staff in a weekly meeting, working on the Protestant Sunday News*

we present all aspects of the multifaceted life within the church. Members of the editorial staff are open to various opinions, they shed light on an issue from various sides, and at times they do not hesitate to write an article, which goes against the grain of official church policy.

*Who is the publisher of the newspaper?*

The ESZ is published by the nonprofit Medienhaus GmbH in Frankfurt. The EKHN is the contracting body and main shareholder. The area of circulation is, of course, mainly the region administered by this church.

*With what degree of independence can the editorial office perform its task?*

For very good reasons Protestant journalism is arranged in such a way that direct influence on editorial work is precluded. This also applies to the Hesse-Nassau region. The newspaper appears in a publishing house, which is in legal terms a limited liability company. This company has a supervisory board with representatives from the Church and its social services. They keep a close watch on editorial work, which is not the same as controlling this work. Or course, every

minister and dean and even the Church President can complain to the editor, if he or she doesn't like something. But there are no formal instructions. The editorial staff appreciates this and handles its freedom with appropriate responsibility.

*Who are the readers of the ESZ?*

On the one hand we are read by people who work for the church or its social welfare agencies or who are involved in voluntary work for them, and, of course, by rank and file members of the church. All people who are interested in the soul of things and in religion can profit from our newspaper. Moreover, the ESZ provides valuable ideas for work in the parishes. Life coaching plays a very important role. Our newspaper views the Church with optimism and sees it at the same time with a critical eye. It takes a

stance, provides orientation, and poses questions. The Church, which way is it going? Of what significance is it in society?

*You are also the editor-in-chief of the Protestant News Agency (epd) here in Hesse. What kind of work does this entail?*

The epd is an ecclesiastical news agency – as AFP, AP or Reuters are news agencies in the secular realm. From the perspective of the Church we provide two thirds of all German daily newspapers and all publicly funded broadcasting stations with news items and coverage on the realms of social policy, culture, the media, environment, and development. Hence, epd reaches millions of people every day. The Protestant News Agency is highly regarded by journalists. (as)