



Schools of the EKHN: A Special Place for Learning and Life Experience

Positive Experiences with Church Involvement in Education

“Education has to convince” and: “The Protestant Profile should be highlighted in the effort”. That is how the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) describes the principle aims of the schools it funds and is responsible for. The involvement of the EKHN in education has increased considerably in the past years. Presently it is running two primary schools, one secondary school (Gymnasium) and one high school (Oberstufengymnasium), attached to it a college for older students and a dormitory.

Churches as sponsors of schools are nothing special in ecumenical Christianity. However, for the EKHN they are, seeing that in past decades the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau has abstained to a large extent from running its own schools. Instead it supported the public school system under the auspices of the state. In Germany this system still accommodates most students. As a rule, public schools and universities are tuition free. In general this school system offers education for all with a quality of education ranging from sufficient to good. Only a few private schools do exist. However, their number has increased over the past years.

With its own school projects the EKHN intends to push forward into new educational territory. It would like to develop models, which stimulate children and take into consideration the special needs of the people in the region. Both primary schools of the EKHN, for example, subscribe to the principles of “progressive education”. Above all schools should enhance social skills, in order to enable the learners to get along with each other, to trust one another and to enable them to solve conflicts without resorting to violence. Children of different ages are in the classroom together. School should become a special place for learning and living, where time and space allow for positive development. Children should learn to develop their own ideas, to contemplate their behaviour and opinions, as well as to accept others in their otherness.

But church-sponsored schools “should above all enable Christians, living in a pluralistic society, to develop their faith and knowledge, so that they may

be able to meet the challenges of a complex world.” That is how church president Peter Steinacker puts it. He stresses that Protestant schools should prepare people “to live in accordance with the Gospel, enabling them to offer to the world the mercy of God.”

Both primary schools together have at present over 140 pupils, ranging from six to ten years of age. One of the schools is located in the northern region of the EKHN, in the village of Laubach-Freienseen, to be exact, the other in the southern part of the EKHN in the village of Michelstadt-Weitengesäß. Up to date they have a good record. During the last conference of the synod of the EKHN it was decided to continue to operate the two schools for an indefinite period of time. The high school (Gymnasium) from grade five to thirteen in Bad Marienberg in the Federal State of Rhineland-Palatinate was opened for the first 56 students in September 2005. The upper level high school (Oberstufengymnasium), the Laubach Collegiate Institute, in upper Hesse has in contrast a long tradition which reaches back to the time of the Reformation. Since 1946 it has been operated directly by the church.

Taking stock of the EKHN involvement in schools up to date, one gets a picture that is quite positive. The institutions find general approval and have a good reputation. Incidentally, not only Protestant children are welcome, but also those who are Catholics or Muslims, as well as children without any denomination. (mkr)



Proud of their own potato yield: The girls and boys of the protestant school in Freienseen.

Full Acceptance comes First

- even Before Challenging the Child

The Protestant profile of a school determines the day-to-day business of the institution and becomes visible in it. The very personalized welcoming of each child every morning takes place in a friendly way at the little ones eye level. This signals that the child is fully accepted and



Rev.
Christopher
Kloß

respected before even having performed in a satisfactory way. Delegating responsibility to the child integrates him or her as a subject in the educational enterprise, encourages him or her to be self-confident, as well as to be considerate of him- or herself and of others. It goes without

saying, that the children take responsibility in this spirit, when assuming liturgical leadership in the devotional get-together in the morning or in devotional school services, as well as in solving interpersonal conflicts. The teacher is a companion, He or she stimulates the thinking of the children, supports them and points out worthwhile goals to them.

The structuring of the way through the classroom periods, through the days and weeks is done by the children themselves. As a rule each child can assume every task; questions and problems are solved jointly. This way they experience freedom and responsibility, which they need to get along in the exemplary polis of the school community. The spiritual comfort the Gospel provides and the demands it poses to each and every Christian is transmitted this way into the every day life of the children.

(chk)



The Protestant High School Bad Marienberg

BAD MARIENBERG. Beginning with the school year 2005/06 the Protestant high school opened its doors to 56 students, offering a sophisticated morning and afternoon curriculum. Everything is still new and has to be tried out first in an experimental way.

Dirk Weigand, teacher for German, geography, and mathematics, says: "We are an all-day school with high standards. The all-day concept is of the utmost importance to us, because students who run into problems frequently lack proper guidance and supervision in the afternoon. We will also modernize our educational methods – already the set-up of the classroom with movable furniture and mobile black board systems make traditional didactic teaching virtually impossible."

In Bad Marienberg many things differ from other schools. "We want to encourage social learning and we want to challenge weaker students just as much as we challenge good ones. In the new building every classroom will have learning niches: This will enable smaller groups within the class to segregate themselves and to congregate with one another, without being disturbed. There are leisure rooms in

Every Child is Created in the Image of God

The Protestant Primary School Freienseen opened classes in the school year 2001/2002. It is located in a rural region. The Reverend Ulf Häbel is considered to be the founding father of the institution. Andrea Seeger poses the questions to him.

You see yourself as a village pastor and you also call the institution a "village school" – why?

The village is an architypal living space for children. Here they grow up and get to know the history of the place and its inhabitants. They experience, how in this

living space of managable size people become cooperative social beings, who learn to regard the shared environment as their home. They also experience the deficits, as – for example – insufficient infrastructure, not enough jobs with sufficient income, and neighbourhood conflicts. They learn to take part in village life, participate in marketing events, church services and festivities, and they can also come in close contact with the elderly, as – for instance – in charitable projects. On the last Friday of every month the children show in public what and how they learn. In the

same way that I as the pastor carry the vitalizing message of the Gospel into the village, the school influences the village through the children.

In the late nineties you were an untiring advocate of the Protestant primary school. Why is this type of school so important to you?

Children no longer have to commute twice a day for 45 minutes in overcrowded school busses. The second reason is that children can get individual attention in a school of managable size, where different age groups are taught together in the same classroom. Hence, they experience

“We Would like to Cultivate Social Learning“



Good feeling: The first day in the protestant school in Bad Marienberg in September 2005.

every tract, allowing students to withdraw and take a break. We will do away with the rigid 45 minute rhythm of classes. That will reduce the arbitrary interruption, disturbing the natural flow of learning,” the principal Hartwig Scheidt says. Team work has top priority. That’s not easy, because here too work has to be graded and regardless of proclaimed liberality and flexibility, teachers have to stick to a prescribed curriculum.

And what about the Protestant profile? Every Wednesday students and teachers attend a devotional service in the school here. Every Monday before commencement of formal classes, students “arrive” back from the weekend. Students should be encouraged to think up prayers, to write them down, and to present them in public.

Over and above this, the members of the Bad Marienberg school community will participate in charitable work. “I am considering the possibility of partnership with a home for the aged,” the principal says. Already grade five pupils would get, this way, the chance to interact with elderly people. The school is also looking forward to cooperating with business firms

and with trade and industry. A number of entrepreneurs belong to the sponsoring association (Förderverein) of the school. Moreover, the ‘Business Study Group (Studienkreis Wirtschaft) has expressed an interest. Principal Scheidt furthermore says: “We will start visiting companies – as early as grade five students will participate, in order to prepare themselves bit by bit and continuously for their practical training. We already have an offer from a company in the metalworking industry. Companies may, of course, also visit the school campus to introduce themselves and the kind of work they do.”

Uniform school clothing is envisaged to discourage brand name fetishism. What the school has in mind is a sweatshirt or a T-shirt with a logo in various colours. Trousers and shoes the students are free to choose by themselves. (as)

the village not only as a hick town with many inconveniences, but also as a quaint place, in which it is a pleasure to live. The third reason is that by doing so our church puts into actual practice its basic doctrine, which has its roots in the Reformation, namely the teaching that faith in God includes the cultivation of man. If you ask, what the church does with the message of salvation, many people here will say: Look at the Freienseen School, then you’ll know.

What is the difference between the Protestant Freienseen School

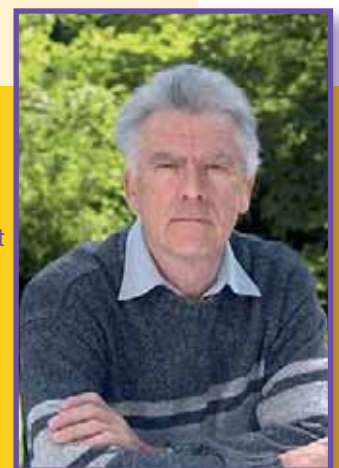
and a state controlled public primary school?

Every child is created in the image of God. That we believe. For this very reason every child with his or her peculiar talents and character traits is unique for us. The notion of a human being being created in God’s image carries with it dignity. This dignity is the point of departure for educational endeavours.

Has your school any particular future goals?

We would like to cultivate the school garden and to lay out the school yard in a way that would

come closer to meeting the needs of children. We would like to find out how the transitions – from family to kindergarten, from kindergarten to primary school, from primary school to more advanced schools – could be organized in the best way for children. And we would like to experiment on how to involve parents in the most appropriate way in these endeavours.



Ulf Häbel, Reverend



Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

On the occasion of Pentecost 2006 we are conveying to you and all our friends in partner churches the good wishes of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN).

You are receiving our "EKHN-Newsletter", of which I am the new editor-in-chief. Hence, I would like to use this opportunity to briefly introduce myself.

In August 2005 I became the successor of the Rev. Cordelia Kopsch, head of the Department for "Mission and Ecumenical Relations in the EKHN". Prior to this appointment I was the pastor of a rural congregation close to the Rhine River. However, ecumenical matters have always interested me. Now the relationship of the EKHN with partner churches, with missionary institutions and offices, and with the World Council of Churches (WCC) constitutes the substance of my work.

It is my sincere hope that, during the performance of my new duties, the opportunity will present itself that we will get to know each other personally. For I do wish to strengthen our partnership, so that friendships may grow and transcend confessional and geographical borders.

May the spirit and the blessing of God be with you and guide you in whatever you do!

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Walter Schneider

"A Time to Make Friends"

This is the motto of the FIFA World Soccer Cup 2006 in Germany, which will open on June 9 with the match Costa Rica-Germany in Munich and close on July 9 with the playoff in Berlin. The matches will be fought out in twelve different host cities. Frankfurt (Main), the metropolitan city of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN), will also host a number of games. Aside from some group matches, the quarter-finals will be fought out in this city as well.

The EKHN is the only Protestant Church in Germany that has appointed a pastor especially for the World Soccer Cup games. In July 2005 Reverend Hans-Joachim Fischer was appointed "World Soccer Cup Pastor" by the Church Board of the EKHN. He is himself an active athlete, who has in the past years kept himself busy, working in the "Church and Sports" committee. It'll be his job to provide church presentations in the Frankfurt Region for soccer fans coming

from all over the world. He wants to motivate church groups and church congregations to come or at least take an interest in sports events.

"A time to make friends" – this inviting slogan should apply to church life in general, so that the many guests, coming to the World Soccer Cup games, can feel the hospitality of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau. On Pentecost – four days before the commencement of the World Soccer Cup games – Church President, Dr. Peter Steinacker, together with Dr. Raban Tilman, Catholic Superintendent of Frankfurt, and Bishop Martin Hein from the Protestant Church of Hesse Electorate Waldeck, will celebrate a welcoming service at the "Römerberg" in Frankfurt (Main).

There are some thematic points of contact between Church and Sports: the idea of international community, Fair Play, and team spirit. Such a worldwide event as the World Soccer Cup also gives cause to think about global justice. (dk)

Report

Due to the initiative of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN), the first European Partnership Consultation with cooperating Protestant churches in Poland, the Czech Republic and Italy was scheduled for February 2006 and took place in Frankfurt (Main), Germany. In the concluding statement the delegates expressed their desire to focus future deliberations upon social services within the church context, church-state relations in an ever increasing secularised Europe, the exchange of clergymen and –women, and church workers, as well as internship in the social service network of the churches.

1 April 2006 Rev. Helga Tröskén (born in 1942) completed her final term as Regional Bishop of the Diocese of Rhine-Main. Initially she had been elected to this office in November 1987. At that time she was the first woman in Germany to hold such an episcopal position. As Regional Bishop she was very much engaged in the ecumenical movement and was a strong supporter of the partnership with the Presbyterian Church of the People's Republic of Korea (PROK). As her successor the Church Synod elected Rev. Gabriele Scherle.

In November 2005 the first meeting between high level representatives of the

Muslim community in the Federal State of Hesse and Church President, Dr. Peter Steinacker, took place. The atmosphere was open and friendly. It was decided to continue this high level dialogue and a meeting for a so called "days of interreligious dialogue" has already been scheduled for this year.

In cooperation with the "Near East School of Theology" (NEST) in Beirut, the EKHN started a training program for pastors to promote Christian-Islamic dialogue. Within the context of this project the first four pastors of the EKHN were sent to Lebanon in September 2005 to participate in a three-month course of studies. "One of the main things I learned was that for a dialogue to be successful, one should be ready to change one's own point of view," was the message one of the participants brought back to the EKHN. (all reports: dk)

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