

## “A Soul for Europe”

The partnership of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) with churches in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Italy exists now for more than fifty years. After the Second World War they were established with the aim to work actively for reconciliation between the people of our nations and later on also to step into the conciliar process for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. Today an important focus of the relationship is the ongoing process of building a united Europe.

“A Soul for Europe”, this motto of the former president of the Commission of the European Union, Jacques Delors, was on the minds of the delegates from different church bodies and diaconical institutions of our European partner churches who

participated in the first consultation held in February 2006 in the Center for Ecumenical Work of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau.

In a final statement all delegates committed themselves to work actively for the continuation of our partnership relations and to ask their church bodies to implement these also at the congregational level. The radical political and social changes in Central and Eastern Europe are still a great challenge for our churches. Multilateral relationships between the EKHN and the European partner churches should be used to search for common answers and for a common Protestant stance in regard to these challenges. All delegates agreed to work out a joint document, entitled “Our Charter for Europe”. This charter should formulate our common vision for Europe. (dk)

## Report

**New Provost for the Rhine-Main District Installed.** On Sunday, October 8, 2006, Reverend Gabriele Scherle (born 1952) was installed as the new Provost of the Church District Rhine-Main. As the provost of this administrative region she is also a member of the Leading Spiritual Council of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN). The formal act of inauguration took place in a special service, presided over by Church President Prof. Dr. Peter Steinacker. The Rev. Gabriele Scherle was elected on May 4, 2006 through the members of the Church Synod. She is the successor of the Rev. Helga Tröskén who was the first woman elected as provost. Gabriele Scherle is quite at home in the ecumenical movement. She has particularly close ties to the *Decade to overcome Violence* of the WCC, since she had been working from 1999 to 2004 as a peace vicar in the *Center for Ecumenical Work*.

**A New Partnership with the United Church of Christ.** In 2004 the EKHN-Synod decided to consolidate an altar and table fellowship with the United Church of Christ (UCC) in the US. The UCC is a mainstream Christian denomination of Protestant persuasion, standing within the tradition of the Reformation. It came into being when the Evangelical and Reformed Church, and the Congregational Christian Churches amalgamated in 1957. This new formation has about 6000 congregations, spread all over the US. There are about

1.6 million members. During the golden jubilee celebrations of the UCC in June of this year Church President Prof. Dr. Steinacker will sign a covenant between both of our churches. In the wake of this new partnership at the upper level the New York Conference of the UCC and the Deaneries of Frankfurt and Wiesbaden have decided to enter into a closer relationship with each other. Youth exchange programs, as well as the exchange of pastors and theologians could be a first step.

**Churches take up the Cause of the Poor.** From June 6 to 8, 2007 the prime ministers and heads of state from the so-called G8 countries will meet in Heiligendamm, Germany. Non-governmental organizations, as well as churches will use this occasion to make the public aware of injustice and violence all around the world. In addition they will take up the cause of people living below the poverty line. Different activities are planned, among others a church service near Heiligendamm on June 3, during which 30 000 candles will be lit. Each candle will stand for a child dying on this day because of poverty. (all reports: dk)

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

On the occasion of Pentecost 2007 I extend my good wishes to you by sending you the ninth newsletter. In the past year I already got to meet some of you. I was able to visit our friends in the Czech Republic, in Italy, and in North India, as well as our new partners from the United Church of Christ in the United States. These meetings impressed me very much. Hence, I'm looking forward to more encounters in our partner churches.

During the preparation of this newsletter I couldn't help noticing current events in Germany. Labor union members are demonstrating against raising the retirement age to 67. Politicians claim that our pension system can no longer be financed, because people in this country are getting increasingly older, while fewer children are being born. This edition of the newsletter deals with this demographic transformation, as well as with the response of the church to this dramatic change.

Yours sincerely,

*Walter Schneider*

Rev. Walter Schneider



PROTESTANT CHURCH  
IN HESSE AND NASSAU

# news letter

## Justice Between Generations is Important Solidarity Between the Young and the Old

How old will people become? How will young and old people relate to each other in the future? These days questions like this, having to do with the age composition of society, trigger off heated discussions in Germany.

Demographic change constitutes a major challenge. People in Germany can look forward to an ever-increasing life expectancy. The relative number of old people in society increases, because simultaneously the birth rate decreases. Presently Germany has a population of about 82 Million. It is foreseeable that this population will decline in the future. Rural areas will be affected the most.

Society changes. Today older people are more active than previous generations, needs and ambitions have changed. New facilities for everyday life and for leisure, as well as for housekeeping and for nursing become necessary. Questions will have to be answered. How can the pension payments for so many old people be financed? How can an elaborate and expensive health-care system continue to provide coverage in old age?

Moreover, becoming older will not only be accompanied with side-effects like the prolongation of sickness and being cared for: The extended life span will provide most people with additional years of active life, during which they are no longer required to work for a living. Whoever is healthy and affluent enough will be able to use these golden years for sportive activities and educational pursuits, for more involvement in family affairs, for the cultivation of friendship – and for participation in church life.

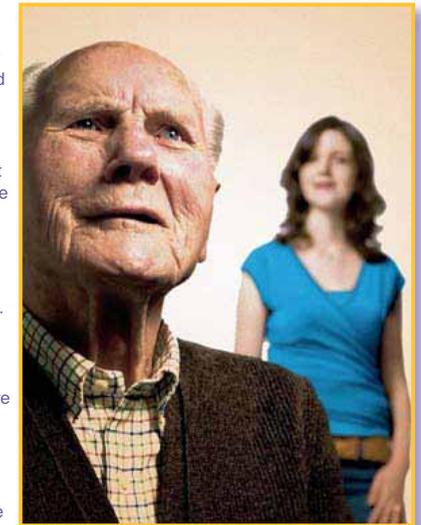
The Protestant church itself is affected by this social change. The population in Germany used to be predominantly Protestant. In future there will be a decrease in membership in this denomination and there will be fewer congregations. The church strives to adjust to these changes. It is looking for ways of doing its work with and for older people. At the same time it is participating in public debates, pointing out ethical problems, central to the phenomenon of aging. The Rev. Friedhelm Menzel, an expert in the ministry for the aged and hospice work in the Social Service Agency of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN), says, “what’s at stake is the inclusion of the elderly in social life. Any kind of discrimination of these

people must be combated. We have to assure that people can live and die in dignity.” The church, as well as society at large have to accept that even old people are quite different from one another and that they wish to manage their lives in a variety of ways. What’s important is “justice between the generations”. All generations have an equal right to participate in life. For this reason EKHN advocates solidarity in old age and with the elderly.

In church services, lectures, as well as in holiday courses it thematizes generational togetherness. Not only does the church raise its voice, it also does practical work: In counseling facilities the Social Service of the Protestant Church supports needy persons and those in need of counseling. Sick and ailing persons receive treatment and care in 85 social service centers of the EKHN. Whoever needs more care than the family can provide, can spend the final years in one of 86 senior citizen or nursing homes or take up residence in one of the many rental facilities with a supporting staff. About 30 hospice groups provide support at home in other facilities for dying persons.

In its concern for very old people, the Rev. Menzel says, the Protestant Church is guided by the biblical insight that a long life – in spite of all kinds of physical ailments – is an expression of God’s blessing. All those who grow old owe their longevity not to themselves, but to God who promises: “And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you.” (Isa. 46: 4).

(mkr)



*Diaconical  
Social Services  
Plead for a Life  
in Dignity for the  
Aged.*

## Living Old Age in Faith

**Marie Granitza**, 86, has been a widow for about two years. The death of her late husband still causes her pain, but she looks back in gratitude on 30 years of married life. For her and her husband it was only natural to go to church. "Sunday was always a special day for us. I prepared the meal.



Then we went together to church. When we came back, we had

a festive dinner and even a glass of red wine." In her congregation, the Thomas Parish in Giessen, she likes especially the bright premises, in which the service is held. Unfortunately she is no longer able to attend regularly. When she still was able, she went to many meetings. But lately her hearing is deteriorating. However, she compensates

her failure to attend church by faithfully listening to Christian radio programs. A female volunteer worker from the visiting service of the Thomas Parish comes to her now once a week for two hours. The old lady feels well taken care of. She is a faithful woman and recalls as a life motto her confirmation scripture verse (Revelation 2,10): "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

**Hubert Breidenbach** has been active in the Darmstadt Southeast Congregation for many years. The former teacher of religion and English is deputy chairman of the parish council. Together with other elders of the congregation he helps setting up church services, makes distinctive contributions to the youth program, visits the elderly and the sick, manages church facilities, represents the congregation in public, has a word to say when



positions are to be filled in the congregation, and is responsible for the parish budget. Aside from that Hubert Breidenbach delivers the mail in the congregation. "That keeps me fit," he says with a beaming face. "My emotions for this congregation run deep, for it has given me a lot." Years ago when he settled here, coming from a strange city, he got to know many people through the congregation. Some of them have become friends. "Even long before I reached retirement, I started to think about what I would do. It was clear to me that I would give back to my congregation what it had given me. That's what makes me happy and keeps me young," Hubert Breidenbach says with a smile. (mkr/as)

## Different Generations under the Same Roof

In former times extended families were the rule and aging in Germany took place within a nurturing environment. However, today the family has shrunk to its rudimentary form, the number of single households in the Rhine-Main region is steadily growing. And what is to happen when people grow older? The Ihrigs, a married couple of ministers, living in the vicinity of Wiesbaden, asked themselves this question – and found an answer. Brigitte and Reinhold Ihrig have bought the "Löwenhof" (Lion's Court), a decrepit farmstead, in Diedenbergen, a small town near Wiesbaden. They intend to convert it into living facilities for the elderly and the handicapped, while providing at the same time apartment space for families and singles. Under the same roof they are to form a cohesive household. Stables, barns, storage rooms, and residential buildings are to be rebuilt by 2008 to provide two houses for families, plus 13

apartments, along with rooms for common use and therapeutic facilities. Together with their four daughters they have developed a concept for living together. The Christian aspect of sharing, helping, and well-being plays a big role in this scheme. So does the wish to make it possible to grow old in dignity. "During my student days I lived in a commune and I can't get it out of my system," Reinhold Ihrig says, who – aside from that – comes from a large family. Financing the project was not difficult at all, because the creditors were impressed by the concept. It is up-to-date and just what's needed today, they summed it up. It is in the trend that families start thinking about how older kinfolk can be integrated into family life. As Ihrig points out, "luxurious facilities cannot be provided. Nonetheless, envisioned are bright and friendly living spaces between 35 and 70 square meters, which will



also be suitable for handicapped persons." Out in the yard there is a 550 square meter area for gardening. Ihrig imagines that it could be turned into a herbal garden or a vegetable plot. But what will become of all of this "the people who'll live here will have to decide," he adds. To this end a users association will be founded. It is planned that future inhabitants will also have some say in what living spaces will be constructed and in what way. Aside from that they are expected to find organizational solutions for living together. Each one should be able to live self-

determined within his or her four walls. However, the "Löwenhof" will have other spaces available for mutual experiences. "In the former vocational kitchen common meals could be prepared," Reinhold Ihrig muses and adds, "a little shop on the farmstead can be turned into a café where people could meet." The Ihrigs will, in any case, move to the farm. One daughter already lives there. She is a trained nurse and is qualified to supervise shifts. "If someone requires nursing, he or she will not have to be moved to a nursing home and can stay in the familiar environment," Ihrig says. (as)

*The farmstead  
ambiance of the  
"Löwenhof" is  
to be preserved.  
Stables and  
barns will be  
converted into  
apartments.*

## Spiritual Support and Loving Care for Old People

"I'm for human beings here a kind of reminder that God hasn't abandoned them," Winfried Hess says. He is pastor in the Hufelandhaus in Frankfurt, a home for senior citizens with nursing facilities for 140 people. Many, as he points out, had already given up on life, when admitted. They were old, weak, and ailing. Every year about 30 to 40 inhabitants in here are dying. "Newly admitted people frequently say that they no longer want to live," the minister reports. Some of them have very little time left before they pass away. Hence, spiritual support for the dying constitutes a major portion of the day-to-

day work of the minister. It goes without saying that he is not able to do this work alone; he is part of a team. The Rev. Hess points out that one of his main tasks is the training of volunteer helpers. "The concept of getting people of the suburb involved makes much sense to me," he says. "In about 70 or 80 hours they learn, for instance, to listen. They are provided with an instrumentarium that enables them to perceive what the other person wants to express. They learn how to decelerate psychological tensions, which the patients sometimes bring with them into the home," Rev. Hess says. The volunteers are in this

house one of the most important assets, for "people in here need nothing as much as contact with other human beings." At the same time Rev. Hess is making no secret of an ambivalence, which keeps bothering him. "As a Christian I feel the need to treat the people here with loving care; the other side of the coin is that human beings are kept alive at any cost." Again and again he sees how the soul is ready to die, while the body is held captive by an elaborate apparatus and by less than natural means of administering nourishment. "In such cases only a



*Rev. Winfried Hess, Brigitte Kramer, Helen Bingemer-Eichhöfer (from left)*

clear and simple power of attorney form, respecting the dying wishes of the patient, to be signed by a relative can help. Otherwise the patients' torment will be prolonged in intensive care." In the Rev. Hess' mind lifesaving at any cost is not the right way. He sees his work not only as a difficult task, but also as a blessing,

"because many of the elderly are happy to see me." Moreover, he gets to see beautiful examples of tender human interaction. For instance, a bedridden elderly lady shared her four walls with another female patient who was very sick. This elderly lady was urged to let herself be moved to another room. However, she insisted on staying in the room. No longer able to get up out of bed, she rang the buzzer when her companion felt particularly bad and needed help. This way she was able to be right there and to provide support when her roommate's life came to an end. (as)

### Coordinating Efforts

Pastoral care in homes for the aged, hospitals, and hospices is in need of more coordination. These three areas of work should be moved together as closely as possible. For that very reason the Protestant Church of Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) has created ministry departments for senior citizens, hospitals, and hospices, the so-called "AKH" services. These service departments are assigned respectively to the various deaneries. At this level it will be decided, which home for the aged and which hospital needs how much pastoral service. Aside from that the training of volunteers will be professionalized.