Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I am 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.

This year’s Newsletter concentrates on the theme “Church in the World, for the World.” Thereby we want to show, what it means to the EKhN that all church actions also have to do with the society in which we live. Or as the Church President, Dr. Jung, says in this main article: “We do not only celebrate our faith behind the thick walls of the church, we also live and practice it in the outside world.”

We always see ecclesial action as a contribution to the development and benevolent structuring of our society and as an overall community service – regardless of a person’s looks, faith or social status.

May the presented news arouse your interest. Moreover, pray the Grace of God strengthen our ecumenical fellowship.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr. Volker Jung

Editorial

“For all who pray in secret”

New Faith Courses in EKhN Congregations

What does it mean to be a Christian? Most of the people in Germany are baptized and are members of the Protestant or Catholic Church. However, many pray very little about their faith or about the Bible. Hence, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has launched so-called “Faith Courses for Adults” to take place in all congregations and church institutions on a regular basis.

The EKhN, fully supporting this initiative, has entrusted the Rev. Klaus Douglass, staff member of the “EKH N Center for Prelection and Divine Services” in Frankfurt, to help congregations organize these missionary activities. According to the Rev. Douglass, significantly more courses with the theme “Believing as Adults” have taken place this year than in the previous year.

In the EKhN region more than 60 congregations and church institutions have sent out invitations to practical introductions to the Christian faith, which started in Spring 2012.

Some 40 or so courses will follow in the Fall of this year and more than 130 in the year 2013.

The EKhN has developed and compiled comprehensive materials for this purpose. The programs are for people of different backgrounds, for the well educated as well as for persons without much formal schooling.

The courses follow ecumenical examples like the “Alpha Courses.” Among others are themes like “Expedition to the Edge” or “Faith has Reasons” which encourage personal discoveries.

The idea behind all of this is to provide information about the notion of God, the meaning of life, about Jesus Christ and about heaven and earth. “However”, as a minister, who organized one class, stated: “we do not expect any decision at the end. We want to teach and learn together openly, without prejudice or narrow-mindedness.”

Term of Office of the Church President’s Deputy comes to an end

Gerdina Kopsch’s tenure as deputy of the Church President expires on 31 January 2013. The syndik did not agree to an extension of her term of office. The new Church Order stipulates that the position does not have to be filled full-time; the work can be done on the side by a theological member of the church board. The syndik in Spring 2012 has decided to announce the position as a full-time job for the next term.

Because of her long service as head of the ecumenical department and her involvement in inter-confessional matters, Gerdina Kopsch is today well-known to many partners.

New Set-Up for Peace Work in the Ecumenical Center

Last year the Federal Republic of Germany suspended the compulsory military service and the German Armed Forces were converted into a professional military force, composed of volunteers. Hence, compulsory alternative civil service has become superfluous, so the reception of conscientious objectors was abolished. Apart from dealing with ethical and theological issues, having to do with peace, the peace office of the ecumenical center will concentrate in future on a new theme: Education for Peace, i.e. proposals as to what the church’s stance on military deployment and other means of securing peace should be.

The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKhN) supports the Internationalization of the EMS. In the past year the syndik of the former Evangelical Mission Society in South Western Germany (EMSG) decided to revise its statutes and to change its name on 1 January 2012. In this way the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany together with partner churches in Africa, Asia and Germany became an international fellowship with equal status. The former distinction between members and partner churches has been dropped. The new name, “Evangelical Mission in Solidarity” indicates this change. The EKhN has advocated this direction for many years.

Church in the World, for the World

by Rev. Dr. Volker Jung, Church President

Our Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKhN) is versatile and colorful. That is why we call ourselves “Protestant Church, Church of the Gospel”. We are set on spreading the Word of God and living in accordance with it. An important part thereof is our concern about the welfare of every human being and society at large. Out of our awareness and conviction we are a church that cares about this world, spreading God’s good tidings everywhere.

Our church services, pastoral care, our sacred concerts, our venerable church edifices, educational opportunities we offer, our worldwide relations and ecumenical partnerships, as well as our social involvement are part and parcel of our mission. In Jeremiah, Chap. 23, Verse 7 we read: “Seek the peace of the city”. These words might be augmented: “Seek the peace of the country, Seek the peace of all people!”

A living church is the sum total of ideas and the engagement of many participants. Our church forms a network: It has 1.7 million members in 1170 congregations in 47 deaneries. In addition there are many agencies with special assignments, as well as social clubs, clubs and social agencies and other institutions that also belong to this network. It grew historically and is constantly changing in response to requirements of the time.

The EKhN is interwoven with society in many ways. The German state adheres to the principle of subsidiarity. If at all possible, it leaves matters of public interest to individuals, private groups or institutions like churches but still supports their activities. In this way child care centers, life counseling facilities, family programs, work with children and juveniles and residential accommodations for senior citizens are paid for entirely or in part through public funds. Medical services, provided in church-owned hospitals are covered by Medicare.

We as a church work in confidence together with government agencies. The Church Board, for instance, attends meetings with the state government and with political parties for public tasks. But we also take a critical and public stance on political issues. Among other things, we advocate the right of refugees to stay in Germany and they are a peace work group in the public debate, concerning the extension of the Fracturd airport. The EKhN is from way back a disputational, devotional and political church. Fundamental for its theological orientation and social engagement is the Confessing Church’s struggle against Nazism during the era of the “Third Reich”. This experience has left its imprint on our church to this day.

We do not only celebrate our faith behind the thick walls of the church, we also live and practice it in the outside world. Christian faith reaches out into the world. It cannot be reduced to loneliness, nor can it be limited to a mere code of ethics that provides a set of values for society as a whole and its members. For us it is important to conceive rituals and ethics as a totality and to see it that the component parts remain interconnected. Keeping both parts in mind is essential to bearing witness to God, as revealed in the Bible.

In our congregations and in our church, people involved have come to realize that everyday life and faith belong together. Where there is lacking piousness loses touch with reality. But where, in contrast, self-re sponsible action goes hand in hand with faith in God, faith accords meaning in the lives of individuals and the life of the community. In this way our church takes on public content. The many different contributions people make church life are of benefit to all.
Portrait of a Pastor, serving in Crisis Counseling

The siren goes off. Or the dispatch center gets an emergency call. Once again something has happened. Police and firefighters respond immediately, also pastors who provide counseling in emergencies. In cases of accidents, suicides, at the scene of a crime, in natural disasters, but also when natural deaths occur, they provide first aid for the souls of family members.

Andreas Marn is one of these pastors who serve in crisis counseling. The Rev. Marn is a pioneer who was there when in 1993 pastoral care in emergencies was institutionalized in Wiesbaden by the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN). His motive was of a personal nature. He mentions, "when my daughter was struck by epilepsy, I came to realize, how important it is to have in a situation like that a basis of communication with people who understand." That is why the Rev. Marn and his fellow campaigners wanted to provide a service, falling under the heading "Spiritual Counseling in Emergency Cases." "However, we were not just looking for experienced ministers, but also for people with other skills, who find in the life-saving services," Marn explains. He saw the St. John's Ambulance (a Red Cross-like organization of the Protestant Church) in action when he was deployed with them in Romania. Good about this experience was working together with people from a number of different occupations. Within the administrative area of the EKHN there are today 22 teams with 600 people involved in emergency counseling; they come from many different walks of life. About one third of them are full-time staff members of the church, the others are volunteers who earn their living as plumbers, teachers or secretaries. Andreas Marn no longer moves out on emergency calls as much as he used to, which he regrets. He is busy now with winning new co-workers and organizing training and updating courses for them. To the question about the worst emergency he had to attend, Marn replies, "strangely enough, the really big cases do not stick that much in my mind. For me the unexciting emergencies within the domestic realm are much more memorable. For example, when a spouse dies and the surviving widow or widower cannot cope with the loss and feels all alone." With the general trend of individualization in our society the number of such cases are on the increase.

Interview with Sebastian Parker

Sebastian Parker is head of the Central Services Department of the administration of the EKHN. Among other things he is working out a concept for sustainable sourcing.

Mr. Parker, you are the head of the Central Services Department. What is your task there?

The Central Services Department with its 40 staff members assure the smooth functioning of the church administration and its working sector. This involves ensuring that our premises are clean and accessible, that work areas are clean and properly heated, and that all equipment and machines function properly. Moreover we are responsible for the mail management office, the mail room, the print shop and the canteen. Our department is also in charge of the motor pool and the care service of the church administration. Aside from that we provide catering for conferences and from time to time we organize various festivities. We also purchase almost all commodities which the administration needs: anything from pencils to staff cars, desks to telephones. Peculiar to the EKHN is that it runs a small retail in the wine cellar.

What should the church take into consideration, when making purchases?

A significant number of people in society expect that the church holds to its ethical standards when procuring merchandise. Safeguarding the creation and respecting human life belong to this circle of ethics. Hence, not only should ridiculous money management be strictly adhered, but also ecological and social criteria have to be observed.

Three criteria are of major importance when sustainability is concerned:

- economical, ecological and social.
- How do you make sure that purchased products do not violate these standards?

Here we are still facing major challenges! Let’s look at a simple example: When buying a flower bouquet we can check if the social standards are observed by the florist we are doing business with. Does he pay fair wages; does he refrain from child labour? But we have very limited influence on the huge business of flower cultivation. Hence, we make it clear to local retailers and cultivators of flowers, under what conditions the church will accept them as suppliers.

At the same time we insist that they in turn scrutinize labels and official seals that vouch for the adherence to social standards, when making purchases. Unfortunately, much still remains to be done.

The big question remains: Is the whole business still economical, if all these standards are maintained?

In some product segments sustainable products are indeed more expensive. However, by reappraising suppliers, with whom we have had business, and considering the array of products and the amounts we purchase, or by bundling demands we can achieve astonishing economical results which will in turn have an impact on sustainable sourcing.

From Kindergarten to Child and Family Center

Not only in medicine is there a call for the holistic approach, but also in the work of church congregations. Whereas formerly kindergartens, senior citizen groups and good women’s support initiatives existed side by side, but had essentially nothing to do with each other, except individual members of the various groups just meeting once per month in a hall. Today the different groups of people and types of facilities are quite interwoven within the parish, supporting and working with each other in an innovative way. There is, for instance, the Luther Congregation in Giessen. It has about 30 fulltime staff members to manage a nursery school (for children under the age of 3), a daycare facility (for children 3 to 6 years old), and an after-school care club (for youngsters between 6 and 12 years of age). The entire arrangement is called “Child and Family Center”. Bern Völl manages it now in his fifth year. The kindergartens are separated from the congregational meeting rooms, the parsonage and the daycare facility just by a courtyard. At the moment it has six toddler groups, because the child and family center has been enlarged in the last couple of years. Völl reports, “we have now 30 places for toddlers from three months to the age of three years, 46 places for children from three to six years, and an after-school care club for youngsters from six to twelve years of age.”

“We are growing bit by bit,” he adds. Parents are expected to get involved in the activities of the facilities and are encouraged to come to the center, when they seek answers to their problems. “We want to reach them exactly where, where they need us,” Völl notes. For instance, on the initiative of a mother a parent-child group was founded, which is open to all. Aside from work with children, work with seniors citizens also takes up a significant place in the congregation. For them there is a café with afternoons devoted to particular themes, a “creativity club”, as well as a physical exercise program, which is particularly suited to the needs of seniors. However, work with senior citizens does not take place in isolation. It is much rather integrated intimately into the general concept of the child and family care center. “That’s exactly what is meant: the center is for all generations – a place for encounter, for gathering experiences, and for learning.” Bernd Völl says. “People networking” is the overall aim, for it brings people of all ages together, from toddlers to senior citizens.

Already small children have fun at learning.