

New EKD Council Elected

In November 2015, EKHN Church President Dr. Volker Jung was elected to the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). During the EKD Synod meeting in Bremen, and as one of 23 candidates, he was named to one of the 14 seats on the nationwide executive council of the Protestant Church. This makes him the first leading member of the clergy from Hesse Nassau to hold a position in the highest representative body of German Protestantism in 42 years. The last EKHN representative was Helmut Hild, who served as EKHN Church President from 1969 to 1985, and who was elected to the Council in 1973. Following his election Jung said: "I am very pleased to be able to bring the experiences of Hesse Nassau to the Council, and to be able to share responsibility for the EKD." In his campaign speech, the EKHN Church President pointed out the church's role in taking on the current social challenges. He cited the dedicated involvement of many congregations in providing assistance to refugees as an example. This

involvement serves to help people in need – and thus is in accordance with the mission of the church. Christians can also help insure that "the coexistence of denominations, religions and non-religious persons succeeds in our society." In conclusion, Dr. Jung encouraged the synod participants: "Let us, as Protestants, speak with confidence in our hearts about our beliefs – in public debates but also, and especially, with our children." In addition to his election to the EKD Council, Volker Jung was also voted to be the new chairman of the board of the Joint Association of Protestant Media Communications in Frankfurt (Gemeinschaftswerk der Evangelischen Publizistik (GEP)). In this position he is at the forefront of the group of companies to which the Protestant news agency (evangelische Presseagentur epd), the monthly magazine "chrison" and also the Protestant journalism school in Berlin as well as the production company "Matthias-Film" belong. (vr / dk)

News Items

Dr. Volker Jung Reconfirmed as Church President. During its autumn conference in November 2015, the EKHN Synod reconfirmed Dr. Volker Jung as Church President by an overwhelming majority. Thus he will lead the 1.6 million strong EKHN for an additional eight years as of 2017. Jung first took up this position, which can be likened to that of a bishop, in 2009 as successor to Peter Steinacker (1943-2015). In his campaign speech he called for a church "with wide open windows and doors." It should see itself "as a church in this world and as a church for this world." (dk)

Annegret Puttkammer Reelected Provost for North Nassau. Also on the agenda of the synod meeting past November was the reelection of the Provost for North Nassau. The duration for the term of office is six years, and the synod must make its decision about a possible reelection one year prior to the end of the term. Annegret Puttkammer was reelected by a large majority, and her new term is to begin in 2017. As an ecclesiastic leader, she is responsible for approximately 230,000 church members in 169 congregations with about 200 pastors. In her campaign speech she stated that "it is important that we make

ourselves known as Protestants and that we show our profile towards society – sometimes proclaiming, sometimes charitable, sometimes political." (dk)

New Church Councils and Deanery Synods Elected. The final results of the church council elections were available as of July 2015, and the newly elected councils took up their work in September. Of the 12,905 candidates, 47 percent were new prospects for such positions. In the end, exactly 9,838 of the candidates were elected to the church council positions, and of these 258 are youth delegates. At 58.5 percent the women's quota remained the same as that of the last election. Following the church council elections, the deanery synods were newly constituted, and the newly elected EKHN Synod is to hold its first meeting in June 2016. (dk)

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
I send you greetings from the Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) and wish you a blessed Pentecost.
"The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself."

(Leviticus 19:34)

This biblical summons has pre-occupied our church time and time again during the past years. It resonates – as is shown by the overwhelming amount of volunteer help and financial commitments for the refugees which our church receives. The situation for people in the Near East and in other crisis areas in Africa and in Asia has worsened dramatically during the past year. Many have set out on the difficult path of escape to Europe, and over one million refugees requested asylum in Germany in 2015. We are in close cooperation with our partner church in Italy, the Waldensian Church, which has integrated Christians throughout Africa, Latin America and Asia into its congregations via its "Es-sere Chiesa Insieme" (be church together) project. Christians in our church congregations dedicate themselves to a welcome and acceptance culture for refugees. You will find some examples of this in our current Newsletter.

I wish you an enjoyable read.
May God's Spirit strengthen our ecumenical fellowship.
Yours in Christ,

Detlev Knoche
Rev. Detlev Knoche



news letter

"Helping Refugees Find Their Way!"

The Church in Germany Supports the "Welcome Culture"

Far more than one million people have arrived in Germany since the summer of 2015 after fleeing wars and conflicts, many of them from Syria and Afghanistan. The vast majority of the German population holds a positive attitude towards them and the task of providing a secure haven for these displaced persons, and towards opening a new home for many of the arrivals. All the churches in Germany dedicate themselves to those seeking help, often combining their efforts with other political and social initiatives. The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) appeals to its congregations in many ways, and asks that they continue to help the refugees. But it is also necessary to address fundamental questions concerning migration. Many refugee activities are in the responsibility of EKHN's diaconical service "Diakonie Hessen." According to Church President Volker Jung, the main challenge this spring of 2016 is to make sure that refugees in the country are treated humanely and with respect. Most of them are sheltered in large collective accommodation facilities at the beginning of their stay in Germany. Over time, however, they will be moved to cities and to smaller towns. "As a church we can do more to make sure that refugees find their way in their new surroundings, and make sure they feel accepted and at home in their new environment. There are a multitude of possibilities and ideas to facilitate this. Each one not only serves to help the refugees, but also to promote community cohesion," Church President Jung explains in his open letter to all congregations. Christians affirm their position and their faith via their commitment towards the refugees. The Bible says: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." (3rd book of Moses - Leviticus 19:33-34) For Church President Jung, foreigners belong to the "social triad" which is often emphasized in the Bible: protect strangers, orphans and widows. The biblical and humanitarian responsibility is great. "Sometimes there is a big discrepancy between that which we can actually accomplish as compared to that which is needed. It is not always easy to withstand this tension. But this also leads to sensing an essential aspect of Christian faith. We rely on God's divine power



Gathering at the Billiard Table...

in all that we do," Church President Jung says. Last winter the EKHN Synod resolved to make EUR 21 million available to support assistance services for EKHN refugees during the coming years. Even now much is being done: nearly 100 professionals work in church projects for the refugees, for example as advisors at the initial registration centers of the various German states or at regional information centers. Nineteen staffers coordinate the volunteers, and EKHN currently operates ten own accommodation facilities with space for about 500 people. Many congregations and deaneries organize projects aimed at expanding the so-called "welcome culture." Volunteers and professionals work together in these projects and, for example, offer language classes, assistance with bureaucratic formalities and help in coping with everyday life. Tutoring for school children is offered at some locations, or meetings are held at cafes which encourage the making of new reciprocal acquaintances. A newly implemented continuing education program promotes intercultural competence in 600 Protestant nurseries and kindergartens as these are often the first places where refugees come into contact with local residents. Despite all the language, cultural and emotional barriers it is often the children who are most successful at getting along together. It appears that the efforts of the Church seem to convince many people for whom it wasn't very important in the past. Congregations report that these men and women participate much more in church activities, and through this they also (re-)gain personal access to the Christian faith. (mkr)

Kindergarten for Refugees

Biebesheim am Rhein has over 6,500 inhabitants. In September 2015, 400 refugees arrived in the town. Those responsible quickly organized tents and containers, and a meeting of volunteers was soon held. Fabia Krenz was also there. "I will do something with children," this was immediately clear for the director of the Protestant kindergarten. "We were given a container which we set up as a day care center," says Krenz. Furniture and toys were contributed from all sides. Fabia Krenz spent afternoons in the refugee kindergarten with 30 to 40 girls and boys. "I had a plan in mind, and I tried to set up a structure," she explains. But there is a difference between organizing 12 kindergarten teachers or 30 volunteers.

There were many various ideas. Some wanted to include the mothers as well. Others on the other hand sought more structure. In addition the high fluctuation among the children had to be dealt with, also on the part of the parents of the refugee children. "They have experienced very difficult situations," Fabia Krenz explains, "naturally they are skeptical and anxious when it comes to their children's welfare." "But the structural aspect kept gaining," the director of the day care center says. She was very happy to see that so many chipped in and helped. And she was also glad for an eight-year-old boy, who was actually too old for this child care program. "The boy had lost an eye, and his father insisted that he participate in our program," Krenz describes the situation. He was quite concerned and hardly took



Refugee Children at the Kindergarten in Biebesheim

his eyes off his son; he kept watching him through the window. "But finally he was able to let go, he finally saw that the child was in good hands with us," she is still happy about the good feeling this gave her. Fabia Krenz must also allay the fears the worried parents of her kindergarten children have, for example, that refugee children would take away the day care spots for the children of Biebesheim residents. Or that the refugees transmit infectious diseases. "I could understand many of their concerns," she says. It was illness and the winter which led to the end of the kindergarten container. "Some of the children in the class came down with fever, and the rumor of a contagious disease made the rounds."

Then they closed the day care center for a week – for safety reasons. Meanwhile the older children and the adults were freezing during their German lessons in a tent which was also much too small. "Then in December we made the container available for their lessons," Krenz said. Officially she and her team ended the day-to-day kindergarten operations with the distribution of packages for the Christmas holidays. Every child in the group was given gloves, cozy socks and / or a comfort blanket along with crayons. "If the children are received well by us, then their lives will be easier. And this will be of great benefit for all of us for our futures together," Fabia Krenz says and smiles. (as)

With a Driver's License and a Job

Everything about her is beaming. Jimika Ram is nearly 20 years old, she will celebrate her next birthday the end of July. She is pretty, smart and well-mannered. She grew up in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. In December 2011 she came to Germany with her mother. Soon afterwards her father joined them. They wound up in Gießen, and later in the refugee camp in Alsfeld. Now the family lives in Frankfurt.

When Ralf Müller, the education and ecumenical coordinator for the Alsfeld deanery, speaks about Jimika Ram he quickly begins to enthuse. When she arrived in Germany shortly before Christmas in 2011, as a 15-year-old with her parents, she couldn't speak a word of German. The young Afghan girl was assigned to a special class in the Max Eyth School, a vocational school with approximately 2,100 students. "That was my very first school. In Afghanistan I was not allowed to go to school for even one day," Jimika reports. The Taliban consider education for girls as superfluous. In addition, the Ram family belongs to the Hindu religious community, a harassed minority group in Afghanistan. Within one school year Jimika was able to complete her German basic school qualification. "All I had was the Google translator on my cell phone and children's books," she laughs. And, of course, plenty of help. The Alsfeld language learning center was involved and Ralf Müller assisted her, both within the framework of the language support program. "She is really amazing," Müller says. Jimika



Jimika Ram

regularly got up at five in the morning in order to study for her school qualification. With a successful result! Afterwards she found an apprenticeship in wholesale and retail sales in Frankfurt. She also found an apartment for her parents and herself. They still hardly speak any German, and they don't hold jobs. Thus their daughter must bridge the gap of caring for her parents on the one hand while on the other hand going out and learning the customs of this country. Meanwhile she has moved out, and now shares an apartment with a work colleague. She quit the apprenticeship after a few months, "too much pressure," she says. But her boss insisted on keeping her. She then worked as a

temporary assistant, and acquired further qualifications in courses. Now she works in the company as a wholesale and retail sales woman – as planned – only that the path to achieving this goal turned out to be different. "I have gotten my driver's license," she says proudly. She never would have dared dream this: the little girl from Afghanistan who was not even allowed onto the balcony in Kabul now works, drives a car, goes to the movies, and meets with friends. "My life has changed so significantly over the past four years that I can scarcely believe it. And it was Ralf Müller of the Protestant church who helped me. I will always be grateful to him," Jimika Ram promises. (as)



Farhad Mostaschari

"I Have Found a Home Here"

WIESBADEN. Those seeking Farhad Mostaschari blessing for becoming Christian must successfully complete 100 units in his baptism class. "People have to really work for my class," the Iranian born Mostaschari says with a laugh. This doesn't seem to be a deterrent as currently there

are 30 Iranians and Afghans attending his class at the Congregation of the Resurrection in Wiesbaden. All of them want to become Christian, and they make a big effort in order to reach their goal. Among each other they speak Farsi, which works out very well. "Next Sunday the Pastor will

baptize three members of our class," the 54-year-old joyfully notes. "Then there will be a big celebration," he adds. He is a member of the church council in his Wiesbaden congregation as well as a member of the ecumenical committee. "Everyone is very kind to me," he says, "I have found a home here." Pastor Roland Falk would help him any time he should need advice and assistance. And Klaus Endter, who until recently was holder of the profile post for ecumenism

in the deanery of Wiesbaden and who is now retired, is always at his side. "I don't know anyone who is quite like him," Endter says full of admiration. "Those who have gone through his baptism class usually stay the course," Endter says, with praise for Mostaschari's member oriented work. The Iranian came to Wiesbaden 25 years ago via Bremen, Hannover and Dortmund. He was baptized while still in Iran, and following his move to Wiesba-

den he founded a home church. "Initially eight, then ten, and even twelve people met in an apartment of only 34 square meters," Endter says. "Space wise this was simply no longer possible to handle. We looked for a larger meeting space and found the congregation of the Church of the Resurrection." Iranian church services have also been held there for nearly five years meanwhile. Recruitment problems? Not an issue! (as)