

»Reformation and One World«

Report to the General Synod
by Church President Dr. Dr. h. c. Volker Jung
June 2016



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EDITORIAL

According to the Church constitution, the General Synod of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) is the main authoritative body of EKHN. The General Synod enacts laws, elects the principal bodies of the Church (including the Church President), makes budget decisions and defines the main political positions of the Church. These positions are prepared by committees of the Synod and regional working groups. Head of the General Synod is its speaker, currently Dr. Ulrich Oelschläger. The General Synod meets twice a year, in late spring and in late autumn.

The term for the General Synod is six years, and delegates are elected by the Deanery Synods. In June 2016 we held the constituent assembly for the 12th Church Synod and its 1st session.

According to Article 47 of the Church Constitution, the Church President presents a report to the General Synod on the situation of the Church and in society once a year during the spring session. In the past years his annual reports were oriented towards the themes for the years of the Reformation Decade. Quoting Psalm 24:1 **“The Earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it”** he continued this direction this year, and his report has the theme **“Reformation and One World”**.

With this English translation of his report, it is our aim to make it accessible to all our ecumenical partners in Africa, Asia, the United States of America, the Near East and Europe, and to all the ecumenical bodies with which the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau is related.

With kind regards

Detlev Knoche

(Secretary for Ecumenical Relations of EKHN)

Director of the Ecumenical Center of EKHN and EKKW)



Dear Mr. Speaker,
dear Members of the High Synod,

In the past years, my annual reports were oriented towards the themes for the years of the Reformation Decade. I would like to continue this direction in this year, too. When the themes were planned no one could have foreseen how current the topic for 2016 – “Reformation and One World” – would be.

There are two fundamental approaches to this theme. One approach describes the worldwide significance of the Reformation. “The Reformation has become a global citizen.” This is how Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, described it. This approach permits the description that the central emphasis of the Reformation regarding the grace of God did not only leave its imprint in Wittenberg, not only in Germany, but that it also initially touched Europe and then spread beyond to Christian congregations and churches worldwide. Currently approximately 400 million people consider the Reformation as the basis for their religious faith. The Reformation, however, is not only a global citizen in that people of faith know they are directly united by the Reformation. It can be said that core issues of the Reformation also shaped the development of political values and structures, and they influenced other denominations and religions. An example was the demand associated with the priesthood of all believers, that all people should be enabled to read the Bible on their own in order to be able to form their own opinions, and which undoubtedly brought forth an enormous push for literacy. It also changed the culture for religious literature.

There is a second approach to the theme which – entirely within the spirit of the Reformation – is oriented towards the universal dimension of the biblical message. It is this approach in particular which I have chosen for this report. This is also expressed in the choice of the Bible verse: “The Earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” (Psalm 24:1) Here it says that God, in whom we believe, is God for this one world. This one world is a gift from the hands of God. And it is and remains in God’s hands – with all its beauty and with all its horrors, as animate and inanimate nature, with all its creatures, with all people, with their talents and abilities and in all their need for redemption. This Psalm purposely makes a case against human claims to power. It is not people who rule over this one world, but it is God. This world is entrusted to people as a “House for the Living” (Lebenshaus) (Erich Zenger).¹ Pope Francis described what this means in his newest encyclical, “Laudato si”. It has the subtitle “On Care for Our Common Home”. The encyclical begins with ecological issues, and deepens these into issues of living together within a broad sense. Dr. Martin Luther King described this global perspective very

1 Erich Zenger, Psalms. Commentary, German edition, vol. 3, Freiburg inter alia, 2003, p. 95.

impressively in 1964 already, during his acceptance speech following the award of the Nobel Peace Prize. He said: "This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu – a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace."²

Now the question can be asked: But did the reformers not have an eye yet on this global dimension? Wasn't it the case instead, that ideas were limited during the Reformation? Concentrating more on local community applications? Nation states did not even exist yet at the time. And how strict the separations from Jews and Muslims were – through to nowadays unacceptable statements for us. Doesn't this preclude simply bridging the gap between the Reformation and global responsibility for one world? It is definitely important to be aware of this distance. Indeed, during the time of the Reformation the liberating message of the Gospel was not associated with global responsibility as we know it today. What was seen, however, and what was newly developed conceptually was: receiving the grace of God – regardless of human performance – liberates and strengthens people from the inside out, but it does not lead to simply nurturing inwardness. In his treatise "On the Freedom of a Christian" Martin Luther described exactly this. The freedom gained from the gospel frees one to take on responsibility in this world and for this world. This freedom doesn't serve to do everything with the aim of securing one's own life and one's own identity. Rather it further evolves towards seeing one's own life in connection with the common good. If we follow this trail and question what this means for us nowadays then we can only do this within a global perspective, the perspective of the one world.

This perspective of the one world has a further justification, and it lies within an understanding of church. For the reformers it was not about establishing a new church. Instead it was their aim to reform the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The original meaning of the word Catholic is "universal". The assertion that the Church of Jesus Christ – beyond any confessional divisions – is one church throughout the world was never abandoned. This is why a single church - in its organizational form and in the plurality of its individual congregations - can only see itself as a part of this one worldwide Church of Jesus Christ. This is also why the fundamental article of our church constitution begins with the words: "The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau stands in the unity of the one universal and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, which is present everywhere, where the word of God is proclaimed clearly and the sacraments are administered justly." It further states – to some extent as a coalescence of this basic provision: "It promotes the community of Protestant Christians in Germany and serves the unity of Christianity throughout the world."

In this year's report I would like to take a closer look at how we, as EKHN, approach this.

The report is divided into three sections:

1. Living Communion
2. Global Responsibility
3. Local Challenges

2 Quoted from: Reformation und die Eine Welt. Das Magazin zum Themenjahr, published by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), Hannover 2015, p. 90.

1. Living Communion

1.1 Organizational Connections

The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) is closely connected with Christianity worldwide. Our ecumenical bond can initially be recognized by our connections with other member churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). At the same time, EKHN belongs to the Union of Protestant Churches as a United Christian Church.

We are a member of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). CPCE has its offices in Vienna and, considering its importance, it has a rather small organizational staff. In addition to other measures, we currently support the work carried out by CPCE in that an EKHN clergyman, Dr. Mario Fischer, works there. Almost all Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist Churches of Europe belong to CPCE – together this encompasses 105 churches.

Also worth mentioning with view to Europe is that EKHN, via the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), belongs to the Conference of European Churches (CEC) to which also Orthodox, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches in Europe belong in addition to Protestant Churches. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the CEC, but it cooperates with them via the Council of the (Catholic) Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE). Within the CEC work the Churches' Commission for Migrants is of particular importance to us, it is where we closely follow issues concerning refugees and migration – not least because Doris Peschke serves and has served as General Secretary of this Commission for many years. She is a former Secretary of EKHN's Church Development Services.³

Since it was signed just over 15 years ago, the Charta Oecumenica serves as a fundamental guideline for ecumenical cooperation in Germany and in Europe. It functions as an ecumenical agenda for the cooperation of the churches in and for Europe – which proves to be more necessary than ever in view of recent political developments.

Naturally EKHN belongs to the Community of Churches via EKD, which is united worldwide in the World Council of Churches (WCC). In addition we are members of two mission societies – the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) based in Stuttgart, and the United Evangelical Mission (Vereinte Evangelische Mission - VEM) based in Wuppertal. Both have made significant adjustments during the past years and have evolved into international communities, also thanks an initiative introduced by EKHN. Here a differentiation between member churches and partner churches was overcome in favor of equal treatment for all members. Our direct ecumenical partnerships in Africa and Asia are integrated into these mission societies, and they serve as our agencies for international volunteer services.⁴

1.2 Ecumenical Partnerships

A special manner of nurturing worldwide communion is by way of direct ecumenical partnerships. In Europe we have partnership relations with the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in the Czech Republic, with the Polish Ecumenical Council, with the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession as well as with

3 In this connection it is also worth mentioning the CEC initiative which addresses global issues concerning environmental ethics: the European Christian Environmental Network.

4 For this section, see also: Ökumene im 21. Jahrhundert. Bedingungen- theologische Grundlagen- Perspektiven, (Ecumenism in the 21st Century. Conditions – Theological Foundations – Perspectives) published by the Evangelical Church in Germany, EKD Text 124, Hannover 2015.

the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland, and with the Waldensians in Italy. In Africa we have partnership relations with the Presbyterian Church in Ghana, the Moravian Church in South Africa and with the North Western Diocese and the Karagwe Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as well as the Moravian Church in Tanzania. EKHN's Asian partnerships are manifold. In India we have exchanges with the Amritsar, Krishna-Godavari and East-Kerala Dioceses, in Indonesia with the Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa (GMIM) and with the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS) on Sumatra, in South Korea with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK). Our newest partnership is with the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ in the U.S.A.

The spectrum is wide. Our partnership churches include those whose roots go back to reform movements prior to Luther: the Waldensians and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. They correctly point out that it is better, considering their origins, to speak of "early Reformation" rather than of "pre-Reformation". Other partner churches evolved from histories of missionary works. The United Church of Christ (UCC), on the other hand, has its own unique history which developed from the desire to overcome Protestant and denominational differences.

We place great importance in the fact that the partnership relations are maintained continuously and dependably. For this we have agreements. The partnerships are vitalized on the church leadership level, on provost and deanery levels, and by the dedication of many congregations. Reciprocal visits make up the central element of the partnerships. These visits are about experiencing church life in their own social and cultural environments. This serves to expand horizons and it allows a sharing of spiritual experiences. In the past years discussions concerning the content of theological issues and common global challenges have become increasingly important and central to the encounters.

I would like to highlight a few current examples.

Last year Bishop Jerzy Samiec, from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, visited us with a delegation. One topic was of particular interest: the ordination of women. Questions regarding our experiences and our counsel were specifically asked. A few months ago the Synod voted on the introduction of the ordination of women. A majority was in favor of this change but unfortunately – as Bishop Samiec later wrote to us in a letter – the required two-thirds majority was not reached.

During a visit by UCC last autumn intensive discussions about our involvement in refugee issues were held with, among others, the new UCC Church President, Dr. John Dorhauer. Our partners attend and support our involvement not only with great interest and with their prayers, but also by addressing political demands to their own government as well. They would like to see much more commitment in their own country and view isolationist tendencies and xenophobic sentiments with great concern. A further topic of our discussions was the question of what position we, as EKHN, take towards the settlement policies of Israel. The UCC passed a resolution which aims to not invest in companies which profit from the occupation of Palestinian territories, and calls for consideration of a boycott of goods produced in the settlements established illegally under international law. And yet the UCC, as was emphasized in the discussions, has in no way denied the right of Israel to exist. For our part, we showed that our position is based on absolute support for the state of Israel as well. We continue to find a two state solution to be a

worthwhile goal and also view Israel's current settlement policies critically, because they make a two state solution ever more unlikely. Due to our particular German history, however, we are critical towards calls for boycotts. We also rate the danger of anti-Semitic functionalization in Germany as particularly high. Instead we prefer to provide practical assistance locally – also in the Palestinian territories – and to support projects which emphasize dialog and reconciliation.

Contacts with our partners show us very clearly how important it is to work towards good religious cooperation. One of our partner dioceses in India is the Diocese Amritsar in northern India which also includes the Kashmir region. There frequent conflicts erupt — mainly due to radicalized Sikhs, Hindus or Muslims. Rumors about the burning of a Koran in the U.S.A. during the summer of 2010 led to an incensed crowd – likely mainly Muslims – who ignited several public buildings. Among these was a school operated by the Amritsar Diocese – a school which is mainly attended by Muslim students. We are very glad that a reconstruction of this school was successful. EKHN supported this project. We are very glad to report that Muslims in Germany also responded to our request for assistance. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Hesse and a DITIB (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) Mosque Community in the Wetterau region contributed donations. It seems especially important to me – and we frequently point this out to our partners as well – that interreligious sensitivity is a basic prerequisite for mutual good and peaceful interactions. Rumors, willful provocations, sweeping accusations are dangerous.

I will use this topic to devote a few remarks to an issue which was debated often in the past weeks and months – also as criticism against the churches. It has often been said, that we disregard the persecution of Christians worldwide. It is also said that we ignore the nearly systematic harassment of Christians by Muslims in refugee facilities in Germany. First of all I would like to say that we do not ignore situations in which Christians are threatened and persecuted based on their faith. When we learn of actual situations where we can effect an impact, then we get involved accordingly – even going so far as to petition governments to get involved. The same applies to situations in refugee facilities. People here should be and feel safe. Of course disagreements and conflicts also exist in refugee facilities. However we have not seen any reliable evidence that extensive threats against Christians exist – the same holds true for responsible government authorities whom we also asked. Again: not a single case of threats, whatever they are, may be ignored. Specific situations, however, may also not be exploited politically. It must not be overlooked that emotionalized debates, which position groups against each other in a very general way, can endanger people.

As a matter of fact, it is just these very specific contacts, the visits, the discussions, the experience of our partnership encounters which can put many things into a proper perspective. Thus the pastoral college group who visited Tanzania past fall with Provost Annegret Puttkammer also reported on interesting discussions regarding refugee issues with people in our partner churches. There they noticed that people found the debate in Europe with comments that 'an entire continent stands ready to come to Europe' as surprising if not even offensive.

These spotlights show how we approach the same issues from different perspectives. Many of these encounters are also described as personally downright enriching by those who experience them. The debates serve to confront the participants, pointing out that they must take another look at their own

positions and must sometimes also call them into question. It would be deceptive not to disclose that different positions towards homosexuality remain a difficult topic. This is especially true for our partner churches in Africa and Asia, but also in Poland and the Czech Republic. But, again, this emphasizes how important theological discussions are in the encounters. We now find ourselves in a phase of the partnerships which makes this very clear.

Here I would like to report about a contact which was not based on our direct ecumenical partnership relationships, but which evolved from a current situation. The moderator of the Reformed Federation in Germany, Rev. Martin Engels, received a request to visit from the Reformed Greek Evangelical Church. Approximately 5,000 to 6,000 members throughout the country belong to this Church. He invited me to join him. Together with the head of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, Manfred Rekowski, and our expert for refugees, Andreas Lipsch, and Doris Peschke, we visited the refugee camp in Idomeni. We witnessed the great efforts to aid the refugees made by the Greek Evangelical Church and their volunteer workers at the time, especially in Idomeni. Together with other aid organizations they made sure that regular meals were distributed to the more than 10,000 people in the otherwise disorganized camp in Idomeni. The situation was quite depressing. It is clear to all that the situation in Greece is overstrained. Even evacuating the camp and transferring the people among other camps does not guarantee that the refugees can apply for asylum. A concerted European effort which ensures the registration, distribution and humane reception of the refugees remains necessary. The current situation for the refugees in Greece is quite a shame for Europe. The work performed by the volunteer helpers is remarkable. We support them together with the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland and other churches – also in cooperation with our disaster relief programs. Our discussion partners said: “We are in a difficult situation ourselves. We have a financial crisis and a refugee crisis. But we want to help – we are, after all, Christians.”

1.3 Ministries Abroad

In this report, I am trying to convey an overview about EKHN's connections throughout worldwide Christianity. These connections also include the possibility for EKHN pastors to apply for so-called EKD ministries abroad. Special vicarships abroad are also available for those interested. The ministries are positions in German speaking congregations abroad. Currently EKHN pastors serve in Ethiopia, Chile, China, Singapore, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden and East Jerusalem. As a rule, the length of assignments for pastors in a foreign country is six years, and this can be extended again one time by three years.

1.4 Migration Parishes

When we look at EKHN's worldwide connections then this doesn't only include looking at the world from Germany. Also important is that we see that people from all over the world come to Germany. Germany is a country of immigration. It has been so for many years already. This also means that the Reformation returns, and that it brings something new with it, particularly as many of the people who have come to Germany and who come to Germany are Christians. Many of them belong to churches influenced by the Reformation, but which then evolved separately in their respective social and cultural contexts. The Hessian Integration Compass for the year 2013 shows that 50 percent of the people in Hesse with a migration background are Christians – 29 percent Catholic and 21 percent Protestant.⁵ These statistics may have been changed somewhat by the immigration numbers in the past two years. No statistics are available regarding the religious affiliation of the refugees during this time. Fundamentally the question arises: How open are we in our congregations and in other areas of our church for the people who come to us? There will be those who seek entry into local congregations. But the desire may also arise to form congregations within their own tradition. We are working towards opening ourselves for these congregations. There are already two such migration parishes in EKHN which are known as "parishes of different language and origin" in our jargon. These are the Korean Congregation Rhine-Main and the Indonesian Christian Congregation. They are independent congregations within EKHN. When such congregations are formed, then theological and legal issues must also always be clarified. Here we benefit from our good experience meanwhile, but we must be open minded enough to be able to equitably fulfill current and future challenges. It is helpful to be aware that organizational forms on the one hand serve to shape a united overall structure, but that they should also be flexible enough to permit individual configurations. By the way, that our church allows space for this follows a long tradition. Think of the French-Reformed Congregations which are, of course, migration parishes according to their origins. Such congregations have always contributed valuable impulses to our church. At the same time, different congregational social structures face each other here – and we are made aware that although our parochial system is important and widespread, it is neither the only nor the dominant form of Christian fellowship from a worldwide perspective. This can inspire our own practice.⁶

An ecumenical overview must, naturally, also include a view of the current state of relations with the Roman Catholic Church. Broader ecumenical understanding must also include a look at the relationship with Judaism and Islam. In my report three years ago I gave a fundamental presentation on this topic. Therefore I will limit my comments here to current developments.

1.5 Ecumenism with the Roman Catholic Church

Good ecumenical contacts with the Roman Catholic Church are extremely important for many of our congregations. We can be very thankful for good ecumenical cooperation in many places. On the level between EKD and the German Bishops' Conference a course has been set that the commemoration of the Reformation in 2017 will not only be compatible ecumenically, but that it can also lead to unfolding

5 20% Muslims, 16% without religious affiliation, 4% other religions, 3% from other religious communities, 7% with no information given. Source: Hessian Ministry of Justice, for Integration and Europe (publisher), „Wie hast du's mit der Religion?“ ("How do you feel about religion?"), a representative survey on religious affiliation and faith in Hesse 2013), pages 26-27.

6 See also: Gemeinsam evangelisch! Erfahrungen, theologische Orientierungen (Protestant together! Experiences, theological orientations), published by the Evangelical Church in Germany, EKD Text 119, Hannover 2014.

ecumenical impulses. On the Saturday prior to the second Sunday in the Lenten season (Reminiscere Sunday) an ecumenical service will be held in which past injustices in the long history of confessional disputes will be brought before God and a joint prayer for forgiveness and reconciliation will be delivered. The service, which will be developed together, can be adopted and regionally adapted for an ecumenical celebration. In addition, it is recommended to celebrate ecumenical services as a joint "Festival of Christ" during the Reformation Anniversary. In some places ecumenical services will be held on Reformation Day as well.⁷

As EKHN we eagerly await the appointments of the currently vacant bishop seats in Limburg and in Mainz. The farewell for Cardinal Karl Lehmann on Pentecost Monday in Mainz was a good opportunity to thank him for his contributions as Bishop of Mainz and as long-term Chairman of the German Bishops' Conference. He left an indelible and unique mark on ecumenism in Germany during the past half century. He continuously pointed out that ecumenism requires much patience, and that very much was also achieved. This is certainly true, and not least also due to his dedication and commitment. In the last weeks of his tenure, Cardinal Lehman made quite clear how much he values the direction which Pope Francis has adopted. Indeed the post synodic apostolic circular "Amoris Laetitia – On Love in the Family" shows a Pope who places the pastoral focus on the issues and needs of people above dogmatism removed from all reality. Those who know Cardinal Lehman know that this was always the approach which he advocated.

From a Protestant point of view we are very interested in seeing how the space opened by the Pope will be filled. It remains to be seen how the inner-Catholic discourse continues and whether and, if so, how a dogmatic new focus regarding the question of remarriage for divorced persons or the position taken towards homosexuality can be initiated from a pastoral angle.

I very much wish that the bishop seats in Limburg and Mainz will be filled by bishops for whom ecumenism is a cause close to their hearts. On the occasion of the Reformation Year 2017 an ecumenical vesper will be held on September 22, 2017 in the Cathedral of Saint Bartholomew in Frankfurt with EKHN, the dioceses of Mainz and Limburg and the Regional Council of Churches in Hesse-Rhine Hesse participating. With view towards the Church Convention (Kirchentag) in Frankfurt in 2021 we have not given up hope that it can be an ecumenical Kirchentag. This would offer a signal for strong ecumenism and living Christian faith which could shine deeply into society.

1.6 Relations with Judaism

It is very good that the last EKD Synod issued a clear statement of disassociation on Luther's statements about Jews. This move was also recommended from within EKHN. The resolution adopted by our Synod flowed into the deliberations. Prior to the EKD Synod Josef Schuster, the Chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, welcomed this distancing from Luther's anti-Semitism but, on the other hand, found an "equally clear distancing from the missionizing of Jews" to be lacking. This question is to be studied further on the EKD level. For EKHN it can be said that no clear explanation exists for this either. But we have always understood the amendment to the fundamental article of our church constitution in the way that it includes a rejection of the missionizing of Jews. But it will certainly be good to consider this point

⁷ For the past years it has been frequent practice to celebrate an ecumenical service on Creation Day – whenever possible together with Orthodox Christians. This Creation Day will be celebrated together with the Working Group of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) and the Diocese of Mainz on September 2 in Bingen.

again when we celebrate the 25th anniversary of this amendment to the fundamental article of our constitution.

I am thankful that just a few weeks ago a first official meeting was held with representatives of the Association of the Jewish Community in the federal state of Hesse. During this meeting it was agreed to meet annually as possible. As to the content of the discussions, one topic was the concern of the Jewish community that some of the refugees could bring a new wave of anti-Semitism to Germany. From our side we emphasized that we will rigorously oppose any and all forms of anti-Semitism. Another topic discussed was the remarkable declaration made by orthodox rabbis last year, in which they expressed interest in supporting partnership cooperation between Jews and Christians.⁸ All of us were agreed that it would be very interesting to observe how the declaration, which reflects the opinion of one particular group, will be further received.

We will clarify whether and – if so – how similar contacts can be made possible with the Regional Association of the Jewish Community in Rhineland-Palatinate.

1.7 Contacts with Muslim Organizations

Last year saw an expansion of contacts with Muslim organizations. Together with Martin Hein, the Bishop of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck, a meeting was held with representatives of the Ahmadiyya congregation and the Alevis. Good contacts exist with representatives of the DITIB (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs), with VIKZ (Organization of Islamic Cultural Centers) and to IRH (Islamic Religious Community in Hesse) on a working level. How a dialog can be continued with these three organizations in the future at a leadership level is currently being examined.⁹



8 "To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians", <http://cjcuc.com/site/2015/12/03/orthodox-rabbinic-statement-on-christianity> (as accessed May 31, 2016).

9 Nine religious communities – including Muslim organizations – signed a joint declaration concerning biodiversity and conservation last year – a very encouraging collaboration.

2. Global Responsibility

The refugee crisis in particular has taught us that many issues we face today and in the future are global issues. It has been said time and again that the most important thing is to combat causes for migration in the countries of origin. This is undoubtedly true. Especially as many people, who undertake to flee, would like nothing better than to be able to stay at home. There are many reasons to flee, and there are also many refugee movements. Of the 60 million refugees worldwide 40 million are internally displaced persons who flee from crisis situations at home to other locations within their own countries. And the 20 million who leave their home countries do not all flee to Europe as is sometimes asserted in populist lines of argument.

But what do we mean by “combating causes for migration in the countries of origin”? We are confronted by war and crisis situations in which we can hardly intervene from the outside. The past has also shown that military interventions did not really lead to peaceful solutions, but rather served to increase medium and long term tensions (as was the case in Iraq, Afghanistan and in Libya). In some situations they also led to regional destabilizations and to a power vacuum, which served to strengthen radical or terrorist groups. Failing states belong to the root causes for flight along with hunger and poverty. It can be expected that climate change will exacerbate this situation. Of course, much can be done to combat causes for migration. Functioning neighboring countries in crisis regions can be stabilized and can, especially, be supported for taking in and caring for those seeking protection. All this is important, but it is not an alternative to also taking in refugees in Europe. In the past year nearly one million people seeking protection came to Germany. This is fewer refugees than those currently living in the small country of Lebanon, for example. I remain convinced: Europe can and must take on more responsibility in future in admitting refugees. The countries receiving the refugees initially, as those along the Mediterranean, must receive relief and be stabilized.

It is not surprising that these highly complex issues are responded to with calls for isolation and protection. I see tendencies towards new nationalisms in this context. And these, I feel, are dangerous, especially as this doesn't solve any of the real problems. Those who are of the opinion that they can place their bets on national regression deny two fundamental Christian and ethical standpoints. On the one hand: connections with Christians throughout the world as members of the body of Christ lead to the question of how other Christians throughout the world feel. Beyond this there are also good theological reasons not to limit this question to Christians, but to expand it to all of mankind. On the other hand: connections with all of mankind throughout the world also lead to the question of whether there are causes of the crisis situation for which we are also responsible. In my opinion this is obviously the case as regards the effects of climate change and because of our consumer habits.

A small but illustrative example: the above average consumption of chicken breasts in Germany and Europe led, among other things, to that in Ghana the highly subsidized EU exports of the remaining chicken parts destroyed the local chicken market. It was our partner church in Ghana who made us aware of this situation, and the Protestant Development Service made it impressively clear in its documentary with the catchy title “Don't send chicken” (Keine Chicken schicken).

In the discussions about the refugee crisis a criticism addressed to Churches is heard over and over again, that they represent a pure ethics of conviction. This means: they would call for the unrestricted admission of refugees without considering the consequences for the respective host societies. An ethics

of responsibility which sets limits is necessary in order to not overextend a society. The reasoning is correct in that humanitarian refugee admissions and immigration must categorically be structured in a responsible manner. And it is also correct that everything needs to be done in order to prevent overload when integrating refugees. It is, however, difficult if the responsible framework is limited to a respective country. In this sense we must incorporate what Martin Luther said very early on – namely during his first reading of the Psalms in the years 1513/1515: “Before God the whole world is, as is man, one entity.”¹⁰ Ethically responsible argumentation must nowadays also take irrefutable global connections into account.

In this section I would like to describe how we at EKHN approach issues regarding global responsibility:¹¹

2.1 Specific Aid

EKHN contributes two large offerings to the work done by Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World): On Thanksgiving and on Christmas Eve. For this the congregations are provided with materials which offer information about the respective campaign. The theme for the current 57th campaign is: “Sated Is Not Enough!”. With this, Bread for the World wants to raise awareness that malnutrition also affects people worldwide and demonstrate what can be done about it. In the past year donations from Hesse and Nassau alone totaled more than EUR 1.7 million.

Together with our disaster relief program we set up donation requests and provide information materials. In addition, EKHN’s budget includes emergency funds, which are transferred to disaster relief programs as needed in specific situations. This was last done for the earthquake victims in Nepal where, together with the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck, we sent an immediate donation of EUR 50,000. This also includes support for refugees along the Syrian borders. But it is often for “smaller” and regionally contained catastrophes which are not picked up by the media and also not by disaster relief programs where we financially support our local partner churches. This was the case, for example, in 2014 following large scale flooding in the Srinagar region of the Kashmir Valley.

2.2 Development Aid – Development Cooperation – Global Sustainability Objectives

In addition to specific assistance in disaster and emergency situations we are involved in development aid and cooperation. Here the Protestant Development Service, in which Bread for the World and the diaconical services section have been merged since 2012, plays a significant role. Here it must be noted, however, that understanding for the term “development” has evolved. At first it was development aid, then development cooperation. But it was always about “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries. Today we see that a development model based solely on measurable growth-oriented and resource intensive industrialization no longer fits. Use of resources, CO² emissions and much more can no longer serve as a model for other countries. We need a new overall concept for global development, based on human rights and ecological sustainability.¹²

10 Martin Luther, Erste Vorlesungen über die Psalmen (1513/1515), Luther German. Vol. 1, edited by Kurt Aland, Stuttgart/Göttingen 1969, p. 47.

11 See also: Kirche sein in einer globalisierten Welt. Zur Weggemeinschaft in Mission und Entwicklung, published by the Evangelical Church in Germany, EKD Text 125, Hannover 2015.

12 See also EKD Text 122 »... damit sie das Leben und volle Genüge haben sollen« (“... that they may have life, and have it to the full”). A contribution to the debate on new concepts for sustainable development. A study by the EKD Chamber for Sustainable Development, published by the Evangelical Church in Germany, Hannover 2015.

In its Agenda 2030, the United Nations in September agreed to a kind of worldwide contract for future generations. The global sustainable development goals, in contrast to the millennium development goals, now connect all three dimensions of sustainable development: economic development, social development and ecological development. Thus they place high demands not only on developing and emerging states, but also on industrialized countries. In this light, even Germany could be considered a developing country! The urgency of this perspective is described as follows in the action plan: “We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet.” As a church and in cooperation with development agencies and their work on national and international levels we are committed to these complex issues regarding the earth and mankind. We are convinced: Only when the close connection between combating climate change and the war on poverty and social marginalization are taken into account can reconstruction of a life-serving and thus sustainable economy be successful.

2.3 Climate Change

Climate change poses major challenges for all of mankind. We are also involved in the implementation of climate protection goals of the UN Climate Change Conferences and sustainable development objectives – both specifically on site by implementing climate protection concepts and in many networks. These networks are within the church as in the developmental climate platform of the churches and the ecumenical process “choosing life – shaping change”, networks with non-governmental organizations such as the “Climate Alliance Germany”, which, with its more than 100 members, advocates a coherent climate policy in Germany; and, last but not least, statewide working committees in Hesse and Rhineland Palatinate which develop and implement sustainability concepts and climate protection projects. It is important and already planned that issues regarding climate protection will be a main topic at one of our next Synod conferences.

Our resolution regarding so-called ‘divestment’ can be seen in connection with acting on global responsibility. This addresses a step-by-step withdrawal from investments in fossil fuel power companies. This is a new and important building block within the commitment for climate protection for which EKHN has taken on a leadership role in EKD. In this position it finds itself not only in good company together with the United Church of Christ in the U.S.A., the Church of Sweden and the Church of England, but also with large foundations such as the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, several universities and colleges in the U.S.A. and in Germany. The implementation by way of a step-by-step withdrawal concept is accompanied by dialog. The far-reaching withdrawal from fossil fuel energy sources is associated with a commitment to systems which contribute to a sustainable reduction of carbon dioxide. Thus the divestment resolution complements the guidelines for ethical investments, to which EKHN has been dedicated for a long while.

2.4 Nuclear Energy

In the past years EKHN has repeatedly spoken out against civilian and military uses of nuclear energy. The triple catastrophe in Japan in 2011 tragically reinforced the urgency of needing to withdraw from nuclear energy. This year EKHN’s Ecumenical Center again issued invitations for an international conference concerning the dangers of nuclear energy and climate friendly power generation. A guiding principle of this conference was conscious cooperation with civilian groups beyond the scope of the Church. The topic

was treated on a consistently international and interdisciplinary level. Based on EKHN's many ecumenical relationships it was possible to introduce a broad international perspective to the discussions, even with representatives of other confessions and religions. The prize "Courage for Nuclear Withdrawal" was awarded for the first time in connection with this conference. This prize, donated by the utility company of Schönau, was awarded to Naoto Kan, the former Japanese Prime Minister, at the end of April with the Ecumenical Center's participation and together with the City of Frankfurt in the Emperor's Hall (Kaisersaal) of the Römer.

2.5 Working Towards Peace

EKHN has a long tradition of peace policy commitment. Nowadays many people ask whether religion truly serves a peace building force, or whether it rather leads to conflicts and even to violence. In all of our educational work we try to point out that religions hold a potential for both, for violence and for peace. At the same time emphasis is placed on one's own responsibility for peaceful ethical actions. Our church's educational work regarding peace focusses on peace keeping elements of religions and the power of nonviolent biblical traditions in Christianity. Here EKHN is, for example, part of the "Rhine Main Project Group for Civilian Conflict Management". This interdisciplinary group regularly hosts educational gatherings at which successful protagonists and models for civilian conflict resolutions are introduced and discussed. By way of its exhibit "Peace works different" (Frieden geht anders) the Ecumenical Center offers schools and communities a look at successful civilian conflict solutions.

2.6 Arms Exports and Security Policies

Closely bound to our work towards peace is a critical assessment of German arms exports. On a national level this is handled in close cooperation with the Catholic Church in the "Joint Conference for Church and Development" (Gemeinsame Konferenz Kirche und Entwicklung - GKKE) which, for example, in December demanded a stop to all weapons and military equipment exports to Saudi Arabia in its GKKE Military Equipment Export Report.

This critical view of the arms export policies is substantiated by EKHN's cooperation with the action group campaign "Outcry – Stop Arms Trafficking" (Aktion Aufschrei – Stoppt den Waffenhandel). Currently the local action groups are campaigning against the export of small arms by which arms manufacturers have literally made killing "as easy as child's play". The Ecumenical Center will, in cooperation with the "Outcry" alliance, host several events in the coming year regarding ethical judgment based on the example of small arms exports.

It is with concern that we follow developments in Germany towards a more strongly supported foreign and security policy. Refugee topics also often revolve around talk of protecting and securing borders. Yet at the same time there is a call to combat root causes of migration. Many of our experts are convinced, that root causes of migration can only then be effectively tackled if the prime focus is not concentrated on reciprocal protection worldwide, but rather on a "peaceful mind set" (Friedenslogik) (HanneMargret Birckenbach).¹³

In our peace work we try to promote and foster thought and action from a peaceful mind set which is

¹³ See Hanne-Margret Birckenbach, Friedenslogik statt Sicherheitslogik. Gegenentwürfe aus der Zivilgesellschaft, in: Wissenschaft und Frieden 2 (2012): pp. 42-47. Available at <http://wissenschaft-und-frieden.de/seite.php?artikelID=1787> (as accessed May 28, 2016).

founded on biblical perspectives of hope. Thus it is only fitting that the guidelines for ethically sustainable financial investments for EKD and the criteria for ethically sustainable financial investments for EKHN exclude anything at all to do with armaments.¹⁴

3. Local Challenges

With this year's theme of the Luther Decade I chose a global perspective. In a kind of inventory, which certainly is not complete, I described the institutional and thematic connections with which we, as EKHN, are interwoven throughout the world. I tried to show that a global perspective is a fundamental perspective of our faith and of our self-perception as a church. Now the big challenge of our time – likely more so than in previous generations – lies in seeing and shaping the global and the local in their insoluble bond.

That is why I close this report with three local challenges:

3.1 Refugee Work

According to a recent survey, nearly 60 percent of our congregations help and assist refugees. This voluntary commitment is truly impressive. With an additional more than EUR 20 million provided by the synod during the past years we currently support 175 projects in congregations, deaneries and regional Christian social services which are dedicated to the assimilation and integration of refugees. In addition we have 60 people working in 36 full time positions in the church and in diaconia whose positions are dedicated to providing professional advisory services and counseling to refugees as well as coordinating volunteer refugee services. This is accompanied by many additional training and education measures as well as extensive information activities which campaign for a differentiated perception and debate regarding the topics of flight and migration. The main challenges I see for us in the foreseeable future are, first of all, to support the volunteer efforts to such extent, that the integration work which lies ahead of us for the long term can be furthered. Second, it is in our interest to connect the topics of flight and migration more closely with other social themes and, last but not least, also together with perspectives for one world.

What we also need in light of the increasing diversity in our society are communication processes about the foundations and basic rights, which transcend all differences while serving to guide and connect us. In my opinion we need such communications processes to be quite precise and at a local level: for example in the shape of open forums, where residents from many different environments and social backgrounds can exchange ideas on living and sharing together within their communities. Here church congregations, with their premises and numerous contacts, can take on a central role in a society which continues to diversify. Just recently EKHN published a position paper for discussion and understanding within the congregations. It is titled: "Is there still room in the inn? A theological reassurance and ethical orientation in view of flight and migration".

14 This specifically means that no investments are made in companies in which turnover of more than 10 percent is assigned to the development or production of armaments (within the meaning of the Annex to the German War Weapons Control Act), and that investments in companies which develop or produce banned weapons (i.e., anti-personnel landmines, cluster bombs, biological and chemical weapons), no matter what the turnover share, are prohibited.

Special attention is to be given also to those people who seek a path to our congregations because they are Christian, or because they are interested in the Christian faith. All Protestant Churches in Germany report increased requests for baptisms – particularly from people from Iran, but also increasingly from people from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Openness within the congregation, sensitive pastoral guidance and special baptismal catechesis which are sensitive to cultural and religious differences are sought. In order to respond to these challenges a working committee “Refugees and Baptism” was established together with the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck, to which also Iranian Christians belong. The Ecumenical Center is happy to inform and advise the congregations and is, for its part, interested in hearing about the experiences made by them.

3.2 Global and Local Faith and Life

Those who call on congregations to address global themes can quickly be held under suspicion for dissolving Christian faith in ethics, or of politicizing it and guiding it towards social action. In contrast I would like to stand up for the following: Global issues are important issues for our lives, and the important issues in our lives are global issues. We would likely also recognize this if we are engaged in the recurring difficult agricultural situation in Germany. It is my recommendation that we do this again soon here in the synod. Taking on the issues, understanding them and searching together for that, which God has assigned us here stands as the center of our faith. Faith in God’s love for this world and all who live in it leads us along the path of keeping up our common ‘House for the Living’ and seeking peace, justice, and a good life for all. “You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world”, this is what Jesus told those who listened. In my opinion it is time that we ask anew: What does it mean to be church in this one world?

I consider it a special local challenge that we ask ourselves the “one world question” anew in our congregations. What does it mean for our lives as congregations in the world if every week during church service we profess “I believe in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints”? There are possibilities to also make this – according to the respective community profile – become tangible: community work, participation in ecumenical partnerships in which completely new contact possibilities have opened up thanks to internet connections, inter cultural and inter religious neighborhoods, Christian social service organizations and projects, Fairtrade, local sustainability concepts and much more. Here the “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace” is worth mentioning, to which the World Council of Churches issued invitations in 2013. And here very special thanks go to the many women’s groups who, for many years, have been organizing the World Day of Prayer ecumenically, with great solidarity and with great enthusiasm, and who have thus been anchoring the global perspective firmly in our communities.

3.3 Celebrating the Reformation

In 2017 we will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. For EKHN we have chosen the motto “Discover God Anew – Reformation Since 1517”. With this we say: Reformation continues. And it is always about us, as people, being receptive to God so that we, in and for our time, recognize anew what God gives to this world. And so that we also realize what is asked of us when that which we are and what we have is not something we owe to ourselves. We do not want to celebrate 2017 in a denominationally narrow or in a national manner. We want to celebrate it with a broad horizon – ecumenically and

internationally. We want to celebrate it with a view towards local challenges and worldwide issues. We want to celebrate it putting our hope in God, who comforts us in our homes and in each church service, and who, at the same time, preserves and protects our Earth and all that is in it. This is to be the perspective for our EKHN and our congregations when we celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation in events and church services, quietly and loudly, with our words and with our actions. And I hope that many will, though this, come to discover Christ anew.

And so I close in this year with the verse of a song which is very well known to us all – both with a global and with a local perspective:

“In these our days so perilous,
Lord, peace in mercy send us;
No God but Thee can fight for us,
No God but Thee defend us;
Thou our only God and Savior.”¹⁵

Thank you for your attention.

15 Evangelisches Gesangbuch (Evangelical Hymnbook), 421.



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