



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
I send you greetings from the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN), and wish you a blessed Pentecost. *"Discovering God Anew"*
This is the motto for our celebration of these 500 years of Reformation. In 1517, Martin Luther's ideas turned the world around. He rediscovered that God does not close the door to anyone. God stands together with each and every one of us, no matter who we are and no matter what happens. This is and has been the nucleus of our Protestant faith for the past 500 years. We will celebrate this in ecumenical closeness and with open minds, knowing that the Reformation is much older than Martin Luther's ideas. In August we will celebrate this during our International Partnership Consultation, to which delegates from all our Partner Churches are invited. Throughout the year 2017 congregations, deaneries and the EKHN as a whole are celebrating this jubilee with hundreds of different events. Our motto, "Discovering God Anew", is meant to express that the Reformation was not a single event in 1517, but rather that Reformation is an ongoing process and that we are continuously asked to rediscover God in our lives and in our Churches. I wish you an enjoyable read. May God's Spirit strengthen our ecumenical fellowship.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Detlev Knoche



At the World Exhibition on the Reformation with the Church of Light

The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau will be present at the World Exhibition on the Reformation in the Luther city of Wittenberg with its prize winning Church of Light. The restrained elegance and the lighting from within this church not only demonstrates possibilities for church architecture in the future, but it also serves to bring people in and around it together in conversation. The Church of Light is located in the area dedicated to "Globalization – One World" at the

World Exhibition, directly in front of the New Town Hall of Wittenberg. The Exhibition centers around the biblical mandate "thou shalt be a blessing". How can we make "being blessed" an element of our lives, and how can this impact our society and the world we live in? These questions will be part of the various offers presented at the Church of Light, which can be experienced as a place of blessing during these days in Wittenberg.

(vr/dk)

News Items

New Church District Boundaries as of Fall 2017. In November 2015 already the Synod – EKHN's highest decision making body – resolved to draw the Church District boundaries anew, and to reduce these from six to five. This mainly affects the existing Church Districts of Rhine Main and Southern Nassau, which are in large part to be combined and united as the Church District of Rhine Main. The resolution is to be implemented when Provost Gabriele Scherle retires as of September of this year. Provost Oliver Albrecht will then head the new Church District of Rhine Main. He will also be the main contact person for the relationships with the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and the United Church of Christ New York Conference. (dk)

Ecumenical Church Convention (Kirchentag) in Frankfurt in 2021. Dr. Volker Jung, EKHN Church President, and Dr. Georg Bätzing, Bishop of Limburg, invite all to the third ecumenical Church Convention in Frankfurt – to be held between May 12–16, 2021. Their joint announcement states: "Following the large and very moving ecumenical Church Conventions held in 2003 and 2010, many people in our country yearn to again be able to send a joint message transcending religious boundaries, giving testimony before the entire world to our common faith in the resurrected Christ,

along with our commitment to our joint responsibility for the peaceful coexistence of all people in our country and beyond." (dk)

500 Years of Reformation – Celebrating an Ecumenical Worship Service Together. For the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) together with the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Limburg and Mainz and the Regional Council of Churches will celebrate an Ecumenical Vesper Service on August 25th. It will take place in the Catholic Cathedral of St. Bartholomew in Frankfurt and Dr. Volker Jung, EKHN Church President, will give the sermon. After the Vespers all are invited for an ecumenical encounter. EKHN has chosen this setting to demonstrate its ecumenical bond and to express its conviction that the Reformation begun by Martin Luther influenced all churches in Germany – not only the Protestant churches. It is very important that we confront the history of the Reformation, even if this history was often associated with conflict. (dk/jb)

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news letter

Discovering God Anew

A wide, ecumenical and international horizon for Reformation celebrations

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses against the sale of indulgences by the Church. The famous nailing of the theses on the door of the Castle Church in the German City of Wittenberg laid the foundation for the Reformation. This not only led to the separation of the Protestant from the Catholic Church, but also led to far reaching changes throughout Europe and gained steadily in importance worldwide over the course of time. October 31, 2017 will mark the 500th anniversary of the posting of the theses.

This Reformation jubilee is celebrated in a big way in many countries and in many Protestant Churches. Like all the member churches of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) is organizing many worship services and manifold events for this anniversary year in most of its regions, institutions and congregations. Following the good spirit of the Reformation, the jubilee offers an opportunity for a fresh approach towards the issues of the Reformation. EKHN has placed the celebratory year under the motto: "Discovering God Anew – Reformation since 1517."

"The basic issue of the Reformation was – and remains – the question about God," says Volker Jung, the EKHN Church President. "Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli and the other reformers rediscovered God as a God of love. They understood that God turns toward us people with love, and God wants to deliver us from all of our entanglements." Christian belief reminds us, "that each of us individually is much more than that what each of us achieves". In God's eyes everyone remains a "beloved child – with all its successes but also with all its failures." Even people in whose lives faith hardly plays a role any longer can turn to God. Thus modern "fears of hell" can be conquered, as they once were during Martin Luther's times by the belief in a God of love.

EKHN wants to celebrate this jubilee "with a wide open horizon, ecumenically and internationally," says Church President Jung: "We want to celebrate it also with a view towards local challenges and worldwide problems. We want to celebrate it with the hope in God, who comforts us in our homes and in each worship service and who, at the same time, keeps the whole world and everything on it protected and safe. This is to be the perspective for our Church."



Travelling the European Reformation Roadmap

During this Reformation jubilee it is also important for EKHN that the distressing anti-Semitic statements made by Martin Luther be confronted and be rejected. He repeatedly made anti-Semitic statements, particularly in his later works. As emphasized by Ulrich Oelschläger, the head of the Church Synod, this position taken by the reformer is incompatible with EKHN's affirmations, and he calls for more dialog with the Jewish community. EKHN explicitly distanced itself from Martin Luther's anti-Semitic writings quite a while ago already. Reformation, however, is not only important for Protestant theology, the Church itself or the relationship with other religions. Protestant life had and continues to have political consequences. During his ecumenical visit to Poland, Church President Jung reminded all of the democratic impulses which emerged from the Reformation. This included individual responsibility, the special understanding of freedom, appreciation for education and the priesthood of all believers. At the same time the Church President warned against nationalism and populism: "Let us honor the meaning of the Reformation – within Europe and globally. Let us venture to try more ecumenism. And especially: Let us do everything possible to live together peacefully in the spirit of Jesus!" This is urgently needed with view towards the burgeoning nationalistic currents throughout Europe. (mr)

The European Roadmap: Following the Tracks of the Reformation

The European Reformation Roadmap is a special project of the Evangelical Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland - EKD). With this Roadmap the Evangelical Church commemorates the posting of Martin Luther's Theses on indulgences in 1517, and emphasizes the importance of the Reformation within a Europe-wide context.

To advertise and prepare for the large World Exhibition on the Reformation in Wittenberg in the summer of 2017, prominent Protestant personalities are travelling throughout Europe in a large truck. Italy, France, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Ireland and Poland as well as important Reformation cities throughout Germany are way stations on the truck's itinerary.

During a visit to EKHN's Polish Lutheran Partner Church in February, Church President Volker Jung was able to welcome the Reformation truck during its stop at the Polish border city of Cieszyn. He held a speech in front of representatives of the Protestant partner church and Polish politicians arguing against nationalism and populism: "Let us dignify the meaning of the Reformation – not only nationally but rather Europe-wide and globally. Let us venture towards even more ecumenism. And, especially: Let us do all we can to live together in peace according to the spirit of Jesus!" At the same time Jung reminded his audience of democratic impulses which evolved from the Reforma-



Church President Dr. Volker Jung with Representatives of the Polish Lutheran Church

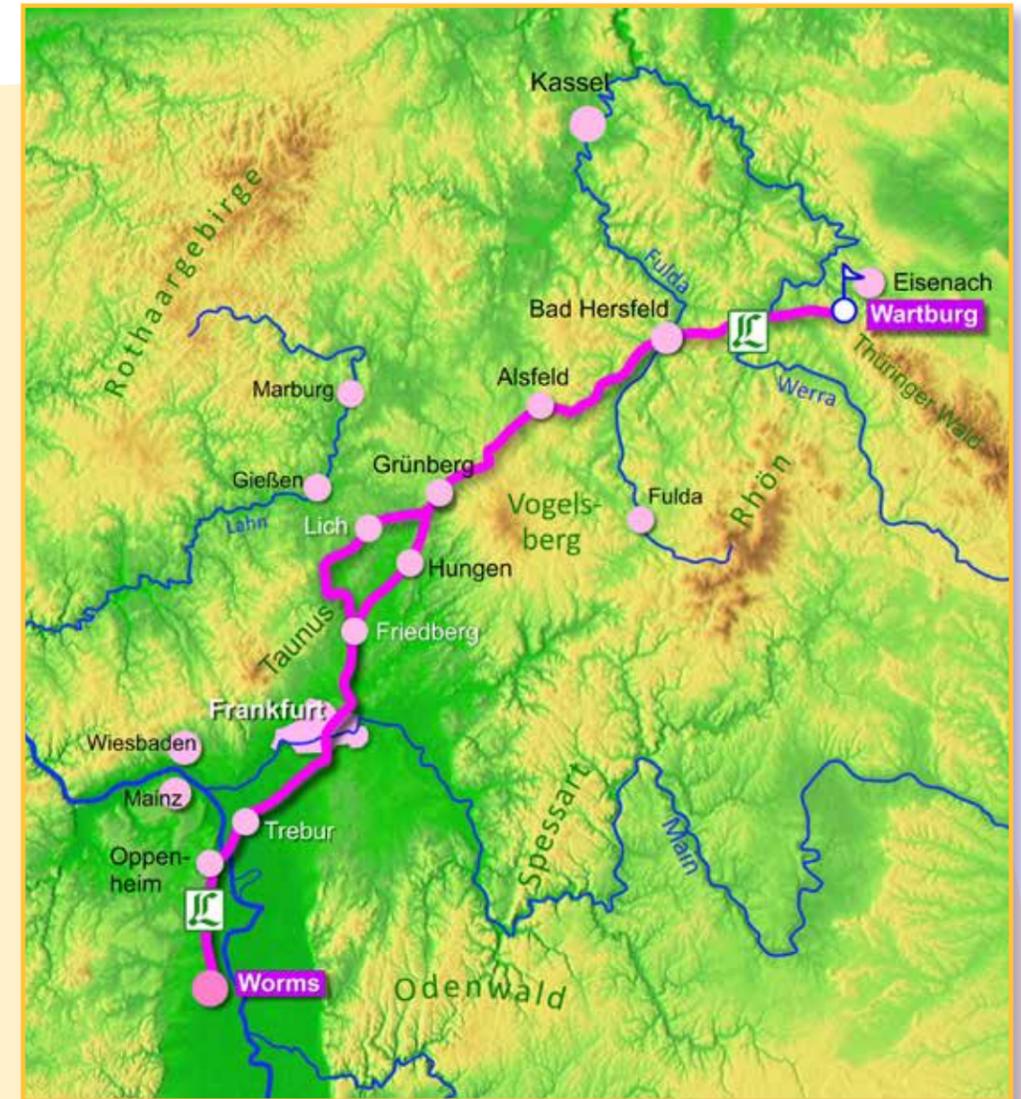
tion. These included the responsibility of the individual, the special understanding of freedom, the awareness of the importance of education and the priesthood of all believers. The truck stopped in Worms on December 10, 2016, and in Herborn on May 9, 2017, both way stations within the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN). A colorful and discerning program was offered at these stops in celebration of the Reformation.

In 1521 Martin Luther defended the 95 Theses and his writings before Emperor Charles V at the Imperial Diet of Worms. Three years later a German Protestant Mass was printed for the first time. In 1584 the Academia Nassauensis, the Herborn Academy, was founded in Herborn by Count John VI of Nassau-Dillenburg. This Academy was reformed from the beginning by its founding father, the theologian Caspar Olevian.

(as)

Following Martin Luther's Tracks

The Luther Trail 1521 connects the Wartburg and Worms over nearly 400 kilometers as it leads through Thuringia, Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate. At the Diet of Worms in 1521, Martin Luther refused to retract his Theses. His writings were banned as a result. The "Luther Trail in Hesse" society (Lutherweg in Hessen) is responsible for the Hessian section of the route. Information regarding the society, current developments, offers for those hiking the pilgrim trail and seminars for those who accompany pilgrimages is available on the Internet at www.lutherweg-in-hessen.de. All venues along the way are easily reached by public transportation. By 2017 the route is to be completely marked with signs, and lodging is to be available for those undertaking the pilgrimage. A large part of the first leg of the trip follows the Rhine Terrace Trail (Rheinterrassenweg). Members of the Luther Trail association take care of the Luther Trail between the Wartburg and Wittenberg. Information on the route's direction, the separate stations along the way and special dates regarding the Luther Decade are available on the Internet at www.lutherweg.de.



Map of the Luther Trail 1521

(trö)



Dean Dr. Jürgen Sauer

Interview with Dr. Jürgen Sauer

The significance that the Luther jubilee holds for rural areas is explained by Dr. Jürgen Sauer, Dean of Alsfeld. The Alsfeld deanery belongs to the Church District of Upper Hesse.

What are your highlights this year?

With regard to the Reformation jubilee, I especially looked forward to May 14, 2017. The Luther Trail 1521 was officially opened on this day. All were invited to the castle church of Romrod for a festive

opening service. Martin Hein, the Bishop of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck, and Volker Jung, President of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau, participated in the service. Following the service the pilgrim trail from Wartburg to Worms was officially opened. Many guests were invited from church and politics, from the Association of the Luther Trail 1521.

What significance does this jubilee hold for rural areas?

The jubilee offers an important impulse, a close focus on Martin Luther's life and works. In this manner God can – hopefully – be discovered anew as a basis and a goal for our own lives.

What long-lasting effect do you hope for?

It is my hope that groups of pilgrims from many different regions walk the Luther Trail and that they, in so doing, find a sense of community, trace Luther's works and gather spiritual experiences.

What significance does Martin Luther hold for you personally?

I especially appreciate the theological clarity with which Martin Luther expressed his insights into words. What particularly impressed me in this regard were the thoughts Martin Luther unfolded during the Holy Communion controversy between himself and Huldrych Zwingli, on who or what God is and where he can be found: "Nothing is so small that God is not smaller. Nothing is so large that God is not larger. Nothing is so short that God is not shorter; nothing is so long that

God is not longer. Nothing is so wide that God is not wider; nothing is so narrow that God is not narrower. It is an inexpressible being, above and beyond anything that can be named or thought." And Luther does not, from a theological perspective, regard heaven naively as a place above the clouds, but rather defines it and the kingdom of heaven as places which can simultaneously exist above the Earth yet also in its middle. There where one finds fulfillment in faith brought about by Christ's salvation, there heaven already exists, and the right hand of God is very close.

(as)