

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Dear Members and Friends of our Parish Christuskirchengemeinde,

For nearly 20 years now we have been reporting on the most important events of the past 12 months in our annual report, that is published at the beginning of the advent season every year. And you may imagine: as turbulent and unexpected as this year has never been a year before and we are longing for an end of the limitations due to the pandemic... Although everything started so encouraging:

Our Congregation from the Advent Season to the Lockdown in March 2020:

We celebrated the advent and Christmas season 2019 with many wonderful services and other events. Our last annual report described the programme of that period in detail. Early in January the three family ski camps took place in Austria – thanks, above all, to the voluntary team members, who have made this possible every year.

(Foto: Anniversaries Radgen, Mey, Mebus)

Subsequently we celebrated three anniversaries at once: **30 years Martina Radgen, 20 years Ulrike Mey, 15 years Thorsten Mebus!** We are very thankful for their precious and continuous work in our parish. This is very important for establishing and maintaining personal relations, without which no community works, not even a community in a Christian parish. For three decades Martina Radgen, being the parish's pedagogue, has been accompanying youth teams of volunteers and has been leading different groups, camps, and projects herself with great commitment. She is involved in the technical team and does lots of background work in our parish. For two decades Ulrike Mey has been working in the fields of services, pastoral care, and education. For some years she even had a half-time post for the project of our alternative service "Kirche anders". With a lot of empathy she has been accompanying curates, and in addition is in charge of the administration and the cemetery. For fifteen years now, Thorsten Mebus' post has been funded by the Association to Support Christuskirchengemeinde and during this time Thorsten has mainly built up the field of modern music in our congregation – being the head and the centre of it: Gospeltrain and New Generation, the bands, the musical shows... And there are many people related to this work, our congregation would be no longer imaginable without them. We celebrated these three anniversaries in February by holding a service, and afterwards by having a delicious lunch and an entertaining programme with many regular donators in the parish centre.

(Foto: Anniversary Banquet in the Parish Centre)

Early in March the alternative service "Kirche anders" had a highlight: Together with the band, the theatre group and the sermon, we were guests of

HASSIA , the Bad Vilbel bottling plant of mineral water, and had a very informative and entertaining afternoon together with the owners Günter and Dirk Hinkel and Peter Ochs. And actually, with the motto of “water – the well of life”, we intended to give a first outlook to the Hessen Festival, where our Christuskirche as the “church of the wells” had been named to be the official Church of the Hessen Festival. But then came Covid 19 and everything changed ...

(Photo: Kirche anders visits Hassia – view of the visitors' hall)

Christuskirche during the Covid 19 Lockdown Commitment and Sadness

On March 15 we were sitting at Christuskirche keeping unusual distance, and we did not want to believe what had already become reality in Germany within a few days. Even the high constitutional right of the freedom of religion was affected... First of all the Gospeltrain concerts and the parish assembly had to be cancelled. Then the services, all Easter celebrations, seminars of confirmation candidates and the confirmation celebration. Our kindergarten Arche Noah was closed, choirs and concerts were cancelled, as well as many camps and trips, that are so important to us... All this brought about a lot of sadness, as in all programmes there is always a lot of commitment involved. Volunteers and staff, team members and visitors, young and old people – all people were affected, and in the face of the figures and trends this autumn, when this annual report was written, it is getting clearer and clearer: We are not yet at the end of this (long?) time...

At the same time, however, there was great commitment and incredible creativity from the first days of the lockdown on:

- As early as on March 22 there was the first **digital Sunday Prayer** on Youtube. Within two days Klaus Neumeier worked out the contents, Sascha Reichel realized the technical concept, cutting and upload included, Martina Radgen was in charge of the sound, and Thorsten Mebus immediately provided the musical programme... In addition, there was the camera and production crew, and then the second technical team was organized. Thanks a lot especially to these absolutely essential people in the background. In addition to Sascha Reichel and Martina Radgen the following persons regularly assisted us: Maurice Petrowitz of the Dortelweil youth team, Pia and Hannah Neumeier, Matthias Meffert, Katharina Waiblinger, and Paula Lebsanft. And all the musicians and our three ministers. The services during the Holy Week and Easter were also organized that way and many people celebrated with us – between 500 and 1500 times all digital services were clicked on. They can still be watched at www.youtube.de/christuskirchengem . It was very special, that we always transmitted live and all viewers felt as if they were with us in the church. The feedback from many circles, also people not so well related to the church, encouraged us to make the effort of these digital services every week anew.

- These digital services for adults were complemented by two digital children's services, that were realized by Klaus Neumeier and Martina Radgen and some of our team members, as well as a service on Good Friday and Easter, and one for Ascension and Pentecost.

(Photo: Digital children's service with Klaus Neumeier standing at the open grave)

- In May the first events to take place were some organ vespers – without joint singing, but with music and spiritual thoughts in our Christuskirche church. From June on, we had the first 'in-church' services at Christuskirche, and then, from September on, at the old church Auferstehungskirche, too – with a large distance between the seats, with masks while arriving and leaving the church, with a list of the persons attending the service, but unfortunately without singing and without communion. Many people told us, how much they were missing this, but that they were glad to come together again. In summer there was a series of services about composers of church music with really special music, partly live performances, partly by videos on the large screen. Later we also had services for small children and also the Crossroads youth services. We are very thankful that all hygiene and safety measures worked very well from the beginning, and that all people treated each other with very much care and consideration. Thanks to Ulrike Mey, who was in charge of all the safety and hygiene measures in our parish, and still is.
- A special challenge for the staff was the realization of the lockdown, the work, and the closing of our kindergarten "Arche Noah" as well as keeping in contact with the children. For Ruth Homann, manager of the Kindergarten, this meant many extra hours and work on weekends, and Anna Marquart, president of the committee of parents, did not imagine in autumn 2019, what she would have to face this year... But both of them, and all other team members and parents, were cooperating admirably.

(Photo: Greetings from the Arche Noah Kindergarten at the garden fence)

- The strongest sadness probably prevailed in the field of confirmations, camps and concerts cancelled in 2020. Lots of things just were impossible: The usual seminar of confirmation candidates during the Easter holidays had to be cancelled at short notice, and also the confirmation celebrations in May. The father and child weekends and the summer camps for young people and children during the summer holidays, partly fully booked, had to be cancelled. After the Gospeltrain all other choirs and bands had to cancel their concerts. How often have we heard that people are missing all this... Well, sometimes appreciation is not being felt until something is becoming impossible, at least for some time.

(Photo: Children's bible week with small groups in their different pews)

- With a lot of creativity, however, many things were possible in quite a different way: Even more children than those, who wanted to join the summer camps, came to the corona-adjusted day programme at our parish centre and at the centre of Dortelweil during the summer holidays. Many children participated with enthusiasm in the children's bible week, learning to praise God, not by singing but by stamping their feet and clapping their hands! The children's programme 'Children's Place' organized by several parishes, started before Corona and was being continued outdoors – a wonderful network project of our Protestant parishes in Bad Vilbel. Bible study groups at first came together digitally, and then, in summer, in gardens and around our parish centre, subsequently in the rooms of our centre with a lot of distance. And with even more distance between them some choir singers met for choir rehearsals again (up to 30 people were allowed in our large Christuskirche). The other teams, committees, and our parish council met under Corona terms – either digitally or in person with a lot of distance.
- “Our charity is distance” – this is the motto of our pastoral care since March: Elderly people are being called by telephone or receive a letter or a certificate of honour in their letter box for their birthdays. Contacts have been maintained by letters – now more than ever! During all those months we maintained very close contact to our partners in India – as well with the children's homes in South India as with our partner congregation Christchurch in Amritsar. At our digital services we collected money for them exclusively and we like to thank all our donors very much on this occasion. In September we experienced a very special service: We celebrated the Sunday service at the same time in Amritsar and Bad Vilbel. Bishop Samantaroy was the host of the joint service, preachers came from both congregations, the music, organ and band, came from Bad Vilbel – what an experience! And what a strong symbol of the Christian community worldwide!

(Photo: Simultaneous German-Indian Sunday service – Bishop Samantaroy on the screen and Rev. Klaus Neumeier at the altar)

- Finally: The Church in the public. Yes, we were very present! Within the digital net and social media, in the local newspapers, with our ZACK magazine, via telephone ... And we received a very clear feedback, that people were very well aware of all this. What indeed was cancelled, also for us, of course, was the great project of the Hessen Festival, where we, with our Christuskirche as the “church of the wells”, wanted to be present in the centre of Hessen's public. Will the Hessen Festival come to Bad Vilbel in 2025? The Bad Vilbel Fair was cancelled, too, and with it, of course, our service at the bumper cars. We could, however, celebrate our Thanksgiving Service in the Bad Vilbel orchards very merrily, in spite of social distancing and light rain.

(Photo: Ulrike Mey at the thanksgiving service

Thanksgiving service in the orchards with light rain and corona distances)

- What will happen during the Advent and Christmas season to come? Will we be able to celebrate our services on Christmas Eve at the Bad Vilbel fairground, as we are planning to do? Or will everything have to be digitally or in writing? We are very curious about it, keeping to the old monks' motto: Ora et labora – pray and work ...

At the same time, however, many things have been going on this year and some of the areas are worth mentioning:

A Very Big Nuisance: Finance and Administration

At first a really annoying area: The administrative work for volunteers and personnel of the parish council is growing more and more and almost cannot be handled any longer. The day nursery "Arche Noah" (Noah's Ark) is to be extended by another storey and all agree that this is necessary – but it is practically impossible to overcome the administrative obstacles posed by church and, above all, secular administrations. Within the church double entry accounting was introduced, as had already been done by secular administrations – the software, however, was totally inadequate, closures of accounts are lagging behind for several years, everything costs a lot of (administrative) money and incredibly many nerves. There are people prepared to do necessary work for the parish for a bit of pocket money – but the paperwork for employing them exceeds every justifiable and understandable measure.

The Parish Council and the staff of our parish are facing all this, trying to find adequate solutions. In one area, above all, this was successful: in the first half of 2020 a new association related to our parish was founded. From 2021 on the "Christuskirche Association for Recreation" will provide the formal framework for all camps and recreation activities. This became necessary, so that the sales tax now relevant for the church due to European law would not cause any problems for our parish. So the financial realization of all camps and leisure activities will be much easier and more transparent. Many thanks to Peter Ochs, Thorsten Mebus, Martina Radgen, and Jörg Debé, who act as the new executive committee of the association.

The Protestant "Quellenpark" Kindergarten "Park of Wells" and the Christuskirche Recreation Centre

Actually the kindergarten work ought to have started already: The call for applications of the patronage referred to October 2020 as the start of the new kindergarten in the development area Quellenpark (Park of Wells), then in 2020 they said: in February 2021 it will be ready. At present the parents are

told that it will start in April 2021. But in spite of these delays the buildings and the work planned there are taking shape. In January 2020 the contract for patronage between our parish Christuskirchengemeinde and the city of Bad Vilbel was signed. Subsequently a qualified head of the day nursery and afterwards the new team for the six kindergarten groups was advertised for . Early in summer Christiane Feucht was chosen to be head of the kindergarten and has been employed and is already working for the future day nursery. Although the market for qualified kindergarten teachers is extremely tight, we are making good progress with future employments. While the public utility company is continuing to construct the building by order of the City of Bad Vilbel, we are at the same time starting the conceptual preparation work for the second kindergarten under our patronage. We would have liked to present the building to the public this year, but the dates for an inauguration party had been delayed several times. In fact the number of applications of children show, how large the demand and interest is. By now almost all families interested are already living in the new houses around the kindergarten.

(Photo: Klaus Neumeier and Christiane Feucht at the start of the future slide of the new Quellenpark Kindergarten)

We are glad that, with this kindergarten in the “Park of Wells”, we can be “in the centre” according to our motto, because the new quarter belongs territorially to our Christuskirche parish. That’s why we like to support the people living there. And we are very glad, that many people are asking for the Protestant format of the kindergarten. In this day nursery, too, we will attach importance to religious education, just like we do in the “Arche Noah”. Another focus will be on musical education. Some of the new staff members are particularly talented in this respect. In addition to this, we are going to look for cooperation with other partners; we have already had informal discussions with the local music school.

We want to support people also by means of a half-time employee funded by our Association to support Christuskirchengemeinde. The Christuskirche family centre, that has been existing for about ten years now, will extend its activities substantially, using the rooms of the municipal family centre in the same building as the kindergarten. As the manager of this centre we employed Eva Raboldt, who is extraordinarily qualified for this post and very well linked in Bad Vilbel. In this field, too, the conceptual work is going to start with many volunteers in the weeks to come.

So the “Park of Wells” means that our congregation really is on the move towards new growth, and we are looking forward to the challenges involved. In principle the course was set in 2020, and everything is getting started in 2021. In this respect we would be grateful for a lot of support: ideas, time, commitment, donations for the post, ...

(Photo: Eva Raboldt)

Welcome to Lay Preachers and Good-bye to Rev. Ingo Schütz

It is the task of ministers to celebrate services, that's what people usually think. That is true, of course – and at the same time wrong: In our congregation services are often celebrated by volunteers, who have undergone a training as lay preachers. These volunteers spreading the gospel are no representatives of ministers. They provide, however, aspects, that are very important to us, telling us about their faith from the point of view of people, who are no ministers. This year three persons of our parish have successfully accomplished their training as lay preachers for celebrating services and giving sermons. We give them a cordial welcome in our team of lay preachers: Dr. Gabriele Castenholz, Dr. Werner Betz, and Christoph Diemerling. They supplement the team of Judith Dietrich, Ingrid Faludi, Arndt Faludi, Christine Schmidt, Hartmuth Schröder, and Tobias Utter. We are very glad that you are with us, providing our congregation – and many of our neighbouring congregations, too – with your commitment, gifts and talents.

On this occasion, however, two other things should be mentioned: in addition to the lay preachers mentioned above, there are so many other “laypersons”, who take the responsibility for our services, cooperating in them for their personal vocation – this includes the services on Saturdays and Sundays in our churches as well as the services for families with preschool children, the service for children at the same time as our Sunday service, “children’s place” a spiritual and creative day programme for children, the Crossroads youth service ... So it is not primarily the responsibility of the ministers to praise God and proclaim his good news and we are glad that everybody in our parish can notice that. – Another cordial welcome to Oberkirchenrätin (member of the Regional Church Assembly) Dr. Melanie Beiner. As a member of the Regional Church Assembly she directs the central department of our church administration as regards contents. Twice a year she intends to hold sermons in our parish – just as she already did in 2020.

And at the end of this annual report we have to mention a good-bye: On October 31 Ingo Schütz celebrated his last Reformation Day service as a minister of our congregation. On November 1, 2020 he started his new post as a minister of his new parish at Oberursel Bommersheim. – There he has a full-time post and is also much nearer to his home at Eschborn. For eight years Ingo Schütz was a minister of our congregation, always cooperating with our teams with great commitment, infectious joy and enthusiasm for religious faith. Ingo promoted the cooperation of Bad Vilbel congregations substantially, he was taking care of social and welfare matters, and, above all, gave assistance to many refugees in Bad Vilbel – they in particular are already missing him... And what would be Ingo Schütz without his enthusiasm for quite creative proclamation and play-acting: Dear Ingo, we had a great time with you.

Life goes on ...

... although we have never known less, how it will go on! As was mentioned above, this applies to the weeks to come, that will furtheron be dominated by

the Corona pandemics. This applies to many new starts with, hopefully, a new colleague in our team of ministers, with Eva Raboldt as the manager of the new family centre, with many new staff members at the new kindergarten. This applies to the starts and challenges with many people, who have recently moved to our parish. The text of the year given by the Holy Bible will accompany us on the ways ahead of us: "Jesus says: Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Luke 6:36

On behalf of the Parish Council

Werner Kristeller, Chairman of the Parish Council

Dr. Klaus Neumeier, Minister and Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council