

## **Dear Members and Friends of our Parish Christuskirchengemeinde,**

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Romans 15:7) – when has ever a text of the year fit better than this one for the year 2015? These texts of the year are established by drawing lots from a large number of suitable bible verses. Can it be that God Himself wants to remind us of the noblest characteristics of Christian existence: to live a charitable life? This bible verse has always been of current interest for our coexistence in family, jobs, neighbourhood and free time. In the course of the year 2015 it has become of particular interest, because so many refugees have been coming to us looking for safety. In Bad Vilbel and our parish we have had this experience, too. From the beginning we have been participating in round tables in our Wetterau district and deanery and in our city. It is good that the inhabitants of Bad Vilbel and the members of our congregation show such a lot of sympathy for the refugees. Quite a number of close relations have developed and again and again refugees living among us are visiting our services. Since mid October one man from Eritrea has been given asylum in our Church. The Parish Council dealt thoroughly with the background and they didn't take the decision lightly, but finally they decided clearly. “To be in the centre” of the society also includes this area.

### **About Persons in our Parish**

We had to say goodbye to Reverend Rudolf Trey. He died at the age of 93. From 1958 on he had been a minister in our parish for 28 long years. During his time in office, for example, the new church Christuskirche and our parish centre with all its side buildings were built. His Bad Vilbel colleague for many years, Reverend Hans Siebert, held the burial service.

We had to say goodbye to two other persons, fortunately not for ever, who stopped working for our parish: after having worked in our children's day nursery “Arche Noah” (Noah's Ark) for 30 years, Doris Lange retired this summer. She practically was a fixture and had already taken care of several mothers, whose children are coming to the day nursery at present.

We are sorry that after only 3 years and a half Simon Harden returned to his mother country Ireland to take up a post as a university lecturer for organ in Dublin. During his short period of office as a choir leader and organ player we were able to renovate the organ at Christuskirche and to build up the church choir for classical music “Evangelische Kantorei Bad Vilbel” again. In keeping with his station, he said goodbye with a very demanding programme of English cathedral music. And we hope that he will come back for organ recitals. We are glad, that he recorded a CD of romantic organ music in our church. You can buy it in our parish office at the price of 10 €.

Fortunately a new leader of the choir was found immediately: Geraldine Groenendijk took over the part of employment and directed her first concert, the Requiem by Johannes Brahms with the Kantorei in November. We are looking forward to further building up classical church music together with her.

In addition to this, we celebrated two anniversaries: Martina Radgen has been working as our parish's pedagogue for 25 years now – and even longer, when we also count the year of internship. It's hard to imagine the children, confirmation and youth area without her, and she also does lots of organisational work, above all in the technical field of our parish. And Thorsten Mebus has been employed for ten years now. His focus is on modern Christian music, and so the Gospeltrain and the youth choir "New Generation" were celebrating their tenth anniversary, too. Several bands of our congregation joined in later and have also been built up by Thorsten Mebus. The "Jesus House Band", that started as the joint youth band of the parishes of Christuskirche and Dortelweil, also recorded a CD of modern worship music in autumn. This CD is also available at our parish office at the price of 10 €.

### **The New Parish Council Took up Office**

In April a new Parish Council was elected and the new members took up their office in September. Let us express many thanks to three former members, who are now leaving the Parish Council, although they will remain active in different fields of our parish: Ursel Metz dealt with many questions in the field of buildings and financing and will continue to take care of all building projects of our day nursery. Michael Kindsvater resigns from the administration and finance committee, but will continue to lead the editing of our parish's ZACK magazine, remain the treasurer of the Association to Support Christuskirchengemeinde, and the president of the Christuskirche Foundation. Anja Seybold is leaving the Parish Council, but will stay in the music committee, in several musical ensembles of our parish and in the team of Kirche anders, our alternative service. We are very grateful to them for their voluntary work in the Parish Council.

The other former members stood again as candidates and were re-elected: Ralf Appel, Christian Brück, Anna Debé, Astrid Edelmann, Irene Hartmann, Steffen Kreiling, Werner Kristeller, Claudia Leiendecker, Judith Reitz, and Tobias Utter. Newly elected were Britta Betz, Christoph Diemerling, Matthias Meffert, and Nadine Schwarz. The undersigned members of this annual report were again elected chairman and vice-chairman: Werner Kristeller and Dr. Klaus Neumeier, Minister. On election day we organized a broad and particularly musical programme, that got a good response. Nevertheless, polling was comparatively low. In fact, there was no important decision to be taken on any new course of the parish, and therefore we are quite confident to continue with the positive development of our congregation in the years to come.

### **Involvement in Financing the Parish Work**

This positive development during the last decade was due to the good financial situation. At first let us thank all those, who provide for our basic funding by paying church tax as Protestant church members. Again and again this system of church tax has been questioned, ultimately because of letters written by banks, and also in Bad Vilbel many wrong things have publicly

been said and even written in this context. And church tax, indeed, insinuates a relationship of the church and the government, which, as a matter of fact, does fortunately not exist at all. There is hardly any other church in the world more independent than ours and is making the most of it. The Government is being paid by the church for collecting taxes. Nevertheless, any other church systems for collecting taxes would, of course, be more expensive. So your money really helps to finance the work done by the church. The church tax itself is tax deductible and its amount is comparatively just, because it depends on income tax. In short: We are very grateful for this simple and safe system of basic funding of our work.

At the same time let us thank all the regular donators of the Association to Support Christuskirchengemeinde. They enable us to do more in the field of music, e.g. by paying the full-time job of Thorsten Mebus and our part of Martina Radgen's post. But of course, the association also finances many other things. And so we do very much appreciate, when people are prepared to support us on a regular basis. Further information can be found everywhere in the parish centre and on our homepage. Of course, any donations to the Association to Support Christuskirchengemeinde are tax deductible.

### **God's Story with us**

During Lent we started a new project: a series of sermons distributed to several blocks. "The Story" summarizes the Bible in 31 topics. The first block dealt with the first two books of Moses in services and during six nights under the motto of "Things that do you good". In summer we continued to deal with this topic at services and during conversation nights in the summer holidays. We intend to go on with this story early in 1916 and during next year's summer holidays.

As regards the services, let us explicitly mention our lay preachers. They are volunteers in our congregation, who have undergone special training and have now been entrusted by our church to lead services, to preach, to administer the holy communion and to baptize. It is true that we have three ministers in our congregation and, with Thorsten Mebus, another theologian in our team, but the work of our lay preachers is much more than only a substitute. With their day-to-day and life experiences, they attribute their own indispensable views to our services. Therefore we are very grateful to all of them. It is really worthwhile visiting services of our lay preachers Arndt Faludi, Ingrid Faludi, Judith Reitz, Christine Schmidt, Hartmuth Schröder and Tobias Utter.

### **Anniversaries in our Parish Work**

In 2015, too, we had many reasons to celebrate. We have already mentioned the choir anniversaries. Between Easter and summer the father-child weekends took place for the 20<sup>th</sup> time – and in September we had a great party in the adventure garden of a fruit press company in Karben, where even a rain shower could not keep us from celebrating a wonderful service. There have been 81 individual weekends since 1996, about 3,500 participants

consisting of over 900 different fathers and children – a real success! From these weekends several other initiatives have developed – e.g. the family ski camps – and a lot of former participants have become active members of today's teams and committees or the Parish Council. A particularly enjoyable event in 2015 was the first mother-child weekend. We are already planning two of them for 2016, in addition to eight father-child weekends.

Another 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated by our Day Nursery "Arche Noah" (Noah's Ark). We had a very merry party in autumn. As a matter of fact, the kindergarten work by our congregation is much older, reaching back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But the modern building at Bergstrasse was built in 1995, and then the kindergarten moved in. Since then, the work of the day nursery has changed enormously: practically all children eat lunch there and are at the day nursery all day long. The team has become much larger and is closely cooperating with the congregation, with schools and the family centre "around Christuskirche". Unfortunately, the administration work has virtually exploded – due to Government and Church regulations. This is putting a great strain on the whole team and, in spite of quality circles etc., obstructs the pedagogical work. Nevertheless, we have an incredibly committed team and a constant waiting list of children. This year's bible week for children has just ended, which is another successful example of the cooperation between our day nursery and our congregation.

We are looking forward to experiencing another twenty years of father-child weekends and day nursery work. There were special editions on both topics in our ZACK magazine, both of which are still available in the parish office and the day nursery.

### **Beyond The Boundaries of Christuskirche**

For the second time all Christian congregations of Bad Vilbel celebrated the service on Pentecost Monday together at the Nidda square in the city centre. Sören Sommer from the Regional Church Community held the sermon, our worship band "Be One" accompanied the hymns together with the brass band of the congregation of "Heiliggeist", and many people were participating. Late in September we had our second Bad Vilbel "Night of Churches", with all the Catholic and Protestant churches, the New Apostolic Church, the Regional Church Community and the Syrian Orthodox Church participating. It was a wonderful cooperation and an eventful programme of all churches, among them our two churches. By now there is a very intimate and trustful cooperation of the ministers and employees of the Protestant congregations, for which we are very grateful. This does also apply to the members of the Parish councils of our Protestant congregations, who met for an evening together in spring.

Many members of our Christuskirche congregation participated again in the church congress having the motto "keen on our parishes" held by the Church of the Land of Hesse in Giessen in October. About 2,400 participants, volunteers and employees of the Church of the Land of Hesse came together to experience a day of services, ideas, forums, and a speech by Margot

Käßmann. Klaus Neumeier, being the co-initiator, was directing the congress, and Ulrike Mey was leading one forum, the Gospeltrain was singing during the central service and the final programme. And we presented several of our parish projects – the “digital advent calendar” winning the second price according to the election by the participants. Congratulations!

### **Social Topics in our Parish**

In addition to the activities with and for the refugees living among us, there were several other social topics we intensively dealt with last year:

- Early this year we worked on the topic of Islam with many participants during two evening sessions. We got to know the most important contents and talked to representatives of this religion that has long since arrived among us. In autumn the CK Cultural trip led a large group to Andalusia, where we got to know a lot about the golden age, when the great monotheistic religions were cooperating peacefully.
- In April and May seminars and services on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's death took place. He was a citizen and Christian of his time and has been of exemplary character for many people until today. On a one-day CK Cultural trip in small busses we visited Flossenbuerg, where he was executed in April 1945, shortly before the end of the Nazi dictatorship – and we visited Nuremberg, where a guide led us through the former grounds of the party conferences of the Third Reich.
- Death was the topic of two nights in autumn. It affects us all, no matter how much we want to avoid it. The bible offers us messages still relevant today, which we were talking about. A visit of our churchyard was a supplement to this topic – as one of the last parishes, we still have our own churchyard.

### **The Advent Season in Bad Vilbel**

A very special form of advent calendar appeared for the first time, when the last annual report was disclosed: each day since December 1 a short film of 90 seconds appeared in the internet, from the congregation for the congregation, till Christmas. It turned out to be quite a colourful programme with many enthusiastic spectators, who clicked the calendar more than 10,000 times. It can still be seen on our homepage –when this annual report is being published, however, there will already be a new digital advent calendar 2015 – a great and modern project of parish work.

There was another advent premiere one year ago: we received a new nativity set. Stephan Guber manufactured large wooden statues according to our instructions with many individual and personal characteristics. In this case, too, we had several donators and we are very grateful to them for making this creative project of art possible. The enthusiasm about the new nativity set was

so great, that we were even able to order another shepherd and two more sheep. They are going to supplement the whole set during this advent season. From the angel to the little baby Jesus all figures of the nativity set were the subject of our sermons during the Christmas season last year. Little booklets as well as cards with statues of the nativity set and an accompanying note by the artist are also available, as our nativity set was also very special to him, because it was his first one.

During this advent season another highlight will take place: on the 4<sup>th</sup> advent Sunday the radio station Deutschlandfunk will broadcast our service from Christuskirche. We are very excited about it.

### **Outlook to 2016**

Some things to come in 2016 have already been mentioned, but let us also hint at some other events: In January we are going to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our alternative service Kirche anders, inviting you all to come to the Parish Centre on January 17, 2016. On July 5 we will again have our great Parish Party in front of the assembly hall Kurhaus. In autumn a large group of us will visit our partner diocese Amritsar in North India – and we are preparing the reformation anniversary year 2017. But we will tell you more about it next year.

For the year 2016 we greet you all with the text of the year: “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you” (Isaiah 66:13). May God bless you.

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