

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Dear Members and Friends of our Parish Christuskirchengemeinde,

As every year this annual report 2019 is being published at the start of the advent season, the beginning of the new ecclesiastical year. When looking back one year later, you often overlook the previous advent season. That is why we start this report by looking back to the advent season in 2018:

The Advent and Christmas Season in 2018

Many special events take place at our Christuskirche during this season: The Grammar School Georg-Büchner Gymnasium, the primary school and the School of Music are our guests celebrating with us concerts and school services. We are glad to be able to welcome so many people who otherwise might not have come to our church. Of course, we also celebrate special advent services, but not only at our church: while other people come to visit us, we also go outside.

(Photo: Advent in the Castle)

It is almost a tradition by now, that at the start of the advent season our weekend of "Things that do you good" takes place in the Rhoen mountains. About 100 people of all age groups experience a very diversified and creative time, thus starting the advent season together very spiritually. What started years ago as a makeshift in terms of the date, has now turned out to be a real blessing. Although there is a fixed group of participants, newcomers have always the opportunity to participate. During the advent season we go outside, leaving our church buildings several times: The youth service "Crossroad" celebrates its Christmas service at the end of the Erzweg street. Instead of one evening service at our old church Auferstehungskirche on Saturday we celebrate "Advent in the Castle" with music amongst others by our choir of young children. And then the joint youth teams of our parish and the Protestant parish of Dortelweil always celebrate their "forest Christmas" on December 22. However, it now only takes place in the Taunus mountains, when there is snow; otherwise they celebrate together in the Dortelweil Church and Parish Centre.

(Photo: Meeting of voluntary team members)

In our Parish we celebrate the new ecclesiastical year always on Monday after the start of the Advent season, when a major part of the 250 to 300 volunteers of our congregation meet in the Parish Centre. Everybody brings some food for the large buffet dinner, that has always been very delicious. Some members of the congregation are being honoured for long years of voluntary work or for special commitment. And to say thank you to them all, there is a highlight as a special gift: In 2018 there was political satire, in 2019 there will be a magical show... We are very grateful to our many wonderful voluntary and employed teams.

On Christmas Eve our churches are quite crowded during five services. About 2200 people celebrate Christmas with us and we are happy about the great commitment of all the people helping to make our services very festive celebrations. In particular the musical accompaniment is worth mentioning in this case. The services during the following Christmas days focus on the Lord's Supper and many Christmas carols. For several years two services set a course at the turn of the year – both at 5 p.m. on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. We celebrate the Lord's Supper, inviting people with candles and stones to a very personal review of the old year and an outlook of the new year, and offering personal blessings. It is quite obvious: this experience of practised trust in God does us good and is accepted thankfully.

Families and Children:

We are facing great challenges:

Two family services for different age groups, children's services, family ski camps, father and mother and child weekends, children's camps, children's bible week, and regular children's groups and choirs, and in addition many events in the course of the year ...

(Photo: Collecting Easter eggs in a Bad Vilbel park)

Actually, we have quite a lot. Actually, ... but you can feel the word "but". We experience, that it is getting harder to get families interested in the things our congregation has to offer. In Bad Vilbel, too, we observe, that more and more families (sometimes even with church experience) do not have their children baptised, find other leisure activities more attractive, and fill their holidays completely with private trips. These trends are being observed in the whole society, but in spite of many good offers by the church also in our parish. Therefore 2019 was a year for finding new ways and making important decisions for the future:

In March, Reverend Ulrike Mey and Judith Dietrich, member of the Parish Council, presented the "Lord's Supper" for all. The invitation for children to participate is in the focus of this new form. Since then we have celebrated many times the Lord's Supper with them. Some children are really happy that they may join now. There have not been any problems so far. Nevertheless, there have been some critical comments, that children cannot understand the sense of the Lord's Supper. After one year we will evaluate our experience and present the Parish Council's contemplations at a congregation assembly.

There is also a new conception of our children's service, in which the confirmation candidates of the first and second year are being integrated. Finally there was the premiere of the joint offer of several parishes called "children's place" inviting children to a spiritual and creative day programme on several Saturdays per year. It is great to experience the cooperation of the Protestant parishes of Bad Vilbel. For our congregation Ingo Schütz and Martina Radgen are in charge in this respect.

Together with the other parishes we also worked out a comprehensive conception of the whole area of parish pedagogics. We need this for the two employees at Bad Vilbel, although it is not only a matter of job description: all the work with and for children, young people, confirmation candidates, and families is to be linked and developed by the Protestant parishes together. This conception was considered to be very good by the Deanery and the Regional Church of Hesse and the new executive committee has taken up work by now.

In summer 2019 we said goodbye to Dirk Nising, the Dortelweil parish pedagogue. He had been accompanying children, confirmation candidates, young people, musicians, also from our parish, in his friendly and kind manner for many years. So we are very grateful to him for his services at Bad Vilbel. Fortunately, the vacancy is to be filled again...

(Photo: Dirk Nising (left) with Thorsten Mebus on a confirmation seminar)

There will be a new start for us at the large building site of "Quellenpark" (Park of wells). More than 3000 people will move to Bad Vilbel, and the Protestants among them will become members of our congregation. In the northern part "Im Schleid" many people have already moved in. There will be a lot of movement around the school, sports hall and the two nursery schools. We had applied for the patronage of the first kindergarten, which we achieved after a long process. The work of the nursery school itself is to be complemented by a special position for children and family work. This position is to be funded by the Association to Support Christuskirchengemeinde. The conception is being developed at present and will be presented soon. Obviously the year 2020 will confront us with big challenges – we are glad to face them and hope for and trust in broad support by our congregation and the city as a whole.

20 Years of Confirmation Seminars

It was Easter 1999, when we went to the "Haus Heliand" at Oberursel-Oberstedten with a comparatively small group of confirmation candidates on a confirmation seminar. The candidates came from two age groups and were experiencing nine days of seminar instead of the weekly lessons, that were usual until then. Klaus Neumeier and Martina Radgen developed this conception together with several volunteers: Daily units of small groups deal with the core issues of faith, theatre and discussions with the whole group in the large meeting room, three times a day very personal devotions in the small chapel of the house, preparation of the introduction service, and a lot of time for getting to know each other and the members of the employees and volunteers teams...

It was already in the third year, that the parish of Dortelweil joined in – an early and quite successful type of cooperation. Of course, this conception was continuously being developed further. The basic structure, however, remained and proved its worth. Part of this is also the invitation to become an active

participant or team member after the confirmation period. Of course, not all of the candidates do so, but without this type of confirmation work the group of volunteers of the youth team would not be that large. Each confirmation seminar means a lot of time and commitment for the volunteers and employees. But we are quite sure that the effort is worth it. An important part of this success is due to the excellent frame conditions of the “Haus Heliand” – thank you to the team of our “confirmation house”.

(Photo: Atmosphere in the Chapel of “Haus Heliand”
Group of the 20th confirmation seminar
Youth band at anniversary ceremony
Sönke Krützfeld, Melanie Beiner and Volkhard Guth)

And this year we went there with the 20th group. The introduction service of the confirmation candidates from Dortelweil and our Christuskirche subsequent to the nine days at Oberstedten was a great experience, as every year: It is always impressing, how the candidates shape the service personally, cheerfully, and seriously at the same time. In 2019 we afterwards had a ceremony in the parish centre: a review of 20 years of confirmation seminars, music played by the Jesus House Band (they were “seminar confies” themselves), short talks, among others with guests from the Deanery and the Church of the Land Hesse: Oberkirchenrätin (member of the Regional Church Assembly) Dr. Melanie Beiner, Oberkirchenrat Sönke Krützfeld, and the Dean Volkhard Guth came to attend the ceremony, speaking very appreciative words. They and several other people emphasised again and again, how valuable the cooperation beyond the parish boundaries is for the confirmation candidates, who know each other from school anyhow and who sometimes cannot understand the division into parishes. This does also apply to other urban districts of Bad Vilbel, and we are very happy, that next year the confirmation candidates from Massenheim will also join us during the nine-day confirmation seminar for the first time – the weekly confirmation groups have already been cooperating closely for several years.

Baptism in the River Nidda With Confirmation Candidates and Refugees

For many years we have been offering to confirmation candidates, that were not baptised, to be baptised in the River Nidda on a summer Sunday. This year, however, this special service was extended: Reverend Ingo Schütz has been in close contact with people who fled from Iran to Germany. Some of them fled for religious reasons, have declared their belief in Jesus Christ for a long time and have been participating in our services. During weekly meetings Ingo Schütz has been talking with them about the essence and contents of Christian religion. When finally some of them decided to get baptised, half a dozen persons took the opportunity to get baptised in the river – according to biblical tradition. Another refugee from the Free Protestant Community and Pastor Clemens Breest joined us, and thus we were celebrating a merry baptism service with many candidates for baptism and baptism assistants. And when people are being ducked into the river in the middle of our city, then

this means to many passers-by a very special experience of Christian faith in our modern times.

(Photo: After the baptism in the River Nidda with the refugees)

Music: Praise of the Lord and Balm for the Soul

Without doubt Protestantism has a rather sober tradition. This is due to historic reasons, but nevertheless it brings us to bay: My mind is unable to cope, if we have to do with God. At the end of each sermon we say that God is greater than we human beings can understand. My heart, my soul and my conscience may feel God and His presence. There's nothing better than music that can help us to do so. Therefore we are grateful for the various types of excellent music in our congregation – all the different choirs, bands of adults and youth bands, organ music ... We are glad to experience all this during services and concerts. Thanks a lot to all those who make this music come true again and again. In 2019, too, we had wonderful concerts in our churches and other rooms that were often crowded. It is not only our experience in Bad Vilbel, that music is important for our faith – but it is a very strong experience, indeed.

Let us take a closer look at some of our guest musicians we welcomed this year. In this respect we had a large variety, too.

- In spring several well-known musicians of our Regional Church came to Bad Vilbel presenting many new spiritual songs to a large audience: Clemens Bittlinger, Eugen Eckert, Mirjam Küllmer-Vogt and Fabian Vogt.
- Early in summer the Ndlovu-Youth Choir performed a thrilling concert. They are part of a project by Dr. Hugo Tempelman in South Africa, whose work we have been supporting for many years and where volunteers from Bad Vilbel worked for one year. In summer this wonderful youth choir managed to reach the final of the competition "America's Got Talent". In Bad Vilbel it was particularly great, that they got on together well with our youth choir "New Generation".

(Foto: Ndlovu Youth Choir in our Parish Centre)

- Carmenio Ferulli showed us, by performing an impressive organ recital, how one single musician can play the "Four Seasons" by Vivaldi on the organ. How lucky, that we spent a lot of money to renovate our organ several years ago so that it is state-of-the-art now.
- The Bad Vilbel choir "Zwischentöne" sang the exigent Chichester Psalms by Leonard Bernstein in our church.
- From Einbeck, a city well-known for its beer in Northern Germany, the choir "Voices" came to visit us. They sang a thrilling concert together with the "Gospeltrain" in a crowded Christuskirche.

- Another collaboration was the performance by the Kantorei, the choir for classical church music, of “Elias” by Mendelssohn Bartholdy: for the second time they were performing together with the Kantorei from Bergen-Enkheim. The Christuskirche was completely sold out and it was a wonderful concert.
- In addition, there were concerts by several Bad Vilbel schools, the music school included.

In addition to this, two special musical events must be mentioned: When in March a group of the youth team visited our Indian friends of Christchurch Cathedral in Amritsar, North India, in addition to services, bible studies, and many meetings, the highlight was a worship concert with our youth band “Faithful 8” in an impressive setting.

(Foto: Concert in India)

The musical work was supplemented by an intensification of the partnership with Christchurch Cathedral with the help of Ulrike Mey and other members of the youth team. In India and at the Gospel Festival of the Protestant Deanery Wetterau Thorsten Mebus was in charge of the overall direction. It is wonderful, how he has been inspiring people by music and by bringing people to music for nearly 15 years now.

... and we should not forget:

... that Ulrike Mey had a three-month sabbatical in summer, when she was concerned with the training of volunteers to become preachers and to lead services. It is great that we have quite a few lay preachers in our parish – not necessarily as a substitute for the employed ministers, but explicitly as a complement and an enrichment of the annunciation.

... the Parish Party around our Christuskirche late in May: services for the adults on the stage in the street Im Grünen Weg and for families at the kindergarten campus, with a lot of music by our bands and choirs and by the MSS Bigband from Seulberg, barbecue and cake, beer and coffee, the blessing roboter of our Regional Church of the Land Hesse, bull riding, and many games for children ... The weather was fine and we could celebrate a merry party.

(Photo: Parish Party in the street
Family service at the Parish Party
Service at the Parish Party with the “blessing Roboter” and pastor Ingo Schütz)

... a service with an impressive sermon by Anne and Nikolaus Schneider on “Reformation 502 – How does church work in our times?” He was Head of the Synod of the Rhenish Church and President of the Council of the Protestant Church of Germany. They say that they together have a “relationship of life,

love and thinking” and were preaching about thoughts on the church in our times that will continue to preoccupy us. These and many other sermons can be found on our homepage at downloads.

(Photo: Nikolaus and Anne Schneider, Klaus Neumeier)

... a “Talk under the Tower” with our Leader of the Regional Church, Dr. Volker Jung, and the digital expert of the German Television ARD Dennis Horn about the question of digital communication in our church and society. Birgit Arndt presented the contemplative and encouraging discussion. She is the head of the media house of our Regional Church and member of a team of volunteers in our congregation.

(Photo: “Talk under the Tower” with Birgit Arndt, Dennis Horn, and Volker Jung)

We will go into the New Year trusting in God’s assistance – personally and as regards our congregation. The Hessen Festival will come to Bad Vilbel – and with this a lot of programmes at our Christuskirche, which, as the “church of the wells”, has been named Church of the Hessen Festival. The new quarter “Park of Wells” with the new kindergarten and our new post “#quellenstelle” will need a lot of attention. The same applies to our day nursery “Arche Noah” (Noah’s Ark) with upcoming building measures and the 25th anniversary of the building. We are looking forward to 2020, sending you all our best regards. Above all we are looking forward to many encounters in our congregation Christuskirchengemeinde.

On behalf of the Parish Council

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

Text of the year 2020

I do believe;
help me overcome my disbelief!

Mark 9:24

Guiding principle: Enthusiastic about Jesus Christ we invite everybody to live together as a lively church