

## **Annual Report 2007**

### **Dear Members and Friends of Christuskirchengemeinde, Bad Vilbel,**

Once again an eventful ecclesiastical year is coming to its end and a new one is starting in the advent season. This 2007 annual report intends to look back on this year, recalling what was essential, but also to take a look at the future. In the past year our new minister was introduced, the first musical show for adults took place, there were anniversaries of holidays for children and young people as well as awards for particular commitment in our parish.

But let's first have a short look at the "most strenuous day of the year", as Christmas Eve is described by people active in church. Without any doubt this day with more than 2000 participants in 5 services is strenuous – but above all it is a real feast! Particularly on Christmas Eve the two services for families and the service for toddlers in the parish centre at the same time show that families are very important to our parish. The cooperation of the different children and youth teams and the "Happy Singers" (shown as angels on the photo of the Christmas musical show on Christmas Eve 2006) is by now working out well, so that even the short time between the services in the church is going well and the calmer vespers service on Christmas Eve focussed on adults can be celebrated solemnly. We were very glad to be able to celebrate the Christmas midnight service in the old Auferstehungskirche again. At this service and at the vespers service the musical accents proved to be worthwhile. Just like our services for families, the musical services attract many people. While this annual report is being written, the preparations for Christmas Eve have already begun and we are looking forward to another lively and at the same time emotional day in our parish.

We are also grateful for all the different services we have been able to celebrate in the course of this year. Our parish has certainly become famous for its variety. And it is good to offer activities and services coming up to the needs of so many different groups of people. At the same time we are glad to say that this variety of groups comes together to celebrate services on special occasions. In this context our outdoor services at the bumper cars on the Bad Vilbel fair and in the orchards for Thanksgiving are worth mentioning (see the photo of Pfarrer Dr. Sautter). Next year we will also have our parish party again. Many people came to both open-air services which were accompanied very well by our "Anders Band" and, for the first time, by the Bad Vilbel town band. These popular events are being developed further with small changes (for example more seats between the fruit trees). This does also apply to the service on Whit Monday together with the Bad Vilbel Syrian Orthodox parish. This joint celebration is a very special service. New horizons are opening up in a cultural and religious sense and the Christian community is becoming alive in our town.

As to the topic of services, let us mention the lay preachers. Being no theologians, they celebrate services, including communion and christening. They can also hold marriage ceremonies or funeral services, although this is not often the case. In our parish Ingrid Faludi, Petra Herberhold, Hartmuth

Schroeder and Tobias Utter act as lay preachers. For this function they have undergone voluntary instruction and so supplement the work of the employed ministers beyond the boundaries of our parish. There is often the impression that they stand in for the ministers at their free weekends or during their holidays. This contemplation, however, would be too superficial. In fact the celebration of services by lay preachers of the parish plays an important and independent part in the preaching activities of the Church. We are very grateful to have lay preachers in our Christuskirche parish and would like to invite you to visit particularly the services held by them. Our parish newspaper ZACK always indicates the person celebrating the service in its calendar section. In this context it is worth mentioning that in spring Tobias Utter had his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being a lay preacher (photo together with Pfarrer Dr. Klaus Neumeier).

Last year all our lay preachers participated in the sermon series dealing with the 400<sup>th</sup> birthday of the theologian and writer of hymns Paul Gerhardt, who until today influences our faith above all with his hymns. In particular during the summer weeks these special hymn sermons were well-attended. We are very glad about this and feel encouraged to hold further sermon series.

As to the ministers in our parish, we gratefully remember the introduction service of Dr. Jens Martin Sautter in July this year. After having been vacant for nine months, the half-time post formerly held by Konrad Schulz was occupied again. In summer Jens Martin Sautter moved with his family into the vicarage Am Alten Wehr. Having experience in the field of religious courses, he has already set new trends for our work which are going to be intensified in the year to come. In addition he is going to concentrate on the work with adults and elderly people in our parish as well as ecumenical activities.

During the 2007 summer holidays we celebrated two anniversaries: Firstly there was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Leomühle children's camp. For many (often former) children these camps have contributed a large deal to their Christian formation. At a ceremony during this year's summer camp we thanked the many team members of all the years as well as the Silber family (on the photo of the ceremony on the left, next to Mr. and Mrs. Metz) who have year after year let us camp on their island in the river Schwalm at the Leomühle near Bad Zwesten. Martina and Gerhard Radgen, who have been participating for nearly 25 years, gave us lively impressions, showing us many photos and telling us even more stories of holidays with many hundreds of children.

In our newspaper ZACK it was described, how important such camps can be also for young people and adults. Particularly the ski holidays for families with about 150 participants and the father and child weekends with over 200 persons have by now become the main emphasis of our holiday work. Additionally the nine-day seminar for confirmation candidates proves that we often gain essential experience far away from everyday life on holidays and in camps. This is especially true for faith, as the distance from everyday life gives us the time to get involved with God and other people and to gain experience that may have a lasting influence on our lives.

This year the youth team has also had its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In the beginning it was a group of our parish only, but then expanded to become a group of the parishes of Bad Vilbel and Karben and finally became part of the Protestant Youth Organisation of Hesse. This network beyond the boundaries of one parish turned out to be an important place of religion and cooperation in the parish for many young people after their confirmation. There are about 40 adolescents and young adults, most of them from our Christuskirche parish. In addition to the monthly meetings there are the highlights of “Forest Christmas” and the “Liturgical Night” at Easter (see photo). To these highlights we also invite former members who do no longer live in Bad Vilbel or Karben. But the most important event of each year is the trip of the team at the end of the summer holidays. In these ten years the trips brought them several times to England and even Scotland, to Italy, the Netherlands, Saxony, Bavaria and this year to Luebeck at the Baltic Sea (see photo). Even a visit to Reinsbuettel near Buesum by the North Sea, the new home of our former minister Hans Siebert, was the destination of one of our tours.

For the third time this youth team organised the “Heaven’s Camp” for teenagers from our parishes. About 150 young campers were celebrating special services, attending various workshops and spending their time playing games on the meadows of the river Nidda near the radio station Hitradio FFH. This camp in the centre of our town is a good evidence of Christian work and a signal visible beyond the boundaries of our parish.

We are particularly proud of two prizes won by our parish: During the Church Congress the youth film group lead by Markus Stein (internally called “the Soap”) received the first prize by a high-ranking jury in cooperation with the TV station WDR. Above all the close to professional conception and its creative realization were acknowledged. The short films are shown, among other things, in the course of our prayer gardens during the passion season or on special “soap” nights held by the group.

Our parish received another award for its special activities in the field of fundraising. Tobias Utter, the chairman of our Organization for the Support of Christuskirchengemeinde, and Frank Sarkar, the Chairman of the Parish Council, accepted the certificate in Frankfurt. (On the photo together with the minister Wolfgang Prawitz from the jury of the Church of Hesse).

We are good at collecting donations. Above all this does apply to the “Initiative to Rescue the Old Church Auferstehungskirche” concluded this year. By means of a bundle of activities about € 250,000 were collected for the basic renovation of the old church. This successful preservation would not have been possible without that money. In the same way it applies to the Organization for the Support of Christuskirchengemeinde. With over 80 regular donors it does not only finance the post of Thorsten Mebus, but also many other things in the parish. Given the still extreme financial stringency of the parish, this will also be necessary in the future. The financial committee is trying hard to improve the financial situation, as the funds received from the church organization are not sufficient at all. In this context we are demanding

that a larger part of the Church's tax income is to be given to the parishes. For several years we have not been able to balance our budget but by donations, collections and reserves. Given the large number of rooms we fortunately use intensively for our work and are not empty, above all the much higher energy costs have been affecting the budget strongly, so that all the funds allocated to us by the Church of the Land have been paid for this purpose and all the parish work has been financed by donations and reserves. This must be changed urgently and Klaus Neumeier and Tobias Utter are doing their best to convince the Synod of the Church of the Land to improve this situation.

It was only due to donations and a contribution by the Organization for the Support of Christuskirchengemeinde that the first musical show for adults, "Touch the Sky", could be rehearsed and four times performed in a packed house, the public full dress rehearsal included. Thorsten Mebus had come up with a musical team that was able to show the story of King David convincingly as regards music and acting. You could feel the enthusiasm of the performers and other participants as well as of all the numerous visitors. No wonder that we are already thinking of another project...

In addition to this special project all the other weekly musical activities must not be forgotten. There are several bands, the flute players and, above all, the choirs with members of all ages from four or five years on: the children's choir and the Happy Singers, the youth choir and the Gospeltrain. They comprise more than 150 participants each week. All ensembles contribute intensively to the services and other activities and events, so being a real part of our parish. (This, too, is made possible by funds from the donators of the Organization to Support Christuskirchengemeinde).

As every year there would be many more things worth mentioning. But at least it should be said that Frank Sarkar, after his first two years in office, was again appointed chairman of the Parish Council and Klaus Neumeier continues to be the vice-chairman. You should also know that the church Christuskirche is open every working day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., on Fridays to 3 p.m. – We think that this possibility of reflection on ordinary weekdays is not yet known to the public. The old church Auferstehungskirche is open on Saturdays from 10 a.m. until the start of the end-of-the-week service. The series called "Hymn and Music" that took place in our well renovated old church also attracted many people.

After so many really satisfactory things (except the financial situation), there are, of course, also saddening facts to report: The first thing is that there is little interest in activities for adults. Due to the lack of participants the tour to the Martin Luther memorial sites planned for autumn had to be skipped, just like the afternoon meetings on St. Elisabeth. The same applies to the very informative one-world evening programmes, e.g. about sponsorships of children all over the world. There were so few people that the committee of "partnerships and ecumenical contacts" decided to stop these programmes for the time being. The same may happen to the "Tuesday night prayers with songs from Taizé", that have taken place since 1999 every Tuesday at 7 p.m. except during school holidays. But this programme is struggling for survival,

as regards its direction as well as its number of participants. – This is extremely sad, because these prayers are directed to target groups other than children, young people and families. The Taizé prayers with their meditative character are in contrast to the other types of services; in principle we think that this is quite important, but ...

Another special event is worth mentioning: On October 3, 2007 the first “Fair of Ideas, Keen on our Parish” of the Church of the Land of Hesse took place in the Sports and Cultural Centre of Bad Vilbel - Dortelweil. Klaus Neumeier was the main co-organizer of this event and many groups and single persons of our parish helped to arrange this fair and its programme. A lot of people outside Bad Vilbel also noticed this event which was acknowledged to be exemplary.

To finish off, some thoughts are to lead us over to the new ecclesiastical year 2007/2008. At first there will be a change in the team of ministers during the advent season – although this will be only temporarily. Ulrike Mey is pregnant and therefore will have an important private appointment in February 2008. Presumably she will be back at her post by Easter 2009. We are sure that we will find a good substitute for her in our parish during that period of time.

As regards our building sites, there will be a lot to do between March and September. After the renovation of the churches Christuskirche and Auferstehungskirche (see photo of the renovated organ prospect of the Auferstehungskirche) we hope that the parish centre will be the last major project of this kind for the next few years. After having been in use for nearly 50 years, the parish hall and the other rooms in the parish centre need a complete renovation. It starts with the out-of-date electrical system and is ending with urgent measures of fire prevention. Planning is going full steam ahead. Of course this project will influence our work in the parish considerably, although the renovation will certainly not be the only thing to influence our work.

It is more important for our parish, what will happen to our services on Sunday morning. For several years we have been celebrating the traditional liturgical service at 10 a.m. and the service for children, confirmation candidates and families at 11.15 a.m. At this time, however, there are no activities for adults (except on Happy (H)our Sundays), while there are no activities for children at 10 o’ clock. Additionally there is a lack of a regular “normal” service with modern hymns. Many team members of all these services are thinking this matter over. Of course, all parish members interested will soon be involved in this process, presumably during the passion season 2008.

And finally we are planning a special project for autumn 2008, that has come into being on a meeting of team members in March this year and is now maturing increasingly. According to the motto “Things that do you good” we will invite you to weekly activities that will “do you good” from October 20 to November 30 (after the autumn holidays until the start of the advent season). Presumably each Wednesday night and alternatively each Saturday morning (then with activities for children, too) we will experience several activities

together (e.g. meals, music or theatre) or split up into some groups to reflect and talk about life, God and our world. And even before, after the summer holidays, we intent to let things do us good and to start a real Bad Vilbel event. You may be buzzing with anticipation – it is the same with us.

For all these reasons we skipped the usual booklet proven during the last two years for our activities in 2008. Due to Ulrike Mey being substituted, the contemplation on changes in the Sunday services and planning the project according to the motto "Things that do you good", there are so many questions open, that we confine ourselves to a small leaflet containing the most important activities and events. It will be issued together with our newspaper ZACK No. 6 / 2007.

On behalf of the Parish Council we extend our best wishes for the starting advent season to all of you

Frank Sarkar, Chairman

Dr. Klaus Neumeier, Minister and Vice-Chairman