

I was a
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and you
welcomed me

Church and Migration





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Evangelical Church of Westphalia
Keynote paper for Synod in November 2018

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Altstädter Kirchplatz 5
33602 Bielefeld
Phone/Fax: +49 (0)521 594-0/-129
E-Mail: landeskirchenamt@lka.ekvw.de
www.evangelisch-in-westfalen.de

Prof. Dr. Dieter Beese, Bielefeld
Carmen Damerow, Bielefeld
Dr. Jan-Dirk Döhling, Bielefeld
Prof. Dr. Traugott Jähnichen, Bochum
Dirk Johnen, Dortmund
Dr. Ulrich Möller, Bielefeld (leadership)
Annette Muhr-Nelson, Dortmund
Christoph Lindemann, Bielefeld
wbv Media GmbH & Co. KG, Bielefeld

Please send your responses to the Central Office of the
Evangelical Church of Westphalia, c/- Carmen Damerow,
e-mail: damerow@kircheundmigration.ekvw.de.

Reports on your experience, ideas for activities, project descriptions,
events and comments should go to Annette Muhr-Nelson,
e-Mail: muhr-nelson@kircheundmigration.ekvw.de.



Foreword

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” The church has always heard a clear mandate in this phrase: Christ calls us to his side – he who, at the Last Judgment, changes places with the hungry and sick, with prisoners and strangers.

In autumn 2015 large numbers of people came into a country in a very short time. They were looking for protection from war and persecution, and for new future prospects. The church, too, inquired what needed to be done in a practical way. Congregations and church districts, offices and agencies, and above all many volunteers offered practical assistance, and they still do. This assistance ranged from housing to clothing, from accompaniment in visits to the authorities and even to sanctuary in our churches. In time, however, deeper questions and new challenges have surfaced in society and the church. Fundamental concerns were expressed. Neglected problems have cropped up. Conflicts have escalated, even into open violence.

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” The biblical phrase stimulates us to see strangers as more than merely needy people needing help. People from other cultures, with other religions and languages, coming from another political context – that is sometimes scary and alienating to people, which we must not be play down or explain away.

Refugees and migrants are people who say “I”, who have their own story and can tell of their concerns and hopes. They are active and do not want to remain objects of pity and affection, of skepticism or fear.

“You welcomed me.” We need to be very willing to change in order for such a welcome to be possible. It calls for a lot of openness to enable genuine arrival and real togetherness. With those who come and with those who are there.

The fact that the strangeness of Christ himself meets us in the challenges is a gentle presentiment, powerful provocation and profound promise at the same time.

It is important to look and listen carefully, to clearly name facts and questions, to take a position and live with perplexity. And it is out of the question to reject strangeness out of hand, seeing it as a threat and understanding migration and refugee movements merely as problems.

Christ as the Lord of the Church gives himself to the church as a gift.

This slight presentiment, this powerful provocation, this profound promise has also been understood in the Evangelical Church of Westphalia. At many places and in many different ways it has brought surprising and happy experiences.

This makes us grateful and hopeful. It prompts us to ask curious questions about what refugees bring with them and what they need. How can we serve peace in questions of displacement and migration, strengthen our life together and respect the dignity of all? We may well be amazed at the many opportunities for the church to change and open up, in order to encounter its stranger Lord anew.

This keynote paper is an invitation to reflect and inquire, to supplement and critique, to engage in respectful argument and make surprising discoveries.

I would like to thank all those responsible for their efforts, care and creativity in producing this paper. May God bless all those who read and reflect on it, and add their contributions and questions.

Annette Kurschus

Annette Kurschus
Praeses

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Introduction: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35)

You welcomed me

This phrase describes the normal case: anyone leaving their old life behind and starting something new depends on being welcomed. For people who have been driven away from their homes, or have been forced to flee, this biblical phrase means: I have managed to escape with my life, I have been saved, I have a chance in life again. Being welcomed is vital for them.

What is happening to millions of people worldwide today is familiar to the war and postwar generation in Germany. Thousands of people lost their homes after 1945 and had to seek and build a new home. That marked them and the following generations. Losing your home country or region is terrifying. But that is what happens to anyone who has to flee or is forcibly displaced. A person also loses their home if it is conquered, occupied or ruled by strangers. It took a great common effort to integrate those expelled from the eastern Germany territories and other refugees. Having a home means living with trusted people in a familiar place, without fear and with good relations. It means: being blessed.

In our Christian tradition we have a certain perspective. Jesus here sets lasting standards: loyal and hardworking people are to enjoy God's blessing. Also foreign, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, even guilty people will find a place to live. Through blessing, the world becomes a place in which people together settle down, East of Eden. They have a foretaste of their heavenly home.

I was a stranger

Being a stranger is not always hardship. Strangeness is also fascinating. Visits to sister cities in Europe or partner churches worldwide always have something exotic and fascinating about them, and have the flair of the “wide wide world”. Unknown people are received as guests just as we are received by our hosts as visitors. People have a right to be strange. They have a right to be themselves and no one can force them to “be like us or you will not be welcome”. Being a stranger and being accepted are not a contradiction but two sides of the same coin. (What would happen to a long-standing couple if the difference between each of them was no longer allowed ...)

Something strange can also be desirable. The example of strange and exotic cuisine is obvious. Famous painters sought the magic of the Pacific in the early years of the 20th century. Our love of travel and the great interest in cruises and world trips stems from the charm of strange lands, of what is foreign and exotic. I can also get used to the strange, come to appreciate it, own it and even regret that through habituation and appropriation something strange loses its special character.

But it is also true that strange things can worry us, simply because they are different and unfamiliar. “Strange lands, strange customs” is an old German saying. That can be unsettling. Not only can something strange be unsettling because it is different. It can also conceal evil intentions, as can things in our familiar environment. You think you know a person and can trust him or her and then come betrayal, abuse, violence, crime. No one would have expected it. You grant the stranger hospitality, open the door give space for development and then the person shows their true face as an extremist and violent criminal. There are reasons when e.g. the Latin term *hostis* applies to both ‘the stranger’ and ‘the enemy’. We should approach each one with caution and vigilance.

You need a whole village to raise a child, says an African proverb. The community involves the individuals in life and work, gives them attention, and leads them into the community. But if they infringe norms, it acts promptly to raise the issue and impose relevant sanctions. That does not just apply to children. It does not call for much imagination to envisage what happens when that is lacking. But we must keep in mind: people who have come to us in Germany and have found refuge are subject to a special, intricate set of rules. They involve residence and labor regulations that only apply to them and not to the indigenous citizens. It is obvious that only refugees will commit certain offences through infringing these rules. Things are different, however, regarding theft, fraud, violence and abuse, and even organized crime. There are an equal number of German offenders in this field. In other words, crime does not need to be imported. True, due to the increase in population through the arrival of refugees and migrants there has been an increase in certain types of crime. Experts say that the crime rate among refugees and migrants is no greater than that of the rest of the population. Rather, for newcomers and locals alike: regardless of cultural origin, religious or philosophical affiliation or social status, there are factors that favor crime and others that serve to prevent it.



In 2016, 22.5 percent of the German population had a migration background, and in NRW it was 27.2 Prozent (Source: Statistisches Jahrbuch 2017). It says: “A person has a migration background if they or at least one parent were not born with German nationality. Persons with migration backgrounds comprise all foreigners, ethnic Germans who migrated to Germany after the Second World War or later, and those who have been naturalized. They also include persons born with German nationality but of whom at least one parent is a foreigner, ethnic German or naturalized.”

Why talk about migration again now?

The Evangelical Church of Westphalia, its members, congregations and organization have been strongly involved in receiving and integrating people who have come to us on grounds of persecution, but also for other reasons such as economic hardship, war and civil war. On the basis of the gospel, it has taken a position on fundamental questions and current challenges. Why is the Evangelical Church of Westphalia today addressing the public with this keynote paper on “church and migration”? The answer is that we consider it necessary to take a position, yet again and in a fundamental way. The situation has taken a turn for the worse in the last few months and the problems have become more urgent. At the same time, the discussion is becoming less and less conciliatory, and more and more uninhibited.

Over a million children women and men have fled their home country since 2015 from war, terror, political persecution and violence, and have come to us in Germany in the hope of a life without fear of death.

With overwhelming energy, countless citizens, Christian communities, Christian and secular welfare organizations, initiatives, associations, companies and unions – in cooperation with local community leaders – dedicated themselves to the integration of the refugees and created a welcoming culture to an unexpected degree.



*Through the refugees I have made new friends.
I have learned a lot and they show me great gratitude and hospitality.*

Man, 52

However, immigration to this extent and at this rate is also a great challenge for the cohesion of our society. It has led to uncertainty and tensions.

On the one hand, it is a long-term, ambitious and difficult task to integrate refugees into our society on a permanent basis. Adults, children and youth have to find appropriate accommodation, learn German, and find access to education and work.

On the other hand, many people in our society are deeply unsettled anyway. Their familiar world is changing rapidly and profoundly, and they are less sure of their own place amid these confusing upheavals. Economic and cultural globalization challenges familiar values. Digitization, mobility, new forms of work and progressive individualization open up undreamed new possibilities. At the same time, for many people, they radically call into question familiar patterns of life, security factors and frames of reference. It is hard to grasp the ever faster upheavals in the global economy. Key factors in people's lives seem to be increasingly slipping out of their control as citizens. All the greater is the fear that these developments are a threat to their own future chances.

There are many people who perceive those who come to us as refugees or migrants as personifying or causing these cares and fears. Integration is a complicated, long-term process, linked with difficulties and problems. Many are increasingly feeling they cannot cope with this. Life in diversity sounds very nice but can also be perceived as a threat to their own familiar way of life. Some people feel that migrants with the ability and the will to rise in society are competing with them for jobs.

At the same time we are seeing that currently populists and rightwing extremists are exploiting these uncertainties, worries and tensions. They are transforming the worries of the population into anxiety and hate. They are directing this hate at people with a migration background and refugees, and also at people who advocate for the rights of migrants and refugees. It is important to speak out and resist hate speech and attempts at intimidation.



I have looked after many refugees since 2015. It all started so well. I 'sacrificed' a lot of time and energy. In some cases, their progress is so slow and laborious, and our enthusiasm has waned. I feel exploited by some and others are simply not getting anywhere.

Woman, 53

How can the church contribute to orientation and an objective discussion in such a situation? How can the stories and images of hope in the Bible sustain people in their uncertainty and worry? How can this biblically grounded hope become a source of strength for our lives and action, for our solidarity with the people who need our commitment? How can it encourage us to shape a common future, in spite of the lack of transparency, the uncertainty and the unknown outcomes of current developments?



I don't know the Bible. Is it true that everyone in it is a migrant? [...] This whole migrant and refugee issue today is glorified if it is directly linked with the time of Jesus.

Ulrich Müller, retired fireman, Schwerte

This keynote paper of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia is not a message from heaven. It speaks from the perspective of close relations with our partners in political and social life. We want to contribute our experiences and insights to the public discussion. And we want to learn from the public debate. We are aware that as Christians we need to constantly adjust and correct our basic stance, but also to seek reassurance and lucidity. That is how we understand the church's mandate and its specific tasks in view of the upcoming challenges. For that reason we are looking forward to the opportunities of direct response and communication offered by the interactive internet version of this keynote paper. You will find the whole paper at kirche-und-migration.ekvw.de along with additional materials, such as pictures, stories, films, interviews, devotions, detailed statistics and other texts.

Let yourself be inspired by it and inspire us with your responses

1. Biblical and theological reassurance

1.1 The Bible as a witness to migration and wandering

When – in the midst of the diverse migration realities of the present – we look into the Bible, we encounter familiar stories – and are challenged to read them with new eyes. Precisely for the established churches in Europe, this gives an opportunity to rediscover the fact that – from the first to the last page – the Bible is a book about migration experiences, memories and hopes.

The Bible is a book about itinerant and mobile people. On the one hand, it shows how tough this is. But, on the other, it is a book about dignity, gifts, strength of faith and the blessing of migrants. Herein lies a double reminder – for the present time and for the question about the church's life and work in a migration society.

While migrants at present are often only perceived in the context of shortcomings and problems, the Bible stories in the center of the Judeo-Christian faith tradition tell of their coping and flourishing. Without concealing the hardship and misery of migrants, the biblical texts speak of persons who do not just suffer their migration as fate but shape and change it, rendering it fruitful, knowing that they are led, sustained and gifted by God in so doing.

The faith stories in the Bible are mostly also stories of movement, wandering and foreignness. That memory changes the one-sided view of refugees and migrants as being lacking in something. Moreover, it leads to questions about our well established and deeply rooted mainline churches. To what extent are we flexible and ready to accept new beginnings, processes and people?



Refugees

Over 68.5 million people have currently fled their country. This is a record figure, according to Bread for the World, the German development agency. Nine out of ten refugees seek refuge in developing countries. Four million asylum seekers found refuge in the poorest countries in the world, in which people themselves have less than 1.25 dollars a day to live on.

Density of experience

The wealth of biblical migration texts reflect, firstly, the fact that people have always been on the move. Secondly, they show that the biblical landscapes were always the scene of struggles, wars and conflicts of interest among the ancient imperial powers. From the warring campaigns of the Egyptians through the empires of Mesopotamia to the conquests of Alexander the Great and the Romans, the people and small states were exposed for centuries to almost uninterrupted foreign rule, siege, conquest and occupation, with often thousands of deaths. Above all, however expulsion, deportation and forced labor belonged to the reality of ancient empires. Particularly influential for the faith and texts of the Hebrew Bible was the experience of the great exiles in the 8th and on the threshold of the 6th century BC. Hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of Israel and Judah were deported or forcibly resettled in Assyria and Babylon. Besides the actual hardship, there was the spiritual and religious challenge in the foreign land to keep their own beliefs alive and sustainable, so literally to rethink everything about 'God and the world'.

Migrant figures like Jacob, the refugee, Joseph, the slave, or Esther, the migrant, at the court of the Persian king, intensify this reality for whole generations and the memory of migration of a whole people. Yet they do not just report facts, they compact them into experience, hope and the certainty that God's own strangeness can be experienced in precisely such stories and realities of foreignness. In them, people are enabled to live and have faith. Moreover, God is shown to be one who goes with them.

1.2 Israel's great narratives

The narrative of being driven out of Paradise (Gen 3:23–24) and Cain's going "east of Eden" (Gen 4:16 ff.) shows that the biblical authors basically imagine human history and the development of culture and civilization as a migration event.

But biblical Israel also tells its own story – and Judaism follows it to this day – as one of multiple migrations. This applies above all to the stories of the mothers and fathers of Israel, the 'arch-parents', to their paths out of Mesopotamia to Canaan and their lives as 'strangers' in the Promised Land. From the beginning of the narrative we are aware of Israel's self-awareness of having been chosen by God and called to follow its own path, under the blessing, that God gives with this special story to "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:1–4).

In the context of this sending, the texts also contain the intention and religious duty to preserve their own identity in the foreign country by living among themselves, their relatives and families – as Judaism lived for millennia and as can be found in many migrant communities to this day.

At the same time, however, and on this basis, the arch-parent stories mostly tell of peaceful conflict resolution; they describe cooperation and respectful border drawing towards others and underline also the mutual religious communication between the family of Abraham and the other inhabitants of the land. The latter recognize the special relation to God of the arch-parents (Gen 23:8; cf. 14:18), and the former learn that the fear of God is also there where they least expect it (Gen 20:14), and that they are called to pray for the good of the others (Gen 20:17).

The Exodus story, Israel's second great migration narrative, is more political and combative. It bears witness to God's option for the oppressed slaves of the state of Egypt and shows how necessary it is for freedom to depend on law and precept. The Torah – i.e. all the law that is to apply in Israel – relates to this experience of liberation and journeying. It serves freedom and is the gift from the God of freedom (Ex 20:1).

Particularly in texts and stories dealing with the memory of the Exodus and the occupying of the land of Canaan we are struck by the sometimes openly hostile tones towards certain other peoples. These texts frequently mirror the brutal experiences of oppression and violence that Israel itself suffered under the different ancient empires.

Foreignness and law

It is remarkable, however, that “the strangers” in the Torah certainly have their own rights. Apart from another word meaning an alien passing by, the Hebrew word for “foreign” (*ger*) means people who permanently live in a place but do not stem from there. They do not belong to one of the resident clans and therefore have no rights as full (male) citizens with their own property. The different legal traditions of the Torah lay down in detail the way aliens have to hold to the religious customs of Israel – e.g. to rest on the Sabbath – and under what conditions they are allowed to take part in Israel’s worship services.

Second, the greatest value is attached to how the members of Israel must behave towards the aliens. Here aliens are, so to speak, a yardstick of just social legislation (Ex 22:20–23:9). Because of their weak position – like that of Israeli widows and orphans – special protection against economic, social and legal attacks, and special welfare regulations apply to the guaranteeing social assistance of the kind received by needy Israelites (Deut 14:29).

As a reason and motivation for loving the alien like yourself (Lev 19:38) there is multiple emphasis that “you [i.e. Israel] were aliens in Egypt” (Ex 22:21). “You know the heart of an alien” (Ex 23:9).

The heart of biblical ethics regarding strangers therefore beats the rhythm of memory. Precisely when you are enjoying the wealth and gifts of your own country you should remember that you yourself were not always there and are not alone there now, either. The local people receive the commission to keep remembering their own life as aliens – even if they have been sedentary for generations.

Just like today, this was probably not the rule back then either. Otherwise there would not be such strict emphasis on protection (Ex 22:20), participation and the ideal of equal treatment of the aliens (Num 15:15f). The reality in biblical times was not idyllic for foreigners. Otherwise the biblical texts would not contain fantasies of the strict subjugation of aliens or even ideas about strictly excluding them from Israel (Neh 13). Here we sense a severe and anxious view of aliens. It reflects negative fears or experiences, inner tensions, the feeling of threat to their own identity and the wish to protect it. In the background is the culturally and politically troubled situation of the Jewish community under the pressure of ancient empires. There is a tangible concern that marrying ‘foreign’ women could lead to a falling away from God (Deut 7:23) and to the loss of Israel’s special identity.

Shifting borders

Yet this view does not remain without contradiction in Israel's Hebrew Bible and our Old Testament. This is shown, for example, by the story about the two widows, Naomi and Ruth. Naomi, an Israelite, returns from the neighboring country of Moab with her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth. During a famine she had been well received there and found wives for her sons.

Due to a certain view by Israel of the past and its identity, marrying the members of this people was clearly contrary to the will of God (cf. Ezra 9–10; Neh 13:23–27). In the case of the Moabites, the Torah (Deut 23:4) states that the Moabites had once refused Israel bread and water when they were on their way through the wilderness.

The story of Ruth reports the opposite and so undermines the basic assumption of exclusion as required by the relevant verse of the Torah. Ruth, the Moabite, looks after Naomi, the Israelite. Her solidarity sets in motion a whole flow of human goodness and overcomes borders. God acts (Ruth 2:10–12). They both – a 'national' and a foreigner – benefit from their gifts of mutual goodness.

Not only is Ruth, the foreigner, able to stay in Israel. The story likewise underlines that Naomi, the socially disadvantaged Israelite (Ruth 4:14–15), flourishes again and there is an increase of blessing and well-being in the whole of Israel.

The final note in the book of Ruth (Ruth 4: 14–15) takes this up. She, the migrant, is the great-grandmother of David, i.e. of the greatest and most glorious king of Israel. And the beginning of the New Testament (Mt 1:5) continues this line of thinking by explicitly naming Ruth as an ancestral mother of Jesus (Mt 1:5).

1.3 Jesus Christ – on the move and a stranger

Pictures and realities on the way

The people around Jesus and the early Christian communities lived with and from the Bible of Israel. They knew its symbolism of being on the move and trusted it. On this basis they interpreted their experiences with Jesus the Messiah.

The gospels describe the earthly Jesus as a person who is normally moving around. His path mirrors God's coming closer (Mk 1:14). His journey and that of his disciples maps out Israel's journey with God and takes it further (Mt 2). Jesus' coming, staying and going to the Father are, particularly in the farewell addresses of John's gospel (Jn 13–17), basic descriptions of the being of God's Son and the power of faith.

Ethnic boundaries like those between Israel, the People of God, and the other peoples are known in the gospels and in some cases even emphasized (Mt 10:5). But, at the same time, Jesus also learns how to cross boundaries (Mt 15:21–28), to people's great surprise. Not only they, but also Jesus learns along the way, as the gospels describe. And the risen Christ extends the learning community to embrace all nations (Mt 20:28).

The Acts of the Apostles tell of how it is God's will, guided by God's spirit, that faith in Christ also reaches non-Jews (Acts 10). At the same time it becomes recognizable that the new "Way" (Acts 9:2) was actually able to turn the believers into migrants (Acts 11:19–20). Like the well-planned missionary journeys, fleeing and persecution (Acts 18:1–3; cf. Rm 16:3–4) were also part of the story of the emergence and dissemination of early Christianity.

Even though crossing over from Asia to Europe, i.e. from today's Turkey to the Greek mainland, was probably not so important culturally in antiquity as it is today, the book of Acts underlines this step (Acts 16:9–40). Interestingly, when the Apostles and the message of Christ arrive on the European mainland in the city of Philippi (Acts 16:11–15.40) they first find hospitality and then faith in the person of a cloth dealer called Lydia, who – as her name suggests – probably came from Asia, i.e. from the western Turkish region of Lydia. This not only shows the extent to which migration determined everyday and working life in antiquity. The dawn of "Christian Europe" was hence marked by the hospitality of a migrant, and, according to the story in Acts, Europe's first Christian was from Asia Minor.

The young congregations brought people from the Jewish tradition together with people of other ethnic, cultural, political and religious traditions. Engaging with different traditions and thinking was part of daily life. That also led to fierce conflicts (Rm 14; Gal 2:11–14; 5:1–6), e.g. regarding the food laws or circumcision, and to various compromises (1 Cor 8; Acts 15). Paul's teaching on justification by faith is also rooted in this struggle for unity in diversity. Baptism creates unity and equality between different persons (Gal 3:28). Those who belong to Christ and belong in him are not decided by the restrictions of ritual purity and social exclusion as laid down by the Torah for Jews. The dividing wall of being strangers to God has been broken down. Christ and his death also make non-Jews into members of the household of God (Eph 2:12–19).

Christ in a foreign country

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me/did not welcome me” (Mt 25:35.38.43). That is what Jesus says of himself in his parables – he the son of man and king who has come to judge the world. The message of the parables is plain and subtle at the same time. It is plain because – as with the behavior towards the hungry and thirsty, naked, sick and prisoners – the kingly judge of the world will, at the end of time, also take personally the action or non-action towards strangers, “the least of these who are members of my family”. The foreigners are here grouped with other socially disadvantaged persons, who then cannot be played off against each other. The parable speaks neither of preferring nor of disadvantaging strangers over other needy persons.

According to the Old Testament, whoever oppresses dispossessed persons also despises the creator (Prov 31), as they are made in the image of God. Likewise the judge of the world in the parable of Jesus also relates the (dis)respect for the least of the “members of my family” to himself. It is this view that places each low and needy person in a new reality by relating him or her to Christ.

The message of the parable is subtle, as well, since it plays with the aspect of surprise. The righteous people ask, “When did we see you as a stranger and did not welcome you?”

Strangers – whether sick, hungry or prisoners – should therefore not be co-opted right away for Christ, or even as Christ, but it is right always to expect to be surprised by Christ in the stranger.

Being Christian as being a stranger – the itinerant people of God

The New Testament letters, in particular, constantly stress that being a stranger, or even having no home, is part of the life of faith. The young congregations recognize themselves in the migration and stories of being strangers of the Hebrew Bible, in the concepts and the images of being on the move and of migration. For example, the author of 1 Peter uses the word “exiles” to address the congregation. Christians are strangers and elect (the Greek word for church is derived from the same word) – these are two sides of a coin (1 Peter 1:1.17; 2:11).

The letter to the Hebrews develops this with particular depth. It roots Christian readers profoundly in the migrant narratives of Israel. It takes them along a path that began there but is not ended. Just as Israel once hoped (and still hopes) for the arrival and rest (Deut 12:9; Ps 95:11) that God promised (and still promises) with the Exodus from Egypt, those who believe in Christ are on an exodus journey and traveling towards the fulfillment of the promises of God for rest (Heb 4:9). As Abraham, who set out obediently “for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance” (Heb 11:8–10), the Christians “here ... have no lasting city, but ... are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb 13:14). That gives rise to an attitude of yearning, seeking and looking from afar (Heb 4:11 and 11:14).

The community with and on the way to God turns the believers into migrants, so to speak. Their hopes and actions, their attitudes and behavior are not fulfilled in the here and now. They are, as Paul writes “citizens of heaven” (Phil 1:27; 3:20) and therefore “not of this world”. The church, and faith, look with the eyes of “spiritual migrants”, perceiving the reality of migration and the faith of migrants as in a mirror that reflects their true identity before God.

The question to us is: where are we still strangers, and where have we long become settled? In what direction do we want to set out and what do we want to look out for?



The people that walked in darkness ...

Late in the evening of 3 October 2013 a cutter ran aground off Lampedusa in the Mediterranean with over 500 people from Eritrea and Somalia on board. The people on the island heard the desperate cries but in the darkness thought it was the screeching of seagulls. The boat sank within a few minutes. The survivors stayed above the water for five hours. Of the 368 people who drowned that night 108 were locked in the hold. One of them was a 20-year-old woman from Eritrea, who gave birth to a child before they both died. Some of these people are buried in Lampedusa. A small shop has displayed the objects they had with them – clothing, water bottles, Bibles and Korans, photos of relatives. A few belongings have made it to our world and bear mute witness to the harsh gulf that extends between those in the land of the shadow of death and us, living at their longed-for destination, in their eyes in the Promised Land.



The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.

Isaiah 9:2

We are very familiar with this Advent reading, but how unrealistic, even cynical it sounds when we remember those who live in darkness. Martin Buber's translation brings it out even more: The people who wander in the dark see a great light and it shines brightly over those who live in the land of the shadow of death.

How may that sound in the ears of those startled out of sleep by the heavy boots of soldiers, who search in dusty rubble for something edible for their children, who wander around in the desert? Are the promises of the Old Testament prophets more real or less real for them than for us? How do they feel on their journey, in the dark nights?

Many who set out, impelled by hardship, cling to their faith. The Bibles and Korans they bring with them witness to that. Their faith is their only hope, and at the same time, a driving force. Hope is the motor of migration. In it lies the germ of the new life, the power to leave everything behind and start anew. What a huge effort that means! How strong must the vision be, the faith that after setting out from the land of the shadow of death, God will show the way that my feet can go?

Those who come to us testify to the faith that moves mountains, and to the hope that in the power of the Holy Spirit will overcome many kinds of obstacle. They tell us about the great light that will one day drive away all darkness. They have seen it and say to us: the light is coming!

1.4 The church of Jesus Christ in God's mission

God's love for the world took shape in Jesus Christ. God's kingdom has broken out in his person and his life – puzzling, incredibly new and liberating. His resurrection broke the finality of death and gave all suffering a prospect of hope.

Through his spirit, Christ draws people into his work. He enables people to live and act as sisters and brothers, as friends of Christ, and to realize God's good intentions with God's creation. Classical theology puts it as follows: Whoever believes has a share in the "kingly rule" of Christ. This king is a brother and friend who wants to win over his friends to share in this "rule". Through often inconspicuous acts of love, acceptance and the strengthening of their fellow humans, this rule becomes attractive and powerful. One of its basic features is love of the neighbor. This is about help in need and about physical or spiritual suffering. Yet it is also about encounter at eye level, the effort to understand the other, to accept him or her in their difference, and about willingness to learn from one another. That way God's kingdom takes shape through unspectacular love of the neighbor.

Yet the life of Jesus is not only the life of the one who kindly accepts people, calls them to the table of his community and frees body and soul from suffering. The life of Jesus is also that of a prophet, who names salvation and evil, malice, lies and truth, and arouses enthusiasm for the quest for truth and justice. Jesus Christ wants to win us humans for this critical and self-critical existence. His cross makes it terribly clear how powerless and helpless people can become when they do not trust the powers of the kingdom of God. The world power Rome turns against him and God's loving work in him. The dominant religion turns against him and his proclamation. Secular and religious laws are invoked for his downfall. Public morality and opinion shout "Hosanna!" and cry "crucify" him. In such a web of power and confusion of voices it is hard to keep a clear head and a calm prophetic voice. Yet Christ, who wants to win us through his spirit for God's coming kingdom trusts us to seek paths of justice and peace. He trusts us to win others and convince them of how reliable, liberating and satisfying these ways are.

Finally, with the example of his life and in the power of his spirit, Christ allows us to share in his "priestly existence". "For" – as Martin Luther said – "whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop and pope..." Through the spirit of Christ people are enabled to bear witness to God in words and actions and to orient themselves and others to God, who is a God of love, goodness and mercy. They become able to trust God, who is all-powerful in that God can create something new and good out of suffering and hardship. This includes turning away from all attitudes that propagate hate and practice hard-heartedness and ill will. It is comforting and liberating to see that the presence of Jesus Christ in the power of his spirit and the coming of his kingdom are not distant dreams. The "good powers" often go unnoticed among us and yet are at work through us. Precisely in the inconspicuous, cautious nature of the coming kingdom lies its great power, inviting all people in.



The theological concept of missio dei overcomes all feelings of superiority. It leads to the centre of faith in the God of the Bible and the Koran that we will (only) find our future in trusting God. [...] The experiences of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all the prophets, which are handed down to us in the Koran and the Bible, are a strong encouragement for us today.

Müzeyyen Dreessen, social worker and educator, Muslim, for decades involved in intercultural and interreligious dialogue

God has plans for the world. That is why the church does not exist for itself but is intended to enable God's plan to transform the world. In the ecumenical movement the concept often used for this is missio dei (God's mission). God draws us in Christ into God's mission. Participating in missio dei and Christ's reign of peace, in his prophetic and priestly existence, is expressed in how we (1) are church together, (2) celebrate faith together, (3) pass on and witness to faith together, and (4) shoulder responsibility. This leads to the questions in chapter 3 about practical ideas for the church and congregations.

2. Social ethical orientation

2.1 A league match of hearts

Daniel is in two minds when he speaks of home. The German-Korean is a Protestant pastor in the Schwelm church district in Westphalia. He was born in 1984 in Castrop-Rauxel and grew up in Dortmund; but for a long time he was torn about where his home actually is.

The child of the Ruhr area, of Asian origin, is firmly linked to Germany. His parents have lived for decades in Dortmund, and feel “fully integrated”. They want to be buried here. First his mother came to Germany in 1967 as a nurse. His father left his homeland Korea in the mid-70s to work in a German mine.

Daniel Cham Jung and his wife, who also has Korean parents, understand themselves as representatives of a future Germany that is culturally more and more diverse. It hurts him all the more when someone says: “You are not German” or “Germany is not your home”. Looking Asian, the pastor attracts attention in his congregation. “At present I am unique,” he knows. Many people cannot recognize on the phone that he comes from a family with a migration background. His appearance cannot be hidden, however, and people often react with surprise. He often has to explain why he looks the way he does. Even friendly inquiries can be irritating and understood as an attack. Being a foreigner is not a yet normal thing in Germany.

Jung understands himself as German and Korean. That became even clearer to him during his 15-month internship abroad in Seoul, Korea. There he was not a foreigner even though he does not speak the language perfectly. For the first time he sensed how it feels to live in a country “in which everyone looks like me”.

Unlike in Korea or in the United States, language plays a big role in Germany, he says. “In Germany people are classified according to their linguistic ability.” Many opportunities are thereby lost, Jung regrets. In the United States, for example, people have to put their ideas across, and make them understandable. How they do that language-wise is not so important – unlike in Germany. Here linguistic ability plays a key role. Jung sometimes has the impression that grammatical correctness and eloquence are all that matters. That excludes many people, he remarks.

Looking different than the norm is a lasting challenge though. Daniel often uses that as a starting point for conversations. The young pastor has a personal dream: “When the first Korean plays in the German national soccer team every goal will be mark a victory.”



Football is a field which is intercultural right up to the World Cup. At the same time, during the 2018 World Cup the debate about Mesut Özil, the former German national player, made it clear how fragile intercultural communication is in our society.

Migration is one of the constants of human history; it was and is a worldwide phenomenon. In almost all countries of the earth there is immigration and emigration. Certainly international migration is particularly high at present. That means when people move to another country for more than 12 months, as only they are included in international statistics. International migration grew continually from 173 million in 2000, to 222 million in 2010, and to 278 million in 2017. Many of these people do not go willingly but are forced to leave their country. At the end of 2015, 63.5 million people were fleeing worldwide from war, hunger and poverty. That was more than ever before. Most of them find refuge in neighboring countries, 90% in developing countries.

The dividing line between migration and fleeing is not always clear. Nevertheless it is significant. Refugees are a particularly vulnerable group of migrants, who had to flee on the basis of political, religious or ethnic persecution, and also due to ongoing war. Most of them flee to neighboring countries. At present these are mainly Lebanon, Jordan and Kenya, whose infrastructure is overtaxed by the high number of refugees. Furthermore, people are often forced to migrate from poverty. General conditions like a drastic prosperity gap, environmental crises, or other events create the conditions and the environment in which people take decisions to go or stay. Modern means of communication and transport make it easier to put the decision to migrate into practice.

Such events can be observed worldwide at all times. The acceptance of Reformed refugees at the Lower Rhine in the 16th century can be understood as an early form of asylum policy, or the welcoming of the Huguenots, French Protestants fleeing for their faith, by German princes in the 17th century, mainly in the Saar and around Berlin.

2.2 Germany as a society shaped by migration

Many Germans were also forced to leave their homes through wars, religious conflicts, famines, political ills and a lack of social prospects. The founding of the first European colonies saw the start of emigration across the Atlantic around 1700. After the Prussian Union formed in 1818, strict Lutherans left as faith refugees seeking religious freedom overseas. Between 1816 and 1914 almost six million Germans emigrated to the United States, Canada, Brazil or Australia, in order to work for better living conditions for themselves and their children.

With the beginning of the high phase of industrialization towards the end of the 19th century, the German Reich became one of the most important countries of immigration worldwide. Laborers from southern Europe, but mainly from the rural regions of east Prussia, particularly Poland and Mazury, immigrated within the German Reich to the then economic “boom regions”, mainly in the Ruhr area. Furthermore, in 1914 there were about 1.2 million foreign migrant workers in the German Reich.

Persecution, expulsion and fleeing characterized migration in the course of the two world wars. The genocide of the European Jews, of which only 34,000 survived in Germany, is still today a warning to guarantee an open and tolerant society.

The years of the ‘economic miracle’ particularly molded German society. Owing to the job opportunities in industry, many people came to North Rhine–Westphalia (NRW) after fleeing the former German eastern territories (now Poland) and from the German Democratic Republic. In 1961, 17% of the inhabitants of NRW belonged to this group. A regulated recruitment of foreign workers – particularly from southern Europe, Turkey and North Africa – took place from 1955, because mining, heavy industry and industrial mass manufacturing generated a great demand for labor. Consequently, various forms of migration movements took place: NRW was “on the move”.



Finally the lower shopping area is interesting again. There are lots of little shops and cafés and no more stupid amusement arcades. I like going to the little Syrian food shop. The people there are so friendly.

Woman, 48

Despite the recruitment stop and an increasingly restrictive migration policy from 1973, many foreign migrant workers remained in Germany and attempted to integrate. At the time they were known as 'guest workers', which was meant to underline their limited residence status. They received support in integrating mainly from churches, welfare associations, clubs and the workplace. However, there was no government policy to integrate this group of migrants.

The arrival of migrants of German origin ran differently. As of 1953 the federal displaced persons law governed the acceptance of Russian Germans as settlers entitled to German citizenship. From the 1960s many descendants of German settlers who had gone to Russia in the 18th century under Catherine the Great moved to the Federal Republic of Germany. In the 1980s, and particularly after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the immigration of the settlers soared. Between 1992 and 2015 over 1.8 million people came to Germany from the former Soviet Union. Since more than 50% of the settlers and late settlers from the former USSR were Protestant there was a great immigration into our church. The Evangelical Church of Westphalia thereby gained about 280,000 new members, who today account for over 10% of its members.

When at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the number of asylum seekers grew strongly as a consequence of the Balkan wars, the political debate peaked in the 'asylum compromise': this enabled the deportation of asylum seekers to 'safe third countries'. Persons with the status of temporary permission to remain were largely excluded from the integration programs and the labor market. At this time there was an upsurge of churches giving sanctuary as a response to the unsolved human rights problems of German asylum law.

2005 saw the introduction of an immigration law and an adaptation of German law to European requirements. For example, the labor market was opened up to European Union citizens through worker mobility within the EU. Most immigrants to North Rhine-Westphalia still come from Poland. But also the share of Romanians and Bulgarians has risen in the course of EU worker mobility, often with hitherto unresolved social problems, since their social security status is problematic. Since the international financial crisis of 2007/08 immigration from Italy, Spain and Greece has risen. These migrants mostly find a job pretty quickly.

For some years there has been much more immigration from civil war areas, e.g. Syria. Owing to persecution, fleeing, wars and famine, the number of asylum seekers in NRW rose in 2015 and 2016 to over 300,000. Since 2017 the number has been falling.



They came as refugees and found a place to live here

I live near the university. In the student residence opposite there are people of many nationalities and different skin color. They get on the tram with me and give me the feeling of living in a cosmopolitan city. People living in the district in the second and third generation travel with us. They came as refugees and found a place to live and a friendly reception. My parish offered sanctuary on several occasions. It runs a social centre in the district with help with homework and an advice service. Together with the Catholic neighboring parish we can always find accommodation even if the market does not seem positive. I enjoy the colorful mix of people out shopping, people with veils and turbans, wide trousers and long dresses, who speak many languages to each other but always German to me.

Ghetto formation and growing roughness

Once a week I go to the opposite end of the city. I have to change to another tram line in the center of town. There too I travel with people who came here from distant countries one or two generations ago. They were settled in a district like a ghetto, people from over 60 countries, in terms of origin hostile to one another for generations. In this tram it is usually noisy young men proudly boast to each other in loud voices how they have tricked a 'cop'. They phone a mate at the top of their voice ("hey, guy"), who is supposed to come to finish off Ali, whom they are going to see. Unashamedly they pull the new knife out of their socks and show it with pride. Late in the night I don't always feel at ease in this tram and am glad when I can change trams again in the city center.

Woman, 75

The debate about the challenge of immigration has increased since then. In often problematic ways, partly linked to xenophobic and racist motives, questions of national identity are increasingly discussed.

By deliberately breaking with taboos, some are calling into question the fact that human dignity is inviolable, regardless of origin and ethnic background.

The group of those who are skeptical to rejecting of immigrants and thereby also of growing diversity is not uniform.



I go through the lower shopping street in our town and can't see a single German shop. Only foreign shops, weird eating houses, strange smells and a foreign language. I can't see any Germans here either. Where are we living?

Man, 70

Besides persons on the margins of society, the skeptics also include men and women who are socially established. They are, above all, skeptical of social diversity on the basis of their framework of conservative values. This group is, however, interested in political discourse. On the other hand, there are representatives of a fundamentally anti-pluralist value stance, who think nationally or even nationalistically and proclaim the ideal of an apparently 'homogeneous' population.

In the new political party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), there are representatives of these different directions, with the national and nationalist group increasingly dominating impact of the party in the media and tending towards rightwing extremist positions.

These distinctions make it clear that the rightwing populist challenge must be handled in different ways.

2.3 Shaping growing diversity – a task for religions



Arriving in the new home: building mosques as a visible sign

The mosque association in Dortmund-Hörde, which emerged from the Turkish-Islamic cultural association, ran a 'backyard' mosque from 1982 in a converted apartment block opposite the steelworks. As the Turkish immigrants increasingly became integrated, the wish arose to feel at home in a religious sense to and make this visible. The mosque association started talks with the city administration in 2003 and looked for a suitable property in the district. This was quickly found – an empty block at Grimmelsiepen.

When the plans became public, the citizens began an intensive debate. Influenced by the events of 11 September 2001, the debate was heated. They founded a citizens' action group, and collected signatures against the mosque. The Protestant parish invited politicians, the church district, the Catholic parish and the mosque association to a round table in Grimmelsiepen. The urban planning department organized public meetings to which over 250 people came and engaged in very emotional discussion.

The Muslims felt attacked and under general suspicion, which hurt their feelings. They did not understand why the German population was suddenly so mistrustful and anxious since they had lived in Hörde for decades, in some cases, and did not feel like strangers.

When Neonazis in 2004 mobilized two national demonstrations against building the mosque in Hörde, that brought the citizens together. The Hörde population distanced itself from the Nazi calls and finally organized, hand in hand with the mosque association, a counter-demonstration with over 1000 participants. Muslims had printed posters with the slogan: "My home is Hörde. Haven't got any other one" and "Not strangers. Fellow citizens for 40 years."

While the protest continued discussion developed about the building plan. Finally the mosque was approved, with votes from the traditional left- and right-of-center parties SPD and CDU on the grounds of freedom of religion.

Since the mosque has been finished, the protests have yielded to a great interest in guided tours of the mosque – precisely from the neighborhood. Many visitors were very impressed by the imposing building in which curious people can look through the clear glass windows. The mosque is a showcase for the district. The fact that it was completely funded from donations impresses most of the visitors.

What is still lacking is a minaret. By way of precaution, the city has already concluded an agreement with the mosque community laying down the number of decibels and stipulating that the Ezan(call to prayer) may only ring out for Friday prayer once a week.

Migration leads to growing social diversity, not least to religious pluralism. More plurality enriches and, at the same time, confronts society with challenges, as migrants bring along other values as well as their cultural and religious backgrounds.

Migrants face the reverse challenge. The ideas about faith and values from their own culture, too, become only one option among many in a pluralist society. They have to be compatible with rules of individual self-determination and equal rights, as set out in the free democratic constitution.

The religions and religious communities are challenged to say how they understand the coexistence of their view of faith, life, the world and God and put them into practice. It is necessary to be able to give information about your own faith and, at the same time, share views on the connecting, but also dividing claims to truth.

The religiously neutral state looks for sustainable conditions and options to further develop the basically religion-friendly German constitution for different religious communities. At the same time, in view of religious violence, we are hearing voices in society expressing definite reservations about a public presence of religions. Excluding religious life from the general public on the pretext of supposed neutrality cannot be the solution in a free state based on the rule of law. However, religions must also clearly present its contribution to a peaceful living together, and that way give guidance with their fundamental values.

With respect to Christian faith, too, the process of pluralization is shown in a growing diversity of denominations. This development is comparatively new. Since the wars of religion of the Reformation period, the various German regions have mostly been uniform in their respective religious culture. Major changes came with the migrant labor during the industrialization period and the history of fleeing and expulsion at the end of World War II.

The present is characterized by friendly proximity and partnership in relations between the two big mainline churches (Protestant and Roman Catholic) and other smaller denominations and Free Churches. In the course of the present migration movements, people with other church and cultural backgrounds are coming to Germany. The migrants experience religious community and celebrating faith in their own language, their worship and musical traditions as a source of strength. At the same time, they seek to encounter and share in the life of the older local parishes.

2.4 Opening ways towards integration!

Migration societies must shape conditions in which integration can succeed. This key task has been long ignored in Germany, to the disadvantage of both migrants and the host society. Only since 2007 has there been a national integration plan, and since 2008 there have been reports on the way integration is progressing (or not).

Although the concept of integration is used as a matter of course, it is often unclear what it means. What expectations are directed to whom? Basically, integration means a mutual process, offering everyone the same opportunities for participation in societal goods (law, education, health, social security). Integration therefore does not mean one-sided adaptation or assimilation of migrants but the involvement and participation of everyone. In this spirit, integration calls for reciprocal stories of encounter, as are often enabled by local connections with your “own” neighborhood, your “own” city or the local sports club. Integration grows best from below, through common experience in the neighborhood, at the workplace, not least in the church or religious communities at the local level.



In my role as a representative of small businesses I have always been in favor of dialogue and have called on Turkish businessmen to join our associations. However, for integration what happens in the mosques is what matters. Muslims belong to Germany, no question of that. But Islam does not distinguish between church and state. This separation is basic for our constitution. So we should be allowed to ask whether an ideological Islam fits with our free and democratic constitution. I don't consider Islam able to integrate in Germany. At any rate, at present I am finding it more of a barrier than an aid to integration.

Friedhelm Müller, former deputy chair of the CDU SME association in NRW, founding member of the German-Turkish Forum



Since we pray together both in a mosque and in a church, the question about the same God becomes secondary. The fact that we pray together and together carry out diaconal service is faith in practice.

Agim Ibishi, social worker, Muslim and member of the Diakonisches Werk in the Evangelical church district of Herford

At another level we distinguish between individual and structural integration. Individually the degree of integration is measured by success criteria with respect to education (particularly language acquisition), work and income, and means an appropriate sharing in the economic opportunities of the receiving society. Structural integration relates, by contrast, to assuming the basic values of the host society and means accepting fundamental rules of the majority culture. This is not without political opposition, but nevertheless describes an essential aspect of integration.

The values of the German society are oriented to the human rights standards of the main “basic rights” of the German constitution (Articles 1–20), which are not up for discussion and must be accepted by migrants if they want to settle in Germany. The standards are historically and objectively closely linked to Christian principles, but can be understood and accepted by people of other religions and worldviews. In addition, certain cultural attitudes of our society must be respected. They include, for example, the rhythm of seasons and festivals determined by Christianity in the annual cycle, which – despite many secularizing tendencies regarding work-free Sundays or at Easter and Christmas time – still basically determine our culture. Furthermore, fundamental historical experiences from recent German history are influential, in particular the culture of remembering the Holocaust with the consequences of rejecting any form of anti-Semitism and recognizing the right to existence of the State of Israel.

On the other hand, many people with a migration history cultivate the language and culture of their family background. That does not contradict the form of structural integration but can be positive in the spirit of a gradual integration.

The cultivation of traditions in the history of origin is an important resource for many migrants, encouraging them in the transition between the cultures. It can, however, also enrich the host society.



*I don't understand a lot about their (Arab) culture
but the people are nice and really friendly.*

Man, 42

Preserving the culture of origin should therefore not be in competition with involvement in the host country but as a natural addition.

In summary, this means that integration is a mutual event between the host society and migrants. This includes the acceptance of fundamental rules of the host society, the cultivation of migration traditions and mutual learning processes. Integration is a cross-societal task, which includes the coordinated deployment of promotion measures and an intercultural opening of state institutions and civil society institutions (not least, religious ones). This, above all, calls for programs to promote and secure equality of opportunities. Migrants are not only objects of state benefits but self-confident agents of societal change. Migrant organizations are therefore important partners when it comes to jointly defining and implementing the necessary steps for social integration. The participation of all is both the way towards such integration and its goal.

3. Practical ideas for the church and congregations

When in autumn 2015 almost 900,000 refugees came to Germany, the churches showed what consequences follow from witness to their faith. Presbyteries, synods and leading clergy spoke out in favor of an open society; countless volunteers invested time, energy and imagination in providing a welcome; parishes made premises available. And to this day they organize language courses and mentoring; they give backing to volunteers and train them in legal matters, integration issues and multilingual services. The commitment of churches for refugees does not remain without repercussions: the experiences of Christians and expectations of the church have also changed the life of the churches themselves.

With the aid of the statements made in 1.4. about the nature of the church, we will now give examples of projects and experiences from the area of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia to encourage discussion and further reflection.

3.1 Being church together



The Lydia congregation wants to become international

The Lydia congregation has the motto “Being church together – becoming an international congregation”. That is for good reason. Its membership roll includes Christians from 62 nations. Since 2016 it has been active in involving people with migrant roots in the whole of parish life. Something that is quite normal in kindergartens and children’s services is now to become the norm in other areas of church life. From 2020 this project will also be reflected in the leadership structures: persons with international roots are to stand for at least two positions in the new presbytery. “We want to interweave our own traditions with new elements” – that is how the congregation describes the goal of this approach.



The Farsee-speaking congregation in Paderborn

About 50–70 Farsee-speaking Christians hold a services and Bible studies in Paderborn's St Luke's Centre. Once a month there are joint services with the Protestant congregation there. As a visible sign of unity, there are baptisms, several hundred in the last few years. The Lord's Supper is also celebrated. Pastor Mehrdad Sepehri Fard, who started in a voluntary capacity, has had a project position here since autumn 2017. He offers "Pastoral care for Persian-speaking Christians" and responds to requests for support from other regions of Westphalia as well. He says: "Christians of other languages and origin feel at home in the Westphalian church if they can contribute not only hymns and rituals but also their language." That is why more and more congregations are going over to holding readings in different languages at their services. That is a way of bringing in Christians from other countries.

The 'congregations of other languages and origins' arose in the 1970s and often lived as good neighbors with Protestant congregations, some as tenants or fellow-residents in parish rooms and churches. The contact was often a challenge – linguistically, culturally and also theologically. Yet some migration congregations now exist in the second generation. Children and young people speak better German than the native language of their parents. They were brought up in Germany. They have a great interest in cooperating with local congregations. Meanwhile, with the support of the Westphalian, Rhine and Lippe churches in North Rhine-Westphalia, a network for good cooperation has developed: the International Church Convention.



The International Church Convention

The International Church Convention of Rhineland-Westphalia (IKK) has about 160 congregations, broadly speaking from Reformation churches, which cooperate ecumenically amongst one another and with the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland and the Ev. Church in Westphalia. The international congregations range from charismatic-Pentecostal to Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran and Reformed. They can join the IKK if they accept the basis of the WCC as:

"A fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

The member churches and congregations offer people from the same language and cultural background a bit of home away from home. They are entry points for new arrivals and help them to cope with a new environment. They also do a lot to help refugees.

The IKK links up these congregations with the Rhineland and Westphalian churches, offering further training, advice and support. That ranges from baptism of asylum-seekers to the Reformation roots of the different traditions, or the understanding of mission and discipleship. The exchange is a great help when it comes to understanding and bridging cultural differences.

The bonds with other congregations and worldwide Christianity is fundamental for the understanding of congregation and churches. This is shown by the very opening of New Testament letters: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. Paul writes to “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2.3). Local congregations are always part of a greater whole. Communion with Christ embraces, puts in perspective and transcends natural, social and national forms of community, says a document by the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, of which the Evangelical Church in Westphalia is one of the founding members. This is the vision of the one, tangible and world-embracing church, which calls its common unity in Christ the “body of Christ”. If we follow this vision, it becomes clear that God presents me with something through the alterity of the other. God it is who challenges and enriches us through that which is strange. God meets us in the stranger: you welcomed me.

Despite all the difficulties, congregations, groups and individuals time and again in our church experience human, substantive, theological and spiritual enrichment when they engage with strangers and new situations. The following examples invite us to ask for suitable answers in our own congregation or work area.



Citizens with the saints and members of the household? (Eph 2:19)

In the midst of our preparations for the New Year reception we got this email: “Is the New Year reception going to be international every time? Then we are not coming. The choir was so chaotic last year that we don’t want that again!”

There follow crisis mails, phone calls, conversations. The result of all sensitive inquiries: the acoustics! It was all too loud! The sound system of the African band was not compatible with ours. There was auditory feedback, speeches and announcements seemed to be shouted, our own system was overloaded. A cautious questions: can you tone it down?

So you are no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God?

Sunday afternoon – a member of the Tamil congregation is at the door. “Our pastor does not want members of our congregation to keep attending the international services. There is too little Tamil character and not enough time for our pastor in the service.” At the New Year’s reception he was supposed to join other pastors in saying the benediction. A personal blessing for everyone who would like it – in the language of the respective pastor. He declined.

Citizens with the saints and members of the household of God?

The pastor of the Korean congregation is upset. He had agreed to take part in a dialogue sermon. This was to be with representatives of the Tamil congregation and himself. “I give my sermons by myself. How can someone else stand there next to me?” Perplexity and uncertainty. We make an appointment for four of us and work out a dialogue sermon together – the Tamil student explains the secular aspects and the Korean pastor the spiritual ones.

Citizens with the saints and members of the household of God?

After a lot of to-ing and fro-ing and sleepless nights, finally it is time for the worship service. The African band has understood the issue: it sings a cappella, only with amplified guitar. Our sound system works perfectly thanks to a church council (presbytery) member with technical skills. The dialogue sermon goes down very well. The Tamil pastor attends, despite his refusal, and blesses those who line up before him. A delegation from a Tamil congregation we know in Duisburg is also present.

Citizens with the saints and members of the household of God!

3.2 Celebrating faith together



“I want to think for myself” – Hasan Nabeel sings in the Luther Oratorio

The Pakistani is probably one of the most unusual singers in the modern Luther Oratorio. Before that, Hasan Nabeel did not know who Luther was. “I am in the process of learning more about him,” says the 31-year-old, who has been in Germany since 2015. In the choir he is not only getting to know more about his new faith and the German language, he has also found friends.

Nabeel had contact with Christianity back in Pakistan. He attended a church with a friend, he says. His Muslim family forbade him to go again. He decided to flee. In August 2016 Hasan Nabeel was baptized. When the strong man, who worked as a blacksmith in Pakistan, talks of this he beams: “I looked forward to it for so long. Before baptism I thought about how much I had lost through fleeing but now I see what I have gained.”

His favorite song in the oratorio is called “Thinking for yourself”. It contains the line “I want to think for myself – alone with God.” What fascinates him about Luther is the message of freedom: “We can make decisions ourselves and do not need to be like other people. We are only responsible to God.”

People gather in worship to be near to God, to praise God and spread out their concerns and fears in prayer. They seek calm and comfort, fellowship with one another and with God and a sermon that is close to their lives. For many, worship is a place of reassurance where they feel at home and a sense of community.

A service of worship keeps alive a long tradition. Many congregations here see the centre of community life. It is all the better when people bring in their experience with other worship traditions and other forms of spirituality. If the service is held “in the responsibility and with the participation of the whole congregation” this can lead to new diversity of sounds and rhythms, to listening to God’s word in other languages and to intensive common prayer.

The act of worship itself has a migration background. Elements from liturgies and prayers from Israel, Syria, Byzantium, Rome and North Africa were melded into what people in Westphalia today feel to be their worship home. “Our” Protestant service reflects the worldwide oikoumene from two millennia.

You can also feel that in the music. Protestant church music was exported worldwide through mission, but also in brass bands. Churches adopted them and made them part of their own tradition. But it also went the other way: gospel music and songs from the ecumenical movement have entered our German services and hymn books. Music overcomes cultural and language barriers and choirs are a good way of getting into contact with a congregation. The spirituality and preaching style of Christians of other languages and origins may be strange to Germans but singing and music can help them experience how praising God unites people.

What is important in all this is the basic attitude of the congregation. Is the service the “best room”, displaying the finest possessions of the parish, or is it the warm kitchen in which all God’s children can come home, still their hunger and thirst and enjoy fellowship?



Here are some ideas:

On the internet (kircheundmigration.ekvw.de) you can find resources and links to liturgies, prayers and Bible translations in different languages. There are also materials on the baptism of asylum-seekers, faith courses and partaking in Holy Communion.

3.3 Passing on and witnessing to faith



Maryam

“I was brought up in a Muslim family but in Iran I always had great problems with the Muslim distinction between men and women, e.g. in court. So I rejected a God who does not love me and lived without faith in Iran. [...] In the refugee residence my children sometimes talked to the couple S. about Christian faith [...] One day I listened in on a conversation. In the story, men wanted to stone a woman caught in adultery but Jesus came and stopped them, saying that whoever is without sin should cast the first stone. [...] Jesus’ words moved me greatly. Consequently in Iserlohn I went to an advice center and found out about Christian communities there.”

According to the Apostle Paul, the whole life of a Christian is worship. Faith is shown in love as to brothers and sisters, in cheerful hope, constant prayer, harmony and hospitality to strangers. Yet worship also involves speaking up against prejudiced and hateful talk and actions in everyday life. In statements and discussion forums we read disparaging remarks about migrants and anyone who works with them. Christians are oppressed and persecuted in many countries in the world. Many religions and beliefs are threatened if they stand up for justice. Our church is committed to counteracting all that questions the human dignity of those who are 'different'. That also includes standing up for the right to freely practice religion, here and all over the world.

Church educational work also testifies to the gospel. Protestant education is a holistic and life-long process. It seeks to promote discernment and enable action oriented to the Christian view of humankind. Above all, however, it is about getting to know biblical words and images that help to interpret and shape life. The parables and examples with which Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God are such life-enhancing stories. If the story about people is heard and enters the light of the gospel, it opens up horizons. Wherever newcomers can tell their stories, things and experiences fall into order. Our own and other stories begin to speak. That way personal encounter becomes a key to understanding the other person. In protected spaces some can even begin to tell of terrible experiences.



A group of Christians from different Muslim countries meets every month with members of the core Protestant congregation for Bible-sharing.

The discussion is laborious and requires a lot of patience. As many only speak Farsee, it is only possible with an interpreter. The woman interpreting is a Muslim and struggles with terms like 'sacrament' or 'Trinity'. Yet the Bible texts encourage the refugees to tell their stories: how they could not even take leave of their families and friends, what an odyssey through various camps lies behind them, what fears plague them, but what power they derive from faith. And all of a sudden, light is shed on the words of Jesus that sound so unlikely in our traditional church ears:

“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.”

Matthew 19:29

Such verses reflect the reality that refugees experience. Puzzling texts gain an individual character. We sit opposite people who change our idea of Christian life. Anyone to whom an Iranian reports how he was attending a Christian meeting underground and could only save himself from the police by jumping out the window will sense something of the cost of discipleship. Anyone to whom a woman tells the story of how her husband wants to throw acid at her as she is interested in Christianity will start to understand the meaning of costly grace.

Much of what persecuted Christians report is disturbing. And it arouses respect for their courage and creates closeness between brothers and sisters in faith. Refugees do not stand before us like saints on a pillar; they find a way into our hearts when they tell of their experiences with Christ, their fears but also their joy, their liberation by the gospel. They proclaim a heartening message to us – who had set out to ‘teach’ these up-and-coming baptismal candidates about Christianity.

Cultural and religious diversity is rare in the familiar groups and clubs in the congregations. However, interreligious encounter mostly starts in kindergarten and in the classroom. Through the people who meet there, the inevitable question is how that can work. Approaching these relations with openness and a readiness for reflection demands a lot of the educators and teachers, parents and children. We cannot just demand a readiness for life-long learning but we can create conditions conducive to fostering it.

“Who am I compared to the stranger?”

In youth work, in adult education and in all other areas of church action we attempt to promote intercultural learning. The following example shows what intercultural learning can be like at school.



Diversity as educational method in childcare facilities

The Protestant nursery schools in Altena, Iserlohn and Schwerte are inclusive in accordance to their mission statement. That means that being together is geared to the individual, regardless of where they come from, what language they speak or what background they have. Everyone is invited to attend and all are treated individually. In all three nursery schools there are staff who have attended the certificate course in intercultural competence and speak English. It is particularly important for them to be familiar with the cultural differences regarding politeness in the country of origin (eye contact, greeting rituals, dealing with time etc.).

Learning from one another at school

At the Hans–Ehrenberg School, students from seven nations have since 2016 been learning German together in the international class. When their German skills allow it they take part in regular classes. “Learning the language for us also means living together and getting to know Christian culture.” The subject teachers and school social worker see to it that activities in daily school life teach students the meaning of Christian traditions. These include weaving Advent wreaths and singing Christmas carols. Its partner school Talitha Kumi in Bethlehem has sent several models of cribs. They are visual aids when introducing the topic of the Christ’s birth.”

The project “Our festivals” is about the different religious holidays in the church year or the ordinary calendar. The religious calendar in the classroom shows the traditions. Symbols help to convey the origin and meaning of the respective days. Points in common and differences are named and respected.

3.4 Shouldering responsibility



“I want to do it particularly well”

Halil Karacayli heads the “Supported Accommodation in Eckardtsheim” unit at Bethel.regional.

Halil Karacayli was born in Germany but returned to Turkey with his family at the age of ten. There he learned Turkish and Arabic, the language of his father.

Karacayli's ‘Bethel career’ began in 2004. He worked with young adults who had behavioral disorders. “When I had to reapply for my job after two years it was made clear to me that Christian applicants would have better chances.” Yet although he is an Alevi he received a permanent job and is now head of a unit. With its staff of 24, this unit is rather small in the whole Bethel institution, which has about 19,000 employees.

Does he think that his Alevi background will stand in the way of another rung on the career ladder? “Probably, or I might just make it to regional director?” Then it will be unknown ground, as no one else like him has ever got that far.

And how does Halil Karacayli go about his diaconal leadership? “My staff mostly do not really want to talk about the diaconal profile of their activity in daily work – it’s up to me to raise it in discussion.” And he is very keen: “Every person is loved by God and consequently we should act towards every person with respect. That’s it, really. And that is what we have in common – the Christian and my Alevi religion.”

How does he look at the challenge of an intercultural opening? “I think that training in diaconal professions should be adapted so that it is more attractive for people with a non-Christian background.” Then there could be even more diversity at Bethel.

Jesus presents someone of another faith as an example of love of the neighbor. The Good Samaritan himself does not ask about ethnic background or religion; he feels pity and helps the person in need. Because he shows mercy he becomes his neighbor. The Bible talks of mercy when God 'sees' the poverty, hardship, guilt and misery (Gen 16:13), 'hears' the lament and cries of the people (Judg 2:6.18), 'gathers' the scattered (Is 54:7), 'cares for' people (Ps 8:4) and saves the oppressed from their dire straits, helping and forgiving them (Mi 7:18; Ps 103:8; cf. Ex 34:6f). Mercy and justice point to one another; only a merciful judge is a good one (Ex 23:6). Mercy brings justice to the oppressed (Lev; Ex 22:20).

European and global crises such as the financial crisis in 2008 ff, the Greek crisis in 2015 and the refugee crisis since 2015 have again dramatically challenged the relationship between personal motivation for assistance, the integrative power of civil society, effective policy-making and a general respect for laws and agreements. There are acute tensions between an open 'welcoming culture', militantly refusing to give support even to the point of violent attacks, and the necessity to abide by international and national law. Mercy as the readiness and ability to create justice for the dispossessed is called for again.



The primary task of our Diakonie organization is especially to attend to those areas of hardship that have slipped through the net of public social service institutions. Diaconal action is always protest, as well, because it eases hardship and at the same time calls for a change in the conditions that create the hardship.

Diakonie Austria, Benz, 2014

Challenges to church welfare organizations

Anyone working with people with a diverse cultural and religious background wants to be 'close' to the people. We need staff who are well trained in intercultural sensitivity or have a migration background themselves and various cultural and linguistic skills. In many areas the shortage of staff is a renewed incentive to think quickly about who is to work in church institutions in future.



The driving force for our intercultural character is not the intercultural work as such but the emergency – we simply cannot fill many positions. There is a huge demand, almost 300,000 vacant nursing posts in Germany. And then there are asylum seekers who would like to train – and for legal reasons are not allowed to. Let us politically match the demand and the people who are willing!

Deacon Regine Buschmann, public relations officer at the von Bodelschwingsche Foundations, Bethel

The population is becoming culturally more diverse, particularly in the big Westphalian cities. Around a third of all people in Dortmund have a family connection with migration. This diversity enriches the city and opens up new opportunities.

The share of the Muslim population is constantly growing. People with a Christian background – even as staff in the Protestant organization known as Diakonie Deutschland – are more frequently members of the Catholic Church than they are Protestant. This applies both to volunteers and to staff. Diversity in the staff of diaconal organizations is therefore a necessity and an opportunity at the same time. How Diakonie as a Protestant employer can handle this will be interesting to see. It is bound to the loyalty regulations of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in order to guarantee the Protestant character of its actions. These regulations presuppose binding and transparent standards for the selection and hiring of staff. The primary focus is on hiring people who are members of an EKD member church. It is also possible to employ staff from a member church of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK). Under special circumstances it is also possible to employ staff who belong to no Christian church. It is not possible at all to employ applicants who have resigned from church membership.

This distinction is helpful. It can lead to the intercultural opening of diaconal ministries. Including migrants in the team leads to sociocultural differences that may contribute new ideas. Diakonie would also distort its mandate and damage itself if it on principle excluded individuals willing to support its services. There is an increasing shortage of trained professionals who are also Protestants. If it were necessary to categorically observe the principle of ‘Protestant applicants’ the result would be that some diaconal agencies at the local level would have to close.



On 31 December 2016 the population of Dortmund was 601,150. 104,115 of the inhabitants were 'aliens', i.e. they had a registered address and a foreign passport. The overall share of immigrants was therefore 17.3%. In the biggest district of Dortmund, in which 59,648 people live, 30,080 people had a foreign passport, i.e. 50.7%.

Intercultural openness is also necessary with respect to the persons to whom our diaconal mandate applies. If, for example, you work in a centre for children with disabilities, you have to know the experiences and values of, for example, Turkish parents in their cultural context. Intercultural skills (culture-sensitive care) are essential in the caring professions. In neighborhood work you have to feel that diversity is enriching and be ready and able to keep intercultural dialogue going.

This applies, in particular, to their work at the side of people who have no positive life perspective, no chance of integration. Anxiety and violence are increasing with the people in society who have no chances – this is also something that the diaconal services note. That is a problem both in assistance for the homeless and in work with migrants. The staff receive special de-escalation training and are trained in appropriate safety measures in order to be able to handle aggression against staff of the Housing for Homeless department, or with drug-related crime and personal attacks on themselves. In the street, on foot, there are some scary encounters, in particular for women staff of the diaconal services. Frustration due to sexual harassment and fear of attacks are among the reasons why enthusiastic young female staff give notice to leave Diakonie.



Willkommen Europa – Casa Copiilor in Dortmund.

More information on Facebook: www.facebook.com/diakoniedortmund/posts/er%C3%B6ffnung-des-casa-copiilor-in/1872271163059770/

4. Consequences for church and society

As a “church in the midst of the world” we want to do our part to achieve peaceful coexistence in society, in accordance with our self-understanding. When it comes to shaping a society defined by migration, we contribute valuable experiences from ecumenical work and interreligious dialogue. Our many years of social policy commitment also equip us to be significant partners in talks for politicians and civil society.

The following section sets out the need for action in the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, and the issues we intend to raise in the political and social debate.

4.1 Deepening the dialogue – developing a more intercultural church

Deepening the dialogue

Those living as Christians in Germany by no means always turn up in the local congregation. Christian life is characterised by an increasing diversity of faith communities and forms of spirituality. That is proving a challenge for ecumenical dialogue. Our local congregations and the local ACK (council of Christian churches) do not always focus sufficiently on the Free Churches and Christian migrant communities around and, in turn, they do not always wish for contact.

A large share of the migrants in Germany come from countries in which non-Christian religions form the majority. Muslims of the most varied backgrounds, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Yazidi, Alevi, Bahai, Sikhs and believers from other religious groupings have immigrated to North Rhine-Westphalia and, in many cases, come across believers in their respective religions who have been living in Germany for quite a while. The Muslim associations have been able to give support to migrants through familiar structures. That has, to some extent, fostered integration. The exclusive use of the native tongue and the orientation to national or ethnic affiliation can, however, impede a constructive engagement with the new society, and its values and opportunities for participation.

Interreligious dialogue links up with the religiosity of migrants and supports them in enjoying their right to the free exercise of religion. Information about religious festivals or the creation of prayer rooms, e.g. in hospitals, leads to mutual communication. Bridges are built into society, which in turn contribute to social cohesion. The same applies to ecumenical conversation with immigrant Christian groups.

For the members of the majority religions resident in Germany, interreligious dialogue is important, because the exchange with those of other faiths leads to a review of their own faith and its profile. This then contributes to helping Christians to become articulate about their faith. In Westphalia, prayers for peace by different religions are well established and the 'intercultural weeks' and the 'week of brotherliness' are examples of cooperation between religions and denominations that impact on the community.

There is a good tradition of interreligious dialogue in Westphalia. Past decades have seen a growth of relations characterized by respect and trust. They promote mutual understanding and form a good basis for tackling present-day religious, human and socio-political challenges together.

Developing a more intercultural church

Diversity is a gift that needs to be nurtured. That also applies to the diversity that people of different origins and cultural backgrounds can mean for our church. This diversity may be enriching.

Practically speaking, that could look as follows:

Congregations discuss the issue with the aim of making acquaintance, approaching and the systematic involvement of Christians of other languages and origins. Particularly of those living in the area of their parish and/or with contact to the parish through the kindergarten, youth work etc. Presbyteries develop a strategy to promote diversity in local church bodies. This approach will then be included in parish policy and put into practice step by step.

Church districts take up the matter in the district synod board. In what decision-making bodies does plurality of origin and cultural diversity lead to a rise in quality? They develop a strategy to make the most of cultural diversity, which is then included in planning at the district level.

The church executive board discusses and adopts a strategy that aims to systematically promote cultural diversity. This then becomes part of personnel policy. Voluntary work is promoted from the angle of diversity management as well.



I find it particularly pleasing that the Evangelical Church wants to cast a critical look at itself and notes, for example, that it needs to become more intercultural. [...] The intercultural opening up state institutions, structures and authorities is a particular concern of the state government and of me personally. Firstly, because it is an important precondition for the participation and successful integration of people with a migration history. Secondly, there is a shortage of professionals that is threatening in many areas, and it is necessary to adjust structures, offerings and services to the increasing diversity of society. This means that we cannot – and must not – do without the skills and potential of people with an immigration history.

Serap Güler, parliamentary secretary for integration in the Ministry for Children, Family, Refugees and Integration of the state of NRW

4.2 Granting sanctuary – strengthening the right of asylum – guaranteeing safe passage

Granting sanctuary

By sanctuary we understand the hosting of refugees in the care of a church parish to prevent the implementation of a state order to deport the refugee. The number of cases in which this church protection from deportation is granted is relatively low in view of the over one million refugees who have come to Germany since 2015. The federal-level, ecumenical working group “Asylum in the Church” estimated it in November 2017 as 348 for the whole of Germany, whereas the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) counted 679 cases from May to September 2017. In North Rhine-Westphalia there were about 100 known cases of sanctuary at the end of August 2017.

Despite their low number, the cases of sanctuary regularly lead to heated arguments. Critics object that granting asylum in a church raises churches above the sole authority of state law, placing humanity above the law and thereby undermining the rule of law. This criticism is correct in that granting sanctuary at first thwarts deportation. However, this does not happen arbitrarily or as the expression of a right of church resistance to the state. It is rather a matter of pastoral and diaconal support for persons who are particularly oppressed. The aim is to ensure a new situation for discussion between the state and the refugee, accompanied by the church. For the churches granting asylum (‘sanctuary’) is the last resort in order to prevent the threat of human rights violations in particular cases of hardship.

The state basically respects this self-understanding of the churches. Accordingly the churches in 2015 concluded an agreement for settling particularly vulnerable cases with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Accordingly, the state does not intervene in such cases and accepts that during the time of sanctuary the deportation will be reexamined legally. In return, the local parishes granting asylum in their church buildings are obliged to report every single case to the authorities and to the competent church offices. So it is not a matter of secretly hiding the refugee somewhere.

In the vast majority of cases of sanctuary since 2015, the renewed examination of the case has led to a positive result, with the refugees concerned receiving the right to remain.

Strengthening asylum law

Fundamental rights and rights of protection for refugees are set out in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union on the basis of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees (Geneva Convention). All the member states are obliged to grant protection to refugees and to examine their application for asylum under the rule of law.

The actual development of refugee protection in the EU is lagging behind these claims. Despite European law, there can be no question of there being uniform standards in asylum procedures and the social participation of refugees in the member states. Especially states on the EU's external borders, in particular in central, eastern and southern Europe, refuse a fair and appropriate service provision and accommodation. The reinforcement of border protection with the goal of sealing off the EU is de facto calling the Geneva Convention into question. Particularly the refusal to allow ships that have rescued refugees to put into safe European harbors merits the most severe criticism.

In Germany there are really high standards for refugees arriving in this country. Yet the federal government also supports the policy of sealing off the EU's external borders. Behind the two legislative packages passed in 2016 and the law on enforcing the obligation to leave lie numerous regulations that aim to deter refugees and run counter to the Geneva Convention.

In particular, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia criticizes the possibility of keeping asylum seekers in the first reception center for up to 24 months, or even without a time limit. During this time there are no integration courses, children are not obliged to go to school and applicants cannot get permission to work.

Another problem is the raising of barriers to recognition of post-traumatic disorders or other illnesses. Not allowing refugees with 'subsidiary protection' to have their families come to join them is also ethically and legally questionable. This contravenes the basic right to protection of marriage and the family, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We will continue to speak up as a church about this deplorable state of affairs. We advocate a humane refugee policy in the whole of Europe.

Guaranteeing safe passage

As an additional instrument the Westphalian church is working to obtain acceptance of a safe passage for vulnerable refugees to Germany, on the model of the successful program of humanitarian corridors in Italy. This is a program that was launched in 2015 on an ecumenical initiative of the Protestant organization Mediterranean Hope by the Federation of Protestant Churches, together with the Sant'Egidio Community, in cooperation with the Italian state. The Westphalian synod has declared its readiness to mount a pilot project with initially about 100 places. Together with its sister churches in North Rhine-Westphalia, the EKD and the Diakonie, our church is currently engaged in talks with the Federal Ministry of the Interior to be able to implement this approach under the appropriate conditions in Germany. Possibilities are emerging in the context of 'community sponsorship pilot projects' (CSP) by the federal government in connection with its current resettlement program. We are aware that such projects can only be regarded as models.



Mediterranean Hope (MH) is the refugee aid organization initiated by the Waldensian and Methodist Church, our partner church in Italy and backed by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI). The humanitarian corridor has so far enable many more than 1000 vulnerable people to leave Lebanese refugee camps and enter Italy legally with a humanitarian visa. There the churches cover their accommodation and accompaniment for the period of the asylum procedure and initial integration. The pilot project was so successful that a follow-up agreement has allowed for another 1000 refugees to have a safe passage to Italy. The cooperation was extended to the Catholic Bishops Conference in Italy for refugees from Sudan. Talks about the possibility of a humanitarian corridor from Morocco have also been concluded. In France and Belgium there are now comparable agreements between the church and the government.

4.3 Introducing an immigration law

We particularly welcome the fact that there is finally a political consensus on the need for an immigration law for the Federal Republic of Germany. Clear goals are necessary in order to manage immigration and integration: doing justice to humanitarian responsibility, contributing to guaranteeing prosperity, improving the life together of Germans and immigrants and fostering integration.

An immigration law officially recognizing that Germany is a country of immigration would foster the acceptance of immigration and cultural diversity. Appropriate criteria, rules and procedures for migration to Germany would create clarity and ease tensions in the present uneasy social situation. Another benefit of an immigration law is that it would slow down the decline in trained workers ensuing for demographic reasons and increase employment as a whole.

In all, an immigration law on the basis of an overall policy on migration and integration would bring about a change of perspective and paradigm. It would overcome border-closing and exclusion, and constructively describe ways to negotiate rules for receiving migrants. Such an immigration and integration law would, however, have to expressly include humane, human rights-based refugee legislation bound to the Geneva Convention. Integration measures would have to be available to refugees and other migrants in the same way.



The key decisions on dealing with refugees were taken top-down and many media communicated them in the same way (or so it was felt) – bypassing the available processes of forming political will. But the change towards a migration society will only work if it is confirmed democratically.

Markus Langer, Head of Brand Communication, Evonik Industries AG

4.4 Taking a position

Human dignity is inviolable (Art. 1 of the German constitution)

Human beings are made in the image of God. That is the basis of their inalienable dignity. Because commitment to human rights is important, we in the Evangelical Church of Westphalia have come out in favor of humanitarian international law and the human rights foundations of the European Union. Consequently our church advocates in many different ways for the rights of refugees, migrants and people with a migration history. In doing so, we uphold the principle that all members of society have a right to participation and just life prospects.

Integration as a “driver for social renewal”

In view of the integration challenge that immigration poses us, poverty-related issues have become even more urgent. Our society should have raised these issues earlier.

The poverty rate in Germany has for years been high. In 2017 approx. 16% of the population was regarded as poor. More and more people live below the poverty line, despite having a job. Those particularly at risk of poverty are families with many children, lone parents, people with a migration history and, increasingly, pensioners. Poverty among children lies at 19%, which is clearly above the population average. In some big cities in the Ruhr area, the group of those at risk of poverty accounts for almost two thirds of the population. Educational success or failure is still strongly determined by social origin. Separation between municipalities is also increasing. The number of disadvantaged neighborhoods is growing. Affordable, good housing is harder to find, partly because of the lack of investment in social housing.

Although these problems have existed for a long time, refugees are often made responsible for them. Certain groupings attempt to fan social envy and racism, and to play off poverty against poverty, and longstanding disadvantaged groups – often also with a migration history – against recent refugees. The poorest of the poor share this hardship. The emergency (e.g. a shortage of affordable accommodation for homeless and mentally ill individuals) is exacerbated when migrants join the competition for scarce resources.

Consequently, we need a policy that takes account of the whole of life in society and supports disadvantaged population groups as well as migrants. Policy instruments along with urban planning and neighborhood development must be further developed and interlinked, with an eye to the needs of the existing residents and immigrants, particularly refugees. A comprehensive integration policy must be developed and implemented at federal, state and local government level. This includes more construction of social housing, an integrating and non-excluding educational system, programs to support families and combat child poverty, the development of disadvantaged neighborhoods with the participation of residents, and access to the labor market for all, regardless of their origin.

A cross-cutting integration policy could thus be a driver for social renewal in Germany.

Dealing with rightwing populism

People are unsettled by changes in their life environment caused by migration, and this is leading to parts of the population closing themselves off to the issue. This should be addressed very seriously. Racism and xenophobia are also present in church parishes.

It is all the more important for churches to defend people who are exposed to attacks for motives deriving from rightwing extremism or xenophobia. Church statements on inhuman positions must be objective and draw the 'red line' between freedom of opinion, on the one hand, and rightwing extremism, anti-Semitism, racism and agitation of the masses. The church should raise the justified concerns of refugees and of disadvantaged locals. Social problems such as growing poverty, exclusion and lack of participation must be clearly named.

The parishes have premises that can be used for open communication and discussion. People should not only be encouraged to talk about their faith. They must also be able to talk about their fears and worries about the future. The church should be a place free of fear in which different opinion can be uttered – with respect for those who think differently.

It is important to run educational programs to strengthen democracy at the different church locations with their respective target groups (childcare centers and youth clubs, schools, church adult and family education, men's and women's groups, Protestant conference centers etc.). Furthermore, it is important to boost the intercultural competence of staff and foster the cultural opening of churches and parishes.

Conclusion

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” We members of synod of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia are convinced that this saying of Jesus is relevant again today.

People are diverse, just as God’s creative action is colorful and diverse. The diversity of people also results in differing interests and goals, and this leads to conflicts and debates.

People depend on one another. They accept one another and also live from being accepted by God. This context makes room for a life in dignity.

In encountering people who are hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, prisoners and lost, we encounter our own failure, and sin. It is Christ himself who encounters us in our suffering fellow humans, and calls us to repent and to a life worthy of the name.

This call to repentance must ring out all the louder, the more people shut each other out and shout each other down with propaganda and violence. We see the danger of an increase in people shutting themselves off from friend and foe.

This public statement is intended to be encouraging, particularly to all those with responsibility in their various settings who have set out on the long, steep and rocky road of reconciliation. It is about giving a hand to the drowning persons, a voice to those whose voice is faint, and rights to the dispossessed. It is about creating conditions to reduce the causes of human misery, and to give practical assistance and not refuse it under the guise of lawfulness. It is about affirming diversity in our society shaped by migration. We want to open up ways to good relations and ensure that all can participate. Integration is not a one-way street. We want to encourage people to open up to the common path of integration.

We are very aware that – in the past and the present – we Christians have failed in these assignments, time and again. The call to repent and to turn away from alienation from God therefore goes first to ourselves. We know we are united with all who are on the way towards a life in diversity. Together with them, we want to confront the challenge that comes to us from our experience of faith in Jesus Christ:

„Ich bin fremd gewesen, und ihr habt mich aufgenommen.“

To the realization of this text have contributed:

Prof. Dr. Dieter Beese

Landeskirchenrat,
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Dr. Michael Bertrams

Mitglied der Kirchenleitung,
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Christina Biere

MÖWe-Regionalpfarrerin
für die Kirchenkreise Dortmund, Hagen,
Hattingen-Witten und Schwelm

Christian Binder

Pfarrer im Fachbereich Gottesdienst
und Kirchenmusik, Institut für Aus-,
Fort- und Weiterbildung der
Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen

Monsignore Dr. Michael Bredeck

Priester und Leiter der Zentralabteilung
Entwicklung, Erzbischöfliches Generalvikariat
des Erzbistums Paderborn

Klaus Breyer

Pfarrer und Leiter des Instituts
für Kirche und Gesellschaft der
Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen

Prof. Dr. Martin Büscher

stellvertretender Institutsdirektor, Rektor der
Kirchlichen Hochschule Wuppertal/Bethel

Prof. Dr. Mark Burrows

Dozent für Gemeindepädagogik
und Diakonie, Evangelische Hochschule
Rheinland-Westfalen-Lippe

Prof. Dr. Klara Butting

Leiterin des Zentrums für biblische Spiritualität
und gesellschaftliche Verantwortung
an der Woltersburger Mühle

Elsie Joy de la Cruz

Pfarrerinnen im Evangelischen Kirchenkreis Vlotho

Carmen Damerow

Dezernat 22: Weltmission, Ökumene
und kirchliche Weltverantwortung,
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Dr. Jan-Dirk Döhling

Kirchenrat, Dezernent für gesellschaftliche
Verantwortung, Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Dietrich Eckeberg

Referent und Geschäftsführer des Fachverbandes
Migration und Flucht, Diakonisches
Werk Rheinland-Westfalen-Lippe

Martina Espelöer

Superintendentin,
Evangelischer Kirchenkreis Iserlohn

Dirk Gellesch

Mitglied der Kirchenleitung,
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Jens Hansen

Pfarrer und Mitglied der Kirchenleitung;
Waldenserkirche in Italien

Dr. Thomas Heinrich

Landeskirchenrat,
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Albert Henz

Theologischer Vizepräsident i. R.,
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Beate Heßler

Pfarrerinnen, Fachstelle Gemeinsam Kirche sein
und Ökumenische Frauenarbeit, Amt für Mission,
Ökumene und kirchliche Weltverantwortung
der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen

Gerd-Matthias Hoeffchen

Chefredakteur, Unsere Kirche

Helge Hohmann

Pfarrerinnen und Beauftragter
für Zuwanderungsarbeit der Evangelischen Kirche
von Westfalen, Institut für Kirche und Gesellschaft
der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen

Wolfgang Hüllstrung

Pfarrer, Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland

Prof. Dr. Traugott Jähnichen

Dozent für Christliche Gesellschaftslehre,
Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Dirk Johnen

Redakteur, Amt für Mission, Ökumene
und kirchliche Weltverantwortung der
Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen

Christa Kronshage

Mitglied der Kirchenleitung,
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Ralf Lange-Sonntag

Theologischer Referent für die Bereiche
„Weltreligionen, insbesondere Islam“ sowie
„Mittlerer und Naher Osten“ im Landeskirchenamt,
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen sowie
Fachstelle „Christlich-islamischer und
interreligiöser Dialog“ im Amt für Mission,
Ökumene und kirchliche Weltverantwortung

Christoph Lindemann

Stabsstelle Kommunikation,
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Dr. Ulrich Möller

Oberkirchenrat, Dezernent für Weltmission,
Ökumene und kirchliche Weltverantwortung
Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

Annette Muhr-Nelson

PfarrerIn und LeiterIn des Amtes für Mission,
Ökumene und kirchliche Weltverantwortung
der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen

Dr. Jean Gottfried Mutombo

MÖWe-Regionalpfarrer für die
Kirchenkreise Unna, Hamm, Münster,
Steinfurt-Coesfeld-Borken und Tecklenburg

Prof. Dr. Alexander-Kenneth Nagel

Geschäftsführender Direktor und
Dozent am Institut für Soziologie
der Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät,
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

Ingo Nesperke

Pfarrer und Leiter des Instituts für
Gemeindeentwicklung und missionarische Dienste

Doris Peschke

Referentin – Projektleitung „Wege in die Legalität“
Diakonisches Werk in Hessen und Nassau
und Kurhessen-Waldeck e. V.

Anne Rabenschlag

Geschäftsführerin, Diakonisches Werk
Dortmund und Lünen gGmbH

Prof. Dr. Gerhard K. Schäfer

Rektor a.D., Evangelische Hochschule
Rheinland-Westfalen-Lippe

Mehrdad Sepehri Fard

Pastor in der Projektstelle „Seelsorge für
persischsprachige Christinnen und Christen“
der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen

Prof. Dr. Michael Welker

Geschäftsführender Direktor des
Forschungszentrum Internationale
und Interdisziplinäre Theologie (FIIT),
Universität Heidelberg

Dr. Katalina Tahaafe-Williams

Programmreferentin für Mission
und Evangelisation, Ökumenischer Rat der Kirchen

Prof. Dr. Peter Wick

Lehrstuhl für Exegese und Theologie
des Neuen Testaments, Geschichte des
Urchristentums an der Evangelisch-Theologischen
Fakultät der Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Birgit Worms-Nigmann

PfarrerIn und Mitglied der Kirchenleitung,
Evangelische Lydia-Kirchengemeinde Dortmund

Dr. Claudia Währisch-Oblau

PfarrerIn, LeiterIn der Abteilung Evangelisation,
Vereinte Evangelische Mission

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