

International Presbytery March 2020 (Gibraltar)

## **Report from Bochum** (English-speaking Christian Congregation: ECC), Associated Congregation

### **Now you see me, now you don't**

Perhaps the greatest change for the ECC since last we reported has been taking leave of Jade Ableitner. Jade's arrival in Bochum as probationer at the end of May 2019 was fairly unanticipated (her husband Eric's firm had relocated him to Germany), and her departure on 2 February 2020 came as just as much of a surprise (Eric's company now wants him back in Scotland). During her time in Bochum, Jade introduced us to Lectio Divina for a course of Advent Bible Studies on Isaiah (adapted from Scottish Bible Society material) and succeeded, with some assistance from this year's IYP representative Dana Buchholz, in getting children and young people together to lead worship on her last Sunday with us. This was well received, and we hope it will become a regular annual event in our worship life.



Another major project, on which Jade cooperated with Revd Eva-Maria Ranft, pastor of the Bochum churches' Women's Bureau, was a travelling exhibition on migration issues entitled "How My Hope Survived: Women's

Stories of Flight and Displacement". The integrative project focussed on present-day refugee narratives (from Syria, Bosnia, Congo and Togo) alongside the narratives of elderly German women who were forced into exile from their homes in East Prussia, etc. at the end of World War 2. Jade's design skills from her previous work before training for ministry in the Church of Scotland were put to good use in preparing the exhibition for display in the Pauluskirche in January-February 2020.

### **Ecumenical and international cooperation**

Together with the Wuppertal-based *United Evangelical Mission* and a local Protestant University (of social work and nursing), we hosted a workshop in the Pauluskirche in November with Roynaldo Saragih, a church musician from North Sumatra, Indonesia; a similar event with a church musician from Tanzania is planned for 16 May 2020. The aim of this series of workshops is to expose German audiences to global varieties of worship music forms.

Our congregation has for many years been part of the International Church Convention (IKK), a network of migrant churches (now officially referred to as 'international congregations') in Rhineland and Westphalia. The newly elected Chair of the IKK, Korean Pastor Mike Lee from Düsseldorf, was our guest for Christian Unity Sunday (26 January), and he addressed the congregation, sharing with us the amazing statistic that there are almost exactly as many such 'international congregations' in our area of Germany as there are 'indigenous' (i.e. German) Protestant congregations (ca. 700 each). I was co-opted onto the steering committee of the IKK in September of last year.



### **The end is nigh**

By means of preparing the congregation for my own retiral at the end of 2021, I am currently pursuing a policy of inviting more guest preachers than usual to take the pulpit for our Sunday worship. We are fortunate in having a good number of (native and non-native) English-speakers locally who are keen to

take up this challenge: Apart from Eva-Maria Ranft and Mike Lee, both already mentioned, these include Professor Mark Burrows (United Church of Christ, USA), Birgit Weinbrenner (Director of Studies at a nearby Protestant Academy), Dr Heidi Campbell (an Edinburgh MTh and PhD graduate specializing in digital religion and new media, who is currently exchange Professor at Bochum University) and Revd Dr Anja Stuckenberger (newly-appointed Director of the Bochum Churches' Protestant Academy), all of whom will be leading our Sunday worship in the coming months. A Lutheran Church Deacon from Lithuania who regularly worships with us will be sharing with me in leading our annual Lenten prayers for healing (based on the Iona Abbey liturgy) on 15 March.

A small planning group with members from the ECC and from our host Pauluskirche will soon be taking up its task of exploring together with ecumenical official in the German (Westphalian) church possible scenarios for securing the provision of English-language worship in Bochum "beyond Brown", i.e. beyond the end of 2021.

### Readers and leaders

We are fortunate in having an astoundingly large pool of ca. 30 eager Scripture readers (ranging in age from 11 to 92), and we were equally fortunate in securing Tessa Westlake, a Creative Speech coach who lives in Bochum, to lead a series of two workshop to help them hone their skills; the first of these was held on 29 February, attended by 11 people, and the second is scheduled for 14 March.



We are currently also tightening up on our safeguarding standards, initially with a special focus on the team of 16 volunteers who regularly lead our Kids' Church (aka Sunday School) on a rota basis. They have been instructed to each secure a so-called *erweitertes polizeiliches Führungszeugnis* (police clearance certificate), and these are slowly coming in. For teaching purposes, our Kids' Church Team uses a combination

of lectionary-based material; apart from the Church of Scotland Weekly Worship resource, we also subscribe to Seasons of the Spirit (a Canadian resource) and, now that it has reverted to the RCL, Spill the Beans. These also form the basis material for our Sunday worship.

### Worship and Christian education (faith nurture?)

Our overall average attendance at worship, taken over the year, has remained stable since 2016 at around 65. Curiously, there is a perception in some quarters within the congregation that attendance has dropped, but the statistics in no way bear this out. However, even mistaken perceptions are, if not *facts*, then at least relevant *factors* in the life of a congregation, and the Council (aka Session) will be looking at ways of attracting more people to our community and retaining those who do come. Our Presbytery Elder Michelle Mizuno-Wiedner has plans to offer a series of pre-church meetings exploring prayer during Lent. Three series of Bible Study courses are planned for the current year, all of them again using Scottish Bible Society resources: Daniel, The I Am Words of Jesus, and Encountering the God Who Speaks. Dates have yet to be finalised for these.

**Last but not least**, we are looking forward to hosting the IP meeting in March 2021. The suite of church halls next to the Pauluskirche has been secured for our use, and tentative enquiries have already been made with regard to hotel accommodation and a venue for the Saturday evening meal. We are confident that – as was the case in 2012 – all venues over the weekend will be within walking distance of each other and of Bochum main railway station.

Jimmy Brown

Bochum, 2 March 2020