

REPORTS FROM THE REGIONS

EVENTS – FINANCES – FUTURE PLANS

NO. 92 ST. JOHN 2021

Bavaria

Nothing new to report.

Dorothea Humérez

Central Europe

Vienna/Austria:

The city of Vienna has not been used to being without events and tourists for a long time, let alone having such high unemployment figures. Slowly the situation is easing and recently someone in the community dared to ask for an interim assessment, namely: What have we learned from this time? After one year, this was quite justified; learning curves are starting to show, especially in dealing with each other. At the beginning, tension could lead to differences of opinion that often bordering on intolerance. But over time a deeper layer of mutual respect became apparent, despite the different points of view and approaches of each person. The learning curve has not yet reached its end, but according to some predictions, neither has the training ground.

Interestingly, just in this “Corona Year” a new group has come into being in the community of Wien “Mitte”, which calls itself the “Resonance Circle”. These enterprising members of the group want to become a “heart’s ear” for congregational concerns, whether in relation to legacy, current needs and gaps, or also wishes and ideas for the future (be it 2022 impulses, looking beyond the horizon, deepening basic themes...). A welcome impulse! Just as pleasing: Hotels and cultural venues are opening again in the city and the number of unemployed is falling again.

Malcolm Allsop (Vienna Centre)

Graz/Austria:

The small Christian Community congregation in the city of Graz (60 members) wants and needs to get out of its backyard existence. The building is old and not particularly cared for or maintained by the owners. Years of searching for a suitable property have not led to success, as most of them were too expensive. For this reason, the congregation has now come to the decision to build a church (wooden construction with a lot of own work) on the existing property on the Messendorfberg, where the priest’s family lives. Two young architects came up with a project together with the board, and this was presented at the Austrian Regional Gathering in March 2021. The plot is large enough at 1,500 m².

The building application has been submitted and approval is expected by September. Construction is then to begin in autumn. The financing of the estimated total costs of € 350,000 to 400,000 will hopefully be possible with the help of other communities. Donations are needed above all. The Region of Austria or Central Europe has no reserves to assist. There is about € 50,000 in the building fund, which can be given as an interest-free loan. The Graz community has so far collected € 150,000 for the new church building.

Herbert Bitzner, Coordinator Austria

Great Britain-Ireland

At the end of May, we held a meeting of the Executive Committee of The Christian Community Trustees in London. It was very good to be able to meet in person again.

Most of the assets – the houses and church buildings – in the Region are held by a charity, The Christian Community in Great Britain. For reasons of history and organisation, the assets in London are owned by a separate charity. As Ireland is a different country altogether, there is a charity – the Movement for Religious Renewal (Ireland) – which owns the property in County Clare.

As well as being the legal owner of the properties, the charities are responsible for the aspects of our work that bear on legal and social responsibilities, for example safeguarding and risk management, as well as preparing annual accounts. Each charity has a Board comprising priests and lay members and some professional help.

One of the responsibilities of charitable trustees is to ensure that their charity is a ‘going concern’. I am pleased to report that the overall picture in this regard is good: The congregations have responded to what could have been a time of need with generous support.

The situation in Ireland is somewhat different, as a major source of support has fallen away over the last years, namely the gifts from Camphill centres where we held services. This has left the finances under severe strain. The group in County Clare is working hard to remedy this.

Longer term, the members in Ireland are hoping to develop the site by building some apartments which could be rented out or sold. In a phased development, we would build a chapel behind the house, where the chapel is currently located, which would give us the space we need for all of our services. A community space could also provide a much-needed resource for Christian Community and allied activities in Ireland. The hope is to create a ‘cultural island’ to serve the wider community as well.

The Christian Community in Great Britain is still carrying a considerable debt for the final phase of the building work in Stroud. We took the decision to complete the work on the church, even though we did not have the funds, as we had some assets that were able to dispose of. Meanwhile we have sold two properties and received some legacies, so we have been able to pay back nearly half of what we owe. We are very grateful to those members who placed their faith in us by giving us unsecured loans at low or zero interest. Floris Books and some of the Regions of The Christian Community in Germany also provided loans on favourable terms.

The new church building process in Edinburgh is now picking up after several delays over the past year. The architect has produced the final design and the application for full planning permission will be lodged in the next weeks. The rest of the year after it is hopefully granted will be spent working further with various experts to get a final costing and building warrant before putting out to tender. The intention now is to first sell Fountain House to raise funds for the build, with the congregation seeking temporary accommodation for the nine to twelve months needed to complete the new buildings.

The congregation in London has a special set of circumstances, as its welfare is bound up with the guesthouse, which has hardly been able to open since the first lockdown. Thankfully we had some reserves which we pray will carry us over until our guest numbers increase. At the time of writing there is a steady flow of new bookings. Meanwhile, the garden, which was recreated around the new Garden Studios, is developing into something quite special. If you are in need of a break after the trials and troubles of this last period time, Peter van Breda and his team would be delighted to extend their warm welcome to you.

We are hoping to welcome new priest in the autumn.

Tom Ravetz

Netherlands and Flanders

Born of water...

After three exceptionally dry summers in the Netherlands a prolonged wet spring stabilised our water levels. In our region, which lies far below sea level, wet dikes are crucial. The solid earth alone is not enough.

Recently, our communities have also returned to more favourable conditions due to the ongoing easing of the health crisis. Nevertheless, vulnerabilities have been exposed, especially in congregations where the priest's commitment was overshadowed by disease and conflict. There is a clear "watershed" between congregations where things are going very well and those where congregational life is troubling. It is therefore gratifying to experience a growing compassion for each other and a renewed attention toward the issue of community building. This requires a new agility from all of us: letting go of fixed patterns and roles and hopefully developing a new appreciation of the fluidity in both space and time.

We look forward to the new chapel in Middelburg which will be consecrated around the St John's festival season, also the extension of the church building in Rotterdam and the renovation of the 'Ur' church in The Hague.

Laurien van der Laan de Vries

North America

The main event of this year was without doubt the ordination of eight people to the priesthood, all of them women priests. The Taconic-Berkshire (northern New York) community, the seminary leadership and the senior leadership worked together with great dedication to put on an event under Corona conditions that I believe everyone could safely and also joyfully participate in. After the feast days the newly ordained begin to organise the transition into their congregations. The first introductions have already taken place.

It will be an enormous task to help shape the transition of seven new priests into their completely new professional and life situations. Fortunately a 'Transition Team' consisting of Ann Burfeind, Emma Heirman and underwriters has been formed to accompany all the processes vigilantly and lovingly. At the next Regional Synod, instead of twenty-four colleagues, there will now be around thirty!

This year, the undersigned was able to hold all confirmations in the USA: Chicago, Devon/-Spring Valley, Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles and Sacramento/San Francisco. As the USA/Canada border was closed, Jonah Evans confirmed his group in Toronto himself. In Atlanta, an affiliated congregation of Washington DC, an amusing situation arose. Since the Waldorf School, which usually hosts us, holds all classes outside, the confirmation also took place in a tent open on three sides. With great joy, a hardworking group of helpers under the guidance of Emma Heirman transformed the 'class' into a worthy place for the sacrament. And lo and behold, it worked!

Some staff news: With the posting of Lisa Majoros to Denver, Jim Hinds can now retire for good. Luis Gonzales Sabater will move to Lima/Peru in October after two and a half years in Sacramento. Nora Minassian is moving to Sacramento after training her successor in Devon and taking a four-month sabbatical. Sanford Miller will slowly approach retirement. In Detroit, Michael Brewer is slowly approaching emeritus status; we will continue to work regularly in Detroit from Chicago to prepare the congregation for a new, as yet unknown future. Julia Polter continues her training and work in hospital chaplaincy in Bellingham, Washington. At her own request, she will do her best to serve the Vancouver congregation (just across the border in Canada) and its Seattle branch.

Ann Burfeind, working with a team of young adults, has planned five children's and youth camps in different parts of the USA: They will be flying kites, hiking, canoeing, among other activities. Carol Kelly, with the help of a student from the seminary, is making her own plans for a children's camp at the Taconic-Berkshire church site. Until 15 June it remains uncertain whether the camp in California with Rafal Nowak and Michael Latham will take place.

Craig Wiggins

North- and Northwest Germany

Nothing new to report.

Thomas Nayda

no message from:

Australia and New Zealand

Central Germany

Japan

Nordic Countries

Russia

South America

Southern Africa

In Johannesburg, Michaël Merle was inducted as the new resident priest at Michaelmas 2020. With him a capable colleague has finally joined Reingard Knausenberger to share her responsibilities. At the same time, the small congregation in Durban-Hillcrest became a branch that will be visited from Johannesburg. In December, despite restrictions, a children's holiday camp was held with 75 children and young people. There is a lively community life, sometimes also involving Zoom meetings. Some courses and lectures could therefore reach a wider audience. During the last twelve months our pro-seminar has worked on one sentence of the Lord's Prayer in three different Zoom meetings. By now, the regular weekend seminars have re-started again. There are now two young men seriously training for the priesthood.

The financial situation in all our congregations has been hard hit through the loss of rental income and reduced contributions from people who lost their jobs. Now alternative sources of income have to be found. Our reserves are depleted and running costs cannot be fully covered. This is also an issue in the training of new priests. Especially in **Cape Town**, priests have now to do extra paid work and pursue additional training in order to meet their living expenses. The congregation is also active in this regard and aims to overcome this situation as soon as possible.

In **Windhoek/Namibia**, congregational life could largely continue as normal, even with communion, as there was no strict lockdown. That was a great comfort for us. However, the number of sick people seems to be rising, so that some measures are now being introduced.

All confirmations could take place at Easter 2021. The three Camphill facilities in the Cape and in Botswana could not be visited since March 2020, or only to a very limited extent. We hope to finally have another face-to-face meeting of our Regional Council in July. We are thinking seriously about our future and are working on a few things, as far as is possible. At the moment we are working more from the 'inside out', i.e. deepening the meaning around the sacraments and raising our awareness of it. At the same time, smaller groups are encouraged to work on topics in an individual way, so that people can also support each other socially. We are searching for ways to grow the congregation.

Reingard Knausenberger and colleagues

Switzerland, Southwest Europe

Nothing new to report.

Christine Jost

Southwest Germany

How quickly half a year passes – our last report appeared in the Infos No. 90 at Christmas 2020! In the meantime, many things have returned to normal: Singing is allowed again, however we still have to painfully do without communion in the Act of Consecration of Man, at least in Baden-Württemberg.

Our committees are also meeting in person again, although the next regular regional meeting will not take place until autumn. On the other hand, we were blessed with a wonderful experience: As our spring synod could unfortunately not take place in Unterlengenhardt – guesthouse Kliever

and the Freie Studienstätte had an accommodation ban – the priests and the congregation in Karlsruhe agreed at short notice to host the synod. This turned into a real celebration, especially with the participation of the outgoing Erz-Oberlenker Vicke von Behr. Many important issues were touched upon, including the question of succession in the regional leadership, as Hellmut Voigt is now in his 70th year. Likewise, an impulse arose to get to work on a regional conference in autumn of this year 2021 (31.10. to 1.11.) with the title: “Christianity in changing times” – One’s own connection with the Risen One – What is strong? What is weak? The aim is to express perceptions and, stimulate and exchange ideas. It will be hosted by the congregation in Wahlwies with the support of the local Waldorf School.

Towards Whitsun, it became increasingly clear that our coordinator, Thomas Gerber, who had been suffering from health problems for about three quarters of a year, was clearly approaching the threshold of death; until April he himself was still optimistic that he would soon be able to resume his activities. But fate pointed in the other direction: On 26 May he left the earth in the Havelhöhe community hospital. In the overall context of the Christian Community (region, corporate association, foundation, publishing house) he leaves a big gap due to his professional and human competence, his broad overview, from which he almost always found plausible solutions and communicated them with human warmth. A special concern for him until the end was the topic of “common good economy”, in which he saw an opportunity to direct the awareness of the Christian Community even more toward the issues of the future. In our region we are thus at the beginning of a process which will ensure that the continuation of the established administration of the region is guaranteed for a longer period of time without Thomas Gerber, taking into account the existing competences and in the search for complementary skills.

It should also be noted that this year’s confirmations all took place during the Easter period in a serious and at the same time joyful atmosphere. After a long period of preparation, our congregation in Schopfheim (southern Black Forest) is moving towards the expansion of its new premises. The branch congregation in Offenburg will move to new premises within the Waldorf School in autumn as a step on a longer-term plan of finding new premises.

Hellmut Voigt

West Germany

The Christian Community in the countryside – a building project of the congregation in Voreifel

Dear members and friends of The Christian Community, we are a small congregation of The Christian Community in a rural area of the Voreifel region situated between Cologne, Bonn and Aachen. Our roots are in biodynamic agriculture. Since the end of the nineties we have been living and working on the Demeter farm Haus Bollheim. When we open the windows for fresh air after the Act of Consecration of Man, the cows of Bollheim greet us. Together with the bakery and the cereal farm, we try to cultivate an impulse toward the vital forces of nature and/or organise joint conferences with the farmers. On the Steinich Demeter farm we regularly organise our own camps for children and young people during the summer holidays. For a long time, we felt the impulse to build our own church. Our vision is a new two-storey building with a chapel and a space for our social activities. We still want to stay close to agriculture but at the same time be easily accessible and engage in an open neighbourhood where we can make friends.

All this can become a reality in the tranquil Roman town of Zülpich where a new residential area is currently being built with an influx of new families. For three years now, there have been two kindergartens with which we have a friendly relationship. Adjacent to the kindergartens is a piece of land which belongs to the builders of the kindergartens and where we are planning to build our church. We are working on a design together with our architect and making good progress. Concurrently, the finance group is working actively on a finance strategy. We are at the moment collecting donations in our circles, but will need further support beyond that.

For the congregation in Voreifel Martin Thiele (priest)

Building in Cologne: Iona – an island and a house

One of the first church buildings after the foundation of the Christian Community stood in Cologne. At the beginning of the Second World War, the church was expropriated and completely bombed at the end of the war. When the city was rebuilt, the streets were widened and the ruins of the consecrated place were demolished. In 1951, through a nationwide effort and donations, it was possible to acquire a plot of land near the first church in Lindental, where the remains of an old villa were still standing. Already at the time of the founding of the new house, it was clear that it would only be a temporary home. It was hoped that the time would come when Cologne would once again have a free-standing church in a worthy location.

Because the post-war period was difficult many flats were built in the new house in Weyertal 96. On the one hand it offered the priests and helping members a place to stay, and on the other hand it financially supported the life of the congregation. And that is how it remained. During the course of time, many ideas for a church building were mooted in these congregational rooms and then discarded. Little by little, many congregations were established in the Rhineland and Ruhr area, but the house in Weyertal remained in its familiar place and waited.

At the consecration ceremony in 1952, Dr. Frieling christened the house IONA and wished that it would shine as brightly as the island of Iona, from where the impulse of Irish Christianity came to Europe. In the midst of the storms and waves of history, in the midst of this Roman Catholic city, the church should be visible so that those seeking a different Christianity might find it. Many people came and went, many tried their best, many tried to “exchange” Iona House for a free-standing church. Some gave up, others moved on; Iona House remained standing in the stormy sea of history.

Time passed. Already a freestanding church had become visible on the other side of the Rhine, but the decrepit House of Iona remained stubbornly in place, smirking through many a crack and openings at the mountains of building group minutes that had piled up through the decades. Sooner or later, people gave up. And just then, when the community decided it no longer wanted to sell the house but also no longer considered demolition it, the house, nodded in agreement and embarked on a thorough renewal from head to toe. What looked like a manageable rebuild at first soon presented a frightening picture: the roof – gone, windows and doors – gone, the floor – gone, walls – gone! Almost nothing remained of the old building fabric. Only the shape of the chapel was a wafer-thin silver thread for us, which we had stuck to for almost two years. All the residents had to leave the house and the congregation went into asylum on the other side of the banks of the river Rhine. The waiting and perseverance was made much easier for us, as our sister congregation in Cologne-East welcomed and supported us most warmly. It was a challenge for all of us: to reunite for an indefinite time what had been separated, without wanting to mix it up.

So on the last Sunday we said goodbye to each other: with laughter and with tears, but also with the knowing that we will emerge from this time with renewed strength, so that we can each stand on our own again: on the Celtic hill of Cologne the red church and on the lowest point of the Roman city the blue house of Iona. There we are, standing together for this city on the Rhine, and a little bit for all of us. On 4 July we will consecrate the House of Iona and our new altar of oak and basalt columns.

Cologne is an important big city, but has only a small group of people who belong to our community. This small crowd has courage and perseverance, faithfulness and trust in the divine power that help will come as soon as one has dared to take the first step. This was also proven by our architect and priest Dietrich Bürgener, because making something new out of something old is not for people of little faith.

We would also like to thank all the people and congregations, especially in our area, who have supported and carried our building with a caring soul and with strength! So, we never feel alone, even though we are an island in the sea. Strictly speaking, however, we are Iona, which has just been ejected from the belly of the whale onto the shore and is now contemplating the new birth.

Pictures of our building and other helpful data can be found on our website: <https://christengemeinschaft-koeln.de>.

Yaroslava Black

Wuerttemberg

After a long time where many events had to be cancelled or could not take place in their originally planned format, we are happy that gradually more things are possible again. This means that our long-planned conference can finally take place, with which the congregations in Stuttgart wanted to make an overture for the big conference in Dortmund next year. 100 years ago, in June 1921, Rudolf Steiner held the first theology course in the Landhausstraße in Stuttgart. The conference with the title: “Stuttgart 1921 – The Being of the Christian Community Appears”, will take place from 10-13 June, and deals with this event.

Anne Fechter

Circle of Seven

In the first week of June the international synod was able to take place in Berlin after being cancelled last year. During this synod, João Torunsky took on the position of Erzoherlenker from Vicke von Behr, who has carried that task for 16 years. Susanne Gödecke has joined the Circle of Seven and was officially inducted into that position at the international Lenker’s meeting in the week after the synod. She will continue to work, albeit to a lesser extent, in the congregation in Berlin Wilmersdorf. Lastly, with João Torunsky becoming the new Erzoherlenker for our movement, he needed to step back from his position as Lenker for South America. The Lenker circle has asked Thelma Dave, from Buenos Aires to take on that task, which she began last February.

Oliver Steinrueck

Verband der Sozialwerke

In the week after Easter, when our helpers training course should have taken place, the leaders of the camps and some of the teams met for one day in Kassel and organised a “helper training course light”. The situation in the federal states and other European countries has now developed in such a way that we can hold all camps in the summer! Again, this involves a considerable amount of additional organisational and financial work. But it’s all about the children and young people, and it’s always worthwhile to invest time, energy and money, especially since this group has suffered and continues to suffer from the Corona-related restrictions.

Dietmar Schwarz

Appeal from Canberra

Dear Friends

We are reaching out to ask for your support in renovating our chapel at The Christian Community in Canberra, Australia. We have a basic hall, but seek your support to transform it into a beautiful and worthy space. How much we can achieve will depend on the goodwill of our local community, as well as other friends in Australia and overseas.

For over two decades we have carried out numerous projects to transform the hall into a basic chapel that includes an altar, simple seating, and carpets. In the last twelve months we have also carried out extensive work including repairs to the roof, bathrooms and drainage. For us, as a small community, this work has represented a significant financial commitment.

We need your help to move into the next vital stage. **For this we have a target of Aus\$150,000 (US\$120,000, £85,000).** With your help we can achieve the following:

- A ceiling, with improved natural lighting and insulation
- Internal walls, serving as vestry on either side of the altar
- An enlarged and welcoming entrance
- Improved social and sacred space and connection with the environment.

At the beginning of 2020, donations from Berlin, Bern, and Melbourne have enabled us to commit to building new altar steps. On Michaelmas Day, we received further an offer from an anonymous benefactor *to match every dollar we raise up to an amount of \$50,000.*



Further information www.thechristiancommunity.net/canberra-chapel-fund/

Thank you for giving.

Account: 442 608 937 (The Christian Community in Australia, Canberra)

St George Bank BIC code: SGBLAU2S, BSB number: 112-908
(For larger donations and tax benefits contact Christian Maclean christian@florisbooks.co.uk)

Christian Maclean (for Australia/New Zealand)

no message from:

Körperschaftsverband (KV)

Seminaries

Haus auf dem Berge

Haus Freudenberg

Treuhandverwaltung zur Förderung der Christengemeinschaft e.V.

Translated by Gabriele Kuhn – many thanks to her!

*****End*****