



DIE VEREINIGTE KIRCHE + THE UNITED CHURCH

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Annual Report 2021 - German Ministry Die Vereinigte Kirche + The United Church

In pastoral care, the most difficult thing is to learn to endure powerlessness. Everyone wants to comfort and encourage and is looking for the right words. But often there is no such thing. If this is understood, it is possible to endure the powerlessness, the fear and the pain together, or to look for ways to give form to the inability to do something. Then, at some point, the courage comes to take the next step - at least most of the time. I think it's important to talk about trust and hope. But it must remain noticeable how fleeting their presence is in our lives. Fear and vulnerability need equal space. Both sides belong together." (Prof. Dr. Ulrike Wagner-Rau, Marburg)

As we look back on the year 2021 in our community, we too can say that - in everything and despite everything - we have lived trust and hope. We were able to do so because we placed our community at the center of our activities. From this center, we could take bold steps and take advantage of current opportunities for events in our church and in other places. With this annual review, we invite you to go through the year 2021 in your thoughts. We are grateful for everything that was possible and look forward with anticipation to what may come!

Worship services

Most of our worship services in 2021 took place through the Zoom platform. In retrospect, it was comforting to experience the essential elements of the liturgy in this way. Readings were often provided by different participants. It was also good that we were able to sing together during the online services.

Funeral services at Prospect Hill Cemetery.

On April 21, 2021, two funeral services were held at Prospect Hill Cemetery. Since 1858, many members of the German-American community have found their final resting place in this historic cemetery. We said goodbye to Waltraut and Guiliano Fornasa and to Toska and Jack Prather. Since the funeral services were held outdoors, they were also an opportunity to come together as a community. As well, the family of Mr. and Mrs. Fornasa, were able to watch the funeral service via the Zoom portal from their home in Germany. We are grateful that we could be so connected during this difficult time.

Reopening/Technical Equipment/Airflow Evaluation

A sigh of relief went through our midst when infection numbers declined in the early summer of 2021 and we could look forward to return to the church sanctuary. It was technically challenging to observe the necessary pandemic-related precautions (social distance, masks, hand disinfection, vaccination) while offering a good worship experience and the feeling of being part of the community to those who could not (yet) attend in person.

We brought in a consultant for the technical implementation of hybrid services and hired a livestream manager. Pastor Albrecht took the lead and launched the first hybrid service on September 19, 2021. We would like to take the opportunity to thank all members of the congregation for their helpful and constructive feedback which contributed to steady improvements while graciously putting up with many a technical glitch at the beginning.

We are very grateful to Prof. Rainald Löhner, for conducting an "Airflow Evaluation" in the church. We rearranged the available seating areas accordingly to take maximum precautions for everyone who comes to the church service.

With the start of the new church year during Advent of 2021, we resumed the somewhat more detailed liturgy that is customary in our church. Due to the low infection numbers, we were also able to resume singing (with masks). This felt good.

Lunch with the Pastors

Lunch with the Pastors took place every Wednesday with a break during the summer. It was led alternately by Rev. Federici and Rev. Albrecht. Meetings with interview guests alternated with discussions on spiritual reflections. This form of togetherness has proven to strengthen the congregation and it provides another bridge between the English-speaking and German-speaking members.

German Meetup

Except for a summer break, Reverend Albrecht continued to chair the weekly German Language Meetups via Zoom throughout the year. The fixed rhythm during the month is the following:

1st Wednesday: Gossip and Culture (commentary on current events in Germany).

2nd Wednesday: Taboo evening (board game)

3rd Wednesday: Conversation (open conversation after an impulse lecture or impulse text)

4th (and 5th) Wednesday: Taboo evening (parlor game)

This sequence has proven to be a good mix and much appreciated by the regular 8-12 participants.

New participants joined from all over the United States and from Canada and the fact that many become regulars speaks to the quality of the meetings and the friendly atmosphere of the group.

For 2022, we hope to have Meetups in hybrid form at the church on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays while the Taboo evenings would continue to take place via Zoom. The start of the hybrid event option was postponed due to the Omicron surge. In the spring of 2022, occasional outings with local Meetup participants are being planned.

Rev. Federici's ordination anniversary on June 13, 2021.

When Die Vereinigte Kirche+The United Church became aware that Rev. Federici would be celebrating his 30th ordination anniversary in the spring of 2021, plans were made to celebrate this anniversary. Ordination is the confirmation for the ministry as a pastor and an important step once formal training has been completed to practice the profession of a pastor.

Rev. Albrecht wrote to people from the various parishes where Rev. Federici served asking for messages for Rev. Federici. Over 40 postcards and letters were sent and Rev. Albrecht took them to Rev. Federici's home in Tysons Corner early in the morning of June 30 as a surprise. He opened the box of letters during the service held later that morning. We are grateful for Rev. Bill's ministry and look forward to continuing to work together!

Connected to the larger German American "community".

On October 6, German American Day was once again celebrated as a virtual event. The United Church as trusted partner of the German American Heritage Museum once again co-hosted this event. As in previous years, the program included a presentation of the history of this day, and messages transmitted from high-ranking politicians including President Biden, the governors of Maryland and Virginia, and the Mayor of

Washington DC. Pastor Albrecht offered a "meditation" and pictures of the United Church were shown on screen.

We are grateful that Rev. Amy Reumann conducted the German service in August and in the English service at the end of November during absences of the pastors. Amy Reumann studied in Leipzig (then East Germany) in the late 1980s and speaks fluent German. She is Director of Advocacy for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the USA in Washington, D.C. She was also a guest at Lunch with the Pastors, where we were able to get to know her personally.

Together with Rev. Dr. Martin Eberle and Rev. Karl Rieger, Rev. Albrecht was invited to participate in an interview as part of the organizational consultation of the German Embassy in Washington by the Chief Inspector of the German Foreign Office. Experiences in working together with the German Embassy were asked for and suggestions for the further development of this were requested. Shortly after this interview, Reverend Albrecht's inaugural visit to the new head of the cultural section at the Embassy, Dr. Michael Haspel, took place.

Joint services with the German-speaking congregations in the region

World Day of Prayer 2021 - Vanuatu

While the informational afternoon meeting and service for the World Day of Prayer in 2020 could take place "in person," this was not possible in the spring of 2021. So, the ecumenical team, accompanied by Pastor Albrecht, planned both events as Zoom meetings.

The afternoon meeting on Sunday, February 21, was particularly impressive because Franz Drees-Gross (World Bank) reported from his own experience of the island nation of Vanuatu. Among other things, he had accompanied reconstruction work there after Tropical Storm Pam in 2015. Simone Kluge (Evangelical Women in Central Germany, Halle (Saale) participated with a Bible study – having her participate from afar was one of the advantages of the Zoom format. The service on Sunday, March 7, was overwhelmingly well received. The appeal for climate protection, which the Sisters from Vanuatu expressed in an unmistakable way, permeated the service - absolutely understandable, since the island state itself hardly contributes to climate change, but feels the consequences (more violent tropical storms, rising water levels) very strongly. The fact that ocean pollution is reaching Vanuatu is also a major cause for concern.

Church service at the German International School

All signs were pointing to "worship on site" when planning began at the beginning of the 2021/2022 school year. Pastor Dr. Martin Eberle of the German Lutheran Church assembled a project choir of congregation members from all German-speaking congregations and from the choir at the German International School at an early stage, and rehearsals took place outdoors and, for safety's sake, with masks. It was not until the week before the service that it was announced that the current Covid measures of the school did not allow for an "in person" event. Therefore, the second choir rehearsal was turned into the recording for the service. The plans were adjusted so that the participants met at the school on Sunday, August 29, and the service was broadcast from there. The choir pieces and piano pieces performed by schoolgirls were shared as videos. Thematically, the service commemorated Sophie Scholl on the occasion of her 100th birthday. For the younger students, the story from the book "Judith and Lisa" (a child friendship that breaks up due to the influence of the National Socialists) was presented.

The fact that over 80 devices signed on for this service shows the importance that this special way of kicking off the school year has for the school community.

Introduction of Military Chaplain Heiko Schulz

In a service at the Bundeswehr Headquarters in Reston, VA on Friday, Aug 20, Military Pastor Heiko Schulz was installed into his ministry. He had already begun his service in this position in February of this year, but an installation with the participation of the Military Dean had not been possible earlier. We are very happy that Heiko Schulz is now serving in this position. During the installation service and the reception that

followed, it became clear that he is perceived at the Headquarters as being just as friendly and reliable a person as we experience in the group of colleagues.

Christmas Eve

A German-language service was held in the church with the participation of organist Steven Carman and the Commonwealth Brass Quintett. Later in the evening, an English-language service was held via Zoom. Great thanks are due to Rev. Albrecht for willingly taking on all the additional organizational tasks associated with this service (creating a seating chart, managing RSVPs and responding to last-minute cancellations or commitments to families on the waiting list, guiding the Ushers at the reception). However, the appreciation expressed by so many worship participants for the first in-person Christmas Eve service in two years made the efforts worthwhile!

Change of leadership at the Foggy Bottom Food Pantry.

For 40 years, the United Church has been a reliable supply point for people who lack food. The Foggy Bottom Food Pantry provides basic food items to families in the neighborhood and beyond on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. This is all done in a spirit that respects the clients as valued counterparts, which is why only top quality food is offered.

This has been possible for so long because of George Madill's dedication and personal commitment as director of the Food Pantry. When he announced in mid-2021 that he would no longer be able to make this commitment due to a move away from Washington DC, the United Church was faced with a difficult decision. Can we continue this truly impressive legacy? Can we find new leadership for the dedicated and highly motivated team of volunteers, the majority of whom are not members of the United Church?

The German Committee, under the leadership of Dr. Claudia Dziobek, after careful consideration, offered to organize a transition to new leadership and to chair a newly created "Board of the Foggy Bottom Food Pantry." We were fortunate to find a new volunteer Director for the Food Pantry and we organized the transition towards the end of the year. We are grateful to be able to continue this important ministry to the people of our city and are pleased that Rev. Albrecht is serving on the Board as "Managing Minister", providing organizational and practical support to the Food Pantry.

Ecumenical series

The Ecumenical Committee continued its tradition of past years and offered important ecumenical services such as the service at the beginning of the school year, an outdoor service, and World Day of Prayer. The Committee launched a new initiative to provide an opportunity for interested members of the congregations to exchange ideas on current topics. Thus, the following three events were developed and offered via Zoom:

Wednesday, November 3, 7:30 p.m. Rev. Katja Albrecht, Vereinigte Kirche / The United Church led an evening on "Dealing with loss and grief-individually and as a society."

Wednesday, Dec. 1, 7:30 p.m. Pastor Eberle, German Protestant Church Community, held a conversation with Military Pastor Heiko Schulz (Ev. Militärpfarramt USA I) on the topic of "Volkstrauertag – a comparison of the cultures of remembrance in Germany and the U.S."

Wednesday, January 19, 7:30 p.m. Rev. Karl-Josef Rieger, German-speaking Catholic Mission, spoke on the topic "Flood: today's flood experiences and flood stories of the Bible."

The participants provided very gratifying feedback. The ecumenical committee is considering how to facilitate further exchanges of this kind.

St. Martin's procession

We were very grateful to hold three wonderful "in person" events during the months of November and December.

On Sunday, Nov. 7, after a one-year break, we invited everyone to the Lantern Parade to the White House. Well over 100 children and adults accepted the invitation and walked over to Lafayette Square with colorful

lanterns and singing St. Martin's songs. The fact that the Metropolitan Police secured each street crossing with two vehicles made an additional great impression.

At Lafayette Square, Pastor Albrecht, supported by 'Martin the Roman soldier' and a 'beggar', told the story of the origin of this festival. Thanks to the police support, the way back to the United Church was safe and all children received a St. Martin's crescent roll there. This event was supported by ten helpers from our parish. A big thank you to them and also to the actors.

Advent wreath workshop

On Saturday, November 27, we invited interested members and the German Lutheran Church to an Advent wreath workshop, crafts for children and singing together around the campfire. We served cookies and warm punch. The outdoor area of the German Lutheran Church at the parsonage in Potomac provided ideal premises for this event.

The event was exceptionally well received by both congregations. Many beautiful Advent wreaths were made for the homes and for the two churches. It felt good to get together once again and to exchange ideas. The feedback from young and old was: Now the Advent season can really start.

St. Nicholas outdoor celebration with trumpet and singing

On St. Nicholas Day, December 6, we conducted an outdoor Nicholas party for students and people working in our neighborhood. The event was organized together with the German Department of George Washington University. Prof. Margaret Gonglewski, Head of the German Language Department, brought many of her students. The invitation had also gone out to church members and to friends of the church in the surrounding institutions (IMF, World Bank, State Department).

Pastor Albrecht had invited a trumpet player and she had prepared a song booklet. Everyone enjoyed singing along! Finally, St. Nicholas made an appearance and he distributed goody bags with typical German Advent treats. The warm punch was also well received.

We noticed on this occasion that it is important that our parish can be seen once in a while outside the church walls. Quite a few passers-by became aware through this St. Nicholas celebration that an active congregation is at home within the historic walls.

Commitments beyond the congregation

Rev. Albrecht has taken on considerable commitments to develop and maintain contacts with the other congregations that are members of the Potomac Association of the UCC as well as the Central Atlantic Conference. In May 2021, Rev. Albrecht was elected to the Board of Directors of the Potomac Association - comparable to the leadership of a church district in Germany. We are grateful that after only three years of service, she is so well connected in our region. As a "Member at Large," her task is to promote the further development of cohesion between the congregations. Together with Darryl! Moch, also a Member at Large, she has developed the "Living into our Covenant" program, which invites congregations to interact and worship together with another congregation from the Association on a regular basis for a set period of time. The goal is for these very different congregations to get to know each other better, celebrate fellowship and to learn from each other how to manage necessary changes.

Community visits are planned in connection with this role. A first visit took place in October 2021 at St. John's UCC in Richmond, VA, a congregation that was also founded by Christians coming from Germany, Dr. Claudia Dziobek came along to this visit where Rev. Albrecht led the service as liturgist and Rev. Moch preached. Afterwards, conversations took place over lunch outside in the sunshine. We plan to continue our cooperation with St. John's UCC as a congregation in 2022.

Training for Communities of Practice (CoP)

During 2021, Rev. Albrecht trained for qualification to lead so-called "Communities of Practice" in the Central Atlantic Conference area of the UCC. These Communities of Practice bring pastors together every month in small groups to worship and discuss issues of professional practice.

Maintaining contacts with the Protestant Church in Germany

Pastor Albrecht maintains close contacts with her home regional church in Germany, the Evangelical Church in Central Germany (EKM). On January 26, 2021, Rev. Albrecht was an interview partner in the "Sofarunde" (loosely translated as armchair conversations) of the Ecumenical Center, where she spoke about her work as pastor of our congregation and on the cooperation with the UCC congregations. The format of the interview at the Ecumenical Center was inspired by our "Lunches with the Pastors" where the ecumenical officer of the EKM, Judith Königsdörfer, had earlier been a guest with us.

Pastor Albrecht is frequently asked to publish sermon mediations. Particularly noteworthy for 2021 is also a publication on recent worship trends in the U.S. such as "Blue Christmas," a way to address the more melancholic aspects of the Christmas season.

Thanks for engagement, commitment, and support

We are very grateful that so many people support the work of the United Church actively and with their financial donations. We especially thank the members of the German Committee, Evie Downie, Ph.D., Christine Hambach, Michael D. Krause, Ph.D., Werner Linder, and Birgitta Sunderland for their commitment and support.

We look ahead to 2022, which we hope will bring containment of the Corona pandemic and with it more opportunities for local events. The annual motto for 2022 can be a good guide for us:

Jesus Christ says, "Whoever comes to me, I will not turn away. (John 6:37)