

„We commit ourselves to share a common life and mission.
We will take all possible steps to closer fellowship
in as many areas of Christian life and witness as possible,
so that all our members together may advance on the way to full, visible unity.“

A possible next step to achieve Partnership could be:
„links between parishes/deaneries and Gemeinden/Kirchenkreisen (..)“

Meissen Declaration „On our way to visible unity“
by the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany (1988):

How about a link between Biddenden + Smarden and Mainz-Ebersheim + Zornheim?

Why this letter?

At the end of our summer holiday we (my wife, our two daughters and myself) attended a service in Biddenden and felt very welcome in the friendly atmosphere with children playing next to us, a moving service and a priest who noticed – while sharing the peace – that there were guests in his parish. At the church door I stepped forward and told Alex that I am a vicar of two parishes in Germany (close to Mainz and Frankfurt) and that we are looking for a parish who would be interested in a closer contact. And Alex invited us to stay for lunch and we talked about the idea.

Some background

I have been involved in the twinning between two parishes in Dudley (West Midlands) and Bremen which runs for more than 25 years. Groups from both places went to see each other. They stayed in families and learned about the life in a different country, had the opportunity to see beauty spots as well as ordinary (church) life. I have learned a lot about the Anglican church, about similarities and differences (which do not divide us!) and would like to get a similar twinning off the ground.

Language

In our parishes most people can speak at least some English. We have people who spent a longer period in England and there are even some native speakers. Language shouldn't be a problem!

What can a link be like?

A link between parishes could mean they visit each other, learn about their situations and church life and bring together people/groups who are sharing a common concern within the life of the Church (e.g. women's groups, ecology, church music, children and youth work, Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation etc.).

At the same time they can create opportunities for reflection and prayer and exchange of intercession material. And they could perhaps meet at the Kirchentag in Germany (or similar events in England or travel) or inspirational places like e.g. Iona, Taizé, Lindisfarne or Gnadenthal...

And if we organise a link family based (which would mean everybody who has space hosts guests for the nights or a meal and vice versa while in the other country), we could keep costs down because we would only have to pay for the travel expenses.

What would you find here?

We are two parishes sharing the same vicar. We live in two villages on the outskirts of Mainz in a wine growing area. (Frankfurt Airport is about 25 miles away from here.) The villages used to be catholic but especially after the second world war and with the building of new houses in the 1970 many protestants moved in. Both parishes built parish centres with a church in the 1990.

We have services at both churches every Sunday (and on holidays of course) which are attended by 15 to 60 people although more than 2000 belong to the parishes.

We have about 20 baptisms and funerals per year and 28 confirmations to date.

There are women's groups in each parish (different age groups), a group for elderly in Zornheim, a

men's group of 35-55year olds, a monthly meeting with a speaker, choirs in both parishes, toddler groups and a special toddler service for toddlers and their parents.
There is a literature group and a group looking after a project in Ethiopia where we support a school. We have employed a person looking after youth groups. She is completely financed out of donations. We try to keep close contact to local community and the catholic church in our villages.

What is our vision?

We want to celebrate God, live together with all generations, talk about our faith and to be active members of our society welcoming all.

We are facing a situation where many people do not get in contact with church and faith at all. Sometimes for generations. Therefore

- we try to keep up a friendly church live to make people feel welcome.
- we try to be as open as possible.
- we try to get in contact to people in our villages.
- we care about people and circumstances.
- and by supporting e.g. a third world project or inviting to our discussion group „Glaube und Gesellschaft“ (= „Faith and Society“) or three evenings on organ donation we reach those on the edges of church.

And last not least: building a link can help to get people involved and interested!

What can we talk about?

We could learn a lot from each other!

Possible themes (picked from a list by the Church of England):

- Spirituality – understanding each other’s spiritual history and practice – worship, prayer . . .
- Liturgy; church music:.. Can we learn from each other?
- Adult organisations within the churches; social activities; fund-raising
- Social welfare issues — how far can the churches be involved in these?
- Church work amongst young people
- Media representation of, and attitudes to, the churches in both countries: Do we have to be in Facebook?
- How far are the churches involved in environmental matters?
- Sunday observance in our two countries
- Effect of unemployment. How can the churches help?
- Ethical issues - bioethics, sexuality, sanctity of life, asylum
- Issues of peace and reconciliation: Responses to world events like war in Syria, Afghanistan, the situation in Palestine etc.
- How do our churches demonstrate their concern for the developing world?
- Finances - comparing the German church tax system with the english voluntary giving.
- Relations with the Roman Catholic Church?
- Different approaches to the relationship between church and state in the two countries?

All this and a lot more could be discussed if we would meet and keep in contact.

Want to see some pictures?

Have a look at our webpages www.ekg-zornheim.de or www.ekg-ebersheim.de

Klaus Wallrabenstein 9/2013

(Pfarrer Klaus Wallrabenstein, aged 50, married with Christina, two daughters, working in Ebersheim and Zornheim since 2007