

# Wilkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome!

**Bishop Rosemarie Wenner**

Methodist Women in Britain

Swanwick Residential: 31 March–2 April 2017

## Keynote Session One: From east and west, from north and south... The Matthew 25 Movement

### The Methodist Church in Germany:

Comprises:

- three Conferences – Germany North, Germany South, and Germany East
- about 500 churches
- approximately 60,000 people.

### The Matthew 25 Movement:

The journey started long ago:

- Many asylum seekers in the late 80s and early 90s
- 1994: Executive of the UMC in Germany speaks to “Church Asylum”
- Support for those who offer church asylum and a plea to accept those who are against such an act of not accepting legal decisions
- Several of the ‘activists’ are still active



### 2010: Charter of the New Sanctuary Movement in Europe:

- All of Europe must become a safe haven, a “sanctuary” for migrant men and women. To this we commit ourselves – in the conviction that God loves the strangers and that in them we encounter God herself/himself (Matt. 25:31ff)
- Link to the Charter:  
[http://migration.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/mig/30\\_Activities/Germany/2010-10-10\\_-\\_Charta\\_-\\_English.pdf](http://migration.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/mig/30_Activities/Germany/2010-10-10_-_Charta_-_English.pdf)

### Spring 2014: A resolution signed by all three Annual Conferences in Germany: “For a new direction for the German and European refugee policy“:

- We urged politicians to work for peace and against poverty in Africa and the Middle East so that people are not forced to migration
- We spoke of the need to protect refugees, to keep up high legal and humanitarian standards as stated in the European constitution
- We requested ‘safe corridors’ in order to avoid more deaths in the Mediterranean Sea

- We expressed the willingness of our congregations to work for a culture of welcome and to assist those who arrive in Germany
- “It is not okay to distinguish between first class human rights and second class human rights“

**2014:** Executive of the UMC in Germany issues a word of encouragement: “Fellow citizens and members of the household of God“

- Positions and speeches that consider refugees and asylum seekers primarily as a danger and a threat and therefore increase the level of anxiety are not in congruency with the gospel

**2014:** Statement of the Executive of the UMC in Germany:

- “Many congregations have experienced that the support for refugees is not only a task, but an enrichment“
- “We encourage our congregations ... to offer hospitality towards refugees and asylum seekers, “for some have entertained angels...” (Hebrew 13:2)

**Summer 2015:** Angela Merkel: “We can do it!“

- About 1 Million people in 2015
- Warm welcome, excitement
- Ecumenical groups and local initiatives were active
- After a short while also an increase of hostility and many debates: “Can we really do it?“
- Most of the congregations responded to the needs
- We established a fund for refugee work and received money from our churches, and also from the UK and the USA

**September 2015:** The European Methodist Council sent a letter to the churches in Europe: “We commit ourselves to immediate actions and the long-term perspectives that the issues raised by migration require.”

- Meßstetten is just one example of many: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-w3bQrdsBU>

**November 2015:** Q&A, Bishop Wenner: “Welcome – suggestions to meet with refugees and support for conversation“

**2016:** The gap between those who were open towards refugees and those who are afraid of them increased

- Discussions on all levels of society
- Closing of the “Balkan Route“
- Deal with Turkey
- More deportations
- The work for helpers is more difficult at this time
- And yet: many churches are continuously doing the good work of welcoming the stranger
- Increasing need for interreligious initiatives (e.g. “Do you know who I am?“ – a initiative of the National Council of Churches, several Muslim institutions and the Jewish National Council for Interreligious Actions for Refugees )
- A Movement in the US, that started during the election campaign of Donald Trump:

**I pledge to protect and defend vulnerable people in the name of Jesus**

What if we would live that way?

Where do I meet Christ today?



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### Keynote Session Two: From east and west, from north and south... Fellow citizens in the household of God

#### International and migrant congregations:

A vital part of the Germany North and Germany South Conference

- E.g. Munich Peace Church – since 1987: today 150 adult members and 70 children and teenagers from many nations
- Work with asylum seekers is a priority for Peace Church
- Currently 10 Ghanaian Congregations
- Three pastors from Ghana are serving in the UMC in Germany (affiliated members)
- Worship according to the liturgy of the Methodist Church in Ghana
- Efforts to work inclusively together although there are cultural differences and language barriers



#### What about the current changes because of the refugees?

- We are telling people who we are not about pushing them to attend worship
- Many people are interested
- New ministries come into being
- Again: Meßstetten – see link above to YouTube clip
- Devotions in a café at the refugee center
- People come to bible studies and worship services
- Youssef Moshashai, a Iranian who lives in Germany since 35 years, is the translator and teacher

**Bremen:** Until 5 years ago, a traditional UMC congregation; today:

- Café Tiramisu: every Friday, 50 migrants
- Language classes
- "Let's talk about faith" – Farsi, Arabic, German, English
- A multicultural congregation



#### Other examples:

- A German-Arabian hymnal from Falkenstein, Saxony
- A worship service led by an Iraqi Christian in Arabic, translated into German, in Weißenburg near Nuremberg
- Translators in many places, some are young Christians

- The biggest group: Farsi speaking people from Iran, Iraq or Afghanistan, e.g. in Munich – Rev. Kamruz Fartash of the Fanuse Daryai-Congregation: Jan 2016 = 36 members; Dec 2016 = 79 members
- Fürth/Erlangen: bilingual worship services: “We are convinced God brought us together!”

The Lord's prayer in Arabic:

الصلاه الربانيه

ابانا الذي في السموات ليتقدس اسمك لياتي  
 ملكوتك لتكن مشيئتك كما في السماء كذلك  
 علي الارض اعطنا خبزنا اليومي واغفر لنا  
 ذنوبنا كما نغفر نحن للموزنين الينا ولا  
 تدخلنا في تجربته لكن نجنا من الشرير لان  
 لك الملك والقوه والمجد الي الابد

### **New ways to live „connectionalism“**

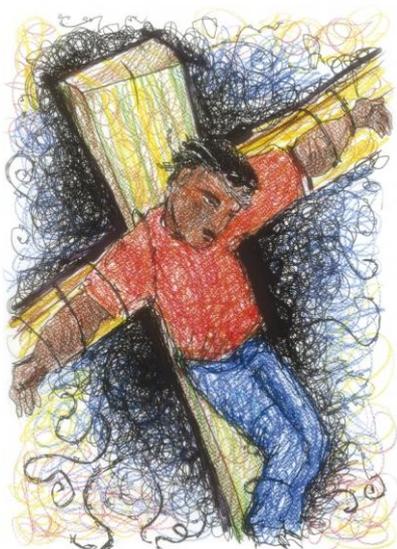
- Meßstetten ➤➤ Wiesloch or Freiburg or ...
- Who knows someone???
- A network of support even in other countries
- Prayers and finances are signs of “being in ministry together“

### **No problems at all?!**

- What about “us“, the longstanding members?
- Cultural differences
- How do we train and equip people of other language groups?
- We are on a journey, no one is the expert, all are learners

### **Open communion table** is a means of grace

- Induction Service of Bishop Harald Rueckert at March 19, 2017: people of all nations
- Recently in my congregation in Wiesloch: bread for the journey for a family from Paktistan



### **What if...?**

- How do I experience fellowship with people from many nations, cultures and languages?
- How can we extend the table of justice and joy?

### ***Christ a refugee...***

*from the manger to the cross*

Artwork by Francesco Piobbicho  
 of 'Mediterranean Hope'