

## All Protestants Church Congress in Germany 2017 Lutherans of the World celebrate 500 years of Reformation in Berlin and Wittenberg 1517 - 2017

From May 24<sup>th</sup> to May 28<sup>th</sup> a few hundred thousand believers and visitors from all over the world came to Berlin and Wittenberg to commemorate Martin Luther and his reformation and to celebrate and renew their faith. At the gate of the Castle Church in Wittenberg Martin Luther had put up his 95 Theses that marked the start of the fire of the reformation five hundred years ago.



Across the borders of religion and different churches visitors followed the motto of the congress:

**“You are the God who sees me” (Genesis 16:13)**

They experienced this wonderful community of believers, celebrated Services, listened to concerts and inspirational

speeches and participated in lively debates.

An ocean of orange scarves with the motto could be seen all over the city and seemed to express that all visitors had the deep desire that God may really see them and the whole congress.



“The God who sees you” Bishop Markus Dröge

The Opening Service took place in front of the German Parliament. So Bishop Markus Dröge explained in his sermon that we all should see each other as God sees us. To look at each other means to care for one another, to support each other, to respect each other and recognise each other. And really the world seemed to be present and wanted to pay their respect to the great reformer. Ex US President Barak Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel discussed the relationship of politics and religion.



Bishop Bedford-Strom, head of the German Protestant Church, Chancellor Merkel, Ex US President Obama

Also the German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and his wife and other politicians attended and gave their viewpoint



President of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier and wife (blue hat)

Another inspiring and peacemaking aspect of the congress was its interreligious spirit. Leaders from other Christian churches attended and gave sermons in the same way as leaders from other religions.



Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, Primas Anglikani



Sheik Ahmad al-Tayyep, Al-Azar, Kairo



Left. Reinhard Cardinal Marx, head of the Rom-Cath. Church in Germany  
Right. Bishop Bedford-Strom, head of The Lutheran Church in Germany



Jewish Rabbi of Berlin

Another big role played the question how to spread God's word in this modern time – modern day technology – the **Smartchurch**.

It isn't always smart that is called smart, but this project deserves to be called like that. For example an interactive Sunday Service, presented by Rasmus Bertram, Pastor from Frankfurt/M.,



- First of all he wants to break off the concept: Only the preacher speaks and the audience just listens.
- Next he wants to transform Sunday Service visitors into Sunday-Service participants.

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The Sunday Services is an event held in a church building with real people in the analogue world, but it is streamed via face book or YouTube. Like that not only the persons present, but also far away people can participate digitally in the Service.

For example they may:

- post via face book
- twitter messages
- send SMS
- call in
- ask questions
- make comments
- send holiday greetings
- make prayer requests etc.

All these messages will be put into categories and will be presented to the preacher, so that he or she can react and interact with the audience near and far. That means no sermon will stay the way like it has been planned in the beginning. A really interactive Sunday Service.



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People have so much to offer as a contribution to Sunday Service. Let us build bridges so that they may contribute.

And anybody may participate, if your are present in person in the church, if you are sick at home or in a hospital, if you are on the road on a business trip etc. You just have to take a little time and have a mobile phone in your pocket which connects you the whole world.

Pastor Rasmus Bertram has put up until today six installations in the larger area of Frankfurt and is expanding.

People are interacting with one another analogue and digitally, especially the younger people. So, if we want to reach a larger audience with the Christian message we have to relate to the people analogue and digitally. The question is not if we want to do it or not. The question is:

**When** do we join **the digital reformation?**

Especially for young people it is a big challenge to walk into a church, but to participate in a Sunday Service digitally is much easier as a first step.

A great event was the project: **Give a Soul to Europe.**

The idea in the presentations has been to build a European Christian Convention, to create a platform where Christians may take responsibility on a European level.



Yes, we have the European Union, but there must be more in store than just an economic union. Europe has to offer so much more.

For example:

- The idea of universalism of human beings in front of God.
- The strengthening of solidarity and the support of each other.

We should learn to discover the charisma in the other person, in the other religion and the other confession.

Churches were filled with enthusiastic believers and changed the often too secular spirit of the capital of Germany, Berlin.



Impressions of and in the "Berliner Dom"

And finally the spirit of reformation could be felt at the Concluding **Festive Sunday Service in the Lutherstadt Wittenberg**



Words of Greetings at the Final Festive Sunday Service in Wittenberg by the German President Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier and others.





There have been much more than three thousand entries in the event database. So, every participant could visit a small section out of this huge spectrum of events.

One last question could be raised:

Was the Protestant Church Congress a success? Would Martin Luther have liked it?

Yes, because the event managers and so many visitors have displayed that faith in the living God has such a great power and relevance to millions of believers.

On the other hand, if everything goes back to normal after the event, back to your daily life, the result and the consequences might not be as large as desired.

God bless all believers and righteous people in the whole world.

A report by M. Div. Werner Fehlberg, Germany

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