



Newsletter of the English-speaking United Methodist Congregation in Munich

September 2021



Dear Peace Church sisters and brothers,

These last few months have been such a mix of joy and celebrations, but also fear and sorrow.

Our news feeds have been full of catastrophe: events in Afghanistan, the earthquake in Haiti, all sorts of things to cause us to feel overwhelmed and afraid. There are elections, Corona, uncertainty. But let us not forget our many reasons to be thankful.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

In Peace Church, we have recently had four reasons to celebrate: three Confirmations and a Baptism!

In this newsletter we both reflect on the tragedy unfolding in Afghanistan and we rejoice with the families and friends of Esther, Akua, Priscilla and Norah. It is right to do both. Let us weep with those who are weeping, and laugh with those who are laughing, and pray continually for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Lots of love,
Kat Wagner, 2 September 2021

Gratitude and hope: ingredients for prayer when we are overwhelmed and afraid

A meditation on 1 Thessalonians 5, by Kat Wagner



I took this photo four years ago. It was my first visit to Afghanistan. Children relax with their toys: a treasured bike and a well used tire and stick. At a high altitude, the September sun brings welcome warmth, the air is dry and dusty. The mountains are beautiful and vast. The remoteness provides protection from armed groups, but also danger when someone needs medical help. It's a long way to get to a decent road that leads to a town with its markets and doctors.

That was why I was there: to visit a maternal health education programme that my organisation was supporting. The project trains local people to teach women and men good practices for safe pregnancy and birth.

My visit to Afghanistan in 2017 was not without its risks. But at the time, these remote, mountainous areas were considered far safer (from attack) than the capital, Kabul. Little did we know that, even here, people's lives would be thrown into danger once more from the sudden rise of the Taliban.

My head is full of questions. Will the local Afghan trainers feel safe enough to carry on their work, or will they fear the repercussions of connection to an international organisation? Will this little girl in the photo be able to go to school? Will women lose their freedoms and be confined to their houses? Will families be able to grow enough food to feed themselves through the harsh winter, or will fear of attack cause them to abandon their crops?

The dramatic events in August which unfolded at a terrifying speed seemed to catch everyone by surprise.

It is hard to reconcile these two images: the relative peace that I witnessed four years ago, with the uncertainty and terror which now impacts every region and every people group in Afghanistan.

After the seeming progress towards a more inclusive society, is everything now lost? Is Afghanistan a country without hope?

No. Because of God, we are never without hope.

I turn to the Bible and read the apostle Paul's first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica:

²...you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

(1 Thessalonians 5: 2-3)

Paul writes to the Thessalonians about 'the day of the Lord', a day that they eagerly anticipated when the resurrected Lord Jesus would return. But Paul warned them that this day would be unpredictable, unexpected and unavoidable.

A global pandemic was for many of us unexpected and is now unavoidable. The sudden advance of the Taliban across Afghanistan in recent weeks was unexpected and now unavoidable.

The Thessalonians too were living in Roman-occupied territory, with their lives controlled by the rules and violence of an occupying power.

What should they do in such circumstances? What can Paul teach us about how we should respond in times of uncertainty or fear?

*⁸...let us be sober, **putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.** ⁹For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹**Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*** (1 Thessalonians 5: 4-11)

Paul advises them to live their faith, act in love, hope in salvation, encourage one another and build one another up. So much positivity! In fact, he goes further:

*¹⁶ **Rejoice always,** ¹⁷ **pray continually,** ¹⁸ **give thanks in all circumstances;** for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18)

We cannot 'rejoice always' unless we are thankful for something. And how do we give thanks when there is so much to be sad about? We have to choose to be thankful. So we start with gratitude.

We are often naturally attracted to the negative. In order to overcome this 'negativity bias', we have to

choose the positive. In fact, our brain needs a minimum of 15 seconds of positive thinking for the communication pathway to re-route. We have to deliberately, consciously choose to dwell on the positive. It doesn't come naturally.

Try spending 15 seconds listing the things you are grateful for.

I try to think of a 'positive' to thank God for in Afghanistan. Eventually, something comes to mind:

Thank you God for the thousands of Afghan people who are now equipped with knowledge for how to have a safe pregnancy and birth. Thank you that this knowledge can never be taken away from them.

When I start choosing to think on the positives, more positives come to mind, and I find it easier to praise God.

Thank you God for the safe evacuation of colleagues who were working in Afghanistan.

Thank you God for leaders, organisations and ordinary people who will never give up on the people of Afghanistan.

But I am also keenly aware of the many who are left behind and without help, and I can't help cry for help and mercy. And I know God hears this too:

God, protect these people. Keep the men safe, keep the women safe, keep the children safe! Let them have enough food. Let them have access to health care and education, to wages and resources. Let them not suffer any further calamities from drought or flood.

God, we pray for your justice, your kindness, your mercy. Let your will be done in Afghanistan as it is in heaven.

We may need to pray this for a long time.

As we dwell on these traumatic situations, let the fears give way to gratitude, and let the thoughts become prayers. So that we may 'pray continually'.

Please join me in praying for Afghanistan:

For those who are fleeing: sanctuary.

For those who are staying: safety.

For those who are fighting: peace.

For those whose hearts are breaking: comfort.

For those who see no future: hope. Amen.

‘Church after Corona’ Questionnaire Responses



It may seem that life is slowly returning to ‘normal’: restrictions are being lifted, and many people have received their vaccinations. However, Covid-19 will undoubtedly continue to affect our lives into the near future.

So, what does this mean for Peace Church going forward? Should everything go back to how it was before the first lockdown? Or are there new things which this experience has taught us – about church, about each other – that we should build into our church life?

Pastor Christine and Kat issued a questionnaire in the summer to get people’s views. Below are some of the responses and themes coming back.

The Council on Ministries is taking these responses and feedback into account as plans are made for the coming months.

1. What did people miss most about Peace Church from before Corona?

Undoubtedly the most common responses were about **praise and worship** (especially singing and the Choir) and **gathering together** after services to share food.

People also missed the kids and youth programmes, sharing Communion, seeing everyone regularly, hugs and closeness, welcoming new people, and the link to the local Giesing population through Coffee&More.

2. What did people appreciate or enjoy about the ways we have ‘been church’ during the pandemic?

The **organization** and **communication** throughout this unsettling time, to make sure that services take place and news is shared, has certainly been appreciated.

Specifically mentioned were the online prayer meeting (with more members), the Peace Cast, Newsletter, kids activities sent in the post, the special recorded services and open church events, and the new format of Sunday services including the Evening Service.

There was also recognition of **growing participation**, especially through the Evening service and Peace Cast.

3. How would people like to ‘be church together’ after Corona restrictions are over?

People are looking forward to **‘being together’** as a church family, whether this is sitting down to share food, a church picnic, or the 12pm and 6pm congregations joining together at some points.

The importance of keeping **multiple options** (online services, different service times on Sundays) was mentioned, but we should be aware of the effort required from the people involved in planning and leading these services and events.

4. Other reflections

There were a few reflections shared on what people have learned through this time. For instance, it was noted that we should **appreciate what we can do** and not take it for granted.

In terms of **creative input**, we should let people know their ideas are welcome and make space for new things to be tried.

One person shared, “We have learned to **love each other no matter the circumstances or the distance.**”

God invites us

*Reflections by Pastor Christine Erb-Kanzleiter
on the Confirmation & Baptism Service on 25 July*



It was THE day of Esther, Akua and Priscilla! A celebration of their young and beautiful lives. God's invitation to them to live with him a life of love and grace. When they were born, God invited them into his kingdom. When they were baptized, they became a member of God's world-wide family. Baptism and Confirmation are God's invitations to his beloved children.

Baptism is a solemn and important event, which invites us to be followers of Jesus Christ. All three – Akua, Esther and Priscilla – were baptized at Peace Church as children. Maybe they don't remember it because they were so little. But Pastor Christine does, their families do, their Godparents, and the congregation.

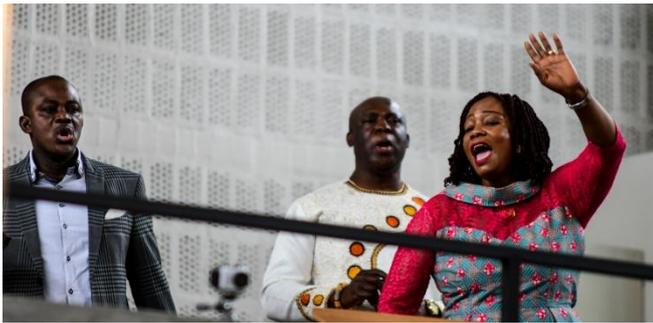
Baptism and Confirmation are times when God confirms how special we are, how much loved we are, and how God wants us to live our lives: in happiness and fullness. God invites us to a life with him – in the footsteps of his son Jesus. We are invited to come and meet each other and God.

Psalm 23, which was read by Akua, speaks about God preparing a table before us. The whole psalm is a confession of faith by a person who dedicates

her life to God. Our life takes place at God's table! God invites us to live with him as the whole worldwide family of his children. Meeting is a "godly event." When we meet God and each other, when we meet God in each other, there is love and grace, and peace and justice – all things which we are invited to accept for ourselves and to share with others.

Part of the confirmation girls' sharing their faith was to reflect on Baptism. What is it about? Norah, Priscilla's little sister had not been baptised yet, because she was born just a few days before the first Corona lockdown in 2020. So, the girls and Christine did some research on the meaning and history of baptism. What they found out, they presented in the confirmation service. Priscilla read to us the story of Jesus' baptism. Esther shared with us what the Manna&Mercy book, with which they had done the "home schooling confirmation class", says about baptism.

After they had been solemnly confirmed, they helped together baptising little Norah. The whole celebration was a most beautiful experience of us all being God's family and living at his table in fullness and mutual love.





Peace Church Calendar

Sunday 5 September	12 noon All-age Communion Service & 6pm Evening Communion Service	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Invitation to worship services</h2> <p>You are warmly invited to our weekly services:</p> <p>Sundays 12pm at Philippuskirche Sundays 6pm at Philippuskirche Tuesdays 6pm online (Contact Vanda or Kat for the Zoom meeting code)</p> 
Tuesday 7 September	Online prayer meeting	
7 – 19 September	<i>Holiday Kat Wagner</i>	
10-12 September	Confirmation Class Weekend Away	
Sunday 12 September	12 noon All-age Service No 6pm Evening Service	
Tuesday 14 September	Online prayer meeting	
Sunday 19 September	12 noon All-age Service & 6pm Evening Service	
Tuesday 21 September	Online prayer meeting	
Friday 24 September	Homework Club restarts	
Sunday 26 September	12 noon All-age Service & 6pm Evening Service	
Tuesday 28 September	Online prayer meeting	
Wednesday 29 September	Women's Bible Study at Katie's	
Saturday 2 October	Fun Day for Kids at Church	
Sunday 3 October	12 noon All-age Communion Service (No 6pm Evening Service)	
w/c 4 October	Kat & Christian's Bible Study starts this week	
Friday 8 October	Homework Club	
Sunday 10 October	12 noon All-age Service & 6pm Evening Service	
Tuesday 12 October	Online prayer meeting	
Friday 15 October	Homework Club	
Sunday 17 October	African-style Harvest Festival (No 6pm Evening Service)	
Tuesday 19 October	Online prayer meeting	
Friday 22 October	Homework Club	
Sunday 24 October	12 noon All-age Service & 6pm Evening Service	
Tuesday 26 October	Online prayer meeting	
<i>Homework Club takes a break. Next meeting on Friday 12 November.</i>		
Sunday 31 October	12 noon All-age Service & 6pm Evening Service	



Did You Know That...?

... there was a confirmation service this summer? On Sunday 25 July we celebrated the confirmation of Priscilla Nyarko, Esther Owusu and Akua Frimpong. You can find an extra article and beautiful photos of the day in this issue of Peace Church News.

...it was very special for Pastor Christine to baptize again after all those lockdowns and restrictions? On Sunday 25 July she baptized Norah Ewurabena Nyarko. We wish the family a happy life with little Norah.

...there will be a confirmation class weekend away? Christine had booked rooms in a farmhouse in Kundl, but had to cancel again because of the Corona restrictions. The weekend will now take place in Christine's new home in Hafelsberg near Glonn, a beautiful spot way out in the countryside from where you can see the mountains.



Christine's new home

...on Sunday 8 and Sunday 15 August Kat Wagner, our Pastoral Assistant, was in charge of the noontime services? Thanks to her and the team of people who supported her: Moses, Vanda, Kate, John, Svenja and Bright! In the services we reflected on the 'Sign of Jonah' and Jeremiah's message: "multiple and do not decrease!"

...on Sunday 22 August Pastor Christine led the congregation in a spontaneous Bible Drama? Since we were only about 32 people in church, it didn't seem wise to pick out a few to act out a Bible story and expect a tiny rest of people to watch the play. It made much more sense to include everyone (!) in church in the role play. It was a great

experience and a real community builder to be right in the middle of the story of the healing of Blind Bartimaeus!

...on the last Sunday in August we were introduced to an unknown young girl who helped heal her master? Christine shared with us the story of the army captain Naaman who had an awful disease, and found healing only because he listened to the idea of a very young foreign servant girl. (2 Kings 5).

...a new Bible Study group will be starting in the autumn? Kat Wagner and Christian Schreiber are offering to host a Bible Study and fellowship group in their home. Kat and Christian live in Laim/Friedenheim (reachable with the U5 or Tram 18). It's open to everyone, and will take place on a weekday evening. Please contact Kat if you're interested (contact details on back page).

...the Women's Bible Study group is reading a new book? The group which meets at Rahel's or Katie's home started reading "The friendship of Women – The Hidden Tradition of the Bible" by Joan Chittister, an American Benedictine nun. The next meeting is on Wednesday 29 September at Katie's home in Drachenseestrasse.

...Communion services are now happening every month? The service on 1 August was attended by so many people that the yard was too small for all of us to stand there and eat our piece of bread and a grape or two. Instead we formed a large circle inside the church, observed the social distancing rules and shared communion there.

...the Sunday evening service will resume in September? We meet again on Sunday 5 September at 6pm. (Note: no evening services on 12th September, 3rd October and 17th October.)

...the Corona Unemployment Fund is still available? Anyone who is struggling financially can approach Pastor Christine for help.

...Kids Activity Afternoons may start in October? A first Fun Day for Kids could be Saturday 2 October. Look out for extra invitation flyers with more information.

Did You Know That...? (continued)

...the Council on Ministries met on 1

September? The members discussed the results of the questionnaire and the following decisions were made:

- the all-age Sunday noon service would continue for as long as it remains impossible to offer a safe Sunday School for the kids.
- the 6pm Sunday services and the Tuesday online meeting would continue for the foreseeable future. However, in order to enable some mixing of the congregations, the Communion Service on the first Sunday of the month would be a joint service at noon.
- we would aim to hold 'open church' services at special moments throughout the year. The next 'open church' would be on the first Sunday of Advent (28th November).
- We aim to offer Church Coffee in the courtyard on Sundays, and serve food whenever possible at special events.
- The African-style Harvest Festival (17th October) will include as much singing from the African Choir as possible, a safe form of auction, and some finger food afterwards.
- The next CoM meeting will be Thursday 11th November.

...Kat and Christine are planning a new church directory? Please let them have your contact details if you want to be listed in the new address list

...Pastor Christine still does fun packs for children? Not once a week, but once a month. Many parents and children are very happy with this monthly gift that comes in the post and contains some games or books or crafts for the children.

...this year's African-style Harvest Festival is scheduled for Sunday 17 October 2021? We look forward to a fun and vibrant service with the African Choir, finger food and hopefully some kind of auction of the harvest offerings. People are encouraged to bring a financial offering and/or a harvest donation. We also plan to make a short 'highlights' video of the service for those not able to attend in person. More details will follow.



Last year's Harvest Festival

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Impressum

Your suggestions, comments and contributions to the Newsletter are welcome. Deadline for the next issue is 30 September. If you would like to receive future issues by e-mail, please send a message to christine@peacechurch.de, simply type "PCN by mail" and we will add your address to the list.