

Courage and Hope for a common Europe

Every five years, the citizens of the European Union elect the members of the European Parliament (MEP), the only directly elected transnational assembly in the world. In June 2024, a total of 720 members from 27 member states will be elected.

MEPs have the task of shaping and passing laws. These laws affect important areas of life in the European Union, from supporting the economy, agriculture and fight against poverty to the climate crisis and security. In this respect, the European Parliament determines large parts of national policy and legislation. As Protestant Churches in Hesse and Nassau and Kurhessen-Waldeck, we are in partnership and friendship with a large number of churches in Europe. Together, we are currently facing major challenges in the EU: growing populism, increasing social inequalities, the climate crisis and war in Europe. Together, we stand for a peaceful, democratic and social Europe. To give courage and hope for a common Europe, we have asked the

Bishops and Presidents of the churches with which we are connected to make a statement that shows our Christian commitment to peace and community. (cs)

Here are some examples:

"I vote for Europe because it stands for freedom, tolerance and community and the future is only possible in community!"

Bishop Reinhart Guib, Bishop of the Evangelical Church A. B. Rumania



"I vote for Europe because it is my own responsibility today to be committed in the dream of a supportive, open, peaceful citizenship that the generations who had to face the horror of wars and holocaust passed on."

Deacon Alessandra Trotta, Moderator of the Waldensian Board



QR leads you to all statements

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With these words from Psalm 133:1, I greet you warmly. My name is Diethelm Meissner, and I have been Head of Diaconia and Ecumenism at the regional church office in Kassel since 1 November 2023.

I am 62 years old, married and the father of three grown-up children.

I am delighted to be able to play a responsible role in shaping the future development of diaconia and ecumenism in our church. Both fields are matters close to my heart: I see diakonia as the practical side of our faith. And for me, ecumenism is the bond with Christians in other churches: Christian life is very diverse - and yet united by one spirit (as in Psalm 133).

My diaconal experience comes primarily from seven years as a pastor in a parish in a socially deprived area in a small

town. I was able to gain ecumenical experience in a variety of contexts: a year of study in Jerusalem, a longer stay in Central America or a doctorate in missiology on the „Church of the Poor in El Salvador“ and many ecumenical encounters as a study leader in the further training of pastors.

Besides diaconia and ecumenism, I have considerable experience in adult education: for twelve years, I organized further training courses for pastors at the Protestant Seminary for Advanced Studies in Hofgeismar – with many visits to our partner churches and the shaping of ecumenical meetings in Kurhessen-Waldeck.

I look forward to meeting you in the coming months and years - and to experiencing together how wonderful it is when sisters and brothers live peacefully together. (dm)



Diethelm Meißner following Claudia Brinkmann-Weiß as Officer of Diaconia and Ecumenism of EKKW. Bishop Beate Hofmann (right) (Photo: Christian Schauderna/medio)

We are united in Christ and referred to one another



International Partnership Consultation, Arnoldshain 2017 (Photo: EKHN)

During your time as Church President, you have always pointed out that living ecumenism is an essential part of the church for you. The new church president will be inaugurated in January 2025 with an international partnership

consultation. That is a strong sign of global fellowship. What is so important for you about ecumenism?

This is linked to my basic theological conviction, which the author of the Gospel of John describes as follows:

"That they all may be one!" (17:21) This phrase forms the basis of several ecumenical movements, united and uniting denominational traditions and of my own church, the EKHN. It is also the official motto of one of our partner churches, the Church of South India, the first church which brought together different denominational traditions under one roof. In Germany we have two main denominations: Protestants and Catholics. For sure there are theological and organizational differences between our denominations as well in some ethical positions. Nevertheless, separation is not the right path in ecumenism. The deepest reason for this is that we are convinced together that we are united in Christ through baptism. Even if we organize our lives differently as churches, we are still referred to one another and commissioned to witness together to the one faith in Christ in this world. 'We no longer want to be church without dialogue with you.' This is the

Interview with Church President Dr. Dr. h. c. Volker Jung

central sentence of a new ecumenical document from the German Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Protestant Church in Germany.

In our churches in Germany, we are undergoing a transformation process that we could not have imagined at this speed when you took office in 2009. What do you find inspiring in our Ecumenical Contacts for our church development?

We are indeed facing major challenges and changes. We find it difficult because we experience it as a loss and a shrinking. We have to close buildings with which people feel closely connected. We will have fewer pastors and will have to merge parishes. But we want to look to the future and seek new ways to bear credible witness to the Gospel. During my time in office, I have been able to visit many of our partner churches. During the Covid-pandemic, these contacts have become

even more intensive thanks to the new possibilities of video conferencing. I am always deeply impressed by the energy and joy with which people in our partner churches organize their everyday life in the congregations and face the challenges in their church. These challenges are often much greater than ours. This has become particularly clear during the pandemic. During the lockdown, there were no church services and therefore no collections - often the only source of income in our partner churches.

Of course, we don't want to rank the ecumenical partnerships, but what special encounters do you remember?

When I took over as church president 16 years ago, we developed a new concept for our contacts with our 16 partner churches and their districts in Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA. The aim was not to visit every single partner church, but to come together for regional thematic conferences.

I fondly remember the two consultations in Tanzania on the issue of charismatic movements and in South Africa on the responsibility of the church towards refugees. Together with representatives from the other African partner churches, we exchanged ideas and discussed our church images and our responsibility in society. With representatives from our Asian partner churches, we discussed concepts of mission in Northern India and the proximity and distance between church and state on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. With our European partners, I particularly remember joint campaigns on migration and this year's European elections. I cannot and do not want to rank. The partnerships were all characterized by great fraternity and wonderful encounters.

The questions were asked by Christina Schnepel