

**WATCH AND PRAY**

**OVER 30 YEARS LATER**

**WACHET UND BETET 30 JAHRE DANACH**



# WACHET UND BETET

»Da kam Jesus mit ihnen zu einem Garten, der hieß Gethsemane, und sprach zu den Jüngern: Setzt euch hier, solange ich dort hin gehe und bete. Und er nahm mit sich Petrus und die zwei Söhne des Zebedäus und fing an zu trauern und zu zagen. Da sprach Jesus zu ihnen: Meine Seele ist betrübt bis an den Tod; bleibt hier und wacht mit mir! Und er ging ein wenig weiter, fiel nieder auf sein Angesicht und betete und sprach: Mein Vater, ist's möglich, so gehe dieser Kelch an mir vorüber; doch nicht wie ich will, sondern wie du willst! Und er kam zu seinen Jüngern und fand sie schlafend und sprach zu Petrus: Könnt ihr denn nicht eine Stunde mit mir wachen? Wachtet und betet, dass ihr nicht in Anfechtung fallt! Der Geist ist willig; aber das Fleisch ist schwach.« Aus dem Buch des Evangelisten Matthäus, Kap. 26, 36 – 41

»Wachtet und Betet« – das Wort aus dem Matthäus-Evangelium stand auf dem Transparent an der Gethsemanekirche im Herbst 1989 und charakterisierte die Fürbittgebete, die Mahnwache und die Fastenaktion in diesen Wochen.

Die Ereignisse damals sind Kernstück der Ausstellung. Sie spannt den Bogen vom Kaiserreich bis in die Gegenwart und zeigt diese Kirchengemeinde in Anpassung und Widerstand, Schuld, Verstrickung und Zivilcourage, Mut und Verzagtheit.



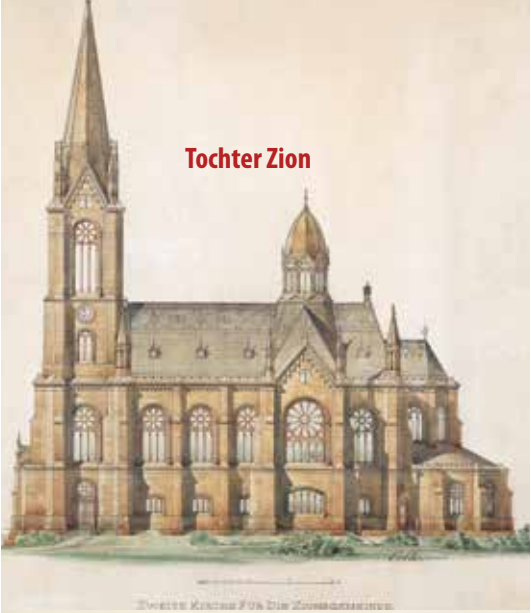
## Keep watch and pray

»Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane and said to them: sit here while I go over there and pray. He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee. Grief and anguish came over him, And he said to them: The sorrow in my heart is so great it almost crushes me. Stay here and keep watch with me! He went a little further on, threw himself face downward on the ground and prayed: My Father, if it wis possible, take this cup of suffering from me! Yet not what I want, but what you want. Then he returned to the three disciples and found them asleep, and he said to Peter, How is it that you three were not able to keep watch with me for even one hour? Keep watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.«

*Matthew, Ch. 26, 36-41*

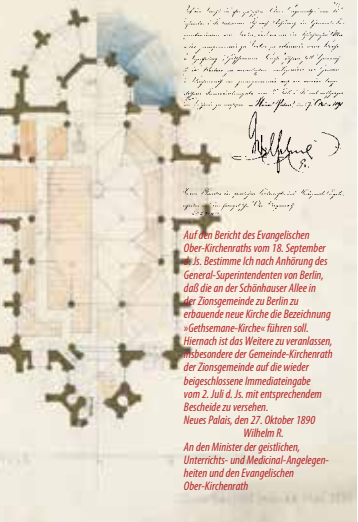
»Keep watch and pray« – These words from St. Matthew's Gospel were written on the banner of the Gethsemane Church in the autumn of 1989 and were echoed in the prayers of intercession, the vigils and the fasting during those weeks. The events of this turbulent period in history form the centrepiece of the exhibition, which spans from Imperial Germany to the present day and presents the church and its congregation in changing roles of assimilation and resistance, culpability and courageousness, constraint and political engagement.

# Tochter Zion



Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts wächst die Bevölkerung im Nordosten Berlins erheblich. Am Karfreitag 1885 kommt es unter den Gottesdienstbesuchern der Zionskirche zu einer Schlägerei, weil nicht alle Platz finden. Man beschließt den Bau einer weiteren Kirche, für die Kaiser Wilhelm II. fast die Hälfte der Baukosten von 460.000 Goldmark übernimmt. Als preußischer König zugleich Oberhaupt der evangelischen Kirche, fördert er zusammen mit Kaiserin Auguste Viktoria den Bau von Kirchen als Bollwerke gegen Sozialdemokratie und Entkirchlichung. Pfr. Wachsmann von der Zionskirche schlägt für den Neubau den Namen »Moria« vor. So heißt ein Berg Jerusalems mit dem jüdischen Tempel; heute steht dort der Felsendom. Zion ist ein in der Bibel mehrfach erwähnter Berg ebenfalls in Jerusalem. Die Zions- und die Moria-kirche sollen so, auf Hügeln stehend, an die Heilige Stadt erinnern. Der Kaiser ordnet allerdings den Namen »Gethsemane« an in Anspielung auf den Garten in Jerusalem, in dem Jesus sich auf seinen Tod vorbereitet und seine Jünger bittet: »Wachet und betet!« Nach drei Jahren Bauzeit wird die Kirche am 26. Februar 1893 eingeweiht. Baumeister ist August Orth, ein Schüler der Architekten Friedrich August Stüler, Karl Boetticher und Wilhelm Stier. Er hat auch die Zionskirche gebaut.

*Sicht und Grundriss Zweite Zionskirche, August Orth, Architekturmuseum der TU Berlin*



*Überhaupt ist es zu erwarten, dass die Zionskirche in der Zukunft die Hauptkirche der Gemeinde sein wird, und die Zionskirche als Hauptkirche der Gemeinde zu betrachten sein dürfte. Die Zionskirche ist die Hauptkirche der Gemeinde, und die Zionskirche ist die Hauptkirche der Gemeinde.*

*August Orth*

*Der Kaiser in seiner Eigenschaft als Oberhaupt der evangelischen Kirche, fördert er zusammen mit Kaiserin Auguste Viktoria den Bau von Kirchen als Bollwerke gegen Sozialdemokratie und Entkirchlichung.*

**Auf den Bericht des Evangelischen Ober-Kirchenraths vom 18. September 1885. Bestimme Ich nach Anhörung des General-Superintendenten von Berlin, daß die an der Schönhauser Allee in der Zionsgemeinde zu Berlin zu erbauende neue Kirche die Bezeichnung »Gethsemane-Kirche« führen soll. Hiernach ist das Weitere zu veranlassen, insbesondere der Gemeinde-Kirchenrath der Zionsgemeinde auf die wieder begeschlossene Immediateingabe vom 2. Juli d. Js. mit entsprechendem Bescheide zu versehen. Neues Palais, den 27. Oktober 1890 Wilhelm R.**

**An den Minister der geistlichen, Unterrichts- und Medicinal-Angelegenheiten und den Evangelischen Ober-Kirchenrath**

*Lageplan für die Gethsemanekirche Karte Archiv – BA Pankow, Amt für Plänen und Genehmigen*



## Daughter Zion

At the end of the nineteenth century, the population in the north-east of Berlin grew exponentially. On Good Friday 1885, a brawl broke out among the congregation at the Zionskirche, because not everyone could find a seat. The decision was made to build another church, and Emperor Wilhelm II covered almost half of the construction costs of 460,000 gold marks. As King of Prussia and head of the Protestant Church, he and his wife Auguste Viktoria supported the construction of churches to prevent the spread of social democracy and secularisation. Pastor Wachsmann from the Zionskirche proposed the name ›Moria‹ for the new church, thereby associating it with the biblical Mount Moriah, or Temple Mount, home to the Dome of the Rock. Zion is another hill in Jerusalem, and mentioned numerous times in the Bible. The Zionskirche and the Moriakirche, both situated on hills, would thereby serve as reminders of the Holy City. However, the Emperor ordered the name ›Gethsemane‹, in reference to the garden in Jerusalem where Jesus prepared for his death and told his disciples to ›keep watch and pray‹. Following three years of construction, the church was consecrated on 26 February 1893.

It was designed by August Orth, a student of the architects Friedrich August Stüler, Karl Boetticher and Wilhelm Stier. Orth also designed the Zionskirche.

*»Based on the report of the Protestant High Council of Churches of 18 September of this year I have decided, after consultation with the General Superintendent of Berlin, that the new church to be built on Schönhauser Allee in the Berlin parish of Zion, will be called 'Gethsemane Church'. In accordance, further action is to be taken, in particular the provision of the Zion parish council with appropriate notices in response to the direct submission of 2 July of the current year.«*

*Neues Palais, 27 October 1890 Wilhelm R. to the Minister of Spiritual, Educational and Medicinal Affairs and the Protestant High Council of Churches*

*Site map for the Gethsemanekirche, Map Archive – BA Pankow, Office for Planning and Approval*

*View and floor plan second Zionskirche, August Orth, Architecture Museum of the TU Berlin*

## Kirche im Arbeiterbezirk



Obdachlose in der Fröbelstraße  
vor der sogenannten »Palme«,  
dem Obdachlosenhaus,  
Museumsverbund Pankow



Stargarder Ecke Greifenhagener Straße,  
Postkarte um 1915

Die schnell voranschreitende, dichte Besiedlung des Gemeindegebietes bringt große soziale Probleme mit sich. Viele kinderreiche Familien leben in den Mietskasernen äußerst beengt.

Die Gemeinde versucht, die Not zu lindern. Unter ihrem Dach entstehen Vereine, die sich sozialen Aufgaben widmen, wie der »Frauenverein zum Zwecke der Armenpflege« und der »Arbeiterinnenverein«. Bereits damals liegt ein besonderer Schwerpunkt auf der Sorge um die vielen Kinder und Jugendlichen. Für diese werden eine »Strickschule für Kinder« und ein »Kindermissions-Verein« eingerichtet, Konfirmierte werden zum »Evangelischen Männer- und Jünglingsverein« bzw. zum »Jungfrauenverein« eingeladen. Der Gemeindevorstand ist eingebunden in Fürsorgeverfahren für Waisen und jugendliche Angeklagte, von denen manche den Konfirmandenunterricht besuchen.

Der 1. Weltkrieg verschärft die Situation. In der Weihnachtspredigt von 1915 berichtet Pfarrer Fleischmann von einer Mutter, die zwei Söhne im Krieg verloren hat und deren dritter in französischer Gefangenschaft kurz vor Weihnachten stirbt – ein Schicksal von vielen. Die Arbeit mit den zahlreichen Kindern und Jugendlichen, die Betreuung Kranker und Trostbedürftiger prägt nach dem Krieg die Gemeinde.



Notgeld für Prenzlauer Berg 1921,  
Museumsverbund Pankow



Gemeindeausflug 1923



Gethsemanekirche um 1900,  
Postkarte

## A church in a working-class district

In this fast-growing and densely populated district, social problems abounded. Many large families lived in very cramped conditions in tenement blocks. The church tried to help alleviate these hardships. Associations committed to social issues were established under its auspices, including the ›Women's Association for the Purposes of Caring for the Poor‹ and the ›Women's Workers' Union‹. At this time, the church was also very engaged in caring for the district's many children and adolescents. Among other initiatives, a ›Knitting School for Children‹ and a ›Children's Mission Association‹ were established. Children who were confirmed were invited to the ›Protestant Men's and Youth Association‹ or the ›Young Ladies' Association‹. The parish council helped to care for orphans and juveniles accused of crimes, some of whom attended confirmation classes. The First World War led to even greater suffering. In the Christmas sermon of 1915, Pastor Fleischmann told the congregation about a mother who had lost two sons in the war and whose third son died in French captivity shortly before Christmas – a fate shared by many. After the war, the church was particularly active in its work with children and adolescents, caring for the sick and those in need of comfort.

*Homeless people on Fröbelstraße in front of the homeless shelter known as the ›Palme‹, Museum Association Pankow*

*Stargarder Straße / corner Greifenhagener Straße, postcard from around 1915*

*Emergency funds for Prenzlauer Berg 1921, Museum Association Pankow*

*Parish outing 1923*

*Gethsemanekirche around 1900, postcard*

## Zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand



Die Spaltung der Gemeinde wird durch unterschiedliche Ausgaben des Gemeindeblattes »Gethsemaneboten« sichtbar:  
Die herkömmliche Ausgabe ist von den Deutschen Christen geprägt. Dagegen geben die Mitglieder der Bekennenden Kirche den »Neuen Gethsemaneboten« heraus.

»Kirche im Aufbau« ist ein Blatt der DC, das über Pf. Hensch bezogen werden konnte.

Der »Kirchenkampf« während der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus ergreift in vollem Umfang das Gemeindeleben. Schon 1932 sind die »Deutschen Christen« (DC) im Gemeindekirchenrat (GKR) vertreten.  
Bei Versammlungen zur Wahl des Gemeindekirchenrats am 21. und 22. Juni 1933 kommt es zu einer Schlägerei.  
Am Wahltag (23. Juni) wehen Hakenkreuzfahnen. Die DC versuchen eine Wahlfälschung, die aber vereitelt wird. Elf DC-Mitgliedern stehen im Gemeindekirchenrat sieben aus der Bekennenden Kirche (BK) gegenüber, die sich zur Gruppe »Evangelium und Kirche« zusammengeschlossen haben.  
In der Folge kommt es immer wieder zu Auseinandersetzungen, die es unmöglich machen, für das Gemeindeleben notwendige Beschlüsse zu fassen. Das Konsistorium versucht ein Gremium einzusetzen, das die Gemeinde leiten soll. Als dies misslingt, werden neue Mitglieder des Gemeindekirchenrats berufen. Ab 1938 haben in ihm die Deutschen Christen die Mehrheit.  
1945 löst sich das Problem, denn alle DC verlassen den Gemeindekirchenrat.



Wahlpropaganda vor einer Berliner Kirchentür für die Wahlen am 23. Juli 1933



## Assimilation and resistance

*The growing schism within the church was manifested in different editions of the parish newsletter, the Gethsemanebote. The regular edition of the Gethsemanebote was published by the Deutsche Christen (German Christians), who were ideologically aligned with the Nazis, while members of the Bekennende Kirche (Confessing Church) – a movement within the Protestant Church opposed to the German Christians – published the Neue Gethsemanebote.*

*Kirche im Aufbau was a leaflet distributed by the German Christians, and could be obtained from Pastor Hansch.*

The Church Struggle, or Kirchenkampf, during the years of National Socialism affected all areas of parish life. As early as 1932 the Deutsche Christen were represented in the parish council. During a meeting to vote for the council on 21 and 22 June 1933, a fight broke out. On election day (23 June), swastika flags were flown. The Deutsche Christen attempted to rig the votes, but were thwarted. In the parish council, eleven Deutsche Christen members were now pitted against seven members of the Bekennende Kirche, who had joined forces to form the group ›Evangelium und Kirche‹ (›Gospel and Church‹). This led to frequent disputes in the council that made it impossible for important decisions to be made on behalf of the parish. The council of churches tried to set up a body to lead the parish. When this failed, new members of the parish council were appointed, and from 1938, the Deutsche Christen had the majority in the council. In 1945 the problem was resolved when all Deutsche Christen members left the council.

*23 July 1933 Church elections,  
St. Marienkirche Berlin, Federal Archives*

*Election propaganda in front of a Berlin  
church door for the elections on 23 July 1933*

## Das Pfarrhaus als Zufluchtsort

Gethsemanestr. 9, ca. 1916



Der kirchliche Widerstand gegen die nationalsozialistischen Gräueltaten ist in der Gethsemane-Gemeinde eng mit dem Namen der Pfarrfrau Agnes Wendland verbunden. Ohne Wissen ihres Mannes, den sie damit nicht belasten will, versteckt sie Menschen jüdischer Herkunft in der geräumigen Pfarrwohnung. Dabei helfen ihr die beiden Töchter: Ruth ist Vikarin in Zehlendorf und Angelika Pfarrfrau in Sentzke bei Nauen. Die Geschwister Rita und Ralph Neumann leben für zwei Jahre illegal als »Gemeindefreier« in der Gethsemanegemeinde. Als Ralph von der Gestapo gefasst wird, versucht Agnes Wendland ihn durch Austausch mit ihr freizubekommen. Sie wird sofort festgenommen und inhaftiert. Als sie erkrankt, geht Ruth anstelle ihrer Mutter in Haft. Ralph und Rita überleben. Ralph schreibt im Mai 1945 ein Schild in russischer Schrift, das er neben der Haustür anbringt: »Evangelisches Pfarrhaus«, was die Bewohner vor Schwierigkeiten bewahrt hat. Ralph reist mit seiner Schwester in die USA aus.

Ähnlich kann Wolfgang Hammerschmidt im Pfarrhaus untertauchen. Über die Treppe des Seitenflügels können die illegal Lebenden in den Hinterhof und von dort zum S-Bahnhof gelangen, wenn im Vorderhaus die Gestapo klingelt.

Eine Gedenktafel am Gemeindehaus Gethsemane erinnert heute an Agnes Wendland.

In der Pfarrwohnung Wendland trifft sich zudem die »Kirchliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft«. Zur Rettung von Juden werden Fahrscheine, Essensmarken und verschiedene andere gefälscht und ein Ring von Unterkünften organisiert, in denen reihum die Flüchtlinge unterkommen konnten.



Agnes Wendland 1928  
im Hausgarten des Pfarrhauses Gethsemanestr. 9



Die Geschwister  
Rita und Ralph Neumann



Agnes Wendland und Angelika Rutenborn,  
geb. Wendland 1929



Agnes und Ruth Wendland 1929



Gedenktafel für Agnes Wendland am Haus  
Gethsemanestr. 9



Gedenkstätte Yad Vashem

## The parsonage as a place of refuge

In the Gethsemane parish, the resistance of the church to Nazi atrocities is intrinsically linked with the name of Agnes Wendland, the wife of the then pastor. Without the knowledge of her husband, whom she did not want to burden, she hid people of Jewish origin in their spacious parsonage. She was helped by her two daughters: Ruth was a curate in Zehlendorf, and Angelika a pastor's wife in Sentzke near Nauen. The siblings Rita and Ralph Neumann lived illegally as ›church helpers‹ in the Gethsemane parish for two years. When Ralph was caught by the Gestapo, Agnes Wendland tried to free him by trading places with him. She was immediately arrested and imprisoned. When she fell ill, Ruth took her place in prison. Ralph and Rita survived. In 1945, when this part of Berlin was under Russian occupation, Ralph wrote a sign in Russian that he put up next to the front door: ›Protestant Parsonage‹, as a result of which the inhabitants were left in peace. Ralph emigrated with his sister to the USA.

Wolfgang Hammerschmidt also found refuge in the parsonage. If the Gestapo rang the door at the front of the building, illegal inhabitants could use the stairs in the side wing to escape into the backyard and from there to the S-Bahn station.

A plaque outside the Gethsemane parish hall serves as a memorial to Agnes Wendland.

The Wendland parsonage was also where the ›Kirchliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft‹ (Church Working Group) met. To help Jews, tickets, food stamps and various other items were forged, and a housing pool was organised, enabling refugees to stay in different people's homes in turn.

*Gethsemanestraße 9, around 1916*

*Agnes Wendland, 1928, in the parsonage garden  
at Gethsemanestraße 9*

*The siblings Rita and Ralph Neumann*

*Agnes Wendland and Angelika Rutenborn, b. Wendland, 1929*

*Agnes and Ruth Wendland, 1929*

*Memorial plaque for Agnes Wendland at Gethsemanestraße 9*

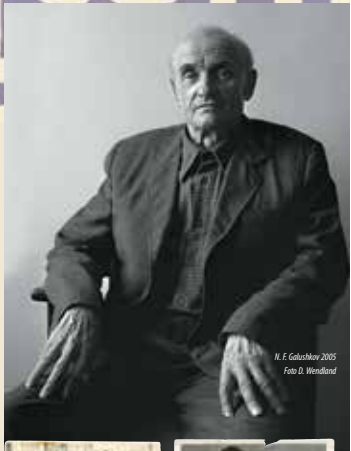
*Yad Vashem Memorial*

## Zwangsarbeit

# OST



N. F. Galushkov in der Zeit seiner Einlieferung in ein Sammellager für Ostarbeiter 1942



N. F. Galushkov 2005  
Foto D. Wendland



N. F. Galushkov als Soldat nach der Befreiung durch die Rote Armee 1945/46



Von 1942 bis Kriegsende setzt die Gethsemane-Gemeinde jugendliche Zwangsarbeiter aus der besetzten Sowjetunion auf ihrem Friedhof Nordend ein. Entrechtet und mit dem diskriminierenden Zeichen »OST« an der Brust, leben sie in einem umzäunten Lager. 42 Berliner Kirchengemeinden haben es zusammen mit dem Stadtsynodalverband auf dem Friedhof der Jerusalemer und Neuen Kirchengemeinde in Neukölln errichtet. Die Lagerleitung ist verpflichtet, mit der Gestapo zusammenzuarbeiten. Dauernder Hunger und Angst vor willkürlicher Bestrafung prägen den Lager-Alltag. Wer krank wird, dem drohen »Arbeitserziehungslager« oder KZ.

Einer der aus Russland Verschleppten ist 1942 der 15-jährige Nikolai Galushkov. Zusammen mit dem gleichaltrigen Pjotr Mashavskij und Sergei Bazanov leistet er auf dem Gethsemane-Friedhof körperlich schwere Arbeit. Drei Kartoffeln, die er dort jeden Mittag zusätzlich zur kargen Lagerkost erhält, hätten ihn gerettet, erinnert er sich.

Gedenkstätte für kirchliche Zwangsarbeiter auf dem Friedhof in der Hermannstraße

1944 tritt Galushkov einer Untergrundorganisation bei, wird verraten und verhaftet. Nach Verhör und Folter im Gestapo-Gefängnis in der Prinz-Albrecht-Straße soll er im April 1945, zusammen mit einer Gruppe von 30 Gefangenen, erschossen werden. Als einer der wenigen überlebt er das Erschießungskommando der SS in Teltow, weil eine getroffene Frau auf ihn fällt. Kurz darauf rücken die Panzer der Roten Armee an und befreien ihn. Zwei Tage später werden auch die anderen Zwangsarbeiter im Friedhofslager von Rotarmisten befreit.

Pf. Wendland schreibt im Juni 1945: »Von den Friedhofsarbeitern wurden ... die Mehrzahl eingezogen. Besonders mühsam war die Bewältigung der Arbeit auf dem Friedhof ... nur Arbeiter im Alter von 70 Jahren und mehr [waren] tätig, die eine Gruft nicht ausgraben konnten. Sie bekamen als Hilfe schließlich Russen und zwar jugendliche Menschen, von etwa 17 bis 18 Jahren, die von Frau Köhn beköstigt wurden. Sie haben sich bewährt und uns geholfen ...«



Pjotr Michailowitsch Mashavskij 1924 – 1983  
1942 Zwangsarbeiter auf dem Gethsemanefriedhof



## Forced labour

From 1942 until the end of the war, the Gethsemane parish put young forced labourers from the German-occupied Soviet Union to work in its Nordend cemetery. Disenfranchised and with the word ›OST‹ (EAST) emblazoned on their chest, they were housed in a camp in the cemetery of the Jerusalems-und-Neuen parish in Neukölln. The camp was jointly established by forty-two Berlin parishes in conjunction with the city's synodal association. The head of the camp was obligated to work together with the Gestapo. Day to day life in the camp was dominated by constant hunger and fear of arbitrary punishment. Those who fell ill faced the prospect of being sent to a labour or concentration camp. One of those who arrived from Russia in 1942 was fifteen-year-old Nikolai Gulashkov. Together with Pjotr Mashavskij, also aged fifteen, and Sergei Bazanov, he was forced to carry out manual labour at the Gethsemane cemetery. What saved him, he remembered, was receiving three potatoes every day for lunch in addition to the meagre camp ration. In 1944, Galushkov joined an underground organisation, was betrayed and arrested. After being interrogated and tortured in the Gestapo prison on Prinz-Albrecht-Straße, he was sentenced to death by shooting in April 1945 together with a group of thirty prisoners. He was one of the few to survive the firing squad of the SS in Teltow, because a woman who was hit fell on top of him. Shortly afterwards, the tanks of the Red Army rolled in and he was freed. Two days later, the other forced labourers in the cemetery camp were also liberated by the Red Army soldiers. Pastor Wendland wrote in June 1945: ›The majority were released from working in the cemetery. The work in the cemetery was particularly arduous ... [there] were only workers aged 70 and over, who were unable to dig graves. Finally they were given Russians to help them, young men aged around 17 and 18, who were fed by Frau Köhn. They proved their worth and helped us ...‹

*NF Galushkov at the time when he was sent to a transit camp for Eastern workers, 1942*

*NF Galushkov as a soldier after the liberation by the Red Army, 1945/46 Pyotr Michailovitsh Mashavskij, 1924 – 1983*

*Forced labourer in the Gethsemane cemetery, 1942*

*NF Galushkov, 2005*

*Memorial for forced labourers in the cemetery in Hermannstraße*

Pastor Rettig with his wife, Eckehard Kubath Pastor Kubath



Pl. Rettig, Renate Rettig, Eckehard Kubath Pfarrer Kubath, 1951 in Grünheide

Aus der »Jungen Welt« vom April 1953, und vom 7. 5. 1953



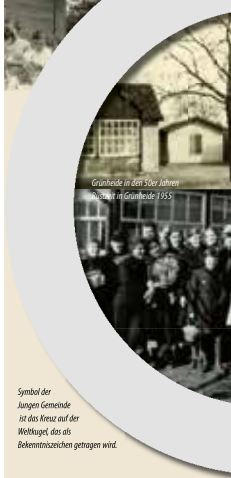
Pastor Rettig, Renate Rettig, Eckehard Kubath Pastor Kubath, 1951 in Grünheide



**Kirche in der DDR**

From the Junge Welt of April 1953, and from 7. 5. 1954

Grünheide end of the 1950s Grünheide in the 1950s A youth camp in Grünheide 1955



Grünheide in den 50er Jahren  
Sommer in Grünheide 1955

The symbol of the »Junge Gemeinde« is a cross on the globe, and worn as a confessional sign

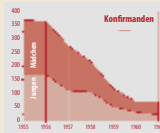
Symbol der Jungen Gemeinde ist das Kreuz auf der Weltkugel, das als Bekenntniszeichen getragen wird.

Number of confirmed youths in the Gethsemane parish 1955 – 1961 Confirmands boys girls

Von Anfang an ist dem SED-Regime die kirchliche Kinder- und Jugendarbeit ein Dorn im Auge. Zwar heißt es in Artikel 44 der Verfassung der DDR von 1949: »Das Recht der Kirche auf Erteilung von Religionsunterricht in den Räumen der Schule ist gewährleistet.« Doch werden Religionsunterricht und evangelischer Kinderhort in den 50er Jahren schrittweise aus den Schulen gedrängt. Christliche Unterweisung erfolgt nun als »Christenlehre« in den Räumen der Gemeinde.

Die FDJ-Zeitung »Junge Welt« eröffnet im Frühjahr 1953 eine Diffamierungskampagne gegen die Junge Gemeinde, die Gruppen der evangelischen Jugend in den Kirchengemeinden, und bezeichnet sie als »Tarnorganisation für Kriegsschetze« und als »Terrororganisation im USA-Sold«. Daraufhin stellt Bischof Otto Dibelius Strafantrag gegen die Zeitung.

**Rüstzeiten in Grünheide**  
1950 übernimmt die Gethsemanegemeinde die Verwaltung des Freizeitheimes Grünheide bei Erkner. Die Kriegsschäden werden beseitigt, und bereits im Dezember kann das Haus eingeweiht werden. Das idyllisch am Wersee gelegene Heim wird zu einem Lieblingskind der Gemeinde. Als Sammelplatz verschiedener Gemeindegruppen, wird es besonders von der Jungen Gemeinde für Rüstzeiten genutzt. Diese sind als »Bibelkurse« zwar genehmigt, trotzdem werden in den 50er Jahren einzelne Rüstzeiten durch die Volkspolizei aufgelöst.



Zahl der Konfirmanden in der Gethsemanegemeinde 1955-1961

Confirmation, 1970s, with Pastor Elisabeth Eschner



Konfirmation, 70er Jahre, mit Pfarrerin Elisabeth Eschner

Confirmation photo of Manuela Tolsdorf, 1974



Konfirmationsfoto von Manuela Tolsdorf, 1974

»Jugendweihe«

Religious instruction, 1950s

Trotz der massiven atheistischen Agitation nimmt weiterhin ein großer Teil der Jugendlichen am Konfirmandenunterricht teil. Ab 1954 propagiert die SED zur »Eroberung der Jugend« die sozialistische Jugendweihe. Wer nicht daran teilnimmt, muss mit Diskriminierung bei der Berufswahl und dem Übergang zur Erweiterten Oberschule rechnen. Daraufhin gehen die Konfirmandenzahlen nach 1958 rapide zurück. Die Kirchen ihrerseits sehen in dem Gelöbnis zum sozialistischen Staat und zur atheistischen Weltanschauung ein Bekenntnis, das mit dem christlichen Glauben nicht vereinbar ist.

In den sechziger Jahren setzt sich jedoch auch in Gethsemane die Praxis durch, Jugendweiheteilnehmer auf Wunsch ein Jahr später zu konfirmieren, wenn sie die Junge Gemeinde besuchen.



Jugendweihe



Christenlehre, 50er Jahre

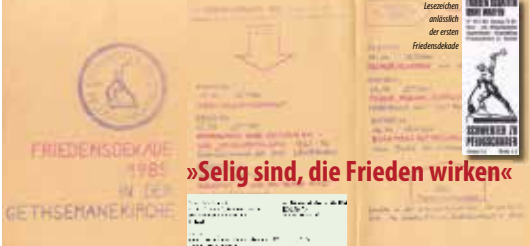
## The church in the GDR

From the very beginning, the SED (Socialist Unity Party) regime was a thorn in the side of the church's children and youth work. Although Article 44 of the GDR Constitution of 1949 stated: ›The right of the church to provide religious education in school classrooms is guaranteed‹, the reality was that in the 1950s, religious education and Protestant after-school clubs were gradually pushed out of schools. Religious instruction, in the form of Christian teachings, now took place in the parish hall.

In the spring of 1953, the Free German Youth newspaper *Junge Welt* began a defamation campaign against the ›Junge Gemeinde‹, the Protestant Church's youth organisation, describing it as ›an undercover organisation for warmongering‹ and the ›terror organisation in the USASold‹. Bishop Otto Dibelius reacted by lodging a complaint against the newspaper. Despite the rise in atheism, many young people were still going to confirmation classes. From 1954, the SED began to strongly promote the socialist ›Jugendweihe‹ – a ceremony to mark the transition to adulthood – in order to ›win over young people‹. Those who did not participate could expect to be discriminated against in their choice of profession or could be prevented from continuing school beyond the tenth grade and thus going on to university. As a result, the number of confirmations fell rapidly after 1958. The Church, for its part, saw this pledge to the socialist state and to an atheistic worldview as incompatible with the Christian faith. In the Sixties, however, the practice of confirming young people a year after their ›Jugendweihe‹, if they were part of the ›Junge Gemeinde‹, was also an option at the Gethsemanekirche.

### Religious retreats in Grünheide

In 1950, the Gethsemane parish took over the running of the Jugendheim Grünheide near Erkner – a recreational centre and hostel where religious youth groups could meet up and spend time outside the city. The war-damaged building was restored and inaugurated in December. Idyllically located on Werlsee lake, it was a favourite retreat for youth groups from the Gethsemanekirche, as well as other churches. It was used in particular by the ›Junge Gemeinde‹ for Rüstzeiten – weeks away for spiritual learning and recreation. Although these were officially approved as ›Bible courses‹, during the 1950s some of these retreats were broken up by the police.



Ende der siebziger Jahre beginnt eine neue Runde des atomaren Wettrüstens zwischen den Staaten des Warschauer Vertrages und der NATO. In beiden Teilen Deutschlands, an der Nahtstelle zwischen Ost und West, wächst die Angst vor einem Atomkrieg.

In der DDR geht mit dieser bedrohlichen Entwicklung die ideologische Aufrüstung einher. Seit September 1978 werden die Schüler der 9. und 10. Klasse im Fach Wehrkunde unterrichtet.

Während in der Bundesrepublik sich die Friedensbewegung als eigenständige politische Kraft formiert, sind es in der DDR die Kirchen, in denen Christen und Nichtchristen offen über ihre Ängste sprechen können. Die biblische Verheißung von einer Zeit, in der die Völker ihre Schwerter zu Pflugscharen umschmieden, wird zum Symbol eines eigenständigen Friedensengagements, das im Laufe der Jahre immer stärker in der Öffentlichkeit präsent ist.

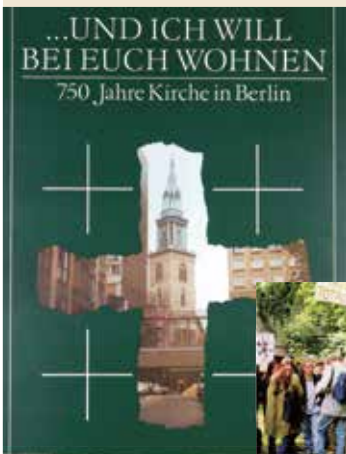
## »Selig sind, die Frieden wirken«



Im Herbst 1980 rufen die evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR erstmals zu einer »Friedensdekade« auf. In zahlreichen Gemeinden finden Andachten, Gottesdienste, Gesprächsabende und Aktionen statt, in denen das Dogma der atomaren Abschreckung in Frage gestellt wird. Bereits im Jahr darauf wird in der Gethsemanegemeinde ein Friedenskreis gegründet. Der »Arbeitskreis für christliches Friedenszeugnis« bereitet Friedensgebete und Veranstaltungen zu den Friedensdekaden vor, beteiligt sich an den Friedenswerkstätten und schickt Vertreter zu dem jährlichen Basisgruppentreffen »Konkret für den Frieden«. Seit 1985 beschäftigt sich die »Arbeitsgruppe Friedenserziehung« intensiv mit Bildungs- und Erziehungsfragen. Das dabei erarbeitete Material fließt in den Beratungsprozess der »ökumenischen Versammlung für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung« ein.

1987 wird in beiden Teilen Berlins das 750-jährige Jubiläum der Stadt gefeiert. Aus diesem Anlass kann in der Hauptstadt der DDR erstmals ein evangelischer Kirchentag stattfinden, der unter dem Thema »... und ich will bei euch wohnen« steht.

Das Eröffnungskonzert findet in der Gethsemanekirche statt. Die Bürgermeister beider Berlins sind anwesend, bei der An- und Abfahrt gehen sie sich demonstrativ aus dem Weg – kein Wort, kein Händedruck.



Eröffnungskonzert zu »750 Jahre Kirche in Berlin« vom Februar 1987.

Aufwähler  
»Schwerver zu Pflugscharen«  
Entwurf Herbert Sander  
Potsdam

Beratungsstand bei der Berliner Friedenswerkstatt im Juni 1988, Foto: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft Berlin





## ›Blessed are those who bring about peace‹

In the late 1970s, a new round of the nuclear arms race between the countries of the Warsaw Pact and NATO began. In both East and West Germany, fear of a nuclear war was escalating. In the GDR, the growing sense of fear was accompanied by ideological rearmament, and from September 1978 on, ›Wehrkunde‹ (military education) was added to the school curriculum for ninth- and tenth-graders. While in the Federal Republic the peace movement developed as an independent political force, in East Germany it was in churches that Christians and non-Christians could express their fears openly. The promise in the Bible of a time when people would beat their swords into plowshares became the symbol of an independent peace movement, which gained in importance over the years. In autumn 1980, the Protestant churches in the GDR organised the first ›Peace Decade‹ – a ten-day programme of prayers for peace, discussions and workshops that called into question the dogma of nuclear deterrence. Already in the following year, a Friedenskreis (Circle of Peace) was founded in the Gethsemane parish. The ›Arbeitskreis für christliches Friedenszeugnis‹ (Working Group for Christian Peace) prepared prayers for peace as well as events for that year's ›Peace Decade‹; they also participated in peace workshops and sent representatives to the annual grass-roots meeting ›Konkret für den Frieden‹ (›Solutions for Peace‹). From 1985, the ›Arbeitsgruppe Friedenserziehung‹ (Peace Education Working Group) dealt extensively with educational issues. The resulting material was incorporated into the advisory process of the Ecumenical Assembly for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. In 1987, the 750th anniversary of the city was celebrated in East and West Berlin. To mark the occasion, a Protestant Church Day was allowed to take place for the first time in the capital of the GDR, under the motto ›... und ich will bei euch wohnen‹ (›... and I want to live with you‹). The opening concert took place in the Gethsemanekirche. The mayors of East and West Berlin were present, but demonstratively avoided each other on their arrival and departure, exchanging neither a word nor a handshake.

*Advisory booth at the Berlin Peace Workshop in June sew-on badge 1988, photo: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft Berlin  
›Swords to plowshares‹ designed by Herbert Sander Potsdam  
Opening Concert for »750 Years of the Church in Berlin« from February 1987  
Bookmark designed for the first ›Peace Decade‹*

Gemeinsam

Group evening in the communal rooms. A private self-defense group presents its work, 1986. Photo: Havemann-Archive Grauzone/Bettina Dziggel

Laying down a wreath at the women's concentration camp memorial Ravensbrück, 1986. Photo: Archive Marina Krug

Group excursion, 1984. Photo: Archive Marina Krug

The Group's own stall at the peace workshop Erlöserkirche, 1985. Photo: Havemann-Archive

Grauzone Group evening in the communal rooms, 1988. Photo: Havemann-Archiv Grauzone/Anne Böwe

Group evening in the communal rooms, 1985. Photo: Havemann-Archiv Grauzone/Bettina Dziggel

Group evening in the communal rooms, 1985. Photo: Havemann-Archiv Grauzone/Bettina Dziggel

»... die Terrorlesben vom Prenzlauer Berg ...«\*



Arbeitskreis  
Homosexuelle Selbsthilfe –  
Lesben in der Kirche  
»... die Terrorlesben vom Prenzlauer Berg ...«\*

In den 1980er Jahren entstand in der DDR eine landesweite, selbstbestimmte Lesben- und Schwulenbewegung, die sich unabhängig vom Staat bei der Evangelischen Kirche organisieren konnte.

In den Gemeinderäumen der Gethsemanekirche trafen sich von 1983 bis 1989 Lesben auf ihrer Suche nach selbstbestimmten Lebensentwürfen. Der Gemeindevorstand und PfarrerIn Elisabeth Eschner unterstützten die Treffen der zur DDR-Oppositionsbewegung gehörenden Gruppe.

Der Raum bot den überwiegend jungen Lesben einen vor staatlichem Zugriff sicheren Ort, an dem emanzipatorische Wege diskutiert, mutige Aktionen – wie die Ehrung lesbischer KZ-Häftlinge im Frauenkonzentrationslager Ravensbrück – geplant und trotz der Verhinderungsversuche der STASI durchgesetzt wurden.

Lange Zeit war »Lesben in der Kirche« die einzige eigenständige Lesbengruppe innerhalb der Arbeitskreise Homosexualität in der DDR. Diese Selbstorganisation war ein ausgesprochenes Politikum und zog intensive Zersetzungsmaßnahmen durch die STASI auf sich. Mit der Formel »Missbrauch der Homosexuellen durch kirchlich negative Kräfte« sollten die Gruppen gespalten und entpolitisiert werden.

Aufgrund der gesellschaftlichen Ausstrahlungskraft der emanzipatorischen Lesben- und Schwulengruppen war der Staat gezwungen, nicht mehr mit Verboten wie noch in den 70ern zu reagieren. 1988 hat die DDR die strafrechtliche Diskriminierung von Homosexualität im §151 (StGB DDR) beendet, die seit 1969 nicht nur männliche, sondern auch weibliche Homosexualität verfolgt hatte.

\* Begriff wurde umf. von der STASI in diffamierender Absicht in Umlauf gebracht, von den Lesben dann als positive Selbstbezeichnung umgedeutet.



Gruppenabend in den Gemeinderäumen. Eine private Selbstverteidigungsgruppe stellt ihre Arbeit vor, 1986. Foto: Havemann-Archiv Grauzone/Bettina Dziggel



Kranzniederlegung in der Frauen-KZ-Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück 1986. Foto: Archiv Marina Krug



Ausflug der Gruppe 1984. Foto: Archiv Marina Krug



Eigener Stand der Gruppe bei der Friedenswerkstatt Erlöserkirche 1985. Foto: Havemann-Archiv Grauzone



Gruppenabend in den Gemeinderäumen 1988. Foto: Havemann-Archiv Grauzone/Anne Böwe



Gruppenabend in den Gemeinderäumen 1985. Foto: Havemann-Archiv Grauzone/Bettina Dziggel



Gruppenabend in den Gemeinderäumen 1985. Foto: Havemann-Archiv Grauzone/Bettina Dziggel

Trotz dieser Veränderungen in der DDR wurden Selbstorganisation und Selbstbestimmung nicht zugelassen. Die unabhängige Lesben- und Schwulenbewegung blieb von politischen Entscheidungen bis zum Ende der DDR ausgeschlossen.

Im Namen der Gründungsfrauen und im Gedenken an Bettina Dziggel (1960 – 2022), die zu den Gründerinnen zählte, und der GayChurch, die in der Tradition der Homosexuellen Arbeitskreise in der Kirche steht.

Marina Krug (Lesben in der Kirche)  
Anette Detering (GayChurch)  
Juli 2023

## **Together We're Unbearable! Working Group**

### **Homosexual Self-Help – Lesbians in Church**

#### **»The Terror Lesbians of Prenzlauer Berg ...«\***

\*This term was first spread by the STASI with defamatory intentions, later the lesbians called themselves »Terror Lesbians«, reframing the title positively.

In the 1980s, a nationwide, self-determined movement of lesbian and gay people started up in the GDR, which was able to organise itself in the Protestant church, independently of the state. Lesbians met in the communal rooms of the Gethsemane church from 1983 to 1989 in search of self-determined life models. The church board as well as vicar Elisabeth Eschner supported the meetings of the group belonging to the GDR opposition movement. The room offered the predominantly young lesbians safety from assaults of the state. Here they were able to discuss emancipatory paths, plan brave missions – like the homage to lesbian prisoners at the women's concentration camp Ravensbrück – which they managed to carry out despite the STASI's attempts to prevent them. For a long time, »Lesbians in Church« was the only independent group of lesbians within the Homosexual Working Groups in the GDR. Their self-organisation became highly political and the STASI tried hard to destroy their union. Using the phrase »abuse of homosexuals by negative church forces«, they attempted to split and de-politicise the groups. Due to the powerful social charisma of the emancipated homosexual groups, the state was forced to react with something other than the prohibitions they had used back in the 1970s. In 1988, the GDR ended the lawful discrimination of homosexuality based on § 151 criminal codex of the GDR, which had been used to persecute male and female homosexuality since 1969. Yet despite these changes in the GDR, self-organisation and self-determination of homosexuals was not permitted. The independent homosexuals movement remained excluded from political decisions until the end of the GDR. In the name of the founding women and in remembrance of founding member Bettina Dziggel (1960 – 2022), as well as the Gay-Church, which carries on the tradition of Homosexual Working Groups in Church.

*Marina Krug (Lesbians in Church)*

*Anette Detering (GayChurch) July 2023*

# Verboten der friedlichen Revolution



Seit 1986 wird in der Sowjetunion durch Michail Gorbatschow ein Prozess der Demokratisierung eingeleitet. Damit wächst auch in der DDR die Hoffnung auf einen politischen Wandel. Die evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR beteiligen sich im September 1987 am Olof-Palme-Friedensmarsch, zu dem Friedensorganisationen auch in Österreich, der CSSR und der BRD aufrufen. Kirchliche Gruppen tragen erstmals ihre politischen Forderungen weitgehend unbehelligt auf die Straße. Bald darauf zeigt sich, dass die DDR-Führung weder reformwillig noch dialogfähig ist.



Berliner Pilgerweg in der Nacht vom 5. zum 6. September 1987, Foto: Bernd Bohm epd-bild.de / Nr. 64853  
 In Ostberlin nehmen etwa 1000 Personen an dem Pilgerweg teil, der von der Zionische über die Segens- und Elaskirche bis zur Gethsemane führt. In der Abschlussdacht wird von der »Initiative Frieden Menschenrechte« eine Verbesserung der Menschenrechtssituation in der DDR angefordert.

Wahrheit, das 19, 1. 1982  
 18.04.1982

In der Nacht vom 24. zum 25. November 1987 durchsucht die Staatssicherheit die Räume der Umweltbibliothek in der benachbarten Zionsgemeinde. Sieben Mitarbeiter werden festgenommen, Druckmaschinen beschlagnahmt. Sofort beginnen Mahnwachen und Fürbittgottesdienste. Ziel der Stasiaktion ist es, die von der »Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte« herausgegebene illegale Zeitschrift »grenzfalle« zu finden. Unter dem Druck der Öffentlichkeit und weil sich die Kirchenleitung solidarisiert, sind die Behörden genötigt, die Verhafteten wieder freizulassen.

Beobachtungen vom 24.11.87  
 Am 24.11.1987 wurde die Stasi durch die DDR mit einem Auftrag beauftragt, im Gebiet von Zionsgemeinde und Zionsgemeinde die Stasiaktionen am 24.11.1987 in Zionsgemeinde durchzuführen.  
 Mit dem Auftrag, auf Befehl der Stasi, die Stasiaktionen im Gebiet von Zionsgemeinde und Zionsgemeinde durchzuführen, wurde die Stasiaktion im Gebiet von Zionsgemeinde und Zionsgemeinde durchgeführt.  
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Überwachungsfoto der Staatssicherheit Mitarbeiter der Umweltbibliothek kurz nach dem Überfall  
 Foto: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft

Konkress der Mahnwache vor der Zionische Kirche, Foto: Hans-Jürgen Röder



## Prelude to the peaceful revolution

In 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a process of democratisation in the Soviet Union. Thus in the GDR, too, hope for political change was growing. In September 1987, the Protestant churches in the GDR took part in the Olof Palm Peace March, with parallel supporting marches by peace organisations in Austria, Czechoslovakia and West Germany. Church groups took their political demands to the street, and for the first time were largely unmolested. It soon became clear that the GDR leadership was neither willing to reform nor capable of dialogue. In the night from 24 to 25 November 1987, the Stasi raided the Umweltbibliothek (Environmental Library) in the basement of the nearby Zionskirche. The Umweltbibliothek was known as a meeting point for dissident groups, and as well as containing officially prohibited books and magazines on environmental and human-rights issues, it also published regime-critical books and leaflets. Seven people were arrested and the library's printing presses were confiscated. Vigils and services of intercession began immediately. The Stasi were primarily hoping to find the illegal journal *grenzfall* published by the ›Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte‹ (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights).

Under pressure from the public and because the church leadership spoke out in solidarity, the authorities were forced to release those they had detained.

*Cross of candles at the vigil in front of Zionskirche  
Berlin Pilgrims' Way in the night of 5 to 6 September 1987*

*In East Berlin, about 1,000 people took part in the pilgrimage,  
which led from the Zionskirche via the Segenskirche and Elias-  
kirche to the Gethsemanekirche*

*In the final prayer, the ›Initiative Frieden Menschenrechte‹  
(Initiative for Peace and Human Rights) called for an improve-  
ment of the human rights situation in the GDR.*

*Surveillance photo of the Stasi: members of the Umweltbibliothek  
(Environmental Library) shortly after it was raided.*

## Vorboten der friedlichen Revolution

Top: Bishop Gottfried Forck at the service of intercession in the crowded Gethsemanekirche on 30 January 1988



Service of intercession, January 1988, Reinhard Schult at the microphone



Proposal of the group »Staatsbürgerschaftsrecht« (Citizenship Law), 3. 1. 1988

On 10 February, the Berliner Zeitung printed the »Declaration of the Church regarding Emigration Issues« signed by Dr. med. Günter Krusche.

Anfang 1988 spitzt sich der Konflikt zwischen oppositionellen Basisgruppen, die häufig unter dem Dach der Kirche agierten, und SED-Führung erneut zu. Mit dem Luxemburg-Zitat »Die Freiheit ist immer die Freiheit des Andersdenkenden« auf einem Plakat wollen sich »Andersdenkende« am 17. Januar an der staatlichen »Kampfdemonstration zu Ehren von Karl Liebknecht und Rosa Luxemburg« beteiligen. Sie werden festgenommen. Eine in dieser Breite bisher nicht gekannte Solidaritäts- und Protestwelle erfasst das Land. Als die Inhaftierten sich unter Druck für eine Entlassung in den Westen entscheiden, bricht die Solidaritätsbewegung in sich zusammen. Doch das Selbstbewusstsein der kritisch Denkenden im Lande ist deutlich gewachsen. Bürgerprotest – noch vorwiegend im kirchlichen Raum – wird zum Vorschein des politischen Aufbruchs im Herbst 1989.

Like other churches, the Gethsemane Church offered its parish rooms for working groups.

Zum »Tag der Menschenrechte« am 10. Dezember 1987 findet in der Gethsemanekirche ein Gottesdienst statt. Die im September 1987 gegründete Arbeitsgruppe »Staatsbürgerschaftsrecht in der DDR« macht dabei mit einer Erklärung zur Verletzung der Menschenrechte in der DDR erstmalig auf sich aufmerksam. Schwerpunkt der Arbeit ist die Beratung zur rechtlichen Situation der Antragsteller auf Ausreise aus der DDR. Die Gruppe informiert über verfassungs- und völkerrechtliche Regelungen und Möglichkeiten der Übersiedlung und wehrt sich gegen die Kriminalisierung der Ausreisewilligen.

Vertreter anderer kirchlicher Gruppierungen wie der Gruppe »Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte« plädieren jedoch dafür, in der DDR zu bleiben und sich hier für die Verwirklichung der Menschenrechte einzusetzen. In einem Fürbittgottesdienst am 4. Februar 1988 in der Gethsemanekirche erklärt Generalsuperintendent Dr. Günter Krusche die Bereitschaft der Kirche zur Beratung und seelsorgerischen Begleitung von ausreisewilligen DDR-Bürgern. Wenige Tage später richtet die Kirchengemeinde ein Kontaktbüro ein. Der Ansturm auf dieses Büro ist nicht zu bewältigen, so dass es nach kurzer Zeit wieder geschlossen wird.



»Wir wollen raus!« – »Wir bleiben hier!«



Am 10. Februar druckt die Berliner Zeitung die von Dr. Günter Krusche unterzeichnete Erklärung der Kirche zu Ausreisefragen.



## Prelude to the peaceful revolution

At the start of 1988, the conflict between grassroots opposition groups, many of which acted under the umbrella of the church, and the SED leadership increased. Carrying a placard adorned with the Luxemburg quote »Die Freiheit ist immer die Freiheit des Andersdenkenden!« (Freedom is always the freedom of dissenters), these ›dissenters‹ wanted to take part in the official demonstration in honour of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg on 17 January. They were arrested. There was an unprecedented wave of solidarity, with protests all over the country. When the detainees decided, under pressure, to be released to the West, the solidarity movement collapsed. But the self-confidence of critical thinkers in the GDR had grown significantly. Civilian protests – still predominantly under the auspices of the church – were the prelude to the political upheaval that erupted in the autumn of 1989.

On the ›Tag der Menschenrechte‹ (Day of Human Rights) on 10 December 1987, a service was held in the Gethsemanekirche. The working group ›Staatsbürgerschaftsrecht in der DDR‹ (Citizenship Rights in the GDR), founded in September 1987, attracted public attention with a declaration on the violation of human rights in the GDR. The focus of its work was to offer legal advice to people who wanted to leave the country. The group provided information about constitutional and international legal regulations and possibilities for emigration, and spoke out against the criminalisation of those who had applied to leave. However, representatives of other church groups such as the ›Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte‹ (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights) advocated remaining in the GDR and to fight for human rights within the country. In a service of intercession on 4 February 1988 in the Gethsemanekirche, General Superintendent Dr. Günter Krusche declared the willingness of the church to offer counselling and pastoral care for GDR citizens wanting to leave the country. A few days later, the church administration set up a contact office, but it was quickly closed down again as it could not deal with the flood of people seeking advice.

**›Wir wollen raus!‹ – ›Wir bleiben hier!‹  
(›We want to leave!‹ – ›We're staying here!‹)**

## Auf die Straße!

## Kontakttelefon



Protest gegen die Niederschlagung der Demokratiebewegung in China auf dem Kirchentag in Leipzig am 9. Juli 1989, Foto Joachim Bleyl

Die Nachrichten vom Massaker an regimiekritischen Studenten auf dem Platz des Himmlichen Friedens in Peking am 4. Juni lösen eine Welle der Empörung aus. Auch in Ostberliner Kirchen finden Klagegottesdienste und Fastenaktionen statt.

### Auf die Straße!

Im Jahr 1989 gewinnt die Demokratiebewegung in der DDR an Breite und Profil. Die Aktionen, die zunehmend politischer werden, verlagern sich aus den Kirchen heraus in den öffentlichen Raum. Auch durch Festnahmen, Haftbefehle und Geldstrafen vermag der Machtapparat der SED die Forderung nach Meinungsfreiheit und Demokratie nicht mehr zu unterdrücken. Bei den Kommunalwahlen am 7. Mai 1989 können durch nahezu flächendeckende Kontrollen durch Bürgergruppen Manipulationen der Wahlergebnisse nachgewiesen werden. Danach findet am 7. eines jeden Monats auf dem Berliner Alexanderplatz eine Aktion gegen den Wahlbetrug statt.



Kommunalwahl am 7. Mai 1989: Bürgerrechtler kontrollieren die Auszählung in einem Wahllokal im Prenzlauer Berg, Foto Archiv Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung



Dokumentation zum Wahlbetrug  
Quelle: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft

Am 8. Juni findet in der Gethsemanekirche eine Veranstaltung »Mut zur Wahrhaftigkeit« statt, in der die Dokumentation »Wahlfall 89« vorgestellt wird.



### Das Kontakttelefon

Seit 1988 bemühen sich oppositionelle Gruppen um die Einrichtung eines Kontakttelefons bei einem kirchlichen Träger. Im Januar 1989 stellt der Gemeindeführer der Gethsemanekirche den Anschluss des Gemeindebüros dafür zur Verfügung. Hier werden von nun an Informationen über staatskritische Aktionen und staatliche Repression gesammelt und weiterverbreitet.

Zunächst ist das Telefon nur wenige Stunden in der Woche besetzt. Im Herbst 1989 wird es zu einer Nachrichtenzentrale der Opposition in der DDR, die rund um die Uhr arbeitet. Die Kontakttelefongruppe liefert aktuelle Informationen zu den Fürbitteandachten in der Gethsemanekirche.

Klaus Kuppel am Kontakttelefon, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft



## **The role of the church in the peaceful revolution**

### **Taking to the streets! Contact phone**

On 8 June, in the Gethsemanekirche, the event ›Mut zur Wahrhaftigkeit‹ (›Have Courage to be Truthful‹) took place, during which the brochure ›Wahlfall 89‹, which provided evidence of vote rigging in the local elections, was presented. The news of the massacre of regime-critical students in Tiananmen Square in Beijing on 4 June sparked a wave of indignation. Mourning services and hunger strikes also took place in East Berlin churches.

### **Taking to the streets!**

In 1989, the democratic movement in the GDR began to take off in earnest. Its activities became increasingly political and shifted from the churches into the public domain. Despite continued arrests, the power apparatus of the SED could no longer suppress the growing demand for freedom of speech and democracy. In the local elections on 7 May 1989, almost nationwide controls by citizen groups revealed that election results were being manipulated. Subsequently, demonstrations against electoral fraud took place on Alexanderplatz in Berlin on the seventh day of every month.

### **The contact phone**

Since 1988, opposition groups had been trying to set up a ›contact phone‹ through the church. In January 1989, the Gethsemane parish council made the phone line of its parish office available for the initiative. From then on, it was used to collect and disseminate information about state-critical activities and political repression. To begin with, the phone was only staffed a few hours a week. In the autumn of 1989, it became a news-gathering centre for the dissident movement in the GDR, staffed around the clock. The contact phone group also provided up-to-date information on the prayers of intercession in the Gethsemanekirche.

*Documentation on election fraud, source:  
Robert Havemann Gesellschaft*

*Protest against the suppression of the democratic movement in China at the Kirchentag (Church Day) in Leipzig on 9 July 1989,*

*Municipal election on 7 May 1989: civil rights activists monitor the counting in a polling station in Prenzlauer Berg,*

*Klaus Kuppler on the Contact Phone*

## Wachet und Betet: Mahnwache und Fastenaktion

### »Wachet und betet«

Im September kommt es in Leipzig im Anschluss an die jeden Montag stattfindenden Friedensgebete in der Nikolai-Kirche zu spontanen Demonstrationen. Sicherheitskräfte gehen mit großer Härte gegen Demonstranten vor. Mehr als 150 Personen werden im Laufe des Monats festgenommen und zu Geld- oder Haftstrafen verurteilt.

In Berlin lädt eine Aktionsgruppe junger Leute aus dem Weißenseer Friedenskreis, der Kirche von Unten und der Umweltbibliothek zu Fürbittandachten in die Samariterkirche und in die Gethsemanekirche ein. Um ihrer Forderung nach Freilassung der Inhaftierten Nachdruck zu verleihen, will die Gruppe eine ständige Mahnwache einrichten. Nachdem sie bei mehreren Gemeinden abgewiesen wurde, beschließt am Erntedanktag der neu gewählte Gemeindevorstand der Gethsemanegemeinde, die Kirche dafür zu öffnen.



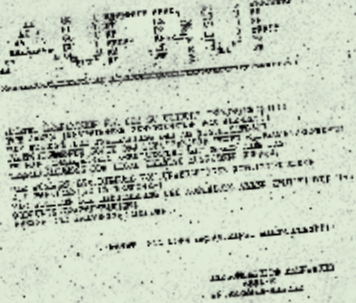
Überwachungsfoto in den Innenraum der Kirche, MS-BV-Bln-Fo-0048-Bild-0017

Überwachungsfoto: Verteilung des Auftrags durch die Mahnwache am 4. 10., Foto BSH 47 Nr. 32

Am 2. Oktober 1989 beginnt die Mahnwache. Die Kirche ist Tag und Nacht geöffnet und wird zu einem Zentrum des politischen Aufbruchs. Täglich kommen Tausende zu den Fürbittandachten, die einen breiten Informationsdienst haben. Die Predigten werden von den Gemeindepfarrern Dr. Bernd Albani, Elisabeth Eschner und Werner Widrat, aber auch Mitgliedern der Kirchenleitung, darunter Bischof Dr. Gottfried Forck und Pfarrern der benachbarten Kirchengemeinden gehalten. Das Leitwort »Wachet und betet«, die parallel laufende Fastenaktion und die abendlichen Andachten machen deutlich, dass für viele der Akteure die Ermöglichung zu politischem Handeln ihre Verwurzelung im christlichen Glauben hat.



Aufruf der Mahnwache



### \* FASTEN-BETETE (am 4. Oktober in der Berliner Gethsemanekirche): EIN BEWUSSTES ANKOMMEN BEIM CHRISTENTUMS WEGWECHEN

- Ich faste, um mich zu beten und mein Leben durch Stille und Gebet neu auszurichten.
- Ich faste, um mich reinigen zu lassen von Angst und Resignation, Hass und Gewalt, Unpolitik und Sensationalismus.
- Ich faste, weil ich keine andere Ausdrucksmöglichkeit für meinen Protest sehe, gegen die Art und Weise, mit der unsere Politiker gegenüber den Schwachen aufrecht erhalten und den 40. Jahrestag als ihren Sieg feiern.
- Ich faste, weil ich keine Gegenwehr zu unserem staatlichen Medien, betroffen bis über die große Anzahl von Menschen, die unser Land verlassen.
- Ich faste, um mit Solidarität zu leben mit allen Menschen, die sich für soziale Gerechtigkeit einsetzen und deswegen leiden müssen und verfolgt werden.
- Ich faste in der Hoffnung, daß sich auch noch andere daran beteiligen - Stunden oder Tagelange, und wir ein Zeichen unseres persönlichen Engagements für einen Land setzen und bereit sind, dafür unsere materiellen Bedürfnisse einzuschneiden.

4. Oktober 1989

Angela Kunze  
z.Zt. Gethsemanekirche

Teilnehmer der Fastenaktion in der Gethsemanekirche (rechts im Bild Angela Kunze), Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, Foto Rolf Zöllner

### Die Fastenaktion

Angela Kunze ist erschüttert über die Nachrichten von der Massenflucht von DDR-Bürgern in die Bundesrepublik. Als am 3. Oktober 1989 die DDR-Regierung die Grenzen zur Tschechoslowakei schließt, entscheidet sie sich, ihren Protest durch eine zehntägige Fastenaktion zum Ausdruck zu bringen. Sie zieht zu der Mahnwache in die Gethsemanekirche. In den nächsten Tagen schließen sich andere Frauen und Männer an. Besucher der Kirche zeigen ihre Verbundenheit mit den Fastenden. Sie bringen Getränke, Kerzen und Blumen. Angela Kunze versteht ihr Fasten als aktiven gewaltfreien Widerstand.



## The role of the church in the peaceful revolution

### Keep watch and pray: vigil and hunger strike

#### ›Keep watch and pray!‹

In September, demonstrations took place every Monday in Leipzig following the prayers for peace in the Nikolaikirche. Security forces came down hard on the demonstrators. More than 150 people were arrested over the course of the month and fined or imprisoned. In Berlin, a group of young people from the ›Weissenseer Friedenskreis‹ (Weißensee Peace Circle), the ›Kirche von Unten‹ (Church from Below) and the ›Umweltbibliothek‹ (Environmental Library) invited people to prayers of intercession in the Samariterkirche and Gethsemanekirche. To reinforce its demand for the release of detainees, the group wanted to set up a permanent vigil. After being rejected by several churches, the newly elected Gethsemane parish council decided on 1 October, the day of that year's harvest festival, to open the church for the vigil. The vigil began on 2 October 1989. The church was open day and night and became a centre of political activism. Every day, thousands of people attended the prayers of intercession, which included a large informational component. The sermons were delivered by the parish pastors Bernd Albani, Elisabeth Eschner and Werner Widrat, but also by church leaders, including Bishop Gottfried Forck and pastors from neighbouring parishes. The rallying cry ›Keep watch and pray‹, the fasting initiative and the evening prayers reflected the way in which the call to political action had its roots in the Christian faith for many of the protestors.

#### Hunger strike

Angela Kunze was shocked by the news of the mass exodus of GDR citizens to the Federal Republic. When the GDR government closed the borders to Czechoslovakia on 3 October 1989, she decided to express her protest in a ten-day hunger strike. She joined the vigil in the Gethsemanekirche, and over the next few days, other people joined her. Churchgoers expressed their solidarity with the hunger-strikers, bringing drinks, candles and flowers. Angela Kunze described her hunger strike as ›active nonviolent resistance‹.

*Surveillance photo in the interior of the church, MfS-BV-Bln-  
Proclamation of the vigil*

*Surveillance photo: distribution of the proclamation  
at the vigil on 4. 10.*

*Hunger strikers in the Gethsemanekirche (right in the picture  
Angela Kunze)*



## **The role of the church in the peaceful revolution**

### **DONA NOBIS PACEM**

On 7 October 1989, the SED party and state leadership celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the GDR in the Palast der Republik, the seat of the East German parliament. Starting in the early evening on Alexanderplatz, a rapidly growing body of protesters marched to the Palast der Republik with cries of ›No violence!‹, ›Democracy – now or never!‹, ›Gorbi, Gorbi!‹. A massive contingent of security forces pushed the demonstrators back, and they began to move towards Gethsemanekirche via Schönhauser Allee. The police and Stasi pursued the peaceful demonstrators. In the immediate vicinity of the Gethsemanekirche, demonstrators as well as passers-by were herded together, beaten, dragged to police vehicles and driven away. More than 500 people were arrested during that night. Others found refuge in the church and tearfully recounted their traumatic experiences. By late evening, the area around the Gethesamenkirche was closed off. Bishop Forck and two members of the parish council negotiated with the duty officer in Stargarder Straße and around midnight they reached an agreement that the people could leave the church – albeit only in the direction of the S-Bahn. On the way back, one of the council members was arrested.

On the evening of 8 October, some 3,000 people gathered for the prayers of intercession in the church. When they wanted to leave the building, they found that the church grounds had been closed off by the police. Following tense negotiations, the police backed off slightly and those who wanted to enter the church were able to do so. In the neighbouring streets, however, the dramatic scenes of the previous evening were repeated. With candles in their hands, calling out ›No violence!‹ and singing ›Dona Nobis Pacem‹, many citizens expressed their non-violent support. Nonetheless, more than 500 demonstrators were arrested.

At an improvised press conference with journalists from the West, representatives of the vigil, the Contact Phone initiative and the Gethsemane Church refuted the assertions made by the East-German media that the violence had been started by the demonstrators.

## Entscheidung in Leipzig/Gedächtnisprotokolle



Fürbitteandacht am 9. Oktober  
Foto epd / Nr. 12596

Bischof Gottfried Forck verliert »Vier dringende Bitten«, die am Vormittag von Pfarrern und Mitgliedern der Kirchenleitung formuliert wurden. Darin heißt es unter anderem:

»Alle Bürgerinnen und Bürger bitten wir dringend, ab sofort angreifrei Meinungs-freiheit auszuüben... Die Ordnungs- und Sicherheitskräfte bitten wir dringend, der Unge duldkritischer Bürger, die sich auf den Straßen zeigen, mit größtmöglicher Zurückhaltung zu begegnen...«

**Entscheidung in Leipzig**  
Am Morgen des 9. Oktober kommen viele Leute in die Kirche, die ihre verhafteten Angehörigen suchen. Sie bringen Fotos mit, weinen und beten. Im Laufe des Tages treffen beunruhigende Nachrichten aus Leipzig ein, die einen Polizeieinsatz mit Waffengewalt gegen die Montagsdemonstration befürchten lassen. Die Angst vor einer blutigen Niederschlagung der Proteste wie in Peking

ist seit Wochen akut. Tausende Menschen kommen am Abend wieder zur Fürbitteandacht in die Gethsemanekirche. Erst als über das Kontakttelefon der friedliche Verlauf der Demonstration in Leipzig gemeldet wird, bricht Jubel los und die Besucher der Kirche ziehen singend und mit Kerzen in der Hand auf die Straße. Die ersten Verhafteten werden freigelassen.

**Gedächtnisprotokolle**  
Das brutale Vorgehen der Sicherheitskräfte auf friedliche Demonstranten sorgt für einen weiteren Glaubwürdigkeitsverlust des SED-Regimes. Viele Betroffene folgen dem Aufruf des Stadtjugendpfarramtes und des Kontakttelefons und verfassen Gedächtnisprotokolle ihrer Begegnungen mit der Staatsmacht, die in der Gethsemanekirche gesammelt werden.

Am 23. Oktober werden sie gegen den Widerstand der SED der Öffentlichkeit übergeben. Am 3. November beruft das Ostberliner Stadtparlament eine Kommission ein, die die Übergriffe vom 7. und 8. Oktober untersuchen soll. Eine unabhängige Untersuchungskommission hatte sich bereits zuvor gebildet.



Am Abend des 9. Oktober 1989 nach der Fürbitteandacht.  
Foto Manfred Hauswald, epd-Bild



## **The role of the church in the peaceful revolution**

### **Petition in Leipzig / Testimonials**

Bishop Gottfried Forck read out ›Vier dringende Bitten‹ (Four Urgent Pleas), which were formulated in the morning by pastors and church leaders. Among other things, it entreated that ›all citizens be allowed to exercise their freedom of expression without fear ... We urgently ask law enforcement and security officials to treat the zeal of critical citizens who take to the streets with utmost restraint ...‹

#### **Petition in Leipzig**

On the morning of 9 October, many people who were looking for their arrested relatives came to the church. They brought photos, cried and prayed. Over the course of the day, rumours spread of an armed police operation against the Monday Demonstration in Leipzig. Fear of a violent crackdown on protestors, like in Beijing, had been acute for weeks. Thousands of people returned for the prayers of intercession in the Gethsemanekirche in the evening. But when news came via the Contact Phone that the demonstrations in Leipzig had been peaceful, the mood changed to one of elation and churchgoers sung and took to the streets with candles in their hands. The first people to be arrested were released.

#### **Testimonials**

The brutality of the security forces towards peaceful demonstrators led to a further loss of credibility for the SED regime. Many of those affected responded to the call of the Stadtjugendpfarramt (the city youth parish office) and the contact phone initiative to record their encounters with state forces. These written testimonials were collected in the Gethsemanekirche and made public on 23 October, despite the resistance of the SED. On 3 November, the municipal parliament of East Berlin established a committee to investigate the assaults on 7 and 8 October. An independent fact-finding committee had already been formed.

*Prayers of intercession on 9 October*

*The evening of 9 October 1989, following the prayers of intercession*





## The church as a political forum

Not all of the arrested were released. So the vigil carried on day and night until 20 October, and after that from six in the morning until ten at night. The prayers of intercession in the Gethsemanekirche also continued until mid November. The group of hunger-strikers moved to the village church of Alt-Friedrichsfelde on 13 October. More and more residents showed their solidarity by putting candles in their windows.

### The church as a political forum

New parties, some of which emerged from human rights and other citizens' initiatives, started coming to the Gethsemanekirche with their political programmes. Already on 4 October, representatives of the civic movements Demokratie Jetzt (Democracy Now), Demokratischer Aufbruch (Democratic Awakening), Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights), Neues Forum (New Forum), Initiativgruppe SDP (Initiative Group SDP), Demokratische SozialistInnen (Democratic Socialists) as well as peace circles (Friedenskreise) demanded the release of detainees and free elections under UN control. In a podium discussion on 12 October, the right to strike and legalise opposition groups was debated. Following an application procedure, the parish council made the Gethsemanekirche available to non-church groups to host events and meetings from 20 October. On 10 November, the day after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Neues Forum held its inaugural meeting. Almost all new groups and parties – including the SDP and Demokratie Jetzt – began to introduce their programmes in October 1989. The independent, regime-critical newspaper telegraph, successor to the Umweltblätter, was also distributed. The church walls were covered with announcements, calls to action, lists, demands – a veritable political marketplace. In the following months round tables were established, many of them in churches; political discussions between parties were moderated by the church. The power structures were changing. On 5 April 1990, members of all parties of the first freely elected Volkskammer (People's Chamber) of the GDR celebrated an ecumenical service in the Gethsemanekirche before the constituent meeting of the new parliament.

*Inaugural meeting of the New Forum on 10 November in the Gethsemanekirche On the steering committee: Reinhard Schult, Rolf Henrich, Jens Reich, Bärbel Bohley and others*

*Gregor Gysi and Hans Modrow (SED / PDS) at the service*



## Dialoge

Plakat Einkehr im Garten Gethsemane, 1992

Veranstaltung zur Unterstützung von Kriegsopfern in Bosnien

Die Gethsemanekirche ist durch die friedliche Revolution bekannt geworden und bleibt eine offene Kirche, ein Ort der Begegnung. Politische Themen und soziale Anliegen haben hier ebenso ihren Platz wie interreligiöse und interkonfessionelle Dialoge. Das monatliche »Gebet für Frieden und Gerechtigkeit« führt die Tradition der Fürbittandachten fort.

### »Krieg soll nach Gottes Willen nicht sein!«

Vor Ausbruch des 2. Golfkrieges ist in der Nacht vom 15./16. Januar 1991 die Gethsemanekirche durchgehend geöffnet für Mahnwache und Gebet. Die Friedensgebete werden nun täglich bis zum 26. März fortgeführt. Auch nach dem 11. September 2001 und seit Beginn der Kriege in Afghanistan und im Irak wird jeden Montag für den Frieden gebetet.

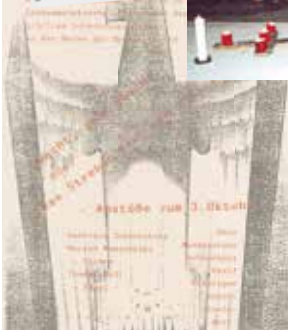
1993 findet der Bosnien-Konflikt Widerhall im Gemeindeleben. Neben Hilfsaktionen und einem Solidaritätskonzert werden Fürbittandachten gehalten. Auf Initiative und in Zusammenarbeit mit Süd Ost Europa Kultur e.V., kommen Serben, Kroaten und Bosnier für Stunden in dieser Kirche zusammen.

### Dialog zwischen Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde

Unter dem Namen »Einkehr im Garten Gethsemane« finden 1991–1994 politisch-kulturelle Veranstaltungen in und um die Gethsemanekirche statt, die neben Gemeindegliedern auch Bürger aus dem Kiez und ganz Berlin anziehen. Demokratie und Ausländerfeindlichkeit werden thematisiert, aber auch Lateinamerika- und Afrikafeste gefeiert.



Friedensgebet in der Gethsemanekirche



## Dialogue

The Gethsemanekirche became famous for its pivotal role in the peaceful revolution and remains an open church and meeting place. It is a forum for social and political, as well as for inter-religious and interdenominational dialogue. The monthly ›Gebet für Frieden und Gerechtigkeit‹ (Prayer for Peace and Justice) continues the tradition of the prayers of intercession.

### ›According to God's will, there should be no war!‹

Before the outbreak of the second Gulf War, the Gethsemanekirche was open all night from 15 to 16 January 1991 for a vigil and prayers. The prayers for peace continued daily until 26 March. After 11 September 2001, and since the beginning of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, prayers for peace are held every Monday in the Gethsemanekirche. In 1993, the conflict in Bosnia reverberated through the church community: in addition to relief efforts and a solidarity concert, there were prayers of intercession. On the initiative of and in cooperation with Süd Ost Europa Kultur e.V., Serbs, Croats and Bosnians came together for hours in this church.

### Dialogue between the Christian and civic community

Under the slogan ›Einkehr im Garten Gethsemane‹ (Contemplation in the Garden of Gethsemane), political and cultural events took place in and around the Gethsemanekirche from 1991 to 1994, which in addition to church members attracted citizens from the neighbourhood and other parts of Berlin. The wide range of issues discussed included democracy and xenophobia, and the many celebrations included Latin American and Africa festivals.

*Prayer for peace in the Gethsemanekirche*

*Event to support war victims in Bosnia*

*Poster ›Einkehr im Garten Gethsemane‹*

## »Was schaut ihr nach oben – Ökumene lebt von unten!«



Fotos KINA Herbert Neetz

Der 1. Ökumenische Kirchentag findet 2003 in Berlin statt. Alle Diskussionen und Gespräche im Vorfeld schließen jedoch gemeinsame Mahlfeiern im Programm aus. Zusammen mit dem ökumenischen Netzwerk »Kirche von unten« und der katholischen Initiative »Wir sind Kirche!« wollen Pfarrer und Gemeindekirchenrat der Ev. Kirchengemeinde Prenzlauer Berg Nord ein Zeichen für die Ökumene setzen. So finden in der Gethsemanekirche zwei Gottesdienste statt, in denen ausdrücklich zur wechselseitigen Gastfreundschaft eingeladen wird: ein katholischer mit »offener Kommunion« am 29. Mai und ein evangelischer Gottesdienst mit »Abendmahl für alle« am 31. Mai. Die Kirche ist beide Male überfüllt. Hunderte Menschen empfangen Brot und Wein im Kirchengarten und auf der Straße. Die beteiligten katholischen Priester, Professor Hasenbüttel und Pater Kroll, werden jedoch durch ihre Amtskirche von Priester- und Lehramt suspendiert.



Ökumenische Begegnungen gibt es seit Jahrzehnten vor allem mit den katholischen Kirchengemeinden in der Nachbarschaft. So werden Martinsumzüge, Taizégebete und Gottesdienste am Pfingstmontag gemeinsam gestaltet. Eine Besonderheit ist im Oktober 1993 in der Gethsemanekirche der Gottesdienst zum Thema »Frieden gestalten – Gewalt überwinden!«: ein muslimischer Imam und ein evangelischer Pfarrer feiern ihn zusammen mit katholischen, evangelischen und muslimischen Gläubigen. Die Verbundenheit mit anderen christlichen Gemeinden findet seit 2002 auch im Arbeitskreis ökumenisches Straßenfest (AKÖS) ihren Ausdruck. Zusammen mit Katholiken, Baptisten und anderen Freikirchen sowie der Heilsarmee werden Straßenfeste mit Bühnen und Ständen von Gemeindegruppen sowie kirchennahen Projekten und Unternehmen rund um die Gethsemanekirche gefeiert.

### Ökumenisches Straßenfest



Kirchfest 2002.  
Fotos Archiv  
Gethsemane

Ökumenisches Straßenfest mit Bühnen und Ständen von Gemeindegruppen



Foto Nordwestmagazin



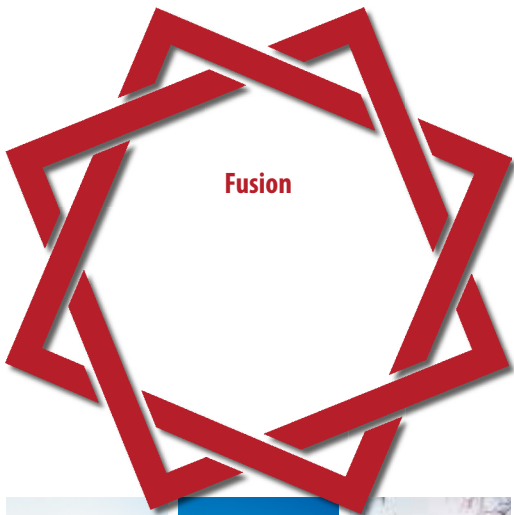
## ›Why are you looking up – ecumenism lives from below!‹

The First Ecumenical Church Day took place in 2003 in Berlin. However, prior discussions and talks ruled out joint celebrations of the Eucharist as part of the program. Together with the ecumenical network ›Kirche von unten‹ (Church from Below) and the Catholic initiative ›Wir sind Kirche!‹ (We are the Church!), the pastor and parish council of the North Prenzlauer Berg Protestant Parish wanted to set an example for ecumenical Christianity. Thus, two services were held in the Gethsemanekirche, to which people of all religious persuasions were expressly invited: a Catholic service with an ›open communion‹ on 29 May and a Protestant service with a ›Eucharist for all‹ on 31 May. On both occasions, the church was filled to overflowing. Hundreds of people received bread and wine in the church garden and on the street. However, the participating Catholic priests, Professor Hasenhüttl and Father Kroll, were respectively suspended from their teaching position and priesthood by their church.

### **Ecumenical street festival**

Over the decades there have been many ecumenical gatherings, especially with the Catholic churches in the neighbourhood. For example, St. Martin's parades, Taizé prayers and church services are jointly organised on Whit Monday. In October 1993, a special event in the Gethsemanekirche was the service on the subject of ›shaping peace – overcoming violence‹: a Muslim imam and a Protestant pastor attended together with Catholic, Protestant and Muslim believers. The bond with other Christian communities has also been expressed since 2002 in the Ecumenical Street Festival organised by the Arbeitskreis ökumenisches Straßenfest, or AKÖS. Together with Catholics, Baptists and other free churches, as well as the Salvation Army, street festivals are celebrated with stages and stalls set up around the Gethsemanekirche by community groups and church projects and initiatives.

*Ecumenical street festival with stages and stalls of community groups  
Neighbourhood street party, 2002*



# Fusion



Elias Kuppelbau



Gethsemanekirche

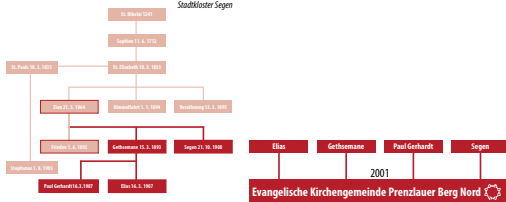
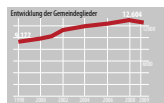


Paul-Gerhardt-Kirche

Am 25. März 2001 wird in einem Festgottesdienst die Fusion der vier Gemeinden Elias, Gethsemane, Paul-Gerhardt und Segen zur »Evangelischen Kirchengemeinde Prenzlauer Berg Nord« gefeiert. Nicht nur wirtschaftliche Gründe führen zu der Zusammenlegung der um 1900 von einander abgespaltenen Gemeinden. Es ist die Chance, Arbeitsfelder sinnvoll zu strukturieren, gemeinsam Neues zu beginnen – wie die Gründung des Stadtklosters mit der Community »Don Camillo« – und Akzente in der Gemeindearbeit zu setzen. Dazu zählen vor allem die vielen Kinder, die zu Christenlehre und Rüstzeiten kommen und die unsere Gemeinde wachsen lassen.



Stadtkloster Segen



## **Fusion**

On 25 March 2001, there was a service to celebrate the fusion of the four congregations of the Elias, Gethsemane, Paul-Gerhardt and Segen Churches to form the ›Evangelischen Kirchengemeinde Prenzlauer Berg Nord‹ (Protestant Congregation of Northern Prenzlauer Berg). The decision to reunite the congregations, which had been separated in around 1900, was made not only for financial reasons. It was an opportunity to structure fields of work more effectively, to initiate something new together – such as the founding of the city monastery with the Don Camillo community – and to make a mark as a community. This community includes, above all, the many children who attend religious instruction and religious retreats and who help our church to grow and flourish.



## Stadtkloster Segen



### »Geistliches Gasthaus an den Wegen der Menschen«

Das Stadtkloster ist ein Projekt der **Communiaté Don Camillo** und der **Evangelischen Kirche Berlin-Brandenburg-Schlesische Oberlausitz**. Es gehört zur **Kirchengemeinde Prenzlauer Berg Nord**. Es ist ökumenisch ausgerichtet.



Im Stadtkloster Segen lebt und betet eine bunte Mischung von Menschen, die ihrem christlichen Glauben im Alltag eine Gestalt geben wollen. Das Stadtkloster versteht sich als ein geistliches Gasthaus an den Wegen der Menschen. Einzelne und Gruppen sind als Tages- oder Übernachtungsgäste herzlich willkommen – die Gästezimmer liegen direkt an der Kirche.



Den Puls des gemeinsamen Lebens an diesem Ort bilden die Stundengebete. Zum geistlichen Programm gehört neben den Gebetszeiten auch die **Abendbesinnung**, ein Gottesdienst am Sonntagabend. Jeden Donnerstagabend laden wir ein zur christlichen **Schweige-Meditation** in der Dachkapelle. In der hektischen Stadt macht ein Raum der Stille Platz für Gottes »leises Säuseln« (1 Könige 19, 12) und öffnet neue Perspektiven. Darüber hinaus gibt es regelmäßig **Einkehrtage** und besondere Veranstaltungen zu den kirchlichen Feiertagen. Gemeinsam mit der Kirchengemeinde bietet das Stadtkloster Glaubenskurse an, zusammen mit dem Amt für kirchliche Dienste **Aus- und Weiterbildungen**.

Der 1908 erbaute Gebäudekomplex wird seit 2007 Stück für Stück saniert, was viel Herzblut, Arbeit und auch Geld erfordert. 2019 konnte die Außenrenovierung mit den Arbeiten am Kirchenturm abgeschlossen werden. Im Innern des Gebäudes ist aber noch einiges zu renovieren.

Die Hoffnung ist, dass im Stadtkloster Menschen sich selbst, Gott und dem Mitmenschen neu begegnen.

Der Förderverein Stadtkloster Segen unterstützt in vielen Bereichen, sei es mit finanziellen Mitteln oder durch die Mithilfe der Mitglieder bei Veranstaltungen.





## Stadtkoster Segen

»Spiritual Inn on People's Paths«

The urban monastery, Stadtkloster, is a project by the Don Camillo community and the Protestant church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Schlesische Oberlausitz. It is part of the parish of Prenzlauer Berg Nord and is ecumenically focused.

In Stadtkloster Segen, a lively mix of people lives and prays - people who want to give shape to their Christian faith in everyday life. The Stadtkloster considers itself a Christian inn on people's paths. It welcomes individuals as well as groups as day and overnight guests. The guest rooms are located right next to the church.

The pulse of communal life in this place is the Liturgy of the Hours. Furthermore, the spiritual program offers the Evening service (Abend-beSINNung) on Sunday nights. Every Thursday we open our doors for a Christian Silent Meditation in the roof chapel. A Room of Silence in a hectic metropolis makes space for God's »still small voice« (1 Kings 19:12) and opens new perspectives. Moreover, we organise regular days of contemplation and special celebrations on religious holidays. Together with the parish, the Stadtkloster offers religious orientation courses, and further training in cooperation with the Church Office.

The building complex was constructed in 1908 and has been progressively renovated since 2007 - requiring a lot of heart and soul, as well as hard work and money. In 2019, we were able to finish the renovation of the exterior with works on the church tower. However, the interior still needs a lot done. The Stadtkloster wants to let people freshly encounter themselves, God and their fellow human beings. The Friends of the Stadtkloster Segen Association (Förderverein) supports the monastery's endeavours in multiple ways - financially, as well as through manpower during events.

# Wacht und Betet – Freiheit Jetzt!

Im Namen der Menschenrechte:  
Tägliche Fürbitten und Gebete



Im Juli 2017 wird unser Gemeindeglied Peter Stuedtner in der Türkei verhaftet. Vorwurf gegen ihn und die 9 Mitverhafteten Menschenrechtsaktivist\*innen: Unterstützung und Mitgliedschaft in terroristischen Vereinigungen.  
**Absurd:** Peter Stuedtner ist als *Menschenrechtstrainer* für den Umgang mit Stress und Trauma in die Türkei gereist.

### Solidarität trägt

Für Peter Stuedtner sind die Fürbittandachten Inspiration und Unterstützung. Täglich sitzt er in seinem Zellenhof und singt die ihm bekannten Lieder mit.



Spontan werden Fürbittandachten jeden Abend um 18 Uhr in der Gethsemanekirche für ihn und seine Mitinhaftierten begonnen. Aus den traditionellen Montagsgebeten für Frieden und Menschenrechte werden tägliche Fürbitten für zu Unrecht Inhaftierte auf der ganzen Welt. Gemeinsames Beten und Singen verbindet, stärkt und bringt Zuversicht



Briefe ins Gefängnis



Solidaritätsveranstaltung für Hasan Celik Sayim

In Zusammenarbeit mit Amnesty International werden Kontakte zu politischen Gefangenen und ihren Angehörigen geknüpft. Rückmeldungen auf Briefe ins Gefängnis zeigen, dass die Botschaft drinnen und draußen ankommt.

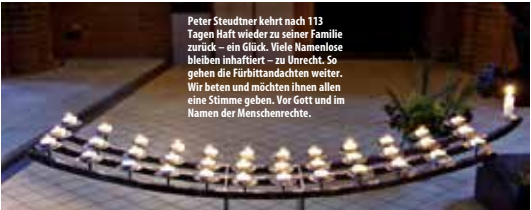


Diskussion über Menschenrechtssituation in der Türkei

Informationsveranstaltungen und Diskussionsforen in der Kirche sowie Mahnwachen und Filme unterstützen die Gebete und machen die Öffentlichkeit aufmerksam.



Engagierte rufen die Initiative »Wacht und betet – Freiheit Jetzt!« ins Leben. Außer dem täglichen Gebet gibt es zahlreiche Aktionen zu den Themen Menschenrechte und Demokratie sowie die konkrete Unterstützung Einzelner.



Peter Stuedtner kehrt nach 113 Tagen Haft wieder zu seiner Familie zurück – ein Glück. Viele Namenlose bleiben inhaftiert – zu Unrecht. So gehen die Fürbittandachten weiter. Wir beten und möchten ihnen allen eine Stimme geben. Vor Gott und im Namen der Menschenrechte.

# **Wachet und Betet – Freiheit jetzt!**

## **Keep Watch and Pray - Freedom Now!**

### **Daily Intercessions in the Name of Human Rights**

In Juli 2017, Peter Steudtner, a member of our congregation, is arrested in Turkey. The accusation against him and 9 other arrested human rights activists: support of and membership in terrorist organisations.

Absurd: Peter Steudtner travelled to Turkey as a Human Rights Coach teaching locals how to deal with stress and trauma.

### **Solidarity Supports**

For Peter Steudtner, the intercessions mean inspiration and support. He sits in the courtyard of his cell every day and sings along with the hymns he knows by heart.

Spontaneous intercessions for him and his fellow prisoners are organised in the Gethsemane Church every day a 6pm. The traditional Monday intercessions for peace and human rights turn into daily prayers for unjustly imprisoned people the world over. Praying and singing together binds people together, it offers strength and confidence.

In cooperation with Amnesty International, contacts to political prisoners and their relatives are formed. The feedback received for letters to the prisoners shows that the message is received inside and out.

Information and discussion forums in the church as well as vigils and films support the prayers and alert the public.

Committed activists found the initiative »Keep Watch and Pray – Freedom Now!«. Apart from the daily prayer, they organise numerous activities on the topics of human rights and democracy as well as the support of individuals. Peter Steudtner returns to his family after 113 days in prison – a happy ending. Many nameless individuals remain imprisoned – unjustly. So our intercessions continue. We pray and want to give them all a voice. In front of God and in the name of human rights.

'80 culture!

Since the church was open day and night, it meant our mother was also there every night. My sister and I were often afraid that the police might take her away when she was at the church, and that we would wake up and she wouldn't be there. You can't imagine how relieved we were in the morning, when we had to go to school, to find we weren't alone!

Up to then, I knew almost everyone who came to the services, our religious classes or to the family services. This now was very different and quite overwhelming. Where had all these people suddenly come from?

Seeing so many people actively involved – I'd never experienced anything like it. It was a completely new experience for us children. At school there were only a few of us who went to religious instruction and to church; in my class it was just four boys and girls. And now, suddenly, there were all these people, also attending church on Sunday.

We spoke clearly. And I think we benefited from this clarity. Christ was unequivocal, he stood by the suffering, the outcast, the marginalised and the frightened, that's why we also stood by those who were being oppressed, we were there for them. We preached change, but we also wanted to give hope and courage. We wanted reconciliation, and we could not be driven by hate.

It was pretty scary. Police with shields, water cannons, lorries, tanks. Who wouldn't be afraid? All of the roads were closed off. I was locked out. For me, too, there was no way of getting back into the church or the grounds of the church. So I stood outside our front door holding the Bible and watched people being arrested. Nobody arrested me. Why not, I wonder?

Men who didn't speak a word, men without words, without language, expressionless. Nobody, not one person, responded to my speech. These young men could be my sons, I thought. They are just as much the children of God as those now in the church holding candles. Don't see them as the enemy!

Our route back home took us past the church. And because for once there was nobody else there, we sat down one afternoon in front of the balustrade covered in wax, and played around with the wax and the candles, completely unaware

of the time. We got home over an hour later, when it was getting dark, and I remember I was surprised by the tirade that awaited us. Only then did it dawn on me that they had been getting seriously worried about us.

I didn't answer back to my teacher, but at some point during those days I stopped believing her. I knew that the songs and the many candles and this strange power that I had felt was more real and true than her impassioned speeches at school. Imperceptibly, the power structure had shifted. With the knowledge I had, I felt like I was her equal.

Pity. That's what I felt for the people who were taking part in the hunger strike in our church. I still remember how one day my sister and I went to the church and brought them fruit and juice. They were sitting at the front of the church, on the right hand side, in the chancel. My sister and I gave them what we'd brought with us. I got to know Angela Kunze, who looked extremely skinny to me. I felt particularly sorry for her. That's why right after visiting the hunger strikers, I looked for my mother inside the church. She had to keep reassuring me that all the people were fasting voluntarily, that they wanted to do it and would definitely not starve to death.

For the first time in my life I was directly confronted by several uniformed policemen and was at their mercy. (I can't remember how many there were and what they looked like; that didn't stick in my memory. It didn't seem important to me at the time, I was only struck by the fact that I was standing right in front of the police.) They had the power, because we wanted to get past the police barrier to take a girl who lived on Stargarder Straße home, but needed their permission.

Over the course of those days, candles won over violence. Not without fear. The church was surrounded, and people had to fight to get out. Two members of the parish council, together with brave Bishop Forck, confronted the police and despite being completely vulnerable, were able to prevent them from accessing the church. But they could not prevent the nightly attacks. Nevertheless, I was deeply affected by the miracle of the peaceful revolution.

When the Gethsemanekirche took on the role of 'host' for many non-Christians, the newcomers were also confronted by the pastoral side of church life. This included not only

providing protection, but also collecting donations for the running of the church. In short: the newcomers were passed the collection box. Some of them were taken aback by the fact that we were asking them to contribute to the heating and cleaning costs of the building.

What amazed us the most was how much people trusted us. They told us all kinds of things ... Together with Marianne, I talked with people until two in the morning. Incredible stories came to light, also in the personal testimonials that people wrote down – it was heavy stuff. We were quite taken aback by the amount of work, and the way that people regarded us a bit like phone counsellors.

I couldn't help thinking: This is irreparable. People, you're destroying your own system! What's happening now is basically beyond repair.

Really we could have done with support ourselves, because we heard so much and sometimes we couldn't tell what was true and what wasn't.

There were people who were really hard-working but who kept a low profile. For example, there was a sound engineer. The sound system in Gethsemane was constantly giving up the ghost. We only knew his first name. He always said: 'I'll sort it out! I'll sort it out!'

It was a great time, which I wouldn't have wanted to miss. But on the other hand, when I read my file, I thought: I did far too little. I held myself back far too much. They were so naive and stupid about many things, we could have done so much more. But at the time we didn't have the foresight, we just didn't understand.

The church was a free space where many people came. Some stayed for two or three days, then left again, others stood there for goodness knows how long. Some came after work – it was an after-work revolution – and went back to work again the next day.

When you're involved in something like that, at some point you stop really thinking about it. You just function. That's why we weren't even aware of certain things. Things happened all around us that we didn't even notice.

All these heroic tales, I can't hear them anymore, I don't

want to hear them anymore! I have absolute respect for what people did, and I also carried the burden. But where's my story? I was stuck at home changing nappies. Our child was born in August 1989. I was sitting at home with two young children and was terrified. I wrote letters to say who should take the children in the worst-case scenario and was alone all day with my fear.

I don't see myself as fearful, and I don't think I was a fearful person at the time. I just did my job as a mother of two young children. I also didn't take the children along to demos, that was too risky for me. And in retrospect I think: well, I was just holding the short straw. Those are the stories that aren't told. People aren't interested in hearing them.

The phones didn't stop ringing as news from different cities came in – everywhere the same thing: demonstrations, clashes with the police. Many reports were dramatic, some of them verged on hysterical. You could tell that many people were scared. They were bewildered and could barely believe what they were seeing.

The Gethsemanekirche, its pastors, its parish council and its Friedenskreis (Circle of Peace) – I think these were people who saw it as their Christian duty to stand up for others, to work on behalf of our society and its values. I'm sure that if there were more churches like these, they would be full today, too.

When we tried to leave the church after the service, everything was blocked off. The Stasi were everywhere, and behind them, closely parked lorries formed a circle around the grounds of the church. There were also guard dogs. And in the middle of it all, the whole time, the Stasi. It was seething. The church was surrounded. People chanted their resentment. All over Stargarder Straße candles were burning.

In the Winterkirche, there were daily meetings to discuss that evening's event. These were led by Pastor Albani. There were about twenty to twenty-five people who met up to get things prepared, and almost as many contradictory opinions about what should happen at the event. I attended two of these meetings for about half an hour, but then left. At six p.m., when the evening event began, a consensus had often not been reached.



I looked back and saw my husband, around a hundred metres away on Schönhauser Allee, being taken away. I couldn't believe it. We walked home to Cantianstraße and hoped that Wolfgang would arrive home after us. During the night, while we waited, the peace was broken by a military unit returning from an operation. The sound of the soldiers' boots marching in time was frightening and fear welled up inside me ... On Stargarder Straße, many candles were burning in the windows and on the street; the feeling of community and connectedness made us strong, reassured us and made us really happy.

Angela had a much crazier idea than me (the idea of a hunger strike in the Gethsemanekirche). It is difficult to describe the feelings that overwhelm you. Suddenly you have no problems of your own anymore. The possibilities seem limitless. After the course, I went back to the church. It was teeming with foreign journalists who, surprisingly, had to leave the country by five p.m. Groups had formed all over the church, and they were immersed in discussions. On the walls you could read the invocations and appeals of the various democratic movements, including Forum, Demokratie Jetzt, Demokratische Sozialistinnen, spDDR and more, and the speech by the party leader of the LDPD, which was very good. There were also pages from the West Berlin TAZ newspaper and from church newspapers, as well as the call of the Leipzig brigades to use force against troublemakers if necessary.

The 16.10.1989 was particularly dramatic. Between three and around nine p.m. I was on duty at the police station on Immanuelkirchstraße along with many other officers. We were on standby. This meant we had the task of actually defending the station if it was stormed by demonstrators. The background to this was that there was a so-called ›hot-line‹ between the Nicolaikirche in Leipzig and the Gethsemanekirche, and on this Monday there were fears that there might be violent clashes in Leipzig.

Of course, we in the parish council also didn't know how this revolution would pan out. Every day we heard of attacks being carried out by lackeys of the state apparatus. News of civilians being arrested or summoned to the police on flimsy charges, often because people living in their building, especially overly zealous party activists, or sometimes colleagues, had snitched on them. Usually these arrests were carried out in the early hours of the morning. These indivi-

duals had no rights and were immediately made to feel this. One thing was clear: as disparate as the members of the parish council were, so were their opinions. But ultimately the credo was: We want to confront the state with its inhumane behaviour and with our rights, but we don't want violence. Easier said than done. More than once our activists at the vigils were provoked outright.

... I told her the truth, that I had run home from the church. But I didn't tell her why, because probably then I would have been put under house arrest and possibly not been able to participate in any more parish council meetings. After all, our two children were lying asleep in their beds – what was she supposed to tell them if one day their father didn't come home?

Of course we soon worked out who was from the Stasi – they usually sat in the back rows, didn't sing, avidly wrote down everything that was said and rushed out of the church every fifteen minutes to the nearest phone booth to pass on what they had heard – these were the days before mobile phones.

That was the first and perhaps the only time I was scared. He led us in prayer, and then we heard swelling voices, cries, shouts from outside. ›Now we have to go outside,› he said – and I was no longer scared. We spread out and pushed the people running into the church grounds into the church. ›Hopefully the gallery won't collapse,› I found myself thinking, and ›hopefully 'they' won't storm the church!›

For a time, the vigil was quite a lively event. Some of those taking part in the vigil were in the church day and night, some of them also slept in the vestry or in the church. There was a lot of support from people in the neighbourhood. They received many donations in kind and money, and were interviewed by journalists. Some of them felt like professional revolutionaries.

It had been inconceivable to me beforehand, and is inconceivable to me again today, that at the time in the Gethsemanekirche, I preached to so many people in such a full, in fact overcrowded, church.

The effect of the intercession for non-violence and peace was truly touching, uniquely expressed through the singing of the canon ›Dona nobis pacem› at the end of each service of intercession. Soon almost everyone had learned and could

sing the canon, people from different backgrounds and faiths, atheists and those who normally had nothing to do with the church. I think that even for the members of the Stasi, the experience left a deep impression.

I think that if we had had weapons, it all would have ended very quickly. It's strange, when you think about it. We were so powerless, so helpless, and suddenly there was a force of a magnitude we had never dreamed of. I also heard many people from the other side say they were prepared for everything, but not for candles.

There was a lot of solidarity. Somebody brought us fresh bread rolls, and there was the U-Bahn driver who always honked his horn and got into trouble with the authorities. I had the feeling we were giving each other strength. It gave me the courage to do more, to carry on, to stick with it. It would have been illogical to think ahead, to think about the possible consequences. I simply repressed those thoughts. It was strange, you couldn't allow yourself to dwell on it. If you had, you probably would have said: Over. Out. Bye.

We radically exploited the freedom that the church offered us. And that was the right thing to do.

When leaving the church through the lines of riot police, I felt increasingly nervous and went home quickly. On the route home, there were more candles on display in people's windows day by day. These candles were a spontaneous symbol of the non-violent protest and gave me courage.

My wife Sabine found my activities irresponsible, because at the time we had two young children aged two and almost six.

Hundreds of people stood peacefully, with lighted candles in their hands, facing the armed security forces. And yet these ›special forces‹ used truncheons and violence. One thousand and sixty-seven people – and this is a known fact – were detained. Imagine how many people must have been gathered there altogether. I was particularly impressed by how disciplined ›our‹ people were.

The candles that usually stood on the altar in the church and illuminated the bringer of peace Jesus Christ (›I am the light of the world‹) were carried out into the streets and united people in peaceful protest against the armed security forces

who were prepared to use violence. At the time, these chains of light became a sign of hope for me, a glimpse of the peaceful kingdom of God.

During those days, one complete unknown was what the Red Army would do. If the SED lost control, would it come to the aid of its ›brothers in arms‹ and, as had happened so often before, restore ›socialist order‹ using tanks? This military intervention was a real possibility and made those of us participating in the peaceful popular revolution very worried.

It is important to emphasise: what had happened politically and within the church can only be understood as a reflex or as a consequence of the loyal, patient faith and actions of the church congregations. Without this ›hands on‹ Christianity, the actions and decisions of the church leaders would have been baseless.

Five o'clock in the morning, Weißensee fire station. Commandos. In detention: ›Keep going! Down there! That way, along the corridor! Go, go! Face to the wall, or you'll be seeing a lot more of us!‹

The rubber truncheon points at the spot on the grey wall on which I am supposed to fix my gaze. Talking is strictly forbidden. Humiliating words, truncheons constantly brandished, nothing to eat or drink, threats made at the slightest movement, an elderly woman pipes up because of her pills and gets a cynical answer. When I have to move because of my aching back, the nearest truncheon-wielding servant of the state threatens me with a trip to the basement.

Memories arise: films about the Third Reich, or Pinochet's Chile, images from faded history books take on a new form in my mind. Time standing still, historical synchronicity? Nobody explains our situation to us. The phrase ›police terror‹ goes through my mind. Nothing to eat, nothing to drink. Eventually names are called, at some point mine. I have been standing with my face to the wall for five hours.

I was startled, when, on the right-hand side of the Schönhäuser Allee at the entrance to Stargarder Straße, I saw ambulances that had been deployed as a precaution for the riot police, all standing in a row. I can't remember the exact number, perhaps eight or more.

The two young people in the household, nineteen and twenty years old, were the reason why the authorities made enquires with the liaison officer in the building about whether there were any connections to the Environmental Library or other similar groups. This was not the case, but better to be on the safe side. The liaison officer also told us about it in confidence. I was sceptical and did not attend the events in the Gethsemanekirche. Anyone with insider knowledge of companies also had no illusions about the future. They knew they would be unable to sustain themselves independently following successful reforms. There was no economic foundation for the economic renewal of the GDR, and simply a change of approach by the people and the government would not be enough.

That's why I got off at Ostkreuz and sat down on a bench and smoked a cigarette. There I met another punk who asked me where I lived and I said: Prenzlauer Berg, and he said: Then you can come along to the Gethsemanekirche.

Once I took material out of the Gethsemanekirche – magazines, flyers, etc. – and distributed them at work. Then I was summoned by the head of department and told very clearly that I should stop doing this. Half an hour after this conversation, he came down to where I was working and told me that he, too, was against the state – but that I shouldn't make it public knowledge.

I was afraid. The Stasi were sitting in the house opposite the Gethsemanekirche, there were lights on in there all night, which meant they were watching us the whole time. And then the permanent threat of the police, who were stationed all around the church. Every time I went in and out, I was afraid something would happen.

Faith didn't play a role for me, not at all. But I perceived the church as an island for people who thought differently, and for that I am grateful.

I can remember that there were a lot of police stationed around the church, they formed a kind of escort when we wanted to enter the building. And the church was always full, so full, I was afraid the gallery on which we were standing would collapse under the weight.

My attitude was: It's important to do something now. You can't say that we'll just wait and see what happens, you have

to stand up for what you believe in. Not least so you don't lose your self-respect.

For me, the Gospel is not apolitical. In political and social situations, where power goes unchecked and is used to slander and oppress critical voices and people who demand the truth and human rights, it is clear to me that the Gospel needs to take sides. Whether you have the courage to do so is another matter.

The prayer of intercession was at six o'clock as usual. And when it was over, and many people wanted to go, they suddenly came streaming back in and said: ›They're not letting anyone out. The police has surrounded the church and won't let anyone out.‹ This was a situation that frightened me. If they surrounded us now, when there were several thousand people in the church and nobody could get out, the situation would quickly spiral out of control.

At the time I didn't believe that we would be able to change anything quickly, but at least in my little circle I wanted to change something and not keep my mouth shut anymore, not just accept the status-quo.

I didn't dare to stay for long and really take in the scene. I was too afraid of being caught, of openly showing an interest or even solidarity with what was going on. Because it was clear that this ›crazy‹ place was being very closely watched and anyone who showed an interest in what was happening would be registered.

If you walked along there at the time, you thought: Can this end well? What are they doing? They're really taking a risk! But then it became apparent that more and more people were joining in.

Of course I noticed that something was going on, there were a few candles standing around. But I didn't think: Something's going on and I have to get involved. Unfortunately not, if I'm honest. We just had nothing to do with the church. Some people had friends in the church, but I didn't even have that.

I went a few times, out of curiosity, to see what was going on there. But I never listened to a prayer or a speech. Usually the church was full, people were constantly running back and forth, there was always something going on. You

noticed it from outside, too. At first there were just a few candles, but these became more and more, and they dripped – big piles of candles along the wall. It looked pretty, but you also realised that something was going on here.

Under the conditions that we lived our lives, it was dangerous. It was really very dangerous, explosive! To become involved would have meant being afraid all the time. A hand could suddenly grab you, and you would end up in Stasi prison. And I didn't want to ever end up there.

The Environmental Library wanted to provide the activists in the Gethsemanekirche with informational material. Two Environmental Library members packed my Trabant full of the material. I always had to drive the car, in the hope that I wouldn't be stopped or arrested by the Stasi. (You didn't lay your hands on a pastor ...!) This rationale paid off: I parked in front of the Gethsemanekirche. Three of us unloaded the stacks of paper and carried them – past a Stasi line-up – into the church and distributed them among the many people.



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