

EVANGELICAL-LUTHERAN CHURCH IN BAVARIA - ELKB

Year Started and Brief History

The Good News of the gospel spread quickly all over the Roman Empire. The area of Bavaria of today was located within its borders. There is evidence that since the 3rd century there were Christian congregations in the Roman (today Bavarian) cities of Augsburg, Kempten and Regensburg.

The doctrine of Martin Luther came early in reformation times to Bavaria. Augsburg, Nürnberg and Coburg became important places for Luther's reformation. The north of Bavaria (Franken) converted mainly to reformation, while the south turned back to Roman catholicism. 30 years of war in the 17th century among protestant and catholic nobility brought death and destruction all over Europe.

In the 19th century it was common practice that the head of state was also head of the protestant church in his reign. In the catholic kingdom of Bavaria 1809 for the first time a synod of the Protestant people was officially accepted. But the catholic king remained head of the church. Much later, in 1933, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria got an own bishop. The close relationship of state and church played an important role during the "3rd Reich" (1933-1945), when Protestantism followed Hitler in its majority, only a small number of believers went into resistance. After WorldWar II the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria took over responsibility for anti-judaism in her teaching and preaching. Today therefore many members of the church are engaged in projects of reconciliation with the Jewish community, furthermore for justice, peace and care of creation.

Church Leader

Bishop Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm

Membership

2.6 million members

Organisational Structure

The church has 4 leading bodies with different duties:

- The Bishop: represents the church in public, head of the council
- The Council: consists of bishop, 6 regional bishops and 6 heads of department, appoints pastors and decides about organisational matters
- The Synod: consists of 108 members, meets twice a year, elected every 6 years, discusses current issues of church and society, decides about church laws and the church budget.
- The Synod-committee: meets monthly for the continuing work of the synod.

The Church is organized in 6 regional districts overseeing 68 church districts with 1537 congregations.

Appr. 25.000 people are employed by the church (2.638 of them pastors), 40.000 by the "Diakonie" (social services). 144.000 volunteers are working in all fields of church life.

Main Areas of Work

- Pastoral and spiritual care in a secularized context
- Preaching and teaching of the Gospel
- Education
- Social ministry
- Advocacy work

Countries of Missionary Activities

- In cooperation with partner churches in the partner's countries
- Germany

Special Challenges

- German society is a widely indifferent society in terms of religious matters. Religion is said to be a private thing practiced by a minority of people. So preaching and mission is not mainly a matter of converting people from any faith to Christianity, but to convert people from having no idea of faith to believing in Christ.
- The two big denominations in Germany (Evangelical churches and Roman-Catholic church) have still a solid base in terms of membership. Their (mostly ecumenical) positions to public matters like peace, justice, globalization, dialogue with Islam and so on are an important part of their "prophetic ministry" of church in society.
- The reunification of Germany in 1990 brought societies together with very different religious background. The East turned out to be mainly atheistic after many years of socialism. While there is a membership rate of appr. 75% in West Germany (all denominations), it is only 15% in the East.
- The financial crisis starting 2008 has caused a wide ethical discussion about economical issues and the role of financial institutions. ELKB is involved in this discussion both by word and deed.

Involvement in Networks or International Operations

The ELKB is widely integrated in all major Lutheran and ecumenical networks:

- United Lutheran Church in Germany (velkd) as part of Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)
- Community of Evangelical Churches in Europe (CECE)
- Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
- Ack Bayern (Ecumenical Council of Bavaria with local branches)
- Conference of European Churches (CEC, member over EKD)
- World Council of Churches (WCC, member over EKD)