

## **Stadtkloster Segen – some information in english**

### **Who we are**

What is the idea behind the Christian Community Stadtkloster Segen?

Members of the community, of the local parish and the registered association “Friends of Stadtkloster Segen” developed the vision of a protestant community in a shared ownership. We want to live Christian spirituality, offer our hospitality and sustain a vital exchange with those who ask for God.

Stadtkloster Segen shall be a place that provides communion and the chance to encounter oneself and God. It is a place where Christians live together in order to have a positive impact and to be a blessing for its visitors and for the local community in the city of Berlin. The services of the Stadtkloster are embedded in a rhythm of prayer, work, meditation and personal freedom.

### **Intentional Christian Community**

In 1977, as young adults, we began the adventure of living together in an intentional community. We were inspired by the tradition of the monasteries and by the example of other women and men living Christian spirituality. The desire for a life in community stayed awake over the years as well as the wish that a piece of the Good News of Jesus Christ is expressed and realized in our community. We share our spiritual life, pray and celebrate together, and look for possibilities to share our faith with others. We work for the large part of our financial needs, while we also share our income.

Over the years a community came into being in which we try to set an example for peaceful conflict resolution, reconciliation and diversity. We learn to support, to love and even to endure each other like God loves each one of us unconditionally. Over the time the building and skills emerged to receive visitors (10,000 overnight stays per year), to offer companionship and spiritual direction for people, to conduct retreats, workshops and trainings. We realized an extensive renovation of the buildings and structures in Montmirail to create space for these activities. In addition to that a modern agricultural enterprise has emerged. For about ten years two of our families worked in Luanda, the capital of Angola. And today we live in Basel, Montmirail, and Berlin.

### **The parish**

Walking down Schönhauser Allee to Alexanderplatz you can catch a first glimpse of the Segen Church at the intersection of Eberswalder and Danziger Straße: Like some other churches built in the Gründerzeit at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is integrated in the row of houses. Right across

from the church tower – with its 75 meters it is the tallest in Prenzlauer Berg - you can see the television tower on Alexanderplatz in about 1 kilometre distance. The Segen Church is located in the centre of the vibrant Prenzlauer Berg district, a few steps from the Kulturbrauerei and the Pfefferberg, diagonally across the Jewish cemetery. Behind the church you find the shopping and bar areas of Oderbergerstraße and Kastanienallee; on the other side the Kollwitzplatz offers playground and meeting place for children and young families.

## **History**

On the 2nd Advent in 2008 the Segen Church celebrated its centenary anniversary. The church emanated from the neighbouring Zion Church, which grew in 1891 to over 116,000 parishioners. This is why the Gethsemane Church (1893), the Paul Gerhardt Church (1907) and finally the Segen Church with 40,000 church members were established. In 1900 the property on Schönhauser Allee 161 was purchased for the construction of the new church. Up to then an apartment house with a restaurant, a bowling alley and a coffee garden was located at this address.

On October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1905 was the first sod ceremony, and on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1906 a construction deed was placed in the altar. At this time the construction process had already progressed to the galleries. Finally the whole ensemble was finished in 1909. Following the plans of the architects August Dinklage, Paul Ernst and Olaf Lilloe the church building – barely visible from the street – forms the end of a courtyard that is surrounded by an apartment house, a rectory, a parish hall and the bell tower with its height of 75 meters.

Equipped with three pastors and several employees for social and diaconal needs the Segen Church faced the many challenges of a working class community in Berlin.

During the time of the National Socialism active members of the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche) worked at the Segen Church. In 1935, the year of the Nuremberg racial laws, the pressure of the “German Christians” (GC) forced the Gethsemane Church and the Paul Gerhardt Church to ban the baptism of Jews. In the same year 114 people with Jewish origins from all over Berlin were baptised in the Segen Church by Pastor Mähl. From 1933 to 1940 nearly 700 people with Jewish origins – mainly adults – were baptised. In the three months before the actual baptism by the volunteer pastors Burgstahler and Knieschke they joined a faith formation group in the Messias Chapel on Kastanienallee. Despite devastations during the pogroms in the Crystal Night (November 9<sup>th</sup> 1938) the Messias Chapel was a safe haven for Christians with Jewish origins until it was confiscated by the Gestapo in January 1941.

During the time of the German Democratic Republic the number of church members fell below 1400. The fall of the wall in 1989 resulted in the transformation of the social environment and an increasingly difficult economic situation. Under these conditions during the late 1990s the communities of Elias, Gethsemane, Paul Gerhardt and Segen Church formed the so-called Northern Association which merged on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001 into the parish Prenzlauer Berg North. The fusion was a reaction to the new environment and its challenges. They thereby anticipated the understanding that was formulated in the introduction to "Salt of the Earth", the perspective program of the Protestant Church Berlin-Brandenburg, six years later: "The knowledge that every parish gives proof to the gospel only in communion with the others, dispenses of the idea that each community has to do everything on its own. Rather different priorities can be realized and parishes can be complementary with their different profiles." (P. 9)