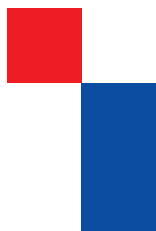


Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen



# Our Church Life Our Faith Our Actions





“Our life – our faith – our action”: that sums up this presentation of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia. We are a church on the move. We want to invite people to come along with us. We are God’s pilgrim people. On our way there are places where we pause for a while, draw new strength, find comfort and assistance and then set off again, heartened and refreshed.

In the reform process “Church with a Future” we have set off down the path of far-reaching reform. God’s will for all people and the whole of Creation, and thus also our hope for God’s Kingdom, are greater than “Our life – our faith – our action”. Comforted and confident, we can see to the needs of the world and so fulfil our mission. We trust in God’s faithfulness and loving care. So we in the parishes, districts and joint ministries of our Westphalian church are on the road together and are heading for new horizons.

The reform process “Church with a Future” is something we really have at heart. At this time of change-over in the presbyteries and synods, and also in the office of presiding bishop in spring 2004, we hope for the coming years that many people in the Evangelical Church of Westphalia will join us with their talents and abilities. The promise of the watchword for 2004 will be our constant companion:

Jesus Christ says:

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Mark 13:31)

Manfred Sorg,  
Presiding Bishop  
until 29 February 2004.

Alfred Buß,  
Presiding Bishop  
from 29 February 2004.

# Our Church Life

We are a living church, with many faces, in which the creative power of God can be seen at work. Let us take a look at the many and varied activities of the Protestant Church of Westphalia as a way of demonstrating this:



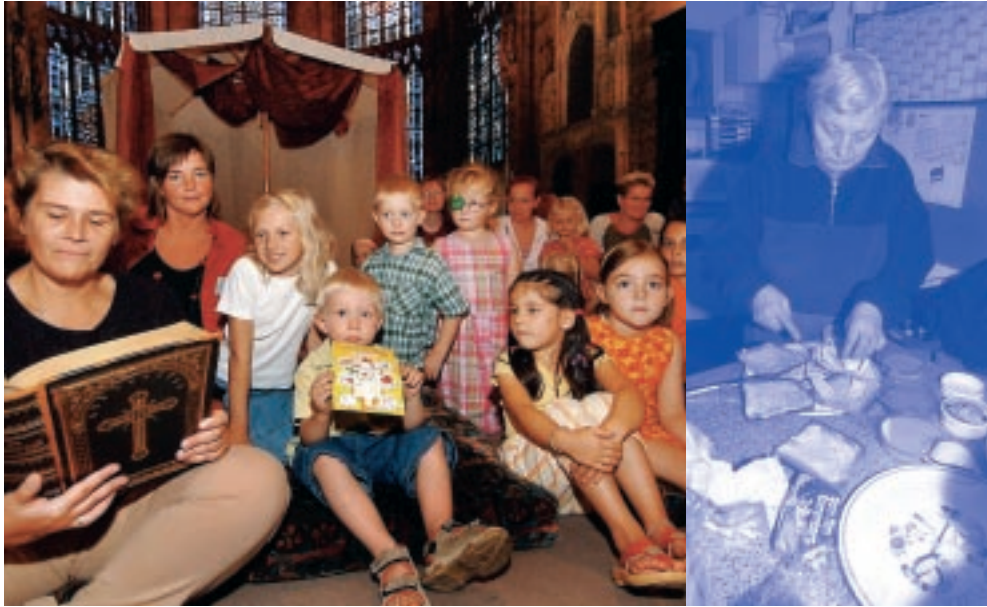
**"There's a lot going on"** – the heading of the calendar of events in one of our parishes.

Our regional church is actively involved in the parishes and social support organisations in a variety of different ways:

- People take part in lively church services and live out their faith in their daily lives.
- Churches with open doors offer a place for stillness and prayer.
- Work is done with children and young people in a large number of groups, offering different programmes and different ways of teaching and learning.
- Counselling and pastoral care is given in the parishes, in hospitals, old people's homes and advice centres.
- When the time comes for baptism, confirmation, marriage or burial the church is present, supporting people at important stations in their lives.
- Protestant kindergartens and schools take on responsibility for the way children develop.
- Religious education and other educational opportunities tell people about the Christian faith and teach them how they can plan their lives responsibly.
- Help and advice is provided by diaconal and social service organisations.

*This is the life  
of the Protestant  
Church of West-  
phalia – but  
there is more!*





**"We are there for you!"** – says a leaflet containing the names and photographs of a team at a church help and advice centre.

A lot of people, volunteers and professionals, are involved in our regional church work:

- Church services are planned by ministers, church musicians, lay assistants, church officers and everyone in the congregation.
- Presbyters and clergy provide leadership at presbytery, district synod and regional synod level.
- Groups, working parties and initiatives work on issues of current interest.
- Christians work alongside other people in hospitals, railway missions and at citizens' advice centres.
- Kindergarten teachers and school teachers, lecturers in adult education and parish educational workers provide educational programmes.
- Outreach officers keep press, radio and television informed on matters of faith and on what the church has to offer.

*This is the life of the Protestant Church of Westphalia – but there is more!*





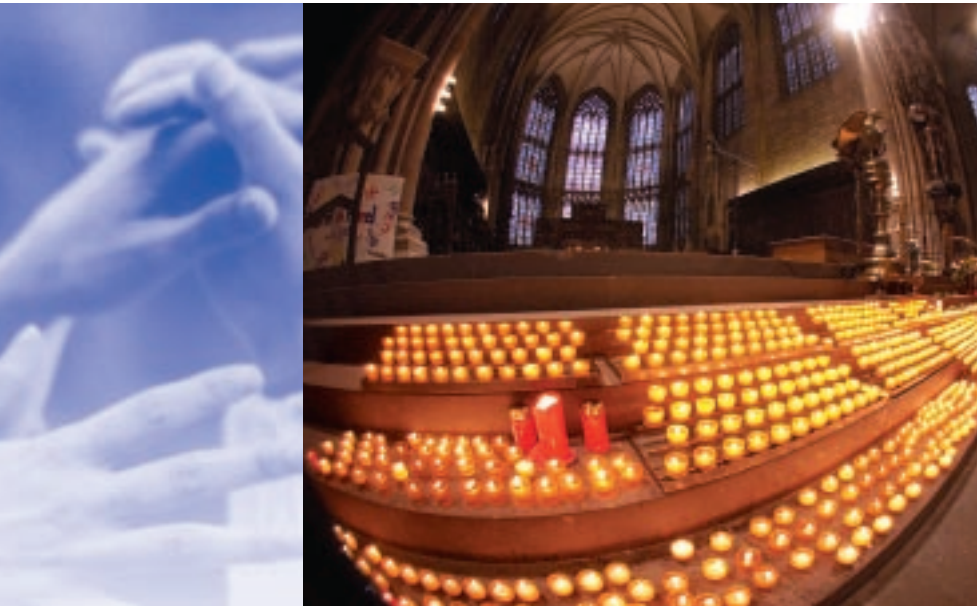
**"The grain of salt"** – is the name of the prize awarded to advocacy groups in the cause of peace, justice and the integrity of creation.

Our church exercises its social responsibility in many different ways:

- Initiatives and self-help groups actively support people who are in need or under great stress.
- We foster the cause of peace by supporting peace organisations and social welfare organisations, by providing pastoral care for soldiers and support for young men doing civilian alternative service.
- We help the unemployed and assist them in their efforts to acquire additional qualifications.
- Our church social services (diakonia) share responsibility for our constitutionally democratic welfare state, and are advocates in questions of social concern.
- In dialogue with academics, artists and cultural workers, we make our ethical standpoint clear and together we set up forums for discussion, exhibitions, readings and concerts.
- In co-operative working groups on “church and industry” and together with representatives of employers’ associations and trade unions we discuss issues of individual and corporate responsibility, solidarity and justice.
- We regularly seek dialogue with those involved in local community politics as well as state and federal politicians.
- We are actively involved in the causes of universal justice and protection of the environment and take part in appropriate projects and campaigns.

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**“Unsere Kirche” (Our Church)** – the name of our weekly Protestant newspaper demonstrates that as Protestant Christians in Westphalia, we belong together.

We live out the traditions of the Reformation:  
Church parishes of different denominations (Evangelical Lutheran, Reformed, United) are joined together in our United Church of Westphalia.

We talk about our different forms of spirituality:  
We have traditions that stem from the revivalist movement, and from diaconal, missionary and socio-political organisations

We are the Church of Jesus Christ in the geographical region of Westphalia:  
We are present with our community care services and church facilities from the Ruhr to Minden-Ravensberg, from Siegerland to Tecklenburg and from Sauerland to Münsterland.

**“Wir – aktuell (Us now)”** is the name of the monthly newsletter of two of our parishes that are campaigning to ensure that their congregations take a look out beyond their church steeple.

Our church organises its work on several levels:

- Local parishes are present in the daily lives of local people.
- Churches form regional districts in order to carry out church tasks more efficiently; shared services like pastoral care in hospitals are provided for specific assignments by towns and districts.
- The regional church supports the work of the parishes and church districts and acts along with them as a partner in public life; church agencies and organisations provide advice and education.

**“Protestant for a good reason”** – in dialogue with other Protestant churches, we continue to develop our identity as a church in the Reformation tradition.

We belong to the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Union of Protestant Churches (UEK):  
In these two associations we are working to see that German Protestant churches speak with one voice in society, politics and the global ecumenical movement.

We are members of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe – the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (CPCE):  
This links up 103 Reformation churches in a common pulpit and altar fellowship. We work together on theological issues and seek to make the Protestant voice heard in Europe.



*This is the life  
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phalia – but there  
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**"Protestant and Ecumenical"** – this guiding principle is applicable to our church, too. We have good relationships with our brothers and sisters in other Christian churches and church organisations.

- We work with the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican Episcopal and Free Churches in the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK).
- We are linked to the Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox Churches of Europe in the Conference of European Churches.
- We are in full communion with the United Church of Christ (UCC) in the USA and Canada.
- In United Evangelical Mission (VEM) we are committed to our common task of mission as a community of churches in Asia, Africa and Germany.
- In the World Council of Churches (WCC), our church works alongside 342 churches from more than 120 states.



**"What unites us? What divides us?"** – locally and world wide, together with other Christian churches and communions we are trying to discover what it is that unites us, even though there is much that still divides.

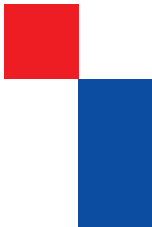
- In common projects and programmes we seek to promote the unity of the churches and to encourage all members of the human race to live together.

*This is the life of the Protestant Church of Westphalia – but there is more!*

- In a world that is torn apart it is our desire to share our gifts, insights and responsibilities so that we are able to face together the challenges of today's world.
- Peace, justice and the integrity of creation are assignments that we tackle together.

Above and beyond all this, the churches have a common duty to engage in dialogue with people of other faiths.





# Our Faith

We believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, revealed to us in the stories and sayings of the Bible. In many images the Bible speaks to us of God’s dealings with us, his people, and his world:

## We believe in the one God, who created and sustains the world.

• God is the source of life. God called the world and all its creatures into being.	For with you is the fountain of life. (Psalm 36:10)
• God made us in his likeness and gave us inalienable dignity. God has passed on to us the task of protecting the dignity of every human being.	God created human beings in his own image. (Genesis 1:27)
• God has power over life and death. God is greater than all the powers in this world.	From him and through him and for him all things exist. (Romans 11:36)
• God holds the world in his hands and blesses it.	The Lord who has been mindful of us will bless us (Psalm 115:12)
• God has entrusted to us the care of the Earth and has commissioned us to take care of creation.	The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to fill it and look after it. (Genesis 2:15)
• By the commandment to love God and our neighbour, God has entrusted to us the care of our fellow human beings.	And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:5)  You must love your neighbour as yourself. (Leviticus 19:18)





We believe in the one God who redeemed and released us all in the person of Jesus Christ.	
But when the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to buy freedom for those who were under the law, in order that we might attain the status of sons. (Galatians 4:4f)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>God came into the world in his Son and shared human life with us. Through Jesus Christ God has bound us forever to his people Israel.</li></ul>
That Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day (...) This is what we all proclaim. (1. Corinthians 15:3f.11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Through Jesus Christ God has freed us from our own self-centredness. His life, the road to the cross and the resurrection have loosed the bonds that our strength alone could not break.</li></ul>
For it is by grace you are saved through faith; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift. (Ephesians 2:8f)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>God's forgiveness is a gift. We do not have to earn it by our own efforts. It sets us free to live our lives without fearing defeat or failure.</li></ul>

We believe in the one God who redeemed and released us all in the person of Jesus Christ.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Because God forgives us and accepts us, we can accept the imperfections and ruptures in our own lives and make peace with ourselves and others.</li></ul>	Accept one another as God accepted us, to the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Jesus' message of God's kingdom, his rejection of the use of force, his compassion and love direct us to shape our world in God's name and according to his will.</li></ul>	As the Father sent me, so I send you. (John 20:21)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Because Jesus Christ has shared suffering and death with us, we have faith that he will stand by us at the low points in our lives, at our dying and in death.</li></ul>	Praised be God (...) In his great mercy by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, he gave us new birth into a living hope. (1 Peter 1:3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In Christ's resurrection God took away the power of death, therefore we believe that death does not have the last word. The nature of our future life after death remains God's mystery. We expect that at the end of time God will set right all injustice and bring what is unfinished to completion.</li></ul>	Of this I am confident, that he who started the good work in you will bring it to completion by the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)





We believe in one God who through his Spirit is at work in this world.		We believe in one God who through his Spirit is at work in this world.	
For in one Spirit we were all brought into the body by baptism. (1 Corinthians 12:13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>God’s Spirit gives his people faith and binds them to God and to one another.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>God's Spirit frees us to live a new life and sets us on the path trodden by Christ’s successors. He gives us many different talents so that we can share our experience of God.</li></ul>	<p>Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (2 Corinthians 3:17)</p> <p>There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:4)</p>
They met constantly to hear the apostles teach and to share the common life, to break bread and to pray. (Acts 2:42)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>By the grace of God’s Spirit we experience God’s presence, as we listen to the Word of God in the Bible, at baptism, at communion, in prayer and in our daily lives.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>God's Spirit gives us guidance and the courage to live our faith in the world. It gives us the strength to resist in situations where God’s commandments are being flouted.</li></ul>	<p>We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)</p>
The Spirit comes to aid our weakness. (Romans 8:26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>God’s Spirit is also present in situations where our faith is weak, we doubt, or search for God.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>God’s Spirit is a Spirit of love. It sets us free to love God, our fellow human beings and ourselves.</li></ul>	<p>Through the Holy Spirit he has given us, God's love has flooded our hearts. (Romans 5:5)</p>
The Spirit you have received is (...) a Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry 'Abba! Father!' (Romans 8:14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>By the grace of God’s Spirit we can pray to God and giving thanks and praise, uttering complaints and petitions, confiding all that concerns us.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>God’s Spirit gives us hope: at the end of time we expect God’s power and might to prevail and be revealed to the whole of his creation.</li></ul>	<p>God will dwell among them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them. (Revelations 2:3)</p>



# Our Actions

On the foundation of our faith we are guided by goals which give direction to the many different activities in our regional church:

## **We set off to find other people.**

God came to us, his people, therefore as his Church we want to approach other people and offer them the same esteem that we receive from God. We give people a chance to talk, we take their questions about life and its purpose seriously and listen carefully to their concerns, criticisms and expectations regarding the church and its faith.

## **We are open and welcoming.**

Because God bids everyone to come to him, we wish to be a welcoming church. We enjoy having guests, and visitors to our churches, parish rooms and educational centres. Whether as a regular member of the congregation or as an occasional visitor, everyone is very welcome. Whatever that person wants - a place to stay for a short while, or a home for life - he or she finds it here with us.

## **We have church services that are full of life.**

In a service we feel the presence of God. Thus we celebrate this encounter with all our senses and talents. We praise God and let his Word speak to us; we hear words of encouragement, fellowship and guidance; we are challenged and receive God's blessing. We involve many people and their talents in our services, making them open and appealing to all.





### We accompany people on their way.

Because God loves us and cares for us, we, his Church, offer people our support. In pastoral care and counselling we get close to people and set ourselves beside them. We speak to them about God and the world; we give them an opportunity to stop and get their breath; and in our prayers we stay with them in their joys and sorrows.

### We offer guidance.

Because Jesus Christ gives our lives a purpose and a direction we tell others about our hope and the foundation that supports us in life and death. Our educational activities are designed to empower young people and adults so that they are able to assume responsibility for themselves and society. We seek dialogue with inquiring and thoughtful people of all ages and encourage them to let God's commandments direct their lives.

### We become strong for other people.

We speak up for humanity and fight for justice because God became our advocate. We are there to assist people and give them advice, caring for and healing them, consoling and strengthening them, encouraging and supporting them in all the difficult circumstances in their lives.



### We give them the courage to believe.

Because we experience God's actions as healing in our own lives we want to share this Gospel with everyone. And so we keep repeating the story of God's liberating love; we encourage people to put their trust in Christ; and offer fellowship in his church. We are there for them when they need us. We develop their skills and see that their voices are heard by the government and in society.

### We recognise our social responsibility.

Because God loves and accepts everyone we defend the dignity of our fellow human beings and their civil rights wherever they are violated or trampled on. Together with other social groups and ecumenical partners we are working worldwide for peace, justice and the integrity of creation.



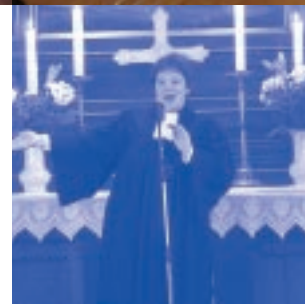


### We invite people to join in and take an active part in shaping the Church.

We want to be a community in which men and women, children and adults enrich the life of the church by their impulses, criticisms and active participation because all Christians have received gifts and skills through the grace of God's Spirit. Our church lives through the voluntary and professional involvement of many of its people.

### With other churches we support worldwide ecumenism.

We support church unity, since all Christians are bound together by their faith. We seek good ecumenical relations with other churches and denominations locally and worldwide. Together with them we approach people from other countries, cultures and faith, in an open and welcoming manner, engaging with them so that everyone everywhere may live in justice and peace.





With this vision, we understand ourselves to be a church open to reform and renewal.

We realise that the tasks God has set us to do are greater than anything we can ever achieve. We want to be a church that continually prays for the courage to be transformed, renewed and converted. Our Protestant concept of Church obliges us to seek renewal, the maxim *ecclesia semper reformanda* emphasising the church's need for continuing reformation.

We want to be a church that remains aware of its faith and evangelical identity in all of its reforms – one that is responsive to people, their questions and their problems and tells them of God's unconditional care. We take an active part in shaping the ethical direction in which our society is going and call for necessary changes.



For all the reforms that are waiting for us on our path into the future we will be guided by the foundation of our faith, our confessional tradition and our Reformation inheritance. Remaining alert to people's experience and hopes, their questions and doubts, we will let ourselves be enriched by the gifts and skills that every individual brings into our church. In our reform processes we take account of social changes and challenges.

We have faith that God will walk the path into the future with us, blessing us and breathing life and renewal into his church by the grace of his Holy Spirit.





# Church with a future

## Imprint

Protestant Church of Westphalia  
Landeskirchenamt  
Altstädter Kirchplatz 5  
33602 Bielefeld  
Fon +46 (0) 5 21 / 59 40

Production and reference:  
Protestant house of Media  
Cansteinstrasse 1  
33647 Bielefeld  
Fon +49 (0) 5 21 / 94 40-0  
[www.reformprozess.de](http://www.reformprozess.de)  
[Öffentlichkeitsarbeit@ekvw.de](mailto:Öffentlichkeitsarbeit@ekvw.de)

Editorial office:  
Uwe Moggert-Seils, Gesine Lübbers

Concept and design:  
Buttgereit und Heidenreich GmbH,  
Strategie. Kommunikation. Design.  
Halter am See, [www.b-und-h.de](http://www.b-und-h.de)  
evm-685-03

Printing:  
Linsen Druckcenter, Kleve

Photography:  
Reinhard Elbracht, Berthold Fernkorn,  
Uwe Moggert-Seils, Stephan Schütze,  
Harald Mante

January 2004

[www.ekvw.de](http://www.ekvw.de)