# Peace Church News











Newsletter of the English-speaking United Methodist Congregation in Munich

# Summer 2021

Dear Peace Church sisters and brothers,

This summer edition of the newsletter has lots of wonderful photos, reflections and stories.

Katie shares a **Bible reflection** on the theme of wrestling with God. When life is difficult, or we feel like we've failed, God reminds us who we really are: beloved of God.

In this newsletter we particularly want to honour and celebrate our wonderful **young people**. How has school life been this year, and how has the Homework Club helped them through the pandemic? We hear from Lily, Fred and Ioris...

We look back at the **Pentecost celebrations** in May, and the creative ways that children and adults celebrated safely together.

In this newsletter you should receive a **questionnaire** about Peace Church in the pandemic – please do fill it in! The **third volume of Bible reflections** (meditations which have been given at Peace Church in recent months) is also shared with you to enjoy reading at home.

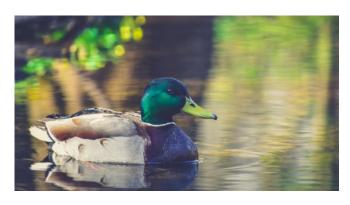
Enjoy the pictures, the stories and the reflections!

Lots of love, Kat Wagner, 14 July 2021

#### The Peace of Wild Things

A poem by Wendell Berry

When despair of the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of the wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.



<sup>6</sup>Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. <sup>7</sup>Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Luke 12: 6-7

#### Jacob wrestles with God

A meditation on Genesis 32: 22-31, by Katie Gill

When we experience pain or criticism, when we feel afraid or ashamed, it's easy to feel like giving up. But even in the midst of these struggles, God reminds us that we are, in fact, defined by God's love for us. The story of Jacob is one great example of this life-lesson.

Katie gave this meditation at the 12pm service on 30<sup>th</sup> May:

Let me set the scene for you, Jacob and Esau were twins. They were born to Isaac and Rebekah. Esau was the first to be born followed by Jacob who seemed to be hanging on to Esau's heel. Esau became a skilful hunter and a favourite of his father Isaac, whilst Rebekah loved Jacob.

Jacob was rather a cunning and wily character. Reading about his life in Genesis, one can see that he was often planning ahead and manoeuvring situations to his advantage.

We can learn about the early lives of Esau and Jacob in Genesis chapters 25, 27 and 28. We read how on one occasion Jacob manages to persuade Esau to sell his birth right for the price of a meal. Birth right was pretty important in those days; it gave the eldest son inheritance rights and a position of authority within the family.

Later, with the help of his mother Rebekah, Jacob deceives Isaac and takes the blessing that rightfully belonged to the eldest son. The account of how that happened is found in Genesis 27. Before we judge Rebekah too harshly for favouritism, we must remember that God had told her the elder brother would serve the younger before the twins were even born. Perhaps Rebekah saw qualities in Jacob that better befitted him to become the authority within the family. We can only conjecture! Needless to say, Esau is distraught and makes a vow to himself to kill Jacob after his Father's death. Once again Rebekah is instrumental in planning for Jacob and sends him off to her brother Laban in Harran until Esau's fury abates.

Jacob flees. He rests on the way there and falling asleep, has a dream where he sees a ladder into heaven with angels walking up and down on it. God promises to be with Jacob, to make his descendants

as numerous as the dust and to bring him back to Canaan. Jacob works for Laban for over 20 years, acquires two wives and becomes very rich – again often through cunning and deceitful means. Eventually Jacob's relationship with Laban and his sons deteriorates. Jacob once again flees. He is at last on his way home with his family and many belongings.

Jacob however is tormented by fear. He feels guilt no doubt at what he took from his brother through deceit and cunning, and sends messengers ahead of him to speak with Esau, with a report of his own wealth hoping this will appease Esau's probable anger. The messengers return with the news that Esau has set out to meet them, bringing with him four hundred men.

Genesis 32 v7 and 8 read: In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.'

Then Jacob prays.....

He reminds God of the promises made to him in the past; promises to bless and prosper him; promises to be with him. Jacob realises his unworthiness but tells God of his fear that Esau will attack him and his family. He asks for God's protection.

Then, Jacob sends great herds of animals ahead of the company as gifts, hoping to pacify Esau.

Jacob is full of fear, full of guilt, full of shame.

He spends the night in the camp, sending his wives, the female servants, his eleven sons and all his possessions ahead of him to cross the river Jabbok. At last Jacob is alone – alone with all his fear; his guilt at what he had done in the past; his deep shame at what he had become – a deceiver and a cheat. Jacob is alone with God.

What happens then is an amazing account of how God deals with Jacob, and how he addresses Jacob's feelings of fear and shame.

Shame is pervasive in our culture. We all suffer from it to some degree or other. We can recognise the feeling of wanting the ground to open up and swallow us whole. Shame is often not rooted in reality but in deceit. It compares us to impossible ideals. It exaggerates our faults. It tells us we will never measure up. 'Are you not ashamed?' It tells us we are not thin enough; not intelligent enough; not young enough; not a good enough mother, father, son or daughter; not got the right job; not got a job............ The list goes on. We all have our own sensitivities, situations that cause us to feel shame.

It makes me think of the verse in Hebrews 12 that says of Jesus: 'For the joy that was set before him, he endured the Cross, despising the shame.' Jesus was vulnerable all throughout his life. He stood up and let himself be seen. He spoke up for the poor and the needy, spoke up for justice, showed solidarity with those whom society had marginalised and rejected.

Vulnerability opens oneself to pain, criticism, disconnection and shame, but Jesus refused to hide, refused to run away or change his message to suit his critics. Vulnerability rather than weakness, is pure courage. As he faced the Cross, what was Jesus saying? 'I will face the shame of abandonment, the shame of nakedness, the shame of mockery and being spat at. I will endure the shame of facing a death reserved for criminals.' Why? Because vulnerability exposes us not only to pain but has also the potential for deepest joy.

As Jesus felt the shame of the Cross, he reached out in compassion to the thief next to him, he sought connection and he expressed no judgment. Jesus prays, saying 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do.' This is not sympathy that stands separate, saying 'I feel sorry for you'. This is empathy. He is saying 'Father I know these human beings. I understand them. I stand WITH them. I see their fear and mistakes but I have compassion on them. I seek to restore relationship with them. Let us forgive.' Are we not included there? This astounding act of empathy is the source of deepest joy — it is the heart of redemption and reconnection.

And Jacob? God honours him by not turning his back on him. Jacob wrestles with God. This fight is not a little tête à tête! It is eyeball to eyeball and fist to fist! God engages with Jacob, is alongside him,

and Jacob doesn't give up: 'I will not let you go unless you bless me'.



Jacob comes away limping, showing the marks. What does God say to him? God gives him a new name. God is saying; 'I know you and yes you have made mistakes, but these don't define you. They don't say who you are. Remember I said you would prosper; your descendants be as numerous as the dust; all the peoples of the earth be blessed through you.' Jacob went forward then in the strength of that knowledge.

And what does that say to us? We need the courage to be vulnerable and let ourselves be seen, in standing up for the needy, the weak, the lost and marginalised, yes, but also in what may seem to be less important ways which are yet vital for our lives.

We show vulnerability when we are ourselves, authentic, showing our own truth. Hiding, being afraid, won't protect us from the shame and pain that comes from simply living or from the judgment and criticism when we stand true to ourselves.

In our pain, we respond to shame by reaching out to each other in compassion and non-judgment, in standing beside each other, as Jesus did. We can only be creative and risk if we refuse to worry about what others are thinking. Vulnerability is risk-taking. It dares to be, in spite of our imperfections, and so we are challenged to love and serve God and the community.

Most importantly we remember who we are. We are not defined by our mistakes or our pasts – they are wrapped in the Love and Forgiveness of God. We are challenged and changed by that love. We are defined by that love. We are beloved of God.

Amen.

### Celebrating Pentecost in new creative ways



An 'open church' Pentecost service was offered for kids and adults to have fun and worship together on 23 May. Here are some reflections of the day from some people who were there.



Julia and Phil welcome people into church

Vanda: WOW.... When I reached Peace Church, I did not expect the Pentecost service to be so fun. We still needed to be aware of all the corona restrictions and safety distance measurement, but the Peace Church 'special' service certainly touched my heart. Indeed, 23 May 2021 was only my second time back to Peace Church after a long hiatus from lots of restrictions.

**Jonas:** When we came in we were welcomed with a creative guest list – we all wrote our names on paper leaves that we attached to a big paper tree on the board. The most fun covid registration so far!

*Katie:* We were celebrating the 37<sup>th</sup> birthday of Peace Church with a form of service that allowed people to come and experience different workshops throughout the Church buildings including using the outside space available to us.

**Vanda:** This 'special service' consisted of eight worship activities: welcome tree, candlelight prayer, storytelling, parachute games, art project, hymn project, prayer wall, and blessing to go.



Pastor Christine tells the story of Pentecost

*Megan:* Even though we were not able to *actually* hug yet (we wore masks and kept a reasonable distance) the Pentecost event, nevertheless, *felt* like a big, warm hug.

We have been meeting as two separate church services, in order to keep the numbers lower for COVID-19 safety reasons, so even just seeing people in church who I had not seen in so long, was joyous in and of itself. On top of that, so many people put forth effort and creativity to make the event something celebratory and special, even within the many restrictions.

*Katie:* The Fellowship Hall offered three different activities: an art project; a quiet area where prayers could be written and pinned to the Prayer Wall; and the Favourite Hymn corner by the piano.



Prayer station

*Katie:* I was sitting at the grand piano in the Fellowship Hall with my coat on. Every window and door had been opened to achieve the best ventilation possible and it was chilly. The cold Spring, quite unusual for Munich, brought the need for unseasonal clothing.

The hymn request process didn't quite go as planned – but no matter – it was strengthening to hear the melodies we all know and love so well. The words of the songs were there in our hearts and minds, and provided almost relief after so long being unable to listen to and sing these hymns. We still weren't allowed to sing of course although a few muffled phrases escaped now and then. It was a joy to be together and share.



Katie plays worship songs on request

*Vanda:* I really enjoyed it when Katie played the piano for all our hymn requests. I couldn't help sing some hymns side by side with Katie (still wearing my mask!). I also heard other people just humming or singing along. Simply beautiful.





Vanda: In the end, the 'blessing to go' station is the one that touched my heart the most. The blessing cards had a very beautiful dove picture which to me looked like a handmade painting. And here is my favourite blessing: May the flame of the spirit touch your soul, the light of Christ's truth fill your mind, and the love of the maker fill your heart. Amen.

**Jonas:** Megan, Amos and I focused our attention on the art station that Megan led and it was so nice to have something hands-on to do together. A great way to see everyone and dive into conversation after having been in separate groups and services for so long.



Craft activity: making Pentecost flower/ flame bracelets

Megan: I was involved in organizing the "craft station." The project was to make flowers ('Pfingstrosen'), or flames, (whichever way you look at it!) out of tissue paper and pipe cleaners. The tissue paper was gold, silver and rose gold, and when completed, many participants wore the flowers or flames around their wrists.

Just as the tongues of fire came upon the apostles at Pentecost, the idea behind the art project was to be a Pentecost reminder of the anointing from the Holy Spirit upon each of us as believers!



Moses and Ian show off their creations

*Megan:* I had a lot of fun seeing people come through and talk and laugh while creating together. It definitely brought a smile to my face to see congregants of all ages and types wearing these bursts of color on their arms as they moved on to listen to music, add a prayer to the prayer wall, or engage in fellowship over coffee in the garden.

Jonas: For me, Pentecost was the first time in a very long time that we got that jovial, lively Peace Church flavor that made us so special before masks and distancing. My sense is that we've learnt a bunch of interesting things about how to create community and church experience together in these unusual circumstances of the past year and I believe we can continue applying them way beyond the pandemic. Open Church is amongst those discoveries for me for sure!





Ian, V anda and Megan enjoying birthday cake

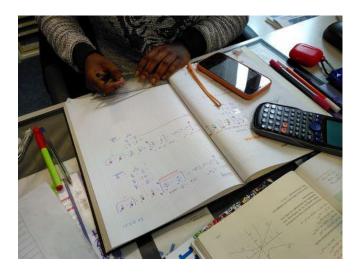
Vanda: There is a word in Chinese "喜" (read: shuāngxǐ - double happiness) which means joy and happiness. Though shuāngxǐ is typically used in the marriage context, I do think 23 May 2021 deserves to be called double happiness. It is a special day for Peace Church as the church celebrated its 37<sup>th</sup> birthday as well as Pentecost.

*Megan:* As Pentecost is also Peace Church's birthday, the whole gathering was a reminder of the resilience, the love, the commitment and the beauty of this community. I would love to participate in an open church event like this again.

Thank you to all who took part, and Happy Birthday Peace Church!

#### Homework Club

Attending school and preparing for exams has been particularly challenging in the pandemic. Peace Church's Homework Club has been there to help. Nico Kanzleiter interviewed three young people – Lily, Fred and Ioris – about their experiences. We also hear from Konrad who is one of the helpers.



# Nico: How would you describe Homework Club to a friend?

**Lily:** Homework Club is a club where adults help teenagers who are still in school with their homework and other school-related things.

**Fred:** I would describe Homework Club as a good opportunity to work out your problems.

**Ioris:** It's a meeting place for students to do their homework with help from older students or even teachers.

### How long have you been coming to Homework Club?

L: I've been coming to Homework Club for approximately ten years.

F: I've been coming since 2015.

I: I don't know exactly, but I think I've been coming to Homework Club for as long as I've been going to school, so about 10 to 12 years.

Konrad: After helping out a couple of times over the past years, I joined as a regular helper just a bit over a year ago.

#### What do you do at Homework Club?

L: I get help with school-related things, such as preparation for upcoming exams or homework in general.

F: When I go, I mostly do Maths. I'm not very good at Maths, so I have to work at it.

I: Mostly I just do my homework at Homework Club, but sometimes when I didn't have anything to do I would play with those who had already finished their homework, or maybe even help someone.

K: I help the students do their homework and revise what they have learned at school. Because I've studied Maths at university, and that subject is always in high demand at Homework Club, this means that we'll be going over maths homework together most of the time.

# What makes Homework Club different from school for you?

L: The difference to my school is that here you can take your time to actually do your work properly. You don't have to rush here. And the good thing is that you can always ask for help at any time and don't have to feel bad about it.

F: At school, I don't have the opportunity to ask my teacher every time I have a question, because most of the time he is busy or answering another question. So when I'm stuck on a problem, I have the chance at Homework Club to ask someone to help me. It's a good thing!

I: Compared with school, Homework Club is more relaxed and friendly and everyone is trying to help. You aren't forced to do homework, instead you're given the possibility to do your work at your own pace with the help of somebody.

K: In school, the focus is on writing exams and getting grades most the time. In contrast, it's okay

to make mistakes and not know everything at Homework Club. Having space where you can ask any questions and take the time you need to understand a topic is a really refreshing experience.

# What is the most helpful thing about Homework Club for you?

L: You can actually finish all your school assignments with the help of someone else. That way, you can both find a solution to a problem and you don't have to struggle on your own.

F: Being able to ask a helper every time I have a question, as I don't feel like I'm disturbing them.

I: The helpful thing has always been the support I was given, because I had some problems doing my own homework at home. At the Homework Club I could focus and make use of the time so I could do my work in the shortest time possible, which allowed me to enjoy some free time on the weekends.

### What is/was your favourite part about Homework Club?

L: I loved it when we all ate together in the beginning before we all started doing our work – it was so great to hear what the others did today or what they're up to afterwards.

F: If we finish our homework we don't have to go straight home. We can talk with the teachers or we can talk with the other students.

I: My favourite part was the experience that learning could also be fun and enjoyable, and also the people I met there.

K: The shared lunch was always my favourite part, no doubt. With everyone coming in after a busy week at school, you could really feel the stress fading over lunch and mealtime chats. However, in recent times that has of course been rather difficult.

# How would you recommend Homework Club to your school friends?

L: Homework Club would be good for anyone struggling to keep up with school assignments.

F: Last Sunday, I told a friend to come with me, and he came. He told me it is a very good club, and he hopes that other churches or other community services would open a similar club too.

### What didn't you like, or what could have been done better?

L: Honestly, I can't really think of anything right now that I didn't like about Homework Club or that could have been done better. It's been so good so far.

F: There's nothing really that I don't like. I think it is perfect as it is.

I: The teachers we were assigned would often change week to week and you had to adjust to the new teacher's way of working through homework. I myself would be happy with the same people helping me over and over on certain subjects, like Maths. But overall, Homework Club is a very nice place.

# Was Homework Club helpful during the home schooling phase?

L: In the home schooling phase I was so focused on the exams ahead of me. It was helpful to be able to personally contact the helpers for help.

I: In my case, I could just meet with Konrad to learn for my final exams, which really helped me.

K: Home schooling is very demanding on the students in terms of self-discipline and time management. I hope that Homework Club helped a bit to provide steady support in these chaotic times.

#### Was it fun?

L: Homework Club was and still is really fun.

F: Yes, it was fun!

K: Of course! We wouldn't be doing this if it's wasn't fun ☺

Homework Club is always looking for more volunteers! If you're interested and available on Friday afternoons, please contact Pastor Christine.

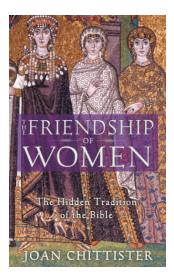
#### Did You Know That...?

... school exams are finally finished?! A huge congratulations to all the students and teachers, parents, school staff and Homework Club helpers!

... there will be a confirmation service this summer? On Sunday 25 July we shall celebrate the confirmation of Priscilla Nyarko, Esther Owusu and Akua Frimpong. The girls had been taught with the book Manna&Mercy. Each month Pastor Christine sent them homework to do which the girls had to send back to her. Christine corrected the work sheets and returned them to the confirmands. The girls did really well and have deserved a beautiful worship service. On the same Sunday, Priscilla's little sister Norah will be baptized. There will be no Sunday Evening service on 25 July, so everyone can take join together for this special confirmation and baptism service at 12pm.

...there will be a confirmation class weekend away? Christine booked a few rooms on a farm in Kundl, Austria, so that the girls who will be confirmed in July can invite a friend each and spend a nice weekend with some of the confirmation class teachers.

...a new Bible Study group will be starting in the autumn? Kat Wagner and Christian Schreiber are offering to host a Bible Study and fellowship group in their home. Kat and Christian live in Laim/Friedenheim (reachable with the U5 or Tram 18). It's open to everyone, and will take place on a weekday evening. Please contact Kat if you're interested (contact details on back page).



...the Women's Bible Study group is reading a new book? The group which meets at Rahel's or Katie's home started reading "The Friendship of Women – The Hidden Tradition of the Bible" by Joan Chittister, an American Benedictine nun. If you are interested in partaking, speak to Christine, Rahel or Katie.



...baptisms will be resuming in the summer? After many months when baptisms were not able to take place, there are lots of babies and not-so-little-ones who will be baptised in the coming weeks. A first baptism was on 11 July. We baptised Glory, Abundance and Marvelous, three siblings. Let's continue to pray for those three and all other young children and their families.



...Pastor Christine still does fun packs for children? Not once a week, but once a month. She may stop doing them as soon as we are allowed to meet with children's groups in person again.

### Did You Know That...? (continued)

...Communion services are now happening every month? On the first Sunday of each month, Communion is celebrated and shared in the 12pm and 6pm services. So far, this has been in a new Corona-appropriate format, with individually packaged bags of bread and grapes which we eat together outside.



...there are regularly 50-60 people at the Sunday midday service? These services are a wonderful time to worship together and have fun. We try to make them as family-friendly as possible, although we are still not able to offer separate groups for the kids. If anyone is seeking a quieter service with fewer people, give the 6pm service a try!



...the Sunday evening service and Tuesday online prayer meeting will take a break in August? The Tuesday online group still plans to have some informal online and/or in-person catchups.

...Kat and Christine are planning a new church directory? Please let them have your contact details if you want to be listed in the new address list of church people.



...there will be an African-style Harvest festival on Sunday 17 October? The Council on Ministries met on 7 July and decided to plan a Harvest festival for 17 October. The exact form that the service can take will be clarified nearer the time. Please save the date!

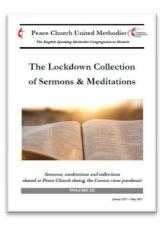
...the next Council on Ministries meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 1 September? We are hoping that by then we will be able to plan some events which we enjoyed before the pandemic and which many of us miss dearly.

...Kids Activity Afternoons can hopefully begin after the summer holidays? We would like to offer an opportunity for our younger kids (and their parents!) to enjoy crafts, games and storytelling.



...the Kids' Club team hopes to offer a holiday project in 2022? The farm in Austria where we went to for so many years has reopened after the Corona lockdown. Guests are allowed there again. Let us hope that by Easter 2022 kids' projects such as a retreat with sleepover at a farm will be possible again.

...a third volume of Lockdown Sermons & Meditations has been published? It's available in church and can be found on the Peace Church website as a PDF document. A big thank you goes to Kat Wagner who put all three volumes together.



...the Corona Unemployment Fund is still available? Anyone who is struggling financially can approach Pastor Christine for help.

...Almuth Zipf is now an ordained minister of the Methodist Church in Germany? Almuth did her internship with Peace Church and Pastor Christine in 2016. Some of you

may remember her



well. She was ordained on Sunday 20 June at the Methodist Annual Conference in Karlsruhe. We wish her many blessings as she begins to work with a church in Plochingen near Stuttgart.





... Svenja and Bright got married on Friday 9
July? Svenja is German and Bright is Nigerian, and it's been a difficult process to fulfil all the requests of the German authorities so they could get married. The two join the evening service and many prayers were prayed for them in the past weeks and months. We wish them happiness, joy and showers of blessings.

# Church after Corona – what will it be like?



It may seem that life is slowly returning to 'normal'. Restrictions are being lifted, and many people have received their vaccinations. However, Covid-19 will undoubtedly continue to affect our lives into the near future, especially when we look at the global situation.

So, what does this mean for Peace Church going forward? Should everything go back to how it was before the first lockdown? Or are there new things which this experience has taught us – about church, about each other – that we should build into our church life?

Pastor Christine and Kat would love to hear about your experiences and your thoughts on this.

With this newsletter you should have received a short **questionnaire** about Peace Church in the pandemic. The main questions are: *what do I miss?* what have I enjoyed? how should we go forward?

Please do take part! Your contributions will be really useful as Pastor Christine and the Council on Ministries make plans for the future.

We look forward to receiving your feedback and ideas.

#### **Peace Church Calendar**

Sunday 25 July 12 noon Confirmation Service with Baptism – no evening service

23 July – 1 August Holiday Kat Wagner

2 – 15 August Holiday Pastor Christine

#### No Sunday 6pm services or Tuesday online meetings in August!

Sunday 1 August 12 noon Communion Service

Sunday 8 August 12 noon All-age Service

Sunday 15 August 12 noon All-age Service

Sunday 22 August 12 noon All-age Service

Sunday 29 August 12 noon All-age Service

Wednesday 1 September 7pm Council on Ministries

Sunday 5 September 12 noon All-age Service & 6pm Evening Service

Tuesday 7 September Online prayer meeting

8 – 19 September Holiday Kat Wagner

10-12 September Confirmation Class Weekend Away

Sunday 12 September 12 noon All-age Service & 6pm Evening Service

Tuesday 14 September Online prayer meeting

Sunday 19 September 12 noon All-age Service & 6pm Evening Service

Tuesday 21 September Online prayer meeting

Friday 24 September Homework Club restarts

Sunday 26 September 12 noon All-age Service & 6pm Evening Service

Tuesday 28 September Online prayer meeting







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#### **Impressum**

Your suggestions, comments and contributions to the Newsletter are welcome. Deadline for the next issue is 5 September. If you would like to receive future issues by e-mail, please send a message to christine@peacechurch.de, simply type "PCN by mail" and we will add your address to the list.