



## **Short introduction into the structure of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN)**

Mrs. Elke Schulze, member of the Church Board of EKHN

*(Statement presented during the International Partnership Consultation of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau; Frankfurt, 03<sup>rd</sup> of September 2004)*

The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau is one of the 24 federal churches in the Protestant Church of Germany (EKD). 1947 took the unification of three originally independent churches place by preserving the three original confessions Lutheran, reformed and united. The 1,8 million members belong to 1179 parishes, which are organized on the next level in 50 deaneries and on the next level in 6 dioceses what we call Propsteien.

The EKHN is organised in a democratic way. Every 6 years the members of the congregations elect their elders for the church board on the congregational level. These church boards elect the members of the Deanery Synod in which congregations on the regional level come together. Out of all Deanery Synods of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau the members of the Church Synod are elected. Two in three of them are not ordained members. The Church Synod formulates the Church Policy, elects the church leaders and the president of the church. It also elects the members of the church synodical board and the church board.

The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau considers itself as a mainline church, which takes responsibility not only for its members but also for the whole society. Therefore it is involved in many activities outside the parish. It is in close contact with the governments of our federal states, political parties and other institutions and groups of society. It stays politically independent in orientation at the gospel. Its work is founded on listening to God's word and answering the challenges of our time.

The financial base of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau is a tax. Approximately 9 percent of the income tax of its members is collected by the state, which charges a fee for this service and transferred to the church. This income is divide into three parts. The main share of the central budget is used to pay the pastors. 50 percent is distributed to the parishes and deaneries for their work. Compared to other churches in the world the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau belongs to the rich ones. The big number of persons employed by our church – 2003 it had been 21.000 persons – can rely on a punctual and regular payment of their salary. Pastors and members of the administration have a work guarantee so that they can't loose their jobs. The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau runs several hospitals, homes for elder people, schools and conference centres. It is involved in several social and political activities. But after a period of growth the economical situation in Germany is getting difficult. Quite a few companies reduce their jobs, the expected economical upraise hasn't been coming yet. The consequences are dropping tax incomes which are clearly less than estimated in the last years. Therefore Synod and Church board have to face the question how to save money and to drop the expenses. There is a discussion going on if working fields should be given up, if services and facilities should be closed , if congregational centres and even church buildings should be sold – these discussions are consuming

a lot of time and energy. They also lead us to considering the essential tasks of church which can't be given up. How can the mission of church be done with less financial resources: preaching the Gospel, spiritual counselling, building our society with education and social activity and cooperation of the Christianity worldwide.

But it's not only the financial pressure which forces our boards to consider reforms of our structure. We have to be aware that the number of Christians in Germany is declining. There is an increasing number of people belonging to no denominations. We have to think about how a parish can be open towards people being distant to church. This shall be reached by reorganisation of working fields and by foundation of working centres and special pastoral and professional services.

There are 5 major working fields:

- Preaching, spiritual life, church music
- Spiritual and other counselling
- Education
- Social responsibility and diaconia
- Ecumenia

Beside this there are public relations and staff and organisation consulting to support the work in those five areas. In every working field a centre was founded to develop theory and praxis and to counsel boards and regional staff and to develop projects as an example. In the deaneries special pastoral and professional services for the working fields of ecumeneia , education and social responsibility are being founded. With the cooperation of the special services and the centres we want to secure that temporary topics adapted to the needs of the region became contents of ecclesiastical work. The valuable work of the congregations can be completed by this way.

Mrs Kopsch will report about the working field of ecumenia. I would like to give an example of the working field of social responsibility. As I said the economical situation in Germany is getting more difficult. Young people without any school certificate have problems to find a job or an apprenticeship. Professionals in the deaneries create in cooperation with the centre of social responsibility a support programme for those young people. They search for retired persons to use their relations to their former companies and create new apprentice facilities. They help youngsters with their applications and with problems at work. To build up those groups costs a lot of time but has a big effect on people in need. This is only one example. Others from the ecumenical field you have acknowledged already and you will discuss it in connection to the partnership. Another goal of our reform is to transfer decisions from the head office to the regions to improve the reactions on diverse developments. The distribution of pastors und the cooperation of congregations and the main topics of the special services are decided in a deanery.

I like to close with a quotation of the study "Mission and shape" which was edited by our spiritual board 1995: The main mission, God's salvation, as it was in Jesus Christ, is to give testimony. That's the service the church has to give to the world. Not any service she is meant to do. But to make a life in faith possible is her task. That's the only service she is called to do. The church is completing her task in giving testimony that the event of Christ, by which she is founded herself, is meant to the whole world. This testimony has to be strong and must be possible to experience and must show effects. This happens next to the Preaching at first through the existence of congregations, at second through her organisation and at third through the life of her members.