

History of TEC in Bavaria and its cooperation with the ELKB

a) History of the Episcopal Church (TEC) and the Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern (ELKB)

The discussions between the ELKB and TEC began as the result of a meeting in June 2013 between Landesbischof Dr. Bedford-Strohm and then Presiding Bishop the Most Rev. Dr. Jefferts-Schori. In their meeting, the two Bishops expressed the wish and challenge for the two churches to explore the possibility of closer communion, including, if possible, full communion with interchange of ministers and sharing of the sacraments.

The American Church in Munich was organized in 1896. The congregation formed itself as the Church of the Ascension in 1903. The community worshiped in the old city, eventually locating to Salvatorplatz in 1909. The Ascension congregation consisted of US citizens married to Germans and living in Munich, students at the university, musicians involved in the opera house, and tourists. It seems there was little connection with the ELKB during the first decades of the 20th century.

Ascension was not closed during the First World War, in part because of the late entry of the US into the war, but also because of Ascension's establishment within the first weeks of the war of a feeding and clothing program for German children and a clinic for wounded German soldiers. With the rise of National Socialism, Ascension became a place where German Jews came to hide their money, obtain food and clothing, request secret housing and seek assistance for visas abroad. The National Socialists closed Ascension in 1939, and the 8,000-volume library was burned.

Episcopal worship returned to Munich with the US forces following the Second World War; services were held at the Army Chapel of McGraw Kaserne in Obergiesing. In 1955 a parish was re-established with the name "Church of the Ascension", and services eventually returned to a church in the city centre. In 1970, the congregation moved to its current location, the Emmauskirche in the Harlaching neighborhood of Munich.

After the Second World War, a historical connection between the ELKB and the US army had already been established on the site of the Emmasuskirche in Harlaching. In 1930, when Harlaching was being developed, the ELKB purchased land on Laurinplatz and built a small church, dedicated in 1935, which was known as the "Betsaal Harlaching" (the Harlaching Prayer Hall). In 1946 the US army requisitioned a large area of Harlaching including the Prayer Hall, which had been badly damaged in the war. The US army restored the building as a chapel and opened it for use by the US army and ELKB. The chapel was eventually returned by the Army to the ELKB. By 1963 the German congregation had grown too large for the Prayer Hall, and in that year construction of a much larger complex, now called the Emmauskirche, was begun next to the Prayer Hall. The new church and connected buildings were dedicated in 1964. In 1970 the Church of the Ascension moved to the Emmauskirche with the approval of the Landesbischof. Ascension began to hold services in the Emmauskirche and rented part of the former Hall. Ascension has now been a guest of the Emmauskirche for over 50 years.

b) The Present

From 1970, the Emmauskirche and Ascension formed a strong partnership. Over many years the two communities have regularly worshiped together and enjoyed festivities such as the Emmauskirche Adventmarkt and Jahrmarkt and Ascension's Christmas Carol Sing, Messiah Sing and summer festivals.

Members and clergy of both churches continue to attend the installations of new Rectors and Pfarrer (ministers), and the ordinations of new clergy. Emmaus clergy and members attended the 100th and 110th anniversaries of Ascension, held at the Emmauskirche, and Ascension clergy and members attended the 50th Jubilee in 2014 of the dedication of the Emmauskirche.

Since 1991, inspired by the Meissen Agreement (even though the agreement did not directly apply to them), the two parishes have joined in Eucharistic services. The tradition of shared Eucharistic worship continues. For the past several years, there has been a joint Eucharist on Ascension Day; one year the Emmaus Pfarrer leads the service in German and the Ascension rector preaches in English, and the following year they reverse roles. The Emmauskirche and Ascension held a joint service in 2014 to commemorate the outbreak of the First World War, and in 2017 a service to commemorate the German Reformation and the important influence it had on the English Reformation 30 years later.

The bonds of affection between the Emmauskirche and Ascension continue to deepen. This is seen in 2015 – 2017 in a joint ministry to refugees who were residents of the nearby former McGraw Kaserne. Together, the churches hosted refugees every Thursday afternoon at the Emmauskirche for refreshments, conversation, German language instruction and games. This joint ministry gave the members and clergy of the two communities the opportunity to serve others together.

The sharing of worship and community life between TEC and the ELKB has never been limited to the relations between the Emmauskirche and Ascension. TEC currently has two other congregations in Bavaria, St Boniface in Augsburg, and St James the Less in Nuremberg. Both congregations are hosted in churches of the ELKB, St Boniface at the Auferstehungskirche and St James at the St Jakob Kirche. Other TEC missions and ministries, since closed, in Bruckmühl, Ingolstadt, and Ismaning also benefited from ELKB hospitality.

In Augsburg, St Boniface and the Lutheran church have held joint services and while St Boniface was without a pastor from 2016 to 2018 the Lutheran clergy occasionally conducted St Boniface's Sunday Eucharistic services, according to the Lutheran Book of Worship. The two churches share many joint activities.

In Nuremberg, St. James the Less has been welcomed by the local clergy responsible for the Jakobskirche. The relationship has intensified over the years. Both the current Episcopal priest, originally ordained a Lutheran minister (ELCA), and the new Lutheran pastor are open and interested in exploring what an increased relationship might look like.

TEC in Bavaria and the ELKB have been friends, partners, and fellow worshipers for 50 years. They are excited to deepen their relations through on-going conversations between TEC and the Convocation and ELKB.