

December, 2005

Good News: Theologian is the new President of the Humboldt University

We are pleased about the election of Christoph Marksches, Professor of (Protestant) Church History, as President of the Humboldt University. In the past, the various committees of the University have often been characterized by sharp disputes among the lobbies. For this reason, it is very surprising that the “dark horse” Marksches received 47 of the 54 votes of the election committee (students, employees and faculty of the University).

The new President, born in 1962 in Berlin, also studied classical philology and philosophy. He has extremely high academic qualifications, but has been a professor in Berlin only since 2004. Hopes are pinned on him, because he is not stuck in old dead-end structures. His election is viewed as a good sign for the “research landscape” in Berlin, which is not otherwise known as being dynamic. Our prayer for the “Köhler Effect”, that is, for impulses from fresh personnel as it happened with the election of Horst Köhler, has been answered again.

Prayer:

- *Thank God for the election of a new, fresh, creative President*
- *Pray for a good beginning and positive support for Mr. Marksches*
- *Pray for fresh impulses for research and education on the Berlin universities*

New Series: Prayer for Berlin districts

This year we have introduced the senators of the city government in Berlin and asked you to pray for them. In the coming months, we would like to introduce different districts of Berlin and give input for prayer requests for them. We will be asking the governing mayor of each of these districts to give information about:

- Strengths and potential of the district
- Problems and challenges
- Desired changes in the next five years
- Areas in which the mayor would like prayer and support

In addition, we will ask a Christian whom we know from that district to give us his/her input.

The District Reinickendorf

The most northern district in the western part of the city has many facets: From the high-rises of the Märkischer Viertel, to the airport Tegel, the Tegeler See, and the well-to-do area of Frohnau. More than a quarter of the district is comprised of forest and water. Nearly 250,000 people live in Reinickendorf, and the district has the second-highest average income in Berlin. Some international companies have their headquarters there (Motorola, Borsig, Otis), as well as 9165 other companies. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Berlin has given this district the title of “businessmen-friendly district”. An image campaign is being designed to continue to promote Reinickendorf as a good location for industry.

Reinickendorf advertises itself with the slogan “At the top of Berlin” (www.Reinickendorf.de). It is true that one can live well in the north. Sometimes it even seems that the world is still ok “at the top” of Berlin. But of course Reinickendorf faces challenges: Among other things, the largest prison for men in all of Europe and the largest place of worship for Buddhists in Western Europe are both in Reinickendorf

Prayer:

- *Pray that the economy will continue to do well and even be strengthened in the district*
- *Pray for strong, attractive Christian churches and initiatives in the district*
- *Pray that God will work among those in the prison*

Input from the mayor

The governing district mayor Ms. Marlies Wanjura (60, Catholic., CDU) has during the past year successfully given impulses in the area of economic growth and involvement of citizens in volunteer positions. There is an office for coordinating volunteer positions and an economic initiative with the motto “Together for Reinickendorf”. This is where the mayor sees a lot of potential for the district. She desires to see the continuation of solidarity for socially deprived persons even during these times of decreasing financial aid. For instance, this winter the district is again supporting the (aid against the cold) project “Good-Night-Café” of the Protestant Church

Her goals for the next five years:

- Create more jobs in the district
- More tolerance for children and young people
- Family policy should become a matter of the heart for the inhabitants of Reinickendorf

She asks for personal prayer /support for:

- Courage for truthfulness
- Making right decisions on behalf of the community
- Mutual understanding between the mayor and the inhabitants
- Grace to keep her marriage and family together

Interdenominational Activities

Three years ago, a small prayer group of pastors was formed in Reinickendorf. Pastors of the Lutheran church and the Stadtmission take part, as well as pastors from a Methodist and a free charismatic church. This has been aided by a long-term cooperation in the Evangelical Alliance. There, two Pentecostal churches are represented, as well as the independent "Church on the Way" (Gemeinde auf dem Weg), that is currently finishing its new building in Tegel.

A yearly prayer evening within the Prayer Week of the Evangelical Alliance has been begun with the motto "Together for Reinickendorf" and will take place again in 2006. In the Lutheran Apostel Petrus church the desire has grown to see a network of prayer groups develop in each of the ten areas of the district of Reinickendorf. Challenging Christians to pray beyond the horizon of their own churches seems to be a long way off, however. The pastors must set a good example and cannot simply "delegate" prayer.

Prayer Evening "Together for Reinickendorf":

Saturday, January 14th, 7pm, Ev. Apostel-Petrus-Gemeinde, Wilhelmsruher Damm 161, Märkisches Viertel

Prayer:

- *Thank God for unity and cooperation among Christians*
- *Pray that more prayer groups will be started so that each of the ten areas of the district will be represented*
- *Pray that the Christians in the district will be more motivated to pray and work together for the district*

Opposition to Ethics Classes

In spite of the opposition expressed by churches and many citizens, the Parliament has decided to go ahead with ethics classes beginning in the school year 2006/07. Since then, the new curriculum has begun to be developed. The first draft however has even been rejected by the coalition partner PDS because of its poor content quality. At the end of November, education experts asked during a discussion with Parliament members that the classes not start yet so soon. One point of criticism is the biased orientation toward philosophy. Another main criticism is the fact that students are to learn only very little about world religions.

660 teachers must still be trained to teach the new ethics classes, which are to be taught from the seventh grade up, but there is no plan nor even a concept of how this is to be done. For this reason, the introduction of these classes at the planned date seems irresponsible. There is broad opposition to the ethics classes among Christian churches and many citizens, since the students have no possibility of electing to take religion classes in place of these ethics

classes. At the beginning of November, they held an "action" week in favour of religion classes. They continue to demand that the religion classes and ethics classes be treated on the same level, giving students the right to choose between the state-sponsored ethics classes and religion classes sponsored by churches or other approved world religions.

Prayer:

- *Pray that students will be given the right to choose between ethics and religion classes*
- *Pray for growing opposition towards a premature beginning of required ethics classes*
- *Pray that the arguments of churches and education experts will be heard by the politicians*

Christmas – Good News of Jesus Christ

For many, Christmas no longer has anything to do with the birth of Jesus Christ. Berliners are thinking about whether the Christmas trees have grown straight, about gifts, and about which meal to serve. At most, Christmas has become a family celebration. This is a big chance for churches in our city. People who are alone, people who have fallen out with their families, and those who have been left alone feel an acute loneliness around December 24th. During this time they are more open to looking for answers to life's questions than during the normal daily routine.

In this situation, we Christians have a great chance to help others understand the true meaning of Christmas. Especially during this season, it is important that we recognize the social needs in our city and strive to meet those needs: "Give them something to eat!" Jesus said. Some churches make a special invitation to homeless people, to those who are alone, and to families in need, in order to show God's love in a practical way. But involvement in a lost world should not only take place through organized activities of churches, but rather also through Christians being actively involved in their own surroundings.

Counseling means taking care of the souls of people, and each of us are to be involved in this. Many people suffer from depression during the Christmas season and are looking for help to keep them from ending up in total despair. Doctors and psychologists in their offices and in counseling centers need our prayers.

Prayer

- *Pray for effective help for people with deep emotional needs*
- *Pray that the Good News will reach the hearts of the lonely and those who are searching for answers*
- *Pray for people and churches who are taking care of lonely people and those in despair*