

"sredna. See, hear, taste differently"

Liturgical experiences in Trier's Barbara district

1. "Can these stones come alive?"

In 2017, the "Trierische Volksfreund" asked me to write an article for the weekend supplement "Die Woch" on the subject of "Easter". The subject of First Communion was requested a week before White Sunday. I chose another topic. The article was about the Herz-Jesu-Kirche in the "Barbara" district in the south of Trier. For almost 15 years I had been living as pastor of the deaf community in the vicarage of the formerly independent parish of Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the course of a parish merger in 2003, it was integrated into the parish of St. Matthias together with another. Since then, parish life had largely come to a standstill. The reasons were complex; This was by no means only due to pastoral centralism. The social structure in the district had changed fundamentally. Many students moved to the district. The number of people who have lived here for a long time is decreasing. An above-average number of artists who work at the nearby theater live here. The "unchurching" may have progressed faster than in other parts of the city. Many residents work in neighboring Luxembourg and use the significantly cheaper living space without really integrating into the social space. From the lively community life of a suburb in the 1970s and 1980s, all that was left was an aging Catholic women's community. The only service was the Saturday evening eve mass, which because of its early start at 5 p.m. also had an appeal beyond the area. For a long time I assumed that the Herz-Jesu-Kirche would be the first church in the south of Trier to be closed - the costs are out of all proportion to the benefits. Eight other parish and monastery churches are within a kilometer radius. The Hohe Domkirche can be reached on foot in just 20 minutes. Against the background of this situation and history, the explosive nature of the question becomes clear: "Can the stones of the Sacred Heart of Jesus come to life?"

In the First Testament, the prophet Ezekiel is led by the hand of the Lord into a plain filled with bones. They have dried up and are scattered everywhere. God asks the prophet: "Son of man, can these bones come to life again?" (Ez 37:3). Without overextending the analogy, I already had the feeling that this question was also directed at me: "Son of man, can you imagine that life can come back to this place?" And my honest answer was: "You know that only you, Lord!"

2. Signs of hope

At least the question could not be answered unequivocally with "no". Even if the phenomena of change were mainly "about to be demolished", there were also signs of hope. The church interior is bright and simple. It is particularly suitable for sign language services. As pastor of the deaf community, that was particularly important to me. Since 2003 we have been using the former vicarage of the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish as our community center – with an office and smaller meeting rooms, the pastor's apartment, a guest floor and a large garden. It took a while for the deaf community to get used to the

new place. The advantages were obvious – at least for me: On a sunny Sunday we don't need artificial lighting. Visually, the room is quite sparse. It is dominated by the red and blue chancel windows. Every small visual change caused by light, textiles, objects and pictures unfolds a different spatial effect and atmosphere. Over time, however, the deaf community in Herz Jesu became more than at home. The worship community was even more important than a friendly, inviting church interior. Having gotten older, I sensed a great deal of openness and curiosity among many of the church service participants. They were survivors of the "congregational church" that had developed in the course of the Second Vatican Council and the Würzburg Synod. The last pastor of Herz-Jesu had shaped the congregation strongly in this direction - and the congregation followed the path with great conviction. From the beginning, the deaf congregation and a residential community with people with intellectual disabilities from a neighboring parish were very welcome in the integrative (later inclusive) services. If today - in Corona times - the worship congregation quite naturally uses their hands to pray and sing along instead of singing, even if no deaf worshipers are present, then this is the fruit of many years of good and creative cooperation. The Easter triduum was formative. In the first years after the parish merger, the services for the Triduum were only held in the main church of St. Matthias. The deaf community began celebrating its own triduum in sign language in 2005, with many elements of youth work. The core of the church service was a group of young deaf people who spent the entire Easter days together in our vicarage. Over the years, the number of non-deaf church participants has increased, so that today these services are fully inclusive: they are celebrated simultaneously and equally in signed and spoken language.

In 2017 we wanted to explore the life potential of the church and community. The impetus came from an experience that two committed women from the congregation had made more or less at the same time as me, but independently of one another: Petra Weiland, the chairman of the board of directors, and Jutta Thommes, the organist, had visited the Würzburg Augustinian Church – like me. I knew the Church from college days. After the makeover, she was almost unrecognizable: the arrangement of the chairs and some other changes gave the room a whole new look. And - independently of each other - we thought: "We should try that in Herz Jesu!" This is how the project idea was born: We wanted to find out what would happen if we rearranged the pews – and placed the altar and ambo in the middle of the church. The pews were easy to rearrange and set up between the four pillars in the nave. A blacksmith from the parish created four simple candlesticks that take up the shape of six large candlesticks in the choir room. These four smaller candlesticks are easy to convert. With a frame and a glass plate, they form the altar in the nave. Simple in its form, provisional, transparent and yet striking, it creates the focal point in the nave together with a similarly designed ambo and two candlesticks. The benches form a hexagon around this center. Over time, a large wooden cross was added, which was used for years at the Ecumenical Youth Way of the Cross. It had to be disposed of because St. Paulus was profaned in the city center. That's how it came to us. "Give us 70 days, from Easter to the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus!" I asked the worship community on Palm Sunday 2017. "After that we will put

everything back and evaluate with you whether anything has changed and how we are going to continue want". We got that leap of faith - there were no complaints with the bishop. The peripheral location of Herz-Jesu in the parish of St. Matthias and the relative art-historical insignificance were a blessing. There were no programmatic discussions in the Parish Council or the Administrative Council. We were able to experiment undisturbed in a church that shouldn't even exist anymore.

3. "sredna - see, hear, taste differently"

The first project period was Easter 2017. The "sredna" brand becomes understandable when you change perspective and read the word "different" in the other direction, from right to left. Inspired by the deaf community in particular, we wanted to enable spiritual experiences "with all senses". In the deaf community it is unimaginable to celebrate a Sunday service without the "eighth sacrament" (coffee & cake) afterwards. People often have a long way to go and enjoy the personal encounter. Another experience with the deaf community made an impression on me: a community festival was totally rained out, the garden of the vicarage could not be used for the festival after the service. A larger room was not within reach. So we moved to the church without further ado – under the gallery and in the side aisles. We turned a few pews, set up tables and celebrated the "eighth sacrament" in the church. The participants were enthusiastic: "We will always have our garden party here in the future!" In the church, eyes and ears are addressed above all. "Tasting" is either very reduced to the Eucharistic gifts or banned outside the church door and in other non-sacred rooms. It should be different with us. During the renovation of 1992/93, herbal and medicinal plant motifs were applied in the church by the parish painter Heinrich Feld: on the wooden ceiling in the vault, on the triumphal arch above the altar, on the front of the organ gallery, but above all on the Stations of the Cross. Medieval traditions and interpretations were incorporated, plants and herbs became symbols of the healing effects of Christ and his sacraments. One of the first events took place under the heading: "From olive tree - thistle - dandelion". Heinrich Feld took a look at three Stations of the Cross, explained the plants and their meaning. Regional Cantor a. D. Joachim Reidenbach improvised on the organ. The punchline: Afterwards, dishes made from the themed plants were offered for tasting under the organ gallery. A first, very original experience under the heading "see, hear, taste differently". Various other spiritual events with a cultural and a culinary dimension have been added over the years. The get-together "under the gallery" after the evening mass was fully established until the start of the corona pandemic. With a glass of wine or soda, part of the congregation stays together for a while - preparation and follow-up are self-organized. The earlier Sacred Heart Festival with a festive service and procession followed by a parish festival fell asleep over the years due to a lack of participation and helpers. It was reborn when it was also being celebrated as a parish festival for the deaf community. The inclusive service in sign language and spoken language was followed by a lively and light celebration in and around the church. When we wanted to put the pews back in the traditional order, there were protests from the traditional church community: "The pews should stay where they are now. We no longer want to give up the feeling of

community in the service!" For two years we lived with a compromise: Outside the project period, the pews in the front half of the church were traditionally aligned, in the back they stood in a U-shape. After a vote at the 2019 community festival, the community decided: The order of the benches will remain in the shape of the hexagon. I would like to mention two experiences in particular: The 2019 Christmas mass was a very special experience. Then many "Herzjesuans" return to their families of origin. They have barely witnessed the changes in the Church over the years. Your need for tradition is great. But here, too, it was amazing how positively the new seating arrangement was received. The second experience was the first mass after the first Corona lockdown in 2020, which also affected the churches: Despite the mandatory masks, the church service participants were able to look "in the eye". The feeling of community despite the distance was very comforting and continues to this day.

4. Spiritual - Creative - Inclusive - Neighborly

After the first positive experiences and a new vitality in the church, further focal points developed: With his pastoral project on the spirituality of creation and some planted raised beds in front of the church, parish officer Heiko Paluch laid the foundation stone for the "Herz-Jesu-Garten" next to the church. An unused green strip alongside the church has been used by a team as a neighborhood garden in the city for the past three years. People from the neighborhood who are only loosely connected to the worship community get involved here. Cooperation with neighboring organizations and individuals from the social area meanwhile shape life in the church and around it: Events and projects with a secondary school plus diagonally opposite, with a Trier cult cocktail bar, with a bakery in the neighborhood, with the Trier AIDS help, with the queer center SCHMIT-Z, with cultural workers from different contexts, with the local advisory board, with the "Trier-Süd" network. The cooperation happens on an equal footing. We experience openness and curiosity. The aim is to help shape a fair, social, lively and livable district. The time when the Catholic Church dominated the district is long gone. Of course, there are also reservations about the church in the district. We benefit from the distinction between the church as an institution, organization and movement (Karl Gabriel and others). As a "movement" we are thoroughly accepted. In the ecumenical spectrum, personal contacts have resulted in relationships with the New Apostolic Church and the Old Catholic Church. The catechumenate circle of the Deanery of Trier often takes part in church services - and brings its cultural diversity with it. Iranian newly baptized people in particular helped organize many church services before they had to change their place of residence due to their asylum procedure. Since the beginning of 2020, "sredna Herz Jesu" has been a registered association in order to be economically independent and to give people the opportunity to participate who have difficulties with the officially constituted Catholic Church or who have left it. In the context of sredna, the "Initiative Kulturelle Diakonie im TriererSüd" was created in September 2020, a project funded by the Diocese of Trier that uses theater and performing arts as a medium of spirituality and diaconal action personally and politically. The employer is the parish of St. Matthias Trier. Despite the corona restrictions, a large number of "physical" and virtual events and

projects have emerged. The interaction of art, culture and spirituality is experienced as enriching and inspiring by all those involved.

5. New liturgical experiences in the social space - in Corona times

A good four years ago I asked the question: "Can these stones (from the heart of Jesus) come to life?" As of today I can say: Yes, they are alive. And it's good that they exist. The neo-Gothic church building with its mighty, elegant tower and the lively garden around it at a prominent street crossing has its own dignity. It is an identification point in the district. The church is jokingly called "St. called Sredna".

Corona and the protective measures have brought us closer together in the district with the Nelson-Mandela-Realschule-plus, with the "Südpol" youth center, with artists, with the AIDS help, with various networks that meet in the church for meetings and events conducted - according to the AHA rules.

Our worship life has changed. In the summer of 2020, a team put together an exhibition about the former Sacred Heart Hospital, which brought many people to the church who had anything to do with the hospital. The hospital was right next to the church. "Half Trier" was born there. On the Saturdays there was "table music" with organ music - prayer - soup with bread - organ music at the end. The other accompanying events also had a spiritual impulse again and again. Despite the AHA rules, the "tasting" should not be completely absent and often found very creative forms of expression.

"20-Minutes-in-der-Kirche" in Advent with "Nelson-Mandela" unexpectedly became a low-threshold diaconal offer after the rampage in Trier on December 1, 2020. Pupils with different cultural and religious backgrounds felt comforted and encouraged. A second series on the theme of "dignity" took place with the Lenten veil of Misereor. In a performance, groups of students brought the cloth from their schoolyard to the church and reflected on the injustice they had experienced themselves.

The Sunday services in Advent and at Christmas time became solidarity services with artists who were thrown into existential and economic difficulties by the pandemic. It was important to us that there should be an intensive interaction between dance, drama, unusual music on the one hand and liturgy on the other hand - to texts from the prophet Isaiah.

The "Happening & Soup" series on Saturday afternoon has been accompanying the "Dignity!!! I - You - We" with 15 queens by Ralf Knoblauch. What does indignity mean at the end of life, for women in distress, for children, for sex workers, for refugees - and how can dignity be restored? The content of the contributions is embedded in music and prayer, and at the end there is soup to take away, since eating together in the church is not possible.

The "Betphon" has been around for over a year – daily at eight in the morning and at seven in the evening. Between 5 and 10 people pray together over the medium of the telephone. Lyrics and songs can be found on our website. For many months we have celebrated a Sunday service as an "eve service" (in the first lockdown) and then as a "morning service" on Sunday morning as a video or telephone conference. People from all over Germany join in. The themes and texts from the "physical" services in the Herz-

Jesu-Kirche were often taken up. Website, telephone/video and the church building form the platforms for "sredna life" and are related.

The "Queer Night Prayer" takes place about four times a year. It is designed by a preparatory team with elements of queer spirituality and is primarily aimed at queer people, couples and families. Of course, the service is included – everyone is welcome. Occasionally it is also translated into sign language. During the lockdown times, the prayer took place online twice. The Trierer AIDS-Hilfe has held their solidarity night several times in front of and in the Herz-Jesu-Kirche. Here, too, the encounter "under the gallery" is an integral part of the service.

In the meantime, the Trier Sant'Egidio community prays regularly in Sacred Heart of Jesus and often participates in festive services.

6. Fragments of the living in new liturgical experiences

The new liturgical life is selective, fleeting, personal and project-related. The shared adventures and experiences change perspectives and opinions, in the best case on all sides. It takes a lot of energy and willingness to communicate. It takes a basic attitude of openness and modesty to get involved in the social space and its processes - as one player among many. We have to treat those with respect and, if necessary, let them have their say who simply don't want to have anything to do with religion, belief and especially with the church. It requires the willingness to experiment and to take risks; an acceptance of imperfection; the willingness to set off without knowing where the journey is going. It takes an understanding of tradition that is not about keeping the ashes, but about passing on the flame.

A new liturgy emerges when a worship community engages with the social space in which it lives and for which it is there. Liturgy grows out of diakonia - and not only through intercessions and the collection. A new liturgy is emerging in new forms of communion - physically, online or on the phone. Conversely, new communities are also expressed in new liturgies. The church building itself has been open daily from morning to evening since the beginning of the pandemic - and has become a place for individual forms of prayer and worship.

Fulbert Steffensky was a guest for a "tisch_talk" in September 2020. His theme was "Fragments of Hope". Culture and thus spirituality are not planned processes. They are fragments. They consist of detours, duplications, overlapping elements and interpretations that do not follow a straight line, but simply come together, complement each other, stand side by side without relation or can even be contradictory. But in this way they open up a space of ambiguity that enables diversity, tolerance, encounters and creative development.

"Can these stones come to life?" - That was the initial question of the church project "sredna. see, hear, taste differently" at Easter 2017. What subsequently developed was not the result of a structured planning process based on the three steps "see - judge - act". We found ourselves more in the three-step "start – evaluate – change" (Dave Snowden's Cynefin model). The developments were often not planned and not

foreseeable. The management team was curious about what was offered. We are eager to see what happens. "I will open your graves and bring you up, my people, from your graves (...). I will breathe my spirit into you, then you will come alive (...). I have spoken and I will do it - says the Lord" (cf. Ez 37:12-14).

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