

What, and how, we will celebrate in 2017

Theological message of the Steering Committee Reformation anniversary 2017

Memory

In 1517 the monk and theology professor Martin Luther published 95 Theses on the system of trading in indulgences in the Catholic Church. His criticism targeted the preaching and practice of "indulgence", that was supposed to save a sinner from purgatory if he or she repented and made a generous donation. Luther countered this system with the power of faith that trusts in God's grace alone. He focused again on the Bible as the spiritual yardstick and Christ as the centre of life and hope.

Luther and many others hoped to be able to get the church of the time to change direction. Instead, Luther's theses became the trigger and symbol of a broad-based process leading to the emergence of many Protestant churches. Protestantism has now branched out the world over and continues to carry this legacy forward, also in dialogue with other confessional families.

Guilt and opportunities

The Reformation is part of modernity's history of freedom. The Reformers emphasised our personal, direct responsibility before God and justification by faith alone. These ideas were ground-breaking, their concept of freedom revolutionary. Nevertheless, they also spawned an uncompromising confessionalism, anti-Judaism, religious fanaticism, tyranny and an incipient over-emphasis on the individual. By contrast, the truth of faith in a gracious God is bestowed on us when we freely encounter each other and in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

The basic ideas of the Reformation, such as the appeal to personal conscience and the priesthood of all believers and baptised, became sources of human rights and democracy, of freedom, equality and mutuality.

Present and future

In this spirit, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the German Protestant Kirchentag (DEKT) are hosting a Reformation Summer in 2017. The **European Reformation Roadmap** "Stories on tour" will lead through 68 cities in 19 European countries that were shaped by the Reformation and its consequences; at the **World Reformation Exhibition** "Gates of Freedom" churches and other civil society organisations from all over the world will present the impact of the Reformation in their different life situations; at the **Confirmand and Youth Camps**, "trust and try", young people can pick up new ideas to take home with them; at the **Kirchentag on the Way**, in eight more towns in Central Germany (running parallel with the DEKT in Berlin) people are invited to come into conversation about life and faith issues. The joint closing service of the **Kirchentag** will be a huge festive act of worship in Wittenberg, where we will reflect on and publicly celebrate our faith in the triune God and our resultant common responsibility for the world. Finally, we will remember, commemorate and celebrate at a jointly organised, broadly ecumenical festival in autumn. Concentrating on the centre of our faith, the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ which unites all Christians worldwide, we can and will celebrate the year 2017 together with our sisters and brothers in other churches as a **Festival of Christ**.

Our Reformation heritage is a force for freedom and reconciliation and substantially contributes to social cohesion, the European integration process and 'just peace' in a globalised world. In the Reformation Summer of 2017 the churches shaped by this heritage will bring it to mind for themselves and the general public, and be ready to engage in discussion with all those taking responsibility for the future.