

September 2010

**Dear brothers and sisters**

The other day the TV news showed only pictures of catastrophes for a full 12 minutes: the floods in Pakistan, forest fires in Russia, floods in Poland and Germany. There is just one crisis after another at the moment. How can we pray? In many cases, negligence on the part of those who carry the responsibility is either the direct cause (e.g. Gulf of Mexico oil spill, Love Parade) or it increases the consequential damages because no measures were taken against fire or flood despite previous warnings. Our prayers according to 1 Timothy 2 v.1-4 can bring decisive results! For God wills *“that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness”*. And we need God’s grace for life-saving decisions to be made by politicians in advance! It also takes wisdom for the right decisions to be made during a catastrophe and for lessons to be learnt for the future. Let us pray all the more with faith. Right now we are seeing an impressive answer to prayer in a time of crisis: Germany is riding out the economic crisis. -RS-

**A new economic miracle**

What no-one could imagine in the crisis year of 2009 became evident in August: the Germany economy is recovering at such a rapid pace that analysts can only call it a miracle. God has answered our prayers beyond our requests and expectations.

The facts: the feared mass redundancies failed to materialise thanks to short-time work payments. The number of the unemployed has fallen in recent months to the lowest level in 19 years. The number of those in employment rose at the same time to 40.28 million – the highest level since reunification! Germany is the only country in Europe where the rate of unemployment is today lower than before the economic crisis of 2008. We now know that the government measures to respond to the crisis were successful. God has heard our prayers for wisdom to make the right decisions! However, it is still not certain how robust this recovery is and there are still open problems to be resolved in the financial sector. **Prayer:**

- **Praise and thanks that God has shown our land so much grace and favour (Ephesians 3 v.20-21)**
- **That the Holy Spirit continues to give courage and wisdom to those responsible for the government and the economy to resolve the outstanding problems.**
- **That our country will recognise how it can serve other nations out of its wealth (2 Cor. 8 v.13-15)** -RS-

**More answers to prayer - we give thanks to God:**

- The economics minister Rainer Brüderle (FDP) wants to abandon the ELENA mammoth data storage project (see May prayer letter). The real costs associated with this project will now be checked.
- The Hamburg authorities have closed the mosque where the “9.11” attackers used to meet.
- In summer camps and in other evangelistic outreaches all over the country people have made decisions to

follow Christ or have had their faith renewed.

- The Love Parade will no longer take place. (But: we mourn that no-one was prepared to better protect these young people!) -RS-

**Unity in our government**

Seldom (perhaps never) has a government achieved in what is still less than one year such bad ratings as this once generally respected “coalition of choice”. Although the decisions that have been made during the crisis since 2008 were overall good and correct, the German people are not thankful to Chancellor Angela Merkel. She has suffered a loss of trust because the public image of the current coalition is one of a permanent battle between the FDP (Free Democrats) and the CSU (Bavarian Christian Social Union). And she is not able get these squabblers under control. There is a spirit of conflict between them. And it does not look good for the issues that all need to be decided this autumn. What is the real problem here?

Politically speaking the FDP took too long to realise that they were concentrating on all the wrong issues. Guido Westerwelle’s dispute over Hartz IV (social welfare for the long term unemployed) led to a fall to less than 5% in support ratings. On the other hand, the problem is the result of the efforts of Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) to make the “Bavarian factor” felt in Berlin by permanently complaining. He wants to raise the profile of the CSU and knows that the people of Bavaria like this form of opposition. To resolve the problem, the CDU needs stronger leadership from the Chancellor. General Secretary Hermann Groehe should submit strong yet carefully targeted proposals at an early stage which he can then also implement for the Chancellor.

The people in the second line of government are also very important for its public image:

- The Minister at the Chancellor’s Office, Ronald Pofalla, that he coordinates activities in a proper way;
- The new press spokesman for the government, Steffen Seibert, formerly with ZDF TV, a Catholic Christian;
- The General Secretaries: Groehe (CDU), Dobrindt (CSU), Lindner (FDP).

The issues for this autumn and the points of contention:

- Implementation of austerity measures – social justice
- Health service reform – cushioning of cost explosion
- German army – compulsory military service or (less expensive) professional army
- Related problem – all charitable organisations would not survive financially without the support from compulsory community (alternative to military) service
- Maintaining security – protection of the population from dangerous criminals at risk of re-offending.

**Prayer:**

- **For unity and humility, so that no-one promotes himself/herself at the expense of others (Psalm 133) – particularly for Horst Seehofer and Guido Westerwelle to show willing to work together under**

### **the leadership of Angela Merkel**

- **For the people in the second line to be quietly preparing good and workable compromise solutions**
- **For clever solutions to the upcoming problems that are sustainable and fair** -OS-

### **Family policy**

With the introduction of the parental allowance and the day nursery expansion program the government is trying to raise the birth rate from the current 1.3 to 1.7 per woman. In 2009 Germany registered the lowest birth rate since World War 2 – and in the east day nurseries stand empty. Anyway, the Family Minister Kristina Schroeder described the parental allowance as the most successful family policy achievement of the past year. The savings announced in June will impact mainly those on long term unemployment benefit. For their children an “education chip card” is under discussion. Above all the communes are questioning if day nursery expansion is affordable. Also there are far from enough trained workers for this. The ideology of the left promotes attendance at a child day care centre at an even earlier age, especially for children from “less educationally privileged” families. Conservatives on the other hand point out the confirmed results of research into “bonding”: successful child development is dependent on bonding at a very early age which is most safely assured within the family. Even in difficult families this bonding can develop if parents get help and encouragement. This does not generally happen in institutions, especially with children.

We who live in the east notice a shocking increase in the number of “bonding-deprived” children in the east with behavioural problems. Many have no qualifications when they leave school. More and more parents are leaving the job of raising children to the “professionals” in day care centres and schools. While the former communist nursery policy threatens to take over the whole of Germany, other lands like France and in Scandinavia provide models for financed parenthood and state sponsored child care alongside each other. **Prayer:**

- **For family policy measures that promote the responsibility of parents and single parents for their children’s upbringing and development**
- **For creative models for parent support (enabling, practical, financial)**
- **Repentance on behalf of us all for the blindness to God’s plan in creation (Psalm 85)**
- **For God’s mercy and healing for the “forgotten” children who were handed over to others for care at too early an age (Isaiah 49 v.15f)** -KH-

### **Alpha Initiative**

For many years the Alpha Course has been running in all denominations. It offers a tremendous opportunity to talk with people about the Christian faith. In a manageable period of time and in a comfortable atmosphere it explains the basics of the faith. It also attracts people who

already have some experience with the faith but are still searching. There are Alpha Courses for different target groups – students, youth, prisoners, etc.

The Alpha Initiative for the first time links all the courses in one state for a combined promotional campaign. On September 24<sup>th</sup> throughout Baden-Wuerttemberg people will be invited to local Alpha banquets. All the courses will then start at the same time. With this joint and wide area promotion more non-churched people should be reached. If this initiative is successful, other states will do the same.

### **Prayer:**

- **That many people will be made aware of the Alpha Course and attend a course in their local area**
- **For the Holy Spirit to prepare people to repent and believe (Acts 2 v.37-38)**
- **Wisdom and energy for all the workers (Eph.6 v.19)** -RS-

### **Victims of war in Afghanistan**

Daniela Beyer (35) from Chemnitz was the single German among the 10 doctors and assistants murdered by the Taliban. She was in the team of interpreters and had a calling from God to translate school books. She knew the danger of her mission but she was upheld by the Word of God and the prayers of her parents and church. She and the Hentschel family in Yemen are examples of devotion to Jesus. **Prayer:**

- **Comfort for the Beyer family**
- **Daily strength for the Hentschel couple and the two released daughters** -OS-

### **Youth Encounter in Israel**

The first Youth Encounter trip to Israel, organised by Christians on the Side of Israel in Germany, took place from 8<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> July. The main aim of this trip was to meet Holocaust survivors as well as young Israelis, and to experience the modern state and people of Israel. There was a series of meetings with Holocaust survivors both in groups and one-to-one. These meetings were often very emotional for both sides. There were also official receptions with the mayor/deputy mayor in Acre and in Yokneam, an emerging high-tech town near Mount Carmel. **Prayer:**

- **That the experience and revelations of the trip will bear rich fruits in the lives of the 13 young people**
- **That the Holocaust survivors will retain good memories of the meetings and perhaps some feelings of healing and reconciliation** -HE-

### **Other events for prayer**

20-23.09 General Assembly of the German Catholic Bishops Conference in Fulda

24-30.09 Intercultural Week (sponsored by many churches in many locations in Germany)

Sept.-Nov. “Jesus House” – local events for youth by the ProChrist organisation

*God bless you*

*Ortwin Schweitzer and Rosemarie Stresemann*