

CHURCH FOR FUTURE

Protestant Village Church Gatow

Emergence and experiences of a church climate protection initiative

1. The beginnings and motivation:

"Church for future" was founded in March 2019.

What was the trigger?

It was the weekly demonstrations started by Greta Thunberg in Stockholm, which called on students worldwide to go on school strike on Fridays. These school strikes had also triggered many discussions pro and con within the church. Pastor Mathias Kaiser of the evangelical village church parish in Gatow had asked parishioners to join him in writing an open letter to the students in solidarity with their strikes and to encourage them. I felt very touched by this and decided to join in.

We linked the open letter with other goals:

- Church should finally take a stand. Not only on the strikes, but also on the desolate political action against the threats of climate change.
- The Church should use its strong infrastructure in society to loudly and clearly stand up for the preservation of creation and fight for it in the Christian sense!
- The Church should no longer accept and in some aspects even support the fact that people all over the world are suffering and dying because the vital resources of our planet are being plundered in order to increase wealth and luxury.

My personal motivation was and is concern for future generations, which I present in the Letter to the Unborn Children of the Future. From the privileges of my personal life, I feel deep within me the responsibility to work for climate protection and the preservation of a healthy planet. To do my best to prevent the worst from happening.

2. The concept

I quickly created a website - www.churchforfuture.com - and quickly the open letter was published. The idea was born to offer events in our community centre on the complex issue of climate change. We met regularly in a small group of parishioners to develop ideas for our planning.

The parish council also agreed to support "Church for future".

There was some criticism from the congregation that we were supporting the forbidden "truancy" or following a "stupid brat" like Greta Thunberg. This did not deter us. We were and are convinced that the school strikes have to cross the zone of niceness and that first the economy and politics have to do their homework in terms of climate protection until pupils can go to school again without worries about the future.

3. The activities

Pastor Mathias Kaiser and I were a super team. We always agreed quickly on the next activities and contents, never had to discuss or exchange concerns for a long time. So we didn't waste any time or energy and could act on a constructive basis of trust. That was a very nice experience. How easy it can be when there is mutual respect and trust and no rivalry!

We also sought dialogue with the EKBO (Evangelical Church Berlin - Brandenburg - Silesian Upper Lusatia) to get them on board and to increase our public impact radius. With them, our website was made accessible to other congregations and their climate protection initiatives, which was unfortunately very little used.

Of course, we were also present at the global climate demonstrations and proudly held up our banner "Church for future - safeguarding creation".

Our events, which were almost always held in the parish hall, were usually attended by about 15 to 30 participants, mainly from the community.

Here are a few examples of topics:

- Health and illness in times of climate crisis.
- "Dealing emotionally with the climate crisis" - how do I turn paralysis and worry into prudence and courage?
- "The world needs people who take responsibility", education as a key factor for sustainability
- Post-growth economy

4. Public relations work, resonance and networking

We came to the attention of the media:

The Protestant weekly newspaper "Die Kirche" published a detailed article about the foundation of "Church for future".

The SWR (Südwestrundfunk) made a documentary with the topic: "Mission Climate", in which "Church for Future" was filmed with various events we organised. This film can be seen in the ARD media library (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Rundfunkanstalten Deutschlands) until 28.3.2022.

<https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/doku-und-reportage/mission-klima-hilft-religion-beim-klimaschutz/swr/Y3JpZDovL3N3ci5kZS9hZXgvczEzNDI5MTk/>

The RBB (Rundfunk Berlin Brandenburg) filmed a report about our workshop "Waste-free through the Christmas season".

There were reports about us and interviews with us on the radio, and a major newspaper article in the "Tagesspiegel", one of Berlin's leading daily newspapers, with the topic: "Vegan pastor founds Church for Future". We also reported regularly about ourselves in the parish magazine of the Dorfkirchengemeinde Gatow.

We joined the growing network of initiatives of the "For-Future-Movement". Our very pleasant experience was that there is no competition and everyone is pulling in the same

direction. The protection of our planet - the basis of all our lives - is the top priority. People inspire each other and create synergies.

Overall, we had a remarkable response from the public. The response within the church, however, was more one of concern. We did not succeed, for example, in promoting at a synod that climate protection and the integrity of creation must be the most important topic of the church's work. On the contrary - we were interrupted in the middle of our presentation and expelled from the podium. Our big goal, to use the strong infrastructure of the church to move politics towards more climate protection, was not supported. That was very disappointing!

5. Planning for further actions

Mathias Kaiser, together with co-authors including myself, wrote a publication with the headline "Church of the Future" with theologically based concepts for a church that tackles the challenges of the time with revitalised structures and gives people a new and more open access to Christian life. We planned readings with music and conversation and hoped to reach a wide audience with this publication.

<https://www.klima-akademie-berlin.de/kirche-fuer-die-zukunft>

On behalf of a large inner-city congregation in Berlin, we prepared a day-long event with lectures, workshops and discussions on the topic: "Pastoral care and health in the face of the climate crisis" together with the "Klima Akademie Berlin. (www.klima-akademie-berlin.de)

A cooperation with the Berlin art house cinema "Wolf" (www.wolfberlin.org) was initiated. where we wanted to show films about climate protection followed by a film discussion

Then Corona came. And threw a wrench in all our plans.

6. The Pandemic

It was as if we were carried by a wave that held us up, that kept us afloat at highs and lows, that gave us strength and joy. It did us good to be active with all the worries about creation. With Corona, this wave suddenly broke away.

After intensive reflection on what we can learn from the pandemic, how we can read into it, where we could dock in the future for our climate goals, I ended with the following questions:

- Wasn't it the case that most of the time only a hard core of the same people who already knew everything about climate protection came to our events?

- Had we really achieved anything decisive in this intensive first year? Apart from the fact that we had attracted attention and connected with the great stream of climate activists?

My fellow campaigner Mathias Kaiser now had to concentrate on adapting his work in the community to the corona-related measures and he had to provide a whole new kind of pastoral care. This cost a lot of extra time and energy.

<https://youtu.be/ay6BZHJQKGw>

Together with a duo of actors, we developed a very impressive performance as part of church services on the theme of climate justice, which was presented during an outdoor

service. Services could no longer take place in the church due to Corona requirements.

<https://youtu.be/qc2t-aO5qcA>

Would I have the energy to "start the cart again" when the pandemic is over?

Wouldn't people then think very differently about climate protection and we as "Church for future" would have to develop a completely new concept for our activities?

For me, I came to the conclusion that I would resign from my - together with Mathias Kaiser - leading function at "Church for future". In retrospect, the feeling spread that our offers had been consumed in a certain way like entertainment - without any discernible consequences. Likewise, we as "doers and makers" actually remained rather alone, even though we constantly advertised to become fellow campaigners with us.

Was it an illusion that the Church would influence politics in order to preserve creation? In any case, I no longer felt able to establish an effective climate movement with the necessary energy and confidence within the Church. Today I see that a lot is happening in the meantime, but I'm out of it for now.

However - doing nothing to protect the climate is out of the question for me.

I will now only devote myself to the "Climate Academy Berlin" and plan to organize so-called "Kladow Climate Talks" in the form of regular panel discussions between experts and citizens on climate issues, together with "Kladow for future" and the district coordination of Kladow/Gatow from spring 2022. The first dates have already been arranged.

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Berlin im Dezember 2021