»... and you invited me in.«
Jesus says: »For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.« (Mt 25:35, NIV)
In 2017, Protestant Christians celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Concerned with the relationship between every Christian and God, the Reformation changed the church and also the world. Luther formulated the new interpretation of the Christian faith thus: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” Therefore, all Christians freely live in God’s unconditional love. Relationships between people are also affected by this belief, since the freedom given is also a responsibility and requires us to love our neighbour. In Luther’s words: “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant to all, subject to all.”

In light of the many who seek refuge from war, persecution and hardship, the issue of neighbourly love becomes tangible. Countless Christians are actively engaged in working for the common good, as the consequence of their faith is solidarity in action. Real and marvellous things are being accomplished, particularly in the area of support for refugees.

At the same time, political solutions are required. The undertaking is enormous and both the options and financial means are limited. Many are concerned about the consequences that migration and integration might have for our society and social cohesion; and the discussions about these issues are greatly polarised. Many are optimistic and welcome refugees, whilst others fear that excessive demands are being placed upon society; some even talk of political failure.

From a Protestant perspective, it is possible for there to be divergent opinions concerning ethical questions. Every Christian is expected to sharpen their conscience through the biblical message, and to find their own position. This statement on the present situation in German society describes some convictions which may be derived from the Christian faith.
God’s love is for the whole world and does not stop at national borders. God is close and is merciful to each person in the same manner – regardless of the colour of their skin, their gender, nationality, religion or financial position.

During these times of international crises, many are responding in ways of thinking that stop at their national borders. In discussions concerning refugee policy in Germany, Europe and elsewhere, the nation state often becomes the decisive standard.

The German government is committed to human rights. All political decisions must, at all times, take into consideration their repercussions on human rights, as they affect the people amongst us, those still fleeing turmoil and those in other states.
God created all people in his own image and has thereby given each and everyone inviolable dignity. No-one has to earn this dignity. Everyone is different and yet as valuable as the next. Their origin, religion, looks, sexual identity, or situation in terms of their rights of residence, have no bearings upon this premise. This fundamental insight of Christian faith finds its secular, legal form in human rights.

War, hardship and persecution cause people to leave their homes. Globally, this affects more than 65 million people. Germany allowed approximately 89,000 of them to enter in 2015, and in 2016 the number of people arriving was about 280,000. At the same time, many standards in German and European refugee law – upheld until this point – deteriorated and a further tightening of the laws is being discussed.

**Human dignity is non-negotiable**, which is why the individual right to asylum must also be safeguarded. Those who are seeking refuge must have safe escape routes. In addition, the European Union needs an immigration law which offers legal pathways to Europe in sufficient measure. Alongside refugees, those entitled to subsidiary protection, such as people fleeing from civil wars, also require protection. Jesus Christ is on the side of those whose dignity has been violated or is being challenged.
LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR IS AN OBLIGATION

We are to love our neighbour as ourselves; on this the Bible is very clear. This is the unlimited obligation to champion the dignity of all our fellow men and women. Love of one’s neighbour does not distinguish between people, rather, it requires that no person in need of help may be overlooked.

Deportations into crisis areas return people to mortal danger. Declaring a country, such as Afghanistan, to be safe will not change this. Capping the number of refugees and increasing the amount of barbed wire on border fences will only result in even more people without protection. It is claimed that these suggestions for better management are justified on account of the organisational problems connected with the admission and accommodation of refugees, the great cost involved and problems with integration.

For Christians however, the love of the neighbour is the highest commandment and they therefore give assistance wherever there is a need. This unconditional conviction cannot be directly transferred to the realm of politics. However, from a Christian perspective, it is both a central position and a point of reference. Therefore, the Evangelical Church in Germany urges that Germany help people seeking refuge – even beyond its own national borders and the EU’s external borders. It will require the support of the international community to solve the global refugee crisis. In this, wealthy states can admit more refugees and give appropriate support to host nations such as Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon and other states.
The state must safeguard the security of all people in the nation. It is free, open societies in particular which require security. However, the desire for security must also be carefully balanced against the rights to freedom and tolerance, which are the very foundations of an open society.

This balancing act is never easy. In some situations, the security of all citizens requires measures which curtail individual freedom. The proportionality of these restrictions is examined by the courts and, in a state under the rule of law, this is done on the basis of human rights.

In many places across the globe, states are failing to meet these core responsibilities. Wherever a governmental authority that protects the population is lacking, people seek other places of refuge from violence and lawlessness. This is why attempts to promote the rule of law, democratic participation and social justice are worthy of support. All of these are necessary for good living together – in Germany and elsewhere.
Faith in God, who judges the peoples with equity (Ps 9:8), means that justice and peace are the guiding principles for our responsibility towards the world.

People who live in a form of prosperity that is based upon unjust structures are living at the expense of others. Income and wealth are most unequally distributed across the globe and only a few possess the greatest proportion of this world’s riches.

As a rich and influential nation, Germany is contributing to the factors which cause refugees to flee their countries: German policies permit the export of weapons and armaments to crisis regions. Consumers in Germany are not only profiting from conflicts concerning raw materials, but also from inefficient or unjust rules of international trade.

Christians are opening their eyes to the injustices and their role in combating such inequalities. This is why many Christians create new opportunities to promote global justice: through fair trade, emergency relief and sustainable development.
Through the process of European integration, it has been possible to overcome historical enmities after two world wars. The European Union brought to participating states an unprecedented phase of peace, friendship and prosperity, as well as democratic, constitutional structures.

The idea of Europe however, and its success story, is currently falling into oblivion. Instead, parties and political movements are increasingly emphasising national interests. When it comes to receiving refugees, the limits of European solidarity and Europe’s community of shared values are becoming visible.

It is in keeping with the European and Christian spirit to open up to others with confidence. Recent decades have shown the fruitfulness of cross-border relationships and mutual dependence within Europe. Given these experiences, Europe can make a contribution towards securing peace in the world.

In terms of policies regarding refugees, the European response must not be merely one of deterrence and closing borders. Fending off victims of violence and terror at external and internal borders, or allowing them to drown, flies in the face of the European Convention on Human Rights and damages the soul of Europe.
Faith is founded upon an individual assurance of one’s beliefs; this is one of the central insights of the Reformation. For this very reason, we treat the religious convictions of others with respect. Every person has the right to have a faith – or none – and to live according to their convictions. No one may be marginalised, maligned or condemned on account of their faith.

Violence in the name of religion and Islamist terror are part of our times and extremely disturbing. However, they should not cause us to become fearful of religion or of Muslims in general. This fallacy endangers social cohesion and religious freedom.

As Christians, we advocate religious freedom. We see the unifying origins and commonalities of the diverse religions just as much as we see the differences. The dialogue between religions and denominations is not always easy but, where there is openness and respect on all sides, it is fruitful. Tolerance ends where religion and religious freedom are abused in order to harm people and violate their dignity. This is why we stand at the side of all the oppressed and persecuted Christians across the globe.
Whilst fleeing, families often become separated. While some have the strength and the means to flee, other family members have to stay behind. Whoever is granted asylum in Germany has the right to family reunification with their spouse or life partner and children under 18. The reality however, is that the waiting time for an appointment to apply for family reunification with a German Embassy in the Middle East amounts to more than a year. In addition, those entitled to subsidiary protection – which, at present, mainly concerns refugees fleeing civil war in Syria – are not able to be reunited with their families in Germany until March 2018 or later.

Divided families must be able to live together again. Whoever lives in fear for their own family abroad is not able to fully adjust to life in Germany, to learn German and to find the strength to begin anew in this country. Integration is best done with the family. In addition, the more vulnerable family members – often women and children – are in particular need of a safe refuge.
Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all these things will be given to you as well, says Matthew 6:33. Christians live out their faith in this great confidence. Their diaconal work and pastoral care for society are founded upon this hope.

Many in Germany feel threatened by certain people and certain groups of people. This is also one of the reasons why rejection and hatred is currently directed against those seeking refuge. Daily, there are attacks on refugees and refugee accommodation which, in turn, put great fear into the hearts and minds of refugees. Even people who help refugees are treated with hostility.

Social cohesion requires the courage to remain well-meaning, rather than succumbing to feelings of fear and defeat towards those who have found refuge in Germany. The more that people encounter one another with confidence, the less room there is for prejudice. True encounters become possible where people are able to actively participate in a conversation on an equal footing. Political participation in a society has a part to play in this, which is why access to German citizenship should remain open for people who permanently establish themselves in this country.
Democracy thrives upon debate. In particular, we need to discuss the fundamental questions as to how we intend to shape our life together within society.

Currently, however, immigration and integration policies are often not discussed in an objective fashion. Racism and unjust demands are highly polarising the political and social debate. This can be seen in Germany and in other nations.

Responsibility for the common good begins with our choice of words. Debating does not mean turning everything into a topic for debate. If the language used is aggressive, a respectful culture of debate dissipates and may run the risk of turning into extremist thinking and action. The distance between hatred and violence is then not very far.

Encounters with others and sharing ideas can break up hardened frontlines in discussion – and thus strengthen social cohesion for the benefit of all people living in Germany.
The Terms “migrant” and “refugee”

Differentiating between refugees and migrants is not clear-cut. There are legal categories and the life situation of those concerned is often very complex. Frequently, many factors contribute to a person finally fleeing their home. They include poverty, political unrest, imminent danger, threat or violence, war or the loss of livelihood, e.g. through environmental disaster or landgrabbing. The status of most refugees will change several times during the course of their lives. Refugees may become successful migrant workers whilst migrants may become refugees, as a result of an erupting civil war, for example.

Migration is Global Normality

Across the globe, more than 230 million people live as migrants outside of their home countries. This corresponds to approximately 3.2 percent of the world's population – a figure which has virtually remained stable for decades, even if absolute numbers are rising. Migration is a fact of global everyday life affecting seasonal workers, professionals, people who move on account of their families, and students who move abroad to study. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 90 percent of all migrants across the globe are either working or being provided for by a working family member.¹
How Many Have to Seek Refuge?

Globally, about 65 million people are currently refugees. This number has never been higher. 40.8 million of them remain within their own country whilst fleeing a particular situation – and are therefore internally displaced persons. 21.3 million people have had to leave their country. A further 3.2 million people are currently seeking asylum. Only those who have been recognised as refugees within the asylum procedure are entitled to receive protection, according to the Convention on the Status of Refugees (Geneva, 1951). Internally displaced persons are not able to benefit from this possibility. They are therefore particularly vulnerable in areas where there is conflict and difficult to reach with humanitarian aid. ²

Where Do People Go?

The destination is not the same for everyone. 82 million people (about 36 percent of all migrants across the globe) migrate within the global South. They move, for example, from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia, or from Nicaragua to Costa Rica. The second largest group of migrants (35 percent) are made up of those who relocate from the global South to the North, for instance from Morocco to Spain, or from the Philippines to South Korea. By far the largest group of refugees seek protection in states which immediately border on their own. Globally, nine out of ten refugees live in developing nations, a large proportion of them in Africa. These facts are often overlooked. ³

Deaths at External Borders

In the last 15 years, more than 30,000 people have lost their lives whilst making the dangerous crossing to Europe. At least 10,000 deaths were counted between 2014 and 2016 alone. ⁴ This makes the European external border the most deadly frontier in the world. But many people also die at national borders in other regions of the world, or are reported missing. ⁵
Germany is Diverse

About 17.1 million people in Germany have a migrant background. This means that 21 percent of the population have at least one parent who was not born a German citizen. And this is becoming increasingly normal. In 2015, more than a third of all children in Germany under the age of five had a migrant background.⁶

Violence against Refugees

In 2016, across Germany, there were more than 3,500 attacks on refugees and refugee accommodation. According to figures provided by the Germany government, 560 people were injured in these attacks, including 43 children. In 2015 and 2016, about 1,000 criminal offences were reported each year in which refugee accommodation was targeted. Compared with 2014, this figure had increased five-fold.⁷

World Champion in Arms Exports

Amidst the greatest global exporters of weapons and armaments, Germany is now in fifth place. In 2016, the German government approved export licences to the tune of EUR 6.88 billion – the second highest figure in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. Some of the recipients of German arms exports are: Algeria, Saudi-Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates. In 2016, more than half of these arms exports were dispatched to states either outside of NATO or the EU, to “third countries”.⁸
Aid – Chronically Underfinanced

Wars and disasters which last for years are increasingly necessitating the ever-frequent supply of international aid. However, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) are permanently underfunded. Nations often pledge more support than they finally contribute. The need for assistance in Syria alone, for example, was, in 2016, estimated to be USD 7.73 billion. However, only 57 percent has been paid out by the contributing states. Wherever food rations are cut, children cannot go to school, and wherever tents are not winterproof, people will even flee from refugee camps.

Germany is Ready to Help

Three out of four people in Germany could see themselves personally contributing to an aid programme for refugees. Regular studies conducted by the EKD’s Institute of Social Sciences indicate that every tenth person is already active as a volunteer giving support to refugees. In addition, representative surveys show that the experiences of those who are in personal contact with refugees are positive. Recent survey results can be found at www.ekd.de/flucht.

1 www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/themen/hintergrunde-zur-flucht/migration-alttag
2 www.uno-fluechtlingshilfe.de/fluechtlinge/zahlen-fakten.html
3 www.oecd.org/els/mig/GERMAN.pdf
4 data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53720
5 missingmigrants.iom.int/latest-global-figures
6 www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/MigrationIntegration.html#Tabellen
7 dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btd/18/112/1811298.pdf
9 fts.unocha.org/emergencies/600/summary/2017
10 www.si-ekd.de/projekte/28726.html
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