

Peace Church — United Methodist in Munich began as a one of a series of innovative ministries to people of different nationalities living abroad. The General Board of Global Ministries, the Germany Central Conference, and the German-language “Friedenskirche” collaborated in focussing originally on British and American Methodist families related to US and UK military forces in bases in Bavaria, who felt unduly constrained by military-base chaplaincies. An American pastor, the Rev. Cheryl Rhodes, whose husband had a military assignment, was the first pastor. The British Methodists also collaborated.

Helen and I arrived with two or our three children in 1992 from Austria. Most English-speaking military personnel had already been withdrawn. The Rev. Richard Acosta, a Mexican-American from the California-Pacific Annual Conference, and his German-born wife Magdalena were retiring as missionaries.

The German host congregation had not received members from the international mission congregation except as guests. The “englisch-sprechende Gemeinde der Friedenskirche” had no members at all when we arrived. Among the dozen families attending were U.S. Americans, Brits, a few West Africans, and Germans married to non-Germans. Tourists from all continents enriched weekly worship.

Naomi, a Ghanaian, sat in the last row with her new baby. As she got comfortable with us, she approached me with a proposition to baptize her child: I should also baptize the baby of her unmarried Ghanaian friend, Alice. Asking about Naomi’s own child’s father, I learned Ben was “once burned and twice shy” due to racism in another congregation. He proclaimed himself a proud Presbyterian, keeping his distance. (Later his sister, a Ghanaian Methodist lay preacher, visited and preached in our congregation.) We planned the baptisms. Ben pledged to support his wife in her commitment to the church for their child. In his role as president of the Ghanaian cultural association in Munich, he invited many compatriots to the baptism. (I later learned much from him — the truly wise elder in our young congregation.)

In the course of time, Ben Yebuah, who had studied in Germany and worked in technology with Tyco Electronics, became chair of the congregation’s Pastor-Parish Relations Committee. The two little girls, Rebecca Yebuah and Edith Borges, supported by mothers Alice Borges and Naomi, became core members of the work with children and young adults. Rebecca, 40 years later, has served as Lay Member from the congregation in the South Germany Annual Conference.

Anecdotally, a church kitchen is a point of potential conflict in every congregation. In ours, a mixture of mild German fragrances, lots of African spices, Kimchi, South African and Filipino debates about rice, and a sometimes volatile mixture of Ga, Akan and Tsee languages among the Ghanaian cooks, sprinkled with English or German, offered challenges!

We replaced a U.S.-style Thanksgiving with an African-style Harvest Festival, an innovation I had previously enabled in the Vienna international congregation. (The Vienna congregation had been organized from its inception as its own Charge Conference, independent of its Austrian housemate, a precedent we noted.) Not only English-speakers, but Germans as well, loved the African-style Harvest Festival with a typically African procession of worshippers dancing to the altar, white hankies waving, bringing their offerings, singing known choruses. The first year there were perhaps 75 guests joining us. When Helen and I left Munich, the congregation’s own official membership had grown to approximately 80. The Harvest Festival was attended by as many as 200 persons from many races, continents and languages.

A British official at the European Patent Office, Graham Murnane, a fan of Graham Kendrick’s praise music, put together a band. Ben Yebuah and others formed an African choir of up to 30 voices. There was never a lack of movement or music. The variety included a white Australian

Didgeridoo player and keyboard musician, Dean Wilmington, and his spouse, Dora Nováková, from a renowned family of Czech musicians.

Worship in the Methodist liturgical tradition was augmented by un-programmed “holes” — one at the beginning of the service where you might have expected a Psalter and one at the end after the prayers and the sermon. Occasionally Nancy Thym, a well-known student of European women’s folk-harp culture from California, would attend and bring a contribution in song with harp accompaniment — or a singer would intone an African melody known only to those from one region, which the rest of us would quickly learn.

Was it by divine direction that the German government had determined that all West African asylum seekers relate to a camp and processing center in Munich? A young Liberian Methodist with a broad smile came to church by himself one Sunday. He was warmly welcomed. On each successive Sunday he brought additional English-speaking Africans with him, mostly men who were escaping conscription by one paramilitary group or another at home. In the course of a few weeks around 50 such persons began to relate regularly to the congregation.

The German local-church structures had difficulty responding to the needs of the rapidly growing international congregation. We moved slowly, but intentionally, toward a separate Charge Conference. I offered details of the U.S. Methodist structure for our very ecumenical congregational leaders to accept or reject. Unable to agree among themselves as to the better alternative form, they acquiesced and we formed a “shadow” structure. District Superintendent Theo Leonhardt gave his full support for our becoming our own Charge Conference, despite significant opposition from within and beyond our host congregation.

Our German host-pastor, the Rev. Reiner Kanzleiter, and his spouse, the Rev. Christine Erb-Kanzleiter, both members of the South Germany Annual Conference, lived in the church building where we gathered. Christine was keenly interested in international ministry. The General Board of Global Ministries and Bishop Walter Klaiber reacted positively to the suggestion to appoint Christine as my associate. She had a special gift for responding to the young African women and their children. Her preaching allowed those feminist Biblical themes, which male pastors may overlook, to engage women and men in reflecting on the meaning of their discipleship and relationships in a foreign culture.

Christine succeeded me in 2003. Peace Church resettled to a new location as guest of the Lutheran “Philippuskirche.” Diagnosed with cancer in 2022, Christine died in August 2023. Leadership of the congregation has passed to the hands of Alexander von Wascinski, who also serves on the Commission for the General Conference in 2028, and Kat Wagner, Pastoral Assistant.

*James Dwyer, Pastor, assigned with spouse Helen as Global Missionaries from 1992-2003*

Read UM News story on Peace Church United Methodist in Munich, Germany, [Peace Church offers 'home for everybody'](#)