

A Home to All Who Come

“Welcome to this place, house of prayer for many nations, home to all who come...” is part of the call to worship Peace church folks in Munich use quite often during the year. It describes the reality of a multicultural, international congregation of the UMC based in the city centre of Munich, Germany.

Pisture the following scene:

On a sunny Sunday in October we follow Lizzy, a black Ghanaian who is leaving the underground station at Sendlinger Tor and is heading towards Frauenlobstrasse 5. Lizzy is on her way to church with her young twins Merle and Joris in a double buggy. She arrived in Munich from Africa five years ago for her marriage to Norbert.

Within three or four months she found her way to Peace Church, thanks to Ben and Naomi Yeboah. Lizzie enjoyed coming along from the beginning, but admits that it took a lot of getting used to. Listening to the unfamiliar accents of readers and preachers was quite demanding. But Lizzie was determined to persevere. “I knew I needed to join God’s people wherever they were. Church is about love and there is love among all here. I always miss it if I don’t go to church.”

Lizzie had particular cause to value the love offered by church people, because when she later became pregnant, she suffered a number of difficulties. “I had a lot of help and prayer. Christine and others visited me. The prayer helped so much and gave me lots of hope in God.”

Prayer for Lizzie and Norbert redoubled when, on 13th April 2002, their twins were born prematurely at just 26 weeks. Church people gave practical help and kept in touch during those difficult and dangerous early weeks. Nowadays, it’s hard to believe that Joris and Merle were once so fragile, as they run around, chatter and play like any other toddlers.

Lizzie simultaneously feeds both twins, laughs and sings with them, comforts and coaxes and still manages to gather her thoughts! She sums up her decision to join Peace Church like this : “A godly person needs the community of God’s people. The preaching and music in church affect the whole of me – fill me with love and the touch of God – even when I’m going through difficulties. Just recently I knew that I need to be a member.”

On the last Sunday in October Peace Church people celebrate their annual African style Harvest Festival. The church is already packed when Lizzy arrives. Crowds of beautiful dark people in the most colourful garments Europe has ever seen are mixing with their sisters and brothers from Britain, Australia, India, the United States, Taiwan, Italy, Malaysia and other countries. A fair number of Germans have been attracted by the special event, and it is already clear that this service won’t be done after an hour. Many different liturgical parts are to be expected. It is all-age worship: the children have prepared for the event. Prayers and songs, old hymns, African choruses and modern songs are put together; the sermon is short but special, child compatible... The African song leader is supported by the Australian organist today playing the drums. The scent of most delicious Ghanaian dishes is already filling the building long before the “Thanksgiving” with dancing and singing is over and followed by an auction of very diverse and colourful things people have brought along.

After the auction over 160 people are invited to stay for lunch and eat the tasty and spicy African Food. Christine who invites people and thanks especially the African women for all their efforts and preparations for this day, is a white German, dressed in a colourful Ghanaian dress which was given to her to honour for her wise leadership of such an amazing melting-pot of nations. Christine is a pastor of the UMC in Germany, assigned by the General Board of Global Ministries to work in the international, English-speaking church in Munich. She has travelled a lot, lived and studied abroad, is fluent in English, theologically progressive, liturgically open and fascinated by the gathering of people from almost half of the world in

her church on a Sunday morning. Here she sees the Christian, if not especially Methodist contribution to a world wide understanding among individuals and nations. Christine's job is a constant challenge. No two Sunday are alike. Church folks come and go. But the church is growing, and Christine sees herself not as the "boss" of this colourful bunch of people but as their "servant" – serving in God's name, following his call, supporting people, inspiring them and helping them to find a home in the foreign country.