

GERMANY celebrates Christmas in diversity

In Germany, we love to celebrate Christmas with our families on Christmas Eve. However, during the weeks before the great feast, we also invite ambassadors for peace (AfPs), friends and relatives to join us in our UPF or FFWPU community centers and feel the spirit of peace and love. Each community has its very special way of doing so. Here some highlights of this year's events:



UPF **Munich** held an intercultural Advent gathering with representatives of various religious traditions. A review of UPF events of the year was followed by participants expressing their thoughts on how to realize a peaceful world and reading out prayers for peace from different religions. Truly, the power of God was felt in the unison prayer concluding the event.

In **Bonn**, UPF hosted an audience of cultural diversity for its "Peace Advent" gathering under the motto "Licht-Blicke" (rays of hope). Young and old were actively involved in the program, reading stories and poems (including self compositions), singing songs in many different languages and expressing thoughts ranging like a rainbow from this year's super moon to words of light and true love.



In **Berlin**, UPF's pre-Christmas event took place on the day of Saint Nicholas, the famous 4th century Bishop of Myra. Since he was an example of love and service, the address centered on the question of how to learn and train the art of loving - a talent that is given to mankind by God and is developed essentially in the family. There were presents for the children, seasonal songs and lively conversations to round up this pleasant gathering.

The UPF chapter in **Hamburg** organized a festive intercultural Christmas Party with AfPs and families, featuring a Japanese choir and a lecture on the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Everyone agreed that wars in the name of religion contradict the founding spirit and purpose of religion. Lively discussions took place and German Christmas cookies and special Indian delicacies served by an Indian AfP couple were enjoyed by all.





UPF **Stuttgart**'s international Christmas event was framed by classical music with flute and guitar and an opera singer's performance of "Ave Maria". The reading of Selma Lagerlöf's Nordic Christian tale "Legend of the Christmas Rose" left the audience enchanted, while the following Indonesian light dance fascinated with its East Asian charm. Africa came into focus with the introduction of a school project in Central Africa, for which a good amount of money was raised.

In **Düsseldorf**, a joint invitation of UPF, FFWPU and WFWP attracted some 120 participants. They enjoyed piano and trumpet presentations by professional artists, German Christmas carols and English songs such as "Winter Wonderland" and "Who would Imagine a King" before cutting the birthday cake for Jesus. A Muslim AfP presented a reading from the Koran about Mary's and Jesus' birth while the Christmas sermon focused on the meaning of love in our lives. Finally, Santa came to show some excited kids substantial love in the form of presents. A raffle was organized to raise money for the Central African school project.



The community in **Gießen** used its Christmas Party for an end-of-the-year review and for honoring some brothers and sister for their 40-year-membership. A powerful band performed some 'oldies' like "Imagine" and supported the communal singing of Christmas carols. Finally, after a traditional Mexican Christmas story, a Posada, read in Spanish, children were rewarded with a piñata.

Members and guests of the Family Federation in **Frankfurt** gathered for a solemn Sunday Service with a sermon on the topic of 'what we owe to Jesus'. During the joyful Christmas celebration afterwards, Santa came to give gifts to the children, songs were presented and thoughtful and funny Christmas stories read. A quiz challenged everyone's knowledge with entertaining questions about Christmas traditions. After cutting Jesus' birthday cake, solemn unison singing of Christmas songs like "Silent Night, Holy Night" concluded the event.



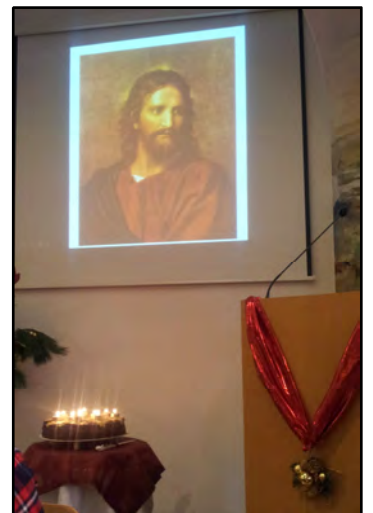
Hannover community had a Christmas Service with a message focusing on the importance of the family. While Santa himself came for the children, grown-ups enjoyed 'Secret Santa' presents given to each other.



Nuremberg community enjoyed its best Christmas celebration ever, with more guests than members attending. The room was packed to overflow! A variety of performances delighted the audience, such as folk dances from the USA, Ireland and Israel, gospel songs sung by an African Christian choir from Uganda, poems, songs, stories - and a surprise sketch presented by members of the 2nd generation about different ways to pray to God. The community leader's message was well suited to the mixed cultural audience of

Muslims, Buddhists and Christians; God wanted to send the Messiah to the whole world, and so the essence of the Christmas Gospel should surpass the external Christian expression of the event.

In all the gatherings, delicious food was served and a special atmosphere created with tasteful decorations, candle light, and sometimes even a shining Christmas tree. This, along with the presentations and performances, helped people draw closer to each other, open their hearts and forget about cultural, ethnic or religious differences. Thus, the love of our Heavenly Parent and our True Parents could be felt – and we hope that they enjoyed this time with us, too, as a tiny, but hopeful embodiment of the peaceful world to come!



Report by Hildegard Piepenburg, Frankfurt