



# Prayer for Berlin

April, 2009

## Good News - Berlin aims to become friendlier

Berliners have a lot of good characteristics—a spirit of survival, a love of freedom, tolerance. But they are not usually known for their friendliness. A current image campaign is aiming to change this. People in public service, but also just “normal” people, are being encouraged to be more attentive and friendly and more courteous to one another.

We, the editorial team, hope this campaign will be successful and encourage our readers to participate. Ask yourself the question: What would those around me need to see in me to discover that the campaign has been effective and that I have become friendlier?

That should not be hard for us Christians, since we are the recipients of God’s friendliness towards us.

## “Hartz-IV-Metropolis”

This is not a nice title, but unfortunately, it’s true—the capital city continues to be a poor city in spite of the economical successes of the past four years. The unemployment rate of 14.4% in February reflects this fact. Only in Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-West-Pomerania the rate is higher. Therefore, it’s not surprising that the proportion of Hartz-IV\* recipients in Berlin (21.3% in October, 2008) is twice as high as the national average (10.2%).

People who are unemployed who are capable of working, but unable to make a living, as well as those who are employed but not earning enough to live on, (so-called (“increasers”)), receive Hartz-IV unemployment benefits.

The ones who suffer the most are often the children. The social distinctions between various districts are massive and are even getting more pronounced. In Berlin’s districts Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Freidrichshain-Kreuzberg, Neukölln and Mitte nearly half (!) of the children belong to Hartz-IV families.

The problem of unemployment is worse among single-parent families—47% of single-parents in Berlin rely on Hartz-IV. This is heightened by the fact that traditional family structures are losing their standing—in the meantime, there are just as many singles as married people over 18.

These numbers should wake us up. They make resolute political action and healthy family as examples even

more necessary. And they drive us to prayer! (Data and facts: Der Tagesspiegel March 18, 2009)

*\*(The Hartz concept is the name given to the recommendations resulting from a commission on reforms to the German labour market and social benefits in 2002)*

### Prayer:

- **Pray for the children and their limited opportunities for education and encouragement**
- **Pray for prospects and specific help for the parents, especially for single parents**
- **Pray for effective political measures for those impacted by unemployment, more than ever because of the financial crisis**
- **Pray for encouraging models of social assistance for children and families through Christian social initiatives (like Die Arche or Jonas Haus)**
- **Pray for protection from discharging tensions resulting from milieus and districts which are drifting apart socially**

## Pray for a peaceful May 1st

In April intense preparation will begin for May 1st. Various political groups are also preparing for this day. Not all of them have peaceful intentions.

The police must prepare for several large-scale operations. This year, increased hostilities are expected between right-wing and left-wing groups, because right-wing NPD adherents will be demonstrating during the morning of May 1st near their federal headquarters in Berlin-Köpenick. The police are expecting up to 1000 participants.

Protest initiatives against this right-wing demonstration are being prepared by anti-Fascist groups. At the last big demonstration of right-wing adherents on May 1, 2004, there were large-scale riots between violent-prone right-wing and left-wing extremists.

Once again in Kreuzberg, there will be a left-wing demonstration that begins at 6pm at the U-Bahnhof Kottbusser Tor. Over the past years, this demonstration has often spawned riots. In various blogs, the expectation is being stirred up that this-year’s May 1st will not be as peaceful as it was in the past two years. The prospect of fighting against right-wing extremism in the morning and capitalism in the evening seems to quicken aggressive fantasies.

For the first time, the sale of drinks in bottles at the Myfest, which once again is being held in the area of the former “SO 36”, is prohibited, because bottles have continually been used as projectiles during violent protests.

Christians will once again be praying for a peaceful May 1st on the streets and will be taking part in an Open-Air Worship Service.

### Prayer:

- **Pray that God’s peace will reign over violent people on April 30 and May 1st**

- **Pray for wisdom for the police in tactical planning for dealing with registered and spontaneous demonstrations**
- **Pray for creative, peaceful measures on the part of anti-demonstrators against the NPD, which will effectively avert the NPD activities**

## Berlin Penal System

In Berlin there are eight prisons, one juvenile detention centre, and one prison hospital. There are over 5000 inmates, all of whom were sentenced “in the name of the people”. But what do the “people” even notice about their fate?

People most normally become aware of the penal system only when something sensational happens like a break-out or a relapse on the part of a former convict. Daily life for inmates is characterized by ostracism and powerlessness. Relatives are punished as well—parents, women, and above all children suffer and have a rough start in their lives as a result.

Employees in the penal system work under rough conditions in a destructive atmosphere and are pressured from all directions.

Staff reductions over the last years have led to deep cuts. A newly-designed framework has been adapted to this difficulty reality. The situation is becoming more and more dramatic.

It is important that what’s going on behind prison walls be brought into the consciousness of the public and that bridges be built “inside and outside”.

### Prayer:

- **Pray that inmates and their relatives will find help and will be able to have a new future**
- **Pray that new ways of re-socialization inside and outside the prisons can be found**
- **Pray for encouragement and a better public image for all those who work in the prison system**
- **Pray that Christians will increasingly become aware of Jesus’ commission to visit those in prison**

## Election of new bishops in Berlin

Bishop Dr. Wolfgang Huber, who is known far beyond Berlin, will be retiring as bishop this year, and later also as Chairman of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD).

In May, the synod of the Protestant Church Berlin-Brandenburg-Schlesische Oberlausitz (EKBO) will elect a successor for their region.

Candidates are: Dr. Markus Dröge, Superintendent in Koblenz; Dr. Johanna Haberer, Professor for Church Journalism, Erlangen, and Dr. Rüdiger Sachau, Director of the Protestant Academy Berlin.

The public introduction of these candidates took place in worship services in March. The state synod will elect a successor during its meetings on May 15-16 in Berlin. The new bishop will take office on November 14, 2009. The bishop represents the Protestant State Church in the ecumenical movement and in public relations.

He or she is also the chairman of the church leadership and gives significant impulses for the future of the church through his/her input in sermons or speeches.

### Prayer:

- **Thank God for Bishop Huber’s positive presence in the public eye and for his emphasis on evangelism**
- **Pray that God’s Spirit will lead the synod in their choice of a successor**
- **Pray that the new bishop will be able to move and persuade people and that he/she will be pleasing to God**

## Keeping On

Arson attacks on cars and also attacks on BVG Bus drivers are still taking place.

The Boxhagener Platz, which for years has been attracting punks and left-wing extremists on April 30-May 1st, is being troubled by left-wing extremist activities.

- **Let us continue to pray for an end to violence!**

## Dates

**Seminar: Prayer (not just) on May 1st**, April 25, 5-6pm EFG Bergmannstr.22, Kreuzberg. Workshops with teaching and practical exercises: Praying on the streets / Blessing and prayer for healing / Prophetic prayer.

Registration by email: [nehlsen@gfberlin.de](mailto:nehlsen@gfberlin.de)

*Come and join us:*

**Open-Air-Worship Service for Peace on May 1st**, in Kreuzberg, probably 11:30 am, place has not yet been decided.

We will keep you informed.