



Will you help us

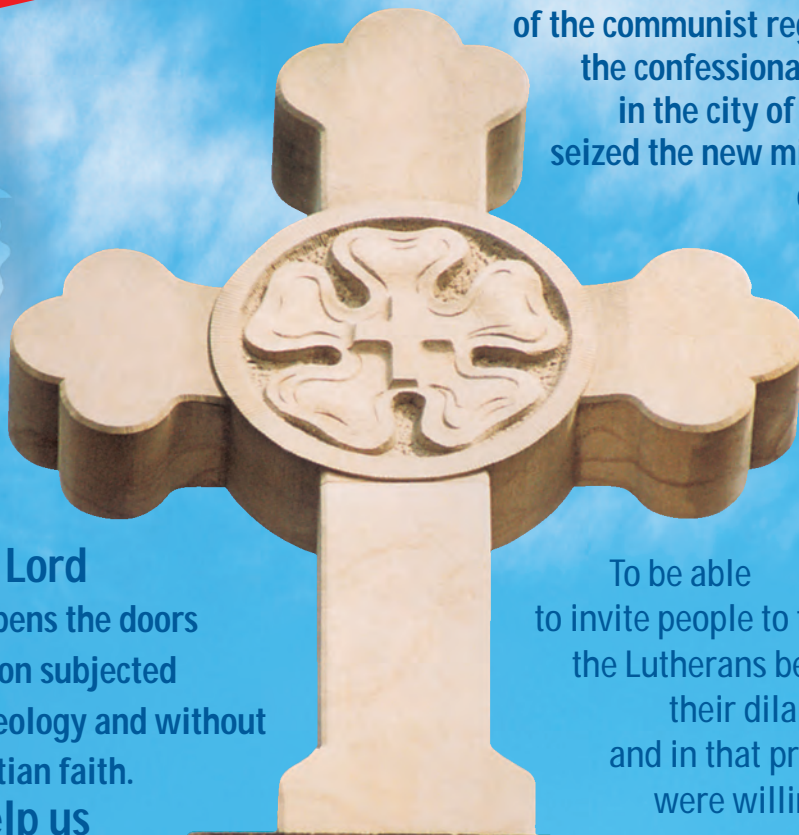
spread the Gospel in the formerly communist city of Cottbus?

Will you join us

in rebuilding the former centre of Lutheranism
in the Niederlausitz region?

East Germany is free at last!

After the fall
of the communist regime
the confessional Lutherans
in the city of Cottbus
seized the new missionary
opportunity.



The Lord

opens the doors
to a generation subjected
to communist ideology and without
the Christian faith.

Will you help us

get rid of our financial burden
so we can continue to take up
the missionary opportunities
God has opened up?

To be able
to invite people to faith in Jesus Christ,
the Lutherans began to repair
their dilapidated churches –
and in that process
were willing to incur large debts.

We urgently request
your support and assistance
to reduce our debts.

Cottbus, the centre of independent Lutherans in the Niederlausitz region of East Germany

History

At the beginning of the 19th century the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III. ordered the union of Lutherans and Calvinists into one Protestant Church. This happened in 1830 on the anniversary of the Reformation.

Lutherans wanted to be independent of state interference

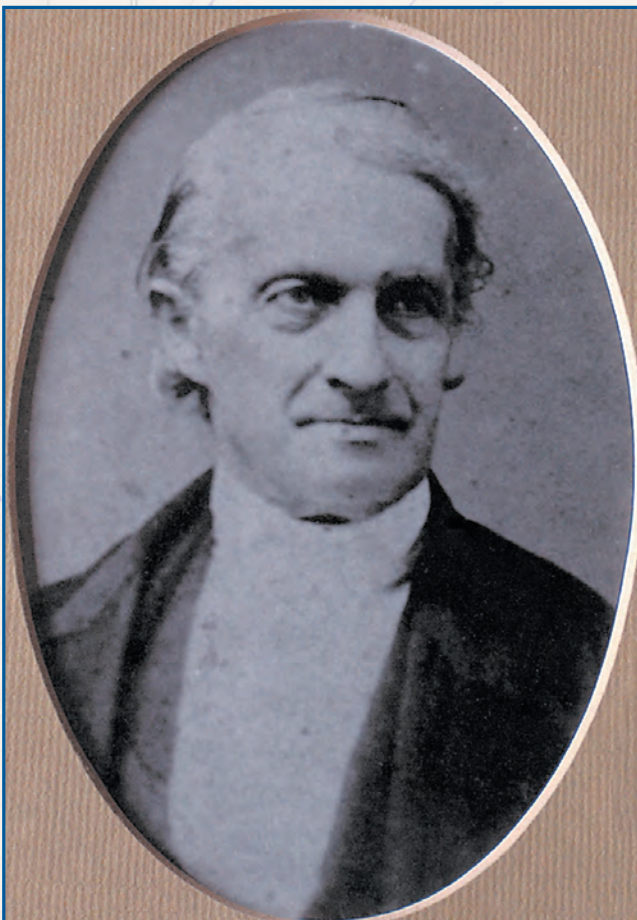
Many Lutherans refused to participate in the state enforced union. In Cottbus and surroundings groups of Lutherans resisted, insisting to live according to their Lutheran conviction. They met for worship in private living rooms and tried to found congregations independent of the state church.

But this was considered illegal. Pastors were imprisoned; parishioners were oppressed and discriminated against. Quite a few Lutherans then decided to emigrate to the USA or to Australia.

Things finally began to change in 1840 when the more tolerant Friedrich Wilhelm IV. ascended the throne.

Those Lutherans who did not join the Protestant Union were allowed to found their own free church, the so-called „Old Lutheran Church“.

A later American citizen made



Pastor Jan Kilian

The first congregation was founded in Weigersdorf, a small village in the Oberlausitz region. In 1848 Jan Kilian became the first pastor of this independent parish.

From Weigersdorf his pastoral ministry extended also to the independent Lutherans in the Cottbus area.

Together with many members of his congregation Kilian emigrated to the USA in 1854. He founded „Serbin“ Lutheran Church, the mother congregation of the LCMS in Texas.

The Cottbus congregation continued to grow. Yet there was no pastor and no church building; they were simple working people with little income.

At the beginning the Protestant Church permitted use of the cemetery chapel as a venue for Lutheran services. Then relations with the Union Church deteriorated, because the „Old Lutherans“ were considered to be something of a thorn in the flesh. The Union church leaders no longer allowed Lutheran worship services in the cemetery chapel. The parishioners were told this after the service on Saturday before the 3rd Sunday after Trinity.

Rud Wagner



1

de the first move

At the same time the former pub in Döbbrick, a small village about three miles from Cottbus city centre, was up for auction. The pub owners had operated a counterfeit circle in the building.

Without hesitation three elders of the Old Lutheran congregation decided privately to purchase this former dance hall.

The dance hall becomes a church

Late at night the contract was signed, and each of the elders put up all the cash they were able to gather.

And a good thing – because a little later someone showed up who wanted to continue operating the building as a dance hall. Too late.

The leaders of the congregation considered their acquisition of the building an act of divine providence.

During the following six weeks they turned the dance hall into a church and changed the house into a parsonage. In 1858 the first Lutheran pastor was sent to Döbbrick to take care of the congregation.

It took the group in Cottbus city twenty more years to build a church of their own in the town centre. They considered themselves too poor for such a church construction project. They desperately needed help – and got it.

Help from our brothers and sisters in the LCMS

Already then, 125 years ago, brothers and sisters from the LCMS provided funds to build the „Kreuzkirche“ (the Lutheran Church of the Holy Cross) in Cottbus, Germany.

And what a blessing that turned out to be – a Lutheran congregation began to grow. Thanks to God, this congregation was blessed and protected through the time of Nazi dictatorship, the communist regime right to this very day. Church building and parsonage were erected in 1879. The pastor, who had to serve Lutherans in the whole Niederlausitz region, was then stationed in the city of Cottbus. At various times up to eight congregations were in his charge.



2

1. Holy Cross Church in Cottbus city in 1920

2. The former dance hall – now Lutheran Church in Döbbrick

The situation after Wo

World War II having ended, Russian troops entered Cottbus. Holy Cross Church was hit by a bomb and heavily damaged. No worship services were possible in the building. So the members of the Cottbus congregation attended services in the village of Döbbrick.

It took more than five years to restore the Cottbus church. It was 1951 before the church in the town centre could be used again.

One of the problems: building materials were not available.

Another problem: the communist authorities hindered the Christian congregations wherever they could. Their aim was to suppress the Christian faith. They continually denied building permits for restoring churches.

After World War II: Churches in disrepair and Congregations depressed

Leaks in the roof of the Cottbus church could not be repaired. So rain dripped through the roof and damaged the vaulting. The brick gaps became leaky and humidity seeped into the walls. Due to the dampness the plaster began peeling off the walls. A smell of devastation and rott permeated the building. The church began to look dirty and repulsive.

1. Holy Cross Church after hit by a bomb in 1945
2. A smell of devastation and rott in the church

A similar problem prevailed in Döbbrick: Church and parsonage were in a ruinous state. Here, too, dampness damaged the building. There was little joy celebrating the worship services amidst such dilapidation. At the end of the 80ies it was impossible even to live in the parsonage.

Such ruined buildings began to influence the people and their attitude to the church. There was a real sense of depression concerning the future of the church and its congregations. A diminishing number of people came to attend worship. At times there was but a handful of people who listened to God's word in the village of Döbbrick. In fact, church life had all but ceased there.



New hope arose after the fall of the Wall

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 new hope arose. Now no more hindrance to or interference with the work of the congregations and churches. Finally it was possible to restore the many dilapidated buildings. Amidst new found freedom many church members were willing to begin restoring church and congregation.

Of course, there were also those members, especially in the village of Döbbrick, who were convinced: „What good will that do? The congregation is dead; we don't have any money; and there is no chance for revival. Nobody will come!“

Fortunately things turned out quite different: Cottbus and Döbbrick congregations joined forces and stood together in expanding their missionary activities.

Trusting in God they asked for the Lord's mandate. Five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall they reflected on the way the congregations were to actively engage in Gospel proclamation.

The congregations resolve: Mission work!



The congregations decided to start a church-planting project in Döbbrick.

World War II

„What would God have us do?“, so they asked themselves.

The fact was: only 18 % of the Cottbus inhabitants consider themselves Christians – implying that 82 % of the population had nothing to do with the Christian faith. 40 years of communism had brought forth a generation that had never heard the name of Jesus Christ.

The congregation's answer: Mission work!

"We are called to bring the Gospel to those who have forgotten God!"



1. St. Peter's Church in Döbbrick after being restored
2. Holy Cross Church in Cottbus city in 2004



What's first?

„We have to restore our churches, because nobody likes to come into a church that is in ruins and smells of devastation.“

Even though the congregation had no funds it was decided to restore the buildings, hoping that the Lord would provide the ways and means for the necessary work at hand. Between 1999 and 2002 Holy Cross in Cottbus and St. Peter's in Döbbrick and their parsonages were fully renovated.

The first step: Restoring Churches



Many members of the congregations spent countless hours on the building site. Even people from outside the church supported our project.

And several times groups from the LCMS came over to help. „Lutheran Hour Ministries“ sent them over for two weeks at a time to help in our church planting efforts.

A group of students from the Ann Arbor College stayed with us for a number of days to work on our building site.

We carried out different summer camps, named „servant events“ by the Youth Ministry of the LCMS. They brought together young people from Germany, Poland and the USA. The young people worked partly at the building sites and partly at a children's camp.



Unchurched people helped restoring the church

There was something in Döbbrick that was rather unusual: People from the village joined the congregation in restoring the church, due to the engagement of our local Lutheran missionary, Pastor Holger Thomas. He had been sent to Döbbrick at the beginning of 2001. Together with Pastor Hinrich Müller he is in charge of the mission work in the area.

By the way: Some of the people that were busy at the building site have by now become Christians and are members of our congregation.

Things are continuing well: work with children, evangelistic events, family services, Bible studies, Sunday school - all this is attracting more and more people to our congregations.



1. Inhabitants of Döbbrick together with Pastor Thomas

2. Servant event 2002

3. The group 2001 of Lutheran Hour Ministries

4. The group 2004 of Lutheran Hour Ministries

Our outreach programs are continuing

At the moment, we are in the midst of preparing a special program for young people. Normally 80% attend „Jugendweihe“ („youth dedication ceremony“, a rather ideological anti-Christian inaugural event), compared to only 20% that attend the confirmation ceremony offered by the churches.

God has continued to open doors!

To begin with there were about 5–10 visitors at worship; now we often count 40, sometimes up to 80 visitors.

Döbbrick congregation grew from 30 members in 2001 to about 50 members today. In our normal worship service there are at times more guests than members.

There are so many doors the Lord has opened for us. People are searching for a meaningful life. We want to help them find answers. We want to proclaim to them the Gospel.

We need your help so we can take up the missionary opportunities the Lord offers

Our problem: We do have the necessary manpower to do outreach work, but we don't have the necessary funds.

Our people are willing and ready to engage in the work. But we are lacking the needed finances.

During communist times, it was most difficult to earn enough money and generously offer it for the work of the Lord. Even now the rate of unemployment in East Germany is extremely high and certainly limits the offerings of our members.

To retire the debts we incurred to renovate our churches is extremely challenging to our small congregations. We are looking for help from fellow Lutherans so such debts might not depress us and paralyse our missionary efforts.

- Help us to bring the Gospel to the people.
- Help us to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ to a generation which was bereft of the chance to hear the Gospel due to an atheistic regime.
- Help us to pay off our debts so we can do continue the real important work of the Church.

1. Helpers from the LCMS in 2002

2. Helping makes friendship

3. St. Peter's Church in Döbbrick in 2003

4. Childrens Camp summer 2004



Dear friends and fellow Lutherans in the LCMS: Help us change our difficulty into an opportunity!

„But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.“
(Ps.73:28)

We have taken first steps to invite people into our midst. But we do not have the necessary financial strength to continue funding our important missionary tasks.

We ask your kind assistance so that Cottbus will again be a centre of confessional Lutheranism in the heart of the Niederlausitz region.

Your generous donation will help us to retire the debts we incurred when we needed to restore our churches. Then we can direct all our efforts to much needed missionary activities in our area.

Each donation, small or large, takes a „brick of worry“ off our shoulders.
Donors of \$ 1000.00 or more will be commemorated on a special wall in our mission church in Döbbrick.

Donations for the reconstruction of the Kreuzkirche (Holy Cross) in Cottbus and the Petruskirche (St. Peter's) in Döbbrick, Germany should be made out and be sent to:

St. Luke Lutheran Church (LCMS)
The Rev. Robert J. Flohrs, Pastor
807 North Stapley Drive
Mesa, Az 85203

Please note on your check „Cottbus“

May our gracious Lord bless both the contributors and their gifts!

Joined in our common Lutheran heritage we extend to you our cordial greetings on behalf ourselves and the members of Kreuzkirche Cottbus and of Petruskirche Döbbrick, congregations of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, the sister church of the LCMS in Germany.



The Rev. Hinrich Müller, Pastor
Cottbus, Germany
May 2005.

Congregations interested in our projects may contact us at this e-mail address: cottbus@selk.de or visit our website at: www.selk-cottbus.de

A trip to U.S. is planned for September/October 2005 and – if needed – in spring 2006.
Congregations interested in hosting us may contact us at the above.



The Rev. Hinrich Müller, Pastor

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