



Chapel of Reconciliation

Protestant Reconciliation Congregation



As soon as you come inside, you can sense the special atmosphere of this round building made of rammed earth. The starkness of the building material, the plain architectural design and the sparse fittings convey what the chapel would like to be, first and foremost: a spiritual place. From outside, it does not look like that; you have to discover it. Many visitors notice this is a church only after coming into the oval interior. They feel the stillness and see the modern cross on the free-standing clay altar with the open bible.

Every Sunday morning, the members of the Protestant congregation of the Chapel of Reconciliation gather here for worship. Often, guests are present as well. In a room-like structure which combines breadth and openness with the familiar closeness of the people, old and new hymns are sung. Here, the eucharist is celebrated, children are baptised and marriages blessed. Sometimes there is a coffin in the centre. Mourners say their farewells.

The prayers of the congregation reach out to the world of today: everyday life in this neighbourhood as well as concerns about new walls in many countries of this earth. Here, at the site of the former border strip, we commemorate the victims who died. At 12 noon, from Tuesday to Friday, each biographical devotion recalls the fate of one of the 138 persons who lost their lives along the Berlin Wall. Ever Saturday, the week-day devotions end with noon prayers during which the Litany of Reconciliation from Coventry is also used. This chapel on the grounds of the Berlin Wall Memorial has been a member of the world-wide Community of the Cross of Nails since 1999, a community of congregations committed to working for peace and reconciliation among the nations. At regular intervals, the Saturday devotions include the commemoration of the individual fate of refugees who have died along the present-day outer border of the European Union.

Especially on the anniversary of the building of the Wall, August 13th, and on the day the Wall fell, November 9th, the chapel provides the framework for social recollection. The commemorative celebrations are attended by representatives of the Berlin Senate and House of Representatives, members of the Federal Government and delegates from the embassies. A special invitation is extended to relatives of the victims, members of institutions working on recent history, local authorities, and representatives of various churches and confessions.

The tragedy of the frontier and the pain of division are woven into the form of the chapel as well as the joy about the peaceful revolution and the good fortune of reunification. Remnants of the ruins of the neo-Gothic Church of Reconciliation which was blown up have been mixed into the rammed earth. At many points in this modest, unheated house of worship, traces can be seen of the building which preceded it: splinters of wood or glass, pieces of burnt shaped stone or ceramic tiles.

The former church on the death strip, inaccessible for people in both the East and West from 1961, was blown up on the order of the GDR government in 1985 following seven years of negotiations. Today's Chapel of Reconciliation does not only bear the name of the church built in 1894 which preceded it. It also contains rubble from its walls; they constitute a "sedimentary memory". The altar reredos (display panel behind the altar), preserved with its severely damaged representation of the Last Supper, hangs at exactly the same place as in the old church. The former sandstone altar slab was inserted visibly into the earthen floor as a sign of remembrance and the foundation for the new altar.

Services: Sunday
10.00 a.m.

Devotions
for victims:
Tuesday to
Friday 12 noon

Midday prayers:
Saturday 12 noon

Anniversaries:
August 13th,
November 9th

History of
the Chapel



The outer covered walk invites you to linger for a while. Some people enjoy watching the pattern of the shadows cast by the wooden strips on the sun-lit clay wall, a magical effect of light. From here on both sides you can see the rye field, a symbol of life. In 2005, along the border of the Cold War, the death field became a cornfield again. Here the Lord's Prayer from the bible has a special ring. It includes the words, "Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our sins." The "Friedensbrot" (bread of peace) Association has spread the reconciling symbol of the field to twelve Eastern European countries which formerly lay along the Iron Curtain border. Twelve more rye fields have been planted with seed from the Bernauer Strasse, from the Baltic countries to Bulgaria, in each case at places commemorating painful history.

We should be happy if you find a moment to meditate in the chapel. If you would like to learn more about the history and the present life of our congregation, you are welcome to speak to one of our volunteer caretakers. And you would be welcome at any of our events, readings, exhibitions or concerts.

The Parish Council

Further information:

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Historical documentation, exhibition, viewing platform, snack bar and toilets:

Documentation Centre Berliner Mauer · Bernauer Strasse 111 · 13355 Berlin.

The church building

Planning started: June 1996; construction started: May 1999. Dedicated on the anniversary of the fall of the Wall: 9.11.2000. Architects: Rudolf Reitermann/Peter Sassenroth. Rammed Earth Builder: Martin Rauch, Lehm Ton Erde Baukunst, Schlins, Austria. Construction costs: 1.9 million D-Marks; Building materials: 390 tonnes rammed earth, brick rubble, flax fibre, wood. Ceiling height 7 m; wall thickness 60 cm; building surface: cross-section of 10 or 14 m in the area of the former choir; the outline of the old church has been traced outside. Rammed earth building erected: August–October 1999 with the assistance of young helpers from the organisation "Open Houses" (Weimar). Number of visitors since dedication: two million (as per 2016).

Furnishings and fittings: Processional crucifix (2002) by Armenian artist Chavarch Khatchatrian, Berlin. Organ: Berlin organ builder Walcker 1965 with pedal and two manuals; a small new instrument suited to the building is now to be built with donations. This "reconciliation organ" will be made of materials from the countries of the four Allies. Old altar slab, reddish sandstone (1894), altar of rammed earth (1999); altar reredos of carved oak (1894); baptismal font and candle bowl (2011); Coventry cross of nails (1999).

Exterior: Three historical bells, Bochum Bell Foundry Association (1894). Sculpture "Reconciliation" by Josefina da Vasconcellos (1999, Great Britain). Tower cross in rye field (1894, cast iron, deformed by fall after demolition explosion 1985). Capitals and tower medallion (sandstone 1894).

Links:

www.versoehnungskapelle.de

www.nagelkreuz.org

www.friedensbrot.eu

www.denkwerk-berlin.de/kunstprojekte_roggenfeld.html

www.stiftung-berliner-mauer.de

Rye field and
peace bread

Information

Dates and facts

