



Union of Evangelical Free Churches (Baptists) in Germany

www.baptisten.de | headquarters



*“For the glory
of God and the
good of man”*

Johann Gerhard Oncken

Who We Are

The Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany (Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden in Deutschland – BEFG) is a free church. It is a corporation under public law. In 1941 Baptist and Brethren congregations in Germany merged to form the BEFG. The division of Germany after World War II also divided the BEFG. After the reunification the Unions of East and West Germany were also able to reunite. The headquarters of the BEFG is in Elstal near Berlin.

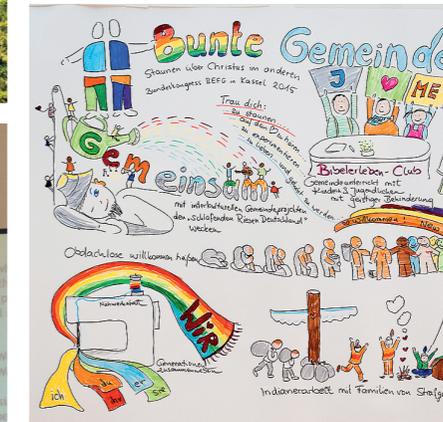
The BEFG sees itself as part of the worldwide Christian Church. Through the Union congregations support each other and carry out projects they would not be able to implement on their own. The **National Headquarters** and the **Departments** in Elstal are partners for the local congregations. They offer a variety of material and programmes to support the local churches in shaping Christian life and community and sharing God's love.

The BEFG consists of 12 **Regional Associations**. Leadership on a national level is provided by the elected voluntary **Steering Committee** and the salaried **Execu-**



tive Board. The **National Council** is the church's parliament of all congregations and organisations within the Union, and the highest decision-making body of the BEFG. On a local level each congregation makes its own independent decisions.

The heart of church life is worship service. It does not follow one specific liturgy. The Bible as the Word of God and its interpretation in the sermon is central to this worship. Church life is also characterized by a strong community and active participation of members in all areas of church life.



Where We Come From

The first Baptist church with members baptized as believers was founded in 1609 in Amsterdam. From there Baptists spread mainly to England and America. In 1834 **Johann Gerhard Oncken** was baptized in the river Elbe in Hamburg and founded the first German Baptist church there. It was the root for Baptist churches in the whole of Germany and mainland Europe.



Baptism in the Rummelsburger Lake – lithograph by G. W. Lehmann



Johann Gerhard Oncken

The Brethren movement began around 1830 in England. The most important Brethren gathering in Germany was founded 1853 in Elberfeld. The Brethren's aim was to practise the unity of the Christian Church outside of all the organized religious institutions. This was mostly done in the Lord's Supper. In the late 19th century the Open Brethren were formed. As opposed to the Exclusive Brethren they practise an open Lord's Supper, which means that Christians of other denominations can take part. The Association of Brethren congregations (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Brüdergemeinden) within the BEFG follows this tradition.

What We Believe

Baptist and Brethren churches are **Protestant**: With the churches of the Reformation they proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour of the world who justifies human beings before God solely by grace and through their faith. The **Bible** is the standard for teaching and life of the believers.

The BEFG is a community of Christians baptized as believers. The congregations baptize those who based on their personal faith ask for **baptism** and church membership. The name Baptists comes from the Greek word for "immerse", which characterizes their practice of baptism.

From the New Testament Baptist and Brethren congregations draw the conclusion that faith should be lived in freedom. They defend **religious freedom** for everybody

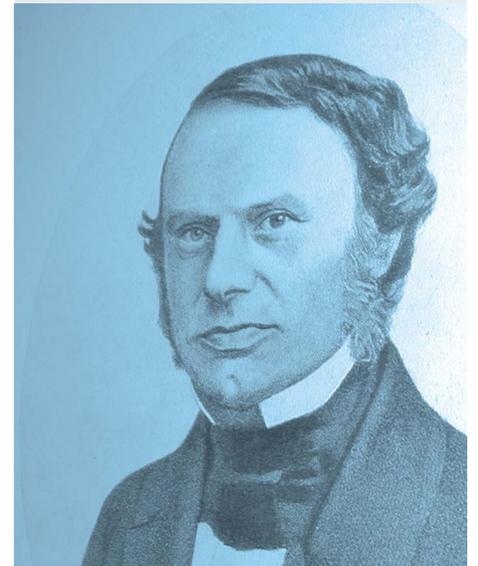
and promote a strict **separation of state and church**. The BEFG and its congregations are funded only by voluntary donations and do not receive church tax.

Johann Gerhard Oncken pointed out: "Every Baptist a missionary!" Baptist and Brethren congregations practise the Protestant principle of the "**priesthood of all believers**". The God of the Bible speaks directly to all believers. The interpretation of biblical texts and the proclamation of faith are a mandate for all Christians. Not only pastors preach, baptize or administer the Lord's Supper.

Julius Köbner

*But we proclaim
... religious freedom
... in fully equal
measure for
everyone, be they
Christians, Jews,
Mohammedans
or whatever.*

Julius Köbner, hymn writer, one of the founding fathers of the German Baptist movement, 1848



We Go Out

The **mission** of the BEFG is the mission of all Christians: to share the Good News of God's love with all people and serve our neighbours. Evangelism and community work go hand in hand in the BEFG.

Baptist and Brethren congregations witness to their faith in the merciful God by word and deed. In manifold ways they preach the kingdom of God and invite people to believe. In nurseries, programmes for refugees or the homeless, with indoor playgrounds, homework tutoring, counselling in difficult situations and much more, local churches in the BEFG live their mission to serve and practise charity. Transregional networks support those with Multiple Sclerosis or victims of human trafficking. There are several independent charitable organisations running hospitals, retirement homes, hospices and counselling centres within the Union. The BEFG is a member of the Protestant Agency for Community Work and Development (Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung), an affiliation of Diakonie Germany and Bread for the World – Evangelical Development Service (Brot für die Welt – Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst) and of the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (Evangelisches Missionswerk).



The **Missions Department** uses creative concepts to help congregations within the BEFG to discover their own evangelistic profile, to be open to all people and to be a church for the community. This department supports church planting, intercultural programmes and integration. It also coordinates and supports social activities in the local churches. Outside of Germany it coordinates social and missionary projects, humanitarian aid, disaster relief and community-oriented church development.

We Train

In the BEFG volunteers and employed staff build church life together. In order for them to have a theological and practical foundation for their varied tasks, the Union provides training and further education for both groups.



Elstal Theological Seminary is the fully state-accredited seminary of the Union for training pastors and deacons. It offers a bachelor's and a master's degree programme in Evangelical Theology and a master's degree programme in Free-Church Social Work.

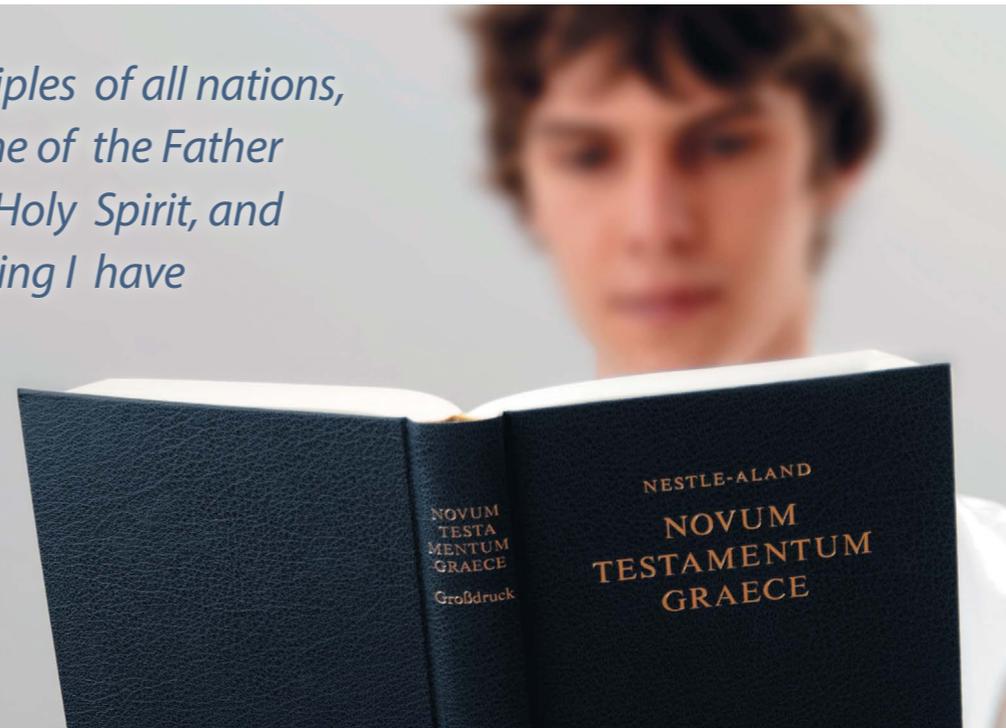


Elstal Academy

develops and coordinates training programmes for staff and volunteers in congregations. In Elstal and elsewhere it offers seminars and trainings on worship service and church practice, leadership and church development, theology and society, mission and integration, pastoral care and psychology as well as family and generations. The Academy is a forum for discourse, interaction and networking.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19-20 (New International Version)



We Are There



The Union's **Family and Generations**

Area supports the interaction of generations in the BEFG. It coordinates programmes for families, women and the elderly and looks into the many facets of aging.

... for all generations

In the BEFG congregations people of all age groups meet. The Union supports local churches in being available for each generation and, at the same time, providing fellowship across the generations.

... for volunteers and congregations

The BEFG helps congregations and their pastors, deacons and other theological staff to grow in their work. As church life is always subject to change, advice from outside the congregation can be helpful.



Programmes for children, youth and young adults are coordinated by the **Children and Youth**

Department (GJW). It encourages the young to actively participate in church and to encounter God. The GJW trains volunteers in the congregations, runs holiday camps, publishes study material and with its "Safe Church" campaign is dedicated to the protection of children and youth. This work is done by the national headquarters of the GJW in Elstal together with the 12 GJWs of the regional associations.



The programmes of the **Department for Ministers and Congregations** are aimed specifically at the more than

900 ordained ministers and candidates for ordination as well as at the local churches within the BEFG. The **Area Ordained Ministers** takes care of all questions concerning the relationship of Union and paid staff, e.g. the placement in congregations. The **Network "Congregational Consulting"** supports the local churches in development processes and conflict.



We Are Connected



We Inform You

Internationally

The Baptist movement is one of the world's largest Protestant denominations. Baptist churches are found on all continents and in great variety of expression. Their common biblical motto is: „One Lord, one faith, one baptism“ (Ephesians 4:5).

The BEFG is a member of the **European Baptist Federation (EBF)** and the **Baptist World Alliance (BWA)**. Internationally connected as they are, Baptists bear witness to their common faith. They promote religious freedom and human rights, e.g. with the United Nations through the BWA.

More than 200 international congregations and groups in Germany are part of or associated with the Union. The **International Mission in Germany (IMD)** in the Missions Department supports them as a network and encourages interaction between German and international congregations.

Together with another 28 Baptist Unions the BEFG supports the work of the **European Baptist Mission (EBM INTERNATIONAL)**. Its objective: to stand by peo-



ple all over the world in their spiritual and material needs through social, missionary and evangelistic projects.

Ecumenically

As the largest free church in Germany the BEFG maintains strong ecumenical connections. It is a member of the **Association of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany (VEF)**, the **Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK)** and the **Conference of European Churches (CEC)**. Many BEFG members are active in the **German Evangelical Alliance**.

Current and detailed information in German language about the BEFG and its activities can be found here:

 www.baptisten.de

 *BUND AKTUELL, the monthly newsletter*

 *DIE GEMEINDE, an Oncken Verlag magazine, published by the BEFG*

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Brochures and hand-outs with detailed information about the various departments of the BEFG, about finances and theological questions as well as about the Baptist denomination and about the Council of Brethren Congregations are available at your request.

Support the work of the BEFG
with your donation

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