

How Are You Demonstrating?

A reflection from Germany

References to slides relate to the PowerPoint available at methodist.org.uk/GlobalRelationshipsResources, with slide 1 opening your service

Mission Partner Barry Sloan is the team leader of INSPIRE, a Fresh Expressions ministry of the Germany Conference that has been up and running on the Brühl in Chemnitz for over two years.

After the deportation plans of some right-wing politicians and extremists came to light, over a million people took to the streets in cities across Germany to protest. It is so important that people today stand up for human rights, for tolerance and against all forms of racism. That's why some members of INSPIRE took part in the demonstrations that were organised in the city of Chemnitz.

But demonstrating is not a one-time action. INSPIRE is involved with demonstrations every week. These are various activities, groups and events that show and demonstrate that working and living together is possible; that everyone is a winner when true integration happens; and that every single person brings a richness with them, regardless of skin colour, religion and nationality.

At INSPIRE, they celebrate diversity! Being with those who think differently is not a coincidence, it's a plan! One example of this is Soul Sundays. Every third Sunday of the month, INSPIRE engages with a theme – and reflects on it – with a diverse range of inputs from believers and non-believers, from Christians and followers of other religions, from locals and foreigners, from 'saints' and 'sinners'. In other words, from amazing people just like you and me. The format is diverse and colourful – with live music, improvised comedy, stand-up comedy, art, coffee and croissants, prayer, storytelling, liturgical actions, fellowship, and community.

INSPIRE aims to support the local community. On the first Sunday morning of the month they have a special neighbourhood brunch. The INSPIRE team makes tea and coffee and provides some basics like bread, butter and honey. Everyone from the community is invited to attend and bring something to share.

They also run INSPIRE Kids, a joint venture with the Bethanien Diakonissenstiftung, a foundation of the United Methodist Church in Germany, with a team of volunteers who run a children's program every afternoon. This ministry impacts the lives of children, many of whom face huge challenges in life.

On Monday evenings INSPIRE changes into a singer/songwriter music bar. It started with a small group of musicians enjoying themselves together but as God opened doors it has grown into one of the top music venues in the city, so the space is often packed with guests.

Jay, a musician in a punk band that performed at INSPIRE, is a teacher in his day job. He saw INSPIRE as the perfect location for a 'language pub' for foreign students to practice speaking German [slide 2]. And so, with 20 of Jay's students from Syria, China, United Arab Emirates and other countries, they began what is now a weekly Language Cafe.



Slide 2: A gathering of the Language Cafe

In response to the changing make up of the population of Chemnitz, they now also have Cafe Ukraine – an opportunity for refugees and guests from Ukraine to come together to find support, companionship and community. They can also try to learn German together in relaxed conversations.

INSPIRE is a community of faith, hope, and love. The core team are all practicing Christians, but there are also many good friends and co-workers supporting the project who are of no faith or of different faiths. They all want to make this world a better place.

As a team, they strive, in spite of their human failings and weaknesses, to live out their faith, showing their friends and neighbours what it means to be a Christian today. They take it as a compliment that they are known affectionately on the Brühl as "The Christians."

Shaped, formed and guided by Christian values, INSPIRE will continue to bring people together to learn German, to welcome refugees and migrants and to include the weak and the outcast. They will strive to do life together with their fellow human beings.

Do you fancy joining them?

Questions for reflection

- Are you already taking part in a 'demo' by being inclusive, as an individual or a church?
- Are there other ways you could do this?