Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference Hamburg

11th to 15th September, 2026

'A Changing Church in an Age of Migration'

Excursion to 'Luthergarten' and 'Regerhof' Refugee Project

Ms Ayllin Schütte is the Coordinator of the Project and she gave us this introduction

Regerhof

Regerhof is an example of community work offering different services and activities for refugees and locals. Here is a quick overview

- **Café Elio**: a very cozy spot where events take place, also social counselling, our weekly team meeting, a weekly sewing café, quiet reading and a café - it can be rented for private celebrations and courses.
- **Schnackschrauber**: here volunteers repair donated bicycles and give them to refugees or other people who can´t afford them; they also repair people's bicycles for a small donation.

- **Office**: for Sabine and me, and the colleague who helps with the administration work
- **Clothing bank**: the heart of the Regerhof. Melanie Krüger leads about 20 volunteers from 6 countries, refugees and locals. It's a good opportunity to get in contact. We have 150 visitorsa week (open 3 days)

- **Free German Course**: in Germany for people to get the possibility of a permanent residence permit and participate in an official integration course must be able to speak German. Also, people who have not lived in Germany for many years need to learn the language. So, it's a very important service.
- **Bathroom**

- **Team Kitchen**: we cook and eat one warm meal together every day usually in the clothing bank
- **Bakery**: we make cake for the Café or kiosk, during summertime we have bigger events like community evenings with live music, where we sell pizza
- **Art Barn**: every Wednesday different creative activities take place, visited by children as well as adults
- **Hofladen/ Kiosk**:you can purchase drinks and snacks and there are different price categories for the items, so everyone can decide which price they want or can buy local products like herbs or honey from the Luthergarten or our Regerhof Hoodie
- **Truck**: Andrea Hois Buero: that's where Social Counseling-takes place when more privacy is needed. Ther old trailer is to be replaced by a new one soon.

As you can see all the buildings here are kind of temporary, which has to do with the German Building law. It is not permitted to build on this ground on a long-term base.

RH exists since 2015 and developed and grew since then. New Areas and services joined

How did it all start?
To understand the original purpose of the project, we have to go back to **2015**.
At that time, many refugees came to the EU and what was special at that time was that many locals wanted to help. There were many volunteering initiatives formed and also the Lutheran parish wanted to help.

At first, they started a small **clothing bank** at the church. Refugees could go there and get clothes and other important things they needed.

But very quickly, the room became too small for all the donated goods and also the people visiting. So a new place was found, and the Regerhof as a refugee support centre was opened.
The Schnackschrauber project also moved here. (They started in an emergency accommodation centre called the Schnacke)

Step by step the place grew and many people, refugees as well as locals, got involved and started to spent time here, for example by administering the donated goods arriving the clothing bank.

How is the project funded?
For us an important question is the funding of the project.
Since 2017, the Regerhof has received public money from the city of Hamburg. For the salaries as well as maintenance costs as there is still a special budget for refugee support.
There was, and partly still is, funding from other programmes, such as a neighbourhood fund. And there are also a few foundations which support single services like the art barn for example.
During **2022**, when Russia invaded Ukraine a very large number of refugees came to Germany and there was a high demand there was additional financial support, from the *Diakonia*

Katastrophenhilfe. At that time the Regerhof needed more employees, more money, and more organisation.

What we now feel is that funding has become more difficult in recent years. There has been a reduction in funding programmes referring to Refugees support. This means that the future of projects like this is less secure. Today we are fewer employees than three years ago.

Our main Funding from the city of Hamburg is expected to stop by the end of next year. So we are trying to figure out alternative ways of funding at the moment. And think about a new conception of the place so we can become less dependent on public money.

The Regerhof also has a little income from the Café and the kiosk. Another very important part of funding the Regerhof are donations. A lot of the work here is only possible because people donate money, clothes, materials, or their time.

What works well?
So why is the project working and what is special about the Regerhof?
I think one of the biggest strengths is that the Regerhof is accessible. People can come to the project and feel safe and welcome.
It does not matter where they come from or what their legal status is. This is important because refugees often have to deal with authorities. They have to fill out forms, go to appointments, show documents, and explain their situation which is exhausting and even can be re-traumatizing

I believe that the Regerhof feels different because you can simply walk in and meet other people with similar but also totally different stories and experiences. You can have a coffee, talk to other people, ask for help, or help someone else, for example, by translating, helping in the kitchen, cleaning, organising things, or welcoming new people. This can lead to more self-confidence and the capability of taking action.

Volunteering in the clothing bank can also offer a daily structure. This can be helpful for people who aren´t allowed to work yet for example. Also, the possibility to network is of high importance. When so many different people meet that can open up unexpected perspectives. Maybe someone shares information about an empty apartment for example or a job offer. It is also possible to receive a little salary for volunteering.

One very strong and moving sentence we heard is **“You are a home for me.”**

I think this shows that the project is not only about clothes, food, or other practical help. It is also about getting in contact and feeling a sense of community

What are the difficulties?
Of course, there are also problems and difficulties. I would not say that it is because people come from different cultures or countries. The real problem is the political and social situation they are put in after surviving their dangerous journey to come here.

One major problem is housing. Some refugees must live in temporary accommodation for a long time, often much longer than the law provides. That makes them feel very insecure; they do not know how long they can stay there or what will happen in the future. This creates a lot of stress. And it also makes integration more difficult.

People are expected to learn German, find a job, and become part of German society.
But at the same time, there are many restrictions which are increasing since the last years continuously. There can be problems with housing, work, education, residence permits, and many other areas. And these are not individual problems but structural problems.

What we can see is that many people are stressed and traumatized which sometimes can lead to tension in the everyday life here.

Different groups have different situations
Another important point is that refugees do not all have the same situation. For example, many people from Ukraine have a relatively good residence status in Germany from the beginning. They often have fewer bureaucratic problems compared with refugees from elsewhere. This is positive for them but of course it can create a feeling of unequal treatment for refugees from other countries. This also can create a lot of frustration and even despair.

There are also differences in people's plans for the future. Many Ukrainians hope that they can return to Ukraine one day. For people from countries such as Afghanistan or Iran, returning home may not be a realistic option. This can also affect everyday life we can feel in our work specially at the clothing room. The need to learn German may be differently urgent, especially when many people are from the same country. This can make communication and teamwork more difficult at some points.

Are there conflicts between different groups?
I have not experienced problems between different groups yet. Of course, people from different countries, cultures, religions, and backgrounds meet here. Sometimes this can lead to misunderstandings. But I think it would be too simple to say that different cultures are the problem. Often, the real problem is that people have very different life situations. For example, if one group has a better legal status than another group, this can create frustration. So, it is not necessarily a cultural or religious conflict; it can also be about different rights and opportunities.

And of course we should not forget that people coming here can be under high stress which can lead to difficult situations which need referring to other agencies because we have no psychologists here, for example.

Practical problems
There are also many small, practical problems. The project is quite informal and sometimes a little improvised. But most of the time we see this as an advantage because therefore the place does not feel like a government office. It feels friendly and informal.

But of course, this can bring some troubles too; sometimes the printer does not work. Electricity stops working or you have trouble heating the oven in the winter, I think you can imagine that what I experienced here is that every day is different and sometimes it feels a bit adventurous. This can be challenging but on the other hand it’s never boring.

The role of volunteers
I already mentioned the volunteering. This is a very important part of our everyday work here. Without volunteers, the project would not work. We are very thankful for them. Volunteers give their time, energy, knowledge, and support. They are extremely important.

What makes the project Christian?

Another question of yours was what makes this project Christian?

Standing up for refugees and creating a new home for them is a core Christian mission. Flight and displacement are central themes in the Bible, and refugee aid or support can certainly be understood as lived love and compassion. We understand our work here within this Christian tradition. And also I think it is the attitude behind the project. The idea is that every person should be treated with respect. It does not matter where someone comes from, what religion they have, or what their legal status is. People should be welcome.

The Lutheran parish is also practicing church asylum. The colleague who runs the art barn and bakery was in church asylum here together with her family. However, this topic is becoming more and more difficult because of the political shift to the right we are experiencing, and migration policy is becoming stricter. This puts projects like ours under increasing pressure.

In Sachsen Anhalt (a county of Germany) the AFD won an election last week and they have already announced want to abolish church asylum. The Bishop plans to outsource the church asylum
Rough times

You also asked what we would recommend to people who want to start a similar project?

First of all embrace the gaps ☺ You do not need a perfect plan from the beginning. Regerhof started with something very simple: a clothing bank. Then more people came. More space was needed. Step by step, the project grew.

Next, create a place where people want to stay. It should not only be a place where people receive help. It should be a place where people can get involved and contribute something meaningful themselves

Then of course do lots of organisation in the backround, find funding, volunteers, good communication, clear responsibilities. Volunteers might also need support so it is good to have a contact person for them.

I think the most important question is not: “What can we do for refugees?” but “How can we create a place where people can do things together?” It is not about seeing refugees only as people who need help. It is about giving people the chance to participate, help others, build relationships, and feel welcome. And maybe even to find a new home.

Especially today, when migration is often discussed in a very negative and political way, places like this are so important. They show that migration is not only a political issue. It is not about numbers. It is about real people. People who can become a community.

The Luthergarten

After we had explored the Regerhof we were invited to go and explore the garden. It is huge, and at first sight it could be mistaken for a wilderness!

However, when we looked closely there were all manner of fruits and vegetables growing, and very healthy they looked.

The garden covers a huge area and, to end our visit, the local Church Scouts had arranged a short service for us around a camp fire.

Most of us found it an inspirational place, and we hope and pray that the Regerhof and the Garden will have a long and secure future.

It gave a very graphic insight into issues involved in caring for the refugees and migrants that arrive in our neighbourhoods.