

# Annual Report

# 2021



**KIRCHE AM START**

... und die Stadt blüht auf!





LIONEL

# Breakthrough instead of break-in

Dear friends of „Kirche am Start“,

Looking back on 2021, I am particularly amazed that KaS did not experience any break-ins during these months but, despite the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, experienced breakthroughs again and again. Some we hoped for and others came unexpectedly.

The daycare center in Obertshausen had been planned for some time but even before it opened, it became clear that KaS should also start a church planting project there. The breakthrough for this was the addition of more and more house churches in Obertshausen and a growing trust with the city administration. In the meantime, the mayor has involved us in the ongoing processes in the city that have to do with us. KaS has become a partner of the city.

We had been searching for a suitable building for a neighborhood center in Offenbach for several years. Last year, we experienced a breakthrough with that as well. We were able to find and rent a building that is optimally located and affordable.

We also experienced a breakthrough among the volunteers in the church. Many declared their willingness to take on responsibility and lead departments- „so that the city may flourish“. In this annual report, they will tell you about what has happened at KaS and show you what God is doing in Offenbach and Obertshausen.

Welcome to the Annual Report 2021.

*Lionel Bendobal*

LEAH

# The start of “Kids am Start”



„Our daycare center in Obertshausen welcomed the first ten children on Monday, May 31. The settling in with the parents went really well and by the end, the children didn't want to leave...”. We were able to share this news in our newsletter in June 2021 and we are still amazed!

Leah never wanted to work in a daycare center but she was there. She recounts the start-up phase: „Because of Corona, the social work I was doing with youth at the time practically no longer existed, so I quit.“ Because she had been a part of KaS for some time, the social worker stepped in for a transitional period at the daycare center which in the end, turned into a year and a half of working there. Initially, the operation started without children. The construction work still had to be completed and, above all, the employees had to get to know each other and familiarize themselves with the open concept of the daycare center.

At the opening ceremony itself, it rained like cats and dogs but that didn't dampen the mood. Many KaS members, the mayor and, of course, parents and children were there - the atmosphere was relaxed and lively, and the garden of the Kita was fuller than ever.

In the weeks that followed four to eight new kids joined regularly until eventually there were 40 kids running around! „This time was very exhausting. Many children didn't speak German at first but we adjusted to each other very quickly. By the end of the year, things were going really well,“ Leah reports.

The open concept of the daycare center also took some getting used to for some parents. In the Kita, there is a role-playing room, a quiet room and a movement room. The children can choose for themselves which rooms they would like to go to. This is something different from the permanent group schedules in other facili-



# “ THAT’S A REAL MIRACLE

ties. But the concept was convincing! A trusting relationship grew not only with the children but also with the parents. Of course, joint activities such as a father-child day, on which the garden was landscaped and a hut was built, or the joint celebrations at Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and also for the Muslim Eid, contributed to this trust. The friendly and curious idea, „Please show me your culture!“ built bridges right from the start - whether into the city administration or to the Turkish grocer across the street.

Looking back, two things stand out in particular for Leah. „These are real miracles for me,“ she says. „First, that children and their families from so many different cultures are now close friends. And second, that God has always sent staff in a timely manner. We’ve had job ads out more often, but we’ve never had a staff shortage until now - for a daycare center, that’s a real miracle.“

LIONEL

# A building in Offenbach



Should KaS have its own building? In the early years, Lionel couldn't imagine it. „Real estate makes you immobile,“ was his perception. „As a church planting ministry, we want to stay close to the people and not be stuck in a building.“ But it was through his experience with the daycare center that he and the other leaders realized that a building also had advantages.

So, they expanded their stance with an important addition, „...unless the property serves our vision.“

The idea was to look for a building that could serve the neighbors as a café and meeting center, perhaps also as an after-school center. It was not to be a classic church center, built for



church services and group meetings, but to be there consistently for others. Lionel notes: „We couldn't go to the outskirts or to an industrial area like other churches, we had to stay in the middle - and the building had to remain affordable.

Was there such a building? KaS placed ads, commissioned brokers with the search and asked at least 120 properties – with no results. Often even without an answer. In most cases, it was enough for the owners to learn that a church was interested in their house.

However, in the summer of 2021, a real estate agent called, „Are you still interested in the downtown garage? It's changed hands and is up for sale again.“ The building is located in the backyard in the middle of a residential area, right between the marketplace and the train station. It could hardly be more central. And best of all, the new owner was eager to rent to Christians. Her son was autistic and had been excellently cared for by the Diakonie (a big organization, that does welfare and social work)

for years. So, she wanted to give something back.

KaS has now been able to sign the lease for the former garage at Bismarckstrasse 70 in Offenbach. After the conversion, the rent will be 7 euros per square meter - around 2,300 euros per month. Until then, the owner will have the building renovated according to the wishes of the KaS architects, it will get new doors and windows and will be insulated. The interior work will be done by the church. It will cost approximately 85,000 euros. The move is planned for November 2022.

The church members are enthusiastic and have approved the project with a large majority. Many are already making a greater financial commitment to help support the whole thing. When the new neighbors learned about the neighborhood center with its planned social, cultural and church offerings, their curiosity was great - and their approval. One neighbor said directly, „Cool, if people don't go to church anymore, the church will come to us.“



LARS

# Elder Training



Can you train yourself to be an elder? „Not only can you, you should,“ Lars is convinced. Together with Didrot, he is currently an Elder candidate. Since the end of 2020, the two have been looking over Lionel’s shoulder at his work and are involved in the church’s processes, even if they aren’t making any decisions yet.

They also work on theological issues and think about how leadership can work in the church. So they get input from Lionel, theology lecturers,93+4 and pastors. They share ideas with other church leaders and discuss a lot with each other to practice critical thinking skills. „We

want to find solutions together - and bring God to our table,“ Lars says.

He emphasizes, „I’m getting to know the church in a completely different way again and want to listen intensively and find out what moves individuals. In addition, I find it really exciting to notice how close we get personally.“

Lars and Didrot are expected to be called and blessed as elders in November 2022. If it’s up to them, many more will follow in order to share the responsibilities among several people.





THORBEN

# Seek collaboration



„Church is only church when it is there for others,“ the theologian and resistance fighter Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said. At KaS, we follow this approach and add „when it works together with others“. This is what KaS has been about from the beginning: looking for partners and networking with people who have similar concerns.

Thorben studied theology and got to know the work of KaS. After an internship there, he decided to stay in Offenbach with his wife. His focus is networking with others locally. At the end of 2021, he began to hold talks with Arbeiterwohlfahrt AWO. They work with migrants, run a retirement home, but also offer „meals on wheels“ and various workshops. His questions were: „What do you need? Where can we get involved with and for you? Where do you lack capacity?“

Various things came out of these conversations. Thorben smiles: „Lionel once again got to know people and talked to them ...“. As a result, KaS was able to use the Wildbach School for bi-weekly services, free of charge, for six months. In addition, Thorben will offer workshops for older people in the future, „My cell phone and me“, to support the work at the AWO retirement home. His idea is to reach adults and children with his workshops - from retirement homes to creative and musical meetings with young people at school and beyond.

„This work with volunteers on both sides means having to find more time,“ Thorben knows. „But it’s worth it. I like to invest myself in doing something good for my neighbors together with others.“

ANNI UND FELIX

# Off to new shores



Anni and Felix were trainees at Kirche am Start from fall 2020 to spring 2022. They were responsible for the departments „Einander ermutigen - encouraging one another“ (Anni) and „Gott erleben - experiencing God“ (Felix). Despite the special challenges posed by the pandemic, they brought themselves here to learn for themselves and their future and to serve Offenbach.

In the meantime, the two have arrived at their new place of work: in Leverkusen. The city in the Rhineland is somewhat overshadowed by its large neighboring city, Cologne. Similar to Offenbach, there are hardly any churches here

that have an impact on the city. Felix says, „KaS has prepared us optimally for the church plant in Leverkusen. I was particularly influenced by Lionel’s approach of consistently seeing church and faith through the eyes of non-believers - they have to be plausible for these people, not for us.“

Asked what his wish would be for KaS, Felix replies, „Consistency. That’s not meant in a negative way, but there’s an incredible amount going on at KaS. People who are committed long term would be good for the church.“



On May 18th, 2021, Naemi and Lionel’s 4th child was born prematurely. Leah Noelle Bendobal was born at 2:24 a.m. at the hospital in Offenbach. Despite her premature birth, she proved to be a little fighter and quickly adapted to the conditions outside the womb. Now she is over a year old and thriving. We are happy to have her with us and are excited to see what God has in store for her.

VANESSA

# Teens in focus



Vanessa is 22, she comes from Erfurt and completed her training as an educator and youth worker at MBS (Marburg Bible Seminary). She came to KaS for a church internship - and simply stayed. To her, it's „fully important that a church goes out into the city and meets people where they already are.“

In 2021, Naemi began building her first relationships with teens in Offenbach. At the same time, KaS analyzed their situation and found that their first impression was correct: There are hardly any offerings for teens in Offenbach. This is when Vanessa stepped in.

Since August 2021, she has been involved in the NextGen department for teens. Her goal was, among other things, to have an open invitation for teens from the city to play, talk, connect and know they are welcome to our church services. The work started under the name „place2be“. Again and again, it had to be adapted to the circumstances, because how useful is a coherent concept that doesn't reach it's target group? Vanessa and her team quickly put the focus on getting to know each other - an invitation to a church service was two steps too far. When the offerings had to be held indoors because of the winter, not many came. As soon as it went outside in spring and summer, more and more kids and teens joined. The target group were teens between 13 and 18 years - but often children between 5 and 10 years came. So the work is

very challenging and the concept is, even now, being constantly revised. But the goal remains the same: to meet the teens once a week with fun activities and to show them Christian values.

In addition, there are church activities for the teens: KaS offers a biblical teaching together with the “Stadtmission Offenbach” church. Once a month on Saturday, the teens meet and deepen their relationship with Jesus.

On church Sundays, there is a teen service for what is still a small group of church teens. „Our group is small but very multicultural,“ Vanessa explains, „even if there are only four teens, they come from at least two nations and their lifestyles and what appeals to them are very different.“ Meanwhile, the teens take turns preparing the message and worship music, bringing their personal experiences with their own faith to the table.

Vanessa is excited about this involvement, „I'm happy that we can live with multiculturally in faith with the teens.“ At the same time, this diversity is her biggest prayer request. „To build trust and to work multiculturally as a trained German youth worker.“ However, it is visible that over the past year individual teens are really ‚on fire‘ and are up for growing in Jesus and following Him.



# Neues aus den Hauskirchen

## HANNA - THE MUSIKERVIERTEL

Wikipedia knows that around 6800 people live in the Musikerviertel in Offenbach. Hanna also lives here and is involved with KaS. She says about her house church: „The house church was not planned at first. I simply decided to meet two women from the community to read a Christian book, and another brought two friends. Suddenly there were six of us and everyone wanted to know more about the content. The friends had nothing to do with KaS or with Jesus, but they came and they came regularly.“ Hanna says, „It’s just an interesting group, and they’re all looking for community.“



## JANA - THE DISTRICT „AN DEN EICHEN“

Jana has been involved with KaS for a long time. Last year, she wanted to have a fresh start with her house church in Bürgel, but how? She and her husband didn't know what that would look like. That's when they got to know a family who lived at An den Eichen - could it be an option to start a house church that could alternate locations?

Starting in April 2021, the house church met sometimes in one house and sometimes in the other. Jana notes, „At the Thiessen family, there are always neighbors in the house. They don't send anyone away - anyone can come. They just maintain a relationship with the people who are there. They don't know church for the most part, but they come anyway.“

That's why the leaders of the house church planned a Christmas outreach. They wanted to take advantage of the Advent season and make it a house church event. Jana recounts, „We didn't do anything special at all, we just made salt dough ornaments for the Christmas tree, but it exceeded all expectations: There was no message but the house was full, with everyone having fun and the conversations were still focused on faith.“ Feedback about the evening was encouraging. Over and over, Jana heard, „I didn't think church could be like this.“

After this encouraging start, there were a few more meetings. Since then, quite a few Christians have come to the house church An den Eichen, as well as people to whom faith is new. Friendships have grown and some have even been coming to the main KaS service because they simply want to hear more about who Jesus is.

# Church planting in



## BJÖRN – THINKING STRATEGICALLY

With its 25,000 inhabitants, Obertshausen is only one-fifth the size of Offenbach and has always been somewhat overshadowed by its big neighbor. But Björn came here in May 2021 to plant a church. He moved to Obertshausen with his wife and child and wanted to get started right away but it wasn't so easy because of Corona. „We were warmly welcomed anyway,“ he says, „but at the same time, a lot of getting-to-know-you conversations with people in charge only took place via Zoom, and there were no parties or activities at all.“

The daycare center in Obertshausen provided a good point of contact, because the work truly emphasized that KaS wants to be involved in the city. Some churches and communities were not interested in working together, while others were very open to it. One Protestant pastor summed up her enthusiasm this way: „You are an answer to prayer for the city!“ (an article on this can be found on the following pages). This, of course, is something to build on.

At the beginning, Björn and the other KaS

employees in Obertshausen asked themselves the questions: „What makes the town tick? What are its strengths? What does it lack?“ From Offenbach's perspective, it seems rather provincial, but if you compare Obertshausen to other cities of similar size, you'll notice how multicultural it is. For many residents, the town itself is not that important; they seek connections to neighboring towns. What is missing is something like a sense of “we”. Björn thinks, „It would make the city much more attractive if there were meeting places there.“

In September, Björn met with other KaS members in a strategy team to continue developing vision and brainstorming ideas. „Since then, we've had a larger community event every two months that happens where the people are. ‚BetterTogether‘ offers everything from scavenger hunts to playground activities to water fights. It provides a great opportunity to get into conversation with people in a relaxed way and to share life together.“ The opening service of KaS Obertshausen is already planned for November 2022.

# Obertshausen



## BRITTA - A DREAM OF CHURCH COME TRUE

Britta lives with her family in Obertshausen. They have known KaS almost from the beginning. Since the focus of the church was initially on Offenbach, it was also the case for Britta at the beginning „that I didn't have a big dream for our place," she says. When the idea came up to start a house church in Obertshausen, she felt overwhelmed and taken by surprise by the idea.

But God took her by the hand and showed her bit by bit his plan for the city. Over time, the desire for a KaS location in Obertshausen grew in Britta. God showed her and the other Christians what He had in mind for the city. The growth also happened at the right pace: first there was a house church, which Britta led. Over time, KaS grew, and more and more members and guests came from Obertshausen. A second house church followed, then a third, and meanwhile the fourth is being planned. „So, God took us step by step into his dream for Obertshausen," says Britta in retrospect.

It was during this phase that the idea of a day-care center in Obertshausen was born. As the

work took shape, it became increasingly clear that KaS should focus on the city. The foundation of the new location with its own church services and offerings is already in the works. Britta is very excited about this: „Now we can reach the people around us: friends, neighbors, and acquaintances with the Gospel. Before, we always had to invite them to Offenbach, which proved to be a hurdle for some because it was too far away.“



This opens up completely new possibilities for the place to flourish, in line with KaS' vision. Reaching people where they are and letting the church come to them is how we think of church at KaS. „We can do that in Obertshausen now," Britta concludes, „and we're very, very happy about that.“



*Kornelia Kachunga - Pastor in the Protestant state church of Obertshausen*

# KORNELIA - CAN A CHURCH BE AN ANSWER TO PRAYER?

Yes, it can. At least that is my opinion. For some years now, we in our congregation have been praying more and more for our town and the people who live in it. We would like nothing more than to reach the people of Obertshausen with the gospel.

And then, at the beginning of 2021, it was rumored that there would be a new KaS church planting in Obertshausen. A daycare center under their sponsorship was already in the making. And yes, I heard a few anxious voices: are they stealing our members?

Admittedly, many Christian congregations often judge and condemn each other. Envy and resentment is unfortunately also in the church (whether free or protestant state church) the reason for divisions and conflicts again and again. But this is never a result of the Holy Spirit. Really...NEVER.

Lionel Bendobal and Björn Ahlers approached my colleague Michael Zlamal and me relatively early last year and wanted to get to know each other. From there, we laid a solid foundation for a good, cooperative relationship. Because of

the Holy Spirit, we do not have to envy or fear of each other, but can recognize and value each other as co-workers on the same team: God's team. We fulfill the same mission and have the same goal in mind. We do not take potential members away from each other, but reach different target groups in different ways. Basically, Kirche am Start is an answer to prayer, because God has sent even more workers into the harvest in Obertshausen. I think that's great and I'm happy about it! After all, it is God's work and His kingdom. He decides who He wants to use, where and when. A free church has many advantages, but also has to fight more. A protestant state church has to fight less, but is in danger of losing the most important drive. I think that God is pleased when we, as brothers and sisters in the faith, live out His love beyond our church boundaries. If we cannot do this locally, how can we do it worldwide?

And that is why I dream that one day we will celebrate a great service in Obertshausen with all Christian churches and that the light of Jesus will then shine so brightly that no one will be able to escape his presence!





# ANDRÉ

# Together on the Way

André says of himself: „I’m not averse to trying something new. I don’t yet consider myself one hundred percent a part of KaS and the faith, but I’m on the right track.“

The down-to-earth family man and his wife Sandy (she is the executive director of the „Kids am Start“ daycare center) are from Saxony. When they moved, they were looking for a connection to a church for quite a while. Because they wanted to get married in church, the pastor of the Protestant church invited them to a ten-week wedding preparation course. „In my generation in the East, there was very little contact with the faith, so I was happy to go along with it. But after a while, I felt like it wasn’t moving forward for me.“ That changed when the two met KaS. There, they immediately felt comfortable and accepted in the family atmosphere.

„I realized that here I can come as I am and my opinion is respected. In addition, I can contribute with technology, for example.“ When asked what keeps him in the congregation, André doesn’t have to think long: „The community. The worship is also fresh, and the messages are

modern in design and they fit my situation. You can also laugh sometimes during the sermon, I enjoy that it’s not dry.“ André doesn’t see things that really bother him in the congregation. Now and then there are misunderstandings and friction between the generations, „but that’s normal.“ Overall, community life is a give and take for him: As a structured person, he has already been able to help some younger leaders organizationally and at the same time, he benefits from their role in faith at KaS.

He laughs: „However, I am in a core group with three other men. There we talk about Bible texts and how they can be practiced in everyday life. We also check with each other to see if we are truly implementing what we learn. That is very challenging and interesting. It’s exciting that the others show me ways of putting my faith into practice and at the same time signal to me that my perspective is also important to them and helps them. So we’re on the path together - and that’s really good for me.“

MIRIAM

# As an intern in the church



Ten interns were at KaS in 2021. One of them is Miriam Kehr. The theology student from Erzhausen completed a six-week church internship in February and March and she stayed on to continue working in the church alongside her studies. She will soon be moving to Offenbach.

Miriam's KaS story began with an internship speed dating during her theology studies. She was looking for an internship near Erzhausen, heard about KaS, then met Lionel for coffee and realized: This fits! The focus of her internship was that she accompanied Lionel every step of the way and was thus able to experience and practice pastoral tasks in a very practical way. The freshman thus learned how missional church work actually works.

The limitations of Corona were definitely noticeable, especially in the continuation of the

internship. Miriam has since been involved in community outreach at the church, from greeting people at services to meeting together as women. But all the while, it was possible to put various ideas into practice, whether virtually or in person.

The theology student recommends an internship at KaS to anyone who wants to think church differently and experience how church reaches out to people. And to those who want to experience church in a multicultural context - after all, 152 nations. Looking back on her internship, Miriam was more excited about many of the sideline conversations that about any single big event. And she is staying in Offenbach.

# 2021

## in Zahlen



Here you can find an overview of the revenues and expenses in 2021. As you can see, both increased in 2021.

The revenues were increased mainly by two things: Anni and Felix Ronsdorf prepared for their future work as church planters in Leverkusen and already started to build up a financial support team for this in 2021. Until they were sent out, this team mainly financed Felix's personnel costs so that he could prepare for the planting.

When it became clear that we would rent our own building and also help renovate it ourselves, we start-

ed collecting donations for it this year. In 2022, these will be spent on the construction phase.

Expenses increased mainly due to the establishment of the Obertshausen location foundation. Here, materials had to be procured and investments made. The higher personnel costs are due to the fact that Felix was trained for church planting, as already mentioned. However, most of these costs were covered by his personal sponsors with an earmarked donation, which meant that KaS itself only had to spend a small amount on personnel costs.

### OVERALL BALANCE

#### REVENUES

204.177,67 €

#### EXPENDITURES

205.083,10 €

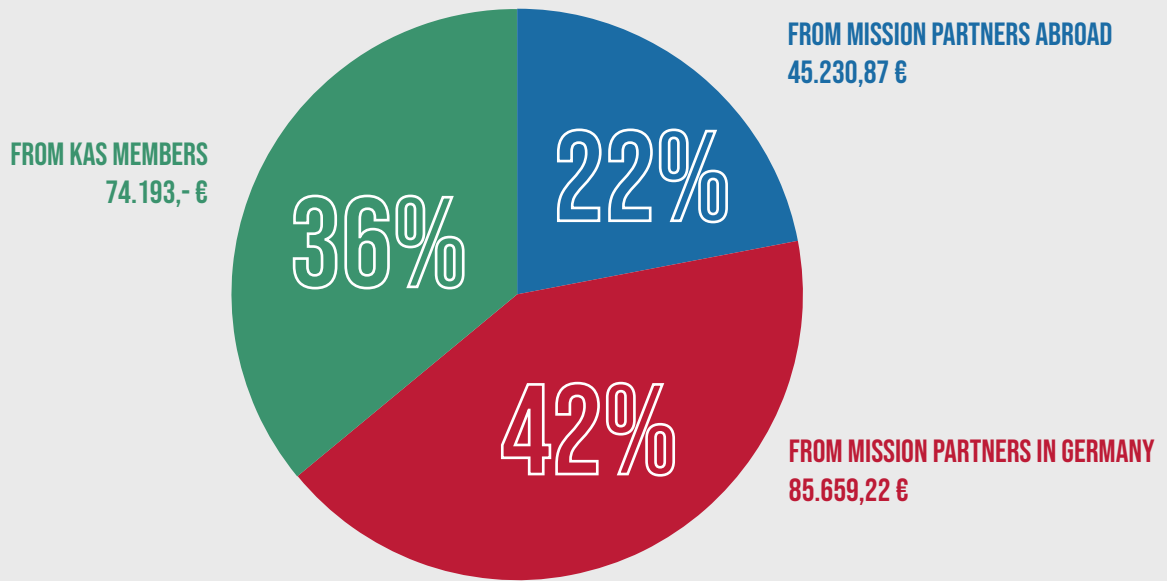
#### FROM 2020

15.000,00 €

#### BALANCE 2021

14.094,57 €


## Where did the incomes come from?



## What was the money used for?

Wages and salaries	96.322,57 €	46,97 %
Required social insurances	50.437,31 €	24,59 %
Employer payroll tax	5.6425,85 €	2,75 %
Rent	17.518,43 €	8,54 %
Consulting fees	6.515,19 €	3,18 %
Advertising efforts	7.295,48 €	3,56 %
Travel and fare expenses	1.075,77 €	0,52 %
Stationary/ Administration	3.767,14 €	1,84 %
Donation toward organisations in the city	1.416,00 €	0,69 %
Insurance	241,80 €	0,12 %
Other	14.850,56 €	7,24 %

# Thank you to our partners!

Other than the countless individuals who are on our side, we are more than  thankful to the churches who invest in us, and the organizations, who have given us their trust.

**Anskar-Kirche Hamburg**  
anskar-hamburg.de

**Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church**  
cspc.net

**Chrischona-Gemeinde Florstadt Stammheim**  
chrischona-florstadt.de

**Christus Centrum Tostedt**  
cctostedt.de

**EFG Bad Homburg**  
efg-badhomburg.de

**Elmbrook Church**  
elmbrook.org

**Ev. Stadtmission Friedberg/Hessen**  
stadtmission-friedberg.stamiglia.de

**KIN International**

**Wasilla Bible Church**  
wasillabible.org

# JAHRESVISION 2022



2022 gehen wir die Wachstumsschritte, die Jesus für uns vorbereitet hat - persönlich, als Gemeinde und vor Ort



Unsere Kultur der Multiplikation führt zur Entfaltung: Wir investieren uns ineinander, um jeden darin zu ermutigen, die persönlichen Einflussbereiche zu erkennen, wahrzunehmen und dort die Kultur der guten Nachricht zu verbreiten.



Unser primärer Fokus liegt auf den Baustellen unserer Herzen, an denen Jesus in diesem Jahr arbeiten möchte. Wir strecken uns nach Erneuerung und neuen Entdeckungen aus.



In **Offenbach** sind wir als Gesamtgemeinde mobilisiert und renovieren mit den Hauskirchen unser Gebäude, so dass es zu einem Ort wird, aus dem Segen für unsere Stadt fließen kann. Wir möchten das Gemeindezentrum im Herbst 2022 einweihen. In **Obertshausen** starten wir im Frühjahr ein „Einander-ermutigen-Programm“. Auch hier wollen wir im Lauf des Jahres anfangen Gottesdienste zu feiern und wünschen uns, dass wir mit neuen Hauskirchen mehr Stadtteile von Obertshausen erreichen.

In unseren Stadtteilen wird Gottes Liebe weiterhin verbreiten: Unsere Hauskirchen sind vor Ort aktiv und sichtbar. Uns liegen besonders Glaubensferne auf dem Herzen, um die wir uns in diesem Jahr intensiv bemühen möchten.





## **KIRCHE AM START**

... und die Stadt blüht auf!

EDITOR

**Kirche am Start e.V.  
Hermann-Steinhäuser-Str. 43-47  
63065 Offenbach am Main**

### BANK WIRE TRANSFER

Here you can donate conveniently and quickly to specific projects and will receive your donation receipt by mail at the end of the respective calendar year. For this purpose we ask you to write in the line with the reference to include your address.

Payee: Kirche am Start e.V.

IBAN: DE96 5009 2100 0001 6751 09

BIC: GENODE51BH2

Reason for transfer: Pastorentopf\_your adress

Banks name: Spar- und Kreditbank Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden eG