



**Christmas message
by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at Schloss Bellevue
on 25 December 2020**

“When can I live my dreams again?”

This sigh of exasperation, my fellow Germans, is one of thousands of personal messages I received from all parts of our country. During Advent, we illuminated the facade of Schloss Bellevue with many of these thoughts – each and every one of them a sign of yearning at the end of a year that turned out much differently than we had all imagined.

Fellow citizens, what a year it has been! A tiny virus took possession of our lives and our thoughts, thwarted plans and shattered dreams. We had to forego so much that we had been looking forward to. Going to watch football in the stadium, to the cinema, to a concert, going on holiday, celebrating weddings and much, much more.

The pandemic reminded us how vulnerable we people are, how fragile what we call our “normal life” is. But we were also able to experience something else: how strong we are when we look out for each other and are there for each other.

Christmas this year is a different Christmas. A celebration of love: most definitely! But particularly at this time when we yearn to be especially close to one another, we have to keep our distance. We – myself included – are missing friends and relatives who we have not been able to see all year. Many older and ill people are spending time alone to protect themselves from the virus. For some, particularly young people, this silent night was much too silent.

There has perhaps never been a Christmas where we felt so keenly how important people are to us, how much we depend on their presence, their affection, the conversations we have with them.

That is good to know. But cheerily celebrating Christmas is nevertheless difficult.

I am thinking of the women and men who, as I speak, are fighting the virus in an intensive care unit. Of their nearest and dearest who fear the worst.

I am thinking of the people who have lost their battle with this illness. Many have died a bitter, a lonely death and they are all missed.

My thoughts are also with those who are finding it difficult to recover from the effects of the infection.

And my thoughts are with our European neighbours who have been hit at least as hard as us by the pandemic.

The restrictions we had to impose affected us all. Schoolchildren are annoyed by irregular lessons, families exhausted after almost a year of working from home and home schooling. Artists, restaurant and hotel owners fear for their livelihoods, retailers are worried about the renewed closure of shops. Christmas is surely not going to be merry everywhere.

Yet, let us ensure the many dark sides of this year do not make us forget the positives. Particularly at this time, we are seeing that the virus does not drive us apart. On the contrary, it draws us closer together.

Our country is a strong country because so many people are there for others and are going the extra mile in the crisis. I would like to thank all those who are on the front line as we fight the virus, who are working to the point of exhaustion and risking their own health – whether doctors or nurses, teachers, scientists or bus drivers.

Our country is a strong country because we are shouldering the burdens of the crisis together. Our state is giving a helping hand to those experiencing economic hardship. Many of you are supporting the shop around the corner, the music school, the sports club. Or you are moving mountains through your voluntary work.

At a time of uncertainty, we have learnt that we can trust our democracy. We have argued about the right course of action – and then joined forces to implement decisions. Those who deny the danger posed by the virus are, admittedly, often particularly vocal. But the voices of reason make up the vast majority. It is these voices that are ensuring that we can protect human life and overcome the crisis.

That is the good news this year has brought. And that is why this Christmas is also a celebration of hope. The vast majority of people in our country are showing consideration and solidarity in their actions – not because the state orders them to do so but based on good sense, empathy and responsibility. It is my hope that we take this public spirit with us as we enter the new year.

One thing is particularly important to me. For many young people, the pandemic has put a spanner in the works, young people

wanting to take up a job, begin training or studies. Let us now also show solidarity with them. Let us ensure that young people can stride forth to a brighter future.

We are seeing especially now in this crisis just how much we can achieve together. We can tap courage and strength from this experience, also when it comes to dealing with other threats such as climate change, or hunger and poverty. Let us work together – in our country, in Europe, with a new Administration on the other side of the Atlantic, also worldwide. And always remembering those born in other parts of the world with far fewer opportunities.

Indeed, we have every reason to be optimistic. Vaccines have been approved this week and vaccinations will start the day after tomorrow. We still have a long and difficult road ahead. But now we are seeing that the long-awaited light at the end of the tunnel is starting to shine more brightly. We will now move closer to the end of the crisis step by step. It is us who decide how long the journey will be. Let us continue to be guided by good sense and stay patient on the home straight, then we will gradually be able to enjoy much of what we have for so long had to forego.

Fellow citizens, things have been difficult. The pandemic also casts a shadow on this Christmastide. But we are allowed to look forward to celebrating Christmas next year the way we so love to: with all the family around the table, with our friends, with embraces and song. Let's hope that the anticipation of next year's joy will help brighten this extraordinary festive season.

Wishing you all every blessing at Christmas!