



BUNDESPRÄSIDENTIALAMT

Read the speech online:
www.bundespraesident.de

Page 1 of 3

**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the final service of the third Ecumenical Kirchentag
on 16 May 2021
in Frankfurt am Main**

Brothers and sisters, you've no idea what a wonderful sight this is from here at the front, after so many months of the pandemic! We would have deserved better weather but no one here is put off by the odd raincloud.

I can see hundreds of happy faces of people who have gathered here to worship together. I can see Catholics and Protestants, Orthodox Christians and members of free churches, people of other faiths, young and old, laypeople and clergy, children and young people, parents and grandparents. I can see optimism and energy, I can see consideration, I can see faith and I can sense hope. "Go and see" was the motto for this Ecumenical Kirchentag.

When someone takes it upon themselves to go and see, they look at someone else. To go and see is more than just a passing glance. To go and see means experiencing, discovering, sensing. We have experienced one another in an ecumenical setting, we have learned how much more brings us together as Christians than divides us.

When one person looks out, someone else looks in. We Christians do not shy away from the gaze of the world and its questions. That is not always comfortable, and many difficult issues occupy our minds. But the world also sees that faith is not merely preserving things past but is open to the future and ready to embrace its challenges. And the world sees people who are willing to be touched by the need of others, people who get involved, who engage.

When someone takes it upon themselves to go and see, they don't just notice what is close to them, they see farther and deeper. We want a bright future, we want to preserve creation, we want to see peace also on the other side of the world.

ADDRESS	Bundespräsidialamt 11010 Berlin
TEL	+49 30 2000-2021
FAX	+49 30 1810200-2870
E-MAIL	presse@bpra.bund.de
WEBSITE	www.bundespraesident.de

We are appalled to see the renewed outbreak of violence in the Middle East in the past few days. We see innocent victims on both sides. We hope for efforts to put an end to the violence.

We also see antisemitic hatred on our streets. Nothing justifies threatening Jews in Germany or attacking synagogues in our towns. Let us together counter this hatred!

“Take an honest look, trust one another and act together” was the slogan for this Kirchentag. That remains our mandate well beyond the Kirchentag.

We continue to feel the strain of the measures dictated by the health dimension of the pandemic. But let us take care not to forget the social dimension of the crisis.

Let us not forget those whose houses are not surrounded by greenery and who are living in cramped conditions. Let us not forget those who cannot work from home but are toiling away on the front line for each and every one of us – in hospitals and care facilities, in shops, in childcare and schools, in buses and trains. Let us not forget those who are lonely and alone, those feeling the mental strain and also those who are experiencing violence in the family.

Let us go and see, let us take a careful look – but seeing yet doing nothing is not enough. After all, the social impacts of the virus are not going to just disappear when the last person is vaccinated, the last step completed.

How we would have loved to be able to celebrate this Ecumenical Kirchentag as a huge festival to mark the end of this nightmare! Unfortunately, we are not at that stage yet.

But we nonetheless have reason to rejoice. The good sense, patience and responsible behaviour of the vast majority, the miracle of the vaccines that have been developed in record time – this is all bringing us ever closer to the safety of the shore. We long for normality and yet at the same time we know that not everything will be the same as it was before the pandemic. But meeting family and friends again, reaching out to shake hands again, embracing one another again, celebrating church services and Kirchentage the way we used to – we are yearning for all these things.

My wish today is a simple one: let us keep taking it upon ourselves to go and see even when the pandemic is over. And we will take it upon ourselves to go and see, because the world does not leave us cold, because we want to make the world a better place, because so much remains to be done.

For us, this also means that we need to heal the wounds that the pandemic has inflicted in our society. We have seen heated debates – on the virus and the requirement to wear a mask, about restrictions and

their easing, about childcare and schools, about vaccinations and priority groups. Many have run out of patience, their nerves frayed. Friendships have been destroyed, families divided, deep rifts tear through our society.

Healing these wounds means reaching out to one another where we have drifted apart. This Ecumenical Kirchentag has been marked by the need to attach more value to what unites us than what divides us. This also holds true for society as a whole.

Of course we need to look at what happened. But we should not lose our way in the ambitious search for fast answers about what mistakes were made and who is to be held responsible. The process of reconciliation within our society will take longer than the 15 months behind us.

We will not win the future in irreconcilable dispute with one another, not in isolation, blinded by dogmatism or without communication. We need to rebuild bridges between people and groups where the pandemic has sown the seeds of hostility. We do not all need to agree with one another –but we do need one another.

After all, if we have learnt one thing from the pandemic, it is this: we are dependent on one another!

Let us take this to heart, brothers and sisters, more than we have done in the past – and, come what may, let us look after one another!