

KIRCHENTAG

The Kirchentag, organised every two years in a different German city, gathered over 100,000 participants of all ages in Berlin; including more than 6,000 foreign participants from 105 countries. It brings together figures from church, political, economic and national life and serves as a major forum for debates on current social and political challenges, as well as offering opportunities for worship, workshops, music and culture.

The opening service took place at the Brandenburg Gate during which Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury gave a greeting together with the RC Archbishop and the presiding Bishop of the German Lutheran Church. This was the first time an Archbishop of Canterbury had been invited to give a word of greeting at such an opening event.

The following day, former US president Barack Obama joined Chancellor Angela Merkel. During a discussion on democracy and global responsibility, Obama spoke of the need for the renewal of the international order against the background of xenophobia, nationalism, intolerance and anti-democratic trends. *“We have to push back against those trends that would violate human rights, or that would suppress democracy, or would restrict individual freedoms of conscience and religion,”* said the former US president. *“We can’t isolate ourselves. We can’t hide behind a wall,”* he continued, speaking at the place where the city was once divided between East and West by the Berlin Wall.



Kirchentag 2017 Berlin – “You See Me”

This year’s event fell in the year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and was one of the main events in Germany celebrating the jubilee. Its conclusion was in Wittenberg, a place celebrated worldwide as the place where Martin Luther’s Reformation began in the sixteenth century. One of the organizers’ hopes was that the impetus of the Reformation would help the nation face challenges such as the integration of refugees, climate change, and financial and economic governance. *“The ideas and fundamental convictions of the Reformation have changed the world,”* this year’s Kirchentag president, Christina Aus der Au (a Swiss theologian and philosopher) said on the opening day. *“It’s anniversary falls in a year, at a time, characterized by rapid change. The world is being rocked by crises and wars.”*

The Kirchentag observed one minute’s silence on Friday 26th May for the more than 10,000 people who have lost their lives on their journey to Europe, fleeing war, hardship and terrorism.