



CPCE South-East Europe group met in Gall-Neukirchen

By Florian Herrmann.

From Switzerland to the Ukraine, from the Czech Republic down to Italy, spread the churches belonging to the South-Eastern Europe regional group of the CPCE. The 37 delegates from the churches in the region gathered from 26th till 29th April for their annual meeting in the Upper Austrian town of Gallneukirchen. For thirty five years now this regional group has been an important forum in which protestant Christians from both sides of the former Iron Curtain can meet.

An ambitious plan shaped the meeting in Gallneukirchen: By 2012 the delegates want to present a study of forms of service in the protestant churches of Central and South-East Europe.

Services have changed in all the churches of the region since the transformation of 1989: In the Western churches of the group such as Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden so-called alternative service orders have more and more come to the fore. There the aim is for communicative celebrations distinct from traditional liturgies. In Italy by contrast services have changed through the immigration of Protestants from Africa: in many places 80% of the members have an immigration background and bring in their own music and forms of piety. The German-speaking congregations in Rumania have shrunk drastically because of emigration to Germany. How do you celebrate worship with only a handful of people?

The churches profit by exchanging these experiences, helping to set their own challenges in a new light.

A high point of the conference was a meeting with the Methodist congregation in nearby Linz, including a shared worship service. The delegates also visited what is known as the diaconal centre of Spattstrasse. The Methodist church has built this up in Linz since the 1960s and today it is one of the largest organisations helping children and young people in Austria.