



Chaplaincy Profile

The Anglican Church of St Thomas à Becket, Hamburg, Germany

Englisch-bischöfliche Gemeinde Hamburg



Introduction

The Anglican Church of St Thomas à Becket is a vibrant, diverse, international community. On Sundays typically around 100 regular worshippers, representing over 15 nationalities, gather for the Eucharist service at 10:30 a.m. Many are from countries where the Anglican tradition flourishes, others are from different Christian traditions; however all are welcome and for all the church provides a spiritual home, support and comfort. Choral Evensong is normally celebrated on the last Friday of the month. The church aims to live up to its mission statement to be “A welcoming, active, inclusive church, growing in our relationship with God and the wider community”.



Some statistics

Demographics of the congregation at the end of 2018	
Total	158
Children (aged 0–10)	8
Young people (aged 11–17)	15
Adults (aged 18–69)	120
Adults (aged 70+)	15
Baptisms in 2018	
Total	21
Infants (aged 1 year)	2
Children (aged 1–4)	7
Children (aged 5–12)	8
Youth/adults (aged 13+)	4
Confirmations	8
Funerals	7

Church history

There has been a Church of England congregation in Hamburg since the early 17th century. Freedom of religion was a part of the unparalleled free-trade agreement the Company of Merchant Adventurers (textile merchants) secured with the Hamburg Senate in 1612. Also known to locals in Hamburg as the “Englische Kirche”, the current church building, dating from 1838, is

the successor to the chapel in the “English House”, Alte Gröningerstraße, where the Merchant Adventurers held church services in English for 200 years.



Die neue englische Kirche in Hamburg.

In 1808 French troops occupied the city and, by Napoleonic decree, the Merchant Adventurers’ guild was dissolved, their assets confiscated and the merchants themselves banished. Fortunately, some treasures from the chapel, like the silver liturgical vessels, the



Staatsarchiv Hamburg



registers and parts of the 18th century organ, were hidden in private homes. The church plate is now stored for safe keeping in the Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte and only brought to the church for Holy Communion on special occasions.

In 1814, the French were defeated and British citizens began to return to Hamburg. The plot of land on which the church stands was gifted by the city of Hamburg to compensate the community for the loss of property seized after the arrival of Napoleonic forces. Designed by Ole Jørgen Schmidt, a Danish-German architect living in Altona,

in what was then the modern neoclassical style, the present church building was consecrated on 11 November 1838. It survived the Great Fire of 1842 and World War I unscathed and, because of its historically important architecture, became a listed building in 1941. The church was hit by Allied bombs during World War II but was rebuilt by the Corps of Royal Engineers, aided by Hamburg craftsmen. It was rededicated on 12 September 1947 by the Bishop of Fulham, William Selwyn, and given the name English Church of St Thomas à Becket in honour of the patron saint of the Merchant Adventurers. The church underwent major renovations in the 1990s.

Location

The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg is located towards the “neck” of Germany. Thanks to this strategic position between the North Sea and the Baltic, and its harbour on the River Elbe, it has for centuries been a major centre for trade. It is one of Europe’s largest ports and one of the most affluent cities in Europe. The citizens of Hamburg (population 1.8 million) have a great affinity for water. Our church is centrally located near Hamburg’s main Lutheran church, St. Michaelis (St Michael’s), and the harbour. Excellent proximity to public transport links makes our church reachable by anybody living in the city and seeking to worship with us on Sundays. Many regular worshippers come from further afield, from neighbouring towns and villages. The Alster,



Hamburg's beloved, centrally located lake, and its many canals, as well as the numerous parks and gardens, give the city a spacious feeling. Due to its trade history, Hamburg has traditionally been home to many foreigners, and the city is certainly very international and welcoming. It is arguably the most Anglophile of German cities. With numerous concert halls, museums and universities, Hamburg offers a varied and vibrant cultural life. The city has an international airport, normally with

several daily flights to and from the UK – London, Birmingham, Manchester and Edinburgh.

Our church and who we are

Growth

Whereas many churches are facing diminishing congregations, St Thomas à Becket is flourishing. Our congregation is made up of Britons and Germans, Americans and Canadians, Ghanaians and Nigerians, South Africans and Australians, Indians and Iranians to name just a few nationalities. There are babies and teens, young adults and seniors and an increasing number of young families, especially from African countries. There are currently about 80 people on the electoral roll.





Clergy and ministry

Barring the periods of Napoleon's occupation of Hamburg and the two world wars, the church has had a full-time Chaplain since 1612. Although this is a solo ministry, three ordained priests holding *Permission to Officiate* are available to take services in an emergency or when the Chaplain is on holiday. In addition to the regular church services, there is an important ***ministry to the sick, the aged and the troubled.***

The Chaplaincy in Hamburg is, of course, part of the wider Diocese in Europe and the Chaplain can always count on the support of the Area Dean, Revd Canon John Newsome and the Archdeacon, Ven. Canon Leslie Nathaniel.

One member of our church is going through the discernment process for full-time ordained ministry. Three members are applying for formal reader's ministry training.

In the light of the current Covid-19 situation, the church has been closed since 10 March, 2020. It has, however, been anything but inactive. We have been well served by our locum, Fr Pete Wright, who had to return to Los Angeles as a result of the crisis, but prepared the services for Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter with lessons, psalms and intercessions read by members of the congregation and sent to him as video or audio recordings. The services are uploaded to our website and are also available on Facebook. Fr Pete is continuing to prepare services beyond the end of his term as locum and until our next locum can travel to Hamburg.

Our choir master, Yotin Tiewtrakul, and his able assistant, Arwen Pearson, offered Compline during Lent and have been organising Evening Prayer since Easter every Saturday evening via Zoom.

The church's website is updated regularly and includes not only information about the services, but also messages, prayers, songs and offers of help. The church has a well-maintained Facebook page and a new Facebook group. We have found that this time of physical isolation is bringing us closer together spiritually; in troubled and difficult times it has been a heart-warming experience that indicates the strength of our community.





Music

One of the defining features of the Anglican tradition is its liturgy and choral music. Our enthusiastic singing congregation is supported by our RSCM-affiliated choir (~ 10 voices) during the Sunday Eucharist. A traditional Anglican Choral Evensong is offered once a month, sung either by our choir, the Anglican Consort or a visiting choir. Our choir also regularly contributes to ecumenical choral events in Hamburg, as well as visiting other regional churches to offer Evensong at least once a year.

Yotin has composed one of the musical settings used for our Sunday liturgy, as well as numerous anthems, carols, canticles and other liturgical settings. Arwen is the driving force behind the choir's reliable rendition of the psalms in Anglican Chant.

Both of them are building a more demanding repertoire with the Anglican Consort, a group of semi-professional singers (~16 voices) dedicated to performing choral music in the Anglican tradition from the Renaissance to the modern day. This ensemble usually sings at least one Choral Evensong a year and leads an Advent Carol Service at the start of Advent.

At the end of 2019, we sadly had to say farewell to our fine church organist Jochim Trede who played the organ at St Thomas à Becket for 55 years. We are in the process of seeking a worthy successor. In the meantime, the organ is played by the choir master or local organists.

The organ itself was constructed by the well-known Hamburg organ builder Johann Gottlieb Wolfsteler (1794-1867), incorporating some of the metal pipes and the Baroque case of the original organ in the English House. Since construction, it has undergone several restorations.

Young people

Young people are a vital part of our current church life and St Thomas à Becket has a





flourishing youth ministry: *Junior Church* for young children, *Becket Mix* for adolescents and a *Young Adults' Group* providing a forum for thought-provoking discussion. These three groups ensure continual parish engagement almost from birth to adulthood.

Junior Church is a thriving ministry at St Thomas à Becket. Every Sunday 5–10 children from five different countries take part. There is direct continuity from Junior Church into the Becket Mix Youth Group, as 50% of the current Becket Mix (for teenagers) members attended Junior Church for 3+ years. Children aged 4+ who are able to stay without a parent are eligible. Our Junior Church leader is supported by six further members of the congregation.

In Junior Church the children learn about God and Jesus in a way suitable for children; they have fun with games and craftwork – which they often proudly show the congregation at the end of the service. They learn to enjoy peer fellowship; they learn to take spiritual steps and help actively in church, e.g. in the choir and with flowers for mothers on Mothering Sunday. They learn about relationship-building through playing games, learning with each other, with our priests, and with the congregation. The highlights of the Junior Church year include putting on the Nativity Play, with Becket Mix and a couple of enthusiastic adults, and the summer picnic.

Becket Mix had their first meeting on 4 June 2017 with 3 members. There are now 15 registered members and an average of 10 attendees at meetings and events. Half of the teenagers were regular Junior Church members for 3+ years; 86% are confirmed. The group chose their own name and have their own prayer. Mixers have to be at least 13 years old and/or confirmed and St Thomas à Becket Hamburg, Chaplaincy Profile 2020



must commit to come to church sometimes. The group is led by two of the mothers. Safeguarding regulations have been observed.

Group activities include sport and fun – e.g.: bowling, ice-skating, camping, cooking together, board games – waffles and crepes at the church bazaar, parish lunch (the proceeds were contributed to two homeless charities) and the Nativity Play. When Mixers reach the age of 18, they can join the *Young Adults*.

The **Young Adults** at St Thomas à Becket are a multinational, multicultural, multilingual group of students and working professionals in their 20s and 30s. They meet once a month to study the Bible, to strengthen their faith, discuss topics that are close to their hearts, discuss politics and other worldly issues and enjoy a hearty meal together. In addition to reading and discussing Bible passages, reflecting and praying, they enjoy learning about each other's countries and cultures. As young adults they are aware that they are the future of the church and try their best to uphold traditions and values taught to them through their many interactions with members of the church and the clergy and by participating in events organised by St Thomas à Becket. They participate regularly in the Sunday Eucharist and also often act as readers and altar servers.

Other groups

Ladies Christian Fellowship and Mothers' Union

The LCF meets a few times a year, usually for lunch and fellowship. Sometimes a guest speaker is invited, for instance, the Chaplain.

The small MU group has not had meetings for some time because several members were away for many months, so this is an area of potential development.

Safeguarding

There are two safeguarding officers, one of whom was recently trained to deliver level 2 training courses at parish level. These face-to-face courses will be delivered to those working with vulnerable people and the Church Council as soon as the current regulations allow for groups to meet. In the meantime, the congregation, and Council members in particular, have been encouraged to complete Diocesan online safeguarding courses. Our parish recognises the importance of safeguarding in the context of keeping our congregation safe. Church Council members had a weekend safeguarding seminar in 2018.



Publications and communication

Telling the wider community about who we are and what we do and keeping our church community up to date with news and events is an important ministry which is shared among a small communication team. The church website – www.anglican-church-hamburg.de – is our central communication tool. It is our main channel for publicising events and articles and is updated as needed by a dedicated webmaster who ensures readers of the website see an active church community. The communication team also maintains a Facebook page and an email mailing list for members and friends of the congregation that is used exclusively for communicating information of direct relevance to our church.

The Church has a Chaplaincy Magazine, *Becket News*, usually produced quarterly. Articles are contributed by members of the church, and sometimes also by former members or visitors. The magazine is now in its 75th edition and has a circulation of about 200. Printed copies are distributed in church and a PDF version is available on the website. As in many Diocese in Europe Chaplaincies, the congregation includes a number of people who spend just a short period living in the vicinity, but who then like to keep up with the news once they move on or return home. *Becket News* is sent by post to a few people and emailed to the church mailing list, which includes a number outside Hamburg.

To mark the 180th anniversary of the church building in 2018, a publication on the history and modern face of St Thomas à Becket, entitled *A visible sign of enduring friendship*, was produced in English and German to accompany an exhibition and film shown in the church.

A team of researchers from St Thomas à Becket also took part in the Arts Society Church Recording project together with the Arts Society Hamburg to make a complete record of the church interior, including furnishings, memorials, metalwork, paintings, silver, windows and other articles. In addition to the record, the work produced a spin-off bilingual publication, *Inside the English Church Hamburg*, which also appeared in the 180th anniversary year.

Outreach

Events, fund-raising and community outreach

The bazaar in November is the most important fund-raiser for the church and is supported whole-heartedly by the entire congregation, with preparation for it beginning many months





before. There are stands selling British produce, cakes, mince pies and other baked goodies, a large second-hand book store – which is open all year round – delicious African and Indian food, waffles, crepes, a café upstairs, all sorts of handicrafts, hand-made Christmas cards, a popular raffle and games for children. The bazaar is well attended and affords us a wonderful opportunity to welcome the wider community. It is also a day on which the congregation pools its many and diverse talents to create a successful and fun event.

Apart from the bazaar, the church organises a diverse range of concerts every year, one of which is a Benefit Concert, a key fund-raising event, featuring well-known and highly acclaimed young artists. The church building lends itself to music-making due to its wonderful acoustics.

Every September St Thomas à Becket takes part in the Hamburg *Nacht der Kirchen* (Night of the Churches) when most of Hamburg's churches open their doors for visitors and offer interesting programmes of music, church history, guided tours and films. Another important annual event in September is the *Tag des offenen Denkmals* (Monument Open Day). This is a weekend event for all listed buildings in Hamburg and always draws a good crowd. The church usually offers a concert of English church music, an open day on Saturday with guided tours and an invitation to the Sunday service and morning tea with the congregation. These events increase awareness of the English Church and also generate donations.

We participate in the programme *Pilgern durch Hamburg* which takes “pilgrims” on various walking tours of Hamburg's churches. In addition, guided tours of the church are offered on request.

Ecumenical

St Thomas à Becket works closely with the Nordkirche. This closeness is a result of the Meissen Declaration between the Church of England and the Lutheran Church (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland/EKD). The church is actively engaged in the work of the Council of Christian Churches – Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Hamburg, the Ökumenisches Forum, the Missionsakademie in cooperation with the theological faculty of the Hamburg University and other organisations. There is a very close relationship with the chaplaincies of the Porvoo Communion of Churches based in Hamburg, and to the Old Catholics.

Mission

We take the plight of those seeking asylum seriously and work with partners to provide support. The church has successfully defended two cases in the Hamburg Civil Court. Our previous St Thomas à Becket Hamburg, Chaplaincy Profile 2020



Chaplain, Revd Canon Dr Leslie Nathaniel, helped prepare a Christian Iranian family, who have been coming to our church for several years, for their court appearance and, as a witness on their behalf, was instrumental in persuading the court to grant them asylum.

Our church is working towards greater support for the Mission to Seafarers, though no details are available as yet.

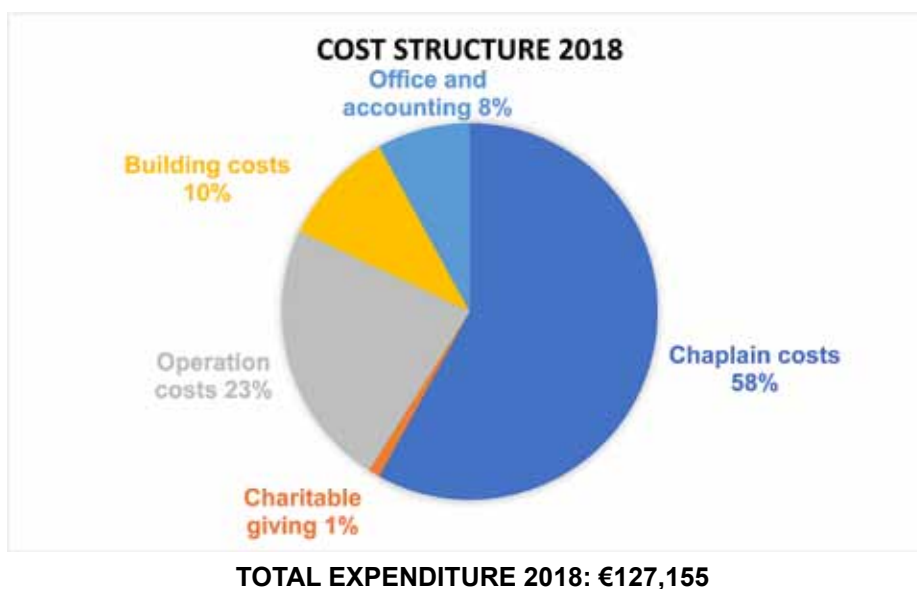
See also “Events, fund-raising and community outreach” above.

Wider community

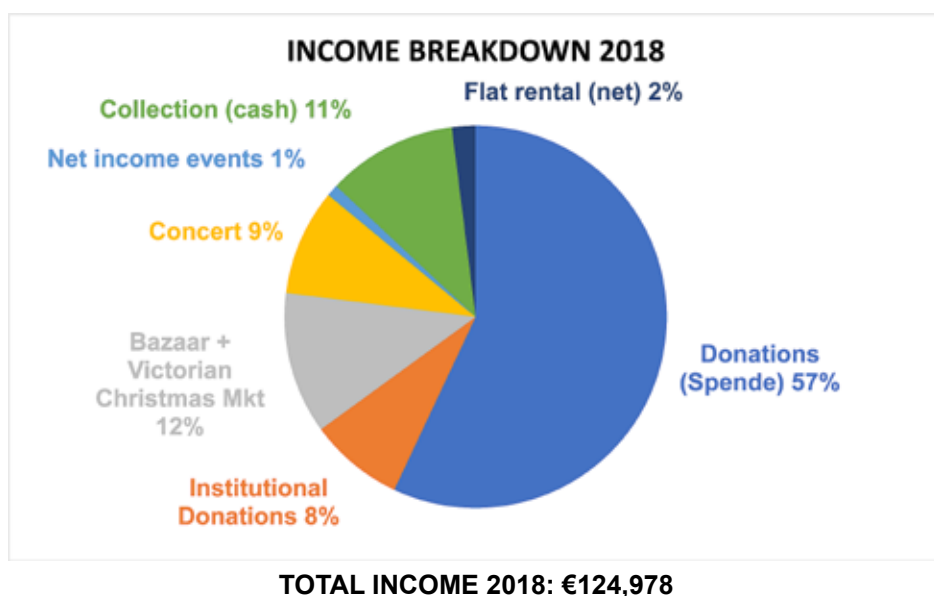
The church has close relationships to, and often engages with: the Anglo-German Club, the British Club, Friends of Britain e.V., Victorian Christmas Market, Port City Birthday, the Arts Society Hamburg, the cricket club and some of the key departments of the city, such as the Ministry of Culture and Media.

Finances

The church is registered as a public corporation (*Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*) under the name *Englisch-bischöfliche Gemeinde*. This legal form means that donations to the church are tax-deductible. The church has no guaranteed income: it does not receive Kirchensteuer (Church Tax) and is entirely self-funding, relying on donations from the congregation, supporters and fund-raising activities. Around €140,000 will be needed annually to cover the ministry of a full-time chaplain, maintain the building and fund activities. Aside from the Chaplain, payments are made to the organist, choir director and an independent treasurer. All other roles needed to run the church are taken on by many dedicated volunteers who give generously of their talents to cover everything from the finances to the website.



The church has learned the lessons of the past concerning financial insecurity and has adopted strict reporting procedures, with monthly financial reports prepared by the treasurer passed to Council. In addition to the bookkeeping and oversight by the treasurer, a treasury liaison officer who is an elected member of Council provides a strategic view on trends and matters that need to be addressed.



About half the income comes from regular donors, the remainder is money raised through fund-raising activities. Thanks to the efforts of the previous chaplain, an annual grant has been secured from the Nordkirche. Like most churches, raising the income needed is a major area of concern.

Currently the church has substantial reserves but needs to address its income base.

Although the church is well attended, the amount of income generated through regular giving by individuals has been declining for a variety of reasons. Therefore, one of the ongoing matters of priority is to increase the regular donor base.

The key fund-raising activities are the aforementioned annual bazaar, which raises in excess of €10,000 and involves the whole community, and the Benefizkonzert (benefit concert), held annually since 2017 following recognition of the need for an additional significant fund-raising event. Through contacts to outstanding young musicians, the catering abilities of members of the congregation and the support of the British Honorary Consul and Anglo-German Club, the concert has proved very successful both in fund-raising and in connecting with the wider community. See also “Events, fund-raising and community outreach” above.

The Council is pursuing a number of measures to address the church income, especially to recruit more donors. This necessarily involves the Chaplain playing a key role.

Note: The decision to show the figures for 2018 rather than 2019 reflects the fact that this is the most recent complete year with a full-time Chaplain and thus gives a better idea of the relationship of costs to income.

Chaplain’s housing

The Chaplain’s accommodation is a two-bedroom flat, on the first floor of an early post-war building in the grounds of St Michael’s Lutheran Church.

The second bedroom currently forms part of the living and dining room area. However, the glass door can be shut and the dining area converted into a guest room. The flat is owned by



the Nordkirche, the regional arm of the German Lutheran Church, who offer it at a reasonable rent in view of its central location. It is located 300 metres from St Thomas à Becket. Both the River Elbe waterfront and the Planten un Blomen park are less than ten minutes' walk away. The main shopping area in town is within walking distance or a five-minute bus ride away.

The flat would accommodate a couple, but it is not large enough for a family with children. There is no disabled access (there is no lift). Public transport is very good in Hamburg and there is no need



for the Chaplain to have a car; however there is a parking space available. For candidates with children, alternative accommodation would need to be found. For cost reasons, this would almost inevitably be a considerable distance from the church.

Looking ahead – some key thoughts

A church with a family orientation

In keeping with its inclusive orientation, St Thomas à Becket continues to be vibrant and is present and engaged in the public forum. It has evolved into a church with a large number of young families, in particular from Africa and Asia worshipping together Sunday after Sunday. Sometimes our Junior Church has up to 15 children and as many as 30 children may come up during communion for a blessing. The church is looking to further strengthen this area of ministry through a greater focus on initiatives for young families to reflect this steady growth.

Ministry to the sick, the aged and the troubled

Important work has begun and will require further development of a good team under the guidance of the Chaplain for this ministry to be sustainable and successful.



The Chaplain

“Every tinker or taylor who may fancy himself inspired can become a British Chaplain in Hamburg.”
Consul J.A. Mellish, poet and personal friend of the German poet, playwright and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1826.

Well, hopefully things have changed in Hamburg since 1826!

We are looking for an energetic Chaplain, who, alongside being “inspired”, will partner us constructively and creatively. It is important to us that the new Chaplain has a strong pastoral focus but also the ability to connect with a very diverse community within the church and beyond. Those living a long way from home, dealing with life in a foreign culture and language need our church to be a spiritual home away from home. Our ageing members have particular needs for support and pastoral care and our young people need a Chaplain who is genuinely interested in them and keen to foster and support the youth ministries.

When the congregation was asked what their greatest dreams for the future were, the most important points were: a long-term Chaplain who is outgoing, enthusiastic, is able to integrate the different groups, is good with children and young people and gives good sermons.

We are looking for a Chaplain who will help us develop spiritually. We are blessed with a wealth of talents and abilities and a desire to use these to the benefit of the church. We are looking for a Chaplain who leads and inspires, but delegates – who allows us to try new things, who facilitates our initiatives, who assesses with us where we can do better.

We hope our new Chaplain will find us welcoming and caring, but also on occasion challenging and even inspired.

He or she is already in our prayers.

Photo credits: Joyceline Anaroura-Schmidt: p. 4 bottom, Becket Mix: p. 7, p. 8, Jo Dawes: p. 4 top, John Finn: p. 1, Roland Magunia: p. 5, p. 6 top, Joachim Mewes: p. 13, Dorothee Möller: p. 6, p. 10, Staatsarchiv Hamburg: p. 2, p. 3.