

The French-Reformed Parish

In order to better understand the peculiarities of the *French Church*, e.g. no paintings, no candles and no altar, it is useful to point out to the developed character of the *parish*. One of the characteristics is the preservation of its own profile: although belonging for more than 180 years to the established *German Evangelical Church*, its bishop and church administration have no say in theological questions of the parish. This unique profile has derived directly – and has continuously been renewed and *reformed* – on the basis of the bible and the self-conception of those French immigrants, who founded our *parish* more almost 300 years ago.

Still today, our *parish* aims to renew itself, so that the theological heritage is not just conserved, but remains inviting in the contemporary context. Visitors have described our *parish* as open to the world, contemporary, practical and spiritual. It is said that together we try to make God's nearness tangible and comprehensible.

Our parish is open to everyone, no matter of what origin.

Historical and political significance

The *French Church* is the oldest existing church of Potsdam. Its construction was financed by *Frederick II* (known as *Frederick the Great*) and is the only building, which has been designed by the both outstanding *Prussian* architects *G.W. von Knobelsdorff* and *K.F. Schinkel*.

Our *church* is the concrete realisation of the famous *Edict of Potsdam*. This Edict – today it might be called an immigration law – regulated the incoming of persecuted protestants from *France*, who had left their country under the threat of life. The *French Church* was a substantial investment into a long-



Huguenot cross

term programme for the integration of foreigners. This programme enhanced the reputation of *Potsdam* and formed its identity beyond the barracks and the city walls. It is still a valuable experience for both European integration and for approaching modern immigration problems.



View of the *French Church* across the *Basin*, 18th century

Planning the *French Church*, the king and his "star architect" were inspired (as in the case of *Sanssouci Palace*) by the *Pantheon-motif*. The king would have liked to erect such a *Pantheon* for all confessions in *Prussia* in order to educate his subjects towards milder manners of living together.

How this ideal worked can be studied at the *Basinplatz*. Here it was possible to build a *Roman Catholic church* next to the *Huguenot church* and to develop a tolerant coexistence with each other, which does not forget about the history, but which did pave the road for a less strained future.

The great ideals that were connected with the *French Church* remained vivid and resilient. In the *German Democratic Republic* (East Germany) our *church* kept a legitimate role in pointing out the lack of tolerance and openness towards the world. Today, the *French Church* is a symbol for common a European history and a reason to revive the connections to *France*, which have left a strong imprint on Potsdam throughout its history.

Architectural significance

The *church* possesses an aesthetic quality that speaks for itself.

The architectural achievement is among other things the successful realisation of the *Pantheon-motif* and its user-oriented transformation towards an imageless church, where at its centre is the Bible and its interpretation into modern times is at the centre.

In a world filled with endless stimuli, the *church* makes possible focus on the essential. Because

there is no distraction or spatial distance, no technical arrangement is necessary in order to communicate; the presented can be felt immediately.

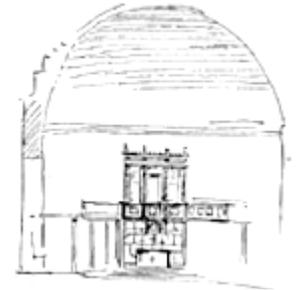
Visitors are not weighed down by the architecture. Human dimension and grandeur are made one.

The acoustics are also outstanding.

Not yet adequately recognised are the unusual engineering solutions, which made possible the safe foundation on a swampy ground, the successful isolation against moisture, and most of all the daring construction of an oval dome.

The *French Church* was planned with symbolic intentions regarding political and urban development. The *church* is a key for comprehending the history of the city and its future development.

The reintegration into the *Basin Square* is still desired.



French Church
Sketch by *Schinkel*, 1833

The *French Church* is prominent

- as part of the *Basin Square* designed by *Lenné*,
- as a fixed point for several viewing perspectives,
- as a counterpart to the post-war buildings in the neighbourhood
- as a remnant of the destroyed *French Quarter*.

The *church* offers an unusual space, which is hardly comparable and at the same not burdened by history. For good reasons, there is an abstention of many common things: altar, crucifix, paintings, baptismal font, etc..

Where do you find a Baroque church with clear windows, without crosses, a belfry and bells?

Diverse, even non-clerical events witness of the good atmosphere, which can be found at this location. Often, visitors react with new reflections of thought or glad astonishment. The environment triggers different associations on the role of art, openness and tolerance.

With the *French Church* and its valuable *Grüneberg* organ of 1783, Potsdam possesses a versatile historical space, which is hardly matched.

Renovation and engagement within the parish

In earlier times, mainly the king and the state financed the renovations of our *church*. Even in the *German Democratic Republic* (East Germany), the state accepted its responsibility in principle. Nowadays, in unified *Germany*, this is no longer taken for granted.

Over 40 years, the *parish* members struggled in even seemingly hopeless situations to preserve and refurbish their church in order to be able to use it

again. The almost abandoned and devastated building was finally saved by enormous voluntary work and many generous donations.



Since 1991 we have raised donations of over 600,000 Euros.

Every *parish* member has contributed on average about 2,000 Euros to the cost of reconstruction. The *German Foundation for the Preservation of Historical Sites* (*Deutsche Stiftung Denkmalschutz*), the *Province of Brandenburg* and the *City of Potsdam* have sponsored the work with more than one million Euros.

The enormous support by *Ernst Naumann* from *Abrensburg* was also decisive. He had a sense of the originality of the *French Church* and its great potential for contemporary use even when it still was in a desolate state.

Now all our savings have been used up.

So we are now even more dependent than before on donations in order to keep up the various uses of the *French Church*.

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Receipts for donations are happily sent by mail (please disclose your name and address for this purpose).

You are welcome to all our services and events.
The dates are indicated on the showcase, in the printed parish newsletter, and in the internet.



Evangelical Church
Berlin-Brandenburg-schlesische Oberlausitz

French-Reformed Church of Potsdam

FRENCH CHURCH

Le temple réformé de Potsdam



- 1752 The *French Church* was built as a reformed church for protestant refugees from France (*Huguenots*) according to plans by *G.W. von Knobelsdorff*.
- 1833 it was redesigned in its interior by *K.F. Schinkel*.
- 1968 the dilapidated church was closed.
- 1991 the gradual renovation began.
- 1993 the celebration of services, concerts and other events in the church was resumed – being still a construction site at the time.
- 2000 the baroque *Grüneberg* organ and the floor heating were put in place.
- 2003 the restoration was completed.

We use the *French Church* in many different ways as a reformed parish church, for events of arts and meetings, which respect the dignity of the place.