



CONVERGE

INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

DARMSTADT

A SHORT HISTORY

New beginnings...

At the Annual Convention Meeting of the International Baptist Convention in 2003 in Oberursel, Germany, a small group of people realized that they all had the vision for a new church plant in Darmstadt. This small group included Martin Levey, Darryl Evetts, Judith Lynn and Stewart Maxwell, and Jimmy Martin. Darryl Evetts was already praying for a place to plant a new church, and so he stopped in Darmstadt on his way home to prayer walk in the city to see if that is where God would have him serve.

Beginning in January 2004, the group met at the IBC Office in Frankfurt to see if this vision could become a reality. It was decided that we would begin with a Bible study in the city and see if a core group could be formed to begin a worship service. The Maxwells agreed to lead the Bible study.

For the next three years, we met regularly on Thursday nights. We never had many - once or twice, it was just the Maxwells. The highest attendance we ever had was seven. Each time there was discouragement, someone would come and offer encouragement. The regular attendees included a young woman from the U.S. who was here training for dressage competition, a German woman who was looking for a good Bible study, and a German woman who wanted to practice her English. In 2007, the group was down to just three people and the Maxwells were travelling frequently for their jobs. It was decided to disband the Bible study. But the dream of a church in Darmstadt still lived.

In 2009, Bob and Carol Marsh made a visit to Germany exploring the possibility of planting a church. After their grand tour of Germany, they felt like Darmstadt was the place that God was leading them to.

The Marshes made a return visit in the summer of 2009, and this visit confirmed their call. They returned home to begin raising the support they would need to come. The initial estimate was that they hoped to be on the field in January 2011. But the economy in the U.S. made raising support difficult and so the moving date was moved to summer 2011.

God was busy moving people into place – literally.

The Eric and Nataalka Eagles' assignment was extended. Igor, Maya, and Leandra Zayer moved here from The Netherlands - and connected with us through the IBC church in Leidschendam. Nicole Trabes had been attending the IBC church in Madrid before moving back home to Darmstadt. She brought her brother Kevin Nickel along. Mark Morton was part of Bethel International Baptist Church in Frankfurt but lived and worked in Darmstadt.



Bob and Carol Marsh

He brought colleague Ben Arnold to the group. The Marshes met David and Nikki Herth and Daniel and Adela Herth (two German brothers married to two Romanian sisters) when the Marshes visited the German Baptist church in Darmstadt. The Herths were excited to hear of the new church. The core group was coming together. We began with one home group in September and in January we grew to two home groups. On Sunday, 22 April we held our first worship service! The vision of a new international church in Darmstadt was becoming a reality. We had some minor glitches on that Sunday night but 33 adults and 3 children worshipped together. In May, June, and July we held four other preview services. The average attendance at these service was 30.

In early August we formed the Genesis Team of Converge International Fellowship, Darmstadt - a group of 12 people who were committed to helping with the public launch of the church, to providing oversight and leadership to the fellowship, and to guide the fellowship through the process of becoming a recognized church within the German Baptist Union, the IBC, and Converge Worldwide. The Genesis Team was composed of Bob and Carol Marsh, Stewart and Judith Lynn Maxwell, Igor and Maya Zayer, David and Nikki Herth, Daniel and Adela Herth, and Eric and Nataalka

Eagle. Our home groups, known as LIFE groups, continued to grow. We formed a third group, meeting in the center of Darmstadt. In August and September we met three Sundays out of the month - continuing to work on some of the "details" of being and doing a church. We publicly launched the church on 7 October with the theme, "It's a Church." Appropriately, on the same day, we celebrated our first baby dedication. There were 75 people in attendance for this first "official" service of the church. On 26 January 2014, the church ratified its constitution. Over the next three weeks, 24 people would sign the constitution and become charter members. In July, the church elected its first elders. At its July meeting, the church also agreed to pursue full membership in both the IBC and the German Baptist Union (BEFG). It is already an associate member in both organizations.

In 2015, we elected our first ministry coordinators (deacons) to head up the three primary areas of ministry and outreach. They recruited team leaders to lead individual ministries within the church. In May, we started a second life group in the center of town, bringing the total to four. In September, this group moved to one of the communities outside of Darmstadt central.



In June, we participated in the Nacht der Kirchen, a Darmstadt-wide night of churches. The theme of the night was “Be Our Guest.” Our presentation was entitled “No Longer Strangers in a Strange Land” and featured a “TV interview” with 3 biblical characters and one modern-day person who found a home in a distant land.

In September the church voted to call Blake Nobles as an intern for the university student ministry. Blake raised almost all of his own support. He arrived in January 2016 for a six-month period. During the six months, he began a bi-weekly meeting with the university students and connected with other students on the university campuses. The ministry has continued under a local leadership team. In August 2016, the church along with sister church Bethel International Baptist Church, Frankfurt, held its first church-wide retreat. Fifty-four people attend the retreat at the Lachener Gaestehaeuser which featured times of worship, small group study, recreation, fellowship, a cookout, and bonfires.

The two churches combined later in the year to fill shoeboxes for the homeless in the Frankfurt area. Two hundred boxes were filled with hats, scarves, a Bible, and hygiene articles and distributed.

The church celebrated the Christmas season with a prayer walk around the Christmas market and downtown area. Seventeen people spent two hours on a Saturday afternoon praying for the city of Darmstadt.

The church continued to grow. Almost every week there were new people attending. We averaged 65 in the Sunday worship services. In January 2017, Pastor Bob Marsh announced to the church a need for a

sabbatical to provide personal refreshment and renewal. Bob preached every other week through March and then took a 3-month sabbatical in the U.S. Denton Lotz served as the interim pastor between March and June. Bob returned to Germany in July and began preaching again on a full-time basis in August. We are thankful for the men in the church and pastors from the surrounding area who filled the pulpit during the time of Bob's absence.

In May, the church hosted the first Science and Faith Forum at the H+ Hotel in Darmstadt. Sixty-five people attended; more than half of these were not from the church. The guest speaker was Professor Doctor Barbara Drossel, Head of the Department of Theoretical Physics at the Technical University of Darmstadt. Professor Drossel has a wide experience of presenting and writing on the topic of science and faith. At the conclusion of her talk, there was a question & answer session, and Professor Drossel fielded a wide range of challenging questions from the audience, which included several Muslims.

Other key outreach events during the year were two Board Game Nights and an Outdoor Worship Service. All three of these events saw new people come to the church.

The church saw a growth in membership during the year despite losing several people. At the end of 2017 there were 41 members with an average attendance of 75 in the worship services.

In 2018, the church spent six months doing the ReFresh process. The ReFresh team looked at the church's mission, vision, and core values and listed key strategic areas for the church to be involved with over the next five years. The church adopted the new mission statement:

**“Knowing Jesus ...
Making Him Known ...
to Every Nation.”**

In December, Pastor Bob Marsh announced his resignation from the church effective in August 2019. The Marsh's U.S. Social Security situation and their gifting as church planters played a factor in their decision and its timing.

2019 was a definite year of transition as the church prepared for its founding pastor to leave after serving the church for eight years. In April a six-member Pastor Search Team was approved by the church. The team began working right away, knowing that the average time for an IBC church to find a pastor was 18 months.

In August, the church said “Auf Wiedersehen” to Bob & Carol Marsh, presenting them with a picture collage of church events as well as a satellite image of the world on the date the church was founded.

Kent and Debbie Staton arrived in October to serve as interim pastor. In December their visa was approved through January 2021, allowing them to serve hopefully until a new pastor was called.

2020 was a year like no other around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic struck Darmstadt and CIF along with the rest of the world. In early March, we stopped meeting in person and moved to Zoom worship services. LIFE groups also moved to meeting online. In an effort to stay connected and pray for the congregation and the world, we began an online prayer meeting on Friday nights. The online-only meetings continued through July, through the first wave of the virus in Germany.

At the end of July, we began in-person services again, following strict hygiene procedures and social distancing guidelines. We continued to stream the services through Zoom, allowing those who could not attend in-person to continue to participate. Unfortunately, due to the rising number of cases in Darmstadt, we had to discontinue in-person services in November. The Pastor Search Team continued to work through the pandemic. It actually was a benefit for the team as they had more time for meetings (albeit online). A new pastor was not found in the first round of applications so they began a second round in August.

Kent and Debbie Staton



Kent and Debbie Staton said good-bye to the church at the end of October. Markus and Allison Schmid, who lived in nearby Mannheim, agreed to serve as the next interim pastor.

In January 2021, the Pastor Search Team and the Elders introduced Chris Horn from Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, as the new prospective pastor. Chris and his wife Nikki and their three boys spent a week virtually visiting the church. Chris preached for two different services and during a congregational meeting on 14 February was called to be the next pastor of Converge.

However, the borders between Germany and South Africa remained closed. The Horns were able to get their visas approved relatively quickly, pending an open border. In the meantime, Markus Schmid continued to pastor the church through the end of April. With the borders still closed and Chris having now resigned from his current pastorate, the church asked him to serve as a virtual pastor beginning in June.

Chris preached each Sunday online and met with groups and individuals virtually.

Finally at the beginning of August the borders opened and three weeks later – on 28 August – the Horn family arrived in Germany.

An installation service was held for them on 5 September. Fellow South African and pastor of IBC Stuttgart Keith Lategan preached the message for the day. IBC General Secretary Tim Faulkner conducted the covenant part of the service and prayed for the Horns. Pastors and wives from surrounding IBC churches were in attendance. Due to COVID restrictions, the congregation enjoyed cookies and drinks outside following the service.

The church continued to meet in a hybrid method with numbers gradually increasing in the in-person services. The Advent season featured the first ever CIF children's nativity program.





In 2022, the church is celebrating the 10th anniversary of its beginning. With hopefully the worst of the COVID pandemic behind us, the number of those attending in-person services continue to climb.

Visitors are coming on a regular basis and new people are joining the church. We celebrated being able to be together again with an outdoor worship service and barbecue in June.



A special Anniversary Offering is being collected throughout the year. We have a goal of 10,000€ - 1,000€ for each of the years we've been in existence.

The highlight of the anniversary year will be the birthday celebration on 9 October. On that day we will celebrate God's faithfulness to us and His vision for our future in Darmstadt.

