

The Bells are Ringing Again

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It was a miracle, something no one had expected any more: At Christmas 2009, after more than 65 years, the bells from the belfry of the former Evangelical Church of Gross Tuchen (Kreis Bütow) rang again, and there was a Christmas service. The church had been damaged toward the end of World War II and gradually became a ruin. Now, with the help of Poles, Germans and Americans, the church has been restored and consecrated as the Catholic St. Adalbert Church.

The Polish Catholic parish, in a Christmas service, honored a German. The Polish priest, Francizek Pudlewski, led Horst Ludwig to the altar. Horst Ludwig was born in Gross Tuchen in 1927 and was expelled in 1945. Horst had been involved in the restoration from the beginning and had supported it with all his strength. He saw to it that the bells were installed with an electronic sound system, as well as the pews and a clock in the belfry, all from his new home in Mülheim on the Ruhr. Especially important also were the donations of the Gnodtke family from Michigan and Germany for the windows that would prevent further damage from the weather.

400 Year-old Evangelical Church

The history of the Evangelical parish in Gross Tuchen goes back to the time of the Reformation. In 1670, the first local Evangelical House of Prayer was finished, but it burned down after four years. A House of God made of wood and brick, and measuring 8 x 15.5 meters in a half-timbered form, was erected by the parish in 1691. The interior of the church was richly decorated. The patrons were estate owners and members of the Evangelical-Kashubian nobility from the Danzig area. In 1749 the building was extended by 7.5 meters.

In the years 1886 until 1889 there was a typical Neo-Gothic brick church building, typical for Prussia at that time. The sanctuary measured 27 x 16 meters and was decorated with red tiles and the 35 m steeple was covered with slate shingles. The Gothic stained glass windows were colored. The inner walls of the church were plastered, and the ceiling and floor were wooden. At the center of the altar there was a portrait of Martin Luther and beneath that on three panels were the words *Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe und Frieden auf Erden und den Menschen ein Wohlgefallen*. (Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth and good will to all.)



1940



1966



2009

Interior of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Gross Tuchen: before WW II, nearly a ruin, and restored.

In the center of the altar was a carved wooden altar dating back to the 17th century. The six-sided chancel before the altar stood on a wooden stan, and on that was a baptistry dating back to the 17th century. On the east side of the church was the choir loft with the great eighteen-chord organ on wooden piles. On either side were galleries with padded seats. The church had three bronze bells with diameters of 1.03 to 0.77 meters.

This huge church was the second largest in Kreis Bütow and the central house of God for the Evangelical Lutheran inhabitants of Gross Tuchen, Klein Tuchen, Gross Massowitz, Neuhütten, Moddrow, Tangen, Klein and Gross Platenheim, Pyaschen (Franzwalde), Zemmen and Tschebiattkow (Radensfelde).

Decline and Rebuilding

After the residents of Gross Tuchen fled in March of 1945, there was fighting in and around Gross Tuchen. The steeple, the roof and some of the windows suffered minor damage from gunfire. Upon their return they found the interior in relatively good condition. It is said that an open Bible still lay on the altar. The members held their last Evangelical service in this church under the direction of the village school teacher, Mr. Mauss. In the service a long list of the names of war victims was read and many of the participants wept. For that reason Mr. Mauss was arrested by the police for inciting unrest. He was taken to the castle prison in Bütow where he was severely mistreated. With that, the Protestant use of the church came to an end. Later the church was taken over by the Catholic parish.

After that it was used as a storage place by the communist authorities, and its condition gradually deteriorated. The pews were sold to a parish in the Gdingen area. The clock went to the court house in Köslin. The remainder of the church furnishings simply disappeared, even the location of the organ is unknown. The bells had been melted down during the war by the Germans.

For that reason the rebuilding of the church has a special meaning and it is a monument of hope for understanding and forgiveness between nations.

Further information about Gross Tuchen can be found at: <http://grosstuchen.de/>. The authors' email addresses are: h.polzin@t-online.de and radde@epost.ch.



Gross Tuchen church in 2009.