

**Major Rolf D. Guenther**  
**Retired Canadian Officer Residing in Germany**

**REFLECTIONS FROM GERMANY**

I am of German descent, but have lived in Canada since 1969. In 1976, I joined The Salvation Army in Toronto and in 1978, my wife Joanne Church (daughter of Brigadiers Doug and Lily Church) and I decided to become Army Officers. From 1982 to 1991, we were appointed as Envoys to various parts of Ontario and the Yukon.

Later on in 1991, we were appointed as Corps Officers (COs) to Nuremberg, Germany. We transferred to Munich the next year as COs of the local Corps and Executive Directors of the "William Booth Heim," an 80 bed hostel for homeless men.

Germany is a small country in the centre of Europe. It is almost three times smaller than British Columbia; however, it has a population of over 82 million people.

About one third of the population is Roman Catholic, another third is Evangelical Lutheran and the rest are without a formal church membership. Both denominations are declining rapidly every year. More members are leaving the churches than those joining. The country is predominantly a secular state.

During our time in Munich - from 1992 to 2002 - we noticed that there were hundreds of homeless people living outside, under bridges and in parks. Fortunately, we were able to buy a canteen truck from The Canadian Red Shield centre in Lahr. The Canadian Forces had ended its service in Germany and so did the services of The Red Shield centre. The canteen truck had German signs and we went every week to the homeless people on the streets to serve a warm meal, coffee, tea and sometimes distributed donated clothes.

We felt that it might be a good idea to offer a "breakfast service" in our church on Sunday mornings for those who were living outside. It was planned for the cold season only, but it went on without interruption for more than ten years. We had our breakfast service at 9:30 a.m. and a traditional evening service at 6:00 p.m. Some told the Munich newspaper that the service at The Salvation Army was the highlight of the week. Others walked through the city for two hours with their sleeping bag in hand to be at the Army on time. We prepared the tables with tablecloths, candles and flowers, while volunteers helped serve our guests. We wanted the people to feel good on Sundays.

The service itself was a bit unusual since we did not sing. Joanne and I felt that they did not know our songs and the songs that they knew we didn't sing. So, we started with a prayer and then had about 25 minutes for breakfast. After breakfast, we had a 20 minute sermon closed by prayer and a blessing—then they went on their way. Every

Sunday we had between 60 and 90 people attending. In the evening we had about 30 to 40 people coming. There was a small brass band and some of the members were African refugees. Out of all this, a weekly bible study group developed and a few people accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

We returned to Canada in 2002 and continued our work with local homeless communities in Hamilton and Oakville, Ontario until our retirement to British Columbia in 2006, where I worked as Social Services Director for the Parksville Salvation Army Food Bank.

In the summer of 2012, after Joanne's passing, I took a trip back to Germany. During my visit, I was asked by the Divisional Commander of the German North-East Division if I would consider helping as a CO for the Kiel Corps and at the end of that year I moved back to Germany to take charge of the Corps.

I met a wonderful German lady who is also widowed and we married in 2013. I now live in Markkleeberg, a small city just outside of Leipzig in former East Germany.

God bless you,

*Rolf D. Guenther*  
*Major (Rtd.)*