

Portrait

Bishop Werner Philipp D.Min.

Bishop of the United Methodist Church in Germany from May 2025

Werner Philipp was elected bishop on February 13, 2025, at the Germany Central Conference of The United Methodist Church (UMC) in Würzburg-Himmelspforten (Franconia, Germany). After a transition period with his predecessor, Bishop Harald Rückert, he will assume episcopal supervision for Germany within The United Methodist Church.

Seeking and shaping unity in diversity

The nomination for the ministry as a bishop and now even more the election “fills me with gratitude and at the same time with great respect,” explains Werner Philipp in connection with his election to the office of bishop for The United Methodist Church. He sees in this task “a calling to a leadership ministry that can only be accepted humbly before God.” Philipp is convinced that this ministry can only be carried out together with the full-time staff and the volunteers of the church. In this respect, he will fully embrace the seriousness and responsibility of the assignment. At the same time, however, he will always be aware: “We’ are bishops!”

Philipp expressly points out that the bishop’s duty has always been entrusted with the unity of the church. “This unity,” said the newly elected bishop, “is a unity in diversity that makes our church strong and beautiful.” In times of diverse polarization in church and society, it will continue to be important to seek and create unity in diversity.

Discovering and releasing the potential for new things

After many discussions about adapting church structures to the current situation, he wants to use his new assignment to work towards bringing the content and spiritual dimension of faith back into the conversation. Structural debates are important, but it must once again be about seeking and finding God together. Exchange with social groups is also important for this. Philipp finds it tempting to come into even more contact with the arts and sciences. This would also help the church to deal with social changes and to prove itself as a respected partner in critical debates.

The 57-year-old finds it painful “that we as a church can only think in terms of retreat.” It should not be the case that the church only understands how to plan “to close, sell or merge.” The church must be more than just accompanying dying congregations. Good, sensitive support is necessary. But the church’s task is much more, “to see the potential or to discover the starting points for something new.” Philipp admits openly that this is something that concerns him a lot. He wants to focus a lot of attention to this issue in his ministry.

Vita and appointments

Werner Philipp was born on August 21, 1967, in Erlabrunn in the Ore Mountains in southern Saxony and grew up there. Because he was prevented from obtaining his high school diploma in the former GDR for political reasons, he graduated from the ten-year General Polytechnic High School. This was followed by training as a roofing specialist, after which he embarked on a path to pastoral ministry in The United Methodist Church.

He began his pastoral career with a one-year parish internship in the area of the Germany East Annual Conference in the Netzschkau parish in western Saxony. He then studied theology from 1987 to 1990 at the United Methodist Theological Seminary in Bad Klosterlausnitz and – after the reunification of the previously divided Germany – from 1990 to 1992 at the United Methodist Theological Seminary in Reutlingen (today: Reutlingen School of Theology).

As a pastor ministering United Methodist congregations, Werner Philipp gained his first experience from 1992 to 1997 in the Großenhain charge, located between Leipzig and Dresden. In his subsequent positions, he was senior pastor in the Reichenbach charge in southwest Saxony for nine years from 1997, and then senior pastor in the

Dresden-Emmaus congregation from 2006 to 2019. During his ministry in Dresden, Philipp took part in the “Doctor of Ministry Program—Church Leadership Excellence” at the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC for three years from 2009. He completed his training with a successful dissertation as a “Doctor of Ministry”.

In addition, he completed training in “mediation and conflict management” and took courses in systemic organizational consulting and business administration for managers. In 2017, he received the vocation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony to teach religious education at vocational schools in Saxony. From 2019 until his election to the episcopate, Philipp was district superintendent for the Zwickau district in the Germany East Annual Conference.

Werner Philipp is married and has four adult children with his wife.

Information on tasks and activities

In the German version of the portrait, you will find detailed information on his tasks and activities within the UMC in Germany, on its international tasks as well as on its ecumenical, diaconal, and other activities.

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