

Information about Religious Education by the ´Freikirchen in Österreich´ (´Free Churches in Austria´) in public schools.

Since autumn 2014 we as ´Freikirchen in Österreich´ (´Free Churches in Austria´) offer religious education in public schools. Before that a team of people from all of the 5 alliances that make up the ´Freikirchen in Österreich´ (Bund der Baptistengemeinden in Österreich, Bund Evangelikaler Gemeinden in Österreich, Elaia Christengemeinden, Freie Christengemeinde – Pfingstgemeinde in Österreich, Mennonitische Freikirche Österreich) met for more than a year of planning and evaluation. They developed the curriculum for religious education that was recognized by our highest decision-making body, the ´Forum der Freikirchen´ (´Forum of Free Churches´). This curriculum is also recognized by the government and can be found here:

<https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20008912&Show> or: <http://www.schulamnt-freikirchen.at/lehrplan.html>

The curriculum includes:

- God loves me - I am a gift from God
- We celebrate - Fellowship with God and with other Christians
- Start off together - God leads me, taking chances
- To shape the world - Accepting God's calling and take responsibility

The foundation for the curriculum and also the whole idea of our religious education is based on God's Word, the Bible. The students memorize Bible verses, and in high school students are encouraged to read entire books of the Bible by themselves.

Week after week, more than 90 teachers, men and women, are teaching the students from our free churches. They have to be a member of a church that is part of the ´Freikirchen in Österreich´. They take classes at the ´Kirchlich-Pädagogischen Hochschule´ (´College of Church Education´) in Vienna, held by lecturers out of the free churches. These lecturers are nominated by the ´Rat der Freikirchen´ (´Council of Free Churches´) and have to be members of a church within the ´Freikirchen in Österreich´.

For the purpose of having religious education, the ´Schulamnt der Freikirchen´ (´Education Authority of Free Churches´) was founded, where superintendents work as contact persons for our teachers and the public school's principals to facilitate a smooth operation of our classes. They are also the ones granting teachers the license to teach our religious classes. These superintendents are appointed by the ´Rat der Freikirchen´.

We installed 'regionale Beiräte' ('regional advisory boards') with the responsibility of communicating to the churches. These advisory boards have a strong voice in deciding who is allowed to teach religious classes and by working with them, every church has the opportunity to be involved in the shaping of religious education within our free church context.

Free church religious education opens up many possibilities for our children: they have class once or twice a week, where they can talk about their own Christian faith and study God's word with other Christian students from their school. Their teachers can be an example to them and show them how to live out their faith within their school environment – which can be a real challenge. Students can also take 'Freikirchlichen Religionsunterricht' as subject for their Matura (Final exam in Austrian high school) and therefore have the possibility to prepare for an exam that is relevant to their faith and interests.

This will also open up new opportunities for our churches: The network between our churches will grow stronger and children will build a strong foundation in their faith – a crucial element to serving in ministry. Religious education should not replace the churches' children's program though; it should rather be a complementary asset.

What do you have to do to let your children attend this religious education? It is a required subject for children from the 'Freikirchen in Österreich' but they can unregister from the class during the first week of the school year. It is important that schools know, which of their students come from the 'Freikirchen in Österreich'. When first registering your child to a school, please provide it as their denomination. If your children have been at a school for a while their denomination can be updated (since 'Freikirchen in Österreich' is only a legal denomination since 2013). In addition please send your children's data to the 'Schulamts der Freikirchen' so new groups of students can be formed. They will also choose the specific teachers for each school. You can get additional information at www.freikirchen.at where you will also find the necessary forms to register your children or to apply as a teacher.

To be able to offer this form of education is a gift and we appreciate every offer of help in this great undertaking. Our biggest joy will be to see many children and youth out of our churches attend the religious education of the 'Freikirchen in Österreich'.