

FORUM

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Where the real Christmas joy lives

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Festive days at the parent house Kaiserswerth of the Diakonie Dusseldorf

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The history of the house with today 148 beds goes back to 1836. Shortly after the start of the former deaconess house Kaiserswerth, its founder, Theodor Fliedner, built an imposing, free-standing church on the site. As a "cultural church" it is now an important district centre, where both senior home residents and citizens enjoy concerts and plays and get into conversation with each other. To protect against the Rhine flood the church space was built on the first floor. The ground floor below offers space for comfortable communal and club rooms.

Christmas tree to enjoy

For festive Christmas spirit you could not wish for a more beautiful setting. Advent has also moved into all the other rooms of Diakonie – from the candy tree with the inscription "Eat me" at the entrance to the rain-proof crib in the courtyard. But how do residents and employees celebrate Christmas in the nursing home? Is it a time of special joy? Or do melancholic memories awaken, because the happy times with family are long gone?

In conversation with the home manager Klaus Patzelt, the head of social services Nina Hundert and her colleague Veronika Großmann, it becomes clear that there is no time or occasion for melancholy. Christmas in the nursing home in Kaiserswerth means a lot of fun and companionship.



At the entrance of the main building visitors are already greeted by Christmas spirit.

In the "men's workshop"

The first preparations begin early, because the residents produce attractive goods for the nursing home's Advent bazaar – cookies, jams, home-made soap or wooden figures. The latter originate in the "men's workshop". "Women are in the majority in our house, so we make sure that the men are not forgotten," explains Nina Hundert. Together with the gentlemen, she plans, saws, grinds and paints the wooden art works. The bazaar took place on the 12th of December and was a great success.

Meanwhile, the gifts have arrived from the district. Schools and clubs from Kaiserswerth donate beautiful things to the nursing home and hand them over on St. Nicholas' Day. This shows how important consideration of the elderly and weak is in our society. A great contrast to the beginnings in the 19th century: At that time, the Protestant hospital was met with considerable mistrust in the Catholic district. Today, the Diakonie's parent house, located in the centre, is an indispensable part of public life.



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Delicacies on Christmas Eve

Residents receive the gifts from the district and neighbourhood at a festive Christmas party on December 20th. Shortly thereafter, it continues Christmas Eve: After a joint service, the employees of the Social Services accompany the residents to the home's cosy communal areas for coffee, poems and songs. Once again there are presents, this time from the nursing home itself. Last year, all residents received a cosy blanket, which provided much joy not only in winter, but also during barbecues in spring. Relatives come to visit and celebrate on Christmas Eve. Many delicious things are served that are already prepared appetizingly on the plates – from salmon to potato salad.

A wonderful party, but of course a lot of work for the employees. In the nursing home there are no Christmas

holidays for the staff, the shifts continue as usual. How does it feel to work when most people are home with their families? Everyone agrees on this question: it feels good. "I think it's nice to be here for Christmas," says Nina Hundert. "We know the people here well, they are part of our family. And they live here, they cannot say: It's Christmas, so I'm going somewhere else. Therefore, we give everything to have a nice Christmas Eve. "Her colleague Veronika Großmann adds:" Actually, we are lucky to be allowed to work here – because Christmas in our nursing home feels so real."