

# German diocese will attract youths with inflatable churches

OXFORD, England – A German diocese plans to use inflatable churches to bring the Gospel to young people.

“The aim is to do something eye-catching which could eventually be extended to all our towns,” said Winfried Dolhausen, spokesman for the Essen Diocese. “These churches will be on a continual journey, meeting the young where they are rather than waiting for them to come to us.”

Mr. Dolhausen told Catholic News Service in a telephone interview Nov. 12 that the first blow-up church would be set up by Easter in a marketplace, mall or school playground in the diocese.

“Although we won’t be celebrating Mass in these new churches, they’ll act as centers for spiritual offices, meditations and discussions, and will encourage the young to get involved,” he said.

Bishop Felix Genn of Essen received support for the idea from other German bishops and saw it as key to a restructuring program that also will divide the diocese into 42 “super parishes,” Mr. Dolhausen told CNS.

“With numbers falling we’ve had to make savings and find better ways of using our money,” Mr. Dolhausen said. Several German dioceses have reduced or merged their parishes, and have sold church property after being hit by rising expenses and falling member donations.

Dolhausen said plans for the blow-up churches, each seating 60 and costing almost \$40,000, were expected to attract complaints from Catholics opposed to the church closures.

“But we have to reach out and respond to the young somehow as well trimming our infrastructure,” he said. “These won’t be fairground attractions but serious places for reflection and contemplation. All that’s changed is their appearance and

availability as places of worship.”

The German Catholic news agency KNA reported Nov. 12 that evangelical churches also had commissioned inflatable churches and several other Protestant communities had ordered moveable acrylic glass churches.