

market will ease in '17

Developers expected to shift attention to suburbs.

By JIM BUCHTA
jim.buchta@startribune.com

With apartment developers hammering their way into a new year, the rental market in the Twin Cities is about to shift. Construction this year will outpace 2016, but it will move from the cities to the suburbs. Rents will rise, but not as steeply as in recent years. And while the vacancy rate is still below average, there are places where it's becoming a renter's market.

"I'm pushing rents this year," said Mark Jensen, president of Steven Scott Management, which operates rental properties throughout the metro area. "But there are pockets where there's too much supply."

An estimated 3,245 new units hit the market in 2016, according to Marquette Advisors, and another 4,200 units are expected to arrive in 2017. See **APARTMENTS** on A8 ▶

der. "Let's lower the tone a little bit and figure out how we can actually work on some of these things that we're all talking about."

See **SESSION** on A5 ▶

The new Capitol
A look inside the three renovated chambers, from ramps to LED. **A4**



The big issues
Five big topics legislators face in the session, which starts Tuesday. **A4**

"It's up to individuals to make their own decision on how to protect themselves."
Abdulwahid Osman, attorney

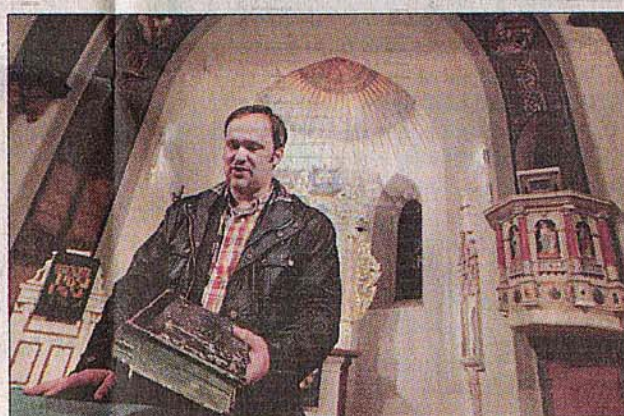
In the land of Luther, church pews are mostly empty

By JEAN HOPFENSBERGER
hopfen@startribune.com

LEIPZIG, GERMANY — As a boy, Helge Voigt celebrated Christmas Eve listening to Bach's Christmas Oratorio, opening a few gifts and savoring a special dinner. Notably absent were a nativity scene, angels atop a tree — or any mention of Jesus.

Voigt's family was typical in the region of Germany where Martin Luther lived and launched the Protestant revolution nearly 500 years ago. While Luther's legacy includes 72 million Lutherans across the globe today, on the streets where Luther preached, about 85 percent of residents have no religion.

More than 40 years of Soviet rule



JERRY HOLT • jerry.holt@startribune.com

The Rev. Helge Voigt held a Bible that dates to Martin Luther's time. Years of Soviet rule quashed faith in East Germany.

ingrained a deep skepticism of God and religion, and overt discrimination against Christians. By the time the Soviet tanks rolled out in 1990, Protestant pastors opened church doors to a people who had never touched a Bible and had been taught since childhood that believers were "unscientific" and "stupid."

Christian leaders have been working here to keep faith alive. The holiday season offers a unique opportunity, as many Germans still attend Christmas services as a family tradition — if not an act of faith.

"I have five churches, and on a given Sunday I might have 100 people total," said Voigt, a Lutheran pastor in Leipzig, where Luther frequently preached. "On See **LUTHERANS** on A10 ▶

Related: With art and travel, Minnesota Lutherans are gearing up to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. **startribune.com**

More of what matters to Minnesota. All day. Every day.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: 612-673-4343 or go to startribune.com/subscribe

STAR TRIBUNE Minneapolis, St. Paul MN • Volume XXXV • No. 272 • Jan. 1, 2017
ONLINE: startribune.com • NEWS TIPS: 612-673-4414 • COMMENTS: 612-673-4000

\$1.99

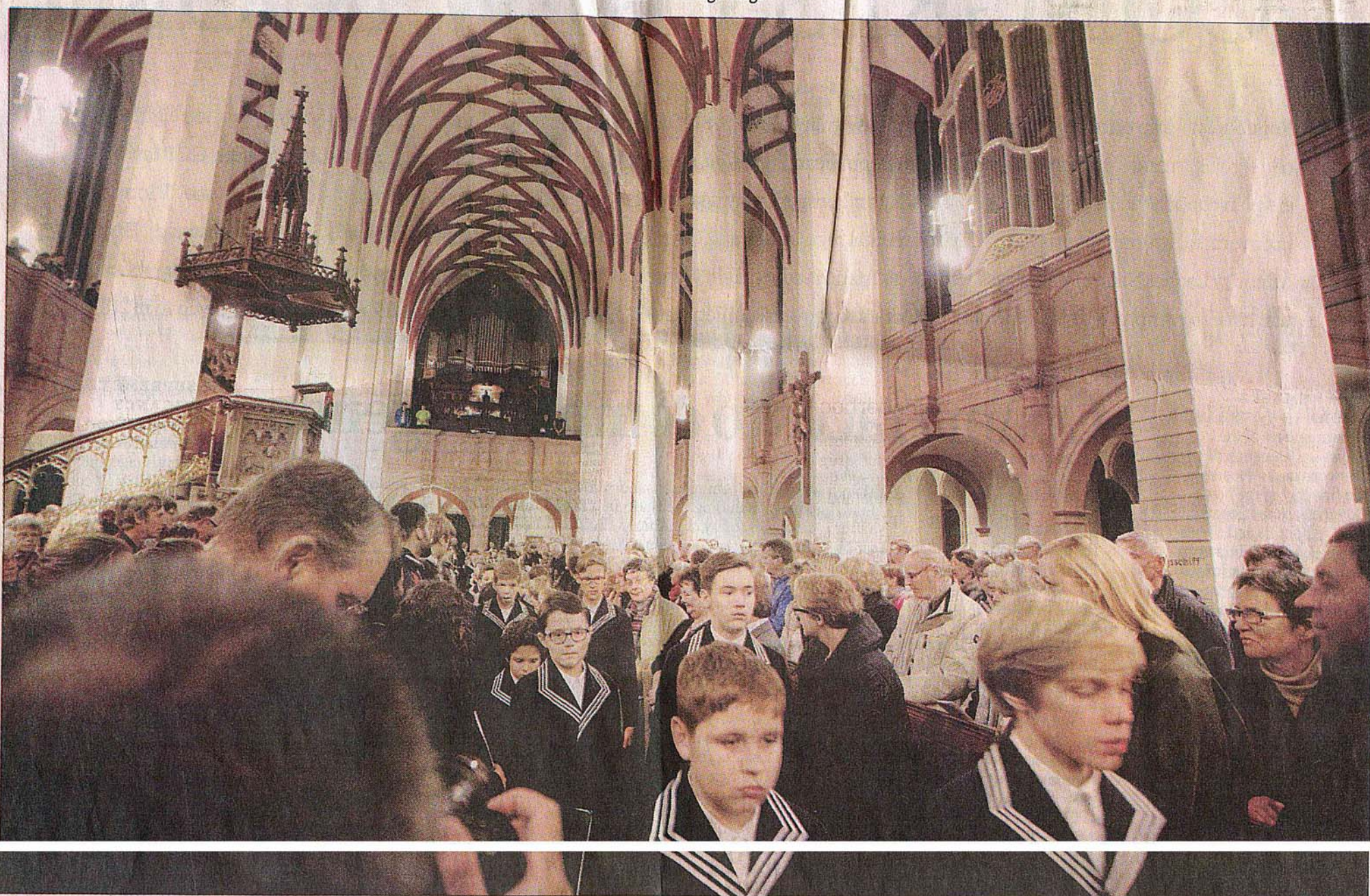


A10 • STAR TRIBUNE ★★

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1, 2017

"In our culture, people are used to hiding this [religious] dimension of their life. Today we don't convince masses. We convince single people."

The Rev. Helge Voigt



Photos by JERRY HOLT • jerry.holt@startribune.com
Members of the St. Thomas Church Boys Choir filed in during a concert in Leipzig, Germany. The famous choir, once led by Johann Sebastian Bach, draws a large crowd. Sunday services here do not.

Keeping faith alive in the land of Luther

◀ **LUTHERANS** from A1
Christmas Eve, I have about 2,000 people, 110 children in the pageant, and 10 services."

Christmas, said Voigt, carries a universal message that can be embraced even by non-believers, namely that God's answer to the world's problems "starts with the love of a small child."

But that message has to be delivered artfully. Voigt jokes that his Christmas sermon has to be really good because "it should last one year before people show up again."

Christianity quashed

"Luther Country" is a region southwest of Berlin where Luther lived, preached and unleashed the Protestant Reformation. It was part of East Germany under Soviet rule from 1949 to 1990.

Forty years of phone tapping, spying, ridicule and discrimination took its toll. In 1950, 90 percent of people living in the former East Germany reported being Christian — overwhelmingly Protestant. By the time the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, 30 percent were Christian and 70 percent had

no religion, according to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany.

Today an estimated 85 percent of the population has no religious affiliation. That compares with 62 percent for all of Germany.

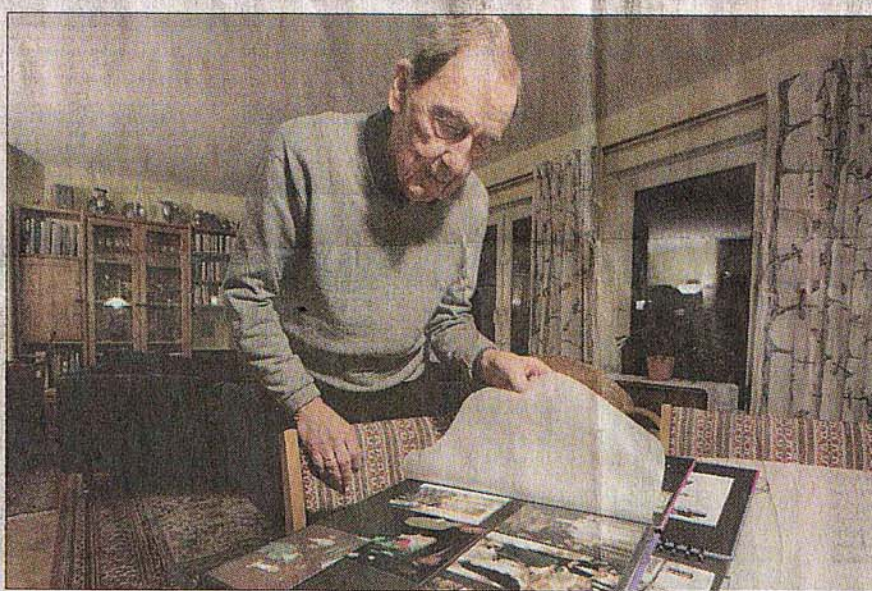
Lutherans who grew up here remember Christian children being ridiculed in class. "The teacher would point them out and everyone would laugh," recalled Voigt, who converted to Christianity when he was 19.

The government even introduced a socialist alternative to Christian confirmation, a secular coming of age program that still exists today. Students who didn't join were typically denied academic privileges, including higher education.

Doors also slammed on Christian adults. Since the government controlled the economy, it controlled prospects for education, jobs, housing, even your place on the waiting list for cars or refrigerators.

It was in this world that the Rev. Paul Rogers of Minnesota found himself in the 1960s, working in what was then West Berlin. Rogers learned from Lutheran leaders there that the government often denied medicine to pastors and their families as leverage so they would become informants for the state.

In a scene reminiscent of



The Rev. Friedrich Magirus, at top, was superintendent of the Lutheran Church in the Leipzig district during the Soviet years, when Christians faced discrimination. "Being a Christian was like walking on a path in the mountains," he said. "You had to constantly be on alert." The Rev. Helge Voigt, above, led a prayer at a social gathering.

IN LUTHER'S FOOTSTEPS

This is the one of several stories spotlighting Martin Luther's legacy, issues confronting the Lutheran church and its outsized impact on Minnesota — home to the largest number of Lutherans in the nation. 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's revolt against the Catholic Church, and Luther will again take the spotlight at events across the globe.

a James Bond movie, Rogers would sometimes help the Lutheran World Federation secretly deliver medicine "so they didn't have to make that difficult decision."

"I would go to [Soviet] East Berlin, ostensibly to photograph a church," explained Rogers, of Minneapolis. "While I was there I would make contact with the pastor. In the conversation, I'd give him the time and a location of a medicine drop ... typically under a bridge."

The Rev. Ulrich Seidel, a retired pastor of St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig, said government informants were planted

in church services. That was particularly true when this church became the center of the October 1989 protests that eventually drew nearly 300,000 people into the streets and emboldened nearby Berliners, whose demonstrations took down the Berlin Wall just weeks later.

For pastors, there was often "a third ear" on telephone line. Mail was routinely opened. The Rev. Friedrich Magirus, retired superintendent of the Lutheran Church in the Leipzig district, recalled that a man on his church council worked at the post office and would advise him, "You should be get-

ting a letter in a couple days."

"You can laugh now, but it wasn't funny," he said.

Sitting in his home in Leipzig, Magirus paged through a book of old photographs tracing his career, which paralleled the Soviet era.

"Being a Christian was like walking on a path in the mountains," he said. "You had to constantly be on alert."

Missionaries at home

The situation has left the Evangelical Church in Germany (they don't call themselves Lutheran here) as missionaries in Luther's backyard.



Source: maps4news.com HERE

Luther's legacy casts a shadow on the churches Voigt oversees, which are all at least 800 years old. One church has a Bible published in 1545 — when Luther was still alive. On the 19th-century replacement cover is inscribed, "Hope you enjoy this for years to come."

Lutheran leaders pray Christianity has many more years to come, and many are reworking Christianity's message for 21st-century skeptics.

"You preach and teach the common language of atheists," said Voigt. "For example, it doesn't make sense to say, 'Jesus died for your sins.'"

No one would care. They don't understand 'sin' as a word.

"If I have a funeral or wedding, I talk about love or compassion," he said. "The Bible says, where there is love, there is God. With that basic kind of message, we can reach some people."

Voigt's workdays illustrate ways Christian leaders are working to expand the faith. On a recent day, the pastor started his morning visiting a chemically dependent man whom the church is helping get back on his feet. He then drove to the home of a mother with cancer who sought spiritual support.

Next stop was a restaurant where a jovial group of about 40 Catholics and Protestants meet regularly to build Christian camaraderie over strudel and strong coffee.

By the time Voigt returned to his church offices at dinner hour, his wife, Anke, was inside giving a photo presentation to about 25 church members about the couple's stay at Christ Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.

There was a photo from a coffee hour after the church service. A box of name tags for church members. A library. Children seated near the altar for story time. Voigt greeting folks in the pews.

"There are some very good things we learned from you,"

said Helge Voigt.

A highlight of Voigt's day came at 8 p.m. when a young man and woman knocked on the parsonage door and headed upstairs with him to his study. They sat in the dimly lit room, a Bible opened on the table in front of them. An animated discussion followed for the next two hours.

But the past still haunts the present. When asked if they would be willing to talk about their decision to get baptized, the new converts say no.

"In our culture, people are used to hiding this dimension of their life," explained Voigt. "Today we don't convince masses. We convince single people."

'Something I can't explain'

Germans such as Katharina Jahn give hope to religious leaders. The university medical researcher grew up atheist, and got her first taste of Christianity as an exchange student in the United States. Back home a few years later, a Christian family helped her after a car crash, and gave her a Bible. She began reading. Later she was surprised to discover that a university col-

league believed in God.

Now Jahn steps inside churches occasionally, and acknowledges she feels a certain peace in the quiet sanctuaries with flickering candles.

"I sit inside, and maybe even pray," she said. "I can appreciate there is something I can't explain."

"But I don't know where I'll go with that."

Jahn pulled out an old cardboard box of Christmas ornaments from her grandmother, who remained a Christian through the difficult years. Inside were tiny wooden angels playing the flute, the violin and other instruments.

Lutheran leaders hope those angels' songs will be heard again. In the new year, they want to build upon the goodwill created by the Christmas pageants and services.

Voigt is convinced Christianity's message is still relevant: "I say it's not so much that people are atheist, as it's a never-discovered dimension of life."

Magirus also is certain Christianity will always be part of this region's life, though never like it was before.

"But the statistics don't matter," he said. "Jesus said, 'Wherever there are two or three assembled, you meet in my name.'"

Jean Hopfensberger • 612-673-4511