

A Light Goes Out, But Hope Lives on

After 55 years, the English Speaking Catholic Community St. John Berchmans celebrates its last Holy Mass in the Chapel of Berchmanskolleg – and looks confidently to the future

Munich, February 2026. On Ash Wednesday 2026, something happened in the chapel of Berchmanskolleg of the Jesuits that deeply moved many of the 130 people present. After the last Holy Mass, the Jesuit provincial's decree of profanation was read aloud. The ciborium with the consecrated hosts was removed from the tabernacle. Then Fr. Christof Wolf, SJ, extinguished the eternal light. Silence fell. The procession took place in silence. Many wept.



Profaned Chapel

What came to an end here was much more than the use of a room. It was the farewell to a place that had been a religious home for hundreds of people for more than five decades – a place of sacraments, prayer, community, and care for one another.

How it all began: a kitchen Mass and an open-minded rector

The history of the parish dates back to the late 1960s. At that time, the American military base was one of the few places in Munich where English-language Masses were celebrated. But the services there were formal, the rooms crowded, and the atmosphere was not very welcoming for families with small children. Some families were looking for a place where they would be welcome – with all the hustle and bustle that children bring with them.

Fr. Brian McDermot SJ, an American Jesuit who was doing his doctorate at the College of Philosophy in Munich, agreed to celebrate Mass for these families. What began as a house Mass grew rapidly. McDermot asked the rector of Berchmanskolleg if the chapel of the Jesuit Community could be used on Sundays. The rector agreed. On the first Sunday

of Advent in 1971, the first English-language Mass was celebrated there – the beginning of a 55-year history.

A place of openness and community

Just a few weeks after the first Mass, Germans also began attending the service, including young Jesuits from the community. Some of them hardly understood English, but they sensed that something was different here. Openness, closeness, and care define the atmosphere here. This experience has not changed over the decades.

The English Speaking Community is a grassroots initiative in the best sense of the word. Everything is done on a voluntary basis. Over the years, it has been supported by committed Jesuits: Brian McDermot was followed by Fr. Steve Muller, SJ, and Fr. Bob Collins, SJ. Since 1995, Fr. Andreas Gösele, SJ, has had a significant influence on the English Speaking Community, and since 2006, Fr. Christof Wolf, SJ, who took over the leadership of the English Speaking Community in 2019. They are supported by Fr. Godehard Brüntrup SJ and, since 2023, by Fr. Patrick Zoll SJ. But the real strength of the English Speaking Community comes from its members.

It has grown steadily, especially in recent years, as major American technology companies such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Meta have opened offices in Munich. Catholic employees of these companies found a spiritual home in the chapel of Berchmanskolleg. Quite a few of them had studied at Jesuit universities or came from Jesuit parishes abroad. Here, in a foreign land, they found what they knew: Ignatian spirituality, a living community, a place that felt like home. Forty percent of the parishioners are children under the age of ten – a living sign that this parish has a future.

Faith that has an outward impact

The parish collects many donations each year and uses them to support local and international projects: the Mother Teresa Sisters in Munich, Caritas' refugee work in Höhenkirchen, and educational and social projects in Africa and India. The congregation maintains close ties with the parish of St. Ludwig, where all sacraments are recorded in the church registers, as well as with the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising. The annual Christmas Mass, which is celebrated in St. Ludwig due to the size of the congregation, attracts almost a thousand people – it is the only official English-language Christmas Mass in Munich.

A painful farewell

It hurts when a place like this is lost. The chapel at Berchmanskolleg was small, often crowded – and loved precisely for that reason. Its intimacy created closeness. Those who celebrated the Eucharist here felt that this was not an anonymous space, but a home. Generations have been baptized here, celebrated their first communion, been confirmed, married, mourned, and prayed. It is a place where faith was not merely practiced, but lived.

The fact that this place is now being used for another purpose is a profound change for the community. When Father Christof Wolf extinguished the eternal light on Ash

Wednesday, more than a flame was extinguished. A piece of home was lost, one that will never be entered again.

A new beginning in the Edith Stein Chapel

But the English Speaking Community St. John Berchmans is more than a building. It is a living community of people who share their faith – in a language that unites them and in a spirituality that sustains them. This community continues to exist.

On the first Sunday of Lent, the parish will celebrate its first Holy Mass in the Edith Stein Chapel at the KHG (the University's Campus Ministry) in Munich. The parish warmly thanks the KHG for its hospitality and looks ahead with confidence. For what began in a kitchen and grew into a vibrant community in a small chapel will continue to live on in a new place – sustained by the same openness, solidarity, and faith that has held this parish together for 55 years.



Edith Stein Chapel

Contact and further information:

www.stjohnberchmans.de