

500th Anniversary of the Reformation in Zurich

In 2019, Zurich celebrates the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in the City on the Limmat. It was from here that Huldrych Zwingli and his successor, Heinrich Bullinger, spread the Reformation throughout German-speaking Switzerland.

Zurich, the Place of Pilgrimage

Before the Reformation, the legend surrounding the martyrs, Felix and Regula, had made Zurich an important place of pilgrimage for Christians in Europe. The pilgrims' path led from the Fraumünster church over a wooden bridge to the Wasserkirche (Water Church), where the two martyrs were said to have been beheaded, and from there to their burial site on the Grossmünster hill.

The Reformer, Huldrych Zwingli

When Huldrych Zwingli came to Zurich in 1519 to work as a pastor, many things changed for the Grossmünster and for the local people. The fervent lay preacher broke with Catholic tradition and began to preach a whole new interpretation of the Word of God. He was of the opinion that everything that was not mentioned in the Bible should be banned from religious life – holy images, relics, singing hymns in church, and much more. From 1530, the citizens of Zurich were subjected to a whole series of strict moral mandates. These dictated, among other things, the wearing of high-fitting, gray clothing, a strict division of gender roles, compulsory attendance of Sunday services and the closure of inns and taverns at 9.00pm.

Heinrich Bullinger Consolidates the Reformation in Europe

In 1549, Bullinger worked with the Western Swiss reformer, John Calvin, on the Consensus Tigurinus (Consensus of Zurich). He also set down the Reformist beliefs in the form of the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, which is still the official statement of faith for the Reformed Churches of Eastern Europe today. Next to the Heidelberg Catechism, this work is the most generally recognized confession of the Reformed Church.

A Thriving Business Center Thanks to the Reformation

It is thanks to the Reformation that the people of Zurich are still just as industrious and enterprising today. Following the Reformation, Zurich became an important business metropolis and as a result of that, a major financial center. The city remained one of the main European centers for the silk industry right into the 20th century. Moreover, Alfred Escher, who was taught by a Reformist theologian, founded the Eidgenössisches Polytechnikum (the present-day Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, ETH), Schweizerische Kreditanstalt (now known as Credit Suisse, CS), and several insurance companies here.

On the Trail of the Reformation

Grossmünster Church

The crypt of the Grossmünster contains original paintings depicting the legend of Felix and Regula. Visitors also come face to face with a larger-than-life statue of Charlemagne. A copy of this statue adorns the Karlsturm (Charlemagne Tower), the more southerly of the Grossmünster's twin towers. It is well worth climbing the steps to the top; those that do are rewarded with a fantastic view over Zurich. The cloister houses a museum with exhibits relating to the Reformation, while the stained-glass window in the choir was created by Swiss artist, Augusto Giacometti.

→ grossmuenster.ch

Fraumünster Church

Since the 20th century, it has also been possible to admire art again in Reformed churches in Zurich's city center. The stained-glass windows in the choir by Marc Chagall are renowned all over the world. Augusto Giacometti also designed a window both here and in the Wasserkirche.

→ fraumuenster.ch

Wasserkirche

The name of the Wasserkirche (Water Church) dates from the time when the church stood on a small island in the River Limmat. Before the Reformation, the church was a kind of pilgrimage site for worshippers of Zurich's patron saints, Felix and Regula.

→ zuerich.com

Monuments

Already back in 1885, a memorial to Huldrych Zwingli was erected in front of the Wasserkirche, which shows him looking defiantly southwards towards the Vatican and the Catholic regions in Central Switzerland. A statue of Heinrich Bullinger holding a Bible in his hands can be seen on the outside wall of the Grossmünster.

Event Calendar

→ zh-reformation.ch

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