

Netzwerk Ökumene: Interchurch Couples and Families in Germany

Report on the meeting held at the conference centre at Schwarzenhof (Rudolstadt/Thüringen), Friday 13 to Sunday 15 March 2009

Theme:	From problem to model – interchurch families as motor in the ecumenical process
Speakers:	Chancellor Heinz Gunkel (Chancellery of the Diocese of Erfurt) Professor Dr. Ulrich Kühn (University of Leipzig)
Representatives of the local churches:	
	Superintendent Marita Krüger, Meiningen Pastor Weiss, Rudolstadt (Protestant) Pastor Andrea Solbrig, Rudolstadt (Methodist Protestant) Father Vockrodt, Schwarzta (Roman Catholic)
Participants:	50 adults and 21 children
Friday, 13 March	
18:00	Supper
19:00	Introduction of those present
	Greeting by Herr Münzer, head of the conference centre. He answered several practical questions. Then Beate Beyer greeted all the participants. She invited the children to introduce themselves by going over to and naming themselves and their parents (whom do you belong to?). Then the children and young people, in the company of their adult leader, Frau Deuster, left to go to their prepared room.
	While this was taking place Gabriele and Christoph Gaukel with their children arrived. Gabriel began by considering a picture, 'Jesus' Robe', by Sieger Köder. The robe is torn down the middle, with the shadow of the Cross falling across it.
	Participants introduced themselves as couples or individuals by deciding on a key word that described their situation. This key word was to be laid then in individual letters on the floor to form the pattern of a crossword with the word 'Ecumenism', already in place. All described in turn why they had chosen this particular key word. Examples of words chosen were Trust, Enrichment, Diversity, Salt, Belief, Praise, Hope, Challenge, Gift, Music, Powerlessness, House Church, Tension, Astonishment, Optimism, Thankfulness.
21:25	The children and young people returned for a shared evening service. Gudrun Steineck distributed prepared sheets and candles to all, then asked four of the young people what made them fearful (one of them said she was afraid of the massacre of children and adults recently in Winnenden school!). Gudrun prayed with each of the young people, then all prayed Psalm 121. The service ended with the singing of 'Stay with me, Lord!', and with a blessing.

Time to socialize round the fire place in the Common Room followed.

Saturday, 14 March

From 7:45	Breakfast	
8:45	Morning worship led by Ingrid and Klaus Georgi	
9:00	Children's and young people's programme. The children were looked after by Frau Deuster. The young aged 13 and over formed their own group, led by Ben Solbrig, who had already agreed for the short term to take over the morning responsibility for this.	
9:05	Gudrun Steineck introduced as speaker Chancellor Heinz Gunkel . He began his presentation with the words of Bishop Aufderbeck: 'No one can do everything, everyone can do something'. Then he expanded on three points:	
	1.	Questions to reach an understanding of our situation today: Where is it that ecumenism takes place? What separates us? He sees the Protestant 'Christ alone' in contrast to the Catholic 'the fullness of Christ' as the fundamental difference between the traditions. At issue is the question: 'How do we stand together in relation to Jesus Christ?'
	2.	Consequences and implications for progress for interchurch families. Here he stressed that one must not deny the fundamental differences.
	3.	Questioning of the way of approach presupposed by the theme. To the statement that interchurch families might be the motor of ecumenism he puts the opposing view that 'The motor only works together with the whole car!' In contrast to the title of the conference 'From problem to model' his opinion is that the problems remain!
9.45	Coffee break	
10:10	Gudrun Steineck gave a brief biography of the second speaker, Professor Dr. Ulrich Kühn .	
	<p>He stressed first that it has become more difficult to speak about Roman Catholic – Protestant ecumenism in view of the most recent measures of the Pope. On the other hand he had noticed that in the round of introductions yesterday evening there was no mention of the Pope! He is apparently not a factor in the personal experience of faith.</p> <p>The second Vatican Council was a sign of hope. Taking as prompt the words of one of the Council documents claiming a 'defect' in Protestant orders, Professor Kühn said 'the Roman Catholic Eucharist also has a defect, as long as it is not celebrated together with us'.</p> <p>What unites us (one baptism, one creed, shared hymns), is much more that what (still) divides us... The question of orders is above all a question of the exercise of power. In an increasingly unchristian world the restrictions between the traditions are ever harder to understand. Interchurch couples and families can become the ecumenical motor, as the theme of the conference expresses it. Their way of being ought to shine out in the parishes and for the clergy.</p> <p>The goal cannot be organisational church unity, but Eucharistic Communion within the framework of a reconciled diversity.</p>	

11:00	Discussion of the two presentations (Moderator, Klaus Georgi)
	<p>Jörg Beyer: Not all mixed marriages are interchurch! The task of the interchurch marriage lies in making its presence as house church visible. Ecumenical preoccupation with image has its roots in the anxiety of the shepherds! It is an ecumenism of neurosis about image!</p> <p>Professor Kühn: There is a division between those above and those below, between shepherds and sheep. In answer to criticism of papers on theological dialogue he said that these papers achieve much! He instanced the work on theology teachers that impacted on their students. In connection with this he supported the plan to produce <i>In Via Erklärung</i> in which there would be emphasis on what work had already taken place 'on the road to unity'.</p> <p>Rosmarie Lauber asked about a 'joint declaration on the Eucharist' that had been suggested by Professor Schütte, to correspond with the joint declaration on the teaching on justification. She noted by way of reminder that Professor Neuner sees clear agreement in the Roman Catholic and Protestant understanding of marriage and she asked why this is not recognised. Rudolf Lauber added that according to Professor Neuner, interchurch marriages are to be understood as house churches.</p> <p>Chancellor Gunkel replied that he agreed in seeing marriage as house church.</p> <p>Hans-Joachim Sieger: between the Lord's Supper of Jesus and the teaching on the Eucharist of the Roman Catholic Church there is a discrepancy that I do not understand.</p> <p>Professor Kühn: 400 years after the debates between the different reformed churches over the question of the Lord's Supper Jesus' words were read in a new way. This led to the Leuenberg Agreement. This shows that the words of the Bible hold an ecumenical potential.</p> <p>Gabriele Gaukel: Visible unity is important! 'Reconciled diversity' alone is too little for me. Democratic structures and catholicity do not have to be mutually exclusive.</p> <p>Beate Beyer: We have too little deep rooted confidence.</p> <p>Frau Wiedenmann: House churches need the Eucharist. There should be a special ruling for interchurch families, an official work produced on this.</p> <p>Chancellor Gunkel: Eucharistic Communion follows on from Church Unity. As far as interchurch families are concerned the ruling on exceptional cases obtains.</p>
12.15	Lunch
14.45	<p>Group work. Three groups were formed:</p> <p>Group 1: Discussion on the conference theme, led by Jörg and Beate Beyer</p> <p>Group 2: Socratic walk, 'walk and talk', led by Bertram Huber</p> <p>Group 3: Music, led by Gudrun Steineck (The group suggested by Nicole Huber, 'Dance, movement', did not happen as sadly Nicole Huber was prevented by illness from attending the conference.</p> <p>In group 1, initially the two presentations of the morning were discussed. The assessment of several of the participants was that Herr Gunkel had given no evidence of any emotional engagement. His address had been much too theoretical. One participant summed it up by saying 'yesterday evening as the introductions passed round the circle I felt joy and encouragement, now on the other hand after the addresses I feel disappointment. The address from Chancellor Gunkel worried me especially'. Others expressed the opinion that</p>

	<p>Herr Gunkel, as a Canon Lawyer, is not allowed to say anything else, this is all he can say. He sits in his ivory tower and is separated from the next generation.</p> <p>After the coffee break the subject was the preparation for the Ecumenical Kirchentag in Munich in 2010. Various participants stressed that we would like a special ruling for interchurch families instead of the present ruling on exceptional cases. What we need is an 'exceptional case ruling made general', as Cardinal Lehmann has asked for in his book.</p> <p>Themes proposed for the services, podia, forums etc for the Ecumenical Kirchentag (to chime with the theme of the Ecumenical Kirchentag) were:</p>
	What hope is possible?
	To give the next generation hope that continues
	Signs of hope on the ecumenical road
	House church as model
	The suggestion for activity on the Network stand was to talk with children about faith!
18:00	Supper
19:00	<p>Evening worship, led by Beate Beyer</p> <p>After Psalm 8, there was a reflection on the words of this psalm, 'You have crowned Man with glory and splendour'. The telling the story of the eagle which grows up in a hen house was used to illustrate this.</p> <p>After the service the children left, to be looked after by Frau Deuster. The young people met round a campfire made ready by Herr Münzer.</p>
19:25	<p>Claire Malone-Lee from England presented greetings from AIF (the Association of Interchurch Families) and brought very best wishes from Keith Lander, the secretary of AIF, on the 10 year anniversary of the Netzwerk Ökumene. Gudrun Steineck reported on a lecture by Harding Meyer and presented a small book, 'Backstage on Ecumenism', published on the occasion of the seventy year jubilee of the Una Sancta working and friendship group from Munich (The ecumenical group Una Sancta was founded in 1939 before WWII. One of its founder members, Pastor Metzger, was put to death by the Nazi regime in 1944. It publishes a periodical 'Una Sancta', to which Heythrop Library subscribes. It's name is taken from the words of the creed, '<i>One, holy</i>' Catholic Church); also the document 'The Our Father', produced by the working circle, known as 'Fundamental Pastoral Questions', of the central committee of the German Roman Catholic bishops.</p> <p>Rosmarie Lauber then gave an account of the history of the Netzwerk Ökumene. The history began in 1969 with the weekends for interchurch couples and families in the Benedictine monastery in Neresheim. There has been a continuous development and blossoming running from the weekend events of that time to the activities of the Netzwerk Ökumene throughout Germany today.</p> <p>The weekends in Neresheim were led by Father Beda Müller in conjunction with a Protestant pastor at each. From this grew the weekend seminars which have taken place in Dornstadt bei Ulm since 1988. At a stall at the second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz in 1997 Rosmarie Lauber provided information about the events in Neresheim and in Dornstadt. Through conversation with the neighbouring stalls run by AIF (England), Foyers</p>

	<p>Mixtes (France) and ARGE Ökumene (Austria) the idea arose to found a network in Germany. On the advice of the ACK (German form of Churches Together) the AÖK (an organisation bringing ecumenical groups together) under the chairmanship of Gudrun Steineck took this up, and in 1999 the Network was founded in Augsburg.</p> <p>Rudolf Lauber followed on with an account of the development of the Network in the last ten years. He drew particular attention to the conferences, which have happened each year since 2000, to the activities that have taken place at the Kirchentags and the Katholikentags, the circular letters and newsletter, the contacts with the church leadership, the taking part in the initiative 'Christian Communities Together', the work on publicity, and by no means least the provision of advice for couples and families. The address list of the Network now consists of approximately 700 addresses of interchurch families and those with an ecumenical interest. The detailed text of the report, and also a chronology of the Netzwerk Ökumene in which the history and development is presented chronologically, is available from the office.</p> <p>At the end of these reports tribute was paid to Rosmarie and Rudolf Lauber for their service in bringing the Network about and for the work since then. A reception in the Common Room followed, to celebrate the ten year jubilee with some bottles of champagne.</p>
21:00	<p>The members of the committee met in the conference room to look at the preliminary design of the newly created poster for the Network's stand at future Kirchen- and Katholikentags and to make suggestions for possible changes.</p> <p>After about an hour of discussion the celebration in the Common Room continued.</p>
Sunday, 15 March	
From 7:45	Breakfast
9:35	<p>Family service. Worship leader Professor Kühn. Preacher Jörg Beyer. Taking up from the introductory group the 'cross words' that described the respective lived experiences of interchurch families, Jörg Beyer looked at three ideas in his sermon:</p>
	Encounter: each contributes what she/he has
	Discovery: exchange and understanding
	Breakthrough into society in the certainty of hope throughout the world in the presence of God.
11:00	<p>Closing discussion, moderated by Bertram Huber</p> <p>In answer to the question 'What went down well?' the following points were named: The group discussion, the walking together in pairs, dividing the afternoon programme into two parts, the music, the worship.</p>

	<p>One participant remarked, 'It was good that we had in Herr Gunkel a speaker who put up some opposition. Professor Kühn gave me courage'. One participant said that the speakers should stay for the whole of the time!</p> <p>Possible future speakers mentioned were Pastor Gregor Giele, Leipzig; Sister Anna-Maria von der Wiesche (Brothers of Christ); and Professor Dr Miriam Wijlens, who teaches Canon Law in Erfurt).</p> <p>For future annual conferences the following themes were suggested:</p>
	<p>Preparation for the second ecumenical Kirchentag in Munich, 2010</p> <p>How to pass on faith to the children in interchurch families and sharing experiences about bringing up the children</p> <p>How do we deal with the increasing decline of Christianity in our land?</p> <p>Giving witness together</p> <p>Sharing between generations in the world of ecumenism – how do we do this on a practical level?</p>
	<p>Gudrun Steineck gave special thanks to Professor Kühn and presented him with a gift, to loud applause from all participants!</p> <p>Beate Beyer thanked – to the applause of everyone – Frau Deuster, who had looked after the children.</p>
12:15	<p>Lunch and blessing on the journey (Beate Beyer)</p> <p>End of the conference</p>

Report compiled by Rudolf Lauber
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