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Richard Fehr

Zurich. Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider called his predecessor in ministry a “wise man with great vision”. The majority of New Apostolic District Church leaders from around the world attended the memorial service for the highly respected and popular Chief Apostle, who had directed the affairs of the New Apostolic Church over the seventeen years from 1988 to 2005. It was in gratitude and sadness that they gathered in the Zurich-Hottingen church to take leave of Richard Fehr, who passed away on 30 June 2013, shortly before his 74th birthday.

Several hundred brothers and sisters took leave of retired Chief Apostle Richard Fehr yesterday evening in the New Apostolic Church of Zurich-Hottingen. The memorial service was transmitted via satellite throughout Europe.

Great sadness

“We need Your help and Your comfort”—in his prayer at the start of the memorial service, Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider brought to expression in very emotional fashion the feelings and thoughts which the bereaved family and many brothers and sisters around the world have been carrying in their hearts over the past days—and which they will also continue to carry in their hearts over the time ahead.

In his opening remarks he referred to the fact that many brothers and sisters had felt the need to gather together, both in the Zurich-Hottingen church and in the many congregations linked by satellite, on that evening. He gave voice to their collective desire to give thanks to God for all the blessings and good things they had been

permitted to receive through Chief Apostle Fehr, and to pray for the latter's wife Sonja, his son Richard, and the entire bereaved family.

The Chief Apostle served on the basis of a Bible text from Hebrews 13: 7:

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” He pointed out that Chief Apostle Fehr had been a wonderful teacher: “All who ever came into contact with him were able to learn a great deal from him. On one hand, he was a master of proclaiming the gospel. He had a gift for getting right to the heart of the matter in a very few concise words.” “No superficiality!” and “For many, much has become too much” were just two examples of his extraordinary expressive capacity and power of articulation.

When he was called to serve along, District Apostle Wilfried Klingler described Chief Apostle Fehr as a diamond with many facets, of which only a small few had been highlighted and described in this memorial service.

A man of faith and love

Faith in the omnipotence of God characterised his life and activity. Chief Apostle Schneider referred to Chief Apostle Fehr's strong and lively faith, his faith in the love of God, in God's work of redemption, and his trust in God. He had held on to this trust to the very end, even during the time of his illness. He always demonstrated his unshakeable trust that “Whatever God does, He will do well!”

He also believed in the love of God with rocklike faith. This faith had often provided him with the strength, motivation, and energy he needed, even during his period of sickness. He had absolute trust in God because he knew that God is a God of love and that He will indeed make everything right in the end.

His love for the members was also great. He travelled a great deal and even visited countries in which there were only a few believers. “He loved each individual child of God, and it was also important to him that all cultures, all traditions, and all the various individual biographies feel at home in our Church,” said Chief Apostle Schneider.

“However,” Chief Apostle Schneider went on to note, “Chief Apostle Fehr also loved all other people. He also wanted all New Apostolic Christians to take people of other faiths seriously and to show respect for their beliefs.”

A man of wisdom, vision, and courage

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider described his predecessor in ministry as a man of great wisdom and vision. He had always been sensitive to the needs of the global Church and had always promoted its internationality. His far-sighted decisions also enabled him to master the increased demands brought on by the rapid growth of the Church—especially in Africa and Asia—even in the financial respect. District Apostle Noel Barnes honoured Chief Apostle Fehr as a visionary and prudent Church leader who made courageous decisions that have since yielded blessed results.

His tenure in office stood, and still stands, for openness and tolerance. In particular, he promoted the further development of the Church in theological questions. In

1999 he established the Ecumenism project group, which has enabled the Church to engage in regular official dialogue with other churches ever since.

The present Church leader also emphasised his predecessor's fine sense of humour. He emphasised that Chief Apostle Fehr had always had a joyful disposition and a friendly and humorous nature—"We will always remember that." The exemplary conduct of the Chief Apostle during his retirement was also a very important support in the present Church leader's own exercise of ministry. "He made it very for all of us to serve and lead."

An example and teacher

"Hardly anyone has ever had as deep and broad an insight into the New Apostolic Church as he did," explained Chief Apostle Schneider. "He had experienced, seen, and known more than any of us, and yet he always held fast to his faith. His love for God gave him the strength, motivation, and energy to serve."

"Chief Apostle Fehr was always a great teacher and leader," said District Apostle Andrew Andersen as he spoke during the service. "He not only taught that which came from God, he also lived the work of God with a clear focus, namely in the awareness of God's will. The District Apostle mentioned a statement which Chief Apostle Fehr had once made at a funeral: "It was not the sickness that took him from this earth, but rather the will of God." This, he said, was also to be a comfort to the bereaved family and all other brothers and sisters today.

Chief Apostle for seventeen years

Richard Fehr was born in Flaach, Switzerland on 15 July 1939. At the age of 22 he assumed his first ministry in the Church. In 1988 he became Chief Apostle of the New Apostolic Church, a ministry he carried for seventeen years. By the time of his festive retirement on Pentecost Sunday 2005, the membership of the New Apostolic Church around the world had risen to over ten million believers. On the occasion of his retirement his direct successor in ministry, Chief Apostle Wilhelm Leber, described him as a very loving minister. "His love for Jesus Christ and the believers was always exemplary. He opened many doors, inspired many new thoughts, and demonstrated great courage and vision," said the latter in his words of thanks to the retiring Chief Apostle.

Letter of condolence from the Vatican

Many hundreds of expressions of condolence have arrived at the offices of the New Apostolic Church over the past days. A very large number of people have thereby brought to expression their sadness and sympathy at the passing of the retired Chief Apostle. Among them was Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, who sent a letter of condolence to Chief Apostle Schneider. In it he expressed his sympathy, and wished the New Apostolic Church the help of God. He went on to express that he would pray for the departed Chief Apostle and that he wished him all the joys of eternal fellowship with God. Chief Apostle Schneider was very pleased to receive this letter, and plans to express his thanks to Cardinal Koch in writing.

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