



European Apostles ring in Pentecost with a meeting in Hamburg

Alle Bezirksapostel und die Apostel aus Europa
nehmen am Pfingstgottesdienst teil

Hamburg/Zurich. Retiring Chief Apostle Wilhelm Leber opened the European Apostle Meeting in Hamburg the Saturday before Pentecost with warm thanks to all the Apostles for their work and support, all their prayers, and all their willingness to contribute and help along in the various developments. With emotion he went on to add: "I would also like to thank my predecessor in ministry, Chief Apostle Fehr. I would like to thank him in particular because he made the transition so easy for me. His attitude left its mark upon me and I have always been able to relate to it. It has been my endeavour to continue his work."

All the District Apostles of the world and all the Apostles of Europe arrived in Hamburg well ahead of the Pentecost divine service. Traditionally there is always an Apostle Meeting on the preceding Saturday. This time the gathering was characterised by a retrospective on the past and an outlook toward the future. The international Church leader captioned the retrospective with the Bible text: "Be sober, be vigilant" (excerpt from 1 Peter 5: 8). In summary, he said that he had always tried to act in accordance with these words. "It requires both sobriety and vigilance to lay down the course that the Church is to follow. The recent course of the Church has been characterised by an effort to open up to the other Christian churches. This endeavour was initiated by Chief Apostle Fehr, and I have tried to move it forward. During my time of office, we went on to develop a clearly defined understanding of baptism, which incorporated the significant change that we now recognise the baptisms performed in other churches. I believe this was an important milestone!"

The change in our understanding of the church of Christ was just as significant, he added.

Remaining firmly rooted in faith

He then went on to caption the outlook on the future with a Bible text from Colossians 2: 6-7: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” From this the Chief Apostle derived a call to unity as well as a collective mandate to assure the integration of the children and youth into congregational life: “One can only be rooted in a cause when there are a thousand threads that keep one there.”

At the end of his emotional address, he thanked Chief Apostle Helper Jean-Luc Schneider for his willingness to accept this new commission. “Please give him your trust.” The gathering then took a very solemn turn when the Chief Apostle shook his hand and said: “Dear Chief Apostle Helper, we promise to support you and to cultivate oneness in the Spirit. It is our desire to reach the goal together!”

Analysing the current state of the Church

Chief Apostle Jean-Luc Schneider, to whom these words had just been addressed, emphasised how important it is to remain rooted in the Lord! “Our orientation to the Lord is especially important when it comes to analysing the current state of our Church and envisioning its future.” In Europe and also in some other continents he had noted a decline in belief in God and divine service attendance. Even the up-and-coming generation of ministers was not assured without some effort. “This situation will have its effect on the mood within the congregations. Some ministers are threatened by the danger of discouragement and resignation. Our challenge for the time ahead of us will be to combat this danger.”

Do not relativise the gospel!

Changes must take place, but they should be carefully thought out and weighed over the long term. The gospel is not a product which needs to be adapted to a market. Rather it is the unchanging and eternal truth. It is from this faith that the early Christians derived the strength to resist, and it was from this certainty that the Christians of the past centuries found their motivation to remain true to the Lord Jesus. “As Apostles and messengers for Christ we not fight for the survival of the New Apostolic Church, but for the Lord Jesus Christ! Today we have been charged with the mandate to proclaim the gospel without relativising it, and to preach the imminent coming of the Lord without becoming tired!”

A reliable Catechism

“Today,” the Chief Apostle designate went on to add, “the Church has a reliable Catechism at its disposal, the quality of which has been widely acknowledged. “Its doctrine is set. Its identity is defined. Today we focus on that which we have in common with other churches, specifically our common belief in Jesus Christ. We harbour the desire to work in cooperation with other churches in order to make the message of the gospel audible in modern society, and we rejoice over all progress in dialogue with the various religious authorities.” He also expressed his conviction

that the “New Apostolic specifics”—namely the belief in the imminent return of Christ, the Apostle ministry, and the opportunity for redemption in the beyond—will not stand in the way of our efforts to come closer to other religious denominations. “Quite the contrary: I am convinced that we as New Apostolic Christians, who love the Lord and are particularly motivated by His imminent return, can provide valuable support for all those who fight for the cause of Christ.”

At the close of his address he presented his priorities to the Apostles for the time ahead, specifically to ensure the wellbeing of the ministers in their ministries and the welfare of the youth in their Church.

He also honoured the “great accomplishments” of the Chief Apostle over the past eight years, and expressed gratitude for his kind manner, his nearness and openness, his patience, and his diligence. Rather than do a lot of talking, he asked the assembled Apostles to rise for a very emotional and heartfelt prayer.

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