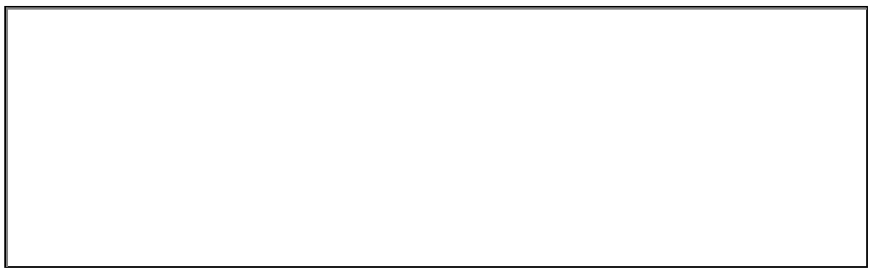
New Apostolic Church
International

Ecumenism Project Group: Mutual dialogue is important!

Theory and practice are not always the same thing - this is something the members of the Ecumenism Project Group can confirm without hesitation. The practical faith of many Christians does not always conform to the prescriptions of the respective catechisms. That is why it is so important for the members of the Ecumenism Project Group to examine both the theory and practice, in other words the theology and actual congregational activity, of the various churches. This means they need to have contacts among them.

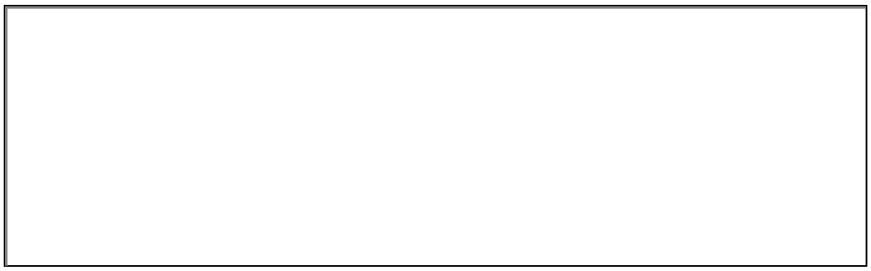
Chief Apostle Richard Fehr established the Ecumenism Project Group on 28 October 1999. Its clear mandate is: "To determine - in close cooperation with the Contemporary Issues Project Group - the degree of compatibility between the fundamental doctrinal statements of the New Apostolic Church and those of Ecumenism." These fundamental doctrinal statements include our understanding of the sacraments, and of ministry, as well as eschatological statements (our anticipation of Christ's imminent return, our conception of the departed).
The members of the Ecumenism Project Group were quick to recognise that the term "Ecumenism" is not uniformly defined. The original idea behind the ecumenical movement, which was to unite all Christian churches and groups under one leadership, is generally no longer regarded to be a realistic one. Today the movement is looking for more of a "unity in plurality" or as a familiar ecumenical formulation expresses it: "reconciled diversity." Nonetheless, ecumenism is also the serious, positive endeavour to support commonalities in the Christian faith, while preserving the identities of, and mutual respect between, the respective denominations. Thus it is important to have a look behind the scenes of the various doctrinal structures and investigate the practical implementation of the various doctrinal statements. That is why the members of the Project Group meet often with representatives from other churches. They have already conducted 20 such confidential rounds of talks with theologians and delegates of the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Churches, Methodist, and Adventist Churches in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. Along with this they have also taken part in a number of presentations and panel discussions at universities with theologians and other delegates of the various churches.



Volker Kühnle (51), an apostle in the District Church of Southern Germany, is the chairman

of the Project Group. He is the one who gave the impetus for such discussions, because he has already been cultivating a number of good contacts with clergy from other churches in his function as public relations officer. He says: "If you want to get to know one another better, then mutual dialogue is important! Whether on the local, regional, or national level, it is important that we present ourselves as a Church that is recognised by the state."

Our chief apostle wishes to cultivate this exchange with clergy from other churches on the local level. This is clearly stated in a letter sent out to all congregational rectors throughout German-speaking Europe. It is entitled: "Instructions for dialogue between the New Apostolic Church and other Christian churches and denominations." There it says among other things: "Discussions and meetings with representatives from other Christian churches and denominations enable us to get to know one another. They are to create trust and understanding, even for diverging interpretations, and at the same time pave the way for comfortable relations with one another. This involves local "trust-building measures", not official contacts at a Church management level. We must always be aware that we will thus be perceived as representatives of our Church."



Other members of the Project Group include Apostle Wolfgang Nadolny (48) from Berlin-Brandenburg, Bishop Hanspeter Nydegger (63) from Switzerland, and District Evangelist Peter Johanning (48) from North Rhine-Westphalia. Each of these individuals has in their own way had the most diverse encounters with other churches. Bishop Nydegger, for example, is - along with Apostle Bernard Meier - an official envoy of the New Apostolic Church with guest status in the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kirchen im Kanton Bern" (Association of Churches in the Canton of Bern). This ecumenical body deals with the concerns of the various churches on a cantonal level.

The first priority of the Ecumenism Project Group is not however, to gain entry in some national or international body of the ecumenical movement. At present this would not even be possible because the ecumenical understanding of sacrament and ministry is significantly inconsistent with the New Apostolic doctrine of faith. When asked how long it would take the New Apostolic Church to become a full institutional participant in the ecumenical movement, if at all, Chief Apostle Fehr answered: "That's a long way". Indeed we will have a long way to go before we really get to know one another, and it will take a great deal more discussions conducted in mutual respect and esteem.

The Ecumenism Project Group

The current mandate of the Ecumenism Project Group is as follows: To continue meetings with representatives of other churches despite the incompatibility of fundamental doctrinal statements of the New Apostolic Church with those of the ecumenical movement.
Discussions with other churches are being pursued on all levels. The Ecumenism Project Group is currently conducting a thorough investigation into the requirements for acquiring observer status in the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva.

The members of the Ecumenism Project Group

Chairman: Apostle Volker Kühnle (51) resides in Aichtal, near Stuttgart (Southern Germany). Before taking on a full time position in the Church in 1988, he worked as a personnel director.
Apostle Wolfgang Nadolny (48) resides in Bad Freienwalde, near Berlin. For years he worked as a surveyor before entering the service of the Church in 1993.
Bishop Hanspeter Nydegger (63) resides in Thun, Switzerland. He was formerly the director of a large commercial enterprise. He has been active as a bishop in the district apostle district of Switzerland for nine years.
District Evangelist Peter Johanning (48) resides in Bielefeld, North Rhine-Westphalia. Since 1996 he has been the media representative of the New Apostolic Church International.



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