The Contemporary Issues Project Group: Providing answers to timely questions is an obligation of the church

The members of the Contemporary Issues Project Group agree that answering questions about modern life constitutes an obligation for the church. Nonetheless they do not consider it an obligatory chore to meet for about 18 additional days per year to carry out their functions. Unanimously they concur: "Our work is meant to support pastoral care activities."



Werner Kühnle (55), an apostle from Southern Germany and member of the group from the start, has been directing the Contemporary Issues Project Group since 2002. His predecessor, retired Apostle Theo Hirschi (68) from Switzerland, had been the chair of the Project Group since its inception in 1987. He took leave of the group in December of last year, along with retired Shepherd Arnold Schönrock, likewise from Southern Germany, and Apostle Gerrit Sepers (57, NAC Netherlands). This leaves three remaining members: Apostle Werner Kühnle, Sister Bärbel Wolff MD (Southern Germany), and Roland Eichenberger, a priest from Switzerland.

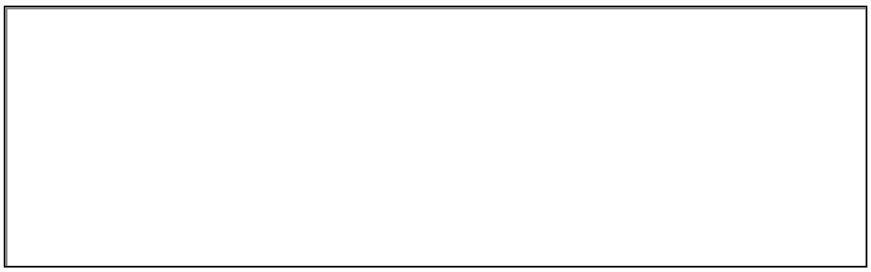
The first topics the group dealt with were AIDS, depression, and homosexuality, but others soon followed. "Over the course of the years we have processed a good 20 different topics, which have eventually made their way into the church's literature," reports Apostle Kühnle. The processing of these items begins when a question, topic, or project is presented to the church administration or District Apostles' Meeting. At that point the chief apostle commissions the Project Group to develop an official position for the church. This elaboration process adheres to specific criteria: the perspective of the New Apostolic faith must remain the focal point, target groups need to be identified, and an introduction plan needs to be developed. Finally the material begins the long but necessary road from one department to the

next: Co-ordination Group, District Apostles' Meeting, chief apostle. The finished product emerges at the end of this cycle.



"There is a need for the church to provide answers with regard to the many questions of life," reports Theo Hirschi from his years of experience as chairman of the Project Group. For example on the issue of abortion, the Project Group conducted a one-day symposium with professionals from various New Apostolic District Churches, among them doctors, psychologists, and legal experts. At the end of this consultation the Project Group formulated a detailed elaboration, which was published in the "House Rules" and other literature in the form of a brief statement (see textbox 3). "The issues must be church-relevant," says Werner Kühnle. By this he means that the topics must have a direct connection with New Apostolic pastoral care through priests or with church instruction through teachers in Sunday school, etc. Often a view to the outside is helpful, as for example with the introduction of the brochures on addiction (see Our Family 2/03).

A new task that the Project Group is working on at the moment is the subject of how pastoral care ought to address sexual abuse. Some of the questions to be clarified include: "What is the church doing about it?" and "How can both victims and perpetrators be helped?" An elaboration is currently being developed to deal with this issue.



Another two brochures are in the pipeline: "Marriage and partnership" and "Child rearing." The basic idea common to the work on both brochures is that there are too few reference points for wise, faith-oriented answers available in our society. "The church must give its own answers as regards raising children or partnership and marriage," says Apostle Kühnle. "Only once parents and married couples know how they can make a responsible decision can the principle of personal responsibility come to bear. The church does not seek to dictate to anyone - it only seeks to lead people to make a responsible decision."

One question that keeps coming up is: "What is conducive to a good partnership or marriage?" Apostle Kühnle explains: "The many broken partnerships and marriages are a burden for the parties involved, but also for society as a whole. That is why the brochure provides detailed pointers from the perspective of our faith on principles for selecting a partner, the premarital period, marriage and partnership, and on how to deal with matrimonial and family conflicts."

The Project Group read a great deal of professional literature while developing the brochure on "Child rearing." More than 160 pages of source literature were summarised and entered into a database, which was also set up in-house. Thus parents receive valuable pointers for child rearing in compressed form and no longer have to look around for information in all sorts of help books. According to Werner Kühnle, the "number one goal of these brochures is to provide parents with helpful thoughts on how they can raise their children to be capable individuals who are also firm in faith." Has the church missed anything or made any errors in this field? According to Apostle Kühnle: "The brochure is not intended to address issues that have come up in the past, rather it is simply meant to convey helpful thoughts. It gives pointers from the perspective of our faith on the prenatal development of the child, hints for parents during the various phases of a child's life, and on dealing with young people right up to the time they choose their partner."

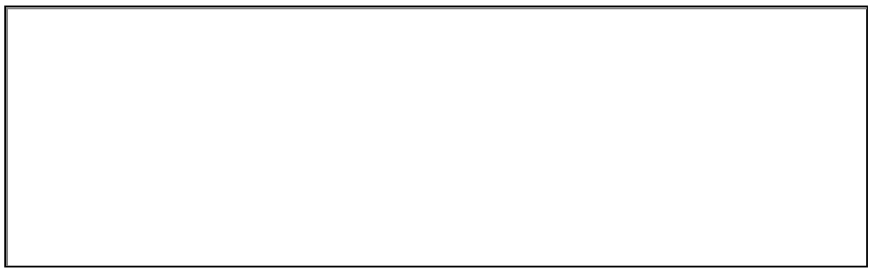
Both brochures are scheduled to be available for ordering from the publishers of "Our Family" in 2005.

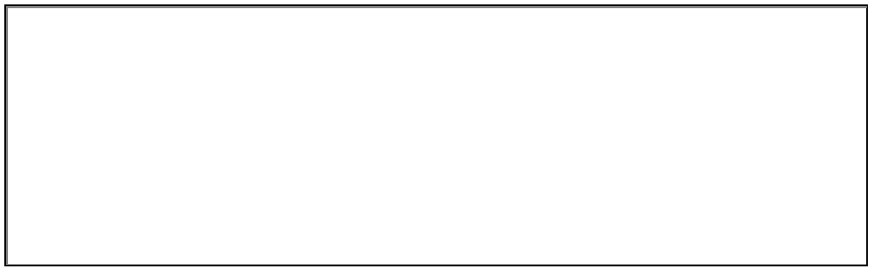
The Contemporary Issues Project Group
The Contemporary Issues Project Group was convened in 1987 by Chief Apostle Hans Urwyler. The first issues of that time included AIDS, homosexuality, and depression. To date the group has dealt with a total of 21 different subjects. Its current members are Apostle Werner Kühnle, Bärbel Wolff MD (Southern Germany) and Roland Eichenberger, a priest from Switzerland. Some results of the Project Group's work can already be found in the "House Rules" publication.

New brochures: "Child rearing" and "Marriage and partnership"
Slated for publishing in 2005. Target groups include all men and women who are raising children, as well as Sunday school and Religious Instruction teachers, young people, and ministers. In terms of content, the "Partnership and marriage" brochure gives detailed pointers on principles for choosing a partner, the premarital period, partnership and marriage, and dealing with marital conflicts. The "Child rearing" brochure offers a concise package of valuable pointers on the prenatal development of the child, hints for parents during the various phases of a child's life, and on dealing with young people right up to the time they choose their partner.

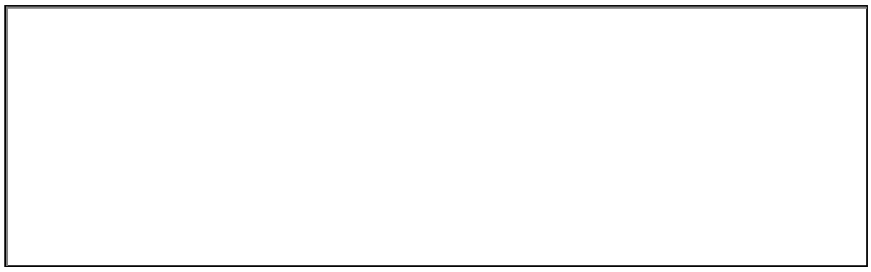
Brief statement on abortion

"The New Apostolic Church considers itself to be a proponent of life. The fertilised egg cell is already an individual living being that has a fundamental right to protection. The New Apostolic Church fundamentally rejects abortion. Certainly the church is also aware that each case needs to be carefully evaluated on an individual basis. A discussion with doctors and ministers can be helpful in seeking the right decision in each case. Medical knowledge is only one aspect that the parties involved must take into consideration however, along with religious and ethical questions. It is equally true that the church respects the personal responsibility of the mother or couple in reaching a decision about abortion, and will care for her or them in an unbiased manner, along with any child that may be born. Pastoral counselling is subject to the obligation of secrecy."









9 December 2004