

E Newsletter

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Dear Friends,

"Es ist Advent,... die erste Kerze brennt." As the Advent Season begins and the Church sets out with trembling on its annual journey to the wonder and mystery of Christmas, the UCC-EKU Working Group sends each of you many greetings, grateful for the grace that sustains us all and nourishes the hope that is in us. This, in the very face of the "bleak mid-winter" into which the world has been moving. May we hear the call that resounds through the ages... "Lift up your hearts," summoning us to joyous and costly discipleship! As one of our beloved Advent hymns puts it... "Look up, you drooping hearts, today, Emmanuel is near; o cast your griefs and fears away, for, lo, your help is here! Hope on, you broken hearts, at last the Lord comes in his might; he loved us in the ages past, when we lay wrapped in night."

This is the first Advent Season since the UCC-EKU Working Group was formed more than twenty-five years ago, that Professor M. Douglas Meeks of Vanderbilt University and Professor Max Stackhouse of Princeton Theological Seminary, are not serving as members. The Church owes a deep debt of gratitude for these two faithful pioneers in the establishment of "Kirchengemeinschaft" with the Evangelical Church of the Union. They, together with Dorothy Berry of Kansas, Russell Bennett of Oklahoma, Charles McCollough of New Jersey, Lillian DeBrew Johnson of Virginia, Nancy Dickinson of Indiana, Paul Schippel of Illinois, and Rita Wilbur of Texas, each of whom has given devoted leadership to "Full Communion" between our two Churches, have relinquished their places as members of the Working Group in the past year, along with our dear staff member, Kenneth R. Ziebell, who has retired to Massachusetts. Without the loyalty and gifts of these precious friends, "Kirchengemeinschaft" would not have taken root as deeply as it has in the United Church of Christ. The present members of the Working Group join the Church in thanking God for the faith, hope, love and vision these friends have offered so completely and with such grace in the quest for unity within the Body of Christ.

As some of you may have noted, the "UCC-EKU Newsletter" was not published in 2001. In its place, the Working Group produced a booklet entitled "You Gave the Weary Your Hand: Bearing Witness to the Light, through the Shadows of September 11, 2001." This booklet contains reflections, sermons, and prayers of twenty-two

friends of "Kirchengemeinschaft" in Germany and the United States. A few copies remain. Had we published the newsletter last year, we would have included some of the documents contained in this issue, with special attention given to the important "consultation" on the future of "Kirchengemeinschaft" held in Cleveland, Ohio in April, 2001. The Working Group hopes you will find these documents of interest, along with two reports from the important meeting of the Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Union held this past June in Berlin, some reflections on ordained ministry by the Praeses of the Synod, Pfarrer Nikolaus Schneider, who is currently serving as Vice President of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, and Jane M. Kropa's translation of some thoughts on Advent.

The UCC-EKU Working Group continues to meet twice annually. Our next meeting is scheduled to take place at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis on December 13-14, 2002. In addition to visiting the future of "Kirchengemeinschaft" between the two Churches, we hope to hear a report on the challenges facing the Church in the Middle East, explore ideas related to the World Council of Churches' "Decade to Overcome Violence" (2001-2010), and the movement towards unity in the ECU and the Churches of the Arnoldshainer Konferenz... Our meeting will provide an opportunity to meet with the faculty of the seminary and to engage in conversation around a variety of issues vital to the life and witness of the United Church of Christ. In addition, we shall talk about the financial resources available to the Working Group and our need to uncover additional sources of support. Our current budget through the Wider Church Ministries of the UCC is \$9,500 annually, barely enough to meet as a Working Group and to publish and distribute this newsletter. If you have helpful ideas on the financial challenge we face, we would rejoice to receive your thoughts and suggestions.

Frederick R. Trost
Editor

Advent

Charm with your stainlessness these winter nights,
Skies, and be perfect!
Fly vivider in the fiery dark, you quiet meteors,
And disappear.
You moon, be slow to go down,
This is your full!

The four white roads make off in silence
Towards the four parts of the starry universe.
Time falls like manna at the corners of the wintry earth.
We have become more humble than the rocks,
More wakeful than the patient hills.

Charm with your stainlessness these nights in Advent, holy spheres,
While minds, as meek as beasts,
Stay close at home in the sweet hay;
And intellects are quieter than the flocks that feed by starlight.

Oh pour your darkness and your brightness over all our solemn valleys,
You skies: and travel like the gentle Virgin,
Toward the planets' stately setting,

Oh white full moon as quiet as Bethlehem!

(Thomas Merton, "Selected Poems," 38-39)

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**A Report from the Cleveland Consultation of
Conferences (UCC) and Landeskirchen (EKU)
An Invitation to Our Churches
(April, 2001)**

As we reach the twentieth anniversary of “full communion,” (“Kirchengemeinschaft”), the partnership ratified by our churches in 1980/81, we thank God for the leadership, good will, and sharing in faith and work that have brought us this far. We recognize that “full communion” always remains an invitation and incentive; that it is never finally accomplished; and, that this is always a vocation we must seek to realize together. We confess that we have not always succeeded in our witness: we have not always expressed ourselves or understood each other clearly; we have not always listened as intently as we have spoken; we have sometimes assumed similarities across boundaries where none existed, while often ignoring common issues that we did not want to or could not yet face. For these things we ask forgiveness of each other.

Yet we also acknowledge that we have gained much from our fellowship, learning during this time what it means to enter into God’s mission together. We have found encouragement in this common witness, and have come to value our partnership for the many ways it has deepened our faith by calling us to share in the cost and joy of discipleship. We also gladly acknowledge that this partnership has restored a measure of unity to the brokenness we have known in both the political and ecclesial spheres of our lives in the United States and Germany.

This partnership has invited us to understand more deeply what it means to be “church” in this age, calling us to love God together in faithful worship and challenging us to love our neighbors in ways we would not otherwise have known. This communion has been a means by which we have learned what it means to “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us, for the glory of God” (Rom. 15.7).

We thus send this report to the Landeskirchen of the Evangelical Church of the Union and to the Conferences of the United Church of Christ not as a declaration of purpose, but as an invitation to this mission. We pray that we might continue on this way of “Kirchengemeinschaft” by committing ourselves to discovering what “full communion” means in a deepening sharing of faith and life. We do so knowing that our churches stand in a quite different place than we did at the outset of this journey together two decades ago. To this end we recognize that:

- the east/west conflict no longer exists in the political and ideological form it had before 1989;
- we are in the midst of a generational change with new leadership emerging in our churches to carry on the work of our common witness;
- resources at the national level in both our churches are limited, and we must find ways to sustain existing forms of partnership and discover new ones so that full communion might find fresh forms and new relationships;
- the status of the churches in German society, and particularly in the former eastern lands, has been significantly diminished, a situation that has brought particular challenges requiring patience and respect and encouragement from all churches in our partnership;
- the unification of Germany offers unexplored opportunities for new partnerships at the congregational, District/Association, and Landeskirche/Conference levels;

- economic globalization has broadened the context of this partnership since it has rendered more complex the question of who our neighbor is, and what relationship we have to him/her.

In all these ways, and others, we are discovering that the call to Krchengemeinschaft entails that we enter into and embody God's mission of peace with justice in new forms, in and for our communities and societies. We find in this work much that binds us together in common cause, not only because of our historical relationships and ecumenical fellowship in recent decades but because we find ourselves living within the same horizon of power and affluence in the so-called "first world." We see that this partnership holds special promise for sharing and mutual encouragement as we discern how to be a church in this time, within our societies and in wider global context. We also hope that together we might find ways to deepen our commitments to this mission to which we have discerned God calling us.

At this juncture, we recognize that we must discern anew the paths in which God is leading us, in our varied locations and in communion with one another. In order to accomplish this, we realize that we must find sufficient institutional structures to facilitate this work in as clear and responsible a manner as we can find. This is particularly true in terms of the UCC/EKU Working Group and its relationship toward the UCC Forum and partnerships existing between ECU Landeskirchen and UCC Conferences, as well as its function within the UCC in relation to such initiatives at various levels of church life. In this regard, we commit ourselves to seeking to clarify and, if need be, establish sufficient, clear, and comparable structures of leadership at both the national and regional levels in order to lend oversight and support within and between our churches.

As we look to the future, we recognize that our witness to God's mission calls us to certain common ecumenical concerns and initiatives. Among these, we identify the World Council of Churches' declaration of this as the "Decade to Overcome Violence" as a special calling for our work together. We do this not only because we receive this mandate from the churches sharing in this global ecumenical relationship but also because we recognize the crucial importance of this challenge on many levels of our societies, from the local to the national.

We further recognize that this problem is directly related to the crisis of poverty in both global and local contexts, and we confess that this finds expression not only in terms of human society but also in our relationship to the earth and all other living creatures. This calls us to attend with special concern to the various other partnerships in our Conferences and Landeskirchen, and local congregations, by which we find ourselves entering into relationships with churches from the developing nations or the so-called "two-thirds world."

As we continue on this journey of partnership, we commit ourselves to the ongoing fellowship of prayer and common worship that has been a source of strength, consolation and joy for us. In such ways we have discovered and expressed what our communion in Christ means through the rhythms and occasions of our liturgical and sacramental life. We also recognize the need to seek fresh expressions, in ritual and liturgy and prayer, of the faith we have inherited and must share with this and future generations.

We also recognize distinct social problems and issues that engage our churches differently at various levels, and we seek to find ways to support, encourage, and, when necessary, admonish one another in relation to these. Among others, we point to:

- the troubling divisions of poverty and privilege, and the inequities related to the global economy that plague our nations and localities;
- the continuing ecological crisis facing us both in our societies and in wider global context;
- the enduring idolatry of racism and other forms of ethnic discrimination and conflict as we know these in local, national, and global contexts;
- the ongoing challenges related to gender and sexual orientation, both in our societies and within our churches.
- attention to the World Wide Web as a powerful new conduit for the proliferation of hatred and the encouragement of violence.

We also realize that the distinctive shape of our efforts in this regard, and particular areas of social, political, and ecclesial concern, will not always be shared. To this end we have asked each other for support and encouragement in:

- Facing the challenges of addressing the culture of death in the United States, with particular attention to the continuing exercise of the death penalty as well as the widespread access to handguns;
- Articulating the essential elements of the faith for those estranged from or ignorant of it in Germany.

In these ways, we know that our partnership calls us to encourage one another in faith by sharing our life and work with each other, as well as to risk entering new avenues of witness together for the sake of God's mission in world. We do this particularly in solidarity with the poor and the vulnerable, and on behalf of the youth and those generations to come. To this end, we commit ourselves to praying for and with one another, with the hope that these expressions of our common life might make us bold in the faith.

Kirchengemeinschaft

between the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Church of the Union
a short summary of events and developments
by Reinhard Groscurth

As a student in the United States nearly 50 years ago (in Springfield, Ohio) I learned that one has to start a sermon or a speech with a story to keep the interest of the listeners ("Sermon Starters"). For my contribution today I have even four stories from a period of 65 years:

1. In 1936, when the so-called Church Struggle in Germany reaches another climax, Eden Theological Seminary confers an honorary doctorate, a DD, to a rather unknown pastor of the congregation Berlin Dahlem. His name: Martin Niemöller. "You still stand firmly for the complete freedom of the Gospel at the present critical moment", writes Eden's president, Dr. Press, to Niemöller [1]. After seven years in the concentration camps of Sachsenhausen and Dachau, Niemöller sees the light of freedom again. During his first visit to Eden after the war he declares that with all probability this international recognition saved his life. Here I discover an early example of *Kirchengemeinschaft*.

2. A second example from those years: Shortly before the outbreak of World War II Reinhold Niebuhr (who in 1933 was successful in providing a safe place for Paul Tillich in New York) and Paul Lehmann [2] pave the way for Dietrich Bonhoeffer to come again to Union Theological Seminary. Both professors, with Evangelical and Reformed background, are well informed about the dangers for Bonhoeffer in Germany and therefore hope that he will stay and survive. But at the end of June, 1939, Bonhoeffer writes to Lehmann: "I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people in Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people." [3] I think this whole episode is another early example of *Kirchengemeinschaft*.

3. A story from the early Eighties: A visiting pastor from the United Church of Christ arrives in a small town in the German Democratic Republic and discovers that his colleague is full of complaints and lamentations – his situation looks hopeless, he feels forgotten and seems to work in vain. Two days of sharing, two nights of discussion – both are deeply moved and promise to pray for each other. Suddenly, there is some light in the tunnel and survival becomes possible. This is *mutua consolatio fratrum et sororum*, this is *Kirchengemeinschaft*.

4. The last story comes from the autumn of 1989 when – *providentia Dei* – a UCC exchange group happens to be in the GDR. In those depressing last days of the communistic state an American pastor has been assigned to another little town. People from the congregation ask the guest for his advice. After long discussions the church elders decide to invite all people to a service of intercession and to a non-violent protest march to the city hall. Before the *Rathaus* the visitor teaches the crowd to sing "We Shall Overcome". The famous John Robinson, one of the early fathers of the UCC, spoke about "the principles of mutual edification and fraternal correction". That again is a fair description of *Kirchengemeinschaft*.

These are my four stories, the last two of them not to be found in any book on church history, not mentioned by Keiling or Gunnemann or any other historian. But here, in the realm of spiritual pastoral care, of "Seelsorge" between churches, we can discover the deepest roots of *Kirchengemeinschaft*. It is connected with the ability to understand the situation of another church; it means respect for the decisions of others and willingness to share their burdens. The "cost and joy of discipleship" (Statement of Faith) can be experienced together. However, all of you know that this is only part of a history which has many strands. There are so many facets that it is totally impossible to squeeze those aspects I know (and other people know many additional aspects) into the remaining 25 minutes of my speech. But let me tell you what you can expect:

1. *Some remarks about the historical background;*
2. *The broadening horizon of our common life;*
3. *Mutual encouragement for today and tomorrow.*

1. Some remarks about the historical background

There is a trend in Germany, particularly with German theologians, to start with Adam and Eve. The temptation is great to begin with the contacts between the old Prussian Union Church and the *Kirchenverein des Westens*, the Evangelical Synod of North America and – since 1934 – the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Instead I will enter history only on June 25, 1957, when (by the way: in Cleveland, Ohio!) the UCC came into existence. Let me try to use some analogies for the different stages:

Stage 1: “Love affair”. Dr. Hans Thimme from Westphalia attends this great event as one of five representatives from abroad on behalf of the EKU. Two months later, on August 29, two prominent EKU officials, Präses Heinrich Held and Professor Joachim Beckmann meet the two co-presidents James E. Wagner and Fred Hoskins - the first official visit in the brand-new New York office. There are intensive discussions about exchange projects, on intercommunion and on mutual recognition of ministries and sacraments. Shortly afterwards the Executive Council of the UCC endorses these plans. Everything seems to be ready for a wedding – or at least for an official engagement.

Stage 2: Suddenly there are complications, on both sides. To begin with the UCC: It becomes clear that the task of reorganisation is enormous and takes a lot of energy. At the same time there are immediately urgent political questions which require an answer. How then could one accept additional points for the agenda? - On the German side there are quite different hesitations, from within and from without, but both with similar arguments. Would not a partnership with this U.S. church put the EKU into a somewhat doubtful company – with “liberal theology” and with “social gospel” instead of solid confessional theology and a real *Bekennnisstand*? (One of our smaller regional churches, the Palatinate (*Pfalz*), after World War II, had concluded an agreement about altar and pulpit fellowship with the Congregationalists in Scotland – and immediately there was an outbreak of protests from the Lutheran side. Should now the EKU repeat such an experience?)

Stage 3: In order to continue with my analogy: Suddenly there appears a “match-maker” (*Brautwerber* or *Heiratsvermittler*). Its rather strange name: Faith and Order, organizer of the third international consultation of United Churches in Toronto in June 1975 to which the United Church of Canada had invited the other united churches. One sub-committee has to draft a text on the relationship between these churches, and in this group are President Robert V. Moss and me. We recommend that the network between our churches be intensified and add: We should recognize each other as churches of Christ [4]. When UCC and EKU discuss the results of Toronto, they agree to take up their discussions again, and first attempts are made to prepare a “marriage contract”. One of the first results: Late in 1976 the EKU Working Group starts - with Prof. M. Douglas Meeks in the chair and Rev. Robert Starbuck as the Secretary (later, Pastor Frederick Trost.) One cannot think of *Kirchengemeinschaft* without this powerful and patient and effective group.

Now to the German side: The Councils of the EKU about a year later request the Ecumenical Committees [5] to continue their work with particular reference to the UCC. The members want to be on the safe side, and therefore again and again *Anfragen* are being sent to the Working Group, and all of these are taken up with humour and patience. In this way, our effort to formulate a proposal is changed over and over again. – And now comes a story which Christa Gregel and I like to tell: When in the spring of 1979 we, the two ecumenical officers of the EKU visited our partners together, we carried draft number 10 in our pockets. Once more

we had tried to define “mutual recognition”. And then, during a remarkable trip through North Carolina, our host and driver, Prof. Frederick Herzog, asked us: “Recognition? But we have done this long ago!” He pointed us to § 2 of the Constitution and By-Laws: “The UCC acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who share in the confession of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Saviour ...” [6]. All of the sudden Christa and I discovered that we had been on the wrong track: Our communion is not based on a kind of marriage contract with lots of specified conditions, but full communion exists as a gift from God which we only have to make our own. This conviction was recently repeated by President Dr. John Thomas: “Unity is not something we create, but something we recognize and receive. Our task is not so much to create unity, as to make it visible.” [7]

Stage 4: The “wedding” can take place, because the official wedding notice is ready. And therefore in 1980 the two ECU Synods and in 1981 the General Synod decide officially on *Kirchengemeinschaft*, full communion [8]. The UCC defines it as “the shaping of full community within the church – ‘full communion’”, but in the meantime the term *Kirchengemeinschaft* has been accepted by many Christians from the UCC like *Kindergarten* or *Weltanschauung*.

I should mention briefly, that (while the Eastern Synod of the ECU took the extended hand of the UCC in real gratitude) in the Western ECU Synod some people were still hesitant. They used similar arguments as those 30 years earlier. Professor Herzog, in his great wisdom, helped us to overcome this dilemma. Looking through the Synod deliberations one can get the impression that a “marriage of convenience” (*Vernunftehe*) was at stake. The XIIIth General Synod of the UCC in Rochester, N.Y., “mindful of our roots in the Reformation”, gladly and joyfully accepted the proposal for *Kirchengemeinschaft* as a help to “renewal in mission and faith” and celebrated the new link. The text of this resolution in my eyes is an important ecumenical document; it clearly points to a “love match”. The meaning has been described by L. Gunnemann: “It became clear that the story was a most significant aspect of the UCC ecclesial journey” [9]. And John Thomas, writing on the “Ecumenical Vocation of the UCC...” [10], calls the relationship to the ECU “one of the most prominent of these partnerships”.

2. The broadening horizon of our common life

Probably I have to refrain from stories and analogies for the rest of my paper. For this part I had to select some areas of our co-operation which in my eyes are the most important ones. Throughout the years the scope has widened, and I am sure that in this consultation is hardly anybody present who has not participated in at least one of those aspects.

First of all, I have to mention the exchange program which started already in 1964. *Kirchengemeinschaft* certainly is more than visiting each other, but the *oikoumene* cannot exist without visits and visitations. We need – and we gain – *Erfahrung*. This German word stands for experience, but is based on the verb *fahren*, to drive, to go. In my estimate, up to now about 400 persons have participated in this official UCC – ECU program, and that makes it impossible to describe the enormous numbers of encounters and their consequences for the congregations and for the personal lives (and even for the professional careers) of the participants. I would not hesitate to call some life-changing experiences real conversions. One of the fringe-benefits for the churches: UCC participants from two Conferences, travelling together for a whole month, also learned something about the entire UCC; ECU participants discovered in the USA how important it was to keep the two parts of the ECU, East

and West, together in the one EKU. "The exchange program can be viewed as a providentially-given opportunity ... to understand each other's faith foundations and mission consciousness" [11]. The widening horizon of these exchanges: first mainly white male pastors, later with lay-people and women-pastors as well – and persons of different racial background.

In addition to this "basic" exchange program, there have been many specialized exchanges: journalists and church lawyers, students and professors, bishops and presidents – and in the last 10 – 15 years particularly, younger pastors (*Vikare/Vikarinnen*), often coming for a longer period of time.

In the rest of this chapter there will be four more sub-sections: the first one on theology, the unity of the Church and the congregations; then another one on the "Third World". Political questions will follow, and the last sub-section will be on plans and failures. The relationship of Conferences and *Landeskirchen* will be mentioned as a kind of appendix to this second chapter.

To start with, theology may be very German, but it is here where we began. Theology is more than doctrine, but they are related. Reinhard Ulrich some years ago warned us not to take "doctrine as enemy" and requested as basis of our belief more than "a vaguely perceived religious feeling" [12]. A first example of theological exchange came up when you prepared your famous "Statement of Faith" of 1959, carefully watched (and judged!) by the Theological Committee of the EKU. It needed a Greek translation in order to become "respectable" with a few German professors, but some years later this "testimony, not test of faith" became accepted and used by many congregations in my country. – Trying to overcome the "ecclesiological deficit" (President Avery Post) the report "Towards the Task of Sound Teaching in the UCC" was published (1977); soon there was a German translation, and the discussion started within Germany and between our churches. – A similar development took place when in 1985 the different doctrinal positions within the UCC were put together and published in "New Conversations". The German translation, together with a remarkable German essay by F. Herzog, came four years later. – Twice there were theological consultations: in East Berlin (Weissensee 1980) and in East Germany (Erfurt 1983), both taking up the related, but still different theological roots of our churches and looking for practical applications. – Another task in the sphere of theology has to do with theological education. The visits of Professors Meeks and Stackhouse in 1976 have been of great importance, particularly for the Eastern EKU. It took nine years, until in 1985 four EKU theological teachers (two from the East, two from the West) visited with four (of the seven) closely related Seminaries of the UCC.

"The world is too strong for a divided Christianity" (Archbishop William Temple). On both sides of the Atlantic our churches have been involved in attempts to make the unity of the Church more visible. (As a friend of mine stresses: "The opposite to visible unity is not invisible unity, but visible disunity!") For the UCC this meant e.g. engagement in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), hopefully: "Becoming Churches Uniting in Christ" next January. Some of our UCC partners were surprised that the EKU followed these seemingly endless conversations throughout the years carefully. But when our Ecumenical Committee prepared a commentary to the Plan of Union, this was felt by some as strengthening the theological basis. – I have to omit details on the different stages of the Lutheran-Reformed conversations in the USA and in Europe, from "Marburg Revisited" via Schauenburg and Leuenberg and via "An Invitation to Action" to "A Formula of Agreement" [13] (October 1998). But I think it was helpful that our two churches were able to share their experiences and insights.

Only one parallel from both continents should be added: There were times when the UCC and the EKU (to be more precise: the German united churches in general) were not welcome in the conversations. "Neither fish nor fowl!" we were accused. Thanks to God this problem has been solved.

Theology is not an end in itself, but it has to serve the proclamation of the Word of God and the edification of the congregation. I suppose there is no one in the EKU delegation who has not gained enormously by the way you realize Christian life in your congregations. The EKU paper "What we, the churches of the EKU and their congregations, can learn from the UCC" expresses this with deep gratitude. The last consultation between the UCC and the EKU dealt with the renewal of the congregation. I could name many additional learning processes, like the inclusion of people with special abilities (for this Harold Wilke has been one of the most impressive ambassadors) or the closer connection between your local congregations and diaconal work. I am glad that quite a few links have been established in this field.

Leaving now the area of theology, doctrine, congregational life, I have to underline one aspect which has been before our eyes from the very beginning: We are not allowed to restrict our relationship to the predominantly white, wealthy, "Western" constituency of most of our congregations. Thus we have looked for joint partners in the so-called "third world". Both of us have contacts with them, partly through our mission activities, partly via the World Council of Churches and the network of united churches. From time to time we have been able to involve persons from united churches outside North America or Europe. The relation to the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) has been one of the most fruitful ones, particularly with the inclusion of young people (project O i k o s).

The two stories I told in the beginning about Niemöller and Bonhoeffer point to a tradition which has influenced the ecclesial journey of the UCC from the very beginning: political engagement. Obviously the UCC interest in the EKU was aroused not only because of its theology, but also because it existed in two different political systems: the EKU regularly provided opportunities to come into contact with Christians from behind the "Iron Curtain" [14]. The documents of the UCC in those years connected with the "Just Peace Church" (General Synod XV, 1981) or the statement on "Christian Faith and Economic Life" (1988), have been of great help for Christians in the two regions of the EKU. The annual "decade for peace", which originated in the GDR, spread also to West Germany and to the USA and was another link, at least for some years. There were also other exchanges on the "peace priority" of the UCC and they involved quite a few from the younger generation. An interesting observation may be added: Sometimes the Evangelical Church in Germany when in need of immediate information from the USA depended on the contacts the EKU had, e.g. during the Gulf crisis.

Though you may have heard enough examples of our co-operation, I would like to call your attention briefly to "CiP", Consultation in Process: Under the theme "God's justice" we tried to bring two strands together: insights of our faith convictions and their realization in today's world. Between January 1988 and August 1989 there were nine consultations, starting in Iserlohn (EKU West) and ending in Erfurt (EKU East) - and in between seven regional meetings throughout the UCC. Additional purposes of this ambitious project: to include as many lay people as possible and to find practical applications of our theological thinking in the neighbourhood. (One example: atomic waste placed in the most impoverished areas of the Southern Conference.) Altogether

seven “reflectors” attended all nine gatherings and provided continuity. All meetings (lasting about three days) concentrated on the same passages from the Bible.

What I have described here may sound somewhat complicated. The results for the two churches may have been limited, and when the final debriefing took place, the GDR – as we say in German – “was giving up its ghost”, and priorities changed immediately. Thus not all hopes were fulfilled. But I suppose this is also part of the history between our churches and applies also to other tasks. We did not always succeed and there were failures and shortcomings. I could easily illustrate this by pointing to what we called *Arbeitsplanung* or working program: agreed goals and descriptions of the different areas of our common tasks, often prepared by Fred Herzog and Christa Gregel; it was combined with a time schedule for the next two or three years. Sometimes we may have expected too much, but on the whole this systematic approach has helped us not to end up in “aimlessness” (Statement of Faith).

The partnerships between Conferences and *Landeskirchen*

I hope that those of you who have come here as representatives of the specific partnerships between Conferences and *Landeskirchen* do not feel excluded because I have mentioned so many points from the place where I worked: in the church office of the EKU. To describe the frame-work of our fellowship was, I guess, my main task. But the story would be totally

incomplete if the regional relations were not included. We have to return to the exchange program. Originally the applications from the UCC were invited nation-wide, but around 1975 this was changed, mainly by proposals from Howard Schomer and our fraternal worker Peter Meister. In the next exchange group from the U.S., there were four Conference Ministers. With them the question of particular relationships came up, and these have grown ever since. I am very happy about this development which has brought *Kirchengemeinschaft* much closer to our congregations and has helped to involve many more people and to realize many more tasks. I would like to share my impression with you: Both approaches are not alternatives, but they supplement each other. It is like having two hands – one hand is not enough. Since we will have special papers on these contacts I will stop here and turn to my last major chapter.

3. Mutual encouragement for today and tomorrow

With these two hands quite a few goals have been reached, promises have been kept, discoveries have been made – it is not too difficult to see our Lord and his grace working among us. When I had reached this point in my preparations, I got to know the list of participants in this consultation. And I must say: I am really impressed. And though I am not here as an “official” representative from the EKU side, I would like to express our gratitude for the encouragement you and your mothers and fathers have given us throughout those years and decades.

Thanks to those in this country who helped us in Germany to get rid of the Nazi dictatorship, who after the war provided food for the starving people, who invited students to their country, who continued with their engagement in Europe during the time of the Cold War and assisted our country to become one nation again. And let

me add this: Thanks to you that the UCC took the two parts of the ECU as their one partner.

The big question remains: What can we learn from all these experiences for today and tomorrow? I would like to point to some topics, starting with a few examples from the area of Church and Society and ending with challenges of our common faith.

We might be able to continue with the question of what the “struggle for justice and peace” (Statement of Faith) means today, in the midst of so many new conflicts in so many parts of the world. “The majority of Americans in day-to-day life have little interest in the rest of the world”, we are told in a recent German book on the U.S. following last November’s elections [15]. But such isolationism is not limited to this country – we know it as well. Together we have to include “the rest of the world” in our considerations, because here are our “third world” partners. For their sake we should look for a Christian “globalization” – instead of the purely economic globalization which “covers a multitude of sins” [16]. We should seek an agreement that the questions of life and death of our globe should not be left only to the politicians. President Bush’s refusal to honour the Kyoto agreements of 1997 on global warming is a real set-back. The United Church of Christ has been an impressive example on challenging the politicians, and therefore I am sure that you will carry the concept of the “just peace church” also into the discussions of NMD (the National Missile Defence System, directed against the “States of Concern,” North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria) and join forces with us for the preservation of God’s creation, including the environment and the climate change.

A seemingly inner-American political problem which not only we Germans, well aware of our terrible past, have difficulties to understand is the death penalty, still applied in 38 States [17]. A most serious problem on our side is the increasing violence of right-wing hate groups, attacking mainly dark-skinned foreigners. Xenophobia and the death penalty, but also the racial unrest as in Cincinnati, Ohio, before Easter should be included when our churches take up the World Council of Churches’ “Decade to overcome violence. Churches seeking reconciliation and peace”. This long-term program might help our partnerships to discover a new focus.

In all these areas of concern we should not leave out our common faith. According to the *Herald Tribune*, Europe is now “the most godless quarter on earth...Europe, traditionally the heartland of Christianity (is) experiencing staggering declines in attendance and affiliation” [18]. The credibility of the churches is waning; only 36 % of the German population have trust in the church [19]. Another indication is the rite of confirmation in the Eastern part of Germany. In 1954, the State started to replace it by the “youth dedication” with a clear commitment to Socialism, and was so successful that eventually 97 % of the children participated. In the meantime it has become clear that all hopes for a re-introduction of the traditional confirmation have failed; about half of the kids still attend a *Jugendweihe*, and only 15 % ask for confirmation. [20] We are well aware of the fact that this development is not limited to the East; seemingly we are all on the way from mainline to sideline churches. How do we help each other to discover a new spirituality, how do we involve the younger generation and equip them with the essentials of our belief? How do we pass on the torch of “faith enrichment and mission outreach”, to quote the resolution of General Synod XIII? Fred Herzog’s hope for a very simple common catechism has to be mentioned here, even when so far there are no results.

There are two final observations I would like to share with you:

The wholeness, the *pleroma* of our “fully committed fellowship” (New Delhi, 1961) requires structures for co-ordination in order to avoid duplication on the one hand and omissions on the other. We do not need a CEO, a Chief Executive Officer, on either side of the Atlantic Ocean who can give orders. But we cannot do everything in a de-centralized way. In my opinion a few persons are required who can connect people and ideas and provide the necessary continuity. With St. Paul, I would call them “workers with you – the *Landeskirchen* and the Conferences – for your joy” (2 Cor. 1: 24) [21]. Persons with vision and enthusiasm, experience and knowledge who can help us not to loose the different strands and the lessons from history.

The last observation: There is no instant ecumenism, and *Kirchengemeinschaft* cannot be based on stop-and go approaches. The bankers nowadays speak of “short-termism” or “ad-hocism”; that attitude would not help the church. We all need the “long breath of patience” (E. Jüngel). We may be comforted by the hope that there are greater things to come. The Puritan pastor John Robinson [22] who (in 1608 went first to Holland with his congregation prior to their final departure to America twelve years later) stated this hope in his famous sermon in Leiden [23] on July 21, 1620: “The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his holy word.” May this hope may be with us in the coming days – and beyond!

This paper was delivered on April 21, 2001 at the Consultation of UCC Conferences in Partnership with EKV Landeskirchen, St. Joseph's Christian Life Center Cleveland, Ohio

[1] James Bentley, Martin Niemoller, 1882-1984. New York, N.Y., 1984, p.92.

[2] Eberhard Bethge describes Bonhoeffer's friendship with Paul and Marion Lehmann in the biography of his friend on p.192 f. (German edition).

[3] See Bethge, op. cit. p. 736. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Werke. Vol. XV, Munich 1988, p.165 ff.

[4] “Each united church makes the explicit declaration that it recognizes the other united churches as true churches of Jesus Christ...” Louis H. Gunnemann, *United and Uniting: The Meaning of an Ecclesial Journey*. New York, 1987, p.67.

[5] There were two because of the division of Germany. The EKV was able to avoid a total split, intended by the East German government, by introducing the so-called “regionalization” in 1972. This did not hinder the different committees having joint meetings in East Berlin throughout the years. The same applied to the Councils and the two administrations.

[6] L.H. Gunnemann, op.cit. p.74.

[7] John H. Thomas, *Walking Together: The Ecumenical Vocation of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* in: *Mid-Stream* 39, 3 (July 2000), p. 34.

[8] This term, first used in an exchange between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Helmuth Gollwitzer in 1936, mentioned again in the Arnoldshain conversations between Lutheran and Reformed churches from 1956 and 1959, came to particular importance in the so called Leuenberg Concord. Some more details can be found in: *Kirchengemeinschaft in Schmelztiegel. Anfragen und Dokumente aus der UCC*, ed. By F. Herzog and R. Groscurth, Neukirchen 1989, p. 16 f.

[9] L.H. Gunnemann, op. cit., p.1.

[10] op. cit., p.72.

[11] L.H. Gunnemann, op. cit., p.65.

- [12] R. Ulrich, Reflection on the Role of the Confessional Tradition in the UCC, in: On the Way, Vol. 12, 2, p.11.
- [13] see John H. Thomas, A Feast that Moves: Real and Missionary Presence in Lutheran Reformed Full Communion. In: Trinity Seminary Review, Vol. 22, 2 Fall/Winter 2000-2001. For me the fact that the President of the UCC was invited to the Lutheran Trinity Seminary to give Kantonen Lectures is an impressive part of full communion. The Lutheran Professor T.A. Kantonen has been one of my most important theological teachers in Springfield, Ohio in 1953/54.
- [14] "The fact that the ECU included member churches from both sides of the Iron Curtain offered the UCC a unique opportunity to relate to Christians in a socialistic context...". John H. Thomas, MidStream op. cit., p.72.
- [15] P. Pinzler/G. Wessel, George W. Busch – Wende in Amerika, Hamburg 2001.
- [16] The Tablet, Roman-Catholic weekly from England, Feb. 24, 2001.
- [17] When last December our parliament discussed human rights world-wide, it happened to be the PDS which brought this theme to the attention of the Bundestag. Suddeutsche Zeitung, Dec. 9, 2000.
- [18] Quoted in The Tablet, Jan. 6, 2001.
- [19] Zeitzeichen No. 4/2001. p.71.
- [20] The 1999 figures for Halle, birth place of G. F. Handel, were: 1.546 kids for youth dedication, less than 150 for confirmation. Zeitzeichen No. 3/2001, p.36 ff.
- [21] Out of my experience I have to put some names to this rather general observation, as Harold Wilke, Howard Schomer, Kenneth Ziebell, but also Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, Ernst Eugen Meckel, Christa Gregel and Gerhard Linn. Without these "*Gehilfen der Freude*" my own work would not have been possible.
- [22] L. F. Gunnemann, The Shaping of the United Church of Christ. New York, 1977, p.139.
- [23] Recently we learned that the *Vrouwewerk* in Leiden where this sermon was preached is threatened by demolition. Would a protest from Berlin or Dusseldorf be helpful?

The Future of Kirchengemeinschaft:
Ecumenical Partnership as Mission and Vocation for our Churches

Mark S. Burrows,
Cleveland Consultation, April, 2001

Some months ago I asked a German pastor of the rising generation, who has been deeply involved in this partnership, what she would say about the future of our life and work together. She turned to a biblical text to answer:

"No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins." (Mk. 2:21-22)

By this she meant that the covenant of our "full communion," "Kirchengemeinschaft," is never an inheritance alone. It is always mission, always a call to renewing vocation, always an invitation to a hope we have known only in part. This covenant is always in part the promise of new vintage because the churches and indeed the

societies in which we live remain hungering for authentic hope. We all grow old hoping to taste the strength of new life! And our churches, as “earthen vessels” carrying the gospel treasure, as the apostle Paul reminds us, always belong to changing ecology of life in this world. Even while we seek to live as witnesses to divine grace, we remain part of nature in its constant cycle of decay and rebirth, of despair and hope, and, yes, of death and resurrection.

Some years ago, in a poignant lament written by the Welsh poet R.S. Thomas and called simply “The Old Language,” we hear a painful account of what it means to stand at the boundary of such dramatic and poignant change. This is where we find ourselves, in our churches, if for different reasons than Thomas imagined. His poem, decrying the painful loss of his people’s memory, does not close with a nostalgic declaration but with a simple, haunting question:

...When spring wakens the hearts
of the young children to sing, what song shall be theirs?

It is this question I would like to hold before us. What song will our children sing? What images of life and faith, of witness and hope, will they have as together we enter this new era – when we remember but no longer live in the shadows of “the Wall”? This is a good theme to hold before us as we consider the future of our ecumenical partnership, sustained through the years of a divided Germany and in the era of the Cold War. Now, as we find ourselves living within different boundaries, our future seems crowded with quite different challenges – and, I suspect, different hopes and different uncertainties – than those we knew in the past. What is our churches’ future, and what awaits our partnership under these changed conditions? What song do we hope our children will sing, and teach their children, as heirs of our faith?

In our “Kirchengemeinschaft,” our churches should “[a]lways be ready to make [our] defense to anyone who demands from [us] an accounting for the hope that is in [us]. ..”(I Peter 3:15). In his first letter, “Peter” portrays a church under siege, suffering for its witness to Christ and needing encouragement to remain steadfast. Our situation is quite different. Our churches exist in cultures that boast a venerable historical tradition of Christian life. But the integrity of this heritage and the “hope” we find ourselves called to steward in this age face challenges Peter could never have imagined: that of materialism and atheism; of the complexities of life in a global economy; of religious indifference and the idolatry of “social religion” (Kulturprotestantis-mus). What is the ground, and direction, of hope in these times?

The ground of this hope is, quite simply, the crucified and risen Christ. But what does this memory, and his presence mean for us? And where is this hope leading us, together, in our partnership? I would like to speak of these challenges, briefly, this morning, touching upon some of the themes where we might do well to discern the shape of this hope, and express this with shared courage and deepening conviction.

In a demanding recent book on “ecology, gender, and society,” *The Eros of Everyday Life*, poet and radical critic Susan Griffin reminds us that “Meaning arises from meeting, from the congregation of a people and the nexus that they make through need and desire.” “Bedeutung kommt aus Begegnung...”. How might “meaning” – the meaning of our faith – arise from the “meeting” of our churches in this new century? This morning, I would like to focus on Griffin’s insistence that we talk of both need and desire – the “vulnerabilities” of our life – in the new situation of our day in order to shape this meeting. I frame these remarks within the ancient meaning of “ecumenical,” which is to say, the call to live in a *single household (oikos)* in this time

and place. What will it mean to express hope in our common household? Can we dare to imagine, and live to embody, such a truth?

But we must here recognize that we do live, already, in a single household. It is the household brought into being by globalization, by the forces of the market in which we all participate. This is not a new situation: as an historian, I would remind us that the beginnings of globalization derive from two primal sources: first, our arrogance as human creatures to imagine that we are what we consume (“Man ist was man isst,” as the prophet Feuerbach declared); and, second, our insatiable thirst for domination, our “will to power,” as Schopenhauer reminded us more than a century ago. Both of these express our essential human nature, fallible and fallen to be sure. And we must be clear about this: The global market did not create these conditions; but that market has widened our capacity not only to exploit *others* but to *be ourselves exploited* by these. Here, as Kosuke Koyama reminded us, we must seek the Christ who rushes to the margins.

First, what is it that defines “home” in our time? We must, first, recognize the challenges brought upon us by *poverty* on an almost unimaginable scale even while we live here in relative affluence; by the *pluralism* of religious life; and, by the *secularization* of the inherited foundations of religious culture we each face. We have heard much in the last days concerning the burden of poverty, and the forms of violence it creates and which arise from it. Perhaps I do not need to explore this, just now, in more detail. What of secularization? Here, I suspect that the particular shape of these challenges will be different for us. In a recent gathering of German churches belonging to the World Council of Churches, for example, you approached the question of secularization as “a chance for renewal” (see EKD *Bulletin*, March, 2001, pp.5, 18). Our culture still allows a stronger public support of religious life, and remains in its political posture at least nominally Christian. But our denomination, part of the old “mainline” churches, has experienced a steady deterioration of membership for much of the last thirty years, and we are now facing pressures that may not extinguish the status quo but will certainly require change if we are to survive. And the notion of a “public church” in this society, as perhaps more poignantly in yours, is now an almost lost ideal heavily laden for some with the remnants of nostalgia for a lost age. What does this secularization mean for us, and for you? What can we learn, together, as we face generations who are either disenchanting with or disinterested in our religious traditions? And, if we dare to raise this most difficult of questions: Is the problem not only in those who have turned from the “noise of our solemn assemblies,” but in the essential failure of this witness?

What song, in other words, *do* our children sing, and what might they still *learn*? In this regard, and for us as for you, the reality of religious pluralism - including for you the burden of living in an atheistic context - is not theoretical, and no longer the subject of a foreign missionary agenda. It is close to home, in our neighborhoods, and often within the circumference of our parishes. What might we learn together about the tasks of bearing witness, of embodying the gospel, in this time when the pressures of pluralism force us to discover, as the ancient writer of Hebrews knew, that Christ suffered “outside the gates” (Heb. 13:12)? What can we learn, separately and together, as we dare to “go to [Christ] outside the camp...and share his degradation”? All of which is to say, we have reached a time when the call to abandon the privileges of our venerable heritage, to live a “theology of the cross” (*theologia crucis*) in our public witness, is perhaps not only unavoidable. Perhaps this is also a necessary path of hope - and first of all for *us* and only consequently for those among whom we live.

Second, we must locate our "home" in terms that might have seemed odd a generation or two ago – viz., in terms of the needs and desires that bring us into unequal relationships in this global age. For us, I suspect, this would entail discovering the radical nature of the original Pentecost vision, reminding us that we already live in a complex relationship of dependence established by production and consumption – and yet we know little of what it might mean to hold things "in common" and share our "goods and possessions...with each other, according to what each one needed" (Acts 2:44.45). I suspect that our courage to seek this path, in order to discover a "nexus of needs and desires" (Griffin), would bring us not to some imposition of duty but to a deeper joy and freedom than we can now imagine. It would mean, for us all, a broadening of "home" to include the unwelcomed stranger – and a discovery that we are that stranger alienated from this creation; that we are rootless wanderers too little related to this earth and its life-giving force. Perhaps we need to discover this earth, in a wider global sense, as the "home" we share with many others, and that we inhabit this "home" within the narrowing confines of a global market. Could a deeper generosity of sharing bring a greater joy to our common life? Is affluence, or the pursuit of it, any guarantee of real happiness? Can we even imagine, anymore, Jesus' simple injunction that we should "consider the lilies...?"

The other side of this, of course, is the truth that we live around an unequal and often volatile table. A table that separates the cultures of consumption and affluence (the so-called "first world," which we would gladly export to increase our security) from the cultures of production and dependence (the so-called "two-thirds" world, with its ever more present "local" expressions in our cities and in our emptying rural communities). A table at which the privileged are alienated from the struggling, and the consumers distanced from the producers who increasingly live "outside the gate." Perhaps we need to find ways of chastening our insatiable desires, and remembering that these often have no relation to our most authentic human needs. For if we remember Jesus' words that we do not live by bread alone, we must surely also remember that bread is the basis of our life and the essential heart of a sustainable local and global community. Could we begin to teach our children, as we learn this with them, what it might mean to live based upon an ethic of commonality? A Pentecostal sharing by which we might find our vocation by identifying our needs in a wider circle? Can we think of "ecumenical" as the mandate of living in a single household – which is, in fact, the real situation in which we find ourselves?

All of this is to say that we might imagine an ecumenical partnership based not only upon our past but upon a shared future. A partnership based upon a common faith in the God who calls us to build a global "home" with and for the "others" who already belong to the constricting circle of the global economy. Such a call would require us to learn a new song than the familiar gospel of the marketplace, based as this is not upon sharing but upon self-protection and greed. Can we bear to take up this cross together? Susan Griffin is right: Meaning does arise from meeting. And a meeting that is genuinely Christian requires of us that we discern our needs and desires in a wider "home," with the hungers of others present to us at the table; that we yearn for a deeper hospitality than we are accustomed to sharing...or even imagining. Can we begin to think of our faith as calling us to such a radical "home-making"? Can we join our desires to those of others at a wider table of sharing? Can we risk hungering for Christ's presence in a broader communion as we gather for the breaking of bread?

Can we find the courage to re-form our churches, and invigorate our partnership, by putting this "new wine" into fresh wineskins?

**Sabbatical
April –June 2002**

Kevin C. Brown

Clack-clack, clack-clack. The sound drifts through the still night air. Clack-clack, clack-clack. I sit in my office at the church in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, USA, but the rhythm takes me five thousand miles away. After three months sabbatical in Germany, readjusting to life at home was more difficult than I ever would have imagined. My life is changed; I can never hear that sound – clack-clack, clack-clack – without returning to Germany and the miles and miles of clack-clack, clack-clack that traveled through my ears. The big cities: Berlin, Leipzig, Eisenach ... and the little villages: Mildeburg, Zehdenick, Niesky.

For three months I lived in Berlin as the Bethge Resident Scholar, studying at the Bonhoeffer Haus in Charlottenberg, and traveling throughout Germany. For three months I met with brothers and sisters in that land, asking questions, gaining insight into their culture and new perspectives on my culture. For three months I met famous people – Wolfgang Huber, the Bishop of Berlin, Albrecht Schoenherr, former Bishop of East Berlin and Franz von Hammerstein, imprisoned resistor to Hitler. For three months I met people who will soon be well-known in the German Church: Fredrich Demke, Frank Schuerer-Behrmann, Iris Susen-Pilger. And for three months I met people who will never be famous, but who showed a stranger incredible kindness: the gay Asian clerk at the bakery around the corner, the patient grocer down the street, the gracious members of local churches who welcomed me into their homes and their communities.

I had an official, stated goal, which was to research the impact of the theology of Bonhoeffer in the “Gemeinde” of the former East Germany. But I also had an unofficial hope, to meet new people, to gain insight into my church by studying the Church in Germany, and in some small way to contribute to *Kirchengemeinschaft*. It will be a long while before I process my experience. I already know that my intellectual study has reaped benefits and that I have learned new ways to live out the theology of Bonhoeffer: Church for Others. “Religionless Christianity.” “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?” I already know that the kindness I was shown by gracious strangers has made me think anew about hospitality and what it means to be a stranger. I already know that I want to be different because of my experience, but how? How shall I be different? That is the task that shall require discipline and thoughtful reflection.

Every day was a new adventure, and every night found me with a headache from concentrating so hard to understand and be understood in a language which was not my own. I re-learned simplicity of expression, something which we preachers too often lack! Each week found me in a different faith community, remembering what it is like to be a stranger. Sometimes I was ignored, once I was treated rudely (was the Elder stunned when the Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg invited me to visit with him following worship!), and occasionally I experienced the most grand fellowship. I was privileged at times to share in worship leadership, preaching in one congregation, serving Holy Communion in another, assisting with the liturgy in yet a third. Following my sermon, members spent two hours talking with me about my message (that never happens in Glen Ellyn!). Following Holy Communion I was kissed by a disabled adult, who probably did not understand that I was a visiting American, only that I had shared the cup and given him Christ’s blessing in his own language. These are the images that fill my mind when I hear the clack-clack, clack-clack.

I brought greetings to our brothers and sisters of the Evangelische Kirche der Union as the official UCC representative to the ECU Synod. I listened as the ECU Synod delegates thoughtfully deliberated (even the Presbyterians could learn something about Order and Discipline from our ECU colleagues!) the act of dissolving their Union and merging with others to form something new, responding to Christ's call that all be one. But I wondered: Would this discussion even be occurring were it not for the financial crisis facing the ECU? And I also wondered: When do we in the UCC treat symptom rather than cause, mistaking one for the other?

Now, back in Glen Ellyn, when I am puzzled or frazzled or just plain fed up, I pause and listen. Clack-clack, clack-clack. My mind fills with images and I am on the rails again filled with gratitude for *Kirchengemeinschaft*.

“One Flock Under One Shepherd”

Andy Lang

“May the promised point in time not be far away when all believers, holding one belief, one love, and one hope, come to be members of one flock under one shepherd!”

(Frederick William III, King of Prussia, September 27, 1817)

The 185 year history of the Evangelical Church of the Union will reach a turning point on July 1, 2003, when the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK) is born. Officially, the ECU will cease to exist and its seven member churches will join the new body. The UEK will be a loose federation of 15 Landeskirchen in Germany, which formed a consultative group called the “Arnoldshain Conference” in 1967. Besides the ECU, they include the Evangelical Reformed Church and several “united” Landeskirchen which, like the ECU, combined the Lutheran and Reformed traditions but were never part of the Prussian Union decreed by King Frederick William III in 1817 (the 300th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation).

Supporters of the enlarged union do not see it as a new confessional “bloc” but as a stepping-stone to fuller ecclesiastical unity through the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD). Significantly, the new body will not be called the “Union of Evangelical Churches in Germany,” but the “Union of Evangelical Churches in the EKD” – symbolizing its commitment to the EKD as the force for Protestant unity. As such, the UEK will be a transitional body. Its structure will be decentralized. There will be no church-wide “synod” with authority to determine policy for the union as a whole, but a “Vollkonferenz” with limited powers. Like the UCC’s General Synod, it will have the authority to “speak to, but not for” the UEK’s member churches.

At the ECU’s next-to-last Synod, June 7-9, 2002 in Berlin, delegates questioned whether the UEK’s decentralized structure would undermine the ECU’s ecumenical commitments to the UCC (USA) and its other partner churches. In principle, the UEK will honor all of the ECU’s ecumenical relationships. Agreements of full communion will remain in force. But in practice, the UEK’s proposed structure makes no provision for an ecumenical officer or a budget for ecumenical relations. Instead, the ECU’s various ecumenical commitments would be delegated to individual Landeskirchen. This, delegates complained, meant that one of the wealthier western Landeskirchen

would probably take over responsibility for the UCC-EKU partnership, leaving the poorer eastern churches “out of the loop”.

The issue was raised on the floor and in committee meetings. The result: the Synod approved two strong resolutions which urge the UEK to take over responsibility for ecumenical relationships. In one resolution, the Synod said it “expects continuation through the UEK of the EKU’s standing ecumenical relations and agreements on full communion. In the other resolution, the Synod said it was grateful for the spiritual enrichment its member churches have experienced through Kirchengemeinschaft with the UCC (USA) [and the United Church of Canada].

“The Synod has the expectation,” it continued, “that this Kirchengemeinschaft will be continued within the framework of the UEK...” The intent of both resolutions was clear: the EKU member churches want the UEK to make some provision for a churchwide relationship with the United Church of Christ in the United States.

No one can predict, of course, how the new union will respond to the Synod’s action. In any case, no decision can be taken before the union’s first Vollkonferenz meets in October, 2003, in Erfurt. But the support for the EKU-UCC relationship remains strong. Moreover, two of the largest of the “non-EKU” churches that are entering the new union – the Evangelical Church in Hesse and Nassau, and the Evangelical Church in Baden – have expressed an interest in joining in Kirchengemeinschaft with the UCC.

UCC observers at the Berlin Synod last June were greeted with warmth by the delegates. Praeses Manfred Sorg of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia—who chairs the EKU Council—set the tone when his report to the Synod singled out his experiences as the UCC’s guest earlier in the year. The UCC’s call for a “just peace” after the September 11th terror attacks, he said, “helped (the EKU) find our position” on the troubled international situation. “I am grateful for this partnership, and for the ecumenical experiences which it opens to us,” he said.

The next and final Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Union will meet April 11-12, 2003.

(Andy Lang, web coordinator in the Proclamation, Identity, and Communication Team, Office of General Ministries, in Cleveland, was a UCC observer at the EKU Synod, held at the Johannisstift in Berlin, in June, 2002).

Report About Changes in the Role of Pastors in the Church and Society

Nikolaus Schneider

Meeting of representatives of the UCC/Southern Conference and representatives of the Protestant Church in the Rhineland, Ebernburg, April 30, 2002

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

It’s a great honor and pleasure for me to have the opportunity to present to you some reflections about the role of pastors in our society and the German churches. I am going to present my ideas in three chapters.

Chapter 1:

The wind of change is blowing in society with consequences for the ministry

Chapter 2:

The wind of change is blowing: the judicial and administrative framework

Chapter 3:

Our attempts to respond to these developments

There is a deep and very important relationship between the role of the church in society, its public legal framework, governmental acceptance of the church and the subsequent conditions of ministry. We have to face an enormous change in society and start describing this societal change and its impact on church life and ministry.

The wind of change is blowing in society with consequences for the ministry

Since the time of the Reformation, the pastoral ministry was fundamentally marked by two important tasks: preaching and teaching. The church's conditions were:

- < church and church life were of public interest;
- < the legal framework was part of the public legal framework;
- < there was an identification of governmental and church territory and region;
- < following the Lutheran tradition, the duke was in a sense the bishop of his regional church.

Later on, the duke's faith had to be the faith of the inhabitants of his territory.

The church was seen as a very important agent in the life of the society; the church was responsible for the education of the people, in the interest that the people would become obedient to the government. The church had to counsel and to accompany the daily life of the people, especially in times of personal crises. The church had to offer a way of fundamental self-understanding for the people by baptizing the children, and by conducting confirmations, weddings and funerals.

These ideas and intentions resulted in an "alliance of throne and altar". So the ministers were responsible for leading, controlling and disciplining the members of the local churches.

The pastor was paid by the government until 1918. The administration was a part of the public administration, the supervision of schools was the task of the local pastor, and the government helped to build churches and to maintain them.

In conclusion, the church was a very important factor for life and peace within society, as it had to guarantee the obedience of the inhabitants to the government. Of course, this was not the case where small Reformed and Lutheran congregations managed to survive in Roman Catholic territories. From the perspective of the churches, this meant that the government opened the space for church life and guaranteed that church life could function.

After the First World War there was a tremendous change, which we call the separation of throne and altar. The supervision of schools by the church ended, and the consequences for the church were no more or much less influence on public education, The finances needed for the payment of clergy and upkeep of church-buildings and equipment ran out. As a result, the church had to struggle with enormous financial problems.

The church experienced a fundamental decrease of importance in society, and many officials understood faith as a "private affair". This is one of the reasons why so many clergy did not welcome the First Republic in Germany (Weimar 1918 – 1933). It is the reason for the lack of support which the churches showed for the first German democracy.

However, there were regulations that guaranteed a new partnership between state and church. The governmental authorities collected the payments of church members; the church was understood as a public corporation or body, not just as a religious club or an association; it was allowed to demand a church tax; it was guaranteed that religion was taught in schools, and the education of religious teachers and pastors is still a public task. The government paid for both.

This is still our present situation. For the role of the pastor, the consequence was that people can still refuse ministers as part of the governmental authority. But there is still the expectation that pastors are responsible for spiritual care, and there is an enormous confidence in pastors. People expect pastors to take responsibility for people in crises, for the poor and for those in need. This kind of pastoral care is completely accepted. Pastors can, however, get into trouble when their preaching focuses on political aspects of societal life, economic problems and the problems of world wide justice. There are two reasons for this. One is, in a way, a kind of historical memory: no more identification of church and government! The other reason is that the political sermon disturbs powerful interests.

Today, questions of orientation and meaning are increasingly considered at other places (e.g. therapeutic and religious groups). The results in the 1980s were a double degree in theology and psychology and the shift of clergy to other professions. This new orientation should obviously compensate for the church's decreased public presence and authority. At the moment, this can be compared with the recent acquisition of management techniques by ministers.

Previously, to be a pastor was one role. Today we experience split-offs into special services and a movement to value specialized services more highly than the basic work of pastors.

In contrast to former times, worship seems only to have an inner church relevance. On the other hand, we face a different tendency today, as big crises in society (as the 11th September and the 26th April) produce new requests for public pastoral care by the churches, and their worship becomes public again.

The vast majority of our church members today experience worship as a ministry within the context of marriages and funerals. So Sunday worship is no longer the central event of Christian life in society.

In summary, we can say that previously the pastoral role carried the person, but nowadays the person has to carry the pastoral role.

The wind of change is blowing: the legal system and the administrative frame work

The following developments forced these changes:

< There was an important increase of special ministries in the sixties and seventies of the last century. 30% of the ministers in the area of the EKD do not work in a local church. For the Rhineland, this figure is 7%. Most of them work in schools, are responsible for pastoral care in the hospitals, or take responsibility for some special

field of diaconal work. This kind of work is preferred by many ministers. Special ministries are valued more highly than the usual pastoral work in a local parish.

< We have a lot of job-sharing in pastoral ministry. Between 1984 and 1997 we had an increase from 1% to 13% in the EKD. Pastoral couples who have both studied theology take advantage of this possibility, but also friends. Nowadays there is a tendency to open positions for 100%, 75% and 50%. We have an important amount of part-time pastors in the Rhineland.

< We have an increasing number of ordained, unpaid volunteer ministers. And there are already voices in some local churches demanding the voluntary work of ministers.

< We have an increasing number of women who are ordained and accept pastoral work. Regarding the figure of vicars and students, we can say that within 10 to 15 years 15% of all clergy in the Rhenish church will be women.

These developments have produced a crisis and a change in the self-confidence and self-assessment of our pastors.

That means:

< Previously, the life role of a person and the pastoral role were the same. It was quite clear that pastors did not have limited working hours. They had to be present for their people. They had to make a special effort to organize their personal and family life, in order to have time for their family. But their whole life was identified with their pastoral role. This identification can no longer be accepted if a part-time pastor is elected in a certain local church. Now we have to define what 75% or 50% of a pastoral position is. And we have to talk about hours, which we always tried to avoid. We now live in a time of transition. We are taking the first steps toward solving the problems. We must admit that pastors and local churches are usually left alone to solve these problems. The result is usually that local churches, which pay just 75% or 50%, nevertheless expect 100% work. And also pastors elected to these positions have a tendency to wear themselves out, usually working more than they should. In general, in local churches with part-time ministry there is an unfair situation for our pastors.

We just try to work out schemes and means to solve this situation. The basic idea is that the necessary restriction of work cannot be organized by definition of single hours, but by the definition of days or weeks.

Another consequence is the importance of the vicarage, the pastor's residential home. The pastor's residence played an important role in our parochial system of organizing local churches. Having a pastor's residence in the midst of the local church guaranteed that all his people knew how and where to find him. And he and his home represented the church in relation to the public.

This traditional role is also questioned now, i.e. from both sides. Pastors ask for more privacy and tend to buy or build their own houses; local churches tend to sell their pastors' residences because their maintenance appears too expensive for them. Up to now, this has been only a slight tendency. There are only a small number of pastors and local churches who are making use of these opportunities. And the church legal system provides only a few possibilities to receive an allowance to live under private conditions and to sell the vicarage.

< The higher percentage of women in the clergy forced the church to learn and to accept new conditions of pastoral service. Usually, women still have the primary responsibility for the family and for raising the children, so they cannot be 100% available for the local church. Therefore, the expectations of our church members have to change.

Some people say that a higher percentage of women in the clergy is connected with a

decrease in the importance of the pastoral role within society. That would reflect the societal value of men and women, because in the framework of other positions men are indeed still valued more highly than women. I'm not sure whether this is really true or not. My experience is that women, occasionally after facing initial resistance, are highly valued pastors in our local churches. But we have to admit that it is only since the 1970s that the Rhenish church was ready to ordain women.

I will close this chapter by referring to the diversification of pastoral roles by the science of practical theology. Nowadays, the pastor is seen as a pastoral counselor, as an interpreter of the world, and as a guide to mysterious areas of faith, while still being seen as a teacher and a preacher to his/her local church.

Today, we cannot foresee to what aims this process will lead us. But we try to keep and to protect the basic needs of pastoral service and to open this space for the needed changes of our pastoral role.

Our attempts to respond to these developments

In general we can say that the church responds in the field of theological education and training.

We work through our theological education in the theological departments at universities, as well as at our church-sponsored theological seminars, and especially through our preachers' seminaries. The curriculum and the method of learning is highly debated. The goal of these efforts is practical scientific reflection to link theory and practice with each other.

We offer training to our pastors. This training is not mainly focused on abilities. We try to find a way to open a space for development of the spiritual personality, and at the same time to discuss problems of life and service. We hope that a time of retreat from daily problems offers new spiritual energy for the person.

We are working on the definition of needed competencies within pastoral service; we mean missionary competence, competence in communication, counseling competence, competence in leadership and spiritual competence. Judging these to be the main competencies, we are working out how to teach them.

Previously, our training institutes were usually orientated toward the deficiencies of our pastoral service. Now we have changed the focus and try primarily to strengthen the abilities. We still try to minimize the deficiencies at the same time-but the focus is different!

Our last Rhenish synod decided to introduce the so call "10-year-interview". The idea is that after 10 years of service the pastor and the presbytery, plus the superintendent, the employed, and the volunteer leaders and workers of the local church, should discuss the service done so far. This method will help to evaluate pastoral work. It should help to identify problems and crises early enough. It should help to discuss problems in a fair way, so that both parties and their interests are respected. And – if no other way is possible – it will help to work out a fair separation of the pastor and the local church and to find a new position for the pastor.

Our last synod also decided that the first call into a position as a local pastor is to be terminated after 10 years. The pastor can be reelected for another term, or he/she has to look for another position. This will also be helpful because after this first time of pastoral service experience a change might be helpful for pastors and local churches. It helps pastors to reflect on the first steps in their ministry so far, and to

strengthen or to correct their personal attitudes towards their understanding of service.

In summary, we are working on a higher level of transparency in pastoral work. We try to develop means and methods, and to discuss the pastoral service in a way that is more rational and fair for both sides. And we try to establish an early warning system to identify if problems are ahead.

The pastoral service is very special. In a certain sense it is not comparable to other work, because to be pastor means to have a calling. So the most important thing we can do is to pray for God's spirit, so that the right people with an inner vocation are educated and ordained by the responsible institutions of the church, and that the local churches are able to find the right person for the right position, so that the pastor's call to ministry is guided by the spirit.

"Der Andere Advent"

Jane M. Kropa

A group in Hamburg, Germany met eight years ago to try to find a way to make the seasons of Advent and Christmas more deeply meaningful. Each year since, they have invited Christians throughout the world to celebrate an "alternative Advent," from December 1 through Christmas and Epiphany on January 6. We are asked to find twelve minutes a day to allow ourselves to be at rest. If thoughts come into our minds, we are to let them have their play over our consciousness. We may meditate, pray, read Scripture,... but above all, be silent, so that we might discern the voice of the Christ who is coming to us. In this way, we will not get caught up in the pre-Christmas season (note the distinction between Advent, the Church's season, and pre-Christmas, the commercial season). Rather, we will truly seek the Christ child and the peace he brings.

From December 1-7, we are called to follow the way to the innermost self. From December 8-14, we are called to find our way to others, especially those in need. From December 15-26, we are asked to find our way to the manger to meet God, who has come to dwell with us in Jesus, our Savior. From December 27-31, we are asked to live in the time between the years. From January 1-6, we are invited to find our way into the new year.

The first meditation, by Uwe Seidel, called "Denn ihr sollt in Frieden ziehen," is inspired by Isaiah 55.

"Then You Shall Be Led Forth in Peace"

"The day is coming soon when we shall be led forth from narrow walls
and be led forth from outmoded beliefs, and be led forth out of cheerless memories.

"The day is coming soon when we shall be led forth from false friends
and be led forth from poor governments, and be led forth from harsh dictators.

"The day is coming soon when we shall be led forth out of melancholy and fear and be led forth out of falsehood and deceit, and be led forth through the desert and through life, hopeful in spite of the times.

"The day is coming soon when the trees will clap their hands, when the water that we drink will come out of the ground pure, and the hills will again be as soft as the skin of a young girl."

You may also use these words of Joerg Zink to help you enjoy the stillness:

"There are exercises on the way to stillness:
To listen to the rain at the window, and to hear nothing at all but the splash of the drops.
To observe day by day how the house plant grows or a bloom gradually opens.
To see nothing but light in the color of a leaf.
To spend a long time watching a spider's web vibrating in the light.
To expect nothing,... only to be present with all one's senses where things are happening.
To be present where Your life, God, lives in the middle of all things."

"Erkenne dich selbst" (A Parable)

"One day, some people came to visit a hermit. They asked him, 'What benefits do you find in a life of contemplation?' At that moment, the hermit was in the act of drawing water out of a deep well. He said, 'Look into the well. What do you see?' The visitors answered, 'We can't see anything.' After a time, the hermit spoke to them again, 'Look into the well. Now, what do you see?' They looked down into the well and said, 'Now, we see ourselves.' The hermit said to them, 'Before, when I was drawing up the water, it was agitated, so you could see nothing in it. Now, that the water is quiet, you can recognize yourselves in it. That is the experience of contemplation.'"

"Look at Jesus"

Now look at Jesus, who came to reveal God to us, and you see that popularity in any form is the very thing he avoids. He is constantly pointing out that God reveals (him)self in secrecy. It sounds very paradoxical, but accepting and, I would venture to say, entering into that paradox sets you on the road of the spiritual life.

(Henri J. M. Nouwen, "Show Me the Way," 65)

"Come to Us, Lord Jesus"

Come to us who wait here, and tarry not!
You only can deliver us, Lord Jesus.
Out of our world, out of its distress,
We call on you, Lord Jesus.

Komme, weil wir warten und saeume nicht!

Komm, rette und befreie uns, Herr Jesus Christ.
In diese unsre Welt voll hoechster Not
Wir rufen dich, Herr Jesus Christ.

Dominique Ombrie, 1963

“A Love Much Stronger Than Our Sadness”

A love much stronger than our sadness, has made us one, Lord Jesus Christ.
In all our anguish, all our darkness, we search for you, Lord Jesus Christ.
And in our discords, though they wound you, we plead with you, Lord Jesus Christ.
You came among us once, a poor man, to save us all, Lord Jesus Christ.
And in our night your Cross of sorrow shall be our hope, Lord Jesus Christ.
But when, at last, your day is dawning we shall see you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Fred Pratt Green, 1972

“Die Liebe, die all unser Leid besiegt”

Die Liebe, die all unser Leid besiegt, vereinigt uns, Herr Jesus Christ.
In unsrer Dunkelheit und grossen Angst wir suchen dich, Herr Jesus Christ.
In unsrem Zank, der dich so tief verletzt, wir fleh'n dich an, Herr Jesus Christ.
Du kamst in Armut zu uns in die Welt, um uns zu retten, Herr Jesus Christ.
Weil Du zu Deinen Bruedern uns gemacht, wir loben Dich, Herr Jesus Christ.
Das Kreuz ist unsre Hoffnung allezeit in unsrer Nacht, Herr Jesus Christ.
Wenn eines Tages kommt das Morgenlicht, dann schau'n wir dich, Herr Jesus Christ.

Marlies Flesch-Thebesius, 1972

"The Manger at Bethlehem"

If God chooses Mary as his instrument
if God himself wants to come into this world
in the manger at Bethlehem,
that is no idyllic family affair,
but the beginning of a complete turnaround,
a reordering of everything on this earth.

If we wish to take part in this Advent and Christmas event,
then we cannot simply be bystanders or onlookers,
as if we were at the theater,
enjoying all the cheerful images.
No, we ourselves are swept up into the action there,
into this conversion of all things.
We have to play our part too on this stage,
For the spectator is already an actor.
We cannot withdraw.

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, London, 1933-1935)
[see "Mystery of Holy Night,"]
The Crossroad Publishing Company,
New York, edited by Manfred Weber, 14]

"O God Most High, Most Near"

O God most high, most near,
open the deep places of our hearts
so that our joy may not be selfishly shallow
in this hour of Christ's coming,
but with knowledge of this world's sorrow,
uplifted and transformed by the timeless grace of his spirit.
Deliver us from all quibbling unbelief
and set us free by the swift flight of our soul's aspirations
to enter into Christmas as men and women humbled
to a joy greater than they expected or earned.
Wherever there are children,
may gifts be holy
in the name of Christ the Child. +Amen+
(Samuel H. Miller, "Prayers for Daily Use," 95)

The UCC-EKU Working Group, 2002

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