

EKHN – The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau

Greetings from Rev. Ulrike Scherf, Vice President of EKHN

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ in our worldwide fellowship!

in the name of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau I welcome you most warmly here in the “Martin-Niemöller-Haus” to the International Conference on Peace and Reunification on the Korean Peninsula. This conference takes place in the frame of the Pilgrimage of justice and peace that has been decided by the delegates of the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches 2013 in Busan, Korea. Welcome to all of you from the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches Korea, the EKD, EMW and from worldwide Christian fellowship.

For decades, this Martin-Niemöller-Haus has been the meeting centre of EKHN. It has its name after a great personality – important not only for us but also for the ecumenical movement –, that is Reverend Martin Niemöller.

Due to his cooperation in the clerical resistance against the Nazi regime, he was sentenced to death in 1937. He owes his life not least to the vigorous commitment of the bishop of Chichester, George Kennedy Allen Bell. He had prevented Niemöller’s execution by informing the international press about this case. After the war Rev. Martin Niemöller became our first Church President – was the main spiritual leader of our Church from 1947 until 1964.

The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau – as we say, the “EKHN” – is located in the middle, maybe even in the heart of Germany. We understand our mission as bearing witness to the love of God for all people and in service to the whole of the society. Through worships and outreach services, through pastoral care and work with children and old people, through many other ways and means we try to live our faith, seriously and full of joy.

What does characterize our church? What is typical for the EKHN? Well, sometime we tend to say, typical for us are the polarities or contrasts which shape our profile.

For example the differences between urban and rural areas. Many of our congregations are situated in the rural areas of the Westerwald and Vogelsberg, the low mountain ranges of southern Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate. There, as we say, the church is still in the centre of the village and in the centre of the daily life of many people. The other side can be seen and experienced in the vibrant, multi-cultural metropolitan area in and around Frankfurt. Men and women from many countries with different religions, beliefs, cultural backgrounds and convictions are meeting and living here – and our church tries to serve them too.

Another example: We have regions in our area with a very specific tradition of piety. The devoutness of these congregations is considerable; their kind of faith is deeply rooted in a certain biblical understanding. In the same moment there are church groups and congregations which are engaged in political action, trying to work for more justice in their neighbourhoods or being involved with demonstrations against enlarging the Frankfurt airport.

Our first Church President Martin Niemöller laid the foundation stone to become an ecumenically open church till today. So very early EKHN became a member of the World

Council of Churches (ÖRK) and of the Conference of European Churches (KEK) and it was one of the founders of the Communion of Protestant and Evangelical Churches in Europe (GEKE).

Niemöller went to Russia and Poland in a time when it was politically a tabu and he started the work of reconciliation which is still today an important mark of EKHN.

Also this place – the Academy of Arnoldshain – is a place deeply related to the ecumenical movement and a few important decisions. The so called Arnoldshainer Thesis's from 1957 have been formulated in this rooms. They laid the foundation stone for the later Eucharistic fellowship of all Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches in Germany in 1973 (Leuenberger Konkordie).

In 1959 – after hundreds of years not talking with each other – the difficult official talks between the EKD and the Russian Orthodox Church (Moskauer Patriachat) started in Sagorsk and Arnoldshain.

And in 1970 the special fund to the Programme to Combat Racism came into existence by a decision of the World Council of Churches in the room where you will meet during the conference. The EKHN was one of the first churches who joined this programme after a very controversial discussion in our synod. Years later when the then general secretary of the All African Council of Churches – Dr. Burgess Carr – came to this place for a seminar he said: "This place is for us Africans a holy place because here for the first time Christians trusted in us as Africans and supported us in our struggle for human rights and freedom!"

Last but not least: this place is also very important for the struggle for peace and reunification on the Korean peninsula! In our strong partnership relation with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea – PROK – we remember very well meetings with delegates from the Korean Christian Federation representing the Christian Community in North Korea during the international book fair 2005 in Frankfurt and here in Arnoldshain. This meeting gave room for a unique meeting of Christians from North and South Korea.

A number of conferences and meetings relating to peace and reunification in Korea were held here in this house. I mention for example the international consultation on the Role of the Churches for the peaceful reunification on the Korean peninsula in 2004. The ecumenical Forum for Korea itself was founded in its present form in 2008 here in Arnoldshain as the successor organization of the ecumenical consortium.

For all these, we are very thankful and we are willing to bring in these experiences and our commitment to the ecumenical movement and to be on the pilgrimage of justice and peace. In cooperation with other ecumenical bodies like WCC, EMS, EKD and NCKK the EKHN is committed to strengthen, support and accompany the process of reconciliation between North and South Korea.

I wish all the participants a successful and fruitful conference. May the conference strengthen the steps for peace and unification. "Oorieh so won on tong il" (our desire is unification). May God fulfill the aspirations of the people of Korea for lasting peace and for reconciliation. God bless you and this conference!

Thank you!