

Reunion of the Foreign Missionaries from 1975

Camberg, 22.-23.09.2017

Hildegard Piepenburg



The atmosphere was electric. Breaks were forgotten and the meeting finished later than planned. It was as if time had stood still, when 19 of the original 80 German foreign missionaries told their stories. „Just how amazing was that - when we, young and full of enthusiasm went out into the world 42 years ago to tell people about the Messiah?“

Memories and emotions bubbled forth and a youthful freshness beamed out from not-so-young faces while everybody listened spellbound – stunned, crying and laughing. „In this company, we could finally receive full understanding for what we had experienced“, commented Wilhelm Lichner, who had experienced the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1978.

It was here in the newly adapted Seminar House Neumühle that the great adventure began in the spring of 1975. At that time they

were all between 18 and 24 years old, had only heard the Principle a few months previously and had never seen True Father....



The idea to hold the first „Alumni-Meeting“ of the German foreign missionaries had been born at the Whitsun Festival. Wolfgang Schawaller and Thea Lepercq, supported by Rita Seewald and Hilde Piepenburg invited all reachable 1975 missionaries and their partners, and 38 members, amongst them also Christel Werner, the wife of the national leader at that time, responded to the invitation. They came from all over Germany, from Austria, Switzerland, France and four even came especially from the USA.

After Wolfgang opened the meeting with a prayer and welcomed everyone, Christian Hausmann as representative of the German Family Federation, expressed deep recognition and gratitude. „Sending out the missionaries was an event of historical significance



for Germany, an exemplary act of faith for such young members“, he said, deeply moved. He encouraged them to write down their memories because „it is not the gold reserve that is our treasure but what matters is what we have done for our relationship with God and for the providence“.

Dieter Schmidt had sent a video message from Cyprus where he was participating in a CARP workshop. He stressed that it was because of the foundation of sacrifice and investment of the first missionaries that many members have joined today in these countries and large Blessings have taken place.



A three-tier cake, donated by the German Family Federation, was a visible sign of gratitude to the world pioneers. At that point, special thoughts were given to those five missionaries who have already passed into the spiritual world: Fritz Piepenburg, Ulf Ingwersen, Werner Elias, Elisabeth Riedl and Herrmann Deidenbach. Many felt their presence, and also that of Paul Werner, who had the heavy task of sending the young members out into the world.

Rita Seewald suggested producing a special book about the contribution made by Germany in sending out the missionaries. Her many memories as the

then secretary of Paul Werner added great interest to the meeting. Her responsibilities included practical preparations for the missionaries: gathering information about the countries, obtaining visas, plane tickets and money, buying suitcases and clothes, as well as making sure that immunizations were done. „When then, at the end of April, everyone - so courageous and loyal, faithful to God and young - had been sent off in buses for their countries, I felt as if I had sent my own children away...!“, she said wistfully.

This sentiment was also shared by Christel Werner, the ‘mother of the country’ at that time. In February 1975 the Werners were with the German



IOWC-team in Pasadena, California, supporting True Father’s speaking tour in the USA. One week after the Blessing of the 1800 couples in Korea, they received a surprise call from Japan where True Father was holding a world mission conference and wanted to send out missionaries to 120 countries before 1 May. „A Japanese, an American and a German should be sent out to each country“, said Christel, „because True Father was convinced that the whole world could be united on the





foundation of unity between representatives of these providential countries.“

Paul would have much preferred to have sent out older, more experienced members, but they were needed for the campaigns in America and Korea. „Germany had already sent 333 members to other countries, and was almost empty“, said Christel, „and for Father, other European countries, even Austria, were out of the question.“ This was a big shock for the Werners! How could they take responsibility to send out



such young members who had hardly any experience in the church or even in life? „We were fully aware of the possible dangers“,

she said „but Paul acted in the firm belief that True Father could mobilize the spiritual world and that the young members would receive God’s protection.“

While the missionaries from America and Japan were older blessed members who had received inspiration from True Father personally in 40 day workshops, the Germans had a 40 day workshop in Camberg with Paul and Christel. Each one of the 80 German missionaries arrived before May 1st 1975 in their assigned countries and had to wait several weeks before the other two missionary colleagues joined them.

The assigning of the countries was a very exciting and most spiritual matter. Several reminisced that they had received an invitation to this meeting, but had not come with any intention of being a missionary themselves. But inspired by the strong atmosphere of faith and the examples of others, they suddenly found themselves raising their hands at the mention of a certain country, and the portfolio of that country was given to them! Several brothers exchanged countries with sisters who had been given Arabian lands, but in the end, each one was given a country that somehow fitted him/her.

„Paul was known for his practical tips and warnings, e.g. not to walk in areas where one could be attacked, or for a woman never



to be alone with a man“, stressed Thea Lepercq, who was assigned to Egypt. On arrival, each person had to send a telegram or telex and thereafter a weekly report. How thankful were Paul and Christel that everyone reported right after arrival and how they prayed for their safety and protection...

The letters from the missionaries from 1975 - 1978 are on a CD, obtainable from Hans-Jürgen Hutzfeld.





The missionaries experienced very differing situations.

In some countries the three missionaries were able to unite, but in others ‘the third world war broke out’, was how Ulrich Völkel described the internal conflicts in the Philippines. In some places the church grew rapidly, whereas in others the work had to be carried out underground. The climate, the foreign culture and mentality took quite some getting used to and there were language barriers to be overcome. Some became very ill and experienced extreme deprivation, others experienced persecution, political unrest, war, evacuation or natural disasters. Shadowing by the secret police, interrogations, imprisonment and deportation had to be dealt with in some cases, but luckily no one came to harm.



An overwhelming point of agreement this weekend was the strong love to the respective country and its people, a willingness to pay indemnity and to fulfill God’s will for the country. And even when the length of stay in the foreign mission field varied greatly, all were deeply affected by their



experience. It could be felt that these members are a very special group of people. They still radiate the bold spirit of a pioneer and this special faith in God and True Parents! No matter where they now are living with their families, they are still involved in the move-

ment, spiritually mature and internally glowing through the extreme situations and experiences.

„God was so real and True Parents so close“. Friederike Buczyk, pioneer in Sri Lanka summarized it for all. At the end, for her remains only gratitude: „Even when I was often traveling alone through Asia, I felt protected and always carried by the prayers and love of True Parents. I was given so many blessings and received much more than I gave.“



Marianne Irwin, missionary for Nicaragua, ended with words of encouragement to all: „Record your experiences for posterity!“ She herself has just completed her autobiography, which contains many deep experiences with God. For her it is clear: „They are not our own experiences and deeds, but those of Heavenly Parents and True Parents, because we went out into the world as their representatives - therefore they are so important!“

*Photos: Benjamin Rauschert
Translation: Catriona Valenta*

The second part of the report will be a compilation of the individual missionaries’ testimonies.

