

Düsseldorf, 25. Juni 2014

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Achtung, Sperrfrist: Mittwoch, 25. Juni 2014, 20.45 Uhr! Es gilt das gesprochene Wort.

Grußwort und Andacht
zu halten von

Präses Manfred Rekowski

am Mittwoch, 25. Juni 2014, Beginn 20 Uhr,
anlässlich der offiziellen Eröffnung der VEM-Vollversammlung im Rahmen des
rheinischen Abends im Tagungszentrum „Auf Dem Heiligen Berg“,
Missionsstraße 9, 42285 Wuppertal

Greetings

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to welcome you all on behalf of the board and the synod of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland to 7th General Assembly of the United Evangelical Mission here in Wuppertal. Today's watchword expresses the joy of the Gospel and its irresistible way around the world. We are together as a family because we are all fruit of the Gospel, as the Apostle writes:

“Just as the Gospel is bearing fruit and growing in the world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.”

(Colossians 1:6)

We are thankful to host this reunion of sisters and brothers from all over the world and are proud to be member of a world-wide family, united in God's mission to spread the Gospel in word and deed, sharing the same spiritual sources and trusting together in the fulfillment of the Lord's promises. 34 churches from three continents gathered as sisters and brothers in the Lord! What an amazing grace! What a miraculous fruit! What a strong and living fountain of different cultures, traditions and expressions of a common faith!

The 7th General Assembly of the United Evangelical Mission takes place on the territory of the Rhenish Evangelical Church. Considered exactly, it is actually not hosted by it. You are at home, here in Wuppertal. The Theological Center is a joint venture of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, the Theological Faculty “Kirchliche Hochschule” and the United Evangelical Mission. Thus, you are shareholders of this place of international theological encounter and exchange. As in John, chapter 1, verse 11, you came unto your own and – I hope - your own received you as brothers and sisters, as shareholders of God's great mission to this World! You are at home on the “Heiliger Berg”, the “Holy Mountain” and we believe that we are here a little closer to God. We hope you will enjoy your stay and that you will appreciate the food, the rooms and the people.

To welcome you on behalf of the Evangelical Church in the *Rhineland* is not said so easily – at least geographically. We have gathered here in Wuppertal – in the valley of the Wupper, one of the many rivers meeting the Rhine River. There is the Ruhr further North that gave its name to one of the most important industrial regions of the world, the Mosel in the Southern region of our Church where an excellent wine is

**Landeskirchenamt der
Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland
Dezernat V.3 Politik und Kommunikation
Arbeitsbereich Kommunikation**

verantwortlich: Jens Peter Iven

Hans-Böckler-Straße 7
40476 Düsseldorf
Telefon (0211) 45 62-373
Mobil (0172) 2603373
Internet www.ekir.de/presse
E-Mail pressestelle@ekir.de



Seite 2

cultivated, and many more. But I don't want to tell you more because the pastors of ecumenism will take you throughout our church later this evening.

There is a telling that children are born here in Wuppertal with an umbrella and a Bible in their hand. Of course this is not serious, but it is reflecting on two important aspects of this city and of our Rhenish church: the frequently rainy weather and the variety of – mostly protestant denominations – in Wuppertal. These observations are true for the whole Evangelical Church in the Rhineland: It is a fertile region where creeks and rivers carry away the rainfalls and where different religious traditions have been coexisting for centuries.

It was my task to welcome you on behalf of man; it is God who welcomes us all together as brothers and sisters. That is why I would like to put this opening under God's Word:

Devotion

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

"For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light." This verse taken from Psalm 36, verse 9 is not only a guideline for today, but it tells a lot about our identity and history as Rhenish Church: "For with thee is the fountain of life". Rhenish Church does not owe its existence to the merits of our own people. It owes its existence and life to God's grace like riparian benefit from the fertility and prosperity a river provides them for. Christianity has come to this area by foreign missionaries in the Roman Era and was renewed by missionaries, mostly monks from Britain and Ireland, centuries later. Reformation did not begin in the Rhineland but farer east, but was mainly brought to the Rhineland due to the courage and the persistence of protestant refugees from France and the Netherlands. The first Rhenish reformed synod took place in Duisburg in 1610. In the midst of mainly Roman Catholic territories Lutherans as well as Reformed Christians were merely tolerated. Today, the Rhenish Church is the second biggest Church but due to its history, it has kept sensitivity and sympathy for minority churches worldwide. Throughout history, our Rhenish Church has learnt to rely on grace, on resources and fountains which are beyond its own abilities and talents. During the Nazi time, our church had to pass across a desert surviving only on the faith and courage of the few whose resistance found the most brilliant expressing in the theological declaration of the Barmen confessing synod in 1934 only a few kilometers from here. After World War II again refugees, from the former German territories in the East enriched and rebuilt the Rhenish Church. Today the world-wide Christianity is at home with us and it is about to change our congregations; almost two thirds of immigrants to Germany are Christians.

You will see and learn more about this diversity and about the past and the present of our church at our exposure day next Monday.

"For with thee is the fountain of life." As a constant reminder of this Gospel the Rhine River crosses our church from the South to the North, coming from our sisters and brothers in Switzerland and France and leaving our area at the Dutch border heading for the North Sea. Different landscapes and a variety of regions stretching along the margins of the Rhine River: rural areas with villages living a comparatively traditional life, vivid towns and the great cities marked by industry and commerce where other rivers like the Ruhr meet the Rhine. A diverse spiritual and denominational life is mirrored in these different landscapes on both sides of the Rhine: women and men, lay people and ordained working for the church, Reformed, Lutheran and united congregations, conservative and liberal Christians, Pietists and others wings of the protestant Church join together in Rhenish Church like a confluence of different creeks.

"For with thee is the fountain of life." As a river is a mere gift given life and prosperity to a region, we have always been owing our traditions and our faith to others. Having you here for the next days reminds us that we share the great river by which God nourishes His church with His blessing and His holy spirit. As the Rhine River has always been a fountain of life for the people living on its banks, our Church will only live on the world-wide ecumenical stream of different creeds, hymns, prayers and insight in God's Word.

"For with thee is the fountain of life." Receiving such gifts is a duty, too. Being given pure water, living on a fountain's fresh waters does by no means include the permission to waste, to poison or to spoil it. Caring for the integrity of creation is a responsibility we all share in God's presence. As we try to receive and to preserve the waters of the Rhine and to pass it over to our neighbors in the Netherlands, we have to care for the liturgical and

Seite 3

theological traditions for the generations to come. Finding new expressions of the faith not only for, but with young people is thus an important concern of Rhenish Church today.

Water is a gift of God and a Biblical symbol for life in abundance. But water is not evenly distributed in the world. Some of your churches have been suffering from floods and disastrous weather conditions, others from drought and a catastrophic lack of rain. Being dependent on a life-giving river also reminds us of the unequal distribution of God's goods. Climate change and unfair trade balances remain a challenge for all those who are living on God's fountain of life.

"For with thee is the fountain of life." The UEM general assembly will focus on poverty and more particularly on children's poverty. As we are pouring from God's fountain of life, the fight against injustice and unjust social and political structures will remain an obligation for the Rhenish Church. Advocacy for the weak and the poor is not a moral duty but a consequence and a testimony of Christian faith. The exploitation and the neglect of children contradict not only their dignity and human rights; they offend the gracious will of their creator. It is a matter of confession, if the future and welfare of men, of children as well as of adults, are subordinated to economic interests. With God is the fountain of life and not with the laws of the market.

"For with thee is the fountain of life." May God richly bless the general assembly, your talks and meetings, your reflections and prayers.

Amen.

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