

## Partnership as Companionship

Our two Churches, EKHN and EKKW, are in direct partnership relations with Churches in Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States of America, in some cases for more than 50 years. We share our solidarity and resources. We learn from each other what it means to live as Christians in our different cultural and religious contexts. We share our spiritual and liturgical traditions and richness. We are committed to peaceful and respectful dialogues and to create a just world. In some of our partnerships, especially with Churches in Africa and Asia, we are looking back on a long mission history. This history shows us that our Christian faith is always renewing through inculturation and is always trying to overcome denominational borders! “That they all may be one” is a strong commitment till today!



Photo: Detlev Knoche

### It's all about participating in God's mission to the world!

It wasn't until 1952 that we developed a common understanding of mission at eye level. It was in Willingen – a small village in the Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck – during the International Missionary Council where all the member churches agreed that church mission is no longer in terms of the “elder” churches helping the “younger” churches by giving financial support, but must be changed in terms of participating in the *Missio Dei*. The theological meaning is that mission must be in terms of “participating in God's mission” in the world.

In all the years that we have been walking together and striving for a responsible witnessing with each other and for this world, we have also not avoided the dangers that lie in the imbalances of giving and receiving, especially when it comes to financial resources. We must ask ourselves again and again whether we are treating each other as equals and with respect. “We are developing a concept of ‘sharing’ as an alternative”, said Bishop Dr. Beate Hofmann (EKKW) after returning from a visit this year to the partners in India. Ecumenical sharing in our relationships and in our mission for this world goes far beyond the financial aspect. It means participating in the joys and sorrows of others and sharing of our life concerns. It is about sharing theological, spiritual, and

cultural experiences, an exchange about living conditions, difficulties, problems, challenges and attempts towards mutual accepted solutions. Only if we are open and honest with each other, our testimony, our mission and partnership in and for this world can be credible. “During my time as Church President I met many of our ecumenical partners. And I learned that our encounters and mutual visits, exchange programs and volunteer services are of central importance for practicing ‘ecumenical sharing’”, sums up Dr. Volker Jung (EKHN) at the end of his term of office. We are increasingly discovering that this also requires creative new forms in light of the consequences of climate change and all the debates about sustainability. Options of digital communication and video conferencing are increasingly offering us these opportunities.

Not all is well yet. As a result of global economic injustices, there are significant differences between our churches. But we are on a path of shared responsibilities. Perhaps instead of „partnership“ we need to look for a new term for our togetherness in an inclusive and equal relationship. Some now speak of a “companionship” (*Weggemeinschaft*) in which members bear each other's burdens, learn together and journey together in joy and sorrow.

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