



Mission Consultation on Partnership between EMS member Churches in Germany and the Church of South India (CSI) – 7th -8th February 2024

Key Note Address

Respected Moderator in charge Rt. Rev. Dr. K. Reuben Mark,
respected General Secretary Mr. C. Fernandas Rathina Raja;
honourable Treasurer Prof. Dr. B. Vimal Sukumar,
respected Bishops, pastors and various partners with German churches
dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

First, I would like to express my deep gratitude for your invitation to this great event of a Mission Consultation Partnership between EMS member churches and Church of South India at the beginning of the new year 2024 – according to our Christian calendar – and for asking me to deliver this keynote address about new perspectives of mission in our different contexts and living conditions and for being churches together.

I bring greetings to you as the President of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity from my sister Rev. Anne Heitmann and brother Habib Badre in the Presidium and from the General Secretary Dr. Dieter Heidtmann in Stuttgart. Last year we celebrated 50 years of a common journey as churches and mission societies and the CSI is one of the strong member churches from the beginning on. EMS – how we call it in short – was established in 1972 as the "Evangelical Mission in South-West Germany" with its seat in Stuttgart. 50 years later we are now known as the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity: 25 churches and five missionary societies in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East form a network of established, long-term partnerships. As a Christian society, we share resources, learn from and with each other, and make decisions together – enhancing the lives of everyone. Together we connect about 25 million believers across three continents.

We share our Solidarity and resources with people in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East through the EMS family. We are committed to peaceful dialogue, the fight against poverty, and healthcare provision. We support schools, education programs and encourage the spreading of the Gospel.

Our vision is a world without hunger or poverty, without war or violence, in which all people can live a self-determined and dignified life. In solidarity with the excluded, the marginalized and the vulnerable, we are working towards just and humane living conditions. We encourage respectful conduct towards one another – regardless of culture and religion.

As the ecumenical liaison officer of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau I bring heartfelt greetings from Church President Dr. Volker Jung and all the

members of the Church Board. Since more than 40 years we are in direct partnership relations with East Kerala and Krishna Godavari Dioceses and in the North with Amritsar Diocese. And as the director of the Ecumenical Center of the Hesse and Nassau and the Kurhessen-Waldeck Churches I bring greetings from my staff and the Asian secretary Rev. Daniel Happel and the partnership secretary of EKKW Rev. Bernd Müller. Together with the Bishop from Kurhessen-Waldeck, Dr. Beate Hofmann, they visited Karnataka Northern Diocese in January – the partner church of Kurhessen-Waldeck.

Since 1995 – nearly 30 years – my personal life is deeply connected with India and especially with the Churches of South and North India, the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad and the UTC in Bangalore. Despite all challenges my heart and soul are always deeply touched when coming to my brothers and sisters in Christ in the different places from the north to the south India.

When looking on “Mission” – especially on Anglican and Protestant Christian Mission in India – we are looking back on a long history starting about 1700 when Protestant missionaries began working throughout India, leading to the establishment of different Christian communities across the Indian Subcontinent. I’m aware that the presence of Christianity in India is much older. The written records of Saint Thomas Christians mention that Christianity was introduced to the Indian subcontinent by Thomas the Apostle, who sailed to the Malabar region in 52 AD. A scholarly consensus exists that Christian communities had firmly established in Malabar, by 600 AD at the latest. These communities were composed mainly of Nestorians belonging to the Church of the East in India, that used the East Syriac Rite.

The first Protestant German missionaries were Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau who began their work in 1705 in the Danish settlement of Tranquebar. They translated the Bible into Tamil language and later into Hindi. It took nearly 207 years till the first person of Indian origin has been installed as a Bishop in India on 29th of December 1912: Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah.

I remember very well my first visit to Andhra Pradesh and our partners in Krishna Godavari Diocese in 1998. I was deeply impressed how much Bishop Azariah was still in the hearts of our Christian Sisters and Brothers. Many institutions have been named after him and I learnt a lot about his Mission, service and commitment to the people, especially to Dalits and Tribal communities. Bishop Azariah was the chief inspirational force behind mass movements that brought roughly 200.000 Malas and Madigas, tribals and low-caste non-Brahmins into church during his lifetime.

Along with his installation as the first Indian Bishop, the Dornakal Diocese of the Anglican Church was formed by the first indigenous missionary society named as “The Indian Missionary Society of Tinnelvely” and it became the first Telugu Diocese in Anglican tradition. It brought together all the coastal districts

and some parts of Telangana province. Later on, in the year 1947 the Diocese of Krishna-Godavari bifurcated from the Dornakal Diocese.

Bishop Azariah served as an important bridge between India and Britain during the last phases of their imperial association and for over two decades, he also played a leading role in the negotiations of church unity in the south of India, which resulted two years after he died in the historic creation of the Church of South India in 1947. Your Church – the CSI – is the first unification of an episcopal church (Anglican) with non-episcopal churches (Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist) since the Reformation.

This is my first lesson I learnt from your understanding of mission:

Christian faith is renewing in inculturation and is always trying to overcome denominational borders! “That they all may be one” is a strong commitment!

The founding of the Church of South India and later the Church of North India took place in a context of main ecumenical movements after the Second World War which resulted in the foundation of the World Council of Churches 1948 in Amsterdam. Since the 19th century all around the world in the former mission areas independent churches came into existence. “Self-Supporting” – “Self-Governing” – “Self-Extending” have been the main keywords. And the relationship between the so called “old” and “young” churches was named as “friendship”, as “co-workers for a common end” (conference on world mission, Edinburgh 1910) or as “Partnership in Obedience” (conference on world mission, Whitby 1947). It took till 1952 to develop a common understanding of mission on an eye-level. It was in Willingen where all the member churches agreed that church mission is no longer in term of the elder churches going to help the younger churches by giving financial support but must be changed in terms of participating in the Missio Dei, that is “in God's mission.” The theological meaning is that mission must be in terms of “participating in God’s mission” in the world. In other words: how the churches develop a partnership for participating in God’s mission.

This is my second lesson I learnt from the ecumenical movement on understanding of mission:

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

In the Conference of the World Council of Churches on `Church and Society` in Geneva, 1966, the members decided to develop the following main theological basics of mission:

- The Gospel is for humanity.
- The Struggle is for social justice.
- Mission is in the context of interreligious dialogue and encounter.

It was a time – like these days – when global conflicts, the Vietnam War and racial unrest also affected the churches. At that time more than 700 delegates of over 200 churches from all over the world met two years later 1968 in Sweden in Uppsala. They deeply debated development aid and the arms race. In the final statement they expressed their concerns for justice, peace and the integrity of creation:

"We heard the cry of those who long for peace. The hungry and the exploited cry out for justice. The despised and disadvantaged demand their human dignity. ... Trusting in God's renewing power, we call on you: Participate in this anticipation of the kingdom of God, and let something of the new creation that Christ will accomplish on his day become visible today." (translation from the German text)

In Germany the Protestant Churches responded to that call and decided to give 2% out of their church tax income for development work. We are keeping this decision through all our crises up to today and even under the present pressure of the declining membership and income. Part of this money is going to the church development service and part of it we use for common projects and programs with our partner churches in Africa, Asia, Europe and the US and within our mission societies like Evangelical Mission in Solidarity.

In all the years that we have been walking together and seeking for a responsible witness with each other and for this world, we have also not avoided the dangers that lie in the imbalances in giving and receiving, especially when it comes to financial resources. We have to ask ourselves again and again whether we are treating each other as equals and treating each other with respect. I remember a linocut by an African artist from 1981 with the title: "They are shaking their hands because they are longing each other".



It shows two women - a white woman and a woman of colour - walking towards each other with empty hands to embrace. For me, it carries the message of "empty hands" into the world. When people approach each other with hands full of gifts, they can't even shake hands or hug each other in greeting, much less exchange their gifts while their hands are full. They first have to put the gifts aside in order to greet each other with empty hands. To this day, this image has remained as a reminder to me.

We have developed the concept of "sharing" as an alternative. 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, sharing in our lives. It is about sharing theological, spiritual and cultural experiences, also about an exchange about living

conditions, difficulties, problems, challenges and attempts towards mutually accepted solutions.

Only if we are open and honest with each other can our testimony, our mission and partnership in and for this world, be credible. Our encounters and mutual visits, exchange programs and volunteer services are of central importance for practicing "ecumenical sharing". To live for a certain time in the context of the other. We are increasingly discovering that this also requires creative new forms in the light of the consequences of climate change and all the debates about sustainability. But digital communication options and video conferencing are increasingly offering us these opportunities. In the EMS, we have developed the format of the monthly sharing of life concerns. On the first Monday of the month, we exchange views on a topic worldwide as part of a ZOOM meeting. You are all cordially invited to take part. Church President Dr. Jung meets once a year in ZOOM with the church leaders of our partner churches to discuss the current situation in the church and society. In this way, we take part in each other's lives beyond all financial support and visit programs.

This is the third aspect I want to highlight when talking about mission in a worldwide context and our responsibility as Christian Communities:

Mission is the answer to the Gospel of humanity in sharing our life concerns and demanding our struggle for social justice and human rights for all people of God's creation.

It is now exactly 18 years back when I came with the first group of Pastors to the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad – the International Centre for Research, Interfaith Relations and Reconciliation. HMI is an ecumenical Christian organization dedicated to the objective, study and teaching of religions and the promotion of interfaith relations and reconciliation. Academic work is just one aspect of HMI's activities. Its goal is to combine academic research with praxis, which is reflected in HMI's mission of reconciliation, which has grown out of a context of inter-religious alienation and violence. HMI's emphasis is on study and action at various levels in order to reduce prejudices, resolve conflicts and increase trust, co-operation and understanding between individuals and groups from different religious backgrounds and faith. It is a kind of mission of the Christian Community to the Indian society which was totally unknown in our German Christian context.

For many years the German Society has been dominated by a so-called German culture. Up to 1970 about 96,4% in the Federal Republic belonged to the Protestant or Roman Catholic Church. This has changed in the last 50 years. At present around 48% of the German population belong to one of the two mainline Christian confessions and around 6% to some of the smaller confessions and the orthodox churches. Especially in the urban areas we have

additionally Christian Congregations with distinctive culture, ethnic, or nationality like the Ghanaian, Korean or Indonesian congregations in Frankfurt. You will find more than 100 protestant international congregations in and around Frankfurt. Some of them are in deep relationships with our EKHN congregations. Beside that, all the other religions have their communities, mosques, temples, gurdwaras or places of worship. We became more and more a multicultural and religiously diverse society.

In their parishes, pastors are increasingly encountering people who seek and find orientation and support in life in religions other than Christianity. They are our neighbours and we meet them while shopping, at school, during leisure activities. In many cases, these encounters are characterized by uncertainty, bias and sometimes even fear. How can Christians make an effective contribution to respectful coexistence between people of different religious backgrounds? And what does this mean for our theological convictions, for our relationship as Christians with people of other faiths and for our understanding of mission? Diversity and difference, which we encounter in other people, must not be turned into an antagonism. Nor should they suggest a simple coexistence. What is required is sincere cooperation and partnership characterized by mutual - and critical - acceptance. Ultimately, the aim is for all people to walk the path into the future together, reconciled and in peace. That is why it is good to know our own way of life. In the one world community, we Christians are also invited, on the basis of God's compassion for humanity, to take joint responsibility for peace, justice and the integrity of creation together with all people of good will.

We have moved some way in this direction with the pastoral colleges "Christians in Dialogue with Religions". In Hyderabad, we experience representatives of different religions who are willing and able to engage in dialog. We discover similarities and do not hide the differences in faith and values. The openness we have experienced encourages us to seek and engage in dialog with people of other faiths in our own place of life.

Today we are aware about the importance of such ecumenical and interreligious study programs and I'm happy that EMS is starting an Inter-Religious Study Program with HMI which is open for all member churches of EMS including the Churches of North and South India. This program will expand the range of Inter-Religious Study Programs in Kyoto / Japan, at the Near East School for Theology in Beirut / Lebanon and the "Study in Israel Program" at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. These programs of intercultural, ecumenical and interreligious learning for students of theology and religious education as well as for pastors in active ministry are integrated into the long-standing relationships of EKHN with our ecumenical partners and are integrated into our International Fellowship of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

They are very different programs in terms of content. At the Near East School of Theology, the focus is on getting to know the ancient Oriental and newer churches of the Middle East as well as their life and thinking in Muslim-majority countries. In Kyoto, the focus is on encounters with Buddhism, Shintoism and new religions, interreligious dialogue, and the situation of Japanese minority churches. In Hyderabad, the focus is on introductions to Islam and Hinduism and approaches to how interreligious dialogue can contribute to peace in the society. In Jerusalem, it is Judaism and theological developments in Christian-Jewish dialogue.

For us it is important to combine intercultural experiences - life and encounters are different in Beirut, Hyderabad, Kyoto, Jerusalem or Accra than in Frankfurt, Darmstadt or Kassel - with knowledge of other religions, interreligious sensitivity and ecumenical broadness. These connections are crucial when it comes to living together peacefully in our society and treating others with respect. This prepares future and present pastors for the diverse new challenges posed by the religious pluralization of our society.

I would like to quote from Dr. Andreas D'Souza, the former director of the Henry Martyn Institute:

„I firmly believe that the many differences that exist among people because of caste, creed, and race need not be a factor forcing one to be confined within tightly closed boxes or heavily guarded enclosures. The whole creation is filled with great diversity and such rich diversity must be seen as a manifestation of God's immensity and variety. It is not a threat to our individual or group identity but a challenge to find God's limitless splendor and beauty as reflected in the creation.”

This is the fourth aspect I want to highlight when talking about mission in a worldwide context and our responsibility as Christian Communities:

Mission considers the differences among people because of confessions, religions and world views and because of ethnical, cultural and national diversity. Such kind of mission is committed to a peaceful coexistence in diversity.

In 2022, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity. We have set aside an entire year from September 2021 to September 2022 as a jubilee year. In doing so, we have taken up the tradition of the biblical "Jubilee Year", in which the 49th year is celebrated as a year of liberation and solidarity. Some of you may still remember the Jubilee Song „Together we are free“

1. It's time to make a difference, to strive for liberty.

To understand that saying "I" is not as strong as "We".

So, let us share our visions, the blessing from above,
let us be ambassadors of love.

2. So many different cultures, and I am different too,
but a common longing will change our point of view.
So, let us share our future, and let our hope increase,
let us be ambassadors of peace.

Refrain

Together we are free.

Together – you and me.

Together we can show the world what heaven will be.

If we love each other, respect our dignity.

In Jesus name: Together we are free.

In mission and in the mission agencies, we are on a path to overcoming the contrast between the "old" and "new" churches. This is indeed not easy, because we still have these images in our heads: of the givers and the receivers - of the historic churches of the Reformation and the "new" churches in the countries of the South - of the older and younger brothers and sisters - of the actual theology of the Reformers and the enculturated theologies of the South. Here we in the EMS Fellowship have started a journey to develop mutuality and participation as central aspects of partnership relations. It was a long process that finally led to the 34 delegates of the Mission Council adopting a new constitution in 2012, which makes the partner churches from Africa, Asia and the Middle East equal members. The EMS Synod ratified these resolutions in the same year. For over 10 years, all 23 churches - now 25 churches - and five mission societies have equal voting rights in all strategic and financial matters. At the same time, the name was changed from "Evangelical Mission in Southwest Germany" to "Evangelical Mission in Solidarity". This also expresses the fact that there is no church that has nothing to give, however small it may be and that there is no church that needs nothing, however rich and large it may be!

Not all is well yet. As a result of global economic injustices, there is a significant difference between our churches. But we are on a path of shared responsibility for projects and programs. The process of internationalization must be continued consistently in order to be successful. Perhaps instead of "partnership" we also 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.

In preparation for the 50th anniversary we invited young representatives from member churches and member organizations to reflect together on what "mission" means today. The young people told each other about the conflicts in

which they live in their respective contexts. For many of them, discrimination, harassment, and violence are part of everyday life. Others experience how the economic and social situation in their country deprives them of the opportunity to contribute to society with their skills and talents. All of them were united by the great concern about the environmental devastation, the consequences of which they are confronted with in many places in a very concrete way.

These personal experiences were the background for their expectations towards the mission of churches and their urgent appeal not to wait any longer, but to become “advocates” of peace and reconciliation and actors for justice and the integrity of creation. They described mission as a “social-transformative instrument”.

And this is my last aspect I want to highlight when talking about mission in a worldwide context and it is taken from the final statement of this young theologians:

Mission challenges all members of the body of Christ, young and old to take action. We can no longer stay silent on the issues, that dishonour Christ and contradict his teachings. In all our considerations we are guided by God. Every day can become a day of the Lord’s favor. Now is the time to act!

Let me come to an end. We started in this New Year 2024 with the so called “Jahreslosung” – a biblical Verse which will guide us throughout the year. For 2024 it is a Verse from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians “Let all that you do be done with love.” (1. Cor. 16,14) To my understanding this is the basic requirement that understanding between different contexts and cultural influences is possible. Christian mission thrives on the certainty that the translation of the message of the victory of life, which is love, can overcome cultural, political, social and societal boundaries. That this message can find a home everywhere and liberate people to interact with each other in a lively, loving and equal manner - and that conversation and understanding on Mission and Partnership remains possible across the aforementioned borders.

My heartfelt wish for the new year 2024 is that you experience God's love as a source of strength for your life. May God strengthen you in all the daily challenges and burdens you have to bear - through the power of the spirit and loving people at your side.

Thanks a lot for your attention and patience!

Rev. Detlev Knoche

Stuttgart | Darmstadt | Frankfurt – 7th February 2024