

**Festive service for the 3rd East Frisian Gossner Day.**

## **"Called to ONE Hope."**

**10 years of partnership with Uganda**

**Sermon on Ephesians 4:2-6.15** (already read during the epistle reading)

Delivered on 22 May 2022 in the Ludgeri Church in Norden by  
Superintendent Dr Helmut Kirschstein

Dear festive congregation, dear brothers and sisters,

can you still remember? In 2010, an earthquake in Haiti shook the world - as 220,000 people died, misery and despair of the so-called 3rd world literally cried out to heaven, and the global challenge to overcome poverty and worldwide justice once again became unmistakable. In the same year, 2010, there was also the worst oil spill of all time: The oil rig "Deepwater Horizon" exploded, and the leaking oil contaminated the sea and the coasts in the Gulf of Mexico for months. Two events that opened the decade of our millennium like a portent, a portent that admonished the whole world to justice and ecological sustainability - a double admonition to global mercy and the integrity of creation.

As if that were the headline over an entire decade! For many other catastrophes determined this decade: in 2011 the nuclear super-GAU in Fukushima, Japan, in 2015 a wave of refugees of unimaginable proportions that swept over Germany and Europe - and yet was only an expression of global injustice and warlike disaster. In Europe as a whole, again and again the merciless brutality of Islamist terrorists - then in 2019/20 here in Germany the attack on the synagogue in Halle and 10 right-wing extremist murders in Hanau. The climate catastrophe became ever more oppressive, then in 2020 the Corona pandemic, and now in 2022 the war in Ukraine - the whole shaken world on the brink of a third world war. What a time we are living in!

And the year 2010: as if it had provided the headline for it! - But this year 2010, of all years, this symbolic start to a new decade, is also the year in which we founded our partnership: Here in the Ludgeri Church we signed the documents and decided to build a bridge that crosses continents: between two dioceses in the north of Uganda and the church district of Norden in East Frisia: **anxious to maintain unity in the spirit through the bond of peace**, as the letter to the Ephesians says in the document.

World-changing? No, the big wide world took no notice. But the people at the grassroots, people like you and me, people in Germany as well as in Uganda, the little people here as well as there! And I firmly believe that it is signals like this that herald a counter-movement and sound the fanfare for the dawn of a new era. Justice, human rights, human dignity - when we sang it together in the summer of 2010, here in this wonderful church, it gripped us all: *"We shall overcome... Deep in my heart, I do believe: We shall overcome some day."* **Called to ONE hope - this common hope filled and inspired us: ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE baptism; ONE God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.** And therefore, in the name of God, hope for the ONE world - a common world of peace and justice, full of reverence for the Creator, full of respect for His creation.

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While the omens of 2010 foreshadowed the catastrophes of an entire decade on a large scale, this solemn act in the Ludgeri Church opened up a growing understanding on a small scale, a far-sighted togetherness, indeed a common peace movement in the ONE WORLD. In January 2011, the first visit of a German delegation to Uganda, 15 men from the Ludgeri Men's Circle, was unforgettable

for all those who were able to be there - all from the *Men's Circle*, because the *Uganda Circle of Friends* was only founded two months later: in March 2011. In 2012, we included the Gossner Mission for the first time, which is now exactly 10 years ago, another reason to celebrate! Because this made it possible to realise much larger projects for the benefit of our fellow human beings in Uganda! In 2016, "Uganda" was finally officially recognised as the 4th foreign field of work of the Gossner Mission. To date we have been to Uganda seven times with a delegation - and our Ugandan friends have visited the Norden Church District and Berlin six times. With the celebration of this weekend, it is now *three East Frisian Gossner Days* that we have danced and sung and prayed through together: 2015, 2018, 2022. We have celebrated services against earthquakes and nuclear disasters, against the misery of refugees and terrorist killings. We assured ourselves that we belong together as Christian people, despite all cultural differences: **ONE body and ONE spirit, called to ONE hope.** *Encouragement* was our common concern from the beginning, back and forth: *encouragement* through our togetherness across all borders. Perceiving what is going on with the other person, what is on their mind, sharing their worries as best we can, but also their joy - how much we have *laughed* together in all these years!

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Often there was a real family atmosphere between blacks and whites! I have always thought very carefully about whether I speak of "brothers and sisters" when I refer to people in our church - looking at our Ugandan friends it was easy for me! And of course: just as we help each other in the family as much as we can, we have also helped and built up wherever we were asked and our strength was sufficient:

We built or helped to build churches in Agung, in Paloga, in Laguri, Centres of hope against the trauma of the terror they have just survived - we have already been able to help 160 people to a more dignified existence with wheelchairs - in Kilak-Corner we have repeatedly supported the brave HIV-AIDS initiative - in two schools we have been able to decisively improve the water supply - we have assisted a self-help group of young teenage mothers - we have built and expanded the kindergarten in Agung and provided support - Civil war refugees from South Sudan received first aid equipment in the Pagirynia refugee camp - we were able to set up a carpentry workshop and build a dormitory so that more refugee children could attend school - and then there were also wind instruments to build up a trombone choir....

Yes, everything is still far too little, everything is only a beginning - but a way in the right direction, on the way together to the Kingdom of God - to a world as it should be, in solidarity, open for each other, peaceful. *Encouragement*... And it is precisely this encouragement that we have also experienced, we evangelical Christians from our crisis-ridden Church in a country that is often so disoriented:

*Encouragement* when our Ugandan brothers and sisters sang so rousingly, in the church service or on Juist or in Berumerfehn or even as guests in the gospel concert on Norderney, *encouragement* during so many prayers in the midst of everyday life, thankful for the safe arrival after a long journey, thankful for the food on the table, thankful for every peaceful togetherness.

*Encouragement* when reading the Bible together: unforgettable the Bible evening in Rechtsupweg, when we Germans revealed so many problems with the Great Commission of Jesus and our Ugandans made a clear distinction between English colonial policy and Anglican mission - they could have done without the English in their country, but never without the missionaries. At the end of this memorable evening they gave us tips on how we could finally win our youth and so many people who are far away from the church for the Christian faith again... *Encouragement!* We owe so much to our Ugandan brothers and sisters: Joy of faith. Faithfulness. Strength of faith.

*Encouragement* at eye level: **ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE baptism; ONE God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**

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Many things have been on our minds *together* for a long time, we Protestant and Anglican Christians in Germany and Uganda: *Education* for children and young people that reaches beyond mere factual knowledge to the heart, education that conveys respect and tolerance and yet establishes a firm Christian standpoint of faith - then the *integration* of refugees and displaced persons and migrants, a broad-minded integration that follows a warm welcome with friendly accompaniment, in Germany as in Uganda - and last but not least *climate issues and climate strategies* to stop the catastrophe after all, initiatives to create new awareness and new responsibility in our one world: *together*.

If I try to look back more clearly from *the perspective of our Ugandan friends*, I have to admit that they have had a much harder time in the last decade than we have. Yes, since 2006 the terror of the LRA is finally over after more than 20 years - but the trauma continues, after the return of tens of thousands from the refugee camps the land conflicts are all the worse, domestic violence, rapes, teenage pregnancies have increased massively through Corona. And refugee flows from South Sudan are increasing again it seems, some 1.3 million people have fled across the border into Uganda - Africa's biggest refugee disaster in 2016/17 - 1.3 million amidst a population that is itself war-torn and often destitute. It is astonishing that the Ugandan government gives these refugees a piece of land and supports them in other ways as well - can this work in the face of so many locals who do not have enough to live on either? In general, the government is not without controversy. President Museveni has held on to power for more than 35 years through intimidation and attacks, and he was only able to win the last election at the beginning of 2021 through obvious suppression of the opposition. With so much social conflict, our Ugandan friends would certainly have liked to do without internal church trouble - but since 2014 at the latest, a real "church battle" has been raging in the Kitgum diocese over a bishop who did not want to give up his office voluntarily - it took a long time for the situation to be pacified, we suffered and prayed along from afar, and in the end we were relieved to be able to celebrate the installation of the new bishop in 2018: **Bear with one another in love and be careful to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace...**

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What an eventful 10, 12 years! Our Indian friends and our guest from Zambia may forgive me if I focus so clearly on Uganda relations today. But I know that they can all rejoice in this Uganda partnership of the Norden Church District and the Gossner Mission: Last weekend we all had a Gossner Day in Hanover for the first time, where our guests got together with each other in joint activities and Bible studies and even in improvised theatre plays. Honestly, this is an old dream come true, we German Gossner people have always wished that our partners in the South would not only build up a Christian togetherness with us, but also with each other, not always only South-North, but also South-South - and these days this is becoming a reality! The beautiful idea of the global Gossner family is no longer just on paper, we are brothers and sisters together. In the spirit of *Gossner*? Even more: in the spirit of *Jesus Christ*: **ONE body and ONE spirit, called to ONE hope.**

*The hopeful counter-movement*: against the growing misery, against the ecological catastrophes, against the warlike disasters of this world. The fact that at the One World Festival the partnerships of our church district and its congregations also joined in: over to Sudan, Tanzania and Togo - that underlines the hopeful dynamics of this movement! Together we are on the way to God's future: **But let us be true in love and grow in all things towards him who is the head, Christ.**  
Hallelujah! Amen.