



Attentive—Courageous—Clear! | Our Mission in Difficult Times

A Message from Bishop Harald Rückert on the Current Situation

Frankfurt/Main (Germany), March 11th, 2024

It is good ...

... that a new passion for the free and democratic basic order of our country has been awakened in recent weeks. Freedom and democracy are very precious commodities!

... that many people are publicly stating that anti-Semitism, ethnic nationalism, xenophobia, exclusion, and violence are unacceptable. Human dignity is inviolable!

... that people in our congregations have a very clear judgement and position themselves. They are committed to the Gospel and fill the »Social Principles« of our church derived from it with life.

... that people who follow Jesus are actively committed to human dignity and human rights. This corresponds to how the Bible testifies to God and how it describes human beings as an image of God.

... that the Christian Churches in our country agree on these fundamental issues and take a stand against anti-Semitism and racism, xenophobia and violence. There can be no compromise. For obvious reasons, society's focus is currently on right-wing extremism. At the same time, we must also be very vigilant against other developments that also contradict the Gospel. The biblical message's »no« to inhuman speech and actions applies to every form of unacceptable behavior—from the »right«, from the »left«, from religious motives or from wherever else it may originate.

Unfortunately, ...

... many people can no longer understand several current political decisions. Uncertainty and concerns about economic and social decline are on the rise.

... there is a rising tendency in our society to doubt and disparage democratic processes and institutions in general.

... the established democratic parties sometimes act clumsily. People feel ignored and left behind.

... there is a growing tendency to stop talking to each other. Personal interests or group convictions are so strongly focused on and defended that cooperation and the willingness to compromise across different perspectives and needs, are left stranded.

... people with a different opinion on one of the many very complex issues currently challenging politics and society are very quickly labeled and compartmentalized. There is hardly any constructive listening and engagement with each other in terms of approval and contradiction. The necessary joint struggle does not take place. Anyone who is different from oneself is depreciated and can quickly become the target of vicious attacks, hatred, and slander.

... radicalized thinking and speech are on the rise in our society. Extreme attitudes have become »sayable« and are gaining influence, partly because social media is spreading and amplifying them at lightning speed.

... many of these developments have paved the way for seductive populism, seemingly simple solutions, exclusion, xenophobia, and the cultivation of enemy stereotypes. Not least, this is leading to a blooming of anti-Semitism that was no longer thought possible in Germany. Extreme nationalist ideas that were long thought to have been overcome are spreading and taking root in people's minds. Distrust and agitation threaten to drive our society apart.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in The United Methodist Church

With these lines I am addressing you. Instead of making a public statement about »the attitude of The United Methodist Church and the people of this Church«, it is particularly important to me to address you directly. The testimony of the Bible and the »Social Principles« of our church derived from it are unmistakable. The horror of the two world wars and the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime led to the protection of the inviolable dignity of human beings becoming consciously anchored in our German »Grundgesetz« (constitution) and used as guiding principles for state action in post-war and now reunified Germany. Extreme political groups and parties—of whatever colors—that abandon or undermine these principles are standing outside our social order and are unacceptable.

Some of you are taking part in the demonstrations against inhuman right-wing extremism that are currently being held in many places. Continue to do so with conviction and clarity. But do so with a philanthropic attitude and a clear view that also recognizes and denounces unacceptable speech and actions from other directions. For example, it is also unacceptable for pro-Palestinian demonstrations to trivialize Hamas terror, deny Israel's right to exist and propagate the eradication of the state of Israel. It is good to stand up against extremist speech, thought and action in the marketplaces together with many others. It is much more difficult to be courageous and clear, especially in the individual encounters of everyday life. But this is exactly what is needed to embody the message demonstrated in the large crowd in everyday life.

Some of you think that your concerns are better served by the German right-wing party AfD than by the established political parties. Your reasons for this may vary. I suspect that very few of you—if any—think that the nationalist ideas, anti-Semitism, or xenophobia promoted by the AfD are right and good. Please keep an open mind to discuss this and do not avoid critical questions. At the same time, I remind you that since its foundation, this party has found it increasingly difficult to distance itself clearly and permanently from right-wing extremist ideas. In the meantime, parts of the party and individuals in prominent, influential positions have been classified by the German »Verfassungsschutz« (the Office for the Protection of the Constitution) as clearly right-wing extremist. Therefore, seriously consider what you are really promoting if you vote for this party.

Dear Sisters and Brothers, let us ...

... try to have conversations in our churches, at work and in our neighborhoods about the current big challenges. I know that this is incredibly difficult. Sometimes it feels like it can't be done at all because the perceptions and convictions of those who should be communicating with each other are completely different. Nevertheless! A serious, sincere, and clear conversation is the only alternative.

... respect each other as human beings. It's easy to talk about each other. But this can quickly lead to seeing each other only as enemies. This can even result in no longer seeing the other person as a human being of flesh and blood, no longer as a person with feelings and needs, no longer as a person made in the image of God.

... try to listen to and engage with each other based on a clear rejection of ethnic nationalism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and violence.

... try to stand up together for human dignity, freedom, and democracy, regardless of our different political convictions.

... sincerely and courageously live out our biblical conviction that God has come into the world in his Son Jesus Christ and has established among us »the message of reconciliation«. As people reconciled with God, we become ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Thus, we are commissioned to reconcile and not to divide, to heal and not to destroy, to unite and not to separate. May God grant us the necessary strength, courage, and wisdom to do so.

*Grace and Peace,
Bishop Harald Rückert*