

Willibrord Letter 2023

Greetings from the Old Catholic and Anglican Bishops in continental Europe to their churches on the occasion of the feast day of St. Willibrord on 7th November 2023

The Willibrord letter is sent every year by the Anglican and Old Catholic Bishops in Europe. They meet each summer for a joint conference. This year Bishop Harald Rein from Switzerland was given the task of writing the joint message.

Keeping on our toes in times of change

Dear brothers and sisters in faith,

In June 2023 the General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) took place in Tallinn, Estonia. The theme of the Assembly was ‘Under God’s Blessing – Shaping the Future’. More than 300 Christians gathered for the conference. Three church families are represented at CEC: the protestant churches, the orthodox churches and the Anglican and Old Catholic churches.

The new presidium is as follows: Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain, Senior Church Councillor Rev. Frank Kopania (EKD, Lutheran Church of Germany), and Bishop Dr. Dagmar Winter (Church of England). Of much greater importance, however, are the topics discussed at the General Assembly of CEC and the decisions which were made, above all the declarations made concerning the war in Ukraine, climate change / environment crisis and migration/expulsion. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia was condemned. We are all called to set an example in preserving creation. We must reject language which is used to categorize and dehumanize fellow people who become refugees.

We are all called to act, so that declarations do not simply remain declarations to calm our consciences. On the surface, there does not appear to be a great deal that we can do, in view of the ever-increasing problems. Still, every little thing we do helps. If each and every one of us, (I myself, our congregation, our diocese) takes one small step, then together we can achieve something decisive to make Europe a better place to live for everybody.

For example, we can support refugee families in our parish, both practically and financially. It would also be a good idea to practise a conscious lifestyle, both in our

personal lives and in our church contexts, in order to help save the resources of this earth and thus help to keep the earth a good place to live for as many people as possible.

Perhaps these are small steps, but it is a question of perseverance and persistence, like in the parable of the widow in the gospel of St. Luke, Chapter 18, verses 1-8. On the surface, the widow in this parable bombards a judge persistently, until he is so annoyed that he decides in her favour. But the theme of the parable is not the judge or a view of God or simply prayer, but the power of faith. The widow is able to change the world and achieve something through her own personal conviction and certainty. Even though initially it appears futile. The widow could have given up or been frustrated, but she persevered. We Christians can change and move the world, if – to use a modern expression – we keep on our toes.

So, nothing that we ask, demand and do in the name of God is in vain. Perseverance has something to do with the persistence with which we as Christians remain active in a secular society and maintain: “Under God’s Blessing - Shaping the Future.”

St. Willibrord brought the Christian faith to many regions of Europe. In the last verse of the parable, we read: “When the Son of Man comes, will he still find faith on earth?” The answer is left open. I am confident, and I wish us all both good experiences and great success in the process.

+ Harald Rein