

What are the expectations of the IKK congregations?

Since the middle of the 20th century, we have registered a steady growth of so-called "congregations of different language and origin" or the recently negotiated term "International Congregations" at the EKD level in the metropolitan areas of North Rhine-Westphalia. While in the initial phase these International Congregations were very much limited to the self-preservation of their own culture and the spiritual care of their own congregation, since the 1990s we have observed an increase in International Congregations with a missionary reorientation. Of the approximately 600 congregations in NRW, about 140 have joined the IKK Rhineland-Westphalia for ecumenical cooperation. On the one hand, these congregations enrich the inner-German ecumenism by their diversity and vitality; on the other hand, they challenge the missionary self-understanding of the regional churches.

In preparation for my brief impulse, I conducted a cross-sectional survey on the topic of "mission" with our representatives of the IKK congregations. I have summarized their convictions or expectations of the regional church in four short theses:

1. mission means first and foremost proclamation of the gospel. The IKK congregations welcome a broadening of the understanding of mission through the conceptual distinction between "missionary" and "missional." While the former emphasizes more strongly proclamation and practical implementation, the latter denotes an attitude toward life and a participation in the *missio Dei*. However, this distinction must not relativize the clear communication of the Gospel. In comparison to the International Congregations, the national churches show a great reluctance when it comes to open and clear communication of the faith. The IKK congregations consider it necessary to speak boldly about Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. Evangelistic sermons on the Internet, distribution of evangelistic literature on the streets, and missionary small groups may seem alienating to national churches, but they express the conviction that mission is not only done by deeds, but also by words.

2) International congregations with their transnational networks are serious mission partners. Such churches see themselves in the diaspora to spread the gospel. Several IKK churches are branch churches of megachurches in Africa and Asia. These include, for example, the RCCG Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria or The Church of Pentecost in Ghana or the Presbyterian Church of Korea or the Full Gospel Church of God in South Korea. These churches list hundreds of thousands of church members and several thousand branch churches worldwide. Many are committed to world missions and have their own mission councils and mission platforms through which they provide financial and spiritual support to their missionaries in the diaspora. Meanwhile, international churches with their transnational networks no longer see themselves as recipients but as givers. Are national churches willing to humbly and gratefully accept financial and other resources from megachurches in the global South?

In order to do mission effectively, we need a variety of congregational forms. Representatives from IKK congregations note that regional church structures with their traditional liturgies are not adequately prepared for the current missionary challenge. We need creative ways to channel missionary dynamics into sustainable structures. In the Rhineland, we include IKK congregations in the process of intercultural opening, which goes hand in hand with the testing of new creative congregational forms. It is not just a matter of creating parallel structures, but of creating so-called intercultural intermediate spaces (third spaces) in already existing regional church and international congregations. In this process, the successor generations of international congregations play a decisive role. Often they move in such

spaces, which have a supraregional and interdenominational character and at the same time have a missionary focus. Can national church and international congregations together create such third spaces and invite to them?

4 Representatives of IKK congregations want to be taken seriously as competent (mission) theologians. Globally, compared to Germany, we can see a significant increase in missiology research at theological seminaries and universities, e.g. in America, in South Africa, in India and in South Korea. In recent decades, some countries from the global South have been actively engaged in missions worldwide and can therefore draw on a wealth of experience. In addition, there are now theologians with doctorates from IKK congregations who can make their reflections and experiences fruitful for the academic, for the church-wide and for the inner-German ecumenism. In doing so, we must not shy away from dealing with controversial topics such as biblical interpretation, healing, liberation, spiritual warfare and Christian ethics, and we must enter into ecumenical areas of tension. Representatives of IKK congregations want to reflect theologically with regional church theologians on a common level.

In summary, I would like to state that the IKK congregation encourages the regional churches to live not only from the promise but from the claim of the gospel. The claim is to fulfill the Great Commission according to Matthew 28:18-20. Mission is not only the task of one congregation, but of all congregations in Germany together. The IKK churches want to be partners on this common path.