

"Mission without equality?" - Challenges for the UEM Andar Parlindungan (UEM)

I am very pleased about the importance the UEM has today for the Evangelical Church of Westphalia (EKvW). The special nature of the understanding of mission is evident in the fact that the UEM is mentioned in the 6th thesis mission statement of the EKvW as a core element of world mission.

It is important to emphasize that the long process of transformation of the UEM from a German mission organization to a fellowship of churches in three continents is an indication that all continents must be considered as mission fields, including Germany and Europe. The Good News must be anchored especially in those areas where society has been transformed by the process of secularization. Therefore, mission in Europe and Germany is also necessary. However, mission today is in complete contrast to the understanding of the missionary works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Mission today means the proclamation of the Good News, which includes mutual commitment to development, justice and peace, partnership and diakonia. Mission today requires equal solidarity, dialogue and non-violent encounters. Have we achieved the vision described above? Not yet, although we have already accomplished a large part of the transformation process. There are at least two clear examples.

1) Donor and recipient.

In our observation, eye level between members has not yet been achieved because many partnership groups in Germany pity their partners in Asia/Africa and many partners in the Global South often adopt the attitude of supplicants, even though they often belong to a large church with many resources. There are still partnership relationships between "givers" and "receivers" in which the respective partners do not yet see themselves as equal children of God. The issue of money, as an important element of partnership, often stands separating and not uniting in the partnership relations between North and South. Let us highlight what ideology is behind the projects and finances. The point here is to avoid power and dependency relations.

2) Stereotypes or Othering

Emmanuel Kileo, a Tanzanian theologian examines this attitude and writes that partnerships have always been based on the principle of "us" and "them", namely "we" have the money and "them" need our help. Or the other way around: "we" need the help of the Germans ("the others") because we are so poor and they are richer than us. The "we" and "the others" becomes clear in several examples in our partnership paper: Europe = rational, Africa = emotional/spiritual, "we" = democratic, "the others" = corrupt and authoritarian; "we" = the old, adult churches, "the others" = the young, inexperienced churches. Does this ideology of white supremacy play a conscious or unconscious role in our relationships within the UEM?

Bishop Josiah Kibira from Tanzania puts it this way: "We all take and give at the same time. There is no church that has nothing to give, however small it may be. There is no church that needs nothing, however rich and large it may be. We need each other." The UEM has much experience and is still developing and renewing itself - to find a form of global church community that is anti-racist, anti-stereotypical and non-judgmental.