

“Lausanne Movement on the Road from Cape Town to Wittenberg”

EKD Opening words at the formal event on 14 June 2017

J. von Campenhausen, Rev. / Director

Ladies and gentlemen,
Sisters and brothers,

(1)

We are pleased to be able to welcome you here in Lutherstadt Wittenberg in this distinctive year 2017 of the anniversary of the Reformation. It is a special honor for us, the Evangelical Church in Germany, to have you assembled here this year at this historic place which has formed and informed our faith. For you, evangelization is the utmost priority. Together we can say “evangelization is the Church’s breath and heartbeat.”

(2)

I am greeting you at a significant place and time.

The spot is Lutherstadt Wittenberg on the river Elbe in the middle of the former German Democratic Republic. It is the city in which the Doctor of Theology, Martin Luther, rediscovered the gospel of God’s free grace 500 years ago. His sins did not leave him any peace. They could not give him any peace. He relentlessly asked himself, “How do I find a gracious God?” Even today there is no other answer to be found than the one that the reformer found in the Bible, in the Epistle to the Romans: “I cannot find a gracious God because his grace has always been there.”

He couldn’t help himself. His deep study of scripture brought him to the realization – or better to the breakthrough – that it is only through God’s grace that he is even able to exist before God. This is what could allow him to live happily and die in peace.

He published this in the theses. Did he personally nail them to the portal of the *Schlosskirche*, hardly 300 meters from here? There is much more that speaks in favor of this than against it. The citizens of the city Wittenberg are 100 % of the opinion that Luther himself took up the hammer on the eve of the Feast of All Saints. This realization – Christ died for my sins, “I am free.” – could no longer be restrained: [it was heard] in Magdeburg and Augsburg, in Rome, Zurich and Strasbourg, all around the world. 440 million people have their spiritual roots here in this little cosmopolitan city: our Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe, the growing charismatic churches in South America as well as the Pentecostal churches in Africa.

Thus it was clear that the 500th jubilee would be an occasion to celebrate thankfully, to look at the path we have taken, to take stock of where we now are and to get our bearings about the way we want to continue.

We in Wittenberg are not only the hosts. Here is where the word of God’s free grace went out into the world and it does not want to come back empty handed. Those who pilgrim here during this Reformation summer are “coming home.” They are coming here because they come from here.

With the historic silhouette of the city as a backdrop – the tower of the *Schlosskirche* on the left with its “Theses Door” and the place where Luther is buried, and the tower of the city church where he preached in the middle – we opened the Reformation summer 2017 two and a half weeks ago with a celebratory worship service including

one hundred and twenty thousand worshipers on the meadowy banks of the Elb river. Personally, that is already one of the important “once in a lifetime” moments for me. God in his greatness wants to be celebrated in great worship services – because he has given us his salvation, because we are grateful for the community that he has given us with himself and with each other. Thus the World Reformation Exhibit has commenced here and includes *Refobeach* from the YMCA, *ErneuerBar* from the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Missionarische Dienste (Joint Venture for Missionary Services¹), a house from the Order of Saint John (Johanniter), a pavilion from the Swiss churches, the Christuszelt (Christ’s tent) in the Center for Ecumenism and Religion – all of these groups and many more have joined us and are now here.

(3)

So many people have already forgotten that they have forgotten God. But the hope that we are nourishing with this Reformation summer, is to kindle a spark of curiosity about God in people.

The Lausanne Movement is present. It is taking part. We’re glad you are here. We hope you find inspiration from Lutherstadt 2017 which you can take with you and use in your work.

Thank you for your attention.

¹ My translation. Council of Missionary Services could also be used.