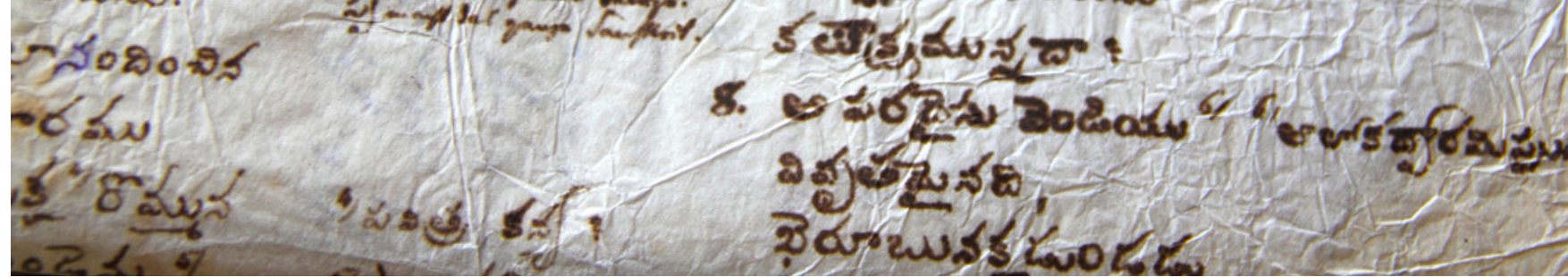




Photographs: G. Girtzmann, NMZ-Breklum



Dear sisters and brothers, dear co-workers of NMZ in our partner churches,

the weeks before Christmas are a time of expectation and joy. We are looking forward to the day when we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. However, in the midst of preparations for Christmas we have to share with you the sad news of a deep loss that we have experienced in the Northelbian Mission Centre (NMZ) and the Northelbian Evangelical-Lutheran Church.

In the night to the Second Sunday of Advent the old Mission House in Breklum was severely damaged by a strong fire. The outside walls are still standing, solid as they are, but the interior is totally destroyed by fire and water. Parts of the historical archives of the Breklum Mission were lost in the flames, many books were either burned to ashes or are soaked with water, offices were damaged. Thank God, human beings were not harmed. The other buildings at the campus – the guest houses, the Festsaal and the Martineum – were thankfully not affected by the fire.

Several fire brigades were at the spot during the whole night as well as many co-workers of the Christian Jensen Kolleg, the NMZ and other institutions. They all had a very hard time with the fire fighting operations and rescue measures, and they did what they could in order to extinguish the fire and rescue valuable items and personal belongings from the building.

According to police investigation the fire was set on purpose at four different places from inside the building. It was apparently a burglary, and perhaps these people have, out of frustration, set fire to the building.

Over the last years, the Mission House functioned as the central administration building for the Christian Jensen Kolleg, an educational and ecumenical centre in the North-Western part of our Church. It contained offices of colleagues from the Christian Jensen Kolleg, the NMZ, and the regional educational centre of several church districts in the region. Over the last years, the buildings had been restored and refurbished.

We share these sad news with you because Breklum, the Mission House and the Christian Jensen Kolleg are known to many of you. Breklum is a small village in the northern part of Germany, but it is also a place of affection for many Christian sisters and brothers around the world with whom we are connected in partnership. Breklum is the place where Rev. Christian Jensen started in the 19th Century the participation of Christians from the far Northern parts of Germany and from across the border to Denmark in world mission and where he established a number of institutions related to missionary outreach, health services, Christian education and care for Christians in diaspora situations in North America. In the 1930s, during the time of the Nazi regime, Breklum was also an important centre for the Confessing Church.

We are shocked about the disaster and feel sorrow and empathy with all our colleagues who have lost their offices and personal belongings. We do hope and pray, however, that this experience of a useless crime will in the end nevertheless strengthen us to continue with our mission. The seminaries and workshops will continue anyhow, and the building, that was destroyed, will hopefully be restored as soon as possible.

On Saturday, December 12th, we will gather in Breklum for a worship of mourning and remembrance. But we also want to gain new strength and courage to move forward in responding to God's call for participation in His mission.

We greet you with the watchword for today. It is a remembrance on the wandering of the people of Israel, but it is also a word that comforts us today:

"You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place." Ps. 66:12

We thank you for your prayers and affection!
We greet you all in name of Christ!

Yours in Christ's service,

Dr. Klaus Schäfer
and all co-workers of the NMZ
in Hamburg and Breklum

