

Where we come from

When die "Association of Protestant churches and Missions in the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin (West)" was set up in 1975, it marked the culmination of a long history of attempts to integrate mission and the churches in West Germany. The founders on the missionary side were the Conference of German Protestant Mission Societies (DEMT) and its executive board, the Council of German Protestant Mission Societies (DEMR), and on the church side the regional churches (Landeskirchen: regional churches, territorially based Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches which together form the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the EKD. After an intermediate stage during which the Protestant Liaison Board for World Mission (EAGWM) acted as the first formal link between Church and Mission, their cooperation was finally given a permanent institutional form in the EMW.

In September 1991, following the unification of Germany, the Association of Protestant Missions (AGEM) in the former GDR (East German) and the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin (West) merged to form the "Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany".

It was in the 19th century that Mission and the Church developed as two separate entities in Germany. Many independent missionary societies and associations sprang up then on the initiative of committed individual Christians. They were the ones who were actually engaged in missionary work. At first only loosely associated in the form of the "German Protestant Missionary Federation", they set up a closer alliance within the "Conference of German Protestant Mission Societies" (DEMT) in October 1933 in order to prevent the pro-Nazi "German Christians" from using the missionary societies for their own purposes. Despite the different denominational and ideological backgrounds of its members and Nazi harassment, the DEMT grew into a spiritual community.

Ecumenical encouragement

The ecumenical contacts maintained by the missionary societies lent them an air of internationalism almost unheard of in the German Protestant Church. This, however, had little effect on the "Landeskirchen", as Mission and the Church had followed their own separate paths for almost 150 years. It was the ecumenical community which provided the encouragement to overcome this artificial division. Here the formal union between mission and the churches was accomplished when the

International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) merged during the WCC Assembly in New Delhi at the end of 1961.

The EKD Synod held in Bethel in March 1963 came up with a German response to these ecumenical developments. It was in Bethel that the idea that "church" and "missionary" ecumenism belong together was put into practice for the first time: the EKD and the DEMA decided to set up a "Protestant Liaison Board for World Mission" (EAGWM) in order to "join forces to take action in the field of world mission going beyond the domain of each individual institution". This was necessary, as neither the self-confident mission organisations nor the EKD member churches were really prepared for cooperation with the national, regional and continental ecumenical bodies which were gaining in importance all the time. The growing joint challenges not only meant that all the missionary resources available had to be combined, but also that new initiatives had to come from the churches.

Integration of Church and Mission

The AGWM was intended to further the integration of Church and Mission by acting as "trustee and coordination centre" for the joint work of the EKD, its member churches and the missionary societies and Free Churches belonging to the DEMA. It had a »liaison board« consisting of an equal number of church and mission representatives. It was hoped that more of the churches' human and financial resources could be used for mission and that the will of the churches to carry out missionary work in Germany and overseas would be strengthened in this way.

This was a first important step towards merging Church and Mission, but the process was still far from being completed. The decisive advance was achieved in the early 1970s when the "Landeskirchen" set up their own regional mission centres and departments. "In order to create a national pendant to these 'Missionswerke', to deepen the integration of church and Mission in Germany and to ensure more effective participation of our congregations in the worldwide mission of the Church within an ecumenical community", the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin (West) was set up in 1975. This brought the work of the EAGWM and the DEMA-DEMR to a conclusion, as their functions were now taken over by the new umbrella organisation. The EMW also continued the associate membership of the DEMA in the WCC commission for World Mission and Evangelism in Geneva.

Thus a decisive step had been taken towards the structural integration of church and Mission.