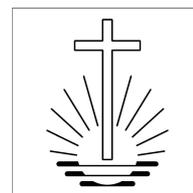


**"The New Apostolic Church and Ecumenism"
Background Information**



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1. Introductory Considerations

Within the scope of our Church's public relations, we have had increasingly more contact with ministers of other Churches and denominations.

At the beginning of 1990 and with the approval of Chief Apostle Richard Fehr, these contacts were strengthened with the Council of Christian Churches in Baden-Württemberg (ACK-BW) in Southern Germany, as a "pilot project" for all of Germany. At the same time, comparable contacts were developed in parts of Switzerland.

In order to examine in detail to what extent essential contents of our doctrine conform, in principle, to ecumenical ideas, Chief Apostle Fehr, already in October 1999, founded the project group Ecumenism.

In 2007, the discussions in Southern Germany had reached a point which made it clear to all involved that it would be advisable and reasonable to continue them in future on a national level. To document the status of the discussion achieved by that point, the ACK-BW published a flyer entitled "***The Council of Christian Churches in Germany and the New Apostolic Church – A Guide for the Congregations in Baden-Württemberg***".¹

As of 2009, these discussions with the AGCK [Swiss National Ecumenical Council] have been conducted on an official level; they are aimed at providing, by the end of 2010, the Church leaders involved with a recommendation concerning further procedures.

The intention behind these discussions was to become better acquainted with each other and to thereby reduce existing prejudices. To this end, the essential contents of faith were discussed and similarities addressed. So far, the goal of these conversations has not been to attain membership in the Council of Christian Churches (ACK, in Switzerland AGCK) or in the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The following explanations are intended to illuminate the background of, as well as the goals and the strategic approach in our ecumenical considerations.

2. What is the Meaning of Ecumenism?

2.1 Definition

The term ecumenism comes from the Greek language and is derived from the word *oikeo*, i.e. *dwell*, and thus ultimately from *oikia*, i.e. *house*. This primarily refers to the whole of mankind as a social community.

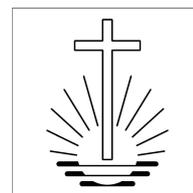
In this sense, ecumenism was initially understood as a sort of social-political term. However, in the early Christian Church, the term took on more religious undertones. Through the "Ecumenical Councils"² it became the term for "Orthodoxy".³

This soon became linked to the Roman Catholic Church's claim of primacy - first over the Orthodox Churches and later also over the Protestant Churches.

¹ www.ack-bw.de/lila/publikationen.htm, www.nak.org/de/news/nak-international/article/15577/

² In the first millennium, seven general Church Councils (gatherings of the bishops) took place, whose doctrines are generally accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, and also many Protestant Churches: the First Council of Nicaea (325), the First Council of Constantinople (381), the Council of Ephesus (431), the Council of Chalcedon (451), the Second Council of Constantinople (553), the Third Council of Constantinople (680/681), and the Second Council of Nicaea (787).

³ "Orthodoxy" was understood as adherence to the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.



Today, the term Ecumenism is characterised by the leitmotif "**unity in reconciled diversity**"⁴ and refers to the brotherly and sisterly fellowship of Christians and Churches of different national, cultural, and societal backgrounds.⁵

2.2 Historical Development

For a long time, all endeavors to reunite the Churches - which have been separated for hundreds of years, particularly due to the Reformation - remained fruitless. Although the revival movement of the 18th century promoted the process of rapprochement, especially in the British Empire, this took place without the participation of the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches.

In 1900, following some earlier conferences, the "Ecumenical Missionary Conference"⁶ was held. Here, the individual Protestant Churches involved were to be assigned specific missionary areas. Due to conflicting interests, these efforts ultimately proved unsuccessful.

The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 marked a turning point; it is generally considered the birth of the modern ecumenical movement.

There followed 21 regional and national conferences, until the First World War prevented closer international cooperation.

The International Missionary Council (IMC) was established in 1921 as a joint institution to continue the concept devised in Edinburgh.

In 1925, at the invitation of the Protestant Swedish Bishop Söderblom, the World Conference for Practical Christianity ("Life and Work") took place - for the first time with the participation of a small group of Orthodox Churches. He coined the famous words: "*The world is too strong for a splintered Church!*"

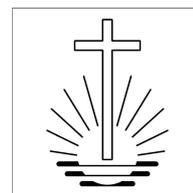
On August 3, 1927, 439 representatives authorised to vote convened in Lausanne for the World Conference for Faith and Order - again with representatives of the Orthodox Churches, but without any from the Roman Catholic Church. Seven relevant ranges of topics which are crucial still today in ecumenical theological discussion were debated: (1) The Call for Unity; (2) The Message of the Churches to the World; (3) The Essence of the Church; (4) A Common Creed; (5) The Spiritual Ministry in the Church; (6) The Sacraments; (7) The Unity of the Church. The seventh topic in particular, "The Unity of the Church", clearly revealed the widely different positions of the individual Churches towards each other.

The many conferences of the following years led, in part, also to a certain competitiveness. Despite some resistance because of this, a constitution for the

⁴ This term dates back to the "Leuenberg Concord" (Fall 1973), which put an end to the schism between the Reformed and Lutheran Churches. This agreement enabled the participating Lutheran, Reformed, and Methodist Churches to achieve a basis for a common concept of Baptism, Holy Communion, and the Gospel. www.theology.de/downloads/1973leuenburgerkonkordie

⁵ cf. Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches, Geneva www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/

⁶ The beginnings of modern ecumenism are to be found in Christian missionary practice. The pioneers of ecumenism were no longer prepared to accept that Christians with different cultural and church backgrounds often contradicted each other in the formulation of the faith and in missionary practice, thereby harming rather than helping the Christian witness. Thus Edinburgh 1910 is considered the actual birth of Christian ecumenism.



formation of a World Council of Churches was developed at the Utrecht assembly in 1938.

Due to the Second World War, the first plenary assembly and constitution of the World Council of Churches did not take place until 1948 in Amsterdam. Its theme was "Man's Disorder and God's Design". 147 Churches from 44 countries were represented. The Roman Catholic Church did not participate.

The WCC's self image was formulated as follows:

"The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour" ⁷

By 1961 the WCC had grown to 198 member Churches. At the plenary assembly in New Delhi, the International Missionary Council (IMC) was incorporated into the WCC; also, for the first time, five observers from the Roman Catholic Church participated. This development corresponded with the beginning of the Second Vatican Council,⁸ through which an opening of the Roman Catholic Church was initiated.

The plenary assembly in Harare in 1998 tried to reconcile the diverging interests of the Western and Eastern worlds. To this end, the formation of an "Ecumenical Forum" was initiated in order to enable all Christian Churches to continue their participation in the ecumenical idea, even when they do not (or, no longer) embrace the political goal and content of the WCC. Unfortunately this measure met with no noteworthy success.

In this context should also be mentioned three additional European ecumenical plenary assemblies:

1989 in Basel under the motto "Peace in Justice"

1997 in Graz under the motto "Reconciliation - Gift of God and Source of New Life"

2007 in Sibiu, Romania under the motto "The Light of Christ Shines upon All – Hope for Renewal and Unity in Europe". At this plenary assembly, a heated discussion ensued concerning a Vatican document on the topic "What is 'Church'?"⁹ in which non-Catholic denominations were again not regarded as "Church" and were only designated "Christian communities".

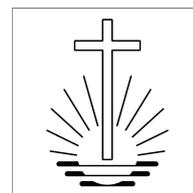
2.3 Ecumenical Organisations

2.3.1 General

⁷ cf. Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches, Geneva
www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/

⁸ The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II, October 11, 1962 to December 8, 1965) is considered the 21st Ecumenical Council by the Roman Catholic Church. Its major result was freedom of religion; it also advocated increased dialog with those of different or no faith. Particularly relevant to ecumenism are the documents *Unitatis redintegratio* (Decree Concerning Ecumenism) and *Lumen gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution of the Church). To these can be added the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (edited 1993 by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity) as well as the two pontifical encyclicals *Ut unum sint* (Pope John Paul II, 1995) and *Deus caritas est* (Pope Benedict XVI, 2005). www.teol.de/vaticii.htm

⁹ Dominus Iesus of August 2000 (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-lesus_ge.html) as well as *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine concerning the Church* of June 2007 (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_ge.html)



The most important international ecumenical institution is the **World Council of Churches (WCC)**. In Germany, the **Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK)** plays a central role. There are also denominational organisations and central offices like

- The **Lutheran World Federation**,¹⁰ the **Union of Evangelical Free Churches**,¹¹ and the **Conference of European Churches**¹² in the Protestant area;
- The Roman Catholic **national Bishops' Conferences**.¹³
- In addition, both Roman Catholic Churches and the Protestant Churches in Germany have **world-view advisers**,¹⁴ formerly also called "religious sect advisers", who observe smaller Churches and church denominations outside the WCC.
- Furthermore, there are several specialised institutes for ecumenical research and observation, e.g. the Protestant
 - Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen [Protestant Center for Questions of World View] in Berlin (EZW)¹⁵
 - Konfessionskundliches Institut Bensheim [Institute for Denominational Studies, Bensheim]¹⁶and, for the Roman Catholic Church
 - The Johann-Adam-Möhler Institute in Paderborn.¹⁷

Due to their particular importance, the WCC and ACK will here be described in more detail.

2.3.2 World Council of Churches (WCC)

The WCC, with its head office in Geneva, is an institution for the worldwide promotion of the ecumenical movement. It comprises today more than 330 independent Christian Churches from approx. 100 countries with over 400 million believers.

Because of its concept of Church, the Roman Catholic Church is not a full member, but exerts, despite merely having the status of "observer", considerable influence.

According to its constitution,¹⁸ the WCC professes in particular the following goals:

- Encouraging its members to jointly follow the Gospel and to propagate it,
- To deepen the mutual understanding of and fellowship with Christian Churches and groups, while protecting the identity of each respective Church.

¹⁰ www.lutheranworld.org

¹¹ www.vef.info

¹² www.cec-kek.org

¹³ www.dbk.de

¹⁴ Protestant: www.ekd.de/ezw/adressen.php; Roman Catholic: www.ksa-hamm.de/landkarte/karte.htm

¹⁵ www.ezw-berlin.de

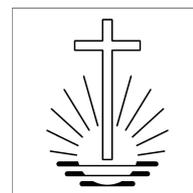
¹⁶ www.ki-bensheim.de

¹⁷ moehlerinstitut.de

¹⁸ www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/

New Apostolic Church International

Project Group Ecumenism



The WCC expressly emphasises that the following are not among its goals:

- Setting up a worldwide Church under a single, united administration (a "One-World Church")
- Standardising the various forms of divine service.

2.3.3 Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK)

The ACK is an organisation - independent of the WCC - for the promotion of ecumenism in Germany on a national, regional, and local level. The individual councils are not hierarchically structured, i.e. their work is fundamentally autonomous.

In contrast to the WCC, the ACK is more theologically and less politically oriented. The Roman Catholic Church is a full member.

The member Churches of the ACK have the following chief concepts and goals:¹⁹

- They acknowledge each other as brethren in their faith in Jesus Christ. They seek ways to make visible their unity in Christ.
- They concern themselves with questions of understanding faith, of divine service, and of spiritual life.
- They are prepared to take into consideration the effects upon the ecumenical community of their confession and service and to assume responsibility for each other in difficult situations.
- They represent the goal of a new and fair community of women and men in the Church.
- They renounce the targeted, aggressive luring away of members from other Churches (proselytism). In cases of conversion from one Church to another, the congregations involved will talk to each other in a timely manner.
- Wherever possible, Churches allow the employment, in their institutions, of persons belonging to other ACK member Churches.

The ACK Germany is structured as follows:

- 1 Federal ACK
- 14 Regional ACKs ("federal state ACK")
- Many local ACKs ("local ACK").

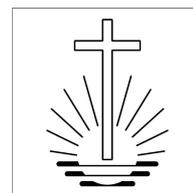
The respective local ACKs of a federal state ACK form the respective regional ACK, and the 14 regional ACKs together form the Federal ACK.

3. The Project Group Ecumenism (PG Ecumenism)

3.1 Motivation for the Formation and Commission of PG Ecumenism

As explained in section 1, since the early 1990s we have had more contact with representatives of other Churches and church denominations. Before that time, such

¹⁹ As in the example of the "Order of the Council of Christian Churches in Baden-Württemberg" of Dec. 1, 2005



contact had been extremely rare and unfortunately marked, in part and on both sides, more by tension and rejection than by understanding and acceptance.

In 1963, Chief Apostle Schmidt received a written inquiry from the WCC, asking whether the New Apostolic Church would like to present itself to the WCC on the occasion of a public event and whether it would like, if appropriate, to participate in ecumenical actions. This invitation was refused. Only under Chief Apostle Urwyler did a cautious opening of the Church take place.

This was continued under Chief Apostle Fehr. While he was still the District Apostle of Switzerland, he had, in 1986, a survey conducted which ultimately became an essential basis for the present official PR and the resulting further opening of our Church as well as the cultivation of contacts with other Churches and Christian denominations.

The experiences and results of the already existing contacts with representatives of other Churches and church denominations, especially in Southern Germany, finally led, in conjunction with our Church's ongoing process of opening, to the establishment, under Chief Apostle Fehr on October 28, 1999, of the Project Group Ecumenism with the following project definition:

"PG Ecumenism shall concern itself with the fundamental doctrinal statements of the New Apostolic Church and their compatibility with Ecumenism. It should closely cooperate with the Project Group Contemporary Issues."

Since entering into office on Pentecost 2005, Chief Apostle Leber has confirmed this course on various occasions.

3.2 PG's Findings to Date

Many discussions with representatives of other Churches and Christian denominations show that different doctrinal positions between the Churches persist (which, by the way, is a matter of course in the ecumenical process). The questions involved here concern mainly the understanding of Sacraments and ministries.

3.3 Future Prospects

On the basis of the overall positive impression received from all discussions held so far, the District Apostles' Meeting has repeatedly commissioned PG Ecumenism to continue to foster contacts with other Churches and Christian denominations despite the remaining discrepancies and corresponding inquiries concerning essential doctrinal statements.

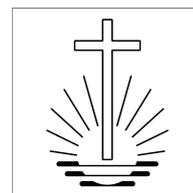
The discussions should continue with an increased emphasis on the question of whether and, if so, when our Church should or could seek "observer status"²⁰ at the WCC or "guest status"²¹ at the ACK.

An important basis for such discussions will be the "Charta Oecumenica".²² This "Charta Oecumenica" is a European Church document that was signed in 2001 by

²⁰ www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/

²¹ As in the example of the federal ACK. www.oekumene-ack.de

²² www.cec-kek.org/Deutsch/ChartafinG.htm



most European Churches as a guideline for the increasing cooperation of Churches in Europe. It is, in its character, neither instruction in doctrine/dogma nor canon law, but merely provides recommendations. Furthermore, it describes various ecumenical tasks in the form of guidelines and obligations which are comparatively noncommittal.

Thus it is a basis for determining commonalities and remaining differences. The latter, however, are only problematic for ecumenical dialog when they are clearly hostile to ecumenism.

4. ACK Membership^{23, 24}

4.1 Relation between WCC and ACK

WCC membership is only possible for a Church or church community which is a member of a national ecumenical organisation, e.g. in Germany, the ACK.

4.2 Principles and Goals of the ACK

In order to become a member of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK), the **Ecumenical Basic Formula**²⁵ must be acknowledged, which essentially states that

According to Holy Scripture, the Churches associated with the ACK profess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior and thus jointly endeavor to fulfil that to which they have been called, to the honor of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

On this basis, they take it upon themselves to serve ecumenical cooperation and to fulfil the following tasks conducive to ecumenical life in our country:

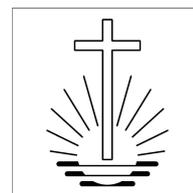
- Communication, advice, and cooperation among one another in joint testimony, service, and prayer;
- Support of cooperation between the Churches on the local, regional, and international level;
- Encouraging theological conversations with the goal of clarification and understanding;
- Mediation in differences of opinion between individual members;
- Representing the special concerns of individual members (upon application);
- Performing joint tasks externally and in public;
- Representing common concerns of the member Churches before political institutions;
- Informing the public of ecumenical events and the status of ecumenical endeavors, as well as fostering an ecumenical sense of responsibility.

These tasks are specified and substantiated in the **Charta Oecumenica**.²⁶

²³ www.oikoumene.org

²⁴ www.oekumene-ack.de

²⁵ *ibid.*



4.3 Organisation of the ACK

Each individual ACK regulates its constitutional structure through statutes or a constitution.

The fact that individual ACKs function as legally independent units not subject to directives from other ACKs or from superordinate ACKs, results in slightly varying regulations and formulations, though they share a common basic orientation. Varying regulations, however, persist, e.g. concerning "guest status".

Due to their legal autonomy, memberships in different ACKs are generally possible.

However, membership in a state or in the federal ACK is usually only possible for a legally independent and autonomous Church/denomination. On the local ACK level, though, the congregation's legal autonomy is not a prerequisite for membership.

On the other hand, it is e.g. conceivable that a Church would be a member only of the state ACK, but not of the federal ACK - or vice versa. The latter is the case e.g. with the Seventh-day Adventists.

4.4 Requirements for ACK Membership²⁷

Prerequisite to membership in the ACK on the state level are, in particular, the following:

- The fundamentals of the constitution/order of the ACK must be supported;
- The Church or church denomination must be independent;
- It must have independent congregations in more than one administrative district of the federal state;
- It must be able and willing to provide personnel to support work in the meetings of delegates and committees.

A Church or church denomination lacking these qualifications has the following options:

- It can become a member of a local ACK;
- It can, upon application, participate in the committee work of the state ACK;
- Upon application from such a Church or church denomination, the state ACK can represent its interests on the state level.

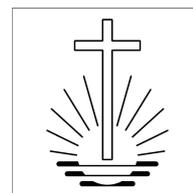
Decision on membership is taken, upon recommendation by the executive committee, by the meeting of delegates and requires a two-thirds majority. This also applies to "guest status".

4.5 ACK "guest status" or "advisory participation"

There are different regulations concerning guest membership:

²⁶ www.oekumene-ack.de/Texte-und-Dokumente.67.0.html

²⁷ As in the example of the federal ACK. www.oekumene-ack.de



- In local ACKs, i.e. at the congregational level, guest status is generally possible.
- In regional ACKs, i.e. at the federal state level, both guest status and advisory participation are possible. This is merely a difference of wording, the material possibilities and obligations are similar.
- In the federal ACK both guest status and advisory participation are possible; this has also been adopted by a few regional ACKs. The material differentiation between guest status and advisory participation obviously depends on the degree of organisation and the interest of the applicant.
- Essential prerequisites for guest and advisory participation status are:
 - The prerequisites for full membership must be met on their merits;
 - The Charta Oecumenica is an important basic document for cooperation in the ACK.
- Essential **grounds** for guest status or advisory participation are:
 - The applying Church or church denomination wishes, for superordinate internal reasons, to abstain (for the time being) from full membership;
 - Superordinate reasons internal to the ACK (e.g. difficulties reaching an agreement) make full membership inadvisable at the present time.
- **Definition** of "guest status" or "advisory participation":
 - The delegate(s) of the respective Church are fully integrated into all councils of the respective ACK, but without the right to vote.
 - Unrestricted participation in all activities of the ACK is possible, but not mandatory.
 - Financial contribution, as established by the executive committee, is required; the amount is based on the number of members and finances of the applicant.

4.6 Previous ACK or AGCK [Swiss National Ecumenical Council] Guest Memberships

At the end of 2009, the following New Apostolic Church congregations in Germany were guest members at the local level:

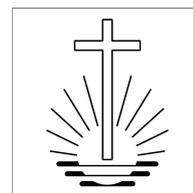
Memmingen, Aschaffenburg, Hameln, Marburg, Halle/Saale, and Göttingen.

In Switzerland, the New Apostolic congregation of Bern has been a guest member of in the cantonal AGCK of Bern for years and, since 2008, the New Apostolic congregation of Frutigen a member at the local level.

5. Arguments for the NAC's Membership Status as a Guest in the ACK and/or Observer Status in the WCC

The discussions with the federal ACK in Germany and the Swiss AGCK shall be continued with the goal of obtaining guest status at the regional and federal levels.

This recommendation is essentially based on the following arguments:



- a) Chief Apostle Fehr and Chief Apostle Leber have repeatedly expressed in public their support of guest status membership - while still preserving our Church's own identity.
- b) The increasing secularisation, as well as the increasing Islamisation (not by immigration, but by conversion) of Europe would seem to commend, or even compel, those professing Christ to cooperate.
- c) The fact that the ecumenical movement, too, has moved towards a "unity in reconciled diversity", while preserving the identity of the individual Church, improves the possibility of our participation.
- d) Our Church has also developed. This is shown by the more detailed definition of doctrinal statements regarding e.g. our understanding of Baptism, our understanding of the salvific importance of the Apostle ministry and the importance of the Chief Apostle (not as head of the Church, but as head of the Apostles' unity), and our understanding of the Woman Clothed with the Sun. Development is also apparent in the Church's systematic PR since the end of the 1980s. Profound theological conversations on these topics are better than prejudiced public discussions.
- e) Through ACK membership, Churches and church denominations achieve a higher level of public acceptance.
- f) The goal of faith, i.e. Christ's return as the Bridegroom, has largely been lost in Christianity in general. This can more effectively be brought to mind if the NAC actively participates in the ecumenical movement.

6. Suggestions for Supplementary Literature

Hinweise zu Kontakten der Neuapostolischen Kirche mit anderen christlichen Kirchen und Gemeinschaften [References to Contact of the New Apostolic Church with Other Christian Churches and Denominations], ed. by NAC International (Zurich: July 2002)

Die katholischen, orthodoxen und evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland – Eine Kurzbeschreibung der Glaubenslehren und Strukturen [The Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Churches in Germany: A Brief Description of Their Doctrines and Structures], ed. by NAC International (Zurich: October 2004)

Hinweise für die Beteiligung der neuapostolischen Kirche an ökumenischen Veranstaltungen [References to the Participation of the New Apostolic Church in Ecumenical Events], May 2006. This paper makes concrete and expands the document ed. by NAC International (Zurich: July 2002)

Council of Christian Churches in Germany and the New Apostolic Church, ed. by ACK Baden-Württemberg, 1st edition (April 2008)