

**Ansprache anlässlich des Goldenen Jubiläums der
Basler Mission/mission 21 in Nigeria
Gavva, den 15.08.2009
Pfr. Jochen Kirsch**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
Alherin Ubangiji Yesu Kristi, da kaunar Allah, da zumuntar Ruhu Mait Sarki, su zauna tare da ku duka (2. Kor 13:13).

It is truly a wonderful occasion and a great honour for all of us from Switzerland and Germany to be granted this exceptional chance to celebrate with you today the Golden Jubilee of the fellowship between the Ekklesiyar Yan' Uwa a Nigeria and the Basel Mission, respectively mission 21. Many other former Fraternal Workers and friends of EYN in Europe would have loved to be physically with us here today; some of whom are still with us but were not able to travel, and others who have already passed away. Yet all of them are with us today in spirit, united with us in joy and gratitude to the Lord, the miraculous creator and faithful guardian of this fellowship, which we celebrate today.

Representative of those absent I bring with me the heartfelt greetings from the Director of mission 21, Rev. Martin Breitenfeldt as well as from the Head of the Department of International Relations, Rev. Albrecht Hieber, who has himself (together with his family) been part of this multitude of personal life stories, encounters and witnesses that make up the very essence of this fellowship.

"Zumunci a kafa take", fellowship is in the feet, as you say in Hausa: Up to this very day our fellowship has been made up and kept alive by the countless feet of both Nigerians and Europeans. By the many feet of those who have left their homes in Europe for different purposes and stretches of time: be it as Fraternal Workers or Ecumenical Co-Workers, as we say today, as PEPs, workcampers, senior experts or whatever else might have brought them here. And in the countless feet of you, our dear Nigerian Sisters and Brothers, who have never become tired over all these years to receive us with such fraternal love and patience, magnanimity and hospitality, and by your visits to our places of work, life and worship in Switzerland and Germany, whenever possible.

Since 50 years now our feet have walked side by side - not as strangers, but as members of the household of God - to jointly explore new ways that God in his mercy shows us.

And now we are back again, back to the roots: back in Gavva, where our journey together began. Back again even together with some of those committed Christians whose feet have covered the Mandara mountains around us 50 years ago - together with Werner Schöni, Lydia Flachsmann, Franz Leutert and the many other women and men from Basel Mission who came after them, preaching under the trees of Gavva, Ngoshe, Amuda and Kamba, building schools and delivering health services and thus sharing the good news of the Gospel in word and deed with those who were thirsty for the Living Water.

On Easter Monday 1963 the first batch of 8 men was baptised by Werner Schöni in the Kamba river in Ngoshe; among them a young man by name of Gwama Kumba Dasa, who is since being called Filibus of Ngoshe and today EYN president.

Much water has since flown down the Kamba river. And the Ekklesiyar Yan'Uwa a Nigeria has meanwhile grown into a lively independent church, reaching out into nearly all parts of Nigeria.

"Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit" (Zech 4:6), was the motto of the Basel Missionaries, and whenever I read this motto at the entrance of our Mission House in Basel, I think of Gavva and of EYN. Not by might or power, but by the grace of our almighty God, the little mustard seeds, sown out in Garkida and in Gavva, have grown into a large tree, giving shelter to the birds of the air (Mk 4:30-32), to women, men and youth, to people of all tribes from small villages or in big cities, to lay and ordained, rich and poor, Christians and Muslims alike.

As mission 21 we feel deeply blessed by this rich history that binds us together and unites us over the limitations of space and time, both as individuals and as a corporate mission body. Through our fellowship we give witness to the dawning Kingdom of God that overcomes the brokenness and disruption within Nigeria, between Africa and Europe as well as in this tormented world as a whole.

Therefore this Golden Jubilee of our fellowship is more to me than merely an occasion for commemoration, as precious as it may be. Much more so I think it also ought to be a time of confirmation and renewal of our mutual commitment.

It is just this grateful look behind on the joint way of half a century that God has lead us together, in the fellowship of feet; it is just this wonder and amazement about the miraculous growth of the little mustard seed against all odds, that should help us overcome the temptation to stand still and merely eat the fruits that our mothers and fathers have sown. Instead it should encourage us anew to go out again, plant our seeds in the middle of the dry land and dare the impossible.

As mission 21 we are ready to cooperate with you in the further development of EYN structures, programmes, leadership and personnel capacities to further the growth and unity of the Church in all its diversity, to support the development of solid theological education in the Nigerian context, to empower women, fight poverty and HIV/AIDS, engage in ecologically sound and sustainable rural development and to further peace and reconciliation between adherents of different tribes, Christians and Muslims.

But fellowship is not a one-way-road. Therefore, beside our engagement in Nigeria, we are equally concerned in finding ways in the future to receive Ecumenical Co-Workers from Nigeria in Switzerland and Germany, for example in the context of the growing migrant communities in Europe. And we are working on the strengthening of both the continental and the international network of mission 21, like we do in the exchange between ZME and the womens work in Cameroon, or the sending of Dr. Safiya Doma as HIV/AIDS consultant to our partners of the Amity Foundation in China.

So let us trust in the miraculous growth of the small mustard seed.

Let us trust in the power of faith and mutual service within the one world-wide body of Christ.

And let us make sure that like we celebrate here today, our children will once look back on us with the same gratitude and wonder at what through our feeble human efforts the almighty God was able to achieve: "Ba ta wurin karfi ba, ba kuwa ta wurin iko ba, amma ta wurin ruhuna, in ji Ubangiji mai-runduna" (Zech 4:6).

Amin.