

## Past, present and future of the Kirchengemeinschaft

Today, I am honored to be here and a part of this blessing of the church for 25 years. From my dad, The Rev. Dr. Ralph Quellhorst, Conference minister of the Ohio conference 25 years ago, to me, today, as the Ohio Conference moderator. Sometimes God works in mysterious ways to share the good news. What a gift of grace from God.

### The past...

In 1981, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ declared a relationship of full communion (Kirchengemeinschaft) with the "Evangelical Church of the Union" (EKU). This church was the ancestral church of the many German-American pioneers who founded the Evangelical Synod of the United States, which is one of the United Church of Christ's predecessor denominations. In 2003, the EKU joined with other "United" and Reformed churches in Germany to create a larger body, the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK). So the Kirchengemeinschaft was transferred by both churches. We are listening to God and joining together in community and relationship.

In 1991, my dad was conference minister of the Ohio Conference, United Church of Christ, and knew of the Kirchengemeinschaft, that General Synod had voted on 10 years before. He had researched, where many of the churches in Ohio had descendants from, and realized that it was the Westphalia area. So he contacted Christa and they began to work together to set up the partnership. It is with great pleasure that I stand before you, as both my dad and my mom have been part of this forum, and my dad has spoken at this forum as well. My dad, has Parkinson's now and so it is very hard for him to talk, but I wanted his take on the beginnings. So I went to visit him and I asked him questions about why he worked to set up the partnership. He replied, "Historically, the Evangelical and Reformed Church in Ohio came from the Westphalia area. And because the Quellhorst family is from the area, and the family still farms here, I wanted the church in Ohio to be part of the wonderful faithful partnership." He talked about the many people that he had met through the partnership, and the trips that he had been on. He shared stories of the different forums and other gatherings. He even connected my family and myself up 8 years ago, so that we could travel to meet our relatives in the area. They live in Lavesloh.

So Christa, as you retire from the sub-committee and pass on the leadership, my dad sends his greetings and good wishes of many years of working together. I too wish to give you my greetings and best wishes for continued success. Blessings abound!

### The past to the present...

There are many present thoughts about the Kirchengemeinschaft. In the 2000's I was linked up with a pastor and his family. We were hoping to grow a partnership with our two churches, that didn't work out how we had planned. But the two families connected and continue to communicate together. In my local church now, we are celebrating 200 years, which for the United Church of Christ is a long time. There are not many churches in the UCC in the US that have been around that long. One of our services was to remember that we came from Germany and so shared the texts in German, and taught everyone Da Gnade geschieht. ( Because Grace happens) which has become our catch phrase.

I also think of all the camp counselors that have come from our partner church. Both my sons, AJ and Andy, who are now 26 and 23, worked at our church camps for many summers. The friendships that they have made with different young adults. They have spent time in our house, my boys would bring them home with them for their time off, or take them to whatever they were doing on their time off. AJ came to Germany for 2 months a couple of summers ago to study at Heidelberg University, before he started he spent time with one of those camp counselor's and his family. They have now become family. The communication between my sons and the young adults who have helped to share God's love at our camps is a great partnership of the present.

I also think of the young ambassador programs that are going on right now. The one group that traveled to Germany this year and the one that traveled to Ohio. The friendships and the learnings have been so wonderful and faithful.

I so enjoy hearing about the partnerships with the different churches, the ones in Ohio and the ones in Germany. How each have figured out what works for them. Some that are long term and some that are new. I believe that when we learn about each other, and each other's cultures, we grow better in God's world.

At the Ohio Conference annual gathering it was so great to meet Christel and to hear her speech on the refugees. It broadened my horizons and reminded me of what the church is and to be about. I believe that some of what we do today is what my dad and Krista envisioned when they chatted 25 years ago.

Being a Quellhorst, and attending Heidelberg University in Tiffin, Ohio, I have always been interested in Germany and the German culture. So to be here and learn and speak has been such an honor for me.

From present to future...

I look to the future with hope. Hope to build relationships that will continue to grow and flourish. Hope that builds faith and opens eyes and doors to God's love and grace across walls that divide. Hope that calls us to live in the ways that love calls us to. Hope in opening ourselves to new experiences. Hope to be filled with the love that God fills us with.

Grace United Church of Christ in Lancaster, Ohio, is my congregation. They send their greetings and their love as we are the church together in this world. One of my future hopes is to have my congregation become a partner with a church in the Westphalia area. My congregation feels the blessings of the church and works hard to be a missional church. Grace is a progressive church in a conservative area, that lives into its mission, *Experiencing God's grace, Seeking God's mission, Sharing God's love...*

Broadening our horizons, living into God's mission and love in our lives and through our faith community is a wonderful way to share God's grace in the world. When we open ourselves up to include others, and when we learn new ways, or different ways to become friends, it opens our eyes and hearts. So for the future, I would like to grow relationships, to be open to new ways to be the church, the Kirchengemeinschaft together.

From past to present to future, our story, God's story continues to fill us. Blessings and hope surround us.