

Our “Missionsblatt”¹

The “**Missionsblatt der Hannoverschen ev.-luth. Freikirche**”² was established on the 1st January 1899 by Pastor **Conrad Dreves** from Hermannsburg (Small Church of the Cross³). Later pastor **Friedrich Wolff** from Bleckmar became its editor from 1915-1920⁴ before inspector of missions pastor **Adolf Blanke** took over from 1920-1950. The latter tried in great faithfulness to provide thorough information concerning the general development in South Africa and published mission reports from other areas of mission besides those by our own missionaries.

With this edition our “Missionsblatt” starts **a new series**. The **editor**, who was called by the Board of missions is **new**, although he has been familiar with the “Missionsblatt” since his childhood. He was permitted to publish his first articles on mission in this newsletter as schoolboy and then as student. He later served many years in the Bavarian mission. At the start of his new service he requests all those, who know themselves responsible for this “Missionsblatt” to join in the prayer: “**O Lord help! O Lord let this endeavour succeed!**”

The **task** set for the “Missionsblatt” now is also **new**. This publication is not only to preserve and keep those churches, congregations, pastors and individual friends already supportive of Bleckmar mission connected with our mission work in South Africa. Rather it is to reach out beyond these supporters in the Lutheran Free Churches and promote this mission work amongst heathens even amongst those friends, who can’t give up on this work for the Lord’s sake, but who have in the mean time been hindered and even prevented to continue in their previous mission work of their own churches due to ecclesial decisions, choices and developments there. Lutheran mission amongst heathens as a work and service of the Lutheran Church must be free from all those ties and obligations contrary to the Confessions⁵. Sadly these wrongful ties handicap, tie down and threaten to eventually strangle the Lutheran faith and confession in the newly formed Union Church in Germany⁶. Our Witness for the freedom of the unrestricted Lutheran Confession has by God’s will made us very lonely people. Yet we are confident, that God’s promise also rests on this our church distress and strain. Thankfully and joyfully we want to make use of every opportunity to overcome the temptation of church **isolation**⁷ by the blessings of genuine Church **fellowship**. Because by God’s Grace our free Lutheran Churches are united in Church fellowship on the pulpit and at the altar, therefore we link our hands and commit ourselves

¹ This is the first editorial by Rev. Dr. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf as written in the “*Missionsblatt Evangelisch-Lutherischer Freikirchen*” 1(1951)43 Pages 3-4, which he edited for the next decades.

² This was the title of the Hannoverian Evangelical-Lutheran Free Church’s Newsletter on missions. The emphasis is found in the original even if it was not in bold print, but rather in wider spacing of the typos.

³ “*Kleine Kreuzkirche*”

⁴ These were the years of the 1st World War.

⁵ The Lutheran Confessions as found collected in the Book of Concord of 1580.

⁶ This is the EKD = *Evangelische Kirche Deutschland*, which Hopf here calls “*gesamtdeutsche Unionskirche*”.

⁷ He uses the word “*Einsamkeit*”, which refers back to his “very lonely people” a few rows back. To make this reference obvious, it should perhaps read: “to overcome this church loneliness...”

to ardent service in **cooperation**, wherever it is possible. The Lord of the Church has opened doors and levelled pathways for this in the mission amongst heathens. Now it is necessary to give up holding back and hesitating. New tasks should not deter us nor should we be afraid of new possibilities either even if they seem to surpass our capacity by far. Rather we should get to work confidently. Our “*Missionsblatt*” is to help with this. That is its new task.

Therefore the “*Missionsblatt*” also has a **new** name: “***Missionsblatt Evangelisch-Lutherischer Freikirchen***”⁸. This name reflects the character of our mission. It is not the matter of some club or society, but rather it is the mission of the church⁹. That is why this new collaboration was agreed upon in an orderly fashion by most of our congregations, dioceses, districts and church councils. That is why this “*Missionsblatt*” can only be the newsletter of these **churches**, which are united in this mission work. We do not say, that this is the “*Missionsblatt*” of “the” or “all” Lutheran Free Churches. However, our decision to work together in this mission of the Lutheran Free Churches amongst heathens is founded on the conviction, that we **may** not only go this route of a confessional mission as an option due to the confessional grounding of our church, but rather we **must** follow this obligation as a given and mandated course. May God the Lord help our mission of Lutheran Free Churches, that it may operate in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions both in word and deed, in faithful doctrine and appropriate living both here at home and way beyond our narrow borders!

This is the intention of our “*Missionsblatt*”. With this confessional prerequisite it starts off on its new endeavour even as it remembers the fatherly admonition by the blessed church dean¹⁰ **D. Rudolf Rocholl** 52 years ago. When the first edition of the “*Missionsblatt*” of the Free Church appeared, he wrote the following in cordial greetings dated the 6th January 1899: “The young ‘*Missionsblatt*’ is to have some fine greetings from the Rhine too. Otherwise we’d deny the comradeship among us. We take special care to take note, as it is but a young, delicate child that’s running about now and knocking on doors. If somebody would indeed answer its call and open the door, it would reach out it’s little hand, expecting ten or twenty pennies.... Dear little brother of mine, if somebody would dare to shut that door in your face, still you may not fret or care too much! No, you are to be a child of peace. So go on and continue running unbothered.... Today very many are going about this business in hastiness and hurriedness. You too can’t relent, but must invest lots of effort. You will have to run extra hard in sunshine or rain. Still do not be afraid.... Remember that often a rather small and delicate child has flourished and matured even when just fed on meagre rations. Bread alone grants red cheeks¹¹. Don’t be put off by the high and mighty. Go your way. Remain friendly to all and in that way, you will not lack. You have a high calling. That gives confidence.”¹²

⁸ Literally translated as “Mission Newsletter of the Evangelical-Lutheran Free Churches”

⁹ “**Kirchenmission**”

¹⁰ “Kirchenrat”

¹¹ Perhaps a reference to the popular hymn of Paul Gerhard with these words: “Er gibt rote Wangen oft bei geringem Mahl...”. Remember that bread was the staple food in Germany, like corn/mielie porridge here.

¹² “*Missionsblatt*” of the Hannoverian evangelical-lutheran Free Church 1899, Nr. 2