

Burden, work and joy in the mission service¹

Five of our seven missionaries are advanced in age. All of them are overwhelmed by work, that they don't get to composing extensive reports. **Superintendent of missions Christoph Johannes** describes his working week in which illness prevents him from writing. The reader of the "Missionsblatt" can get an idea of this as he reads his restrained account of the countless burdens, which weigh heavily on him year on year. They should consider however that the other brethren are similarly weighed down. We can't just expect extra-ordinary experiences in these mission news. Still we can be grateful for the positive "signs" like the occurring conversion of heathens, new baptisms, celebrated mission festivals and the confirmation that native Christians are coping with the challenges of the new faith in living and dying in their heathen environment. The merciful God grants these to us, because he bears our weakness and therefore he sometimes allows us to catch a glimpse, that some of it "fell on good ground" and that our work is "not in vain in the Lord". Regrettably we too often imagine, that every mission report should recall such visible miracles and wonders. This necessitates conversion and the realization that even in the Christian mission amongst heathens we are walking **by faith and not by seeing**. That means: It is enough, that we hear of the silent, faithful sowing taking place on God's lands both by foreign and indigenous servants². The knowledge is sufficient, that the faithful stewards of God's mysteries in the orthodox³ Church are going on and on dispersing seeds of God's pure Word and His unsullied sacraments. We are content to trust God's unfailing promises concerning the effectivity of such ministrations: some fell under the thorny bushes, some on hard rock, but some brought forth fruit for blessed eternity. If our missionaries are forced to report on very many disappointments and if not many visible success stories are evident, if some histories sound deterring and discouraging too, then we want to encourage our brothers on the mission field: Please copy us on these your many burdens and share the heat and affliction of your daily work!

Superintendent Johannes describes his service in the work on his mission station "Salem" of 3, 727 souls in 1949⁴. He writes: "Of course this did not happen overnight. When I took over from my father, the long-time pastor and teacher of the German Lutheran Congregation Wittenberg had already gathered some 300 Zulu-speaking people besides his congregation. On the 1st January 1908 he inducted me into this congregation after our old superintendent Prigge had ordained me on the previous 18th September 1907 on Goedehoop. The farm "Salem" was bought and then the church was erected first. It was consecrated on the 4th Advent 1908. In 1939 this church was expanded to attain its present size. The nave was 26 meters long and 11 meters broad without belvry and sanctuary. The old church then became the transept and the entire building formed a massive cross. Yet, let us first return to the time of the beginnings. Before the church was built in its original and simple form and the divine service had thus found its centre, the congregation had until then be gathered in various carriage houses on surrounding farms. In 1909 the parsonage was built and then

¹ Pages 14-16 in the "Missionsblatt" 2 (1951) 43. This is a report by the inspector of missions Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, who has taken a letter by Superintendent Christoph Johannes (Salem, S.E. Transvaal) and transcribed it for the 2nd Missionsblatt edited by him. Translated by KPPW Weber on this 9.5.2016.

² He calls them: "Black and white workers"

³ "rechgläubige"

⁴ That was the year the great War ended.

we proceeded step by step: Outbuildings, school, further enlargements and outbuildings for the expanding school and then finally the Seminary for evangelists followed.

Besides this external **growth the work** also expanded outward in outreach beyond congregational borders: 1908 Salem had one out-station, now (1951) it has nine. The missionary stationed at Salem now has served two further stations for more than 30 years already. These stations previously each had their own missionary. The first is **Mabola** with 718 souls and four out-stations. Second was **Etshondo**⁵ with 370 souls and two out-stations and one preaching post. If we add this all up, the superintendent serves 4, 825 souls on three mission stations and 15 outstations. That's nearly 20 different places to serve with preaching and the administration of the Lord's supper and baptisms. These places are about 10-90 kilometers away from Salem. 40 years ago there were no bridges nor roads either. My means of transport was a bicycle, which I had brought along from Germany. Later on my work would have been impossible if I hadn't obtained a donkey cart and still later a car even. This was an answer to prayers. Without this the expansion would have been impossible. Lots of time was saved this way.

How is this service covering so many kilometres possible? For some years now **missionary Karl Meister** also lives on Salem. He was sent out 50 years ago. He came from the Lutheran Church in Prussia.⁶ He is in charge of the Seminary and besides that he helps our Superintendent in numerous ways despite his age. There are also **17 native co-workers** on the three mission stations and substations. Several pastors, who excelled in their service have already passed on to the heavenly homes. One was serving on the mission station Mabola. He had a stroke and died shortly afterwards. Such a loss is hard to bear and its even harder to find suitable substitutes. Salem has eleven Evangelists, Mabola three and Etshondo two. What is their work? Every parish has a catechist or co-worker in charge. They conduct school in the indigenous language⁷. They teach children reading, writing, Luther's Catechism, biblical stories and singing. He visits the ill and shut-ins, buries the dead, conducts emergency baptisms, which he then reports at the first opportunity. Normally however, he will call for me. Sundays he will conduct the divine service. The service of the native co-workers needs constant supervision, council and support by the missionary. The catechists and co-workers regularly come to Salem every Friday morning. We work through the sermon passage for the coming Sunday and I give them guidelines for the sermon. Then we discuss those things, that have come up in their weekly service on the outposts. We see, where advice is needed and also which weapons are called for in the opposition to the sectarians and other malefactors. These mornings are my favourite time of the week. I can assist and help, but also learn to understand the native way of thinking and doing and thus together be strengthened in our partnership and cooperation in missions and church work. They don't only learn from me, but I also learn a lot from them and this in more than one way too, but especially for my own preaching and work at caring of souls.

There is a plan regulating the **Sunday service of the Superintendent**. According to that he can only be in Salem to be present there himself each **third Sunday of the month**. This then is the Sunday, when most congregants try to be present in Salem too for that is the Sunday with Holy Communion. On the other Sundays either missionary Karl Meister or a native conduct the divine service as Superintendent Johannes is on the road as he tries to be present at each substation at least every

⁵ This was previously called "Quellwasser".

⁶ Kreuzburg in Selesia in the parish Konstadt.

⁷ isiZulu

Quarter. Every two months and every second high holiday Johannes is at Etshondo. Since the native pastor fell ill on Mabola, Karl Meister and Christoph Johannes now alternate to be there every first Sunday of the month to conduct the full divine service with the Lord's Supper too. On three of four Sundays in the month Superintendent Johannes can visit two stations, conducting the first service at 9h00 and the second at 12h00. The other substations however need an entire Sunday. Besides the regular divine service, the superintendent holds many consultations, which deal mainly with church discipline. This is quite tiring, that he's rather spent on Sunday evenings. During the week he regularly conducts confirmation class in the morning and in the afternoon he takes time for weddings, communion service for shut-ins, funerals etc. Then he also has to preach on numerous mission festivals, because every congregation delights in its own celebrations and expect the brass band to come from Salem too.

These reports make us grateful, but they also call us to take up our responsibility for this mission service rendered by our brethren. We confess before God and men, that it is the work of the confessional⁸ Lutheran Church.

⁸ Hopf writes: "Free Lutheran Church" i.e. free from state- and other non-ecclesial interference.