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Liebe Leute

Hier kommt ein Sommergruß der besonderen Art. Traditionell war das Fest der Apostel Petrus und Paulus am 29. Juni der Tag für Priesterweihen im Bistum Regensburg. Für meinen Vorgänger, Bischof Fritz Lobinger jährt sich dieser Tag am Sonntag zum 70sten Male. Man muss nur alt genug werden, 96, um das zu erreichen.

In dieser Zeitspanne ist viel geschehen. Zu seinem 96. Geburtstag erschien ein Artikel von mir in der südafrikanischen Kirchenzeitung, „The Southern Cross“. Etwas bearbeitet habe ich den Text unten beigefügt (sorry: auf Englisch).

Dieser Tage war mein Nachfolger, Bischof Joseph Kizito, kurz zu Gast in Deutschland. Er konnte erzählen, wie vieles, was Fritz Lobinger mitgestaltet und eingeführt hatte, weiter besteht: Die kleinen christlichen Gemeinschaften, das Bibel-Teilen, die vielen Leaders, für die Aufgaben in den Gemeinden, das Gemeinsam-Verantwortung-Tragen durch synodale Gesprächsformen, die allerdings nie so genannt wurden. Ein Problem benannte Bischof Joe ganz klar: durch Abwanderung gerade junger Menschen versiegen im Hinterland gerade in kleinen Gemeinden die menschlichen Ressourcen.



Soziale Fragen lagen Bischof Fritz schon lange am Herzen. Früh startete er das AIDS-Büro in der Diözese. Wir erweiterten es dann zum Aliwal Diocese Welfare and Development Committee, weil so viele Probleme entstanden. Um den Namen einfacher zu machen, schlug ich damals vor, das Ganze unter der Fahne von Caritas laufen zu lassen. Das hat sich gut weiterentwickelt – leidet aber auch unter der ersatzlosen Streichung einiger internationaler Mittel. In Hannover konnte Bischof Joseph die Caritas besuchen – auch mit der medizinischen Versorgung von Migranten in Zusammenarbeit mit den Maltesern. In der südafrikanischen



Bischöfskonferenz ist er für die Migranten zuständig. Auf der Herreise hatte er noch an einer Tagung in Äthiopien teilgenommen, die dieses Problem auf afrikanischer Ebene aufgriff. Von dort berichtete er, dass sich viele nicht vorstellen könnten, dass die Flüchtlingszahlen innerhalb Afrikas die Zahlen in Europa wie Zwerge erscheinen lassen. Der Einsatz geht also weiter.

Herzliche Grüsse in den Sommer und:

Herzlichen Glückwunsch und Dank an Bischof Fritz. Dein Leben ist ein Glücksfall für die Menschen, denen Du zu Diensten warst!

The Bavarian Xhosa-Bishop – He'd do it all again



In his last email to Bishop Bucher (formerly of Bethlehem, SA), Bishop Fritz Lobinger wrote in his Bavarian German dialect "mia dadns wiada!" – we would do it again.

What would he do again? The life of a priest, now at the age of 96 in its 70th year. To live out something worthwhile, an opportunity to participate enthusiastically in the ultimate and daring creativity of God for the sake of his people. His motto as bishop reflects this: *But all of you are brothers and sisters.*

Already as seminarian he, Oswald Hirmer and Hubert Bucher – all three of them eventually became Bishops in South Africa – urged their reluctant Bishop of Regensburg to release them for the missions. Arriving in the Diocese of Aliwal in 1956 he used his sharp and attentive mind to explore Xhosa-Culture and language, pastoral practice, always comparing and learning also from other denominations. One might assume that his favourite punctuation mark was the question mark.

The people gave him as nickname *umXhosa*, and honoured him with the clan-name *umGcina*. For they had witnessed his dedication, respect and serious insertion into the local culture. Involved in the translation of the Xhosa-Missal he and their team relished the opportunities for meaningful inculturation when translating Prefaces, the Blessings and the Great Doxology at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer in an excellent example of dynamic equivalence, powerfully capturing the meaning or message.

His high esteem and respect for the people could be seen in his consultative approach when introducing the Pastoral Plan a year after his episcopal ordination. To get their benevolence towards some profound changes he created forms of meetings and used methods that could well be understood as fully fledged synodal procedures, three decades before Pope Francis surprised many by approaching Synodality in participative and spiritual ways.

Lobinger turned his biography into a bibliography. Countless Books, training manuals and articles in periodicals reflect his dedication to the development of qualified participation of the laity in many leadership roles. Involved in the long period of developing the Pastoral Plan of 1989 – *Community Serving Humanity* – he unfolded what he found in a sort of cross-fertilization when researching the just emerging Small Christian Communities in East Africa.

He addressed many “churchy” issues, but within the context of apartheid in South Africa he had a great concern for matters of social justice not just in publications and training material of the Lumko Institute. He got involved in addressing serious conflicts within the diocese and trying to broker solutions.

One of his outstanding themes was the research and reflection on the possibility of ordaining suitable, proven people emerging from mature communities so that the Eucharistic celebration can contribute to spiritual strength. He researched sister Churches that already implemented such move. Here is a prolific writer from our South African ranks who did in depth studies – and published even illustrated books weighing thoroughly the implications, a reminder of the methods used by Lumko Institute. He even suggested ways how to go ahead – and endured that little was taken up.

When I visited him not too long ago in Mariannhill, I received an email by Professor Zulehner from Vienna, with whom Lobinger published on this topic, saying *“You and Bishop Erwin (Kräutler from Brazil) are a vanguard of church politics. The church as a whole is predictably slower, but without scouts the promised land would not have been reached.”*

The apostles became daring only after Easter. Lobinger lived this apostolic tradition. Even “blue Mondays” were transformed into creative sessions, looking for the best outline of pending workshops or for most suitable fitting words in publications – to advance the Mission of Christ in the most comprehensible and participatory way. He balanced work and life in daring and authentic ways. As to illustrate this he did not hesitate on an outing to venture across the narrow top of a high dam – something I avoided for fear of falling down. Indeed, now frail he has been a man, a priest of trust, not only in God, but also in the people of God, in his co-workers, and in life.

He would do it again!

