

CELEBRATING THE COLOURFUL CHURCH

INTRODUCTION.

Honour, praise and glory be unto God our Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ our saviour and to the Holy Spirit our comforter. Greetings in the name of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. I bring greetings on behalf of your sisters and brothers in the Baptist World Alliance family. This is our global movement of Baptists sharing a common confession of faith in Jesus Christ, bonded together by God's love to support, encourage and strengthen one another while proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit before a lost and hurting world. We celebrate the fact that we continue to grow and the BWA membership now stands at 232 conventions and unions in 121 countries and territories comprising 42 million members in 177,000 churches.

Our focus areas as the BWA family; are nurturing the passion for mission and evangelism; promoting worship, fellowship and unity; responding to people in need; defending human rights and justice; and advancing relevant theological reflection.

I am honoured and thankful to God to be invited to your assembly and to share with you. As the BWA family we are thankful to God and we always value contribution of the Baptist Union of Germany in the life of the BWA. As we see the challenges that we face in the world today let us hold hands and use our world Baptist network to serve the Lord. We need each other more than before. I pray God's blessing upon the mission every congregation in the Baptist Union of Germany and I wish you a successful assembly.

I wish to encourage with these few words under your theme: "Colourful congregations - marveling at Jesus Christ an one another."

Act 13:1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. **Act 13:2** While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

The creation story in Genesis tells us that God is the author of creativity and diversity. In Genesis 1:11-12 and 24-25 we read that God created vegetation and all other living creatures to be different. The diversity in the vegetation and other living creatures is a revelation of God's greatness. We look at nature and animals and we marvel at the

beauty. The beauty is not only in the what we see, but it is also in how nature is so inter-connected. And we as people are the crown of God's creation. We are created in the image and the likeness of God that means we have in us the appreciation for diversity.

So, when we fail to celebrate the diversity we have failed to see God in action. The text says that in the church at Antioch there were members with diverse gifts, diverse nationalities and different backgrounds. All those people belonged to this one congregation. The Bible says that while they were worshipping. That means they were in the spirit and the mood of worshipping, praising God in songs and prayers. These were Jews, Africans, Greeks, Romans and other Middle East nationals they together under the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What do we learn from this text?

1. Those who celebrate diversity do not worry about the difference.

When we celebrate the diversity, which reveals God's beauty we do not dwell on how different we are. The church in Antioch focused on the ministry and not the differences in the congregation. They saw the grace of God in the church and not different nationalities, tribes, or ethnic groups. The colourful congregations are a manifestation of the grace of God. It is the cross of Christ that brings us together under that unity of the Holy Spirit. The Churches that are not open to other nationalities do not reveal the work of Christ at the cross but they reveal the evidence of sin and fallen nature.

2. The church in Antioch benefited from the diverse gifts from each member. God has gifted each nation and tribe differently. We need each other because together we are more powerful and strong. Colourful congregations are not only a marvelous sight but they are a channel of God's power. It is a witness to the divided world.

3. When we celebrate the diversity then we begin to experience the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. Those who dwell in the negative cannot hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. When we celebrate the colourful and diversity in the body of Christ. We learn to accept one another in love then the Holy Spirit will manifest in our celebration. The Holy Spirit will send us out to the world. God cannot send out people who are unhappy to the already hurting world. Unhappy people celebrate on what looks like them. When the church allow the Holy Spirit to lead her to the place where colour, creed, language and nationality does not become a barrier. Then the church has seen and realize the grace of God. Paul the apostle says this grace is sufficient even to make us overcome the worse barriers in life. Colourful congregations is Christ in us the hope for the world.

With the grace of God upon, with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ in us we celebrate the colourful congregations -marveling at Jesus Christ in one another. Amen.