



Free Church of the Seventh-day
Adventists Hanse-Vereinigung KdöR

To the communities and groups of
the Hanseatic Association

Hamburg, 20.12.2023

A letter from the pastors of the Hanseatic Association

Dear sister, dear brother,

The topic of "LGBTQ+" is currently being discussed with great commitment in our congregations. For many brothers and sisters, the publication of the book "queergedacht" and the September issue of our church magazine "Adventisten heute" gave us the opportunity to express our views. Very different points of view were expressed, ranging from clear approval to emphatic rejection.

During a conference in September 2023, it also became clear that we as pastors do not all agree on this topic. But it is important to us to listen to each other and try to understand the different arguments, learn from each other and treat each other with respect. In our view, it is not so much the difference of opinion that is the problem, but how we treat each other. And that is the reason for this letter.

As we will always have to deal with tensions, we believe that a way of interacting that is characterized by love and appreciation is absolutely necessary instead of increasingly heated discussions. Especially when dealing with complex issues, we need non-violent communication and a joint struggle for answers that resolve tensions and do not exacerbate them.

Unfortunately, we see that we have arrived at a poisoned relationship with each other as a result of all the events (mutual condemnation, distancing ourselves, forming camps) and we observe with concern how attempts have been made in the past to "conquer" positions, brothers and sisters and spaces instead of keeping Christ at the center of our actions and treating each other with respect. And so we miss a respectful, friendly and Christian approach to each other in some statements, as well as a fraternal goodwill at congregational, association and also federation level.

Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the state of Bremen KdöR, in Hamburg KdöR, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania KdöR, Lower Saxony KdöR and Schleswig-Holstein KdöR

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Mutual condemnation, defamation and slander - in writing or (remotely) verbally, whether publicly or personally, in the church or towards all our leaders - turns us away from the Christian path. We recognize in this a lack of love and a lack of fellowship in Christ. We therefore clearly reject such a path and do not wish to follow it any further.

As pastors of the Hanseatic League, it is important to us that we discuss issues with one another in an atmosphere of acceptance and common struggle. As Adventists, we see the Holy Scriptures as the only standard for our faith. However, we also do not want to ignore the latest scientific findings. The findings of science have always enriched the reading of the Bible, as they have clarified the depth of God's plan and work for us. We come from a common past of discourse in which we have always wanted to come to new and deeper biblical insights. For this we need faithfulness to the Bible that is **not restricted by church traditions**. A faithfulness to the Bible in which we allow the Word of God to have a **new effect** on us. A faithfulness to the Bible that, like the attitude of our pioneers, includes the **freedom to approach biblical texts with an open mind in order to gain new insights**. We need a discourse that is based on the trust that we will struggle together in prayer for answers without condemning.

Unfortunately, we have not managed this well so far, we have made mistakes. And so we sadly and painfully confess before God, the congregations and the Free Church that we have not yet succeeded in dealing with the current topic and with each other in a constructive and spiritual discourse. We have not succeeded in **presenting differing positions** in a balanced way and enduring the tension that this entails. In the awareness that our identity in Christ is undeservedly granted to us by him, we now humbly take our seats at the Lord's table. And where we have made ourselves doorkeepers and advocates in his name, we confess our guilt and are grateful for his liberating willingness to forgive us all.

We therefore do not want to deny or even question each other's identity in Christ. For God has called us leaders, whom we have confirmed in our trust in God. And so we are called to encourage and support them. We all have a responsibility to deal with them honestly, to uphold them in prayer and to encourage and strengthen them in their ministry (Eph 6:18f).

Unfortunately, we have not yet succeeded in promoting this attitude in our congregations with far-reaching consistency as a pastorate and as congregations. Through excessively harsh, verbal formulations, some of which have abandoned all Christian decency, we as brothers and sisters in faith have become guilty of the leaders commissioned by us and called by God, as well as their families. We have also sinned by remaining silent and by not taking sufficient care of our sisters and brothers in crisis.

We therefore appeal to all those involved in the current and future discourse to align their words and actions with the biblical word in Romans 12:9.10:



"Let love be unfeigned! Abhor evil, hold fast to what is good! Love one another with all your heart as brothers and sisters. Surpass one another in esteem."

And so we consciously promote heartfelt loyalty to God and to the appointed leaders at all levels of our church, and we promote service in the kingdom of God that is based on loyalty, mutual appreciation, a willingness to forgive and constructive reinforcement.

In union with God's spirit, this should be an expression of our attitude towards each other!

The pastors of the Hanseatic Association of the
Seventh-day Adventist Church
