

## The BFP in Germany

### **Beginnings of the German Pentecostal Movement**

**A**mong Bible believing Christians in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century, there was a great desire and longing to experience a deeper relationship with God. Along with this desire many questions were raised concerning the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Christian publications at that time featured articles with titles such as, “Dear Brothers, Let Us Speak With New Tongues!“, and “God Is Suffering Because There Is Not A Pentecostal Blessing“.

A 1905 Evangelical Conference in Brigg featured the theme, “Did the First Church Grieve the Holy Spirit?“. A repentance movement ensued among the conference participants that spilled over into their respective home churches.

In that same year a cross denominational revival broke out in the city of Mülheim located in Germany’s industrial Ruhr Valley. Nightly meetings continued for six weeks resulting in the conversion of three thousand people.

The Evangelical Alliance, headquartered in Bad Blankenburg in central Germany, hosted annual meetings which were attended by Christians from various denominations. Dr. R. A. Torrey was the keynote speaker in 1906. During Torrey’s ministry many received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and later some of these believers became pioneers in the German Pentecostal Movement.

#### **How Pentecost Came to Germany**

In 1906 the Norwegian Methodist Thomas Ball Barratt went to the United States to raise finances for his Oslo City Mission. He was not a successful fund raiser, but did attend the Pentecostal meetings at Azusa Street in Los Angeles. Barratt did not receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in Los Angeles, but did receive it sometime later alone in New York, as he prepared to return to Norway.

After arriving in Norway, he began holding special meetings, and many received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Anges Teile and Dagmar Gregesen were Norwegian school teachers who attended Barratt’s meetings and later traveled to Kassel, Germany, in 1907 to share their Pentecostal experience.

In Kassel, as in Norway, revival broke out as many received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Sadly though, due to the lack of experienced leadership, this revival turned into emotional excesses which eventually forced local authorities to close the meetings. In spite of the excesses in Kassel, many people who visited from other parts of Germany took their Pentecostal experience to their home churches. The experiences of these believers were the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement in Germany.

As previously mentioned, many German believers were longing for a new move of the Spirit and praying for revival. At the same time, many leaders in the established churches vehemently rejected this move of the Spirit, due in part to the excesses in Kassel and other points of misunderstanding.

Resistance to the Pentecostal movement in Germany gained momentum, bringing about an organized opposition that reached its peak with 56 respected Evangelical leaders signing the Berlin Declaration on September 15, 1909.

#### **Exerts from the Berlin Declaration:**

- This so-called Pentecostal Movement is from below (satanic influence), and is therefore the result of demonic activity in which Satan intertwines truth with lies.
- It is impossible to recognize this movement as sent from God.
- The Church of God in Germany must reject this movement.
- The issue is non-Biblical teaching from the above statements.
- We believe there is only one Pentecost. We do not expect a new Pentecost. We are waiting for the soon Return of Christ.

This declaration would be the basis for anti-Pentecostal prejudices that influenced the entire Evangelical church for a century. Only in recent years have Pentecostals been allowed to work with other Evangelical churches within Germany. In 1996 the Kassel Agreement, signed by leaders of the BFP and the German Evangelical Alliance, restored this broken relationship. In spite of the Kassel Agreement, still today many Evangelical are skeptical of the German Pentecostal movement.

### **A Brief History of the BFP**

Between 1906 and 1908 several churches were founded, that still today are a part of the Pentecostal movement in Germany.

The oldest churches in the BFP are located in Berlin, St. Ingbert, and Velbert.

In 1922 the evangelist Heinrich Vietheer established the “Berlin Tent Mission“ and began planting Elim Pentecostal churches. Later other independent Pentecostal churches joined his fellowship.

U.S. Assemblies of God missionaries Herbert Schmidt and Gustav Kinderman directed the efforts of the Danzig Bible school beginning in 1928. Through the influence of this Bible school the Pentecostal message expanded in Eastern Europe amongst Germans, Poles, and Russians, resulting in the formation of the Freie Christengemeinde fellowship.

Evangelist Karl Fix began ministering in Berlin during 1934, and later moved to the Province of Württemberg in Southern Germany. Karl Fix along with Karl Keck and Paula Gassner worked to establish the Volksmission church fellowship. All the above mentioned church fellowships today make up the BFP, including many other local independent churches of varying background.

### **Repression and War**

In 1938, due to the political repression of the Nazi regime, the Ehm churches affiliated with the Baptists and Darbians, forming the “Bund Evangelisch Freikirchlicher Gemeinden“ (Union of Free Protestant [Baptist] Churches).

In 1936, the Berlin “Free Pentecostal Mission“ led by Benjamin Schilling and Erwin Lorenz was forced to close (verboten) by the Nazis.

The results of World War II were disastrous for Germany, bringing mass destruction, expulsing millions of people from their homeland, and costing millions of lives. This led to the dissolving of

many Pentecostal congregations in the East, as well as the destruction of numerous church buildings.

Interestingly enough, German Pentecostals who were expelled from their homelands in East and Southeast Europe, became the founding members of many new congregations throughout modern Germany.

### **A new beginning**

The BFP traces its beginnings as a denomination back to the “Erweiterte Brüderkonferenz“ (Conference of the Brethren) during May 1947 in Stuttgart. This conference was attended by 25 people.

Due to the chaotic conditions in Germany after the war, there was a new desire by various Pentecostal leaders to seek fellowship and closer cooperation.

As a result of this desire for closer cooperation among various Pentecostal churches, the “Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Christengemeinden in Deutschland“ (ACD) was constituted as a non-profit organization in 1954. The Bible school, located first in Stuttgart then in Erzhausen, was established by Assemblies of God missionaries in 1951. It played an important role in bringing about unity in a divided Pentecostal movement.

After the establishment of the ACD, various ministries were launched, among them:

- Leuchter Verlag (publishing house of the ACD)
- Velberter Mission (foreign missions)

Many years later other ministries would include:

- Royal Rangers (for boys and girls together)
- Aktionskomitee für Verfolgte Christen (ministry to persecuted Christians and worldwide relief)
- Bibelunterrichtswerk (teaching materials for local churches)
- Neulandmission (pioneer church mission)
- Bundesverband der Sozialwerke Freikirchlichen Pfingstgemeinden (the umbrella organization within the BFP for various social work type ministries)
- Bundesjugendwerk (national youth department)

In March 1974, the state of Hessen granted the ACD the much sought after higher legal status of being a “Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts“ (Cooperation of public jurisdiction). Hessen is where the Bible school and headquarters are located. In 1982, as a result of this new legal status, the name of the ACD was changed to “Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden KdöR“ (Union of Free Pentecostal Churches), or in short BFP.

In May 1988, the Volksmission with churches located primarily in Southern Germany affiliated with the BFP. In 1991 after the fall of communism, thirteen Elim churches in East Germany affiliated with the BFP. These churches were Pentecostal already back in the late 30s when they joined the Baptist Union due to Nazi repression. In May 2000, thirty Ecclesia churches affiliated with the BFP.

As of September 2009, the BFP had 751 churches with over 45,000 members and 50,000 adherents. One third of BFP churches are international churches. Approximately 80% of the international churches are African congregations.

## **Reports in the Pentecostal Evangel 1933 -1937**

### **Swastika Doctrines - December 30, 1933**

Brother G. Kinderman writes to us from Danzig concerning the religious body known as "German Christians," who are endeavoring to control all evangelical bodies in Germany today. He gives a quotation from Dr. Wieneke of Berlin, who is a leader in this new movement: "Many are expecting the government to work out a new creed. The government would not think of it, but rather demands that man should begin to comprehend what was meant by the old creed: I believe in God the Father the Son, and the Holy Ghost. In order to understand the Apostles Creed in the present day, it is necessary to substitute different words for God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, namely, Nature, History, and personal Life." "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith." 1 Tim. 4:1.

### **Pentecost in Germany - May 18, 1935**

Brother Donald Gee has just visited Germany. He reports a very happy meeting in Leipzig where there are 400 members. At the Sunday afternoon meeting about 750 attended and twelve found Christ. He was warned not to speak against the present government in Germany, and that Nazi detectives would probably be attending the meetings. He writes: "Our Pentecostal brethren have no difficulty in accepting the present regime up till now. There are many admirable traits in Herr Hitler, and he has undoubtedly done much good to his country which they are not slow to recognize. The official greetings from all railway and other workers now is never 'Good day' but always 'Heil Hitler,' with the salute." The Pentecostal Brethren are recognized by the German government and have the same standing as the Baptists and Methodists. He reports a most helpful conference in Berlin, attended by 30 to 40 Pentecostal pastors. Each afternoon there were crowded meetings in one of the nine Pentecostal assemblies of Berlin and each night a great gathering at the ornate "Concordia Hall." He writes: "The singing, praying, preaching, and everything was thoroughly 'Pentecostal'."

### **Good News for Germany - September 7, 1935**

Pastor Martin Gensichen writes from Berlin: "In the Lutheran church of Germany a new movement has begun. The ministers are defending Bible truth and the churches are filled with people seeking the truth of the Gospel according to the teaching of Martin Luther and the Reformers. I believe this will develop into a new reformation of the Lutheran church. There is also a new spirit of prayer in our Pentecostal churches. We are praying for another world-wide outpouring of the Holy Spirit and for a worldwide revival, as the coming of the Lord is so near. In some Berlin churches we are having prayer meetings everyday in the forenoon."

### **Protestants Imprisoned in Germany - September 4, 1937**

"Another crisis has arisen in the German Church by the arrest and imprisonment of Pastor Martin Niemoeller, the outspoken Evangelical Church leader, who has bravely and consistently opposed the adoption of the new Nazi religion inside the Christian Church and vigorously protested against the persecution of the German evangelicals," says the Christian Herald. "During recent months, twelve eminent German Protestant ministers have been put on trial, charged with disobeying state decrees, and two other pastors have been fined \$250 each or thirty days' imprisonment."

"The imprisoned Pastor Niemoeller addressing a special service of protest last April declared: 'Christ Himself is regarded as a public enemy,' and indicating the attitude of those who are with

him in his protest he stated on the last Sunday in June, when speaking of the latest arrests which so nearly preceded his own: 'It remains and will remain ... that God ought to be obeyed rather than men.'

"Occupying the pulpit at Dahlem, Berlin, in the place of Pastor Niemoeller, Otto Dibeus, defied the secret police by declaring: 'Like Paul, Pastor Niemoeller is in prison, and we can do little but beg that he may have strength, and pray God to give him a strong heart.'"(As this goes to press, we hear of the arrest of four more evangelical pastors.)

## **Division of Foreign Missions Report in the early 1960s.**

### **The Assemblies of God Contribution**

The Pentecostal church in Germany is a national work with national leaders. Assemblies of God ministers have gone to Germany to take their places beside the German brethren and to help where needed to produce an effective furtherance of the gospel. The cooperation which exists has been particularly significant in the training of young men for the ministry, in the Sunday school and literature programs, and in evangelism. The German Branch of the Assemblies of God, U.S.A. also, has rendered valuable assistance to the work in Germany.

The only Assemblies of God minister in Germany immediately after the war was Gustave Kinderman. Because of the extreme physical need in Germany at that time considerable emphasis was placed upon relief work. Many tons of clothing and food were distributed and hundreds of families were assisted to immigrate to America.

In 1948 Mr. Kinderman was joined by Mr. & Mrs. John Lindvall. The years 1950 and 1951 brought a number of American ministers to Germany: Mr. and Mrs. Walter Waldvogel, Mr. and Mrs. B.T. Bard, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Wilhiscroft, and the Misses Victoria Schott, Emma Decker, and Olga Olsson. Mr. and Mrs. John P. Kolenda arrived in 1953. The arrival of additional ministers of the Assemblies of God, U.S.A. brought an expansion of the work and a stronger emphasis upon other phases of ministry.

### **Bible school**

The great need for trained pastors and evangelists to answer the many calls for ministry and to establish new churches in the larger centers of population, led to the recognition of the need of a Bible school. Under the leadership of B.T. Bard a school was established in 1951 in Stuttgart. When John Kolenda arrived in 1953, he became director of the school. In 1954 the school was moved to Erzhausen, near Darmstadt, where the construction of new quarters was undertaken by faith. With much sacrificial effort on the part of Mr. Kolenda who supervised the construction, also students and others who worked with him, a plant has been constructed officially appraised at \$140,000, yet its cost is only one half that amount.

The main building which is a three story structure has accommodations for seventyfive students, apartments for faculty and workers, office space, and room for an expanding printing plant and publishing house. On the campus are also three other houses, a carpenter shop, garage, and ample space for future construction.

Realizing the need for more trained workers to consolidate the results of evangelism, Evangelist Willard Cantelon felt he wanted to have a share in the strategic missionary ministry of the Germany Bible school by raising funds toward the cost of the building. Mr. Cantelon took time out of his busy schedule to raise thousands of dollars for this project.

At present the faculty of the school consists of three German teachers: Erwin Lorenz, Conrad Lemke, and Richard Breite, and three Americans: John P. Kolenda, Paul Willisroft, and Olga Olsson. Other Americans who have contributed to the success of the Bible school are Walter Waldvogel, and Emma Decker. Seventy-eight students have completed the two-year course -at Bibelschule "Beröa." Many of these men are filling positions of increasing responsibility in the Pentecostal work in Germany. Two of them are now teachers in the Bible school and at the same time are serving the entire fellowship in the editorial and Sunday school departments. Some have experienced outstanding success in pastoral and evangelistic work. Three are missionaries in foreign fields. As workers become available new churches are being organized. Each new church adds another link to the chain of Pentecostal witness in Germany.

### **Sunday School Program**

After conducting Teacher Training classes in 1950, Walter Waldvogel recognized the need for adequate Sunday school materials. He translated and produced in mimeographed form the Primary Teacher's quarterly, along with visual aid material. Two years later Paul Willisroft was given the task of promoting a Sunday school program. The Beginner, Primary and Junior Teacher's quarterlies and Junior workbook are now available, together with colored visual aids. The Teen Teacher and Student quarterlies are also being published. Printing plates for the off-set presses are kept on file for the entire series of lessons. When the lessons are repeated after two or three years, as the case may be, these plates are again used and no preparatory work is needed.

Under the capable leadership of Paul Willisroft the workers of the Sunday School Department conduct Sunday School Conventions and Teachers Training course, not only in Germany, but also in Austria, and in the German-speaking section of Switzerland. The program is bringing about the use of improved methods and materials, resulting in larger Sunday school attendance, and many more souls won for the Lord.

### **Printing Program**

The printing program started in 1953 with the printing of the Sunday school lessons on a small off-set press in the Bible school office in Stuttgart. Through the help of Speed-the-Light a printing plant with modern equipment is now in operation. Three off-set presses, complete photographic equipment for making plates, and other machines as well, are in use. These presses produce not only large quantities of Sunday School literature, but a monthly church paper, young people's magazine, and hundreds of thousands of tracts. With the many open doors in Germany the Assemblies of God is challenged to an all-out effort to help put gospel literature into the hands of the German people.

### **Evangelism**

Germany also presents an open door for extensive evangelism through tent meetings, and revival services conducted in churches and rented halls. Thousands of people have responded to the call for salvation; large numbers have testified to God's healing power, and hundreds have been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Great blessing has come to Germany through the ministry of a number of American evangelists. Among them: Mr. and Mrs. Willard Cantelon, who spent several summers in effective tent evangelism, and Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Garr who worked with the Cantelons. Mr. and Mrs. Richard Ruff, and Harold Herman, devoted several summers to successful tent campaigns in Berlin. (The Ruffs are now engaged in evangelistic ministry in Germany, Austria and Switzerland) Olga Olsson, now assisting in the Bible school, also spent several seasons in evangelistic work. The meetings conducted by Mr. and Mrs. Martin Busse in 1958 were particularly successful in the number of young people who accepted Christ. A.C. Lane gave two extended periods of ministry in churches and tent meetings. Mr. and Mrs. E. T. Quannabush also spent one summer in tent evangelism.

## **Servicemen in Germany**

This pamphlet would not be complete without reference to the ministry being carried on among servicemen stationed in Germany. In the fall of 1955, after having had considerable ministry among servicemen when the Bible school was located in Stuttgart, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Williscroft called a conference of servicemen. The first Servicemen's Retreat brought in men from all over Europe. A similar gathering was held the following year. Since then three retreats have been held in excellent army facilities in the Bavarian Mountains, with an attendance reaching nearly 300. Fellowship meetings, with excellent response, are held on holidays at the Bible school. Contact is maintained with many small groups of Pentecostal servicemen who meet together, usually once each week, at the various bases where they are stationed. Through these contacts these men are encouraged in their stand and testimony for Christ.

## **Sharing the Task**

An urgent need is support for the Bible school students \$25 per month. Wages are so low that few students are able to save sufficient funds for even one year of training; those from behind the Iron Curtain are completely without money. Future progress of God's work in Germany depends upon available trained leadership. The large population centers can only be reached as men, called of God and consecrated to His service, are trained for His work, and go out to proclaim the message of salvation.

Another urgent need is funds, either gifts or loans, for the construction of church buildings. Local lending institutions do not loan money for church buildings, and it often takes years for a congregation to gather sufficient money to buy a lot on which to build. Rented halls and school rooms being used for services are often crowded to capacity, with no other facilities available. Any expansion of the work will be greatly curtailed unless the need for church buildings can be met.

## **How the BFP views Itself**

The founding fathers of the BFP viewed their fellowship as an "umbrella" under which various Pentecostal groups could cooperate and fellowship together. The underlying notion implies that as the Pentecostal movement in Germany becomes more unified, the German people will be reached more effectively with the Gospel.

The BFP has always tried to avoid the establishment of a centralist authoritarian structure that simply dictates policy.

Unity in the body of Christ is very important for the BFP, and great **effort is put** forth to work and cooperate with other Pentecostal and Charismatic groups. This desire for unity carries over to other free churches in Germany, with which many BFP churches work together locally in the Evangelical Alliance.

The BFP is a member of the Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen (Association of Free Protestant Churches).

The following is a list of denominations who belong to the VEF:

| <b>Denomination</b> | <b>Membership as of 2000</b> |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Baptists</b>     | <b>86,700</b>                |
| Methodist Church    | 37,418                       |
| BFP                 | 34,604                       |

|                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Free Evangelical Church | 32,078 |
| Mennonite Church        | 6,000  |
| Mülheimer Church        | 2,900  |
| Salvation Army          | 1,505  |
| Nazarenes               | 1,100  |

#### **Associate Members**

|                             |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Seventh Day Adventists      | 35,687 |
| Herrnhut Moravians          | 6,729  |
| Church of God (Pentecostal) | 4,800  |
| Church of God (Evangelical) | 2,200  |

#### **Total VEF membership**

|                             |         |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| including associate members | 251,721 |
|-----------------------------|---------|

According to the VEF, there are about 188,000 members in other free churches including independent charismatic and evangelical churches in Germany.

The VEF estimates that there are a total of 856,446 adherents of free churches throughout Germany.

Some local BFP churches as well as BFP Districts have a working relationship with the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen Deutschland (National Council of Churches).

#### **Baptism**

Generally there is a longer preparation time before baptism in European churches than in the States. Many churches wait months before baptizing new converts because of their Lutheran or Catholic ties. Also, many new converts need time to decide whether they are willing break with the State church. Before baptism it is recommended that new converts officially deregister from

the state church. Many churches in Germany connect water baptism with membership according to Acts 2:31.

### **Church Membership Transfers**

It is very common in Germany to give members who join another church (Evangelical or Pentecostal) a letter of transfer (Überweisung). Also, when new members want to join your church it is appropriate to request a letter of transfer from their previous church.

### **Communion**

Communion in Germany may be served with wine or grape juice. Some churches offer a choice of either one. Communion may be served in individual glasses, or as the common cup. Some churches serve communion only to their church members.

### **Music**

In German churches at least 90% of all worship songs and choruses have been translated from English. You will find even the latest English worship music translated into German.

## **BFP Organizational Structure**

The BFP has a congregational form of church government with the local church being autonomous but not independent.

Elders provide leadership for the local church, whereby the pastor is usually the “leading“ elder. Some churches have a Gemeindeleiter (lay church leader) along with the pastor.

The BFP is governed by an Executive Presbytery (Geschäftsführender Vorstand) which is made up of the following 8 offices:

- Superintendent (Präses)
  
- Two Assistant Superintendents
  
- Secretary (Bundessekretär)
  
- Treasurer (Bundesschatzmeister)
  
- Three officers at large

These officers are voted on at the same time every 4 years during the Bundeskonferenz (General Council). The executive presbytery meets approximately every 6 weeks.

The BFP Präsidium (General Presbytery) is made up of the Executive Presbyters and all District Presbyters (Regionalleiter). The District Presbyters are usually full-time local church pastors. They are elected every four years. The Präsidium meets two to three times per year.

The Bundeskonferenz (General Council) is made up of all credential holders including church delegates. Church delegates are allotted according to church size. The Bundeskonferenz convenes one to two times per year making decisions relative to the entire movement.

The Regionalkonferenzen (regional conferences) have been established to strengthen relationships amongst churches and ministers at the state level. The regions assume responsibility for evangelism and church planting in their respective areas. In recent years more and more responsibility is being turned over to the Regionen (regions) as the BFP grows at the national level. Some larger regions have divided themselves up into Distrikte (sections) for more effective fellowship and cooperation.

### **BFP Financing**

Each local church is required to support the national general fund by paying a fixed amount (Gemeindebeitrag) per member per month. As of the printing of this manual, 2,05 Euro per member per month is paid by the churches in East Germany and 3,10 Euro is paid by the churches in West Germany. A smaller amount is also paid by each local church to the BFP regions to help facilitate ministry.

### **BFP Youth and Children Ministry**

The BFP has established the Bundesjugendwerk which is the national umbrella for Royal Rangers, Kid's Alive (children's ministry) and Youth Alive (youth ministry) in Germany. Under this umbrella each region has in place a Landesjugendwerk which coordinates Royal Rangers, Kid's Alive and Youth Alive at the state level.

At the national and state level there are various seminars and conferences for workers to facilitate effective ministry in the above mentioned areas at the local church level. Also, most regions offer camps and retreats for youth and children, along with special one-day rallies.

## **Partnering with the BFP**

As of the writing of this manual, there are 36 AG missionaries and missionary associates working in Germany.

AG personnel work in the following areas: ICI, literature development and distribution, church planting, US military and international church ministry, university ministries, marriage enrichment, MK schooling, Teen Challenge, teaching ministry, and Bible school instruction.

During the 70s' two churches were started in Germany through the efforts of AG missionaries (Worms and Munich).

During the 80s' four new churches were planted (Mainz, Saarbrücken, St. Wendel and Neustadt).

Of the 60 new churches started in the 90s within the BFP, 12 of these were planted through AG missionaries. Following a list of these cities: Neuwied, Potsdam, Buchen, Moosburg, Bad Tölz, Rostock, Görlitz, Hoyerswerda, Losheim, Gera, Weiswasser, and Norderstedt. Six of these works are in former E. Germany.

Since 2000 Assemblies of God missionaries have planted, or assisted others to plant churches in the following cities. East Berlin, Eisenach, Erfurt, Bad Dürkheim, Dresden-Gorbitz, Kamernz (Saxony), and Dresden-Prohlis.