

#17/GW#3

Letter from Danzig to Russia. May 1789

Gerhard Wiebe Diary pp. 165-168

Translation by Dorothy and John Friesen, Winnipeg (2020)

In Danzig there was a meeting of our 4 churches regarding the Russian emigrants in order to discuss sending an *Aelteste* to go and care for them. So, with support from the other bishops and the entire assembly, the Danzig bishop Pet. Epp, calmly accepted with God's leading to undertake the journey there. What he especially desired was an assistant of the gospel to be his traveling companion.

Thereupon the following letter to the Russian church was prepared.

In the Danzig city district
May 24, 1789

Worthy co-workers of the gospel
And dearly beloved brothers in Christ!

To the church of God, the sanctified ones in Christ, the chosen holy ones, together with all those who call on the name of the Lord J.C. Grace be with you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!

After these well-meant and hearty wishes, we have reason to greet you with the customs and teachings of Sirach (in chapter 51): Be joyful in the mercy of God and be not ashamed to praise him – for God in his grace has heard your prayer, and has provided the request you asked for. Yes, beloved Brethren, it has pleased the highest authority to move the hearts of this church here, so that it was led to provide for your spiritual needs; so that in empathy and complete trust in God (whose grace was also evident here), it unanimously agreed to the emigration of your beloved bishop.

This morning we came to this conviction at a large brotherhood meeting, and after the honourable bishop Regier had delivered a moving presentation on Acts 16:9 and 10, we brought this important matter in prayer and supplication to the Lord. We hope that God's spirit has been with us and has provided this important decision to your great advantage, to which this beloved bishop, through God's leading, has become convinced that the Lord has called him to go there to preach the gospel to you.

Beloved, give thanks. The Lord our God, who in His grace has seen your spiritual needs, has laid upon the bishop's heart your invitation; and also upon the individuals who initially were not completely of one mind (although with sorrowful eyes) to agree to consent. Honour and praise be to Him for this for ever. Amen.

But now, dear brethren, upon checking with the church, we consider it necessary to underline that permission for the beloved bishop to make this difficult trip completely alone, was granted on the basis of the following three conditions. Dearly beloved, you will be able to understand the fairness of these conditions, since by fulfilling them your love both for this man, and for us, will become clearly evident.

First, since the Church here, although with heavy hearts, agreed to the emigration of its beloved bishop, and was only persuaded to take this difficult step in order that you should no longer be orphaned, this decision was made on the basis of the following condition. After he has provided the spiritual assistance, built the walls of Zion in order to make the necessary arrangements for the position of *Aelteste*, dearly beloved, that you, with willing hearts and the peace of God, will allow him to return home to us again. Dearly beloved, you will more quickly accept this, since you yourself will be convinced, because we will have to be without our dear bishop for a long time.

Secondly: dearly beloved, with respect to the anticipated journey, which you accepted with greatest readiness, and toward which you committed 180 # in three different dates, in increasing portions, we are requesting dearly beloved in the name of the church to improve the friendly offer right at the beginning: so that the sum of one hundred and eighty # will be deposited in one posting, that is at one time, at a local business office. As soon as the same has been received, dearly beloved, you can depend on the early departure of our beloved bishop. The sooner the same will be deposited here, the sooner, dearly beloved, you can rejoice in his departure.

According to our calculation (God willing) that could happen in six weeks. And this, our official request, will surely be sincerely granted by everyone, for everything is done with the best intent.

Thirdly: When the Lord has given His blessing on the successful return of the beloved bishop, as well as on the extensive organizing of the spiritual household, the local church here is assured that the same dearly beloved will have fully achieved your urgent needs – you will also be responsible to provide all essential necessities for your, as well as our, dear man, on his (God given) successful return journey, so that he, under God's protection, and accompanied by many well wishes, will have all expenses forwarded to you. Until then, and until his safe return, the office of bishop will be vacant.

Also, dearly beloved, based on your love for him and us, we have full confidence this quite modest request will be quickly accepted with willing hearts, like the bishop did when he accepted care for your spiritual Zion.

May God, however, who has called our beloved co-worker of the gospel over there with his holy call, accompany him in his time, healthy and happy in place and space. And may He allow this important effort to be a blessing to your hearts in praise of His name. Finally, beloved brethren, rejoice, be perfect, comfort each other, remain united, live in peace so that the God of love and of peace may be with you; the precious peace with which we all, and the whole church, greet you as commanded by God, abiding in true brotherly love.

Dearly beloved.

Fellow servants and brothers in Christ. Also signed by 40 brothers.

Signed by the following:

Peter Epp, Dirk Tiessen, Gerh. Wiebe, Corn. Regier, Anthony Woelke, Corn. Warkentin, Corn. Epp, Peter Tiessen, Jacob de Veer, Gerh. von Bergen, Joh. von Bergen, Hans Momber, Gert Bachdach, Corn. Tocking, Joh. Kauenhowen, Daniel de Veer.

* A rotated # sign is used to designate the currency used.