

H.-G. & M. Hoprich & Family
Jacob Rauschenfels–Gasse 8/10
A–7000 Eisenstadt
AUSTRIA
Tel. / FAX: +43–2682–76021
Mobile: +43–664–55 44 021

e–mail: Hans-Georg@Hoprich.at
SKYPE ID: HansMaggiHoprich
Internet: <www.DMGint.de>
<www.beg.or.at>

<www.facebook.com/hansgeorgmargret.hoprich>

<www.johannes-rebmann-stiftung.de/en/missionaries/hoprich.html>

TT – ‘Travelling Together’ (64)

“AS FOR ME, IT IS GOOD TO BE NEAR GOD.” (Psalm 73 v 28)

Dear Friends,

November 2014

It was a very special evening when the majority of the FORUM workers assembled on Austria’s National Holiday (26th Oct.) to put in place some concrete measures concerning the future of the “Eisenstadt FORUM Free Church” and the next steps which need to be taken. With the confirmation of the church constitution the church planting phase is complete. On 21st November – at the annual delegates’ gathering – we will be recognised as the first church in Burgenland belonging to the Association of Evangelical Churches (BEG). The first applications for church membership have already been received! The **addition of two committed families** has given great support for the youth work team and the music group.

You will find an attached **picture taken during our church family holiday**. We are **SO encouraged by all this and our THANKS go to the LORD of the church who has heard your prayers and ours!**

We are not the only ones here in Austria who are planting churches! New churches are coming into being in: **Telfs** (Tyrol), **Enns** (Upper Austria), **Deutschlandsberg** (Styria), **Hollabrunn** (Lower Austria) and **Seestadt Aspern** (Vienna).

Aid for refugees in Turkey – Half the population of Syria has fled!

Every day we are receiving dramatic reports and shocking pictures of endless streams of refugees from Iraq and Syria! These people are fleeing into neighbouring Turkey from war, violence and atrocities. Often they have nothing more than the clothes they stand up in. Many of the refugees are disillusioned by the majority religion, they are afraid to have any further contact with it! This has led to the **Turkish authorities specifically asking the few Christian churches in the region to assist**. These were ready to respond straightaway, although it was clear to them that it would be an overwhelming task. In spite of that these Turkish brothers and sisters wish to help in practical and spiritual ways!

The number of Christians in the whole of Turkey is estimated to be about 4,000 out of a population of 80 million...

Whoever wishes to support these brothers and sisters in their refugee aid projects can get in touch with us.

Family News

Our **fifth grandchild** is on the way! **SEBASTIAN** and **ANNIE** are looking forward to the arrival of their first child in May 2015. Up till now the pregnancy hasn’t run completely smoothly and they would both be glad of any support in prayer!

Recently **DAVID** celebrated his **30th birthday**... with a wonderful surprise party lovingly planned by his wife **CLAUDIA**.

ANNIKA really enjoys being part of the new FORUM youth group! As part of her nursery teacher training she spent a week at an establishment for the disabled. It made a deep impression on her!

In retrospect...

We covered many miles during our travels in October and we experienced God’s safekeeping! We were blessed with many encouraging meetings with church fellowships and visits to see friends! At the first ‘**FORUM Ladies’ Café**’ held on 11th Oct. (with a talk entitled “Before it gets too much for me”), the busy team welcomed 30 visitors. The next similar event is already being planned. We are receiving totally positive reports from our **short-term missionary workers around the world**, even from Nadina in Ebola–stricken Guinea Conakry! Please don’t forget these young people in the various countries where they are working. **We THANK YOU so much for your support during the past weeks!**

Our outlook for November

6th Nov.: ‘Eisenstadt Christian Lecture Meeting’ with the very well known Christian politician Dr. Gudrun Kugler

8th Nov.: **Morning:** talk in **Modra, Slovakia**, at a big missionary conference on: “**Experience of Short-Term Missionary Work**”. **Afternoon:** talk at the “Café 50 PLUS” at the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Parndorf (Burgenland, NE of Eisenstadt) on: “**Grieving is a Journey**” (Hans-Georg) (**SEE ATTACHMENT: “Condolence with Hope”**)

15th Nov.: Ladies’ breakfast, 9am at Vienna Meidling Evangelical Church: “The main thing is to be healthy... isn’t it?” (Margret)

16th Nov.: Preaching at the Eisenstadt FORUM (Hans-Georg)

18th Nov.: Important discussion between the Eisenstadt FORUM and the Burgenland Lutheran superintendent, the local protestant vicar and a church leadership representation from Eisenstadt

21st/22nd Nov.: Annual delegates meeting of our Association of Churches (BEG)

29th Nov.: Meeting of the FORUM leadership team

This should give you a little insight into the many things that are happening this month.

In all of this we depend very much on God’s strength and wisdom..! THANK YOU in anticipation of your support in prayer! What a privilege it is to have your ongoing commitment!

Yours in His service,



Hans-Georg, Margret & Annika

DMG interpersonal e.V., Buchenauerhof 2, D–74889 Sinsheim, www.dmgint.de/about-us.html

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CONDOLENCE WITH HOPE

Interview in 'ethos' (German language Christian magazine)
Edition 11/2013 Pages 12–15

Daniela Wagner speaks to Hans–Georg and Margret Hoprich

Introduction

Originally Hans–Georg and Margret Hoprich trained as an electrical engineer and a nurse respectively.

Following theological training at All Nations Christian College in England (www.AllNations.ac.uk) they went to Papua New Guinea as missionaries with 'DMG interpersonal' (www.dmqint.de/index-en.html).

Out there they were involved in training and church planting on the island of New Britain. They have been working in Austria since 1998 (still with DMG). Right from their early months in Austria they have both been involved in the important task of arranging and conducting Christian funerals ('Condolence with Hope').

Also they are responsible for the 'Foreign Missions Team' (TAM) in the Association of Evangelical Churches of Austria (www.BEG.or.at/Teams/Auslandsmission) and for church planting work (www.FORUM-Eisenstadt.at) in Eisenstadt (Burgenland at the eastern end of Austria).

They have five children, Benjamin (34), Sebastian (32), David (30), Manuel (27) and Annika (17), three of whom are married.

The Hoprichs have four grandchildren.

As Christians, Hans–Georg and Margret see their ministry to their fellow people as being literally 'from the cradle to the grave'.

They talked to 'ethos' about what is behind the 'Condolence with Hope' ministry.

How did you first get involved in conducting funerals?

Hans–Georg Hoprich:

It was through Rita, a dear friend from our church.

She died a year ago and is now at home with the Lord. ('ethos' published her testimony in August 2012: "When everything else collapses...".)

A friend from her school days is a funeral director here, and so we built up a contact with him.

The first request came out of the blue on 6th December 1998, when we weren't that long back from Papua New Guinea.

In mid December we conducted our first funeral by Lake Neusiedl. It was a very frosty day – minus 20°C.

Margret Hoprich:

My fingers were freezing on to the guitar strings as we sang the final song, 'My Times are in Your Hands' at the graveside.

Since then there have been hundreds of funerals!

Do you need any training or can anyone conduct funerals?

Margret and Hans–Georg Hoprich:

Actually anyone can do this here in Austria. However, it is a great advantage to have a background in counselling or some form of relevant qualification.

Here there are even funeral directors who arrange the funeral service and conduct it themselves.

You stress repeatedly that only those who have had the experience of being comforted can comfort others.

What does 'genuine comforting' mean in your lives?

Our comfort comes from our personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the knowledge that even in difficult situations, with the loss of loved ones we have a living hope, through Him who as the first one to go through death and defeat it: Jesus.

His resurrection is the best witnessed fact in world history.

In what situations did you need to be comforted?

In 1972 Margret's father died totally unexpectedly at the age of 46.

Her mother was suddenly left with four children.

Margret was 16 and her youngest sister was barely two years old.

A lot of comfort was needed.

Also in our time as missionaries in Papua New Guinea we were very dependent on God's comfort.

Our oldest son Benjamin, who was nine at the time, became seriously ill.

The doctors couldn't find the cause and gave us to understand that his brain had been affected, and as a result he would not live beyond the age of 13.

We, and many believing brothers and sisters spent many hours in prayer for him.

The comfort we experienced was immense.

In the middle of this very difficult time there was, for example, a whole tribe who came to faith in the Lord Jesus.

The sickness brought years of uncertainty, but in God's school we learnt two important lessons:

1. When we are weak, in despair and not able to see the way ahead, then God is certainly still at work.
2. This experience made us sensitive to people in need.

So we can now pass on to others the comfort which we ourselves have received.

How do you stand regarding your own death?

Have you made any preparations?

Our wish is to be ready to go at any time, reconciled with God and with other people.

A year ago the Reverend Rolf Scheffbuch died – he was the vicar who took our wedding service in 1979.

He was a faithful supporter right to the end.

Way beyond retirement age he still served the Lord Jesus tirelessly, right to the end.

In the midst of it all he fell asleep peacefully.

It would be lovely to go in this manner – who wouldn't wish it!

Other 'earthly preparations' should include making a will.

What is the aim of the kind of funeral which you hold?

First and foremost it is about giving hope and strength from God's Word to those left behind.

So we would like to provide a dignified form of service and to look back over the life that has been lived.

A 'Christian Funeral' as such is not mentioned in the Bible.

A Christian farewell service should reflect the hope and comfort which we have received in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are offered the opportunity to encourage people faced with death to change their ways and redirect their lives.

With non Christians we are very careful what we say in the ceremony and at the graveside.

We do not wish to spread lies or give false hope.

We encourage the family and friends by directing them to God's righteousness and grace.

What are the preparations for funeral service of this kind?

Saying the final farewell to a deceased person is an important part of working through grief.

The support of those left behind is therefore of great significance and it requires a lot of sensitivity.

In our meeting with the mourners to arrange the service we listen carefully and build up trust.

Then we discuss the things which need to be organised.

We take on board the individual wishes as we plan the ceremony together.

“Everything fades to a dark question mark, if it is not illuminated by the light of the resurrection.”

As you meet the family to plan the funeral, do questions regarding their own death come up?

Are there opportunities to speak of real hope?

In the countless meetings that we have had with families who have lost a loved one, the conversation has only ever been about the deceased.

Speaking of one's own death is still a taboo subject and is avoided.

In any case we have observed that during the funeral that the mourners become very quiet when they see the coffin or the urn containing the ashes.

We give every bereaved family a written 'portrait' of ourselves, so that they know who we are.

Often we share our personal testimony or talk of the experiences we have had with the Lord Jesus.

You support those left behind who do not have any religious convictions.

Do you find that people become angry when you wish to speak to them about God?

Angry, no, but instead they simply refuse to have any Christian content in the ceremony.

This will go to the point of not even having the 'Lord's Prayer' said at the graveside, as the whole family have not stepped inside a church in generations.

It is important for us that people take note that this is not about church piety, a style of belief, theological differences, sects etc.

Jesus is alive and we can experience Him.

That's what it's about!

It is with love and truth and a completely natural style of faith that we wish to win people over.

Can you outline the format of such a funeral service?

The format is never exactly the same.

As well as verses from the Bible there are prayers, songs and hymns, organ music, the life story of the deceased, the procession to the graveside...

Often we introduce ourselves briefly, as in this rural area a non-denominational funeral is very unusual. The mourners are wary and are puzzled who the people are taking the service and speaking in an unfamiliar German dialect.

At the end of the address we stress that this special time could be crucial for eternity.

We invite people to make a personal decision, to confess their sins and turn to Jesus and so to be ready for their own death.

We try to explain the difference between religiosity and having a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A lot of this can't be taken on board by the friends and family of the deceased because of the pain they are going through.

After the funeral we give them a transcript of everything that has been said and the words of the songs and hymns.

This gives them the opportunity to read through it all later in the quiet of their own home.

At the close by the graveside we stay in the background and say goodbye – where possible – in person to the people in the congregation.

Many have questions...

What does the Bible say about death? After death is everything final?

Psalm 23

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." Psalm 116 v15

"The length of our days is seventy years – or eighty if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." Psalm 90 v10

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11 v25–26

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Romans 8 v18

“For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true (Isaiah 25 v8, Hosea 13 v14): “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory, Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of death is the law.

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 15 53–57

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”

2 Corinthians 4 v18 – 5 v1

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

1 John 5 v 12

“...man is destined to die once, and after that face judgement...” Hebrews 9 v 27

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” Revelation 21 v 4

Often at a church funeral it is suggested that Heaven is assured for everybody. From God’s Word we know this: only whoever says “Yes” to God’s loving offer of forgiveness in Jesus is a child of God and therefore an heir of His kingdom. Isn’t this an irreconcilable area of conflict?

Being saved is always something dramatic!

We try to find the clearest words as possible to inspire the mourners with the thought of heaven!

In any case we also say that there is an eternity without God for those who already wish to live without Him here.

God’s unconditional love for all people and the patience that He has in seeking them is our driving force. It is clear to us that our human words are not enough to reach people’s hearts if the Spirit of God doesn’t fill them with life and allows the truth to touch their hearts.

That’s why we always ask our friends to support us in prayer particularly when a funeral is taking place.

What ‘fruit’ have you seen from your work?

‘Fruit’ in the sense of conversions will only be known in eternity, it is rather a sowing of the Gospel of hope and a passionate invitation to come to Jesus.

What we notice especially again and again is that people have already heard about us and that trust is growing.

As a result of these funerals we have been invited by family members of the deceased, for example, to visit schools to talk about our work in Papua New Guinea where we also talk to the pupils about our conversion to the living God and give out Bibles.

Is there a particular funeral which sticks in your memory?

There was the unforgettable funeral of a well known young sportsman who was one of the leaders in his sport in Austria.

He collapsed while training and died shortly afterwards.

Like most of the people that we conduct funerals for he was without any church connection.

When we talked to his family to arrange his funeral we were faced with unimaginable hopelessness, grief and despair, especially in his frail elderly parents.

Their only son had only recently moved house so as to be near them in their old age.

Now he was dead.

Although they were religious, they didn’t have a Bible of their own.

It is a good thing that when we meet bereaved families to arrange the funeral we always take a small New Testament with us and where appropriate we read from it, write a personal dedication in it and give it to the family.

This gift is always readily accepted and this was the case with the father of the sportsman. When we approached him on the day of the funeral, he greeted us by saying, "Thank you so much for the little Bible".

He then took it out of his pocket and went on, "I have already read 37 pages and it has given me unbelievable hope and comfort!"

It was clear to us once again that God's Word is the real source of our hope.

It can be shared freely and encompasses life and death – for all people, in all places and at all times.

Thank you very much for talking to us.

We wish and pray for ongoing wisdom from God for you in this challenging work.