



# Daring!

The Anabaptist Movement  
1525-2025



A MOVEMENT-  
500 YEARS OLD

# Daring!

## The Anabaptist Movement 1525-2025

**“Daring! The Anabaptist Movement, 1525-2025”** reminds us of the Reformation movement in which many Christians as mature adults, consistently and with one mind, wanted to lead a life aligned with biblical standards and values. Their ideals were freedom of faith and nonviolence. They dared much and, for that, suffered persecution, forced migrations and discrimination. “Daring!” calls us to consider, following the Anabaptist lodestar, what being Christian means in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### A glance behind and ahead

2025 reminds those congregations and churches that stem from the Anabaptist movement of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century - or those others that profess a common bond - about the first Anabaptist baptism upon confession of faith that took place at the end of January 1525 in Zurich. Within the common name, “Anabaptist,” was hidden in the 16th Century a great diversity. Alongside the Wittenberg and Swiss Reformation, the Anabaptists constituted the third Reformation stream. Various groups such as the Mennonites, the Hutterites, the Swiss Brethren, the Melchiorites - and many other separate, mostly smaller groups - belonged to the Anabaptist movement.

Anabaptists lived, among other places, in the Netherlands and in Northwest Germany, in the Confederation (Switzerland), but also in the Palatinate, Bavaria, Hesse, Thüringen, Württemberg, as well as in Austria and Moravia. Also, Baptists and Quakers, who emerged in connection with the English Reformation at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, are ranked within the wide spectrum of Anabaptist churches. A colorful and compelling culture of remembrance traces its origins back to this diversity.



## A MOVEMENT – 500 YEARS OLD

The Anabaptist Movement of 500 years is a history of highs and lows, of emergence, decline and renewal, of debates, discussions and controversies, of courageous faith and feeble faith. This diversity grants the courage to reflect upon one's own faith, bringing it into ecumenical discussion self-confidently and with dialogical skill, and having the curiosity to learn to know the faith of others.

**“Daring!”** therefore focuses not only upon the past, but also asks about the meaning of the Anabaptist traditions for today and tomorrow.

### **“Daring! The Anabaptist Movement, 1525-2025”**

invites us on a five-year common path, to reflect on history, memory, tradition and heritage, in order to shape the today and tomorrow, and to establish ecumenical impulses.

Annual brochures will be produced, intended to stimulate reflection within discussion groups, koinonia groups, congregations, ecumenical groups and educational institutions, concerning the theme-year at hand. Exhibits, materials for schools and educational institutions, along with conferences, will illustrate and bring depth to the wrestling with the past 500-year trail of Anabaptist history. The theme-years will come to life through the involvement of churches, congregations, conferences, initiatives, study groups and educational establishments. The goal is, via the Internet, to report contemporary activities, resulting in a worldwide interconnectedness.

## The annual themes

### 2020: **Daring to live maturely**

Baptism – Freedom of the Will – Freedom of Religion

### 2021: **Daring to live together**

Equality – Responsibility – Autonomy

### 2022: **Daring to live consistently**

Oriented to Jesus – Nonconformed – Confessing Faith – Martyrdom

### 2023: **Daring to live nonviolently**

Peace Church – Resistance – Reconciliation

### 2024: **Daring to live hopefully**

Kingdom of God – Utopia – Renewal

**In the year 2025** commemorative events will take place, coordinated and sponsored by various institutions and networks of the Anabaptist churches, such as the Mennonite World Conference and the Baptist World Alliance.

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**The office coordinating all activities** concerning the annual themes is the society, “500 Jahre Täuferbewegung 2025,” located in Frankfurt, Germany.

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Theme-year

# 20

## Daring!

*“But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift .... In that way the body of Christ is to be built up until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine.”*

(Ephesians 4:7, 12-14a)

**W**ithin richly diverse Reformation-era Anabaptism, and in Anabaptist churches, freedom of religion and conscience was vigorously laid claim to. As persecuted minorities, Anabaptist congregations promoted individual freedom and the limiting of magisterial power in questions of religion, and thereby ultimately promoted self-determination as a fundamental right of each person.

## to live maturely

To live maturely means to be free in the faith in Christ. This includes the responsibility for self and for others.

### Challenges for today

The Theme-year “Daring to Live Maturely,” raises the question of what the unrestricted freedom of religion in a religiously pluralistic society can look like. Wherein lies the validity of standing in opposition to discrimination and the societal condemnation of people based on their religion and religious practice? Which impulses from within the Anabaptist tradition open up perspectives on human interaction for a just coexistence, fit for human beings?

Yet we must also ask, self-critically: Were not Anabaptist congregations often enough too greatly occupied with their own pious world of faith, and thereby not capable of reaching out cooperatively? Did not the Reformation impulse of living maturely and the freedom of the individual too often transform itself into authoritarian congregational structures? What does it mean today, as a society of mature Christians, to live and prove our faithfulness?

Baptism - Freedom of the Will - Freedom of Religion

Theme-year

# 21

## Daring!

*"All who believed were together and had all things in common."*  
(Acts 2:44)

*"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."*  
(1 Corinthians 12:27)

Out of the practice of faith-baptism arose within the Anabaptist movement a new image of church: Church is the fellowship of those who have voluntarily banded together, based on their faith-baptism. Recalling the original form of the church in the Acts of the Apostles, women and men fostered binding relationships and sustained one another. Individual groups such as the Hutterites even ventured into a common life together, which included community of goods.

As "grassroots-churches," they understood themselves to be autonomous local congregations, each responsible to regulate its own matters. Throughout the course of their history, this earlier practice, however, did not prevent Anabaptist congregations from creating hierarchies within their own fellowships which challenged equality for all. Moreover, an exclusive understanding of church could sometimes develop, bringing with it a restrictive separating from other church fellowships. Also, a rigid ban placed upon dissident believers by their own congregation resulted in painful separations and exclusions.

## to live together

In a "congregation of equals," all Christians enjoy the right to speak and to develop corporately the formation of congregational life.

### Challenges for today

In the Theme-year "Daring to Live Together," the concern is whether, and how far, the church-models of the Anabaptists can give answers to the challenges of a pluralistic society. How can solidarity and personal responsibility in the new forms of with- and for-one-another be practiced? Which impulses of binding fellowship manifest themselves today as sustainable?

How do we deal, today, with the increasing variety of religious expressions, denominational confessions and various forms of spirituality - and what does this mean for the with-one-another in ecumenical Christianity?

Equality - Responsibility - Autonomy

Theme-year

# 22

## Daring!

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* (Romans 12:2)

The Anabaptists of the Reformation era were convinced that the message of the Gospel and the proclamation of the imminent kingdom of God had to lead to a radical renewal of church and society.

Based on consistent orientation to the message of Jesus, many opted for a simple, nonconforming way of life and stood by their own convictions against the mainstream of public opinion.

According to the directives of the Sermon on the Mount, they rejected the oath and refused military service. Through this radical discipleship they came into conflict with the societies within which they lived. During those times when there was only one truth, and religious confession was dictated by the state, this nonconforming conduct led to persecution and martyrdom.

## to live consistently

Christians within the Anabaptist tradition do not swim with the stream but out of their bond to Jesus develop new and specific perspectives for their own lives and for the structures of society.

### Challenges for today

In the Theme-year “Daring to Live Consistently,” the motif reflected upon shall be what it means today to orient oneself to Jesus and his Gospel. What generates a “nonconforming” life-witness, personally and socially? Where have today’s Christians, through their orientation to Jesus Christ and his Gospel, risen up in word and deed as nonconformists?

In what way, however, can a radical discipleship and making ethical norms absolute also lead to exclusiveness, and to refusing to participate in the building up of society?

From where do Christians today receive the strength to lead a consistent life in the bond with Jesus?

Oriented to Jesus – Nonconformed –  
Confessing Faith – Martyrdom

Theme-year

# 23

## Daring!

*"You shall not kill."*

(Matthew 5:21)

To live nonviolently is a challenge for every Christian in his or her own personal life - in actions, talk and thought. Indeed, renunciation of force of arms, which has often been described as "nonresistance," meant, among the historical Anabaptists, not only simply to refuse military service. Underlying this were the convictions that viewed the nonviolent actions of Jesus as authoritative for one's total intrinsic lifestyle. The impulse to live nonviolently opened a broad spectrum of theological and practical-life aspects, which were also contentiously debated in Anabaptist congregations.

At the same time, nonviolence was often coupled with disengagement from society, with "separation" from the "world."

Implementation of nonviolence within everyday life brought with it ever-new questions for the Anabaptists, based on current circumstance. Whereas some refused to support the financing of wars through their taxes, other Anabaptists saw therein no conflict with their conviction to live defenselessly. Some traveled on trips with weapons in order to be protected against holdups; others refused to protect themselves through weaponry. The death penalty also gave rise to controversy.

## to live nonviolently

For Christians within Anabaptist churches, the nonviolence that Jesus taught means performing no services involving weaponry, renouncing retaliation, and not fending off oppressors and violent criminals forcibly.

### Challenges for today

In the Theme-year "Daring to Live Nonviolently," arises the question of how to deal with our neighbors in church and society. Does not freedom from violence begin in one's thoughts? How can nonviolence in thought, talk and action be brought into congregations and into the realm of human interaction worldwide - based on the Anabaptist witness of peace - in a good and fruitful balance?

In our current society the challenge does not lie in pulling back from violence, but rather in encountering violence with actions free of violence and with peace-creating actions. In more recent times, initiatives have developed regarding conflict resolution and mediation in political and inter-human crises and conflicts.

Peace Church - Resistance - Reconciliation

## Daring!

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth .... He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his people ... and God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.”*  
(Revelation 21:1,3-4)

Like so many Christians of their time, the Anabaptists in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century believed in an imminent end of the world. They reckoned with the inbreaking of the kingdom of God in the foreseeable future. Hence apocalyptic visions evolved in a few Anabaptist congregations, whereupon the chosen, through baptism by faith, were to be assimilated into the apocalyptic flock. Above all, the peasants and the simple populace were held to be the true instruments of God, the worldly powers having discredited themselves through exploitation, constant conflict and greed.

The benchmarks of the kingdom of God should be implemented and achieved within Anabaptist congregations. This they indicated by consciously separating themselves from the world through their disciplined lives, and by striving for the purity and sanctity of their fellowship. In the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster, 1534/35, the citizens of the city organized the “New Jerusalem” as a holy place and redemptive city of God. This “utopia,” however, led to radical divisions between believers and unbelievers, to the expulsion and persecution of dissidents, as well as to violent defensive measures.

## to live hopefully

Living hopefully means, in the light of God’s future, not to resign oneself to current existence but to discern the nature of power structures and their dependencies, and to devote all of one’s energies toward a just society of people, infused with peace and love.

### Challenges for today

In the Theme-year 2024 arises the question regarding the enduring potential of Anabaptist hopes and perspectives. Where do congregations find themselves today in the perennial interplay between tradition and renewal? Are we prepared to challenge our own heart-felt positions? Is it enough for us to reserve hope in God’s future for our own personal faith alone? Cannot the biblical images of hope inspire much more towards a modified way of life, and a new search for a just society of all people – in small and large matters?

The biblical benchmarks of the kingdom of God are not only for inner reflection; they can overcome long-standing social, economic and even sexual barriers. How can Christian hope be implemented in everyday life and in churches, without harming others and excluding those with different beliefs? Utopias can fail, but even then, they leave behind as an exhortation the dream of a fraternal world, and a new quality of human society.

# Steering Committee

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