

The "Good Life"

Results of the 2018 student consultation in Ghana

Backgrounds and stakeholders

In 2016 a first group of students of the Evangelical Student Church (ESG) together with Pastor Dr. Andreas Quade and the then project coordinator Katharina Roesing flew to Ghana after extensive preparation in cooperation with the North German Mission. This trip was to be the impetus for a long-term cooperation between ESG and a Ghanaian student community, whereby getting to know the church leadership in Ho and the university in Accra was at the forefront of this trip.

In spring 2017 a Ghanaian student community with Pastor Dr. Bridget Ben-Naihmah and Pastor Eric Glee visited the ESG in Bremen as well as the church congress for the Reformation anniversary in Berlin and Wittenberg. The students from both countries experienced a colourful programme that was intended to provide an insight into intercultural, interreligious and student life in Bremen.

Another year later, the first consultation on "good living" took place in Ghana. Another very heterogeneous group of six students with different religious and non-religious backgrounds as well as pastors Dr. Andreas Quade and Nele Wiehenkamp from the North German Mission made their way to Ghana. In Ghana, six students of the EPSU Legon (Evangelical Presbyterian Student Union Legon) and pastor Dr. Bridget Ben-Naimah join in. The EPSU Legon is a congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church Ghana that has existed since 1998 and is specially designed for students.

Preparation

In the period from March to July 2018, ESG prepared intensively for the consultation in Ghana. In addition to geographical and historical peculiarities of Ghana, the main focus was on an insight into the culture and traditions of the people in Ghana. A visit of the North German Mission, talks with Ghanaian volunteers in Bremen as well as a Culture Night "Ghana", which was organized together with the Ghanaian community of the university, helped to dive a little bit into the culture of Ghana and to get a first impression of the diverse country. In addition, the group dealt with some theoretical approaches to the "good life" from various regions of the world. Ghanaian students were also preparing for the joint consultation. A first exchange of

letters at the beginning of the preparations helped to establish contact with the participants from Ghana even before the consultation and thus to get in the right mood for the consultation - also with regard to content.

Consultation procedure

Of the ten-day stay, four days were foreseen for the actual consultation. All participants prepared individual programme items and carried them out together with the group. The result was not only a thematic, but also a methodological diversity that revealed a wide variety of perspectives on the *good life*. Among others, socio-economic, traditional Ghanaian and Christian perspectives from the German and Ghanaian point of view were represented. However, the group also dealt with the question of how these different perspectives can be brought together and where opportunities and challenges in interreligious and intercultural cooperation can lie in the search for a *good life for all*. This, too, was methodically supported - for example by intercultural short training, which offered space for reflection on different perspectives. In addition to the varied programme, intensive discussions and the time spent together offered the opportunity to take the perspective of the other person a bit further, to explain one's own point of view and to consider together how a *good life for all* could be made possible.

Different perspectives on the *good life*

All participants have contributed their individual, German, Ghanaian, Christian, non-Christian, Bahaic or other perspectives. Great importance was attached to giving space to the diversity of perspectives on the good life and not to limiting these to the "German" or "Ghanaian" perspective. The findings from the consultation are the sum of all these perspectives and cannot be generalised. To give an impression of the results of the consultation, however, we will briefly describe where there were main similarities between the German and Ghanaian student groups and where different views on the good life remain.

There was agreement that basic care through adequate and healthy nutrition, medical care, housing and everyday needs, but also social embedding, for example by family or friends, was regarded as a prerequisite for a good life. Equality before the law, enforcement of human rights, free and democratic elections, a globally effective legal system, international cooperation and peace between people, countries and continents are also regarded as important foundations for a good life. Access to education should also be a matter of course in all countries of the world. Furthermore, the protection of our environment and nature, a sustainable economy and the

preservation of resources are essential prerequisites for a good life for all. Under "all" present and future generations, but also all living beings of the earth are summarized. In all our diversity, *unity in diversity* is important for a good life for all. Only in this way can different perspectives on the world and life be brought together and a path to a good life be found together. In order to be able to open up to other people and to support each other, one's own well-being is also important. For those involved in the consultation, this also includes a form of spirituality (religious and non-religious) and a meaning in life. All could agree that problems, challenges and mistakes can be seen as milestones on the way to a good life and should never build walls on this way or between people. In the opinion of the group, the path to a good life can only be followed together.

On some points, however, there were also clear differences between the German and Ghanaian groups. While from the Ghanaian point of view clear definitions of and expectations for different roles (for example gender roles or social positions) are important for a good (cohabitation) life, the German participants are predominantly of the opinion that flexibility in this respect is important. In addition, from a Ghanaian perspective, the social community has a higher significance for the good life - even if from a German perspective this is also indispensable. In Ghana, ideas about what constitutes a good life often come from the social community and in Germany increasingly from the individual. There was also disagreement about the role of the community in educating children. While in Ghana children are regarded as children of society, in Germany education and the associated convictions focus on their own children. Also convictions to different forms of education up to the use of physical force for the education of children are still facing each other. From a German perspective, there was also greater flexibility with regard to the definition of a good life. Thus, aspects could also be included in this definition which were not represented by the individual or individuals or which one can doubt oneself. From a Ghanaian perspective, the reflections on what constitutes a good life were more binding and firm. For example, the Ghanaian side made it clear that the path to a good life can ultimately only be taken through faith in God.

Both the similarities and the different views on the good life are perceived as opportunities. It is important to recognize similarities in order to work together on what everyone understands by a *good life*. But also to perceive different views and to leave them standing helps to remain open for other perspectives, to get to know new perspectives, perhaps even to accept them, before one blindly stiffens oneself to one's own point of view, but also to be able to justify, reflect and self-confidently represent one's own point of view.

Other Activities

In addition to the actual consultation, the trip offered sufficient time to get to know the country and the people better. So the group visited the university in Accra and got to know the EPSU, which also celebrates its services there. A visit to Elmina Castle has provided an insight into colonial history and shown that different cultures deal with the same history in very different ways. A visit to markets, a weaving mill and a church service completed the programme and enabled a relaxed and interested exchange within the group.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to all those who organized and financed this trip. Above all, however, also the people who took part in this consultation with their heart and soul and thus made possible an exchange at eye level, a look beyond their own horizons and a milestone on the common path to a *good life*.

We would like to thank the Bremen Evangelical Church, the North German Mission, the EPSU Legon as well as all the staff and volunteers of the ESG Bremen who, through their trust, courage and commitment, have made possible a step towards a *good life for all*.