

Dutch Mennonite Letter to Prussian Mennonites regarding Immigration to Russia

From Hermann Rempel's translation of David Epp's Chortitzer Mennonites book.

Amsterdam 15 May 1788

“To the beloved elders and their honorable fellow-workers and stewards of the Mennonite church outside of Danzig – we wish you all God's blessing and peace through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends and Brethren:

We have had the honor to entertain and to speak with the honorable v Trappe in our church and in our homes. He has informed us that there are a certain number of Mennonites from our church as well as from other churches who have made their way to Cherson at the invitation of her imperial majesty so that, God willing, this may release them from their oppressed state. The honorable v. Trappe has further informed us that her imperial majesty not only allows full freedom of religious worship but has offered to erect a church for you; but at the same time her majesty would like to see the various church groups unite as one church and that there should be permission to intermarry.

As his honor understands the situation, it is still the practice in your church to impose the ban on those who marry outside your church. He has asked us if it could not be possible that these friends who are going to Cherson and wish to marry could do so without being banned or removed from the church.

This plea we could not and would not deny his lordship Trappe, especially so because we ourselves, not so long ago, were faced with the same problems.

And truly brethren, when we take into account God's infallible word, we will soon become aware that the practice of banning is far too harsh for those who have chosen a partner outside their own church. Obviously, even though these persons have their weaknesses, they may otherwise be good Christians; we are all in need of help in many ways. Should someone be separated from the church for this reason alone and denied the seal of unity as long as he or she is alive? No! We are reminded daily how incomprehensible is the love of God for all his children and so we have not dared any longer to treat our brothers so harshly and so grievously.

That the late Menno Simons would have found this acceptable during his time is quite another thing since everything else around was Catholic. Now things are far different. We believe that if Mennonites fall in love with Mennonites who have been nurtured in the same teachings, they should be free to marry.

So we pray, dear brethren, that you would consider this in the fear of the Lord. It would be a great joy to us if we could hear in the near future that this matter will be resolved according to the wishes of the members.

We close with friendly greetings and God's blessing on your church and for our brethren in Christ.

From the fellow workers and elders of the Onde Vlaamschen Doopgesinde Gemeinde in Amsterdam.

This was signed by the fellow workers and elders of the above named church; one signed himself J. E. Sepp.