

#21/GW#6

## Power of Attorney (*Vollmacht*) sent from Prussia to Russia

Translation of Gerhard Wiebe diary pp. 182-186

Dorothy and John Friesen

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Comments by translators and editor in square brackets]

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Anno **1790**, the month of March.

March 14 Today it has pleased the Lord to lay on me a painful illness. Before Easter, I could not walk beyond my room. During the following three weeks I was still sickly. After that, praise the God, with God's help I was able to take up my service again.

In response to the letter from the honourable authorities in Russia, we have submitted to them the following letter:

**March 18.** Response to the letter by the Russians of *Dec. 18, 1789*.

We the undersigned *Aeltester*, ministers, deacons of the church of God in Elbing and Ellerwald wish the teachers and deacons, as well as the whole church in Russia, in the village of Chortitz, our beloved co-workers and brothers in Christ much grace and peace through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Saviour, together with the working power of the Holy Spirit. And that you may be strengthened in your faith with much power, so that in all grief and adversity you may remain constant and endure patiently until the blessed end.

After this well-intentioned heartfelt greeting, we report that the letter dated Dec. 18 (old calendar) 1789, for which we waited the whole summer and fall with a longing desire, was received with great joy, on Feb. 13 (old calendar), together with some attachments which were also greatly anticipated. We would have gladly written to you, however, didn't know to which place we would address it, or whether you in fact, have been overrun and totally dispersed and dissolved by the Russian enemies [enemies of Russia]. Therefore, we have written to the church at Wischenka on the estate of the honorable count [Graf] Romanzof, and have requested them to scout out and report to us about your situation. The answer to that has not been reported to us. However, when your letter arrived and from that we understood your earnest desire that a *Aeltester* come to you, we did not remain indifferent, but instead addressed your request in light of our resources. At the same time we circulated your beloved letter to all our churches to get the best advice about sending the *Aeltester*.

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Then, since it pleased the dear Lord to place the beloved *Aeltester* Peter Epp on his sick bed right after he had delivered his farewell speech, and finally to transpose him on Nov. 12 a.c. [old calendar] through his earthly death into blessed eternity, and thus our, as well as his, plan and desire was thwarted, it seemed as though it had not been God's will. So now a different solution had to be considered, which, however, could not be arranged through a general meeting because of the mild winter and impassable roads. In order that your urgent request could be addressed as quickly as possible, we have drawn in all the churches via letter for their confirmation, and their unanimous advice is that we authorize you in the name of all our

churches to conduct an election for Aeltester. At the same time we formally ordain your choice in a letter, which is enclosed, and thereby we will have provided assistance. As soon as circumstances permit, there will be a meeting of representatives from all the churches, in which the well-being of the church will be considered from all possible aspects. In the Kingdom of Poland at Einsiedel near Lemberg, as reported by their Aeltester Jacob Miller, a church which recently moved there from the Palatinate [Pfalz], was provided with a Aeltester and minister (Lehrer) in this manner. Since the Lord bestows us peace on earth, hopefully the fear regarding the trip to you will diminish somewhat so that maybe someone will allow himself to be persuaded to travel there; and therefore the travel money will be kept in hope.

An outsider, a talkative minister, has shared the advice that your request for a parcel of land from the Russian Imperial Majesty for the support of a Aeltester minister is extremely necessary. This request would be more appropriate, and more likely to be successful now at the beginning rather than later. If no minister would need it, the church could use it to support the poor.

Now dear brothers and fellow church members ["Mitd"], follow our sincere advice, and in heart-felt prayer to God, elect a Aeltester from one of your ministers, because the one who has bestowed upon them strength and support to proclaim the gospel will also fill with strength the one who has been elected through votes and the lot to hold the office of Aeltester.

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We are all frail people like you. For what is really important is that souls be won for the Lord Jesus Christ. So through his divine power sufficient strength will be provided, for his saints are with him in grace and mercy, and he watches over his chosen ones. If it pleases the Lord, he can eventually send someone out of our midst to you, which we request from the divine provider, but also want to submit to him in a calm manner.

It saddens us that some disagreements appear among you because of the Frisian brothers, and yet it is not contrary to our suspicions. Paul says, There must be rats among you, in order that those who are slackers become visible. Our sincere advice is that you do not involve yourself in any controversy, rather devote yourself to patience and being conciliatory. Should they boast in pride about their mission, let them boast. We are familiar with them going their own way and their quarrelsomeness [see the diary of Frisian Aeltester [Heinrich Donner](#)]. We will not be able to cure their obstinacy. Only let your light shine before the people, for thus you will be saved from all evil, for who can harm you if you do that which is good?

We would also be eager to learn whether you were settled with the Frisians, or if each group is to live apart? Because of your division, it would be easily possible that an accusation could be made to the authorities. But you would rightly be able to counter that for the sake of order, already many years ago, you were divided into two communities. This division in itself did not cause controversies, but it could prevent disputes, and if both groups live together peaceably, you will best be able to soothe them.

In regards to the authorities of the country, be humble and submissive, even if they act harshly against you, return good for evil in order to overcome them. Diligently take care not to offend the religious authorities, because they have the greatest ability to make you hated.

We also request that you let us know how far you are from Kremenschuk, how far from Elisabethgorod, thus how far you reside from the Polish border. If one could send a letter from Kremenschuk, or from another city, directly to Warsaw, then one could save a lot of postage,

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...for this route is much shorter than over Riga.

We will await your response with eager anticipation to see whether our proposal has found a good reception. In the meantime, our dear brethren, we pray for you God's care and greet you with the peace that the Lord Jesus Christ dearly paid for; we remain in love, etc....

Signed by G[erhard]. Wiebe, Fr[anz]. v. Riesen, A[ntonie]. Woelke.

Authorization for the election of an Aeltester in Russia.

After a considerable number of our fellow believers, from Danzig and other places, based on the gracious permission of the Russian royal majesty, settled in the area of Kremenschuk in order to establish a Colony, it was also arranged that the Aeltester from Danzig would provide for their spiritual welfare, who, however died before his departure on November 12 (old calendar), and thus the Russian church was not provided with the services of an Aeltester, and up to the present no solution has come to light, thus together with the Aeltester, ministers (Lehrer), and deacons of the Flemish Mennonite Church in Prussia, we have decided, in a spirit of being helpful, that the afore mentioned foreign church shall be provided with an Aeltester from within their midst.

We authorize and empower the church in Russia that they, with reverent prayer to God, in the name of Jesus, move to the election of an Aeltester, expressed in that they gather the brotherhood on a specific day. First the importance of a leader, or Aeltester, should be presented to them according to attachment A. and they should be exhorted to pray. When this has happened, and the prayer is ended, then the two deacons, Peter Dyck and Cornelius Friesen, together with 2 or 3 men, go into a separate place and count the men's votes, to see which of the 4 ministers received the most votes. To him, in the presence of the gathered brotherhood, the office of Aeltester shall be entrusted. However, if the votes ...

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... for two people are the same, then the lot can be used to make the decision. And whoever is elected, should faithfully follow this call, accept the blessings from his fellow ministers, and not withdraw from this office of caregiver, in the hope that the God who has bestowed this office upon him, will also provide him the strength to fulfill it.

If through God's grace the election can take place, the newly elected Aeltester will be asked the usual questions by one of the ministers, following the attached ordination formula, and the office will be conferred on him.

And this elected Aeltester will then be committed, for the church for which he is now responsible, to teach the basic principles of our faith according to the ability which God will provide him, to preach the grace enriched gospel of Christ, to consecrate the Aeltester, ministers and deacons according to the traditional pattern, to baptize repentant adults upon their faith, to distribute the communion of our Lord within the church, together with the brethren to remove the stubborn and those committing major sins, to accept again those who repent, and in general to see to it that everything in the church proceeds in an orderly manner.

We commend this newly elected Aeltester most heartily to the church and implore the church to obey and follow him (Heb. 13:17), to respect him, and if he should have need for physical sustenance, to provide for his support, which is the righteous Christian responsibility and obligation, according to 1 Tim. 3:17, Luke 10:7, 1 Cor. 9:14, and others.

Since this is our honest desire and order, we the Aeltesten, ministers and servants listed below, have signed with our signature in the name of all, and for additional verification, stamped

with the seal of the whole church. Dated in Danzig the second day of the month of March in the year of our Lord 1790.

NB. This was signed and sealed by the churches in Danzig, Heuboden, Gross-Werder and Elbing.

[edited by GHP Feb 2024]