

**The Letter sent by a group of Chortitza colony Mennonites to the Prussian Mennonite minister [Lehrdienst].**

Found on pages [259](#), [260&261](#), [262&263](#) in the Diary of Gerhard Wiebe of the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation.

Edited, from the translations of Elfriede Rempel and Edwin Hoeppner, by Glenn Penner.  
Comments in square brackets and any highlighting by the editor.

I [Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe] received the following letter from Russia via Elbing, Oct. 26 , 1793:

To the elders, teachers and deacons of the church of Jesus at Danzig we wish grace from God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. We take liberty to report to you about the circumstances of our congregation, although, with sadness. As you know, we had chosen the esteemed **Johann Wiebe** as elder of our church a while ago, but we are reporting now that this man can't be persuaded in any way to accept this position. A while ago a number of brethren agreed and managed to install Ohm **David Epp**. But because of that there is a lot of dissatisfaction because many brethren were opposed to that. So far, we have been hoping in vain that things would settle down again. These are brethren who did know Ohm Epp well when they were living in Danzig, and they don't want to accept him as their elder because it is said that he didn't conduct himself well by buying grain which had been stolen. Others are testifying in letters from Danzig that Ohm Epp hadn't been able to pay his debts because of lack of money. And here in Russia he is said to have declared that he took along 100 German Dukates in cash. looked at the matter and therefore many consider him to be a cheat. Some of his travel companions have said that Ohm Epp had been drinking so much near Dubrovna that he had been unable to walk at times, he fell down the stairs, at other times they led him because he was unable to keep his balance, and he is said to have been drunk on the trip. But these old failings would have been disregarded if there had not been any new ones. But it occurred that Ohm Epp was to have handed over a certain amount of money to 6 brethren who are to buy construction lumber of the colony, money entrusted to him in Riga. Of that money he used up over 200 rubles in Dubrovna and he owed this money to those people for a long time. But when he paid them back, he announced to those 6 men that **Johann Bartsch** owed him 30 rubles, which they could get from him and credit the amount to him. But before those people got around to do that, Ohm Epp went and requested 10 rubles of that amount. Ohm **Gerhard Neufeld**, the teacher, who was one of those 6 men and was involved in the matter, accused Ohm Epp of this, and he went so far in his words that Gerhard Neufeld said that Ohm Epp was using up money belonging to them, by saying the money was theirs and then he had gone in secret to get the money himself. The matter was submitted to the brethren. Then Ohm Epp began to lie, saying he had borrowed the money from Johann Bartsch and **Jacob Hoeppner**, and so Gerhard Neufeld must be wrong. Because of that, many brethren, including Gerhard Neufeldt, are not going to the meetings, but Ohm Epp tried to get a few people together, they consented and voted against Ohm Gerhard Neufeldt, out of the ministerial office. That same day 2 men were sent to him, to let him know that he had been released from his office. He was surprised and asked for the reason. They said they didn't know. This peculiar act again caused a lot of turmoil. After a while, the matter was taken up again and

Gerhard Neufeldt asked Ohm Epp, whether he could really say in good conscience that he had borrowed the money from the brethren mentioned earlier. Ohm Epp was unable to do so and had to admit that he had gotten some of the money which he had promised to those 6 men. Many brethren saw that Ohm Epp is a cheat and liar and is deceiving others. They are insisting that Gerhard Neufeldt should be reinstated into the teaching office, because he had been innocent. Ohm Johann Wiebe also said that it wouldn't have been right. But the matter had been settled and should remain that way. Many applauded this. Ohm Epp is a man who rarely has as much money as he is able to spend. Thus, he often has troubles because of that. A brother by the name of **Peter Neufeldt**, who had lived in Stolzenberg, had also had troubles with him regarding financial matters, and he said in the presence of the brethren that Ohm Epp had deceived him. He admitted that he had erred, and thus the matter was dropped. However, there are many dissatisfied

brethren, and they are concerned about where things are going. Ohm Johann **Wiebe** is a young man with little experience, and he isn't concerned about many things. It is a lamentable situation, because there is disorder and disharmony in the church. When there are things to be settled by the brotherhood, it rarely happens peacefully, rather there is such rancour, noise and yelling, that those who haven't been witnesses of it, can hardly imagine it. The house of prayer can rightly be called a house of sin. Many are keeping away because of that, because one can see and experience how the rules are being bent. Ohm Epp knows how to arrange things, so that those favoured by him are in the right. His involvement in secular business is an obstacle in his office. It also happens that he is dragging brethren before secular authorities before submitting the matter to the church first. He promises money to the authorities, money which belongs to the church, in order to reach his goals. The teachings of the Mennonists are sometimes, yes, most of the time, pushed aside, and we are reporting this to you because we doubt that you have ever been informed of the lamentable situation in our church. It is too bad that such a large congregation remains in error and in confusion. Some brethren have even given notice in writing, saying that they don't want to have anything to do with the ministry and the church for the time being, and some of them have signed this letter. We are asking you for good advice by letter and would like to know whether you deem it good if we seek to get Ohm Gerhard Neufeldt back into the office of minister. Although some are opposed to that. He can preach for those who like to hear him. Where the word of God is received well and where souls are hungering for God's word, there it falls like seed into fertile soil and generally yields good fruit. We would be very pleased if we would receive a letter from you soon, and we ask you to address it to Ohm Gerhard **Neufeldt**, for we are concerned that we might not hear anything about it if it is addressed to Ohm David **Epp**. Since we have left Germany [Prussia], we have deemed it very necessary, to have a worthy, reasonable Aeltester from your churches, but so far we haven't been that fortunate, and it is not as difficult as you perhaps think for you to come here. The benefit for our church would be invaluable, in our view. Is there any effort in this world which is of such value as the effort for the salvation of men, and this is no less the most necessary effort, if you would decide that an elder from your churches would come to us. It is just as needful as it was before, for we are in such a state that things are getting worse from time to time, and we doubt whether we will ever have order and unity under the present rule. Ohm Epp is a man who is lacking in integrity and he is only out for a good life on earth. And Ohm Johann **Wiebe** can't be persuaded to accept the office, for we have tried everything, but in vain. He claims that he is not capable for such an office, and that it is too difficult to establish order in a church which has so much trouble, he is

too young and inexperienced (he says). We wish you all the best and we remain in true love and respect your friends, willing to serve.

Chortitz, Sept. 3, 1793

Johann Pauls [Johann Pauls #196185]

Cornelius Enss [Cornelius Enns #199245]

Johann Sawatzki [Johann Sawatsky #8410]

Heinrich Claassen [Heinrich Classen #196381]

Antonie Hopner [Anton Hoeppner #156777]

Jacob Hopner [Jacob Hoeppner #174689]

Hans Dyck [Johann Dyck #?]

Abraham Friesen [Abraham Friesen #?]

Johann Neuffeld [Johann Neufeld #?]

Frans Barkmann [Franz Bergmann #198308]

Johann Baartsch [Johann Bartsch #12624]

Peter Peters [Peter Peters #134084]

Abraham Krahn [Abraham Krahn #197094]

Johann Wieler [Johann Wieler #197280]

Peter Dell [Peter Doell #17771]

Wellam Barkmann [Wilhelm Bergmann #198302]

Isaak Kasdorff [Isaac Kasdorf #266382]

Peter Teigrecht [Peter Teichroeb #196147]

Johann Krahn [Johann Krahn #197081]

We have signed on behalf of many other brethren who are asking for counsel and help in these matters.

Mennonite  
Heritage  
Archives