

Hensie van der Merwe | S.1  
We celebrate birthday

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Hensie van der Merwe, President of Youngstars International



**The year 2024 is one of great celebration and great expectations for Youngstars work. The BESJ is celebrating its 50th anniversary, Juropa will celebrate 20 years of being an association and Youngstars International was founded in Spain exactly 10 years ago.**

It is well known that the number 50 in the Bible talks about the year of Jubilee. The number 10 is connected to testimony, the law, responsibility and the completeness of order. And according to some scholars the number 20 is seen as the time of a complete or perfect waiting period. After 20 years, Jacob received his inheritance, including his wives. We see how God worked in his life and heart to be able to reconcile with his brother and return to the promised land. 20 years is also how long King Solomon worked on completing his construction work - the temple and his own palace. The arc of the covenant, after being in possession of the Philistines for 7 months, did not come back into Jerusalem but waited in Kirjath-jearim for 20 years before King David under great celebration brought it into the city.

So, let us then glance back at this road that brought us to this place and time.

In 1953, the first Youngstars groups were formed in Winterthur and Wil. 20 years later in 1974 the BESJ "Bund Evangelischer Schweizer Jungscharen" was founded as a national association. In the next 20 years work started in Spain and Austria, and the 1999 marks the official start of the Juropa project under the leadership of Kurt Mühlematter. Joined by Walter Gut in 2000, work already starts to form a supporting board which would later become the supervisory board for Juropa. Soon coaching and training was established, and a volunteer corps raised up in the following years. In 2003 the "Schweizerische Missions-Gemeinschaft" (SMG) becomes a partner of Juropa and the doors were opened for new partnerships.

2004 was a big year as Juropa as an association was officially formed. Also, in this year the work spread to Romania under the leadership of Daniel and Daniela Horst and, through the ministry of Hans-Georg Gerster to Bulgaria shortly after.

Over the next years Juropa went from strength to strength as the Lord added capable personnel and volunteers to the association. It is with great appreciation we remember hundreds of so faithful Juropa friends, members and coworkers.

In 2014 the international umbrella organisation "Youngstars International" was founded at the international country leaders' meeting in Spain. YoungstarsWiki likewise became its own organization under the leadership of Ramun Badertscher. As such, Juropa adopted its new mission statement and realignment as a partner of Youngstars International.

During the next 10 years the Lord had opened new doors and highways to see the work develop further not only in Europe but beyond its borders. From a group of 4 national members and three pioneer members together with a few single founder members, the association has grown to have 33 members including 12 countries with national and pioneer movements. We are excited about the way that Youngstars has broadened its horizons to beyond Europe with work starting in Cuba, Ethiopia and Brazil.

All this has been the work of our Father in heaven. Thus, together with all involved I fall on my knees in worship when thinking about the road that has brought us to this place. We could not have done it without the body of Christ, without our members, partners and supporters. Thus, we would like to say THANK YOU. Thank you to everyone who is receiving this newsletter. You have walked with us, lifting the hands of those leading the movement over the years, just as Aaron and Hur did for Moses as Joshua fought the battle against the Amalekites in Exodus 17.

When God had placed the ministry vision for a Youngstars movement in the hearts of his children half a century ago, the church in Europe was at a turning point. In the 1970's 88% of the world's missionary force came from the global north. Slowly however the church in the Global South was emerging as a missionary sending force. We are living in a time of great tribulation for the church in Europe where we see moral values being ridiculed, the church seemingly losing its voice and the continent statistically becoming a least reached area.

"By 2020 fully two-thirds of all Christians were in the Global South, with only one-third in the Global North. By 2050 we anticipate that 77 percent of all Christians will live in the Global South." (*International Bulletin of Mission Research*). The church in Latin America and Africa is rising up, to take on the challenge of again reaching Europe with the Gospel. Today the church in Central and Northern Europe is in need of the church in the Global south. They are answering the call of our Lord with 47% of missionaries sent out in the world today coming from countries like Brazil, South Korea, the Philippines and China. Looking forward we as Youngstars need to understand our role in investing into the Global South, seeing the movement grow there, taking hands with the Lord as he moves the Global South church to be a missionary force to reach the world, including Europe.

So, as we celebrate during 2024, let it be with expectation of what the Lord will do both in Europe and beyond its borders. Let us look ahead and cross the spiritual Jordan into the promised land that the Lord has for the Youngstars Movement. Let us heed His call, and remember that, just as He commanded Joshua, so He is commanding us, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:8 NIV)

