

Road Builder in the Kingdom of God

Call an life of Reinhold Krebs

A book will certainly be written about Reinhold's life. But I want to give you, dear sisters and brothers, at least a small overview of this extremely rich life, of which so many have benefited. I also want to share what Reinhold told me on October 7th, 6 days before his death. I would like to choose 5 headings that make up Reinhold's life for me:
road builder, pioneer, networker, apologist, strategist

1. Road builder

Reinhold was born on February 27th, 1957 in Kochersteinsfeld, a small village with 1300 inhabitants, roughly where the A 81 to Heilbronn crosses the River Kocher. After all, the place was mentioned as early as 996, which definitely benefited the self-confidence of the residents. Reinhold was the eldest, then there followed Joachim, Beate, Sybille, Gabi and Johannes. The parents Rudolf and Ruth had a road construction company with about 15 employees. Locals and also many Italian employees.

The parents bring up the children with love, but of course the business has to run. Both motives characterize Reinhold. Entrepreneurial, but also living the Christian faith and love. Perhaps it is important to say at this point that mother Ruth actually felt and knew that she should consecrate her first son to God. And she hoped that Reinhold should do a spiritual service. But we know from the Bible, things turn out differently than mothers imagine.

In addition to the family, the Protestant parish in Kochersteinsfeld was of course also formative for young Reinhold: together with the YMCA there. Children's group, children's church, brass choir, and he was only 13 or 14 years old when he himself began leading youth groups.

As the eldest of the children, he naturally also has responsibilities in his parents' business. Well, Reinhold knew very early on how to flatten the asphalt with a steam roller. And because he knew that, he didn't include flat-rolling at all in his later catalog of methods. But he was influenced by how important it is when you make a way between two places. So that people can get closer to one another.

The father soon realized that road building was not Reinhold's last calling in life. It's a good thing that his next brother Joachim lived up to these expectations and was able to join his father's business.

Reinhold does his school career in Neuenstadt and then his Abitur in Neckarsulm. Then, at 19, he does an internship at the YMCA Pfalz in Otterberg in the Palatinate Forest, and can get into youth work there. But it wouldn't be Reinhold if he hadn't done it for the whole district right away.

2. Pioneer

Actually, Reinhold always wanted to earn his living as a tent maker like Paul and do voluntary work in the kingdom of God. Far-sighted as he was, it was clear to him even then that this church would have to develop more and more from a full-time supply church into a participatory community. That's why he doesn't embark on the time-honored career of a theologian. He is much more drawn to Missionschool Unterweissach, where he receives theological basics, but beyond that the much broader field of youth work opens up to him, with incomparably greater freedom than a pastor.

I had intensive discussions with him more than once, in which, as a Vicar, I naturally had to live within the system of the national church and hierarchies to a greater extent. As a youth officer, he was a free bird in comparison. That doesn't mean he claimed that freedom for himself. He was a Loyal Radical in the best sense of the word. He didn't use this freedom for an easier professional life, but as a pioneer he thought ahead, and he could also address structural problems with greater freedom. And this not only gave him, but also his wife Margit, many sleepless nights. But we're not there yet. He got to know Margit during this time in Unterweissach. That was in 1978, when Reinhold was 21 years old. Margit Habermann was a 19-year-old girl from a farm near Neuenstadt. But also active in youth work. And she also wanted to go to Himmelkron with the district youth organization for the Silent Days. She actually wanted to get into the car with another intern. But somehow she had to go to this Reinhold Krebs. She was sitting in the back of the R4, her friend was in the passenger seat, chatting merrily with Reinhold, but his eyes and Margit's eyes met in the rear-view mirror.

Everything else happened by itself. The two married in July 1981 in Kochersteinsfeld. By then Reinhold had finished his training in Unterweissach. Margit was already a dental technician at that time. They move to Bittenfeld near Waiblingen for Reinhold's year of recognition and build up youth work there on a voluntary basis. For four years, together with two other friends. Reinhold lives the tentmaker principle with Margit. He works 2-3 days a week on the construction site as a laborer. In building houses, not just road building, he still recommended on October 7th that I tell you: Reinhold the house builder, I should mention that.

Summer camps, youth church services, home group work, youth group work... and also growing vegetables in the garden. Luckily, family and friends support them, otherwise the two would probably not have made ends meet. The two have a full house. The young people also want to be fed, in the summer there they fed on zucchini quite often...

3. Networker

Already at the beginning of their marriage, Reinhold got in touch with Young Life in the USA. Reinhold immediately recognizes that this new way of doing youth work would also be decisive for Germany. Contact and relationship work, the saying he used again and again: We have to make ourselves heard. Lead from behind. Later "Belong, believe, behave" is added from GB. Golden tools that no one in Württemberg really understood at the time. At least not in church circles. He made that the basis of his work, putting him ahead of the other 20 years. After two years, David as the first child was born, in 1983. And then Annelie in 1985. Because of the delay, it was clear that things couldn't go on like this. The Krebs family faces different directions, some doors close. They open up in Sielmingen. The pastor there, Walter Dutt, recognizes the qualities and talents of Margit and Reinhold. Reinhold stayed in Sielmingen for 9 years as a parish deacon. Large children's church work, youth work, leisure time in summer, forest work. One of his interns was Gottfried Heinzmann. The two youngest children were also born at this time, Mareike in 1987 and Pia in 1992.

During this time, Ten Sing Norway is planning a trip to Filderstadt. Nobody can contact. Reinhold offers himself as a contact person. The final concert after a week of relationship work in Sielmingen goes beyond all dimensions. After that, Ten Sing Filderstadt was founded with 120 young people. Suddenly a completely different clientele came, and that was a good thing. Fear of the unknown was unknown to Reinhold, he made contacts, built up relationships: later this was called networking, since Reinhold had been practicing it for a long time.

In 1992 he was appointed to the Protestant Youth Work, Cornelius Kuttler will tell us more about this later.

(For open work and Ten Sing. Reinhold organizes a lot on a European level, big Ten Sing meetings at the Dobelmuehle, big performances, concerts, even 14-year-olds learn how to conduct. Ten Sing was incredibly motivated, experience your gifts, experience yourself again, experience God. Important projects for him in recent years: Messy Church, Learning Communities, Network, Global-Local, Giving Mood, every single project innovative, integrative, forward-thinking, that was Reinhold, and although he was the one who initiated it all, it was always very important to him that his name should not appear in large letters, and that others should take responsibility for it. He was the initiator and enabler.)

Reinhold is convinced that the church must change. Where can people feel at home who can live a missional lifestyle? Reinhold is looking. Already in the 90s contacts were established with Bob and Mary, Anglican Church Planting Initiative. In the early 90s he organized excursions to England, where they seem to be much further along. He tries to infect others with the same enthusiasm he is inspired with himself.

4. Apologist

I should explain: Apologists in early Christianity were people who defended Christian truth through clever theological and philosophical arguments.

Reinhold reads theological literature. I was always completely amazed and overwhelmed at the theological level at which Reinhold was. Mission Theology: Darel Guder, David Bosch's Transforming Mission, Lesslie Newbigin Gospel in a Pluralist Society, just to name a few... Reinhold has mostly already read and reflected on these theological milestones in English, which were translated into German some 10 years later.

And of course the Empirical Studies: Mission Shaped Church... Jesus People (format Jesus, on the way to a New Church) from England published by the later Bishop Steven Croft. In MY

theology studies we mainly dealt with GERMAN theologians. Here, too, Reinhold was way ahead of us. And Reinhold was of course also able to use these great minds to substantiate his work with arguments, so that sometimes we, quite provincial Württembergers, just fell open-mouthed. And what was true of theology was also true of sociology. He KNEW the results of the current Shell Youth Study. Or the figures for confirmation work in Sweden and Norway. He was also way ahead of his time when it came to economics. He even completed a master's degree in non-profit organizations in 2009. So he was able to acquire funds from American foundations via fundraising, which were able to create jobs here in the ejw. Cornelius will certainly also report something about this.

But I'll go back 10 years. Reinhold was also a strategist.

5. Strategist

Reinhold noticed that arguments, no matter how good, could always be ignored with a smile on church politics. "He's just a youth worker, we don't really have to take it seriously!"

At some point, he once told me, he was having a coffee with Friedemann Stöffler and talking about the undesirable developments in the Württemberg regional church and the muddled situation of the synodal discussion groups. And – as he told me – then it was suddenly clear to us: We have to set up a fourth discussion group, someone has to do it. Why not us as a church for tomorrow?! The idea and the name were born. That was in 2001. A new field of a higher level engagement opened up. Initially smiled at, now with 12 synod-members of 90. And currently 253 supporting members, it started with Reinhold. It was only in this way that what Reinhold had recognized long before could be heard in church.

Reinhold had contacts in England through Bob and Mary Hopkins as early as the 1990s. (Anglican Church Planting Initiative). The bishops are already getting on there. However, the England connection intensified again when the entire leadership team from St. Thomas Crookes Sheffield (the largest Anglican community outside of London) came to Network72 meeting in 2004 in Erkenbrechtsweiler on the Alb (that's when you drive up to the thermal baths). Reinhold's findings are confirmed across the board. The British are 20 years ahead of us - they offer us their tools: the life shapes, huddles, learning communities, mixed economy. The missionary community. The Order of Mission is also one of them, to which the Sheffielders invite us. TOM is an international group of more than 250 people from all over the world, mainly UK and Denmark, but also based in other parts of Scandinavia, Europe, Australia, North and South America

I would like to mention one strategic feat from that time, because it was so important to Reinhold. In 2011 he organized the church 2.0 congress in Bernhausen in a few months, the local dean Rainer Kiess, his former ejw boss and friend supported him to the best of his ability. Bishop July cancels participation. Only when he understands that both the Baden and the Bavarian regional bishops as well as two bishops from England are present (including this Steven Craft), because the matter is so important, does he quickly agree. That was Reinhold's approach. He lets people see for themselves that they should perhaps think about the meaning of something again and change their mind. Up to the regional bishop.

"If it's true, then it matters!" he told me just 10 days ago on his deathbed. Reinhold was fast, very fast, much faster than most of his contemporaries. And he had to learn, especially in recent years, that it's also important to give people the time to catch up. That was a tightrope walk.

Reinhold networks, he is a strategist, looks ahead as a pioneer, and as an apologist he brings the best theologies from all over the world. He's in Aarhus, or on some Greek island, in Kassel or Cambridge. He had networks in America, which we only ever heard about at our TOM prayer meetings, when Reinhold mentioned us as a prayer request that the foundation application should go through. (Cornelius will certainly also report on the projects that were made possible by this). There are many things I can no longer pick up here, e.g. his fantastic wife Margit, who meant so much to him and without whom he would not have been able to do all this. His wonderful children, children-in-law and grandchildren, whom he supported and shaped with all his might and of whom he was very proud, his work in his family of origin. I was able to report a little more about it in Haslach.

But in the end I would like to come back to what has pervaded his life for at least the last 25 years and what was also important to him to share 2 weeks ago.

6. Prophet

Reinhold, in addition to all that has been said, had a prophetic line in his life:

He once told me that under the seal of secrecy 15 years ago, but he said: Now, at his funeral I could tell it. Reinhold received the Prophetic Vision for his life. He got the first card in the Bernhäuser Forst at a communion service that Rainer Kiess led at the end of the 90s. Kind of like New Year's Watchword.

On it was the quote: Isa 58:12 And through you what has long lay waste shall be rebuilt, and you shall raise up again what was founded in the past; and you shall be called: "He who walks up the gaps and repairs the roads, so that people can dwell there". That's where all of the lines I've reported on converged. Building roads in the kingdom of God. What a promise.

And then a few years later, a similar occasion, another tray with cards, Reinhold saw that Isa 58:12 was there again and deliberately grabbed another one, and then he noticed that there was a second one behind the New Year's ticket Los stuck, and what did it say? Who closes up the gaps and repairs the paths so that one can live in them.

Five years later at St. Thomas Crookes, Sheffield, he stood in line, I remember well, at the Lord's Supper, and Paul Macconocie, the young leader of St. Thomas Philadelphia, said to him: "You will be God's street builder, listen to your heart, no..." and then he corrected himself, "Reinhold, God will build the road and you will help him with it."

And then at a network at Nordalb 2014, the path to Graceland Hall had just been paved. A young woman who did not know these stories said in a prophetic word: "Like this path is being built here, your life will consist of constantly building the path, but you will not see it finished." – A prophetic line that ran through his life, a promise from God that was confirmed again and again, a power that made him think and act ahead, God's spirit. And that empowered him to act as a prophet for his church.

Reinhold the prophet, strategist, apologist, networker, pioneer, Reinhold the road builder: he hasn't finished, but road building in the kingdom of God is probably NEVER finished. In any case, Reinhold has built a lot, and I believe it is his, no, it is God's will that we continue to build on the roads that Reinhold built, that we make a path in our church, a path through the desert where we move in youth work, in our communities, in our families, in our own lives. In our society.

Soli Deo Gloria, AMEN