

OBITUARY

Pastor Eberhard Goehner

THE death was announced last Friday of Pastor Eberhard Goehner at the age of 88. Pastor Goehner was a retired Minister of the Lutheran Church in Biberach and was a great friend of Guernsey and he had many friends here.

Biberach is the town to which most of Guernsey's wartime deportees were taken and where they were interned by the Nazis from 1942 to 1945.

Eberhard visited the island in 1997, along with the first group of Biberach citizens, at the invitation of the Guernsey Council of Churches under the chairmanship of the late Rosemary Jagger, who organised a memorable Week of Reconciliation. This followed the initiative some months earlier by Biberach which invited former deportees to the town. After this inaugural trip he became a frequent visitor to the island.

In 2002 he became the founding chairman of Biberach's Friends of Guernsey Association.

He retired from that position in 2010.

In 2003, at the invitation of the then Bailiff, Sir de Vic Carey, he preached at the official Liberation Day Service in the Town Church and also at the People's Service in St Stephen's Church on the same morning. He was an ardent ecumenist and was passionate in his quest for reconciliation.

Sir de Vic Carey, Bailiff from 1999 to 2005, said it was a moving service.

'In 2003 the island invited the municipality of Biberach to attend our Liberation celebrations.

'At the Town Church Service the Mayor of Biberach made a fulsome apology in German for all that had happened. Eberhard preached in clear English, as he had gone to university in the US.

'Any reservations some older members of the community understandably had about the occasion were in large part assuaged by Eberhard's moving message of reconciliation so sincerely felt.'

In 2011 the island was represented at the funeral of Eberhard's wife, Ursi, by Jurat Rev. Peter Lane, but due to present travel restrictions such representation will not now be possible.

However, on the island's behalf, Rotraud Rebmann, who together with Helga Reiser is the current joint-chairman of Biberach's Friends of Guernsey Association, took flowers in the Guernsey colours, arranged around a Guernsey flag, to Mr Goehner's bedside shortly before he died.

Sir Geoffrey Rowland, Bailiff from 2005 to 2012, remembers an inspirational man.

'When Eberhard Goehner was asked to deliver sermons at the Town Church Liberation Thanksgiving Service and also at St Stephen's in 2003, he knew that it would not be an easy task, but recognised that it would be an honourable and important task.

'His sermons, in fluent English, were masterly, inspirational and left a deep impression.

'They enhanced the reconciliation journey and were a catalyst for broadening and deepening the spirit of reconciliation. He recognised that the quest for reconciliation in both Biberach and Guernsey was blossoming and would help to lay to rest the pains of the troubled past. 'Instinctively he knew that the more we learn about each other's communities, customs and the common honesty of our peoples, the stronger the roots of the tree of reconciliation would grow.

'Quietly he would emphasise the importance of worshipping together and building personal relationships. He often stressed that there can be no enduring reconciliation without remembrance.

'Over the years he played a significant role as chairman of the Biberach Friends of Guernsey Association, ensuring that reconciliation would flourish. Happily it has grown deeper and broader, embracing participation



Pastor Eberhard Goehner.

(Picture supplied by Jurat Rev Peter G Lane)

by choirs, musicians, schools and youth groups.

'Reconciliation between islanders and the people of Biberach has been a success story helping to heal the wounds of war and Occupation.'

Jose Day first met Eberhard in 2001 when she and her husband, the late Chris Day, who was Deputy Bailiff, travelled to Biberach.

'Chris was the co-founder and chairman of the Guernsey Friends of Biberach Association and we were representing Guernsey and Eberhard made us both feel very welcome. Here Chris and I began a special relationship with Eberhard and that was to continue over six more visits.'

Jose managed to speak to Eberhard by telephone before he passed away. 'I spoke to his daughter and she said "Daddy is listening to this conversation and he is smiling". He said it was lovely to speak.

'He had a quiet religious commitment and he was a very special Lutheran priest.'

Eberhard Goehner's funeral takes place at the Biberach town cemetery on Tuesday 15 December at 12 noon (Guernsey time).



Pastor Eberhard Goehner bidding farewell to the 2015 contingent representing the island at Biberach's quinquennial 'Guernsey Week'. Left to right: Biberach guide Margaret Walter, Rotraud Rebmann, Jurat Rev. Peter Lane, Wendy Lane, Pastor Goehner, Dorothy Le Conte and the late Jurat David Le Conte. (28989000)