

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf

AN APOSTLE WITH HESSIAN ROOTS



A TV studio in Wiesbaden, Germany on August 11, 1987. The German television station "Zweite Deutsche Fernsehen" (ZDF) is broadcasting live. Their program, "Tele-Illustrierte," is airing. The spotlights are focused on a light grey circle on the studio floor with the title, "In Conversation." On two office chairs we see the well-known anchor woman Helge von der Heyde with Dieter F. Uchtdorf, age 46, chief pilot of Lufthansa German Airline.

"We are Christians," the interview guest explains. "Christ is at the center of our religion. The temple is the House of the Lord." In the ZDF evening program, they are not discussing air travel. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be dedicating their Frankfurt Temple in a few days.

Today, Dieter F. Uchtdorf lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the headquarters of his church. He no longer flies as captain of a B747 to worldwide destinations. He has dedicated himself fully to service in his church. He is very comfortable at the podiums of the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Members of his faith address him as "Elder" because he preaches and leads like the elders of the church in the New Testament. Elder Uchtdorf represents his church to the public across the world as well. In the past year he met in Berlin with Chancellor Angela Merkel and former President Joachim Gauck.

"Tele-Illustrierte" invited him to this interview in 1987, because, as the chairman of the temple committee, he was preparing the Frankfurt Temple open house and dedication. In addition, he was serving at that time in the voluntary role of a stake president, in charge of the ecclesiastical leadership and ministering of all church members in the Rhine-Main area.

Church buildings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be found in many cities in Germany. The Frankfurt Temple in Friedrichsdorf im Taunus is the second temple in Germany. A temple is not a normal church building. It is reserved for the most important ordinances in the restored Church of Jesus Christ, such as marriage for all eternity.

The ZDF television interview lasted longer than initially planned because a news report was not coming in as expected. What differentiates the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from other Christian churches? In the Church of Jesus Christ twelve apostles lead the Church, explained the faithful pilot, "just as in the ancient church."

Now, 20 years later, in Frankfurt am Main, Elder Uchtdorf himself is one of those twelve apostles. Just as Andrew, James, or Paul, he bears testimony in all the world of Jesus Christ. We follow him as he visits an office building in the Eckenheim area of Frankfurt. From this central office, employees of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints support the congregations in all of Europe.

The apostle is meeting with Dr. Gerhard Spörl, head of the Hamburg central department of the news magazine, "Der Spiegel." Once again, he is being interviewed. And once again, Elder Uchtdorf is speaking of the temple. It is holy, he says. After the interview, the "Spiegel" writes, "It probably helps to see things as they appear to the pilot of an airplane; from a higher point of view, the glaring sun on the horizon, the earth far below. Everything from here looks so heartwarmingly beautiful; ordered and endangered at the same time. And perhaps still possible to be rescued."

In his sermons, Elder Uchtdorf frequently draws parallels between flying and what it takes to live as a follower of Christ.

Elder Uchtdorf was born in Ostrava in what is now Czechia. As a four-year-old child he fled with his family to East Germany. When he was 11 years old, because the life of his father was in danger for political reasons, they fled again. And so, he arrived in Hesse, Germany. Here he met his wife, Harriet Reich, and raised his children. In Frankfurt am Main he learned everything about mechanical engineering. When he speaks German the soft melodies of the language he learned in Hesse in his childhood and youth are recognizable.

Elder Uchtdorf is an apostle with Hessian roots. From the beginning, the media have connected his name to the Frankfurt Temple. He prefers that the focus be on a different name. "The House of the Lord – Holiness to the Lord" stands over the entrance of the temple. At a worldwide conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints last April he said, "Strive to follow the path of discipleship. When our love for God and His children grows, so will our determination to follow Jesus Christ."

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