

Story: How We Obtained Membership

Source: DAI Microfilm T-81; Roll #599; Serial 817; Group 1035;
Item 1275; Frames 5386765-5386766
Translated by Allen E. Konrad – January 2013
PO Box 157 Rowley, IA 52329
<onamission@lbt.org>

[Translator's Note: What the boys of confirmation age had to experience in order to become ringers of the church bell.]

[Begin Translation]

Assignment 24: How We Obtained Membership

Baumann, Tarutino
[??]ülerzahl 256

Our school children got confirmed at the age of 15. They were then considered as of marriageable age but single (*ledig*). As such, the 14 year olds were called catechumens (*Konfirmanden*) and felt superior to the other school children. Woe to the cheeky (*Nassweis*) young one who dared to insult a catechumen. In my home village, the confirmands were given the responsibility of ringing the church bell. They were called ringers. The year's class (*Jahrgang*) was distributed into the units (*Einheiten*) of last year's class, three fellows into each, who had to change off ringing the bell on Sundays and Festival days. The units were referred to by number such as unit one, unit two, etc. It was considered a special honor to belong to unit one. These were usually considered to be the best ringers. Whoever thinks that ringing a bell is not an art should talk to the confirmands in my home congregation. It was with great longing, yes, even with impatience, that the young students looked forward to the time when they would become catechumens and bell ringers. Only through lots of hard work and effort (*Leiden und Hiebe*) would a fellow become worthy of being a bell ringer.

It was customary with us that the year's class, which was going to be confirmed, even before the day of confirmation, would have certain ringers chosen from younger age group. This was done by the unit. "Unit One" (Year 1901) agreed in February to establish unit two and had already come up with a list and, naturally, had already set on course the whole process. It was kept secret deliberately who would be most fortunate to be chosen as a bell ringer. One from "Ours" managed (it is said, to his shame) to find out, but only by means of bribery, that unit one made up only four ranks with four bell ringers in their unit. Our year's class numbered 28. Once we came to know this, all our efforts (*Dichten und Trachten*) were focused on learning the names of the lucky ones. But this became a very difficult thing since everyone wanted to be the one in unit one, each one, without exception, wanted to be in the unit and wanted the others to be bumped without mercy. We shrank back in our problem with our "Helpers", that is, the age group of 1900. Because those who were a year older than us, according to strict adopted custom, were our protectors, now turned out to be our enemy. There were more of us than of them and that may well have been a reason that notice was given, through intermediaries, whether they had

chosen the bell ringers. We had agreed among ourselves that we were going to stand up against such a great abuse, and that our helpers would want to stand by us.

One Sunday afternoon, unit one invited us to show up at the cemetery the next Sunday at 4:00 PM. We were to become members. Snow covered the ground. We gathered with our comrades and discussed the thing that was going to take place.

“Boys,” said one, “I have put on a thick sheepskin coat (*Pelzmantel*) and will feel nothing if they beat us up.” Another had put on a sheepskin vest, another put some leather on his back, under his shirt (*Kittel*), etc. Each person had taken precautions to dull the impending blows. I did not do anything like that.

Finally we headed out. Our enemies met us on the hill with mischievous smiles and sneering grins. We hated them like mortal enemies, but had to literally face up to the inevitable unless we did not want to have the honor of becoming bell ringers. We stood opposite them without exchanging a single word and showed our animosity.

The leader of our enemies, “like a big shot”, held a list in his hand. We were told to all stand in a row. Everyone from unit one moved to the back of us and, with the fist, gave each of us a rough blow on the back. We were not allowed to flinch. Then they took up snow and bombarded us with snowballs. We were not allowed to fight back. When they finally grew tired they let it be known that we were finally in.

Their leader stepped forward with the list and read the names of the first, the second, the third, and the fourth member. Then the cowards once again stepped back and pummeled us violently. The bombardment of snow began anew, yes, they wanted to rub us with snow. At the signal, we took flight and arrived in the village puffing and dog-tired (*küchend*). We had become members and we were now also legitimate bell ringers and regarded as confirmands. Our comrades, who did not have the good fortune of becoming bell ringers, gathered around us in silent envy. They would not be allowed to freely stand on the bell platform (*Glockenstuhl*). That was how it was going to be. It was tough what we had to go through to gain the position.

[End of Translation]