



Funeral oration for Josef Döllner

held by Hermann Pönisch at the funeral on Friday, 8 April 2022

Dear Sabine, dear relatives, dear friends,

Only a week ago, after the last, fifth operation in the accident hospital in Murnau because of a wound on his leg, which Josef had contracted on 27 December as a result of falling down the stairs in front of his front door, I spoke to him on the phone. He was already impatient and joyful to finally be discharged on Monday, 11 April after six weeks in hospital and to return to his beloved home in Gröbenzell.

Our Creator arranged it differently. A severe heart attack last Sunday put an abrupt end to his life. He died in the presence of his beloved Sabine.

Josef was born in August 1933 in Zieditz in Egerland, near Falkenau, now Sokolov. His parents ran a prosperous bakery, owned two tenement houses and considerable land.

He often told me about his Czech nanny, through whom he also learned Czech as a child.

His professional career was preordained. In Prague, his uncle Andreas Döllner was the sole owner of the private bank Döllner & Co. which had existed since 1871. Since his uncle was childless, Josef was destined to be his successor at an early age. For this reason, he learned the profession of banker.

Shortly after the end of the war, his family was driven out of their homeland - and like all displaced persons, dispossessed of all their possessions.

The family found shelter in Lower Bavaria, and Josef spent six years in an unloved boarding school in Regensburg.

He then completed his training as a banker and was able to continue his education for one year at the Bankverein in Zurich and then for six months in Canada. At the Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft he became director of a branch in the east of Munich and was extremely successful.

Early on he became involved in the SPD, to which he belonged for 67 years until his death. The reason for joining was: his once so wealthy father was told in his new home of Lower Bavaria "displaced have-nots" we cannot have in a conservative party in Bavaria.

The integration of refugees was obviously a problem even then.

Despite the painful loss of his homeland, Josef made an early effort to reconcile Czechs and Germans. Reconciliation and the pursuit of peace marked his entire life.

In 1964, the border to the former Czechoslovakia was reopened. Immediately the idea was born to establish a "small" border traffic. To this end, the initiators Dr. Max Fischer, then District Administrator in Cham, Walter Richter and Josef decided to found an association. The foundation did not take place until 1968 due to political resistance on the German side. There was a long struggle over the name until the OWWC could be registered. At that time, international connections and friendships across borders were not desired during the coldest Cold War.

Josef was the soul, the heart and the motor of the OWWC for many decades. I often jokingly said that the club should actually be called the Josef Döllner Club. He always tried to bridge gaps, to build up and maintain contacts, to bring projects forward.

Also in 1968, Josef found his way to the Odd Fellows, an international order with the ethical principle of pure humanity. Josef lived this principle his whole life. Until the end, he maintained his contacts, especially with the Sovereign Grand Lodge in the USA. We owe many visits to countries where the Order is active to him. It is to his efforts that we owe the success of installing new Lodges in our neighbouring countries to the east.

A brother in the Lodge and personal friend was the Munich doctor Dr Karl Daxl. Charly, as he wanted to be called, was a general practitioner and already at that time convinced that a healing therapy was only possible if one treated holistically. For the time, this was still an unusual approach. Together with other brothers, the Thomas Wildey Institute was founded to publicise this idea. Here, too, Josef was the driving force, especially after Charly's early death. In the last two years we have given a lot of thought to how to make the work in the TWI active again. That is precisely why we wanted to meet again immediately after his planned release.

One of Josef's heartfelt concerns throughout his life was his old home. Many times I was with him in his birthplace Zieditz, in Falkenau and especially in Maria Kulm, the largest and most important pilgrimage in the Egerland. The provostry there was in a pitiful state after the communist era. Through Josef's initiative, the Maria Kulm pilgrimage church support association was founded in 2000. Josef found sources of money, including 1.1 million euros from a Norwegian fund, so that the baroque church in Dientzenhof could be renovated and can now shine in new splendour.

It would fill many pages to list all his activities. His voluntary work has been honoured.

In 1995, Josef received the Federal Cross of Merit on Ribbon and in 2001 the Federal Cross of Merit 1st Class.

In 2019, Dominik Cardinal Duka, Archbishop and Czech Primate, awarded him the "Antonina Podlahy" Episcopal Medal for his services to German-Czech reconciliation at the Archbishop's Palace in Prague. So far, only 26 people have received this rarely awarded distinction.

For the 40th anniversary of the OWWC he received the OWWC Gold Medal, for the 50th anniversary a Bavarian Lion, as President Eberhard Sinner aptly said: "A Lion for the Lion". The IOOF honoured him with the Odd Fellow Merit, the SPD as a "bridge builder".

I thank Josef for allowing me to be his friend for more than 50 years. Josef had the gift of approaching people and inspiring them with his ideas. He stood by his friends unwaveringly.

Finally, however, a special thank you that Josef would certainly have liked to express himself: it goes to his wife Sabine, who always cared for him, who took over everything that was in her power. Two people who understood each other, trusted each other and loved each other dearly. Without Sabine, to whom he was married for 54 years, many of the things he tackled would not have been possible.

Farewell, dear Josef - you were always a good person with a big, sincere heart.

We bow down before a truly great person. Our world has become poorer.