

Two Pledges for the *Jugendweihe* (1955/1958)

Abstract

In the 1950s, the state and the Protestant Church in the GDR struggled over the issue of influence on East German youth. The SED regime used coercive measures to restrict the church's youth work while simultaneously striving to provide young people with attractive alternatives. These efforts included the establishment of a secular, festive *Jugendweihe* – focused on commitment to Socialism – for East German youths at the age of fourteen. The concept of the *Jugendweihe* as a replacement for Protestant and Catholic confirmation dated back to the nineteenth century and had already been popular among workers in the Weimar Republic. In 1950, the SED rejected the concept but then changed its attitude in response to Soviet pressure. The first large-scale *Jugendweihe* took place in East Berlin in March 1955.

Source

The pledge for the *Jugendweihe* (1955)

Dear friends!

Let us rise from our seats! The youth will now make its solemn pledge. With the knowledge and skills they have acquired and will acquire under the protection of and with the help of the community of the entire nation, they shall serve world peace, the unity of our fatherland, and the build up of Socialism. My dear young friends! Are you ready to use all your strength to fight for peace together with all peace-loving people, and to defend it to the last breath?

The young people: Yes, we pledge.

Are you ready to use all your strength to fight, together with all patriots, for a united, peace-loving, democratic, and independent Germany?

The young people: Yes, we pledge.

Are you willing to use all your strength for the building of a happy life, for progress in the economy, science, and art?

The young people: Yes, we pledge.

We have heard your pledge. Now accept the promise from the community of all the workers of our people to protect you, to support you, to help you, so that you might reach the lofty goal that you have set for yourselves.

The pledge for the *Jugendweihe* (1958)

Dear young friends!

Are you ready, as loyal sons and daughters of our workers' and peasants' state, to work and fight for a happy life for the entire German nation, then answer me: Yes, we pledge.

Are you ready to use all your strength, together with us, for the great and noble cause of Socialism, then answer me: Yes, we pledge.

Are you ready to stand up for friendship among the nations and with the Soviet nation, and to secure and defend peace along with all peace-loving people of the world, then answer me: Yes, we pledge.

We have heard your pledge, and you have set a lofty and noble goal for yourselves. You have taken your place among the millions of people who are working and fighting for peace and Socialism.

We solemnly accept you into the community of all working people in our German Democratic Republic and promise to support, protect, and help you.

With united forces – forward!

Source: H.G. Koch, *Staat und Kirche in der DDR*. Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1974, p. 234ff; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, ed., *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970*. Göttingen, 1988, p. 573.

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