



church and peace

Church and Peace Rundbrief Spring 2015

Dear Friends,

Can we stop violence with violence?" is the title given to a peace church statement issued in several languages by one of our member organisations, the Bienenberg Theological Seminary. We are able to reproduce the statement on the following pages. Not only the horrific events in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and many other countries, but also the attacks in Europe, present a major challenge to the pacifist position. An increasing number of voices, including some within the churches, are calling once again for military intervention or at least for supplying weapons. But can this be allowed to cause Christians, amidst feelings of powerlessness and anger and a desire for quick solutions, to turn away from the call of the Gospel to nonviolence and love for our enemies? The staff at Bienenberg have tackled this question rigorously.

Many events at the German Protestant Kirchentag (church gathering), which was held in Stuttgart at the beginning of June, took up peace themes. Some of these events were part of the official programme of the Kirchentag. Others were held in a "Peace Centre" which was organised independently by a number of organisations, including Church and Peace. Our chairperson, Antje Heider-Rottwilm, was involved in organising a panel discussion on Saturday 6 June about the World Council of Churches' Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. She then also acted as moderator of the afternoon event. Church and Peace organised events in the Peace Centre, at which the work of Quakers at the European Union in Brussels and the Southeast European initiative "Faiths for Peace" were presented.

Good progress has been made with preparations for this year's international conference in Pristina in October, thanks to two more trips to Kosovo. Our member organisation there, the Fellowship of the Lord's People, is very much involved and is providing a great deal of support.

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Wilfried Warneck died in March. Not only was he the first executive secretary of Church and Peace (1975-1990); we and many other people have lost a man of peace, and we have much to thank him for. His witness spurs us on to continue to promote his vision of the church as a community engaged in service for peace and service to the poor.

Warm greetings from Laufdorf,

Using violence against violence?

Statement from a peace church perspective, Faculty of the Theological Seminary Bienenberg: Lukas Amstutz, Frieder Boller, Heike Geist, Hanspeter Jecker, Denis Kennel, Bernhard Ott, Michel Sommer, Marcus Weiland, Marie-Noëlle Yoder

In the face of the terror caused by the IS militias in Iraq and Syria, Western nations have reacted with air strikes and deliveries of weapons. A reaction that, given the atrocities described, has been widely accepted – also increasingly in churches. Among the same churches that almost unanimously raised their voices in protest against the American invasion of Iraq, there is now an increasing contingent which holds military intervention to be a moral responsibility compatible with the Christian faith.

The Theological Seminary Bienenberg is rooted in a peace church tradition whose commitment to pacifism is rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a position that once again faces fundamental questions in light of the terrible and threatening events in the Middle East. First and foremost, we find ourselves – insofar as is possible in well-protected Switzerland – deeply shaken when we hear about the persecution and execution of Christians and other minorities. We also experience feelings of powerlessness, anger, and the fervent longing that a stop be put to this brutal course of action as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, we believe that the situation does not render pacifist convictions obsolete. Because we are Christians, we now see ourselves challenged to find a way of dealing with the enemy according to the principles of nonviolence inspired by the Gospel. For this reason we are addressing all who profess Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace and seek to follow him. It is His call to love one's enemies that we hear as an appeal to the churches to witness to God's coming kingdom in this world.

By writing this, we are sharing a few rough thoughts about events that at times render us speechless. To speak out in this manner runs the risk of coming across as crude or cynical. We are also quite aware that we do not have a satisfactory answer for all things. However, we would like to share our wrestling with the pressing questions that time and again are raised by such eruptions of violence. We know that it is only possible to express some of these thoughts when at a safe distance from violent conflicts. We are also part of a society that has for far too long taken a passive role and has not yet exhausted all possibilities to help. However, we do not want to let ourselves be paralysed by helplessness and resignation, but rather we carry on, humbly and with the help of God's Spirit, in the “hunt for peace” (Heb. 12,14) as best as we are able. This we do in fellowship and solidarity with the victims of these inhuman actions. God have mercy!

Objection 1: Isn't (Christian) pacifism idealist and naive?

The current characterisations of (Christian) pacifism as naive are nothing new (1), but rather a familiar and recurring accusation. Throughout history, people and movements that set themselves against the conventional wisdom of returning violence with violence have been derided. Yet those with power have often considered them to be far more than harmless crackpots. They recognised what was actually at stake and asked apprehensively, “What would happen if even more people were seduced into nonviolence?” They frequently answered this question in the form of sometimes violent per-

secution. The Anabaptists, for example, could tell a few tales in this regard. The question, “What would happen?” would by and large remain unanswered. Which is a shame, because history has recorded a good number of stories of peacemakers whose apparently “naive” pacifism impeded or put to an end to bloodshed (2).



These are examples of unexpected turns made possible because people acted “naively” in the best sense of the word. They cultivated a “culture of peace” (3) which fostered an alternative relationship to violence. Therefore, it cannot be said that Christian pacifism is fundamentally doomed to failure, although there is of course no guarantee that it will always lead to the desired result. The same, however, can also be said of military intervention.

We must also not forget that Christian pacifism is a costly path (4). This too it shares in common with military intervention. The hope of being able to lead a “clean” war with intelligent weapons with which “only” terrorists are targeted and killed without further victims has long since revealed itself to be an illusion. Is there really such a great difference between the necessary willingness to make sacrifices of an armed soldier and a nonviolent Christian, that only the latter is seen as naive and unrealistic?

Objection 2: Violence can only be stopped with violence

Eleven years ago, the American military made a move to overthrow the then-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein as part of the “Axis of Evil”. They succeeded and celebrated this as the speedy success of their potent military machine. It did not take long, however, to recognise how short-sighted their strategy was. Instead of the quick withdrawal of troops they had planned, a long and drawn-out war persisted which did not just claim many victims, but also accrued horrendous costs. When the last troops withdrew in December 2011, they left behind them a region crippled by a political vacuum, which has since been filled by increasingly radical groups. The military action in Iraq had thus eliminated a dictator, but also paved the way for new excesses of violence. This is a phenomenon that has been demonstrated in other cases as well. Benjamin L. Corey rightly asks: “If the use of violence is how we got here, why would we think MORE violence would actually make things better?” (5)

Under the banner of R2P (Responsibility to Protect), political and ecclesiastic leaders have argued in favour of a three step program to solve, or at least hinder, violent conflicts: Prevention – Reaction – Rebuilding (6). However, the example of Iraq is a painful reminder that hasty and unilateral violent reactions to conflict do not solve the problem and sometimes only aggravate the situation. Such military interventions frequently promise far more than they are able to deliver. One can only imagine what would happen if at least as much funding were directed into conflict prevention and reconstruction (including trauma recovery) as is to the stockpile of weapons that is supposed to secure or reestablish peace. (7)

Objection 3:

Should we then simply stand by and watch as these terrible things happen?

No. A peace church position is not equivalent to apathetic passivity. The current situation requires a reaction. The question is, by which means? A military intervention seems justifiable at this point. Yet history shows that previous “just wars” have been carried out with dubious motivations at odds with their original or official intention. What are the goals of the “coalition of the willing” in Iraq? In its military actions, does it itself follow the rules of engagement that it demands from its enemies? Why do we not hear the cry of the responsibility to protect in the face of so many other instances of inhuman injustices in the world?

We are convinced that evil must be confronted. Military violence seems to us, however, unsuitable for the task. In the following points, we see alternative means of actions:



Prayer. We Christians ask God for astounding things. He who prays to God for a sunny day despite a bad weather report expects nothing less than that God will override the basic physical laws of meteorology. What makes this trust in God so fleeting when it comes to war and peace? When we pray not only for the victims and for those threatened, but also for the perpetrators, we do so in faith in God's promise: “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit!” (Zach. 4,6).

Nonviolent peacemaking operations. Often unheeded by official reporting, people in conflict zones around the globe dare to place themselves between the fronts without weapons. They do not shut their eyes before evil, but rather confront it bravely with their unarmed presence. In their vulnerability, they break through the classic friend-enemy mentality, which can open the door to unexpected possibilities for action. Impressive reports of such peacemaking operations show that there is a “third way” and raise challenging questions about conventional peacekeeping strategies. (9) They also continually remind us how important contact between people and (church) communities in conflict areas is in helping us not to be led by media coverage into indiscriminately dividing parties into “good” and “evil”. In searching for an appropriate course of action against the terror of the IS, we would therefore especially like to hear from directly-affected Christians.

Help for refugees. Our Anabaptist history contains many examples of people who responded to repression and persecution with flight. Many of these experienced a great deal of solidarity and hospitality in difficult times. Today we can take on responsibility as hosts with similar generosity – whether providing emergency assistance at the local level or seeking to improve the process of admission of refugees here in Europe, who at the moment are far too often impeded by bureaucracy. (10)

Police operations. The phrase “just policing” – calls to mind in church circles the deployment of international (!) police troops. Trained in nonviolent conflict resolution and held to the standards of international law and Human Rights, such teams could be deployed in order to protect people. Whether they would be completely unarmed is debatable. If weapons were, however, to be used in an extremely restrained manner – for example, to secure a refugee corridor – it would nevertheless amount to a

completely different strategy, than a large-scale military invasion with the goal of eliminating the enemy. Peace church circles that consider such an operation to be acceptable strongly plead for a “nonlethal use of violence.” (11)

Objection 4:

Doesn't the Bible also speak of necessary violence?

There are without a doubt some vexing passages in the Bible in which violence is described as desired, or at least legitimised, by God. However, to derive from these instances an across-the-board rule of thumb that violence is just sometimes necessary seems inappropriate to us. Taking into account the overarching lines of the biblical narrative as a whole, it becomes clear that God truly desires Shalom – a just peace. This can be seen most clearly in the comprehensive will to peace of Jesus. He wages a battle without compromise against pseudo-religion of any kind, against injustice and self-righteousness – and in spite of it all loves his enemies instead of killing them. Even upon being sentenced to death on the cross by the political and religious powers that be. God protests against this logic of violence with the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Morning and in so doing validates Jesus and his way. In reflecting upon the story of Jesus, the early church arrived at the conclusion: in Jesus, God responded to human hostility with reconciliatory love (Rom 5,10). Instead of fighting back, God embraces the world and brings about Shalom. It also becomes clear that Jesus set an example for how Shalom can take root in our own relationships (Phil 2,5–11). As Christians, we see ourselves called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus (1Pet 2,21; Lu 22,49–51) and to overcome evil with good (Rom 12,21). In saying this, we are aware that there is no guarantee that this way will come without suffering and always deliver the desired results. Throughout the centuries, peacemaking individuals have occasionally paid a very high price. Yet it is the resurrection that stirs in us the belief that enmity and death do not have the last word, but rather God's love makes everything whole. We pray therefore, that our fear abates to the love that reaches even to our enemy. (12)

- i The wanting realism of Christian pacifism has, for example, recently been criticised by Reinold Scharnowski in his article, „Allerletzte Möglichkeit ist Waffengewalt“, (http://www.livenef.ch/themen/glaube/glaube/261886-allerletzte_moeglichkeit_ist_waffengewalt.html).
- ii A collection of such stories of peace can be found in Cornelia Lehn, Friede sei mit euch!, Weisenheim am Berg 1987.
- iii Also see Alan & Eleanor Kreider, Paulus Widjaja, Eine Kultur des Friedens: Gottes Vision für Gemeinde und Welt, Schwarzenfeld 2008.
- iv This costly way is described by Ron Sider, „Gottes Volk versöhnt“ in: XI. Mennonitische Weltkonferenz Straßburg, 1984: Hauptansprachen. Strasbourg: CMM (:35–39), in English: <http://www.cpt.org/resources/writings/sider>.
- v <http://www.theologiestudierende.de/2014/08/19/irakischer-voelkermord-unsere-gewalt-hat-uns-hier-her-gebracht/>
- vi The concept is thoroughly explained here: <http://www.schutzverantwortung.de>. A detailed examination from a peace church perspective by Jakob Fehr can be found here: ([http://www.dmfk.de/fileadmin/downloads/Fehr - R2P die Konfrontation mit dem Boesen.pdf](http://www.dmfk.de/fileadmin/downloads/Fehr_-_R2P_die_Konfrontation_mit_dem_Boesen.pdf))
- vii For the call to a long-term strategy for Iraq, see also http://www.huffingtonpost.com/derek-flood/is-there-a-nonviolent-isis_b_5670512.html
- viii An example is the Christian Peacemaker Team (<http://cpt.org/>)
- ix To such reports can be found on <http://mennoworld.org/2014/09/01/cpt-aids-refugees-seeking-safety-in-iraqi-kurdistan/> und <http://mennoworld.org/2014/08/29/jim-foley-is-and-what-i-learned-from-being-kidnapped/>
- x American Benjamin L. Corey asks on a related note: „Why not stage the largest airlift since the Berlin Airlift, and bring all of these religious and ethnic minorities out of their situation, and grant them asylum here in the United States?“
- xi See also the presentation of Fernando Enns „Gerechter Frieden zwischen Interventionsverbot und Schutzgebot“, <http://friedensbildung-schule.de/sites/friedensbildung-schule.de/files/anhang/medien/fbs-responsibility-protect-449.pdf>
- xii Alice Su describes this transformation impressively on <http://gospelworldview.wordpress.com/2014/09/03/1-john-isis-and-the-gospel-versus-terror>. A German translation can be found here: www.bienenberg-blog.ch.

The miracle of God's loving power

Inspiration for Pentecost by Sr. Nicole Grochowina
Community Christusbruderschaft in Selbitz, Germany

When the day of Pentecost had come,
they were all together in one place.
And suddenly from heaven there came a sound
like the rush of a violent wind,
and it filled the entire house
where they were sitting.
Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them,
and a tongue rested on each of them.
All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in other languages,
as the Spirit gave them ability.

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-5

Pentecost – the Holy Spirit blows through the world; people who speak different languages suddenly understand one another and feel connected; the good news is finally heard loud and clear throughout the whole Earth, so that no-one can ignore it.

Pentecost – the right words are found for talking about God's action; ancient promises about the unity of God's people are fulfilled in a single moment; and the awe-inspiring miracles where Heaven and Earth meet take everyone's breath away. The phenomenon of Pentecost is not a whispering breath of wind such as that which persuaded Elijah of the presence of God, but rather a noisy witness to the reality of God's existence which is able to transcend all boundaries.

And yet the Acts of the Apostles adds a short and peculiarly unspectacular but nonetheless important sentence before the account of the actual miracle of Pentecost: The people who were first touched by the Holy Spirit were already gathered together in one place – and then the roaring of the Holy Spirit came over them.

But what does it mean to share a particular space and then experience Pentecost? Or, to put it another way: What does it mean to be crowded so closely together that every flaw in another person becomes blatantly obvious? And what does it mean to then experience Pentecost in this place? Here in this place. This is a safe space, because it is a place where both flaws and signs of joy are equally evident. The Holy Spirit descends on people who have gathered together in one place, a safe space. These people then have the task of creating and opening up safe spaces in other places so that – in this way which everyone can understand – they are able to show people the miracle of God's loving power, which knows no bounds and protects and unites everyone.

Time to deepen our commitment to justice and peace

On 8th May, Britain woke up to the fact that although only 37% of the voters had voted Conservative, the British electoral system meant that we now had a Conservative government with an absolute majority.

That same day, the government proceeded to cut the funding for a programme to help disabled people find work. Two days later, a Justice Minister was appointed who is on the record as supporting the death penalty. The Home Secretary remains in post and continues to refuse to support any programme for helping the refugees in the Mediterranean, continues to be in open conflict with the Police Federation by expecting them to increase their work-load with much reduced resources, and is proposing that the government act as a censor for programmes on TV and radio. The Prime Minister intends to hold a referendum on British membership of the European Union sooner rather than later, and is rushing ahead with his plan to scrap the Human Rights Act and replace it with his own "Bill of Rights" – and possibly leaving the European Human Rights Convention in the process.

The Conservative project of diminishing the state and handing over as much as possible to private companies will continue. So too will attacks on the situation of asylum-seekers, the increased militarisation of our society (including the Community Covenants which were actually started under the last Labour government), and the disdain shown to the weakest and most vulnerable members of our communities.

For people of faith, it is difficult to know how to respond to this. The Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Home Secretary all describe themselves as Anglicans; the Justice Secretary is a Presbyterian; and the Minister responsible for Work and Pensions (and thus for many of the problems suffered by those at the bottom of the social scale) is a Roman Catholic. Their interpretation of the injunction to "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God" clearly differs from that of the churches to which they belong.

The knee-jerk reaction to the election result is to organise; and it is indeed noticeable that campaigning groups have increased their activities in the past few weeks. We can each of us look at our lives and examine what we do individually as an act of witness for peace and justice. We can consider how effective our actions are, and consider what more we can do. For my part, I have decided to give up a couple of things in order to do more campaigning work (although I won't stop reading novels, making cakes, or knitting!)

But we can't achieve our goal only by organising. As people of faith, we have a different calling and one which possibly gives us more stamina for the long haul. As a former General Secretary of Church and Peace once wrote: Our response to violence and injustice is to pray more deeply, because only God can show us the way out of the mess that the world is in. And only God gives us the strength to follow that Way.

Barbara Forbes

What are Quakers doing at the EU?

Promoting Quaker values in the European context. A brief report by QCEA Representative Alexandra Bosbeer.

There is a wide variety of non-governmental organisations in Brussels and in Strasbourg. Many are the EU advocacy offices of global organisations. Some are faith groups promoting religious tolerance or the rights of the members of their own faith. There are a great many commercial lobbyists – [the Transparency Register](#), a public register of the organisations active in contacting the European Commission and the European Parliament, lists over 8000 organisations. Half of these are commercial lobbyists and another thousand are professional advisers and lawyers. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) make up only a quarter of the organisations registered to lobby the EU institutions.

QCEA is small fry in this sea of lobbying organisations. We represent a small faith group with only about 20,000 members. The European membership of several other churches is several thousand times as large.

So what are we doing here?

As Quakers, our faith is based on the conviction that we can all have direct experience of God's presence and discern God's will for us and for the world. Since our origins in 17th century England we have sought to live out our testimonies to truth, peace, equality, and simplicity. The Religious Society of Friends is recognised as an historic peace church: the challenge of how to honour the people on all sides of conflicts continues to be a living one. The staff here at the QCEA office in Brussels keep in mind that we are not simply an interest group lobbying the EU: we are people speaking to other people who happen to work in EU institutions.

A [stakeholder](#) is someone who has an interest in a project. If we think of the EU as such a project, almost everyone in the world has an interest, whether as a citizen of an EU Member State or a citizen of a third country affected by EU policies.

Stakeholders take action in different ways. Some attend meetings and call for the institutions to achieve a certain high standard. This is necessary: the presentation of a radical alternative reminds us all that things do not have to be as they are. One crucial dimension of stakeholder or civil society participation in policy-making is the totally different view, the one that cracks open our understanding of how things should be and brings us all to a different place, where we can see new ways forward. The promotion of [restorative justice](#) might be an example of this approach.

The people working for QCEA get to know the people with whom we are in dialogue, and to understand their situation. They are not enemies but people with their own reasons for doing the work they do. They are often striving for similar goals. We make suggestions based on our own expertise and observations, about how common goals might be achieved. And very often, our suggestions are taken on board. Friendly conversations can bring us all to a better shared understanding.

We also work in partnership with other NGOs in several more or less formal networks. One example is the [Human Rights and Democracy Network \(HRDN\)](#), a collaboration of more than forty human rights organisations working at the EU level. Last year QCEA played a significant part in an HRDN campaign in which candidates for the European

Parliament pledged to promote human rights (see stand4humanrights.org); our ongoing relationships with those who were elected as MEPs means we can discuss opportunities for the Parliament to stand for human rights both inside and outside the EU.

The stand4humanrights campaign was promoted by QCEA staff and supporters – we wrote e-mails and so did many of you who had signed up to receive QCEA action alerts. The work continues for our staff in Brussels. We are able to converse with MEPs about human rights issues during meetings of the Friends of Human Rights and Democracy group.



Transparency is a crucial element of democratic governance. QCEA recently joined with 44 other NGOs to call for increased transparency in the revision of the European Commission's own guidelines on impact assessment. The [European Ombudsman](#), Emily O'Reilly, is an active contributor to the promotion of [transparency on many fronts, from the negotiations for the EU-US free trade deal \(TransAtlantic Trade and Investment Partnership or TTIP\) to the Commission's expert groups](#), which often seem to be biased in favour of commercial interests.

QCEA aims to work with our partners and the people in the institutions here, to promote fundamental values of peace, human rights, democratic governance, sustainability, and economic justice. We do this by working alongside the many people who have similar aims. We welcome your support: your prayers, your time, your responses to our action alerts, and your subscriptions and donations. Thank you!

What should the future of EU foreign and defence policy be?

The success of the EU depends upon it remaining true to its origins.

The EU was conceived as a peace project, created out of the destruction of the Second World War to ensure that armed conflict between European states could never take place again. Sixty years later, social, institutional and economic connections make war within the EU inconceivable. The story of European integration began as a story of peace. QCEA believes that it is by exporting its values and its success as a peace project that the EU can be most effective on the international stage, not by emulating the military power of the US, Russia and others.

The EU is not naturally a military alliance. Its strength comes in its 'soft power': its ability to wield influence without relying on military strength. Through its development aid, civilian-led overseas missions, and its role in strengthening international law, the European project has thus far represented an alternative to the militarism often present at the national level. For the EU to focus on developing military capability is to relegate its potential strength in using soft power to second place when instead its soft power should be at the forefront of its external relations.

The greatest strength of EU foreign policy is the range of civilian-led tools that it uses to create a more just and peaceful world. It is these agencies, instruments and institutions that should be strengthened and supported in the years to come. The debate around the future of EU defence policy – currently focussed on the European Council this December – is in danger of marginalising the successful civilian-led approach the EU is commended for.

From: QCEA Briefing Paper: Defending Europe. An introduction to and critique of the militarisation of the European Union. Chris Venables, Nov. 2013, p. 9
<http://www.qcea.org/2013/12/briefing-paper-growing-militarisation-of-the-eu/>

Service and Community Wilfried Warneck 1929 – 2015

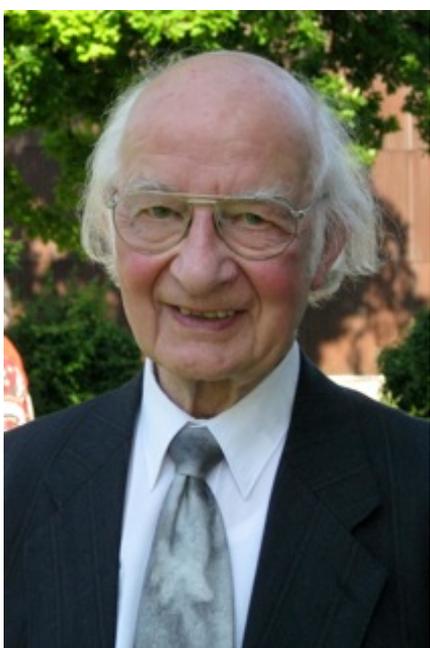
Wilfried Warneck left us on 10 March 2015. This man of peace, so profoundly moulded by the gospel and a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, has completed his earthly journey, surrounded by his wife Ruth and the members of his community, the Laurentiuskonvent.

Two main themes ran through the whole of Wilfried Warneck's life and work: service and community. From his youth and when he was training for the ministry, he launched or accompanied an impressive number of social and community initiatives. After spending three years at Taizé, he returned to Germany to found the Laurentiuskonvent with companions of like mind. 56 years later, this ecumenical community of families and singles still exists and continues to personify the fellowship and diaconal vision that inspired its founders.

Wilfried Warneck was successively the executive secretary of organisations such as the social service agency Förderergemeinschaft Kinder in Not (working among homeless children), Weltfriedensdienst (an overseas development organization) and Eirene (International Christian Service for Peace). He was one of the founders of the platform for Christian peace services in Germany, the Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF – Aktionsgemeinschaft Dienst für den Frieden). From 1975 to 1990, he expanded and inspired the work of Church and Peace as its executive secretary. This is a European ecumenical network of communities from religious orders or groups of families, of parishes, peace movements, peace services and training centres founded by the historical peace churches and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Finally, supported by the Laurentiuskonvent, Church and Peace and friends sharing his vision, he founded in 1992 the organisation "peace diaconate", known today under the new name of "acting without violence" (gewaltfrei handeln).

Wilfried Warneck attended the WCC assembly in Vancouver (1983), the ecumenical convocation in Seoul (1990), and the European ecumenical assemblies in Basel (1989) and Graz (1997). There he courageously represented the minority position of pacifist Christians, becoming the spokesperson of the members of Church and Peace to affirm that objecting to the use of armed force and service for peace are at the very heart of the church's witness and calling.

The life and vision of Wilfried Warneck were strongly marked by the spirituality of Taizé, the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the exegesis of André Trocmé and Jean Lasserre, and Mennonite theologians. Yet the theological and practical vision expressed in his sermons and writings is very original, very personal and very nuanced.



All those who knew Wilfried Warneck will keep the memory of a prophet of modern times. He was genuinely humble, extremely discrete and of the utmost integrity. His gentleness and friendliness, even in the most heated of debates, made him an open and kindly partner in talks involving the most diverse people and their opinions. During the last few years of his life, marked by a grave illness, he amazed more than one visitor with his still lively interest in developments on the political scene and in the life of the churches and communities. But he was no less interested in the lives of his visitors themselves.

A pioneer of peace work within the churches has just left us, and an authentic witness to Jesus Christ. Our thoughts go out to his wife Ruth, who, over the decades, supported and shared his commitment with all her strength. The witness of Wilfried Warneck encourages us to pursue his vision of a church genuinely promoting community and truly committed to serving peace and the poorest of the poor.

Is this the first time you've been to Pristina?

International Church and Peace Conference, 7 – 12 October in Pristina

Daniel Geiser–Opplinger, Administrative Committee Church and Peace

In April Martin Schuler and Daniel Geiser–Opplinger visited Kosovo to make further practical preparations for the international conference. Contacts have been made through the Protestant Evangelical Church in Pristina, the Fellowship of the Lord's People. The International Protestant congregation is the newest member of Church and Peace and is led by Pastor Artur Krasniqi, who has already attended several Church and Peace conferences and has many contacts throughout Kosovo. Holding the conference in Pristina will mean more work for the office in Laufdorf and also higher costs, but – like other members of the Administrative Committee and staff – I returned with the conviction that it is not only feasible to hold the conference in Pristina, but that it will also be good for our partners in the region.



My initial impression at the airport was one of fast and friendly processing of the arriving passengers. I was greeted in German: "Herzlich willkommen! Is this your first visit to Pristina? We wish you a pleasant stay." I experienced this friendliness and helpfulness many times during each day of our visit. On our first walk through Pristina I saw nothing of the suffering and extreme poverty of a great many people, but we then encountered this through conversations and observation during the following days. In partnership with the House of Hope, the congregation works amongst and for the poorest people, e.g. Roma children, and in doing so faces up to reality.

During the journey from Pristina to Peja and Prizren a lot of war damage was to be seen. The Sar Planina Mountains along the Macedonian border reminded me of the Swiss Alps. We enjoyed a wonderful gift when we visited the Serbian Orthodox church in Prizren, where nuns were singing a cappella in a church with excellent acoustics.

The prospect of the international conference of Church and Peace being held in Pristina is accompanied not only by great joy but also by high expectations. There is a desire for new impulses and support for the work for peace, justice, and reconciliation, i.e. conflict resolution, – impulses and support which are rooted in Christian spirituality and conviction. Participants from the region hope to be encouraged and strengthened in their Christian identity and witness.

The story of Gideon in chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Judges was the text for the sermon at the church service on Sunday. This story can be regarded as a model for the church and for Christians in Kosovo. At a time of great instability for Israel, Gideon, together with a small group of people, is tasked by a messenger of God (the word of God) to trust in God and, using their own power, to take action to liberate the violated and oppressed people. The Lord turned to him and said: "Go and use this strength of yours to free Israel from the power of the Midianites", who were the oppressors at that time.

Save the date

**June 9 - 10, 2016 Francophone Regional
June 10 - 12, 2016
Annual General Meeting and Conference
nearby Paris**

Beginning June 13th Eurosatory, the large arms fair, will take place in Paris.
A vigil and peace presence is being organised at the entrance.
More information will follow.

**When Jesus said, "Love your enemies,"
I think he probably meant don't kill them.**

From a song by Linda K. Williams, First Church of the Brethren, San Diego, California
ON EARTH PEACE, P. O. Box 188, New Windsor, MD 21776 (410) 635-8704 www.brethren.org/oepa



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