



Newsletter Church and Peace January 2009

Dear readers,

As we collect the articles for the first 2009 Newsletter the Middle East is again shaken by war. Its official aim: security for the population of southern Israel. Security is a legitimate need - but the means used to achieve it are brutal in the extreme. The number of victims is rising everyday. How can we imagine for an instant that this massacre could end up in real security for those who perpetrated it and those who supported them? Meanwhile, elsewhere, other conflicts are placing a burden on the future of whole generations.

There is another reality, however. In Israel, in Palestine, in the Congo, in the Balkans, peace workers are standing up for peaceful coexistence without the force of arms. The regional conference in Mostar, described on p. 6, is an example of the humble, determined and patient struggle of believers from all backgrounds. We should turn our attention to these groups in this year that the UN has declared the "International Year of Reconciliation". They open the way to renewed relations, to genuine, lasting peace. They work to heal the wounds of the past. They prevent the conflicts of tomorrow. Yet they are too little known and need all the more support.

Other regional conferences organised by Church and Peace have taken place in autumn: one examined the achievements of the European Union since its inception, and the challenges it faces today, including in the field of peace work. The other continued the debate on the "Responsibility to Protect". CPT (Christian Peacemaker Teams) and PBI (Peace Brigades Internationals) are two organisations that show the way to take practical action in this field.

Before wishing you "a good read" let us share again a meditation read at the last Administration Committee by Lore Weber from the Wulfshagenerhütten

Community, and written by her late husband for those who refuse to believe that war can lead to security:

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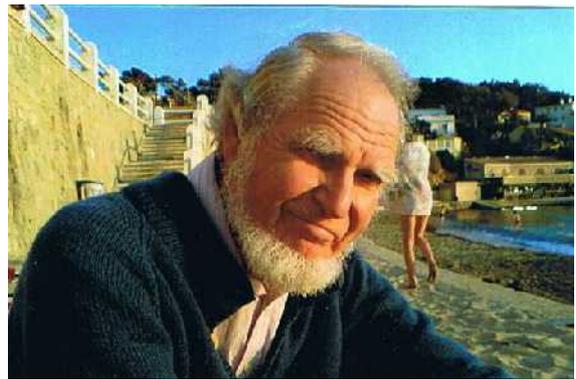
Jesus says: "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth." In this beatitude Jesus encourages all those who take the path of "gentle courage" (literal translation of German *Sanftmut*, meekness); in another translation we read: those who refrain from using violence. Those of us who want to go down this route truly need encouraging. Because it really seems that it is not the path of meekness but that of armed strength that leads to the future. No, says Jesus, it is not those who build their life on violence and weapons and live by the law of the strongest who will inherit the earth. It is you who do not use force at all, you who unite courage and gentleness. But given the realities of this earth, bristling with weapons, you cannot preserve gentleness and courage yourself. It will do you good to look away, to me and my path of meekness, which I followed to the end, to the Cross: I did not resist and I did not use any violence and still I was not brought to nought. Rather I live, my heavenly father having saved me with his life-giving hands and awakened me from death. I live and you on my path of courage and gentleness will also live.

Marie-Noëlle von der Recke

Marie-Noëlle von der Recke

Obituary for Paul Gentner

Our member Paul Gentner, a former treasurer of Church & Peace, passed away on 29 September at the age of 75. Paul Gentner first did voluntary service with *Mennonite Central Committee* in the USA and in Algeria. Then he became a volunteer and local coordinator of *Eirene* in Marocco and its manager and financial officer in Römlinghoven and Neuwied.



Paul in Sanary, F

Paul's life and service illustrated, in rare fashion, what we mean when we say that peace service is an indispensable element of Peace Church witness. From this conviction, Church & Peace pressed for the creation of *Eirene*, International Christian Peace Service, in 1957. However, it was Paul Gentner with his wife Annik and his whole family who gave the organisation its unique profile. Neither in projects nor in the life of the team did Paul ever allow considerations of prestige to mark decision-making. Instead, his life dedicated to following Jesus infused all *Eirene's* activities with a spirit of radical solidarity. In Paul we lose a deeply credible witness to this spirit and this calling.

Wilfried Warneck

Administrative Committee Meeting 1.-3. October, 2008 at Church and Peace member "Le Soc" (Plowshare) in Wimmenau, France

In the first three days in October, the Administrative Committee (AC) gathered at *Maison Jean Goss* where our member group "Le Soc" is located in the beautiful hamlet Kohlhütte in the northern Vosges mountain range.

This was the first AC meeting since Martin Schuler began his term as executive secretary and since Terri Miller's departure last summer. Although there was a long agenda, the AC was able to discuss all of the topics and also take time for breaks.



Betty and Claude Braun, Le Soc

One outcome of the meeting is that the AC decided to report about its work through the newsletter. This report is replacing the earlier "Letter to Members" and thus reaches a larger circle of friends and supporters.

At the beginning of the meeting, the AC took time to remember Paul Gentner, former treasurer of Church and Peace, who passed away two days before the meeting.

The year 2008 was filled with many conferences:

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) in May, at Barchem, and the regional conference at Ammerdown, Great Britain, which we reported on in the last newsletter and which were now evaluated by the AC. The three other regional conference reports are included in this issue of the newsletter. The interest in these conferences as well as the positive experiences we have had in cooperating with our partners will be taken into consideration by the AC when discussing again at the March 2009 AC meeting how often the regional and international conferences should take place. The last AGM had asked the AC to prepare a draft on this subject.

The next AGM will be held on **11./12. June** right before the International Conference (Jubilee conference) at Bienenberg (**June 12th - 14th 2009**). At that time, the election of new AC members for Church and Peace will take place. For several months the nomination committee has been working on contacting candidates.

A peace declaration will be presented at the AGM. It is currently being formulated by an international theological group and will be the topic of one of the workshops during the International Conference.

One of the jobs given to the AC at the last AGM was to start thinking about how to get younger people involved. In an intensive and fruitful brainstorming session, we filled a flipchart with many ideas and at the end, decided to invite young people from the member groups to enter into a dialogue. The AC would like to hear how they envision Church and Peace and what they think about it. Church and Peace wants to learn from their answers and is open to their participation in the planning and implementation of future events.

One of the first concrete steps is to offer six scholarships for young participants for the International conference at the Bienenberg – one for each decade. Older participants will be given the opportunity to sponsor other young people as participants (see invitation leaflet and registry sheet, which is attached to this newsletter).



Naturally, we can't have an AC meeting without discussing the topic of "finances": the treasurer and the executive secretary were able to report to the AC about the first eight months of 2008, that the state of our finances is tight, but stable and within the budget. The opinion at that time was that we would close the year 2008 without a new deficit, which we can happily report has come true. For this, I want to especially thank all of those who have helped make this happen. The

situation is good at the moment, but it is not yet in the clear. In October, the AC also set the goal for the Jubilee year of 2009 and Church and Peace's 60th birthday, of creating an outlook and a plan for the coming years. The budget for 2009, which was presented in draft form in Wimmenau, is open for discussion and adoption by the AGM.

In order to have fundraising attempts not only in the German-speaking region during the Jubilee year, the AC has decided that the colored Church and Peace leaflet should also be printed in English and French. The English copies are available and can be requested at the International Office. The French version will be printed as soon as the coordination for this region has been clarified. The AC hopes, along with the International Office team, that the new allocation of tasks will provide more room for Marie-Noëlle to work at strengthening relationships in our network.

Finally, the AC registered an application for individual membership and will recommend its approval to the next AGM: Harry Schram is the Chairperson of *Eirene International*.

Martin Schuler

Regional Conference held in co-operation with the branches of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) in Strasbourg, France, from 3 – 5 October 2008. The first such meeting to be held in France in four years was both exciting and fruitful.

The original concept had been to organise a francophone regional meeting of Church and Peace in co-operation with MIR France, the French branch of IFOR. This concept developed, however, into a project of truly European



Demonstration in front of the Opera

scope, with over fifty participants coming to 'Strasbourg – European City' from France, Switzerland, Germany, UK, Netherlands, Belgium and Austria. The theme selected for the weekend meeting was **'European Union, in the beginning a Reconciliation Project – but what about today?'**



Maria Biedrawa, Marie-Noëlle von der Recke, Frédéric Rognon

The opening 'meet and greet' programme with its relaxed atmosphere made possible an awareness of the European and non-European family roots represented by the participants. The discussion and exchange of various linguistic heritages and different groups and traditions, all working toward peace began then and there!

Lectures of considerable substance were presented by Frédéric Rognon (Member of the Communauté de l'Arche, and university

lecturer of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Strasbourg) and Ullrich Hahn (Chair of the German branch of IFOR). They described the development of European integration up to the present day, with particular emphasis on what has already been achieved in legal development, as well as on the reconciliation of former enemies. These lectures offered visions and opportunities for present and future challenges – among other things a turnaround in economic and military policy, as well as in dealing with refugees.

Hildegard Goss-Mayr, Honorary President of IFOR, was interviewed, and described her fifty years of commitment and personal witness to reconciliation in Europe. In moving words she called to mind the path-breaking encounters which she and her husband Jean Goss had conducted in a still divided Europe. She named five areas as priorities for the years immediately ahead: inter-religious dialogue; dialogue with citizens of former East Bloc countries; solidarity with countries in the southern hemisphere; peace education; and the founding of a European Peace Agency.

Participants then split into three workshop groups to discuss the following topics in more depth: *peace service and reconciliation work in Europe*; *realising a shared system of common values*; and *the development of a petition for the establishment of a European Peace Agency*.

The highlight of the conference was the demonstration in the square in front of the opera calling for the founding of a European Peace Agency. This became even more exciting as the French military were holding an information event there at the same time, so that many soldiers in uniform were in the audience. - It would be pure conjecture, of course, to reflect on how the words spoken on behalf of a European Peace Agency were received by this section of the public, but it was fervently hoped that the enthusiasm shown by the members of the Regional Conference was not lost on the military.



Hildegard Goss-Mayr

Southeast Europe Regional Conference - Mostar 8-12 October 2008

45 peace activists from former Yugoslavian countries and several members of Church and Peace attended the second interfaith regional conference "By building Peace, we glorify God". It took place from 8-12 October 2008 in Blagaj near Mostar in Bosnia. Like the first conference in 2006, it was co-organized by RAND (non-violent training, Zagreb), MCC (the relief, development and peace agency of North American Mennonites) and Church and Peace. Marie-Noëlle von der Recke was unable to attend, but gathered these impressions from Maria Biedrawa and Ana Raffai:

In what context did the conference take place?

Ana: 15 years ago, Blagaj was on the front line. You can see that from the destroyed churches and the new Muslim cemetery. In the eastern part of Mostar there are mostly Muslim symbols and, in the western part, modern buildings around a church bombed during the war and currently under reconstruction.



memorial on the muslim cemetery

Under "Mostar", Wikipedia tells several stories: the English version underlines the Croatian responsibility for destroying the bridge and the acts of reprisal committed against the Muslims; the German version is more neutral; the Croatian version mentions the Bosnian crimes and the Bosnian version those of the Croations. Not a word about all that on the city's own website: it is as though the war had not taken place. The problem is repressed. But in the streets there is a kind of war of symbols, you could say that the symbols of identity are firing at each other. That attitude is comprehensible, but so devastating.

Who were the participants at the conference?

Ana: 27 women, 18 men, including 9 Muslims, 11 Orthodox, 12 Catholics, 11 Protestants, 2 agnostics. 12 from Bosnia, 13 from Serbia, 12 from Croatia, 3 from Macedonia, 5 from Germany, France and the USA. They were all in some way interested in theology and/or working for peace.

Maria: They were all close to their respective faith communities and active in ecumenical or interfaith initiatives with young people, children and veterans.

Ana: They will be a valuable resource for peace advocacy in future, competent and motivated multipliers. Two thirds of them were not at the first meeting, which is a sign that the movement of "**believers for peace**" is growing.

What was the conference about?

Ana: The topic was "Renouncing violence - the path of coexistence", and it was approached by alternating small-group work and plenary lectures. The first day concentrated on clarifying the terms "coexistence" and "renouncing violence". Brother Ivo Markovics moved the group with his passionate plea for non-violence, as a logical and practical alternative to a nationalist religion. It is his

conviction that God is a God of revelation. Quite unlike someone who forges human beings in the image of their desires and greed, God demonstrates power in not forgetting anyone, protecting the vulnerable, showing compassion, and calling us to love, mercy and conversion. The second day was devoted to thinking about that which - in the religious tradition of participants and speakers - motivates us to renounce violence.

Maria: The addresses and discussions showed the role of religions as factors for peace and reconciliation: bearing significance and hope, they are very motivating. In this sense, people of faith are ahead of the population, which is still painfully recovering from its collective trauma.

The speakers, starting from their respective tradition, drew the same conclusion from the Bible or the Koran: what unites us is our all being children of God, created by God and created different. Respect for the creator God goes through respect for God's creatures: their difference and ability to coexist is rooted in God.



T-Shirt sold in Mostar

“Coexisting” is more than just “living side by side”. The term has weight for those who have lived through ethnic cleansing: on the pretext of difference thousands of people have, in the literal sense, lost the right to exist. What matters is letting others live in their difference, their alterity – that is a religious act in the pure sense, common to us all: an act of worship and praise to the Creator.

One specific feature of this conference is the organising committee.

How do they work?

Ana: 11 men and women - Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox and Muslims – meet several times between the conferences. They endeavour to use non-violent methods: interactivity, seeking consensus. There is a great sense of trust in the group. Its very existence and its way of working is in itself a message for participants at the conference.

What do you think the conference achieved?

Ana: You had told me some time ago that interfaith dialogue in Germany was only in its infancy and that we were progressing much faster. That encouraged us. The participants were aware of experiencing an event that was unique in Europe, an important step for peace-building. We made the conference possible in a safe place, in a space where we felt ourselves to be on an equal footing, despite our differences.

The “safe place” is part of the discoveries that we make through non-violence. It is a strategy: **we are both the one inviting and the one invited**. In this space, our differences are a source of growth for each of us in our own identity. Part of the group felt challenged to get involved in peace work while others felt encouraged by the theological foundations given to their commitment. The



conference is increasingly becoming a place of training in the theological and educational field. All participants were motivated to take action in their respective context.

Maria: The lesson of this conference goes to the western world: do not forget the Balkans and the scourge of nationalism that is alive and well. Our media have stopped talking about it. Other conflicts have taken over in media coverage. Our governments have military commitments in other regions

and are hypnotised by the financial crisis. Some politicians in the Balkan region take advantage of this to preach their inflammatory message, which is aggressive and clear: wait for the right moment for revenge and regain the lost territories, if necessary by arms. "We are in a Dayton time warp," one speaker said. "Everything is negotiable and up for grabs. Nothing is guaranteed."

What will be your aims after this conference?

It is not our aim to grow in numbers. Our aim is to consolidate ourselves, persevere and be visible, in order to be the ferment of change in our society. That will take time, of course, and not be without conflict. We want to prepare for that. The preparatory group is imperative for this process: we will survive to the extent that we are sustained by this sense of common purpose.

Church and Peace, the German branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) and the German Mennonite Peace Committee (DMFK) met at the Thomashof conference centre to take another look at the question of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

What is the international community to do when a government is not able or willing to protect its own vulnerable population from severe attacks or even genocide? This was the question as, from Friday 21 to Sunday 23 November, 75 people gathered at Thomashof near Karlsruhe (Germany) to continue the reflection on the Statement of the responsibility to protect "Vulnerable populations at risk" adopted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Porto Alegre in 2006. The issue had already been discussed at two Church and Peace events this year (see September 2008 Newsletter).

As at the discussions at Barchem (23-25 May 2008) and Ammerdown (July 2008), the talks did not centre on the manifest consensus regarding the emphasis of the WCC paper on prevention and reconstruction in crisis areas. Rather, it focused on the controversial concession that R2P



could, as a last resort, be fulfilled by the use of armed force. The debate was enlivened by the lectures from Jakob Fehr (peace worker, DMFK), Thomas Nauert (Catholic theologian, IFOR) and Moisés Mayordomo (lecturer at the Bern theological faculty, Mennonite) on the WCC paper and the light shed on the topic by the Bible.

Three reports from practical experiences - by Paul Metsch, *Peace Brigades International*, Ilse Mühlsteph from *Christian Peacemaker Teams* and Dietrich Gerstner from the diaconal community *Brot und Rosen* (Bread and Roses) – impressively illustrated the urgent nature of the topic and also the variety of conceivable non-violent interventions.

Further first-hand reports followed during a story-telling evening - with wonderful musical accompaniment by Ernst-Christian Driedger. Along with the ecumenical act of worship



around the sending out of Jesus' disciples in Matthew 10, they deepened the insight that the community of Jesus Christ is called upon to stand by those who lack everything, with authority but without the means of power.

What results did this conference achieve, building on the first two events in Britain and the Netherlands? The following points emerged:

- While there was broad consensus among participants that assistance for those deprived of their rights is at the heart of the Christian mission, the option of military interventions was rejected, even as a last resort. The acceptability of police interventions remained an open question.
- Examples from practical life gave convincing witness of the way in which people under threat can be assisted non-violently (see informations on PBI and CPT on the following pages).
- The organisations and programmes doing this work are little known and have insufficient funding.

The group at Thomashof represented many facets of the network of non-violent Christian groups in the German-speaking region – peace ministries, peace churches, IFOR, communities, theologians and practitioners, young and old. No statement was drafted but it became clear that a lot of "homework" needs to be done:

- the cooperation of sister organisations led to a fruitful exchange that should be continued, both for reassurance and also to deepen and continue the discussion, hoping that the insights gained thereby may flow into specific, common projects;
- the practical examples again brought out the importance of community and peace ministry, particularly of service "between the fronts". Here both diaconal communities and peace ministries are confronted with the issue of human resources and finance. The churches need to develop greater awareness of this;

- Mennonites present were challenged by the report on CPT, since it was among Mennonites that the original idea of Christian Peacemaker Teams arose in 1984. In Germany there are only two people who have done a stint with CPT and there is still no structure to publicise and advance this important activity. The Mennonite conferences and congregations are challenged at this point.

Marie-Noëlle von der Recke

Peace Brigades International



PBI is an international grassroots NGO that has been promoting nonviolence and protecting human rights since 1981. PBI sends international volunteers to areas of conflict, providing protective accompaniment to human rights defenders threatened by political violence.

The founders of PBI shared a profound conviction that ordinary people can take action to stop war and human rights violations even when their governments cannot or will not.

PBI's work is based on the principles of non-partisanship and non-interference in the internal affairs of the organisations it accompanies and believes that lasting transformation of conflicts cannot be imposed from outside, but must be based on the capacity and desires of local people. PBI's role is to open political space and provide moral support for local activists to carry out their work without fear of repression.

The main focus of PBI's work is international accompaniment, a technique pioneered by PBI for protecting human rights defenders threatened with violence because of their work. Since 1981 PBI has protected the lives of hundreds of activists in nine countries, enabling them to carry out their work.

PBI volunteers work in Indonesia, Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia and Nepal, backed up by an international structure of 15 country groups. PBI accompanies a wide variety of threatened activists all over the world: women's groups, indigenous communities, lawyers. What they all have in common is struggling for their rights against heavy odds and receiving threats or violence for carrying out their work.

In addition to protective accompaniment, PBI also works with local partner organisations on Peace Education programmes that aim to strengthen society's capacity to resolve conflicts without violence. PBI's programmes focus on trainings and workshops in conflict transformation.

For more information look up: www.peacebrigades.org

"What would happen if Christians devoted the same discipline and self-sacrifice to nonviolent peacemaking that armies devote to war?"

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) arose from this call in 1984. Enlisting the whole church in an organized, nonviolent alternative to war, today CPT places violence-reduction teams in crisis situations and militarized areas around the world at the invitation of local peace and human rights workers. CPT embraces the vision of unarmed intervention waged by committed peacemakers ready to risk injury and death in bold attempts to transform lethal conflict through the nonviolent power of God's truth and love.

Initiated by Mennonites, Brethren and Quakers with broad ecumenical participation, CPT's ministry of Biblically-based and spiritually-centered peacemaking emphasizes creative public witness, nonviolent direct action and protection of human rights.

A strategy developed thoughtfully over the years has taught CPT that:

- trained, skilled, international teams can work effectively to support local efforts toward non-violent peacemaking;
- "getting in the way" of injustice through direct nonviolent intervention, public witness and reporting to the larger world community can make a difference;
- peace team work engages congregations, meetings and support groups at home to play a key advocacy role with policy makers.



Ilse Mühlsteph reports at the Thomashof on her peacework with CPT in Palestine

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) offers an organized, nonviolent alternative to war and other forms of lethal inter-group conflict. CPT provides organizational support to persons committed to faith-based nonviolent alternatives in situations where lethal conflict is an immediate reality or is supported by public policy.

Projects

Colombia: a continuing presence since February 2001. Through fasting, public prayer, and nonviolent action, team members support threatened communities, primarily in the Magdalena Medio region, working for a peaceful end to Colombia's 40-year-old civil war.

Iraq: a continuing presence since October 2002. Team members have accompanied the Iraqi people in the period leading up to the U.S.-led invasion, during the "shock and awe" bombing of Baghdad, and throughout the occupation to expose abusive acts by U.S. Armed Forces and support Iraqis committed to nonviolent resistance.

Palestine: a continuing presence in the Hebron District (West Bank) since June 1995. Team members stand with Palestinians and Israeli peace groups engaged in nonviolent opposition to Israeli military occupation, collective punishment, settler harassment, home demolitions and land confiscation.

Read more on the CPT Website: www.cpt.org

Church and Peace International Conference

„Guide our feet into the way of peace“
60 years peace witness and ecumenical dialog

June 12th - 14th 2009, Bienenberg, Liestal (Switzerland)

A contribution to the *Decade to Overcome Violence*, on the way to the international ecumenical peace convocation 2011

Some programm features:

Retrospect over 60 years of peace witness and ecumenical dialog

theological and practical reflexion on „discipleship, community and nonviolence“ with Maria Biedrawa (The Ark community, International Fellowship of Reconciliation)

Workshops on the future of peace work

Ecumenical worship service

Informations and registrations at the Church and Peace international office.



Church and Peace is a European, ecumenical network of peace churches and peace church-oriented congregations, communities and service agencies.

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