



# *Church and Peace*

## Internationale Geschäftsstelle

*Church and Peace* is an ecumenical network of Christian communities, churches and organisations in Europe committed to the peace church vision.

### **5 Characteristics of a Peace Church**

*Christians of many churches and communities gathered at the Bienenberg near Basel (Switzerland) from 28-30 May 1999 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Church and Peace movement. They met in a time of severe crises and wars in various parts of the world, in particular the shocking bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO and expelling of many inhabitants of Kosovo by Yugoslavia. This was the context which gave birth to the following declaration.*

As disciples of Jesus, we are learning what it means to live as peace churches. We have found this both challenging and enriching, and we invite other Christians to share in this life and vision. In our experience, peace churches have five characteristics:

#### **1. Proclamation of the gospel of peace**

We announce God's good news of reconciliation and peace (2 Cor. 5:19) through Jesus Christ who is our peace (Eph. 2:14). We have received this freely, as God's gift. We ourselves are needy people, and we offer this good news without condition to all needy people, including those who feel themselves marginalized and disadvantaged (Mark 2:17).

#### **2. Love of all human beings - even the enemy**

We have learned through Jesus Christ to love our enemies and to pray for them (Mt. 5:44), even when we are called to resist nonviolently their unjust actions. We were God's enemies (Rom. 5:8) and remain complicit in a sinful world, but Christ has reconciled us to God and to one another, and has invited us to seek reconciliation with all people. We want to build bridges of understanding and peace to those whom we and our nations call enemies.

#### **3. Rejection of violence**

Therefore we are learning first to recognize and reject our own violence. We refuse to use violence personally or to justify the use of violence as an instrument of power whether on a family, societal, national or international level. We seek to learn and to practice the skills and disciplines of nonviolent conflict transformation, and to train others in these.

#### **4. Commitment to the victims of violence**

We are determined to not close our eyes to the horrific sacrifices which violence requires. As Jesus in his time stood with the victims of oppression and violence, so we are committed to standing with today's victims. We seek to be reliable partners of the oppressed even in situations of great danger.

#### **5. Community and solidarity**

To realize this vision, we need each other, in our own congregations and communities, and in solidarity with other Christians around the world. Our citizenship is in 'heaven' (Phil. 3:20), and we are the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). Therefore all ties to nationality, ethnicity and land - important though these are - have been relativized. We seek to be a social expression of God's new world, alternative societies in whose climate justice, peace, mercy and truth will flourish. We invite others to share this vision with us and to discover its reality in their own congregations and communities.

*18 June 1999*