



## *Church and Peace*

*Church and Peace* is an ecumenical Peace Church network made up of communities, training centres, peace organisations and peace-service agencies in Europe.

### **Spiritual discipline core to choosing logic of peace over security**

#### **Church and Peace network explores what it means to "live secure" in today's Europe**

SCHOEFFENGRUND, 15 June 2016 - Church and Peace has affirmed its commitment to building true security through nonviolence rooted in a spirituality of peace at its Annual General Meeting (AGM) 10-12 June at the Loisy Centre near Paris and with a vigil at the Eurosatory arms fair the following week.

The European ecumenical network could not have predicted during planning last year just how relevant its chosen theme - "...and they shall live secure" from the book of Micah - and meeting place - mere kilometres from the Stade de France, where three suicide bombers struck during the November 2015 attacks - would be, said Chair Antje Heider-Rottwilm in welcoming the AGM participants.

The question of security was front and centre in France and the many places the members had travelled through to reach the AGM, but peace and security were often confused, she noted, quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words of 1934.

Bonhoeffer's reflection that "there is no way to peace on the way to security," was an apt opening to a meeting that interwove thematic reflection with association business and concluded with demonstrations at Eurosatory.

#### **Working for true security**

Some 80 network members from 14 European countries, including Albania, Croatia, Kosovo/a, Macedonia and Serbia, reflected on the impact that security-related issues had had on their lives and work in recent months, and shared about nonviolent responses.

These initiatives ranged from theological reflection on the link between language and politics, and promoting the shift to a just peace concept at the institutional level of the Church, to involvement in inter-religious dialogue and support for Christian-Muslim peace building. Members told of efforts to welcome refugees, challenge racism and exclusion, prevent extremism and end the ever-increasing arms trade that feeds the violence forcing people to seek refuge in other countries.

Particularly striking was the decision of the Belgian association *Sortir de la Violence* to remain open to others by going ahead with a planned training course in Brussels the day after the terrorist attacks. 120 people came together despite the shutdown of public transport.

The network gave its backing to an ecumenical initiative that aims to urge the international community to take two concrete steps towards just peace, namely declaring all war and armed conflict to be illegal, and developing a civilian peacekeeping service instead of military intervention.

The AGM is also encouraging network members to write to their respective governments to register that they are war tax resisters to highlight the 100th anniversary of the recognition of the right to conscientious objection to military service.

In other business the network welcomed the Anabaptist Forum for Peace and Justice, Switzerland, and the Evangelical Church in Baden, Germany, as corporate and associate members, respectively, as well as an individual member from Novi Sad, Serbia. The AGM also elected Vjollca Racaj of the Fellowship of the Lord's People in Pristina, Kosovo/a, to the Administrative Committee, representing the South East Europe region.

#### **Living secure**

Questions of security were not new for Church and Peace, Heider-Rottwilm said.

"We've been exploring the concept of 'common human security' in many of our conferences and calling the churches to do theological reflection and offer practical alternatives to military interven-

tion with regard to the so-called ‘responsibility to protect’ civilians at risk of genocide and similar violence.”

Keynote speaker Dr Christine Schweitzer said that a paradigm shift was needed among the international community from the prevailing logic of security to a logic of peace, embodied in the commitment to nonviolent action.

While nonviolence did not always work in the short term, there were many examples of successful impacts of nonviolent action, the executive secretary of the Germany-based Federation for Social Defence pointed out, lifting up in particular the work of Peace Brigades International and the Non-violent Peaceforce.

Ultimately there could only be security when there was security for all, based on justice and achieved through nonviolence, she asserted.

### **Spiritual security**

Maria Biedrawa, member of the French branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, spoke of the biblical model of emotional and spiritual security.

To live in safety as Ezekiel (34:27-28) promised meant finding a way to transform the sense of powerlessness that threatens to paralyse peacemakers when the only way out of the dead-end of despair seems to be violence, she noted.

The ability to provide security corresponded to the ability to accept one's own helplessness, to "welcome powerlessness and its limits, its confusions," asserted the nonviolence trainer, who accompanies peacemakers in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The realization that security ultimately is to be found in God alone opens the door to a "Holy Land" where nonviolence can be born and right relationships formed.

### **Required: spiritual discipline**

Christian peacemakers needed to be rooted spiritually so that they could take nonviolent action, Dr Neal Blough, who teaches at Vaux-sur-Seine Evangelical Seminary, Bienenberg Theological Seminary, and the Catholic University of Paris, underlined in his sermon exploring Matthew 5:38-45 and Ephesians 6:13-18.

What needed to be resisted was not humans but the “forces of evil” that manifest themselves in structures and in relationships, he reminded AGM participants.

Life remains a fight despite Christ’s victory over these forces but the weapons of the churches’ resistance are not to be found at Eurosatory. Rather, as Paul told Christians in Ephesus, they are such as prayer, faith, truth, righteousness and the gospel of peace.

“Practising and having spiritual discipline is not a luxury but a necessity in a world with no security in sight,” said Dr Blough. “To confront our lack of security we have to put down deep spiritual roots and cultivate trust.”

The Church was called to be a school of peace, pardon and reconciliation, he said. Peace communities such as those in the Church and Peace network are important places of practice and training to grow these spiritual roots.

### **Security through nonviolence**

Around 35 of the participants put learning from the AGM into practice directly afterwards. They met in Paris together with other Christian peacemakers for a nonviolence training session and ecumenical prayers to prepare for a vigil during the Eurosatory arms fair.

Through nonviolent witness at the Paris Bourse and the entrance to Eurosatory, the world's largest international defence and security exhibition, members of the Church and Peace network were able to speak with many passers-by and people coming to check out the latest in weapons technology about a logic of peace – security through nonviolence.

Visit [www.church-and-peace.org](http://www.church-and-peace.org) for presentations, the sermon text and photos from the Church and Peace AGM and Eurosatory vigil.

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