



Church and Peace Newsletter Spring 2011

Dear readers,

'I feel like a man'—those were the words of a Libyan student holding a Kalashnikov and talking to a reporter against a backdrop of explosions and siren screams. North Africa and the Middle East have been in turmoil for weeks. One after the other people have risen up against authoritarian regimes. Many have lost their lives in this movement that has already led to the downfall of two dictators. Fresh on our minds is Libya where the government and its opponents hurried their country right into a civil war and a humanitarian disaster. And the Western camp has once again not resisted the temptation to intervene militarily. The short phrase of the student insurgent challenges me: is that what being a man means? To kill to impose one's way?

What a surprise, in this context, to hear that [Gene Sharp's](#) principles for non-violent revolution have influenced the strategy of the peaceful wing of this movement. And what a joy to see a 'white wall' stand between protesters and armed forces in Iraqi Kurdistan, and also to see flowers in the cannons of soldiers. [A fascinating picture](#) ... Is the white wall, are those guns in bloom not carried by men too?

This newsletter speaks about men—and women—for whom manliness and brutality are not synonymous. It reminds us that the commitment to a just peace is a long-term, bottom-up and violence-free process. The international conference of Church and Peace (20 -22 May 2011 'You will be my people and I will be your God') will highlight what humanity in the service of peace and justice in the XXI century might look like.

We are entering the time of the Passion. The words of Pilate: 'Behold the man' in John 19:5 (which should be translated: 'Behold the human being') sum up the whole meaning of Passion: true humanity revealed in Jesus Christ and in those who give their lives for justice without resorting to force.

Excellent reading

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Naivo-Höllersmeyer-Rocher

Southeast Europe –Reconstructing from the bottom-up

Travel impressions of the Church & Peace mini-delegation to Serbia and Kosovo, with a short stay in Croatia (October 2010)

The appearance and the reality

Two decades have passed since the start of hostilities in the former Yugoslavia. Now nine years have gone by since the last visit of a Church and Peace delegation to the region. We arrived in Belgrade in the early morning, a little dazed from the night train and with a lot of luggage

The vast amount of new construction is what strikes you immediately as you drive into Belgrade, Novi Sad and Pristina. And then there's an air of 'normalcy' and even a holiday atmosphere when you stroll in the romantic area of Zemun or on roads that snake between Kosovan vineyards in the golden light of October. When looking more closely, it becomes clear that this first impression is misleading. In Serbia, intermittent explosions of violence occur with alarming intensity. This violence comes from the bottom-up and is neither linked to the uniform nor heavily armed. Yet it breaks whenever and wherever it finds a pretext; it breaks spontaneously, uncontrollably, spilling out through streets and stadiums. In Kosovo/a, this violence is memorialized by the

roadside tributes to the 'heroes' of the conflict, ruined houses in the city and the ubiquitous international military. The atrocities of 1999 left Kosovo/a's Albanian communities with widows by



Serbia between chaos and rebirth

the dozens. Thousands of Serbs were forced to leave that same year as the province became a nation. The latest atrocities dating back to 2004 affected all communities and provoked new departures. Orthodox churches (rebuilt to replace those that back then were destroyed in just a few days) are beautiful but gutted of their members. The return of refugees seems improbable and the hope of coexistence illusory.

Pillaging of a region

The privilege of our delegation is the constant presence of members and friends of Church and Peace, who with great skill help us better understand what we see, for instance, the bridge in Novi Sad, destroyed during the bombing in 1999 and rebuilt

at astronomical expense by the same people who destroyed it. One example among many of the absurdities of war...

The booming revival of certain industries masks a deep crisis: many brand new buildings in Novi Sad and Belgrade are the headquarters of foreign companies come to exploit this country's resources for their own profit. Mass privatization in favor of a minority of often corrupt local or foreign investors drains profits that should be used for long term reconstruction. Shockingly, the reason why the real estate sector is booming is because it is an ideal setup for money laundering. And if the malls and banks sprout like mushrooms, these are not signs that the population as a whole is significantly better off. In a country where a teacher approaching retirement earns only about 400€ a month and everyone needs multiple jobs to survive, credit purchases at exorbitant interest rates are common-place.... The plundering of resources by those who ended the conflict with force and who continue to be thought of as guarantors of peace sweeps away any remaining doubt about their true intentions when they called the 1999 bombing a 'humanitarian intervention'.



Headquarters of Russian gas operations in Vojvodina

'Everyone person involved here is a story of peace'

For two weeks we visited friends and made new contacts as well as attending the third interfaith conference (In Making Peace, We Glorify God'). Two weeks full of intense, rich, encouraging, sometimes stunning, conversations. The organisations and people we encountered are not high-up in society. They are affected in their daily lives by the profound, yet sadly characteristic, disruption of society in war's aftermath. They are terribly fragile at the material level and yet...



Conversations at Bread of Life headquarters

Be it the team organising the interreligious conference (eleven men and women from four countries, three Christian denominations and Islam), its participants—organisations like [Bread of Life](#) and Tabita doing humanitarian work, [RAND](#) and the Centre for Religious Dialogue (NGOs engaged in nonviolent training and dialogue) or the church leaders in Pristina, Prizren, Djakovica/Djakova)—those we met have in common a courageous yet realistic commitment. They take a stand against the odds. They confront adversity head on even though they may have every reason to capitulate.

Each organisation brings its own response to the situation. The Christian communities of Kosovo serve widows and young people; Tabita and Bread of Life focus on

helping the most vulnerable in society (Roma, the aged). The RAND team trains in nonviolent conflict resolution throughout the region, especially among Christian and Muslim believers. The Centre for Religious Dialogue organises the informal networking of representatives of the major faiths in Belgrade.

From the beginning of our journey we are immersed in the environment of these commitments, and we appreciate the value of what our friends do and are. 'Every person involved here is a story of peace,' says Jasmina Tosic, Bread of Life director. We hear the story of lives that have been shaken by history. They are now reconstructing themselves, through discovering or rediscovering faith, and through service for peace and reconciliation.



Tutoring for Roma children

The stories heard are all the more impressive, considering that the churches and Islam themselves were not immune to the collapse caused by war and have not really been able to repair the breaches. Serbian Orthodoxy, which is going through a severe crisis in its own hierarchy, remains isolated and always dependent on military protection in Kosovo/a. Small independent churches are seeking a new identity. The Baptist federation, for example, dissolved at the opening of hostilities twenty years ago. Islam itself is torn between radical and moderate tendencies.



One Delegation, Four Nations: Branka Srnc (Serbia), Ernst von der Recke (Germany), Peder Wiegner (USA), Marie-Noëlle von der Recke (France) taking the picture

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed....

Thus, while war profiteers (the expression is sadly banal, but how else can you describe them?) take whatever they can from the disruption caused by war, the reconstruction seems to be occurring from the bottom-up, thanks to women and men rooted in their faith. With them a network of solidarity grows and strengthens itself over meetings, trainings, and joint actions. Our last stop allows us to gather our impressions before catching the train to Germany. In the warm atmosphere of their little house in Sesevete (near Zagreb), our friends Ana and Otto Raffai help us to take stock and to confirm or correct our observations. We start our return in the early morning from the Zagreb train station, pensive, delighted with the hospitality we encountered throughout the journey, and with the firm intention not to wait nine years until the next visit.

'Leaving the culture of retribution' - 80 people attend the German-speaking regional conference 26th to 28th November 2010 at the Thomashof near Karlsruhe (summary report by Karen Rothenbusch - 'Die Brücke')

Church and Peace organised this meeting in collaboration with the German Mennonite Peace Committee (DMFK), the German branch of IFOR and the Quakers. The keynote speaker was Howard Zehr, Professor of [Restorative Justice](#) at [Eastern Mennonite University](#) (USA). An 'Alternatives to Violence Project' workshop took place at the same time.

According to Howard Zehr, traditional justice focuses on punishment. If a crime has been committed the questions asked are: 'Which law was broken? Who committed the crime? What punishment has the offender deserved?' The attention is fixed on the offender. The concept of restorative justice raises different questions: 'Who was injured? What are the needs of the victim? How can these needs be filled?' In this scenario the focus is on the needs of victims and the offender's responsibility to repair, if possible, the damage s/he has caused. The goal is to make a dialogue between the victim and the perpetrator possible. The victims need to have the opportunity to talk with those who wronged them so that a healing process may begin; they must be able to tell their story in order to regain their balance. The perpetrators themselves must take responsibility for what they have done and take concrete steps to repair the damage. The practical implications of this concept were presented by Howard Zehr using numerous examples. He also showed that restorative justice - restoration, healing - is the great theme of the whole Bible.



Howard Zehr and his translator, Madeleine Bähler (left)

Other workshops were held on the theme of 'Justice in the German Legal System' with the lawyer Ullrich Hahn, who spoke on current developments in this area and on 'post-war reconciliation,' with exercises conducted by Roswitha Jarman and Jürgen Menzel.

On Saturday night the program was devoted to a presentation of several member organisations of the Church and Peace Network, punctuated by music and short theatrical presentations written and performed by Jakob Fehr and friends.

The meeting concluded with a celebration including a sermon by Marie-Noëlle von der Recke about the life of Jacob (Genesis 33: 1-11).

'Punishment is necessary! Is punishment really necessary?' This was the title of a workshop led by the lawyer Ullrich Hahn at the German language regional conference held at Thomashof (Karlsruhe). Here in abbreviated form are his main theses, the entire text of which may be obtained on request from our International Office.

1. Punishment is in fact not necessary. It is by no means a necessary consequence of unlawful conduct. It does not heal the wound that has been caused, but instead administers a new one. Punishment is an evil and does not belong to the order of creation. We have grown accustomed to its presence, just as we have acclimatised ourselves to war and exploitation.

2. The use of punishment to overcome lawbreaking does not fulfill the expectations we place in it.

- Punishment may frighten those who are punished, but it does not deter them. The possibility that one could be apprehended might act as a deterrent, but not the degree of punishment.

- Punishment does not improve those who are punished. If persons do not return to criminal behaviour after release from prison, this is in most cases because they have experiences that contribute toward healing the wounds of the past and of their punishment (newfound willpower, new relationships, revived perspectives for living).

- Punishments and prisons do not make our lives safer. The longer that such persons remain captive, the more difficult it will be for them to readjust to life in freedom and to live a life without delinquency.

3. Punishment in fact serves other purposes than those that are officially propagated:

- protecting authorities from opposition and satisfying the public's need for retribution, which is spurred on by the media in particularly heinous cases. This is not connected to the victim's need for rehabilitation, but to the public's fear of crime, which politicians are ready to manipulate.

4. Choosing not to punish should not be understood as a refusal to address unjust behaviour. Certain things remain unaltered:

- establishing the responsibility of the offender in a process like that of the judiciary (including police investigations). Unjust acts need to be dealt with not only as the immediate concern of the victim, society as well must take responsibility,



Ullrich Hahn, German branch of International Fellowship of Reconciliation

- reflecting on the importance of justice and equity, meaning offenders need to be confronted with their actions and the victim is 'rehabilitated' in the eyes of the offender and the public,
 - the obligation of offenders to provide some form of compensation or repayment, possibly including being removed from positions where they have misused power or privilege, and
 - offenders need to be made aware of the consequences of their actions; where they are weakly motivated, they need help in strengthening their willpower.
5. At the political level, the focus should be prevention of misdemeanours and felonies, instead of dealing with their consequences. This includes:
- striving for social justice, and
 - education aiming at responsibility for one's actions.
6. Dealing adequately with crime also necessarily involves:
- the acknowledgment that there is no such thing as complete immunity or safety from crime, neither with nor without prisons, and
 - even respectable, law-abiding citizens have moral weaknesses in their souls that lead them to suspicions and setting up scapegoats.
7. The churches can contribute to an improved climate in dealing with crime by no longer teaching the ideas of a chastising God and of humans prone to evil who need to be whipped as children and penalized as adults. The correct approach would be to emphasize that we are always in need of forgiveness.

The Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP) offered a course for young people as part of the 'Leaving the Culture of Retribution' conference. Nine people between the ages of 14 and 49 participated. Margrit Arnold, gives her impressions (with information from the report by Wolfgang Habicht, one of the trainers):

The programme consisted of six units: introductions and basics on AVP, assertiveness, communication, cooperation and community; introduction to 'transforming power' and conflict transformation with roleplaying. Each unit began with a playful introduction or a creative phrase that led to the topic. The content was then applied to everyday life situations and discussed. The trainers transitioned to the next unit with lighthearted activities.

The interaction between participants made it often possible that the results could be summarised without special effort. Trainers convened the sessions with sensitivity, presenting the results on flipchart so that it was possible at any time to measure the group's progress. They had their material in mind but remained flexible and responsive to suggestions and to the internal evolution of the group. On the first evening, for example, in the unit on 'assertiveness', we did an exercise 'I'm probably the only one: to be able to do/who knows/has done this'. During the evaluation, young participants suggested it might be encouraging to name our weaknesses.

The next day our instructors created a unique exercise during the cooperation unit. The participants sat with their backs to each other at different places in the room

which was lit only with candles. They sat in silence, and in this silence began to say, one after the other, what causes problems for them. Then there was a time of silence in which what was said could find its place. It was a very moving experience for all the participants. It took courage to tell others about one's own weaknesses. From this experience emerged a deep sense of closeness, mutual trust, and communion. Thus the ground was prepared to address the issue of power that is at the root of conflict transformation, not only in the intellect but also in the heart and soul.

I was surprised at what a large amount of content could be communicated to participants without theoretical input, 'only' with learning by doing and their feedback. The group became more and more united and each could make their own contribution, like so many stones in a mosaic. The 'fun factor' greatly facilitated content assimilation. All in all, an extremely rewarding experience!



World Sunday for Peace, 22 May 2011: An invitation of the Decade to Overcome Violence to celebrate peace with the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation

On Sunday, 22 May 2011, in a worldwide event, churches in every corner of the world are invited to [celebrate](#) God's gift of peace. Those who take part will be together in spirit, song and prayer with the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) in Jamaica, united in the hope of peace.

The suggested text for the Sunday is Ephesians 2, where Christ 'who is our peace' makes peace among us and creates 'one new humanity'. Reconciled in Christ we are 'no longer strangers and aliens' but members of the household of God

As parishes in each time zone gather for worship and prayer on Sunday, 22 May 2011, a wave of praise and prayer for peace will encircle the world. All churches and congregations are invited to use a [peace prayer written by the Caribbean hosts of the IEPC](#) in their worship that day.

Join the celebration of World Sunday for Peace, 22 May 2011! [You, your parish and your church are invited.](#)

A series of interreligious conferences entitled 'in building peace, we glorify God' have been held since 2006. The third of its kind took place in the idyllic forest of Fruska Gora in northern Serbia from 13 to 17 October 2010. Its theme was: 'We live in a society of peace and nonviolence - and now I need your help!' Ana Raffai from Zagreb writes:

In Southeast Europe, it is very easy to associate religion with war. If you think a bit longer, you just might associate it with peace, and this is the motivation for the interreligious conference. The most important aspect of the conference is the cross cultural experience. As Martin Buber said, 'true life is encounter.'

Approximately 60 people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, USA and Germany attended the conference, among them a large proportion of youth (who, allegedly, are not interested in interfaith dialogue).

The words '... and now I need your help' are borrowed from the film 'The Imam and the Pastor', which evokes the work of reconciliation between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. The film alerts us to unintentional offences in communicating with one another; in that case one can better pause in order to clarify the situation. In

choosing this phrase we wanted to emphasize that we are looking for practical tools for the work of reconciliation in our own regional context.

At the meeting we once again experienced that no one remains unchanged when this happens. At the same time, the conference was also a time of training. For the first time, four of the speakers came out of the ranks of the organising team. Two women spoke of the potential of faith when working for peace, one from the Catholic perspective, the other from the Muslim perspective. Two men

led the discussion on various forms of nonviolent action, using examples drawn from the experience of the past twenty years, and stressed the importance of building trust to overcome ethnic and religious barriers. A speaker from Sarajevo presented several biographies of women who have distinguished themselves in working for peace.

There was a room for prayer and silence in the conference centre. You could go there at any time to pray. A Bible and a Koran were available. I was once in the room when five Muslim men and women entered the room to pray. I stayed and watched. Theirs was a beautiful prayer which involved the whole body. At the end they gave each other a sign of peace, and included me in this gesture, although I had not participated in their prayers. This prayer touched me because I know these people and I appreciate them. It felt somehow as if this prayer had become a bit



Anra Panzo and Ana Raffai during Anra's lecture

mine as well. There was an Imam in this group who has contacts worldwide, including with young Israelis and Palestinians. The day before, he had sung gospel and Taizé songs with the same freedom he showed in offering the sign of peace in the prayer room. I enjoyed those songs, which I received as a mark of respect, yes, as a sort of bridge between our two worlds.

On the second day of the conference we visited a monastery and a mosque. Then there was a creative workshop on the program: thoughts, feelings and wishes

were to be expressed, this time at least, without discussion but through sculptures made of clay, paper or wool, collages or poems. To me these pieces of art were like symbols of their makers' souls; they expressed the creative potential of each person. The colourful hall full of people further illustrated the vision of the society we want to live in. We believe it is possible, as we experience it in embryo in such moments. This is what a multicultural society might look like: embracing variety, possibly noisy, full and concentrated.

We who organise the interfaith conference in South-Eastern Europe have no money and almost no advertising of this type of event is possible because church magazines do not consider them important. Nonetheless, new people come to every conference, among them youth from across the region. Organising this event is an opportunity for us to live our faith and make it useful not only for ourselves, or for our own groups, but for all, with no intention of converting anyone.



Visit to a mosque



The organising group

Since Terri Miller left the international office in 2008, the office won one German-speaking member, Martin Schuler, but had no English-speaking staff anymore. Thanks to Susan Pracht who has been sent by [Brethren Volunteer Service](#) of the Church of the Brethren in the US, the office team will again be trilingual from spring 2011 on

Greetings! My name is Susan Pracht, and I am thrilled to volunteer with Church and Peace as the Communications and Events Assistant for the next two years through Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS). Born and raised in Rhode Island in the United States, I am a graduate of Gordon College, a Christian college in the northeast.



Susan Pracht

During college, I studied Sociology and worked on local council elections in London for a term. Previous to BVS, I was a civil rights investigator for the state of Rhode Island for nearly four and a half years and preceding that was an assistant to the executive director and fair housing intern. During my time with the state, I also designed, wrote, and edited publications and delivered numerous educational presentations for the community. Additionally, I administered several grants from the federal government.

I am a trained mediator, with four years of experience in community, government agency, and court-based mediation. I love yoga, animals (especially cats and cows), meeting new people, good conversation, dancing, football (European-style), reading (particularly theology and Christian practice) and traveling. I am a terrible vegan, but a pretty good vegetarian.

Though I have attended numerous denominations, right now I call the Anglican church home. I believe strongly in Christian community and have been deeply moved by my experiences. In 2009 I spent a week at Taizé, and last year I served as a volunteer for the Iona Community on the Isle of Iona in Scotland for two months. I look forward to being part of Church and Peace and meeting all of you. I am particularly excited about the emphases on networking and relationship building, theological and practical reflection, ecumenical dialogue and worship, and promoting peace and reconciliation.



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

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Photos: Archive Church and Peace

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