



## **Church and Peace Newsletter September 2010**

Dear readers,

"Dreaming of the dawn of God's kingdom has a point", Jakob Fehr stated in his sermon at the closing worship of the last Annual General Meeting of Church and Peace. "It is the very calling of the people of God", we add, at the risk of being suspected of ignoring contemporary problems.

The September 2010 newsletter reflects the meaning of this provocative statement. If the *Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches* invites the peace networks to support its steps in promoting a denuclearized world, or if Lutherans, united the world over, ask forgiveness of the Mennonites for the persecutions that their churches allowed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it is undoubtedly because some people are ready to lift their eyes beyond the realities of the world as it is, because they are ready to reject resignation, ready to open themselves to something new, to wager on a change of mindset and behaviour, and to believe in a promise.

### **Contents:**

**p.1 Dear readers**

**p.2 Church and Peace AGM**

**p.7 Lutherans ask Mennonites  
for forgiveness**

**p.9 New features on Church  
and Peace website**

**p.10 Sermon: Awakened by  
dreams of the Kingdom**

**p.11 International conference  
2011**

**p.12 Important dates**

We invite you to read about the most significant moments of the most recent Annual General Meeting of Church and Peace and its agenda for the weeks and months ahead. Church and Peace is pleased to continue to make its own contribution, among other things, to the programme of the *Decade to Overcome Violence* of the World Council of Churches and to the events that mark the end of that decade, by holding its next international conference in parallel with the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation to be held in Kingston, Jamaica.

If "dreaming of the dawn of God's kingdom has a point", let us dare to dream and to work for the cause of the Kingdom!

We trust that your reading will be inspiring!

*David-Höllermer der Roche*

**57 people from all over Europe attended the Annual Meeting of Church and Peace from 4 to 6 June 2010 at Bienenberg in Switzerland. The AGM is not just an opportunity for dealing with the current business of the association but also for exchanging news from the network, praying together and working on topical issues.**

For the first time, working parties were organized for those members able to arrive early. The subjects were: the development of the communities, the work of Christian Peace Teams (CPT) and the critical evaluation of the second draft of an ecumenical declaration on just peace. This is to be discussed at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2011 as follow-up to the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV). The conference was opened with presentations: Henk Blom and Coot Winkler-Prins, the Netherlands, along with Marijana Ajzenkol, from the Belgrade Interfaith Centre in Serbia, were known for having participated for many years in Church and Peace conferences. They described their work for peace within the churches before being officially welcomed as individual members at the business session the next day.

Marijana Ajzenkol is Director of the Centre for Religious Dialogue in Belgrade, an association which brings together people from the three Abrahamic religions: Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The aim of the association is to assist people to learn more about each other's faiths and promote a greater tolerance across religious barriers.

The center received its status as an association in 2000 although it had already been operating unofficially since 1996, when the Orthodox bishop Lavrentije and the Catholic Archbishop Perko held talks that paved the way for greater openness. Regular informal meetings, concerts of spiritual music from different traditions, poetry evenings and prayer for Christian unity are some of the activities organized by the Centre.

Marijana Ajzenkol stresses the importance of the experience of everyday living together without being scandalized by the very existence of religious differences but, rather, learning to consider them as a test of our own roots in our faith.



*Marijana Ajzenkol, from the Center for Religious Dialog in Belgrade became an individual member of Church and Peace*

**Albert Meyer**, one of the few living witnesses of the Puidoux Conferences in the 1950s, had come from the USA with his family and recalled this pioneer period in the existence of Church and Peace in which he participated when doing his civilian service in France as part of Mennonite social service. His son Rich reported on the ecumenical dialogue in the United States during the Decade to Overcome Violence, underlining that the North American Mennonites, who are not members of the World Council of Churches (WCC), were invited to participate in the DOV activities and have entered into a fruitful dialogue with the churches, the latter highlighting the different forms that violence takes in our society while the Mennonites emphasize the importance of combating the scourge of war.



*Al, Rich and Mary-Ellen Meyer, from Goshen, Indiana*

The AGM was devoted to reports from the regions, the international secretariat and the Administrative Committee, along with adopting the financial report for 2009 and the 2010 budget. The finances of Church and Peace remain fragile but the faithful support of the members, donors and sponsors permit work to continue. A substantial subsidy from Mennonite Central Committee has made it possible – amongst other things – to update the website and extend our means of communication – website, newsletter – to four languages (Serbian/Bosnian/Croatian as well as French, English and German), which reflects the multiplication of contacts towards Southeast Europe during the last two decades.

The program devoted a lot of time to exchanges with the representatives of church organizations relating to the European institutions in Brussels. Present were **Rüdiger Noll**, director, and **Elina Eloranta**, executive secretary for peace and reconciliation of the *Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches* (CSC/CEC), along with **Martina Weitsch**, from the *Quaker Council for European Affairs* (QCEA) and vice-president of the *European Peace-building Liaison Office* (EPLO). We wanted to get to know them in order to explore possibilities of cooperation on a topic of common interest: European peace and security policy.

In her intervention, Elina Eloranta urged Church and Peace – which has been an associate member of CEC since 1997 – to support the Commission in its efforts to advance current talks on the abolition of nuclear arms. CSC has drafted proposals



aimed at a re-examination of the nuclear weapons non-proliferation treaty, advocating for a new policy of disarmament on the part of the European Union: (<http://csc.ceceurope.org/issues/nuclear-disarmament>). Aware that the policy of world denuclearization, also recommended by President Obama, represents a unique opportunity, the members of Church and Peace affirmed their desire to reinforce their commitment in their respective countries and churches to abolishing nuclear weapons. They also oppose the civil use of nuclear energy due to the risks involved, which are not only ecological and economic but also at the level of security.

Martina Weitsch presented the essential facts about the European security strategy and outlined the underlying idea of this policy, demonstrating that the legitimate need for security felt by the populations cannot be guaranteed by military means. Based on the positions set out by Diana Francis in her new book <sup>1</sup>, she underlined the fact that, assuming we depend on the natural environment, we have to envisage this interdependence going beyond national or European borders.



*Antje Heider-Rottwilm conducts the panel with  
Elina Eloranta and Martina Weitsch*

From this angle, peace and security are indivisible. This approach runs counter to the common conception that we will lose if we do not win, we will be dominated if we do not dominate, we will be killed if we do not kill, the present tendency in European and world politics. It is up to the churches and non-governmental organizations to campaign for security focused on the common good, a security including the ideas of interdependence and justice (see the sketch borrowed from a presentation by Diana Francis on the next page).

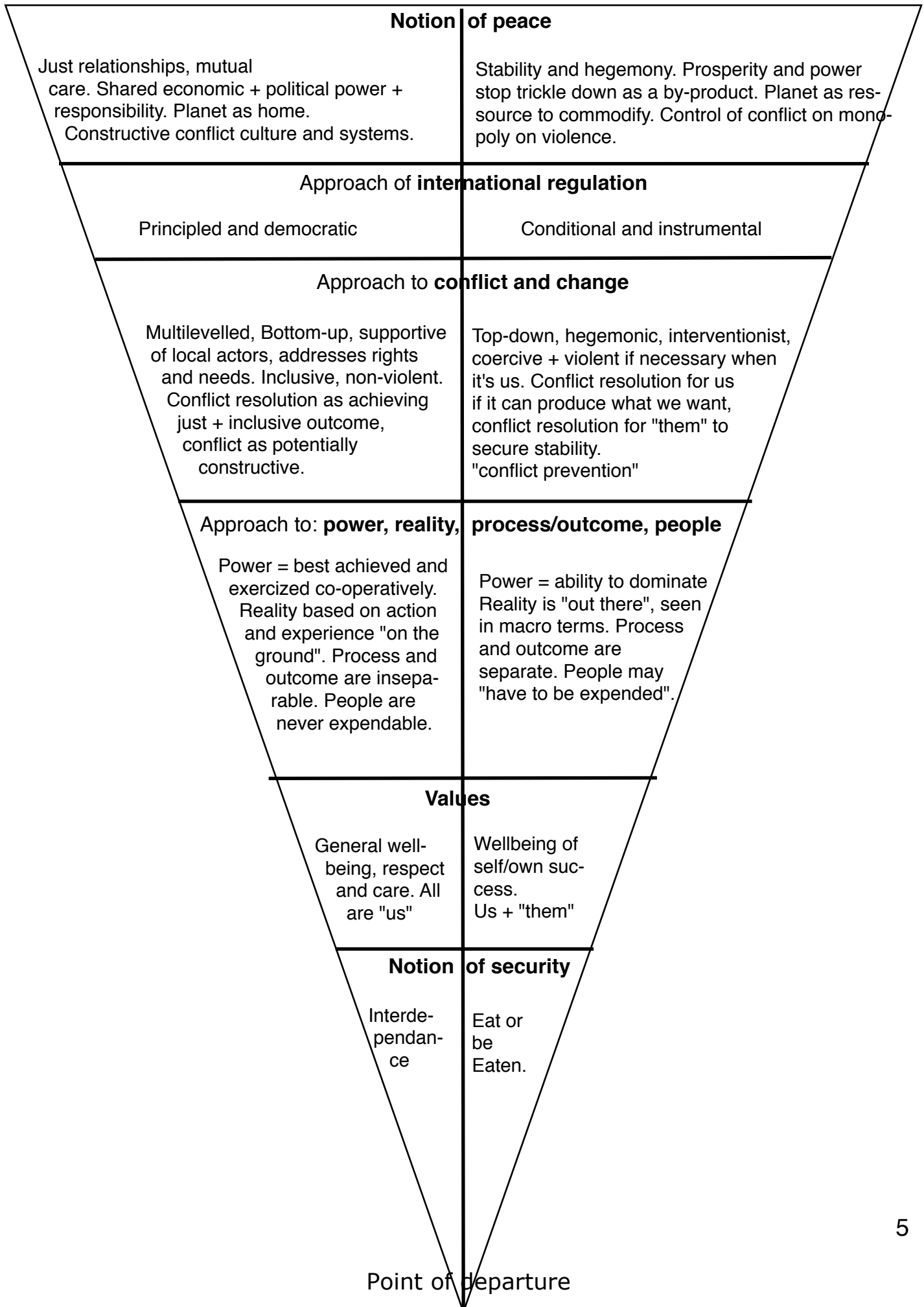
(continues on page 6)

<sup>1</sup> Diana Francis, *From Pacification to Peacebuilding A Call to Global Transformation*, ISBN: 9780745330266, 208pp, 2010.

# Two world views

Peacebuilding

Pacification





*Discussion with Elina Eloranta from the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches*

Working groups enable a definition of the expectations of CSC and QCEA vis-à-vis the Church and Peace network and vice versa. In a press release, participants called upon the *Conference of European Churches* (CEC) and the *Council of European Bishops Conferences* (CCEE) to present a clear, theologically

based peace testimony. This should support non violence as the best option on which to base a European policy of conflict prevention and resolution. In turn, the network will offer its skills in the field of non-violence and reconciliation in the context of church and society, and in its collaboration with its partners at the European level.

Prayer, celebration and sharing were on the agenda this year too.

The network is alive and present beyond the borders of Europe, as shown by the numerous conversations with the North American guests and the final prayer for traveling blessings for Marius van Hoogstraten, who joined a group of Christian peacemakers CPT in Iraq immediately after the Annual Meeting.



*Al Meyer in conversation with Elisabeth Freise (Eirene) and Kristin Flory (Brethren Services)*



## Lutherans ask Mennonites for forgiveness

**Stuttgart, Germany - Almost 500 years of guilt were formally laid to rest July 22 as representatives of 70 million Lutherans around the world asked forgiveness for the persecution of Anabaptists in the 16th century and for the way negative portrayals of Anabaptists and Mennonites have been allowed to continue within their communities and theological institutions. Representing the Anabaptist-Mennonite family, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) acknowledged their request and granted forgiveness.**

The action came on the third day of the eleventh Lutheran World Federation (LWF) assembly, held in Stuttgart. Through the adoption of the statement titled, "Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of Anabaptists", Lutherans repented for persecution of Anabaptists and for the ways in which Lutheran reformers supported persecutions with theological arguments. Some 480 delegates from around the world acknowledged "the harm that our forebears in the sixteenth century committed to Anabaptists, for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and scholarly forms, to the present day."

The action, which LWF president Bishop Mark S. Hanson described as possibly "the most significant legacy this assembly leaves," was the culmination of four years of work by the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission of the LWF and the MWC. Representatives of MWC along with other Mennonite guests from Europe witnessed the action.

LWF outgoing general secretary Dr. Ishmael Noko of Zimbabwe announced in his opening address to the assembly that the action would redefine Mennonite-Lutheran relationships. "Only by rooting out the violence, exclusion and discrimination in our own tradition and practice ... and by seeking to heal memories among us and between us and other church families, can we become credible and effective witnesses for peace and reconciliation in our wider societies."

In preparation for the vote, Hanson said the action would be "both communion-building and communion-defining" for the Lutherans. He emphasized that approving the statement was only one part of the action. "To ask for forgiveness of God and our Mennonite sisters and brothers is most fundamentally a prayer. So for the first time at an LWF assembly we will engage in a service of repentance immediately following this plenary session." In his remarks Hanson also acknowledged the witness of non-violence of Mennonites in his native United States. "We have much to learn from you in how to be formed as communities of forgiveness."



*Ishmael Noko, Danisa Ndoou, Mark Hanson during the reconciliation service*

Joachim Track, head of the ecumenical commission of the LWF, presented the motion, which in the discussion time was given heartfelt affirmations from delegates. Following a time of prayer Hanson called on delegates to vote by standing or kneeling. The action passed unanimously.

Representatives of MWC were invited to respond on behalf of Anabaptist-Mennonites. In the MWC response, LWF-president Danisa Ndlovu faltered with emotion as he told the assembly that Anabaptist-Mennonites cannot come to this table with "our heads held high; we also stand in need of God's grace. We believe that today God has heard your confession and is granting your appeal

for forgiveness. We joyfully and humbly join with God in giving forgiveness. In the spirit of the rule of Christ, we believe that what we are doing together here today God also is doing in heaven."

Recalling the practice of foot-washing in some Anabaptist-Mennonite churches, Danisa Ndlovu, presented M. Hanson with a wooden foot-washing tub and a towel. He said the tub was "a sign of our commitment to a future when the distinguishing mark of Lutheran and Anabaptist-Mennonite relationships is boundless love and unfailing service. We will learn to seek one another's good from a posture of vulnerability and mutual submission."

Following the action, the general secretaries and presidents of the LWF and MWC led a procession of all delegates and guests for a solemn service of repentance and healing which gave space for both Mennonites and Lutherans to share stories, prayers and music from their heritages. A Mennonite-Lutheran choir led the congregation in songs from both Anabaptist and Lutheran traditions.

Larry Miller, MWC executive secretary, during his testimony, displayed a picture of Anabaptist Dirk Willems rescuing his pursuer

who had fallen through the ice. The image has become symbolic of Anabaptist ideals of loving the enemy. Miller acknowledged, however, that such stories have sometimes led Anabaptist-Mennonites to adopt the martyr tradition as a "badge of superiority". "We sometimes nurtured an identity rooted in victimization that could foster a sense of self-righteousness and arrogance, blinding us to the frailties and failures that are also deeply rooted in our tradition."

Following scripture readings and prayers for healing, several people from the MWC community came forward and covered the purple cloth on the altar display with a white cloth, symbolizing the movement from repentance to healing. They also placed olive branches around the altar, indicating a commitment to live in peace.



*Larry Miller, executive secretary of  
the Mennonite World Conference*



Delegates passed bowls of oil from the Holy Land to anoint each other with the words, "God gives you a new heart and a new spirit."

As a way of looking to a future reconciled relationship, the worshippers were treated to another time of testimonials from the Lutherans of how they are already seeking peace. Colombian bishop Eduardo Martinez recounted how Lutherans and Anabaptist-related churches are already working jointly in confronting the violence in that country. Susan C. Johnson, national bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada shared the podium with MWC vice-president Janet Plenert. They told of joining initiatives in Canada, from growing grain together to planning joint resources for study and worship.

The timing and the location of the delegate action and worship service were heavy with symbolism. Stuttgart's Stiftskirche, the venue for the assembly's opening and closing worship services, was itself a sign that even in the 16th century the Reformers were not united in their persecution of Anabaptists. Johannes Brenz, buried at the church, had argued vigorously that the state lacked authority in matters of faith. As Bishop Mark Hanson said in this action, Lutherans were now "reclaiming" the legacy of Brenz.

The action comes just seven years ahead of 2017, when Lutherans and other Christians mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of the 95 theses on the Wittenberg church doors. The reconciliation with the Anabaptists thus contributes to prepare the way for the celebration.

*Summarized from Byron Rempel-Burkholder, MWC news service*

[www.church-and-peace.org](http://www.church-and-peace.org)

**A new step has been taken in relaunching the Church and Peace website, now presented in four languages and making many already published or unpublished documents available**

Thanks to grants from the Mennonite Central Committee, the website is now available not only in French, English and German but also in Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian. This new phase in the presentation of Church and Peace on the internet reflects the expansion of the network of contacts and cooperation with groups committed to peace in Southeastern Europe.

The site offers, under the "documents" tab, texts in pdf format which can be viewed online and downloaded for free. These include already published or unpublished newsletters, statements and press releases from the Church and Peace meetings and texts on the theology and the practice of peace.

We invite members to keep us informed of the dates of their activities (training, conferences) so that we can announce them on the website. Thank you in advance for facilitating a better communication within and beyond the network.

To further improve the site, it is essential that we hear your views as users. Please send your feedback and suggestions to the International Secretariat which, in collaboration with the webmaster, maintains and develops the site. Thank you in advance!

## **"Awakened by dreams of the Kingdom"**

**During worship at the AGM, Jakob Fehr, director of the German Mennonite Peace Committee, pondered on prophet Joel's words as quoted in Acts 2:17. Excerpts from his message:**

"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men and women shall see visions, and the old shall dream dreams".

(...) in our Bible passage Peter emphasizes that dreams at Pentecost are only the beginning of something new that will energize the followers of Jesus. (...) Dreams can wake us up – wake us up to new possibilities. How do they do that? They do it by re-creating life. (...) Life re-created, life turned around, life resurrected – all that means: Life calls us to act again in a new way.

In our dreams they happen. Things that are really quite improbable, quite impossible, things that seemingly cannot be altered, are suddenly seen quite differently. And what happens then? Does it remain an escapist fantasy? (...) Was it a vain and pointless dream to believe that a fundamental structure of 19th century economic life – Black slavery – could be ended? Was it futile to envision an end to apartheid in South Africa? Was it mere idle dreaming that the Berlin Wall could fall?

(...) Dreaming of the dawn of God's kingdom has a point. The dream that God places within us is the beginning of the kingdom. Because those things that stay in our dreams become our thoughts. And our thoughts become our words. And our words become our actions. And our actions become our communities. And our communities become the kingdom. Therefore dream! That is: think and speak the words of God's dream. Dream! That is: act and build the communities that live from the dream.

That's why dreaming plays such an important part in the biblical story: Dreams begin the process that leads to thinking and speaking and acting and community-formation. In our Bible text Peter announces on the Day of Pentecost that the time to dream has begun. The last days have broken out. The kingdom of God is happening. Can you see it? Can you imagine it? What does it look like?

Dream of the kingdom of God. Pray for the kingdom of God. The kingdom, Jesus says, is here and now, even within us. It's in our deepest dreams and hopes. Dream and pray for the kingdom – reach into your soul and listen. What do you see when you close your eyes? Do you see ways of re-imagining the world? Can you imagine acting upon what you dream?

Dreaming of the kingdom is about freeing our souls from compulsion, from foreign powers and principalities, freeing our thoughts from the necessities that want to rule us. That's not easy. Who really wants to put aside a well-organized life? We spent so much energy in planning this-and-that. And some of those things have to be done. But dreaming of the kingdom means occasionally putting our calendars aside.

Let's remember that radical person who walked among us and who showed us how

to love, how to dream, and how to thrive in the way God created us to love, dream, and thrive. What Jesus did, was so surprising, because no one could imagine that it could happen. No one dreamed that the lame could walk, that women could be treated as equals, that meals could be shared with enemies, that those in power could be challenged.

Let's wake up to our dreams! And let's tell the story to others – let's tell them the good news that will make them dream: that the world can be turned around, that life can be resurrected. **Amen.**

**"You shall be my people and I shall be your God"  
- our Calling to be a Church of Peace.**



**The next Church and Peace international conference will take place at the Communauté de l'Arche de Saint Antoine (Ark Community of St-Antoine) in France, at the same time as the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC).**

The international conference of Church and Peace, from **20 to 22 May 2011** will be held at the end of the World Council of Churches' *Decade to Overcome Violence* and take place in the same week as the IEPC in Kingston, Jamaica. We will hold workshops on the IEPC topics:

- Peace in the Community,
- Peace with the Earth,
- Peace in the Marketplace,
- Peace among the Peoples.

The plenary inputs and debates will concentrate on the calling of the people of God to be peace-builders.

At the conference we will be able to find out more about a community that has been a Church and Peace member for decades. The Ark Communities were founded by Lanza del Vasto in 1948, after his meeting with Gandhi. Singles and couples there live a life in community characterized by work, simpler needs, conciliation and reconciliation, prayer and a deeper spiritual life – not to forget singing, dancing and celebrating. They participate in actions for justice and peace, in conjunction with other non-violent movements. The Community's experience is unique among those who work for peace.

The members of the St-Antoine Community are Christians from different churches who have a religious calling to reconciliation while respecting each person's own path.

The conference will take place in a large heritage building (abbey) in the beautiful medieval village of Saint Antoine l'Abbaye, near the small town of Saint-Marcellin.



## Upcoming events:

### **Southeastern Europe conference**

Place: Novi Sad (Serbia)

Date: **October 13 - 17 2010**

Theme: "In building peace we glorify God"

### **German speaking regional conference**

Place: Thomashof near Karlsruhe (Germany)

Date: **November 26 - 28 2010**

Theme: "Auge um Auge? Zahn um Zahn? - Wege aus der Vergeltungskultur"  
(Keynote speaker Howard Zehr speaks in English on restorative justice; Seminar of the *Alternatives to Violence* Program for youth in German)

### **Annual General Meeting and International Conference:**

Place: Communauté de l'Arche de St-Antoine

St-Antoine-L'Abbaye

38160 St-Marcellin (France)

Date: **May 19 - 22 2011**

**For more details look up our website [www.church-and-peace.org](http://www.church-and-peace.org) or contact the international office. You can download this newsletter as well as other documents.**



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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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