



Church and Peace Newsletter Autumn 2012

Dear readers

This newsletter offers you numerous echoes from the Church and Peace network that reflect its great diversity.

In the last few months our work has focused on the Church and Peace Annual General Meeting held in Brussels on a theme related to that city: 'The European Community – an unfinished reconciliation project: The integration of the countries of former Yugoslavia'. It was a great pleasure to come together with many members of our network and to discuss this issue, which lies at the very heart of European politics. We used the opportunity to engage in discussions with those people in Brussels who try to promote policies that will contribute to sustainable peace. Our conference also featured representatives of various initiatives in the region who expressed interest in exchanges with our network. See Marie-Noëlle von der Recke's report about the AGM 2012 on page 2.

Another important matter was of course Marie-Noëlle von der Recke's decision to resign from her post as General Secretary of Church and Peace at the beginning of next year after decades of service. We took seriously the task of choosing a successor. We began by asking our members to reflect on the present state of our network and on what priorities we should set for the future. The job description that we posted was one visible sign of this process. Thanks to all who have contributed toward this process, which led to applications from various strong candidates. We are convinced that we have found in Davorka Lovreković a general secretary who brings a lot of experience and a high level of motivation to working with Church and Peace. To find out more about her, read further on page 4.

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Excellent reading

Antje Heides-Rothorn

Beside the business part of the meeting, the Church and Peace Annual General Assembly 2012 held in Brussels provided an opportunity to discuss a topic central to European politics.

Members of the network of Church and Peace from all over Europe met on 27 to 29 April 2012 at the Notre Dame du Chant d'Oiseau conference centre. On the agenda were discussion of the reports of the International office and the regions, vacancy of the General Secretary position, Finance Report 2011 and Budget 2012 and the election of a new administrative committee. Hans Häselbarth, Brigitte Mesdag and Brian Tracy did not stand for a further term. The mandate of Antje Heider-Rottwilm, Bruno Sägeser, Elisabeth Freise, Janna Postma, Ian Ring and Branka Srnc was extended by three years. Elected to the board for the first time were Daniel Geiser-Oppliger and Laurens Thiessen van Esch.



Martin Schuler presents the 2011 financial report

The thematic part began with a panel discussion on a central issue in European politics:

The European Community – an unfinished reconciliation project
– The countries of the former Yugoslavia and European integration –

For many years Church and Peace has been in close contact with partners and members in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, who struggle to respond to the wounds of wars among the various ethnic groups and religious populations by fostering reconciliation through concrete social action and through training in nonviolent conflict resolution. Church and Peace supports the work of these various initiatives and organizations, the formation of an inter-religious network and the organization of interethnic and interreligious meetings/conferences under the guidance of experienced facilitators. Church and Peace also supports the development of relationships and exchanges with initiatives in other regions of Europe working for reconciliation and the nonviolent pursuit of human rights and peace.

Andreas Zumach, journalist from Geneva, moderated a lively discussion among the podium guests:

- Tobias Heider, Advisor on Security and Defence for The Greens European Alliance, Brussels
- Elizabeta Kitanovic, Advisor on Human Rights for The Conference of European Churches, Brussels (www.ceceurope.org)
- Nikola Knezevic, Centre for Religious Studies, Novi Sad, Serbia; Coordinator of RECOM (www.zarekom.org/The-Coalition-for-RECOM.en.html), an initiative to compile facts about the atrocities committed during the war in former Yugoslavia, and about the victims of war crimes.
- Snjezana Kovacevic, theologian and peace activist, Osijek, Croatia.

In the podium discussion and in the subsequent conversations it became increasingly clear just how complex are the long-term political processes that strive for integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. How can deeply divided societies find reconciliation if there is no intellectual and political elite supporting the process? What are the effects of decisions by the EU on the situation in each country and between countries, especially with respect to the implementation of human rights standards?



Margrit Kruber-Arnold comments the report of the nominations committee before the election of the new Administrative Committee

Tobias Heider explained, with examples, the many still unresolved issues as well as the difficulty for younger members of European Parliament to really grasp the meaning of the events that have led to the conflicts in the 90s. He believes that the Brussel elites are not willing to truly address the problems in the region.

Nikola Knezevic stressed the hope that Serbia's accession to the European Union will allow his country to pass through the economic trough. Their entry could also have a positive impact on the lives of ordinary people and lead to absolutely necessary structural changes, such as democratic mechanisms, transparency in government and in the parliament, the fight against corruption. He also pointed to other necessary preconditions, albeit difficult to fulfil for an accession of Serbia (judicial reform, elimination of discrimination and other human rights violations), and still others which are unacceptable for the government and the Serbian people (such as the recognition of Kosovo's independence).

Snjezana Kovacevic referred to the scepticism of some of her generation in view of the accession of Croatia to the European Union (middle-aged people who have experienced war firsthand). Ante Gotovina, a war criminal, whose arrest is requested by several member countries of the European Union is still a hero for many Croats. Snjezana confirmed that 66% of the Croatian population are in favour of EU accession and that with the help of European funds quite a number of projects are already under way, especially in the education sector. The younger generation, in search of opportunities for education and work, look very much forward to the entry. The ratification of the treaty should take place in June 2013, so that Croatia can be joining the EU from 1 July 2013. The present Croatian government is facing numerous challenges and the same applies to Serbia: Economic progress and the rule of law in the interior and foreign policy.

It also became clear that there are more and more non-governmental organizations working with great tenacity to foster internal integration within their respective countries – at the social level as well as in the historical investigation of the causes of war and its consequences.

Snjezana Kovacevic reported that in late 2011 'Platform 112' has been launched, under whose umbrella sixty different organizations have joined forces, all of them



*Around the panel :Nikola Knezevic,
Snjezana Kovacevic, Andreas Zumach,
Elizabeta Kitanovic, Tobias Heider*

have many years of experience in the field of human rights, peace-building and ecology. They are monitoring the final stage of the accession process of Croatia to the European Union, to particularly ensure the development of human rights and the rule of law. Snjezana noted with regret that due to lack of funds the civil society organizations have been less and less focusing their efforts on peace issues..

Elizabeta Kitanovic pleaded for a clearer commitment of the churches in particular for human rights and for closer cooperation in the upcoming tasks.

Reconciliation will take time. Western Europeans know this all too well from their own history. And at all levels it will need targeted support for the forces of reconciliation. Europe's future depends on reconciliation in her ethnic and religious diversity. The discussions revealed that this is a huge challenge for the political leaders as well as for those who actively persevere in working with people for reconciliation.

This is a clear request to the churches, both in the Member States of the European Union and in the candidate countries. And finally, this is also an encouragement for a network such as Church and Peace, whose vocation consists in bringing together peace churches and church-based peace organizations, despite all borders and without awaiting the permission of politics.



Church and Peace has a new general secretary from Januar 2013. Davorka Lovrekovic introduces herself:

A poster hangs in our kitchen. It is somewhat old and has moved with me from one apartment to another for almost 25 years. It says: "At the table of peace there will be bread and justice."

This sentence has been guiding me in my activities for a long time. It is the invitation of the Sermon on the Mount to stand up for justice and peace, and to share the bread. We have been invited to the celebration of God's people – and we have not only heard the invitation, but we have also accepted it. We participate actively in preparations for it. Now and then some folks – one by one or as a group – come and take a seat at the table. Sometimes the table has been set in haste, sometimes very carefully. People taste from the food, they strengthen themselves and others, they continue inviting others to join in. It is as if the celebration with everyone had already begun.

I was born in Zagreb. In 1966 my parents asked for political asylum in Germany. So I grew up here in Germany. My family – which was deeply rooted in the Catholic Church – has repeatedly made the experience of being invited as strangers to this table. Despite of all the difficulties inherent to life in a foreign country, they experienced "home" in the Church community and in the warm relationships with neighbours, some of whom became friends. I've learned from my parents to deal constructively with hostility, and the witness of their authentically nonviolent attitude has influenced me deeply.



Davorka Lovreković

In 1980 I signed the commitment of "Ohne Rüstung Leben" ("Living without armament"): "I'm willing to live without the protection of weapons. I will work in my community to make this possible." I did not want to threaten others – and I did not want others to do it in my name. Only 17 years old, I was aware that this would be a lifelong commitment. So I started to look out for others who might pursue this vision too and who would nourish themselves and others for a longstanding commitment. I have found these people in the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, people who say not only NO, but also say a powerful YES

to life, to a culture of nonviolence, to the theology of peace and reconciliation. At our annual meetings we not only work together but also nurture community with each other, which encourages us for the time when we are back home on our own and engage in a nonviolent lifestyle.

During my volunteer service in a Christian community in the U.S. (Koinonia Partners in Americus, Georgia) I have met Quakers. After returning to Germany I moved to Ham-burg because there was a large Quaker meeting. I became a Quaker because I believe that "that of God" exists in every human being. In our silent worship we come together to hear God's call to us and to support each other to answer to this calling with our lives. With our move to Laufdorf as a family we feel lucky to be able to participate in the life of the Lauentiuskonvent community, and contribute to the witness they give.

Never before so many people had an interest in nonviolence or were so keen on learning about what it takes to build nonviolent structures. The recognition that this is the meaningful, sustainable and reasonable way to settle conflict in the world has never been so strong. Churches and Christian Communities have been influential in this growing awareness and Church and Peace is an important impuls for the Churches and society. I am looking forward to continuing together with all of you to invite people at the table of peace and justice, and to set it with joy, so that there is bread for all.



The French-speaking regional Church and Peace conference took place on April 26th–27th in collaboration with Church and Peace member "Sortir de la Violence". Philippe Gonzalez a sociologist of religions and lecturer at the University of Lausanne gave two presentations highlighting the root causes and the mechanisms of the rise of community identity which affects our society. Hervé van Baren and Valentine de Beauvoir-Ursel report:



***Philippe Gonzalez,
religion sociologist
(University of Lausanne,
Switzerland)***

Church and Peace held this year's francophone regional meeting in Brussels, home of one of its member associations Sortir de la Violence. The bright idea arose to merge this one-day regional gathering with an internal training meeting planned by Sortir de la Violence. A special guest, sociologist Philippe Gonzalez, was invited for the occasion to share his vision of Christian identity today.

The Oslo attacks perpetrated by Anders Breivik served as a starting point for reflection. Breivik justified his horrific acts by the need for "cultural Christianity" to lead the battle against the Islamic invasion that, according to Breivik, threatens Western identity.

In this vision, one on which the ideology of the extreme right is increasingly based and which is at present impairing democratic debate even within moderate political parties, religion is perceived as both foreign aggressor (Islam) and an ultimate bulwark of protection (Christianity). Philippe Gonzalez stresses the irony of this identity claim of belonging to Christianity being made even by those who broadly endorse the secularization of our society.

Over against this simplistic view, Manichean and inconsistent, Philippe – citing several Biblical passages – poses the true heart of Christian identity by highlighting one of its facets: the principle of difference.



***40 participants listen to
Philippe Gonzalez***

Being a Christian amounts to "becoming a stranger there where we were once at

home." The First Epistle of St Peter says: to be faithful to the Word we must uproot and exile ourselves, not in order to isolate ourselves from the world but better to focus on a plural humanity, rich in its differences.

The story of Babel gives us another lesson, that of a perversion which consists in turning humanity into a uniform and freedom-destroying collectivity in the service of some great project that is realized at the expense of human dignity. These two Biblical passages are extremely relevant and shed much light on the meaning of our Christian commitment today. In this context,

"the Church has the responsibility to announce that every human being has the dignity to recognize him- or herself as a child of God."



Thomas Peeters from "Sortir de la Violence" reports the results of a working group

As Philippe said in conclusion: "We are called to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, the Son, with all our peculiarities, in communion with each other. Only then does the word "Christian" have any meaning."



Benoît and Ariane Thiran introduce the project: Sortir de la Violence

Philippe's presentation was followed by group sharing on the theme "how do we translate this vision of our Christian identity through action and concrete commitments in our lives?" At the close of this fruitful day, a spokesperson for each group briefly presented the results of the discussions.

As always, the richness of collective work came from the extreme diversity of perspectives, commitments and testimonies of the many participants ... in other words, from 'difference'.



A colloquium on the occasion of the 100th birthday of Jean Goss took place in Innsbruck, Austria 8– 9 June 2012. Some one hundred people gathered to remember, celebrate, and reflect. Here we summarize some of the highlights of an article written by Alfred Bour¹, a friend of Jean Goss, which evokes Jean's vision beginning with his experience of a profound conversion on the eve of his imprisonment in Germany in 1940.

Out of this foundational experience, Jean Goss' vision of Christ will come to merge with his vision of the human being: for him, Christ is Man–Love, he is love made man. Jean said, in the manner of the labour unionist he was, what Vatican II would later say: "The mystery of man can only be truly made clear in the mystery of the Word incarnate." Jean gives a very precise meaning to this love. It is truth and justice. It is active, dynamic, aggressive in the face of evil and injustice but never towards another human being, creator of life on all levels and redemptive, that is, it pays for the other. He sees this love as lived, realised and fully completed in Christ.

The first step in non–violence, for Jean, is love for one's neighbour. This is the first dimension of love, and the first dimension of the human being. The love of enemies is the second: "what have we, Christians, done for 2000 years other than do harm to an evil person, and even crushing him if we have to. 'If someone asks us to take one thousand steps, take two thousand'... What does this mean? Drown evil with good!" And Jesus goes much further: "he came to bring us everything, to give us everything. Yet it was only on the Thursday, the eve of his death, that he confided to us the very secret of the life of God. He then gives us the third dimension of Love, which is the third dimension of the human being. 'There is no greater love, he says, than to give one's life for those whom one loves'." To live such love demands that we do not remain alone or simply have ourselves be helped by others.

His wife Hildegard Goss–Mayr wrote: "Moved by his love of others and by God, the All Other, throughout his whole life Jean followed the path of more and more becoming an instrument of peace. He demonstrated for us the extent to which we need one another for our own transformation, and that our own authenticity is intimately tied to what we experience both on the personal and social planes."

There was one expression which Jean constantly used: "absolute respect for the human person". The mystical was everything to Jean, but for him the mystical should immediately become incarnate. In discovering Christ, he discovered a human person as an exceptional being in Creation, a sacred being, created in the image and resemblance of the God–Trinity. As a consequence, each human being became sacred for him. Jean founded this sacred aspect of the person in redemption. Nevertheless, the absolute respect of the human person has also a solid humanist foundation, such that an atheist, agnostic or humanist could easily work with Jean. And there were many, in the labour union milieu from which he came, in the poor suburbs of post–war Paris. This humanist foundation is very much essential when one thinks of the non–violence that Jean bequeathed to us.



¹ The full article can be read in NonViolenz-MIRoir, number 4, summer 2012, p.1ff.

L'Arche community, a member of Peace and Church for many years, named Margalida Reus-Legland as its new general head at its last chapter meeting.

Almost two hundred committed members² of L'Arche community from Latin America and all over Europe gathered in St-Antoine l'Abbaye for the chapter meeting generally held every seven years.

Moments of prayer, presentations, workshops and informal exchanges punctuated the meeting at which the community's organization and modes of operation were discussed and a new international leader elected.

Presentations by Frédéric Rognon ("the Art of Doing Community"), Martin Arnold ("the Dynamic of Goodness, the potential for new shoots") and Daniel Vigne ("L'Arche, a spiritual message for today and tomorrow")³ sparked intense discussions on community life, non-violent commitment and spirituality.



Jean-Baptiste Libouban (right) speaks about his time of service as "pilgrim" of the Arche. Left the new leader: Margalida Reus



The Members of the Arche community read the text of their commitment in 5 languages

At the final celebration, followed by a big party (something at which L'Arche is quite expert), successive leaders of L'Arche since its foundation took turns speaking. And the pilgrim's stick of Shantidas, the founder of the community, passed from hand to hand as in a relay. After Michèle Leboeuf the newly elected leading person is Margalida Reus.

A meeting planned for December will determine who will coordinate the Francophone branch of the community.



² In the Arche community we no longer distinguish between 'compagnons' and 'alliés' but only speak of 'engagés', committed members.

³ L'Arche plans to make the texts of these contributions available in all of the languages used at the meeting.

'Gewaltfrei handeln' (acting nonviolently), formerly known as 'Ecumenical Shalom Services', is a member of Church and Peace since the year 1999. The organization celebrated its 20th anniversary in August. Ralf Becker relates the following:

Since its incorporation as an association in 1992, this organization has trained over 2,700 people through 153 two-week workshops and seminars, 10 courses of advanced study, and courses for workshop leaders.

The founding fathers and mothers, along with many other course graduates, partners, and members of the association gathered for a celebration at the premises of the Adam von Trott Foundation in Imshausen near Bebra, Germany. The expression of great thankfulness for its initial thrust on one hand and for the dynamic evolution of the association up until the name-change on its twentieth anniversary on the other hand, was a striking feature of the gathering.



Ljubinka Petrovic-Ziemer

Ten sister organisations brought brief congratulatory messages. The participants were deeply touched by the messages of the keynote speakers, Christof Ziemer and

Ljubinka Petrović-Ziemer. Christof Ziemer, former pastor in Dresden and an eminent figure in East Germany's peace movement, expressed his thankfulness for 'Gewaltfrei handeln's' personal and professional mentoring that helped him in his peace activities in the Balkans. When war erupted in ex-Yugoslavia, he launched project 'Abraham'. It was during this period that he met his wife, Ljubinka who, in turn, set down the deeply moving story of the reconciliation work that was carried out among the religious and cultural groups.



*Reinhard Voss, former Executive Secretary
of Ecumenical Shalom Services*

During the course of the festivities, a 24-page brochure and a new book containing texts of one of the founders, Herbert Froehlich, were presented. They are available from the office of the association.

The southwest German Protestant Church in Baden has launched a discussion process. It will be discussed at its next synod in 2013 on the basis of a list of propositions. Martin Wirth (Spiritual director of the Community Christusbruderschaft) reports:

Is it enough to speak of a "preferential option for non-violence", as the last peace memorandum of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) does? "In view of the experience that the military option enjoys priority in practice, e.g. financially speaking, [should we not] advocate for non-violence as the only option from the Christian viewpoint?" After a broad discussion among its members the Baden Church synod wishes to reposition its peace ethics in 2013.

The discussion paper describes the path from the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount in the first centuries [of Christianity] to the theological teaching of the just war after Augustine, with the goal of limiting violence, to the "just peace" currently advocated in church circles. In the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King spread the idea of the Sermon on the Mount as an effective guide for real political action.

As proposed by the discussion paper, the idea of a just peace means turning away from the doctrine of just war and towards a broad concept of peace, taking up the results of the conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC). Underlying this is the biblical understanding of the gift of Shalom, the findings of peace research and the perspective of breaking, also in political terms, with the practice of violencia (violence, disgrace, desecration) and establishing non-violent, democratically grounded governance along the lines of potestas (subject to law and sanctions). (Ulrich Frey)

To sum up, the propositions quote nuclear physicist and peace activist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker: "The effort to abolish war as an institution must continue." He adds: "War must be rejected once and for all! It must no longer be an option for action for Christians. As they follow Jesus and accept the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, non-violent methods are the reasonable options available to Christians to defend human rights and overcome injustice and oppression."

Urgent forms of practical action are prayer, worship and church-related peace witness at all levels, and the further development of non-violent conflict prevention policies, peace research and a total ban on exports of weapons of war. Together with other churches, the Baden church should set up a Protestant Institute for Peace Education, for "peace can and must be learned".

Since the Lutheran World Federation and the World Mennonite Conference came together in Stuttgart in 2010 with the request for forgiveness in an act of moving, mutual reconciliation, the issue of Church and State has gained new impetus; and in view of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 the Reformation churches also have occasion to reflect on their "Constantinian captivity" in a spirit of penance. Within the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), the German mainline churches are also discovering themselves more clearly as churches in diaspora in a confessionally and ideologically more and more variegated society, and Free Church congregations can self-critically name tenden-

cies to flee the world into spiritual niches. Through ever deeper conversation with one another, participants can rediscover and mutually reinforce not only the strong social-diaconal tradition of public, macro-social engagement but also the prophetic force of opposition to violence drawn from the biblical vision of just peace.

The next International Conference of Church and Peace in early June 2013 in Selbitz, Germany will have this tension as its theme. I am looking forward to continuing the discussion with the biblical prayer to the Holy Spirit: "And guide our feet into the way of peace!" (Lk 1:79)

Announcement: International conference 30 Mai - 2 June 2013



Venue: Christusbruderschaft Selbitz

Topic: **Seek the Welfare of the City -
The prophetic vocation of the Church**

Keynote speakers: **Dr. Lloyd Pietersen,
Alen Kristic**

More informations at the Church and Peace international office IntlOffice@church-and-peace.org and on the Church and Peace website www.church-and-peace.org

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

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