

**Anniversary Celebration 70 years of Church and Peace  
Berlin 18 Mai 2019**

‘I will give you future and hope’ (Jeremiah 29:11)  
70 years of living nonviolence - resisting militarisation

**Welcoming address**

(Antje Heider-Rottwilm, Chair)

Dear friends, ladies and gentlemen, dear guests,

The work of the Annual General Meeting of Church and Peace now lies behind us:

The reports of the activities of the international office, the board, and the members in the regions over the past year; the finances; the release of the board from liability... And now we want to celebrate. Not only amongst ourselves, but with guests. We look back with gratitude on seventy years. We give thanks to God for guidance and enthusiasm, for diversity and enrichment. We are grateful to you all for accepting our invitation.

This afternoon we especially welcome those who will say some words of greeting:

Dr. Volker Berresheim, Ambassador for Religion and Foreign Policy at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin

Dr. Dr. h.c. Markus Dröge, Bishop of the Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia, from Berlin

Catherine Tsavdaridou, from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Conference of European Churches

Jan Gildemeister, Executive Director of the Action Committee Service for Peace, based in Bonn

Thank you very much for coming!

And we are also very pleased to welcome guests from Pax Christi, Chemin Neuf, Sant' Egidio, Prof. Konrad Raiser, the former General Secretary of the WCC. We all need each other.

And I warmly welcome Flois Knolle-Hicks, a church musician with a great deal of ecumenical experience, who will lead us with familiar and unfamiliar melodies and songs in calling for the future and hope which God promises. She has also prepared and blessed us with this wonderful songbook.

I would also like to thank all those who helped to make our conference and this celebration financially possible: Kirchen helfen Kirchen, Eirene, the Threshold Foundation, whose members are among us, the Nordkirche, whose representative Anne Freudenberg is here, the Protestant church in Hesse-Nassau, the Catholic Fund ... without your support, the Annual General Meeting and this celebration would not have been possible!

‘I will give you future and hope’ (Jeremiah 29:11) - 70 years living nonviolence and resisting militarisation - this is the title which we have chosen for this celebration.

Together with the entire General Assembly and our guests - 100 people altogether - we left the Johannisstift in Spandau at noon today to be guests in the halls of our youngest member: The Reformations-Campus e.V - Community at the Reformation Church (REFO Moabit). "Here we want to create a place where culture, faith and practised solidarity are closely linked", that is what your self-description says. Now we are curious about how the peace church tradition and your young community will go on together in the search for peace in the neighbourhood and worldwide. It is great that we can be here today! We have a gift for you: In the search for culture, faith, and lived solidarity it is also about language, especially biblical language, so we have brought you a "Bibel in gerechter Sprache" - a Bible in language which respects equality.

‘Then and now: Called to be peace church - living nonviolence - resisting militarisation’. We have tried to continue what others have begun before us and we have now counted 70 years: 70 years since the beginnings of the movement which led to the founding of Church and Peace:

Seventy years after the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic were founded and Germany became divided - with serious consequences for the whole of Europe; seventy years after the foundation of NATO and, on the other hand, also of Taizé, we draw attention to a process which was not in the focus of public attention at the time: the question of what theological and practical conclusions the churches of Europe should draw from the catastrophes of fascism and the two world wars.

At the founding assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam in 1948 it was jointly agreed that "war is contrary to the will of God". However, this was understood in different ways: On the one hand, war was a necessary evil for national defence, war was actually injustice, or sometimes an unjust duty or obligation; Or, on the other hand, war, the use of military force was forbidden to Christians. So in 1949 a joint committee was formed with representatives (among them two women) of the historic peace churches (Church of the Brethren, Quakers, Mennonites) and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR). The brothers and sisters from the USA were informed by centuries of consistent peace theology and peace practice - in contrast to just war theology - and the associated willingness to withstand, to resist, to be subjected to persecution and suffering.

But they were also moulded by the experience of the church, the community, being the place where God's power can be felt - in communal prayer and worship and in communal life, a practice of peace - inwardly and outwardly in solidarity with those who suffer from violence.

Now, for the first time since the Anabaptists were discredited and persecuted during the Reformation, a series of 'official' theological conversations took place under the auspices of the WCC. These talks were between the peace churches, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, people from the mainstream churches, including the German regional churches which had stood by the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche), and people from other European countries in both East and West. Their theme was "The Lordship of Christ over Church and State".

The talks began in Puidoux on the shores of Lake Geneva. The „Puidoux conferences“, which were later held in other places as well, were intense attempts to understand each other theologically and to come to a joint understanding, to work out the similarities, and to bring each other closer together. But in the end the old contradictions remained and a study group within the theological research centre of the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), the FEST, was commissioned to continue working on the subject. And this is where the churches in the World Council of Churches, and in the Conference of European Churches still stand today - despite the hugely important paradigm shift from just war to just peace.

And even despite the clear statements of Pope Francis, the mainstream churches are still moving very cautiously and timidly away from the justification of military force as ultima ratio to nonviolent conflict transformation as prima and ultima ratio.

It was and is an ecclesiological question – a question about the doctrine and form or structure of the Church. Wilfried Warneck, the first general secretary of Church and Peace, wrote: "An answer could not be found by discussions alone. Thus in 1957 Eirene - International Christian Peace Service was founded as a second strand of activity, as an ecumenical and pacifist organisation, especially for long-term voluntary service. It was about solidarity service in the world, committed to justice and peace.

In 1975 there was a discussion about how, beyond the historic peace churches in Europe, approaches to peace church existence, which were primarily practised in communities, grassroots congregations and peace services, could be connected with each other. At that time Eirene, but also other initiatives had found their place in the Malteserhof in the community of the Laurentiuskonvent.

Now it was no longer a matter of merely continuing the dialogue with the mainstream churches, but of discovering and awakening traces of peace church within them.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Church and Peace 1949 – 1999, p. 25f.

This was the central theme of Ruth and Wilfried Warneck's life: she was a Protestant deacon and he a pastor. Released for this ministry by the Laurentiuskonvent, they began to travel through Europe in 1975, visiting the congregations and communities in the various churches who saw themselves as peace congregations, for whom nonviolence in everyday life, in faith, in simple lifestyles, and in actions of resistance against economic and political violence were a sign of the Kingdom of God.

"What unites them is the experience of the God of Jesus of Nazareth, a God who will never kill - except death itself - who does not avenge and who does not force anyone, who overcomes only through love. They are united by the experience of Jesus' nonviolence as the self-evident expression of this love; they have discovered it as the redeeming third way beyond war as well as cowardice and apathy" Wilfried Warneck wrote in 1990 about his encounters with 'churches of the nonviolent'.<sup>2</sup> Out of this networking exercise Church and Peace was founded in 1978 as a registered association.

I do not intend to present the fullness of developments, conferences, activities, crises, new opportunities, and issues at this point. It would be too tempting and could fill the rest of the day, if we were to remind each other of the many steps on the path of peace: the commitment to the Conciliar Process in the 1980s, the courageous reconciliation initiatives in the context of the wars in Yugoslavia, the unceasing prayers and actions for peace in various places in Europe, the struggle for a theology of peace which clearly and convincingly invites the mainstream churches and the ecumenical movement on the path of nonviolence, the protest against the emerging development of the European Union becoming a military power, and in these politically volatile times the commitment against the worldwide madness of armament and the sabre-rattling at the expense of millions of people who suffer or even perish from the consequences. We have compiled some information in our last newsletter, and there is a lot to be read on our website.

The retrospective is to be done by people who were Church and Peace staff during these years. And then we will turn to the present, the wealth of developments and experiences that move our members. Among the important people are the former general secretaries, but also the former board members - many of you are here today - and other staff members without whom the network would not have been able to operate. I would especially like to mention Terri Miller and Martin Schuler - both send their warm regards!

As regards the general secretaries:

*Wilfried Warneck was Executive Secretary from 1975 to 1990.* He died in 2015 at the age of 86. We have already heard from him and about him.

*In 1990 Wilfried handed over to Gordon Matthews - Gordon sends us warm greetings.*

*And Christian Hohmann, who was General Secretary from 1996, was also unable to come, but responded in writing.*

I asked everyone the question: What were the most important issues at the time? What was particularly successful and what pleased you the most?

Two previous general secretaries are with us:

*2000 - 2012 Marie-Noëlle von der Recke, Laufdorf*

*2012 - 2017 Davorika Lovrekovic, Hamburg*

Since 2017 Lydia Funck has been our general secretary. We will see her tonight as the moderator of the session on "Envisioning the future – Renewed inspiration for our work", because it is about her future with Church and Peace.

Many thanks to her, Marina Hueber and Helga Amelung for all the preparations for this celebration!

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<sup>2</sup> W. Warneck, *Friedenskirchliche Existenz im Konziliaren Prozess*, 1990, p.1f.