



# Newsletter

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Photo: Shutterstock

## Promoting Reconciliation

*The commitments of the Charta Oecumenica, signed by the European churches 20 years ago, are also a challenge for Church and Peace. Chair Antje Heider-Rottwilm reflects.*

In recent months, I often have found myself thinking about the future, and Strasbourg. Will it be possible for us, the Church and Peace network, to finally meet again for our annual international conference – in Strasbourg, in September – to actually meet in person, face to face?

And in recent months, my thoughts often have taken me back to Strasbourg, where, 20 years ago, in April 2001, the Presidents of the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Catholic Bishops' Conferences signed the *Charta Oecumenica*.

This is what the Charter was all about: *Europe – from the Atlantic to the Urals, from the North Cape to the Mediterranean – is today more pluralist in culture than ever before. With the Gospel, we want to stand up for the dignity of the human person created in God's image and, as churches*

*together, contribute towards reconciling peoples and cultures.*

Since the European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz in 1997, various drafts had been the subject of intensive discussion in the churches throughout Europe. And now, young and old, women and men from all over Europe had come together to celebrate the signing of the Charter with their prayers and their hopes for the future, and then to go on their way with a commitment to bringing the Charter to life.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (Mt 5:9), is the verse at the top of the third section of the Charter, 'Our Common Responsibility in Europe'.

The commitments of the churches are clear and unmistakable: *We commit*

*ourselves to work for structures of peace, based on the non-violent resolution of conflicts. We condemn any form of violence against the human person, particularly against women and children.*

*Reconciliation involves promoting social justice within and among all peoples; above all, this means closing the gap between rich and poor and overcoming unemployment. Together we will do our part towards giving migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers a humane reception in Europe. (III.8)*

We find ourselves challenged again and again by the commitments of the *Charta Oecumenica* – we as the Church and Peace network, and also the churches, with whom we struggle together to follow the Way as disciples of Jesus and, as we do so, unambiguously affirm

*continued on page 3*



## Church and Peace

The European ecumenical network of peace churches, and peace church-oriented congregations, communities and service agencies

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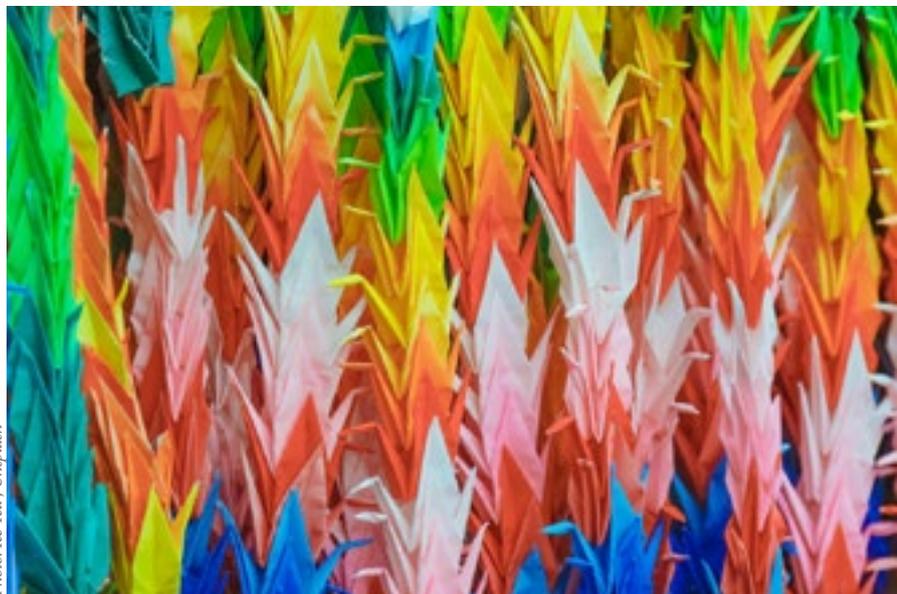


Photo: Ice Tea - Unsplash

## Work for Peace in COVID Times

Dear readers,

twenty years after the signing of the *Charta Oecumenica*, working for reconciliation in Europe remains a constant challenge, also for the churches, as Antje Heider-Rottwilm reflects in this issue's cover article.

Both civil society and faith communities have proven their resilience in the face of challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We, too, in the Church and Peace network continue to ask ourselves where and how working for justice and peace is necessary and possible in these times.

In these pages you'll discover stories showing where and how the challenge to build reconciliation has been taken up.

Online events and discussions have explored the call to defend human rights in Europe, particularly with

regard to the situation of refugees; to build peace in the context of racism and hate speech; to ensure security through the development of peace at the local level. Members in Croatia have pursued their work for peace despite the pandemic and earthquakes. And in the UK, the Community for Reconciliation was relaunched under the name Seedbeds.

In 'The Last Word', Maria Biedrawa reflects on the parallels between the psychological impact of armed conflict situations and of the coronavirus pandemic, and gives suggestions to cope constructively with this fallout in daily life.

Happy reading! Suggestions and feedback are very welcome.

With best wishes,



*Promoting Reconciliation**continued from page 1*

the nonviolent transformation of conflict and the renunciation of all military options.

Again and again we are made aware of the fact that in this Europe 'from the Atlantic to the Urals, from the North Cape to the Mediterranean', human dignity is being violated and that from this Europe, violence is spreading out. During an international Zoom discussion in the autumn, we were reminded of this by Rosá Björk Brynjólfssdóttir, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Vice Chairperson of the Assembly's Committee on Migration, Refugees, and Displaced Persons (see page 6).

In press releases and joint campaigns with other organisations, and with the support of alliances for action such as United4Rescue, we continue to advocate that 'migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers' be given 'a humane reception in Europe'.

We see the connections between racism, power, and sexism as a challenge for peace churches, a challenge which we have begun to face. The experience of our members and friends in Britain and Ireland is especially helpful, and we have benefited from this on several occasions in online discussions organised by the region. This subject will also be discussed at the Strasbourg conference on the theme of 'Images of God and Nonviolence'.

Last but not least, we are closely following developments in the European Union: are these developments contributing 'towards reconciling peoples

and cultures'? Our statement at the conclusion of a long period of political decision-making regarding the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021–2027 makes it clear that we consider the funding of arms research and production from the EU budget to be a disastrous paradigm shift and that other decisions about military options also call the European 'Peace Project' into question. We are dismayed by Brexit, which was finally cemented by treaty, and are especially concerned about the risk of a new flare-up of the conflict in Northern Ireland after it has been contained with such great difficulty.

We will also continue to work to ensure that the EU strengthens human rights and climate justice and Europe as a peace project, instead of tying human and financial resources up in armaments and military operations.

Read Church and Peace's analysis of security policy decisions taken during the German EU Presidency: [www.church-and-peace.org/en/2021/02/comments-on-eu-security-policy-decisions](http://www.church-and-peace.org/en/2021/02/comments-on-eu-security-policy-decisions).

The *Charta Oecumenica* ends with a prayer that was valid when it was signed 20 years ago and will continue to be equally valid in future: 'May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit'. (Rom 15:13)

**Antje Heider-Rottwilm**

Read the *Charta Oecumenica* and find out more about its impact at the local level: <https://t1p.de/COe>.



Photo: Church and Peace

# Inspired for the Climb

*Barbara Forbes, Church and Peace Board member for Britain and Ireland, reports on the region's conference on 13 March on the theme 'Building Peace from the Ground Up', co-organised with the Fellowship of Reconciliation UK.*

Thinking about a world which seems overwhelmed by hatred manifesting both in physical forms and through hate speech, we felt blessed to have inspiring speakers who shared their experience and wisdom with us. Conference participants came not only from the UK but also from across Europe – from Dublin to Moscow, Berlin to Tirana, via Switzerland and Hungary – as well as Pakistan and the USA. A rich mixture of people – and topics!

Church and Peace Chair Antje Heider-Rottwilm noted that since the first regional conference in 2014 our focus had always been on peace in the broadest sense – not just militarism, but also climate change, racism, and political developments. She highlighted the link between blasphemy and hate speech, which occurs in all religions when people are tempted to defame and devalue others who don't share their faith.

Keynote speaker Lisa Cumming, Quaker, lifted up insight from the Quaker thinker and academic Adam Curle – that we need to transform unpeaceful relationships into peaceful ones, but also to transform the conditions we live in so that they are unfavourable to violence.

This second challenge is particularly important in today's world. In a series of workshops, we went on to look at how we might begin to do this, for example by tackling hate speech online, by striving to move from non-racist to anti-racist, by learning from grassroots efforts



to bring people and communities together.

Keynote speaker the Revd Dr Sharon Prentis reminded us to listen to the deep lament rising from our contemplative life, and to develop a compelling vision of an incarnational way of living which impacts others around us.

An innovation for this conference was an 'Open Space' workshop for sharing individual concerns. Those at the session heard about the struggles of the Christian community in Pakistan, which seem totally intractable and any response of ours, inadequate. However, Open Space participants vowed their support, including the important promise to offer up prayers.

We were challenged on many levels. Transforming the relationships and

conditions we live in so that they are unfavourable to violence seems a very high mountain to climb, and we know our shortfalls. The words of our speakers and workshop leaders will provide inspiration and encouragement for this journey. As the American Quaker Bayard Rustin said: 'God does not require us to achieve any of the good tasks that humanity must pursue. What he requires of us is that we not stop trying.'

**Barbara Forbes**

*Let yourself be inspired as well! Find conference contributions and a detailed report at: [www.church-and-peace.org/en/regional-conferences](http://www.church-and-peace.org/en/regional-conferences).*

# Only Peace Brings Security

## German-Language Regional Conference 2020

*How can the path of peace also meet the need for security? Peace must be 'dared' (Bonhoeffer), but there is also the human need for order in society. Who ensures security, and who ensures peace? Peace and security are not opposites; indeed, they are mutually dependent.*

Around 80 participants at the German-language regional conference 2020 explored the relationship between peace and security. The conference took place online on November 27-28, organised by Church and Peace together with the German Mennonite Peace Committee, the German branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, and German Quakers.

The conference began with a fascinating look at the concept of anarchism around the question 'How can anarchism inform our thinking on peace and security?'. The two keynote speakers, Ullrich Hahn and Benjamin Isaak-Krauß, presented theses which pointed to a close relationship between Hebrew and Christian theology, and anarchism's critique of power.

For Christians, there is only one Lord, and he wants to give us a life free from insecurity and violence. 'The State rarely appears in the Bible as a guarantor of true security; it is more often a cause of insecurity and violence. In addition, there is scepticism about the ability of even a well-intentioned State to provide true security. True security grows through demilitarisation, participation in the means of

production, and ecological sufficiency', Isaak-Krauß said.

On Saturday morning, speaker Hanne-Margret Birckenbach contrasted the two approaches of a logic of peace and a logic of security, which, like a grammatical framework, lay the basis for analysis and courses of action in conflict situations.

In a conventional security framework, violence only becomes a problem when it is directed against one's own position and interests. In the logic of peace, however, violence is fundamentally problematic. The logic of peace emphasizes that the resolution of a conflict is based on the conflicting parties' mutual dependence on a successful relationship with each other. Recognising the legitimacy of the other's position is the basic prerequisite for dialogue and de-escalation.

Six working groups in the afternoon highlighted aspects of the relationship between peace and security and presented projects, past as well as current approaches, to inform our action as Christian peacemakers.

It became clear to the participants that only peace can bring security. To make this a reality at the local level is a task for all of us. At the same time, we need to communicate to political, transnational decision-makers – who reach reflexively for weapons – that the proven principles of the logic of peace (conflict

### Workshops

- Anarchy as a lifestyle
- Utopia and Pennsylvania: A different way to do State
- Peace education: Examples from schools and churches
- Rethinking security: Political strategies for long-term security through peaceful means
- Security and solidarity among professional peace workers abroad: Strategies from PBI and CPT

Learn more: <https://t1p.de/rxyy>

transformation, dialogue, etc.) offer a significantly better strategy for a safer world.

### Jakob Fehr

*is director of the German Mennonite Peace Committee.*

*Discover insights from the conference for your own work for peace (materials in German): [www.church-and-peace.org/regionale-tagungen](http://www.church-and-peace.org/regionale-tagungen).*

*The tension between peace and security*



Photo: Christian Peacemaker Teams

# Peace Churches Called to Be Defenders of Human Rights

*Ensuring respect for human rights in Europe requires action at all levels of society and a look at one's own role in perpetuating injustice, concluded participants at a Church and Peace virtual event last October.*

Held to mark the 70th anniversary of the *European Convention on Human Rights*, the online discussion focused on protection of the rights of marginalised people, particularly refugees and asylum seekers. Three speakers looked together with participants at the work of grassroots organisations and the role of the Council of Europe in protecting human rights in its 47 member states.

Rosá Björk Brynjólfssdóttir, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Vice Chairperson of the Assembly's Committee on Migration, Refugees, and Displaced Persons, noted that human rights challenges in the area of migration have worsened since 2011. COVID-19 has highlighted the need for equal protection for migrants in times of crisis. She said the biggest task ahead is to embrace unity and

compassion. This means working to ensure a life in safety for all in a peaceful, equal, and healthy environment, and to eliminate prejudice, racism, and hate speech.

Jakob Fehr, German Mennonite Peace Committee, shared how the grassroots organisation Aegean Migrant Solidarity (AMS) has been supporting refugees and monitoring trials against them on the Greek island of Lesbos since 2014. He said that, having experienced violence, injustice, and abandonment, refugees on the island have little hope. Indeed, on the very day of the online event, police cleared the alternative refugee camp Pikpa, which had been a safe haven and beacon of hope.

Andrew Lane, Quaker Council for European Affairs, is in regular contact with the Council of Europe in Brussels. He referred to the many people across the continent whose rights are not being protected and remarked that despite Europe trading on its history of upholding human rights and being civilised, 70 years of the Convention have not led to a deeper cultural change. He believes peace churches are called to go beyond political advocacy and pioneer radical counter-cultural witness which is based on the lived experience of those whose rights are being violated.

The lively online conversation with more than 50 participants from 10 countries underlined that continued efforts at all levels are needed to ensure human rights are respected. This includes political advocacy and using existing legal tools like the Convention to hold countries and institutions accountable. And peace churches must take concrete steps to recognise their own implication in the causes of displacement and forced migration; engage in current public debate; and provide humanitarian support for uprooted people.

As Rosá stated in conclusion: 'Human rights need to be safeguarded and we as citizens have to make sure that this happens. We all need to be defenders of human rights.'

*Read more: [www.church-and-peace.org/en/2020/11/conversation-human-rights-in-europe/](http://www.church-and-peace.org/en/2020/11/conversation-human-rights-in-europe/).*

*Blot on Europe's human rights record: the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees on the island of Lesbos, Greece.*



Photo: Jim Black, Pixabay

## **Criminalisation of Migration**

Find out more about human rights violations against refugees and migrants on the Aegean islands in AMS's co-authored monitoring report *'Incarcerating the Marginalized: The Fight Against Alleged "Smugglers" on the Greek Hotspot Islands'*.  
<https://t1p.de/7aqz>

# Of Earthquakes, COVID and Great Expectations

*Church and Peace individual members Ana and Otto Raffai from Croatia reflect on last year's seismic pressures and this year's hopes for peacebuilding in the Southeast Europe region and beyond.*

Behind us lies an unusual year, 2020. Here in Croatia, we experienced the 'embrace' of two 'companions': COVID-19 and earthquakes. Even now, we feel aftershocks in daily life.

Both natural phenomena showed the strength and weakness of the community.

We saw strength in the whole-of-society solidarity with those affected by the earthquake in Petrinja and Sisak: people organised humanitarian aid and volunteered for weeks on end. Of note was that the population responded without ethnic divisions in an area with a significant Serbian minority.

The COVID pandemic has marked us. Many training activities of our association, RAND (Regional Address for Nonviolent Action), had to be cancelled or postponed. Danger and restrictions are ever present. We work a lot online; we wait for a vaccine.

Despite these challenging circumstances, political unreliability – which breeds public distrust – is more difficult to bear, especially as social injustice comes to light through the crises and through corruption scandals. Public discourse has become more violent, echoing the populist politics which have made themselves at home in our region for years.

Women again played an important role resisting this ever-growing political narrowness in society. Last year, new initiatives to end violence against women came into being, successfully raising public awareness.

From a political standpoint, the refugees at the border between Bosnia and EU-member Croatia are invisible, rarely mentioned on Croatian television. Human rights violations are viewed as disinformation, if considered at all. Refugees are portrayed as untrusty young men with murky intentions – an official state policy all the more dangerous, since we know how easy it is to foster public distrust of the 'other'.

Sadly, church representatives have not taken a clear stance on these issues. The Church could still have an impact in the region to protect victims of violence and make itself relevant in this way.

## Looking Ahead

In 2021, we at RAND hope to have many more *in-person* meetings and training sessions. We hope to do strategic planning with the interreligious Believers for Peace initiative here in Southeast Europe.

And, we and six other peace activists hope, despite financial uncertainties, to launch the Academy for the Politics of



Photo: Goran Božičević

Nonviolence (*Ustanova za politike nenasilja*). This emerging project will focus on education, action for peace, and advocacy – timely given the nation-wide local elections coming up in May.

*Preparing the launch of the Academy for the Politics of Nonviolence*

We look ahead in hope. To paraphrase the German theologian Ernst Lange: We will not let our path be determined by the obstacles of 2020, but instead be guided by our great expectations for the future.

**Ana und Otto Raffai**

# Seedbeds

## *A New Season for the Former Community for Reconciliation*

The former Community for Reconciliation (CfR) is ready for spring. The Church and Peace associate member has relaunched its ministry under the name 'Seedbeds' and aims to grow leaders and communities for a more shalom-filled living together.

The Revd Ash Baker, co-CEO of Seedbeds, likens the revisioning process to the trees at the community's centre at Barnes Close, UK, readying themselves for winter by shedding their leaves and burrowing deeper for new sources of energy. 'We [couldn't] rely on previous sources of energy in the ways we once could and so we [are digging] the roots deeper into why CfR was planted to prepare that gift for a new generation.'

An aging membership and dwindling numbers in recent years triggered reflection about the future. From discussions with the Birmingham-based Newbigin School for Urban Leadership a common Seedbeds vision emerged, with four areas of engagement.

**Seedbeds Learning** focuses on leadership development. The Change Makers programme trains a new generation of urban leaders, while the School for Urban Leadership offers higher education programmes including an MA in theology with pathways in urban mission, humanitarian development and social justice, transformative leadership, and ecology.

Change Makers also is one part of **Seedbeds Local**, which supports community peacebuilding in challenging urban settings. Communities nominate a 'pod' of future leaders for the 6-month programme, which integrates them into a broader regional and national network. Currently, there



are four seedbed communities in Birmingham and East London.

Seedbeds Local also includes Red Letter Christians UK, a network of people 'living for Jesus and justice', which Ash says is interested in sharing insights across Europe.

International work continues through **Seedbeds Global** affiliates like CfR Footprints and its Touch of Hope initiative in Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, and partnerships in Germany and Ukraine for urban ministries.

Finally, Seedbeds is regenerating its CfR roots onsite at Barnes Close, with **The Greenhouse** retreat and education centre as a place to incubate and grow shalom with a new generation.

CfR's renewal process has been about letting go and transition, a getting ready for a new season with Seedbeds, Ash says. He is excited to re-imagine the ministry of reconciliation in the coming decades to see more of God's shalom fill people and places.

'The need for more Christians to become signs of hope in a hurting world couldn't be more important.'

Join the Seedbeds launch party on 10 July at The Greenhouse (COVID-permitting). For more information and Greenhouse bookings, visit <https://seedbeds.org/>.

*Emerging leaders from local seedbeds in Birmingham and East London meet for a first Change Makers session at The Greenhouse at Barnes Close.*

Founded 35 years ago by United Reformed Church ministers John and Joan Johansen-Berg as a residential community to train and resource peacemakers, CfR grew into a UK-wide network with international partnerships. In 2008 CfR joined the Church and Peace network.



Photo: Seedbeds

**Diary****2–5 September 2021****Annual General Meeting and international conference****'Images of God and nonviolence'**

'And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (Phil 4:7)

Strasbourg, France

**Web Resources**

*'Church and Peace comments on recent security policy decisions of the EU'*

Church and Peace press release regarding statement from the Board, 25 February 2021

*'Nuclear weapons are banned – a historic day'*

Church and Peace press release, 22 January 2021

*Detailed reports from the 2021 Britain and Ireland regional conference and online events on racism and white privilege*

*More Church and Peace press releases*

Download and share in your networks!

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



Photo: Markus Spiske, Unsplash

## Francophone Region: 'Signs of the Times' Sparks Dialogue

**W**ith an invitation to discover what the Spirit wants to say to us today, the Church and Peace Board sent network members the dialogue paper 'Signs of the Times' in autumn 2020 as a discussion starter. Such an unusual year poses the question: 'Business as usual, or what do we learn and how do we move forward?'

The pandemic continues to define our lives in many different ways. When our energy flags, we wrestle with the question of what comes next: Where do I focus my commitment to peace and justice? What contribution can I make? When is it time to take a break?

The francophone region has initiated a monthly time of exchange based on the 'Signs of the Times' dialogue paper. 'We simply wanted to make space for sharing,' says Maria Biedrawa, Board member for the region. 'To talk about what is on our minds with regard to nonviolence, how this relates to our daily lives.'

The talks are also a dialogue between generations, which will allow francophone members to hear more from each other in the coming months. 'Get away from stress and into connection with others, experienced peacemakers and companions on the way, to draw from the faith that is alive in us,' says Maria.

'From this common starting point, we open ourselves to be further led,' she continues. 'But it is already clear that such moments of joyful encounter – rich in both insight and human connection – simply do one good and are also needed in times like these.'

*Would you like to share thoughts and experiences with other Church and Peace members? Contact the International Office for more information.*

*Download your copy of 'Signs of the Times' with questions for reflection: [www.church-and-peace.org/en/2020/09/signs-of-the-times](http://www.church-and-peace.org/en/2020/09/signs-of-the-times).*



**Northern Ireland**

***Imagining A New Normal***

Church and Peace individual member Tony Weekes proposed a holistic vision of work at an event organised by the South Belfast Eco-Quaker Group during the 2021 Imagine Belfast Festival. Under the motto 'Let's imagine a "new normal"! some 35 participants explored approaches such as renewable energy, universal basic income, and community wealth building as more sustainable, equitable ways of being and doing post-pandemic.



**Global**

***Focus on Conscientious Objection***

International Fellowship of Reconciliation-IFOR, a Church and Peace founding member, highlighted the issue of conscientious objection in the first part of 2021 with a webinar series on campaigning and an intervention at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council. The webinars focused on strategic litigation, the UN human rights system, public awareness, and international solidarity. <https://t1p.de/x27a>



**Global/UK**

***Building Back Better for Creation***

A webinar offered by the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) in February explored how the coronavirus pandemic could trigger ambitious climate justice action. 'How do we seize the moment to protect God's creation and life on earth?', session 8 of the Quaker Conversation series, discussed ways to build back better to create a more sustainable future. FWCC's Europe and Middle East section is a Church and Peace member. Watch the webinar: <https://t1p.de/acac>.



**UK**

***Ash Wednesday Witness***

Church and Peace member the Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament co-hosted the annual Ash Wednesday Witness and Resistance online for the first time. Meeting in their own homes rather than outside the Ministry of Defence in London, 150 participants gave thanks for the *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*, lamented UK policy in support of nuclear weapons, and prayed for peace. Watch the service: <https://t1p.de/nm85.nm85>.



## the Network

## Switzerland/Bosnia and Herzegovina

***Transforming the Trauma of War***

Church and Peace member Julianne Funk has co-edited and contributed to a resource on trauma transformation in Bosnia and Herzegovina launched in February. *Healing and Peacebuilding after War* explores strategies to promote recovery and the healing of memories in countries rebuilding after armed conflict. Book launch: [youtu.be/zicmKhDO\\_w8](https://youtu.be/zicmKhDO_w8). Orders (discount code FLR40): <https://t1p.de/uaxf>.

## France

***Restorative Justice and Nonviolence***

The French branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (MIR France) explored the relationship between restorative justice, reconciliation, and nonviolence at an online conference on 27 March. Thirty-five participants joined the Church and Peace member event, with prison chaplain and Baptist pastor Christophe Hahling of the French Platform for Restorative Justice as keynote speaker. A future issue of MIR France's *Cahiers de la Réconciliation* will feature Hahling's presentation.

## Switzerland

***Grandchamp Prepares Prayers for Christian Unity***

The Community of Grandchamp, a Church and Peace member, prepared the resources for the 2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity under the theme, 'Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit' (Jn 15). For more than a century, churches worldwide have come together in an annual time of prayer and reflection for unity, traditionally between 18-25 January. Read more at <https://t1p.de/mqnp> or download the resources at <https://t1p.de/d3dh>.

## Southeast Europe

***Believers for Peace Launch Podcast***

In November 2020, the interreligious initiative Believers for Peace in Southeast Europe launched a podcast series exploring the interface between contemporary issues, nonviolence, and faith. Episodes have explored the concept of responsibility in a post-COVID society, solidarity, and (dis)trust in politics. Believers for Peace, which aims to strengthen peace-making potential in the Abrahamic traditions, includes Church and Peace members and friends in the region. Listen in: <https://t1p.de/dhc2>.

*The Last Word*

# Pandemic Times: When We're Pushed to the Brink

*Reflection by Church and Peace Board member Maria Biedrawa on the parallels between her experiences as a peace worker in conflict zones and the reality of the coronavirus era.*

As is the case in any extreme situation, we are revealing who we are in these pandemic times in our human greatness but also our human vulnerability.

The virus has driven some of us to the brink. Physical, emotional,

Since the pandemic began, doctors and psychologists have been saying that the virus and its aftermath are triggering symptoms resembling those of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): outbursts of rage, an all-encompassing sense of danger and powerlessness, insomnia, addictive behaviours, depression, social withdrawal, irrational fear of unfamiliar situations, constantly reliving a horrific situation in one's mind, and a certain inability

human – a human 'being-with-others':

- Become a 'word midwife': Help yourself and others to find words for what you are experiencing. Tell yourself and others stories of how you overcame other difficult times. What was the spark of life that made it possible? What was beautiful and meaningful today and what do you hope for tomorrow?
- Tend to your physical, emotional, and social equilibrium. What has done you good in the past? Do it now! What has a neighbour, colleague, or friend found helpful? If it doesn't seem completely absurd, try it too and then talk to them about it. This creates mutuality.
- (Re-)Connect with nature. Choose a plant or tree on your street to observe on a regular basis and watch how, with tiny changes, it anticipates the coming of spring.
- Bring laughter to those around you on a regular basis, and if you live alone, buy a joke book, read three jokes a day, and then tell them to someone else.
- Turn off the TV and disconnect from social media if certain news frightens you too much.
- Pray. Immerse yourself, your loved ones, the sick and dying, all of us, all of creation, over and over, deeply in God's love.



Photo: Kelly Sikkema, Unsplash

and social equilibrium teeters; the mind can no longer keep up; values, even faith, may begin to falter. Some communities and relationships, and also professions which face a high risk of exposure to the virus (such as healthcare providers), have become conflict zones over the past year.

to speak about an experience because there are simply no words to describe it.

How can we do good for each other in this extreme situation?

- Nurture close and far-away relationships, and don't just talk about the virus and crises. Stay

**Maria Biedrawa**