



# *Church and Peace*

## International Office

*Church and Peace - the ecumenical peace church network of communities, training centres, peace organisations and peace service agencies in Europe*

### **Message from the Board of Church and Peace: Churches are challenged to the path of nonviolence**

*Berlin, 30 May 2022 – In light of Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine and the extent of death and destruction with no end in sight, we strive for the radicality of nonviolence to which Jesus challenges us. We encourage to stand by the knowledge and experience of nonviolent prevention, intervention, and de-escalation of military conflict. We call for continued commitment to nonviolence rather than surrendering to the seemingly inevitable escalation of military logic.*

War is back in Europe on a previously unimaginable scale. Its global effects are already being felt. It is children, men and women who are suffering. It is those whose lives, health and livelihoods are destroyed by violence who are suffering. It is those who – whether voluntarily or forced – engage in acts of war and who will suffer profound psychological injuries as a result. Every war degrades, uproots and destroys, and it always takes an incalculably long time for the wounds to heal. This is the painful experience of all wars of the past and present, not least in South-Eastern Europe, where members of Church and Peace have been seeking ways of healing for decades and are trying to prevent the violent outbreak of unresolved conflicts which now is threatening one again.

It is not a matter of telling the people in Ukraine and other conflict areas of the world how to defend themselves, nor is it a matter of leaving them alone. Nonviolence, especially in view of the extent of open violence, in view of the threat of escalation, in view of the dangerous latent or open conflicts worldwide, opens up an alternative perspective for a future in security for all on our endangered planet.

It does not seem newsworthy so far that people in the past and present have practised and are practising bravery other than with a weapon, including in Ukraine and even Russia. Researchers have studied 323 violent conflicts over the last 100 years. In cases where nonviolent resistance was practised to respond to violence, half resulted in lasting peace – twice as often as in cases of military defence. There were victims in these as well, but significantly fewer than in armed responses. (Chenoweth, Erica and Stephan, Maria J., *Why civil resistance works*, New York 2011)

Nonviolence is first and foremost an attitude. It respects the humanity and dignity of every human being, including the opponent. It is linked to courage, skills, creativity and activity. Nonviolence is NOT passivity! On the contrary!

It is about preventing the danger of violent conflicts with all available means, de-escalating hot conflict situations. It is about actively supporting people in resistance to war as well as after the end of military violence in the situation of defeat and in resistance to occupation. And after a war, it is about working through trauma, healing memories, continuing nonviolent efforts for justice and freedom as a prerequisite for reconciliation. All this has to be learned, and for that, more than ever, an investment in people and skills is needed, at least as much

as has been invested in weapons! This requires a radical rethinking instead of increasing armament.

The introduction to the Olaf Palme Report 2 *Common Security 2022 - For our shared Future*, published in mid-April, states: “The world stands at a crossroads. It is faced with a choice between an existence based on confrontation and aggression or one to be rooted in a transformative peace agenda and common security. In 2022, humanity faces the existential threats of nuclear war, climate change and pandemics. This is compounded by a toxic mix of inequality, extremism, nationalism, gender violence, and shrinking democratic space. How humanity responds to these threats will decide our very survival.” ([https://www.ipb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CommonSecurity\\_Report\\_2022\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ipb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CommonSecurity_Report_2022_EN.pdf), p.4)

This war also highlights that the earth's resources – oil, gas, soil, food and water – are becoming weapons of war. Yet we have to live together on this limited, endangered planet – also with Russia.

Against this background, the Evangelical Church in Baden, Germany, developed the scenario *Rethinking Security*, a hopeful perspective which is now the subject of international discussion, and which develops long-term alternatives to military security – and in which we as Church and Peace are involved ([www.sicherheitneudenken.de](http://www.sicherheitneudenken.de)).

Let us dare to hold on to the conviction that “War is Contrary to the Will of God”, as the first General Assembly of the World Council of Churches testified in 1948. Let us dare to hold fast to the political conviction that there need be no war. Let us endure the mockery and ridicule, the accusation of naivety and living in the past!

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Mt 5:9) And: “It is to peace that God has called you.” (1 Cor 7:15) – we regard these and other words of the Bible as a challenge, yes, even an imposition, for us and all churches in the discipleship of Jesus. We understand them as a mandate to the churches to encourage and challenge our societies and to dare to follow the path of nonviolence.