

## Report of the Board of Church and Peace August 2021 – September 2022

### **A Strange Year for our Network**

The 3rd year of COVID-19 meant a lot more online sessions. Even the 2021 Annual General Meeting (AGM) and conference, which we originally planned to hold in Strasbourg, were held as a Zoom conference on 3-4 September. We were therefore all the more pleased to be able to meet as a new Board for the first time in Berlin at the end of May.

### **The Work of the Board**

The members of the Board, who were elected at the 2021 AGM, are: Maria Biedrawa, Étienne Chomé, Barbara Forbes, Elisabeth Freise (Treasurer), Salomé Haldemann, Antje Heider-Rottwilm (Chair), Kees Nieuwerth (Vice Chair) and Ruben Sečen. The entire Board met several times via Zoom during the year covered by this report and met face-to-face for the first time in Berlin, 23-25 May. The Board members consulted with the office staff about every other month. Individual members of the Board also talked to each other or with office staff in between these meetings. The AGM, conferences, and regional events require a lot of careful planning, but these events demonstrate that the Church and Peace network is very much alive.

The first half of the year was still dominated by the COVID-19 crisis and all its consequences. The AGM had put the issue of racism on the agenda. During the winter a survey was conducted among the members on how they personally and/or their group/community/organisation deal with the issue of racism and colonialism and what experiences they have had. We received a total of 44 responses. A working group is going to be convened to do further work on the topic using the results of the survey.

The attack on Ukraine on 24 February, in violation of international law, shook the world, as did the almost unanimous call that this war could only be countered with armed force. Church and Peace members in Germany and other countries organised online meetings to share their concerns and doubts and to ascertain how sustainable the voice of nonviolence is in this situation.

Regrettably, Barbara Forbes withdrew from the work of the Board during the winter. We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank her for her dedicated work on the Board since 2015.

The Board meeting in Berlin showed us that we need to give ourselves more time to come together more closely, so we are planning a longer Board meeting in December, during which we will be accompanied and facilitated externally.

### **International Office**

We, the members of the Board, are very pleased that Church and Peace was once again able to work under stable conditions during the past year. When Helga suffered a long period of illness, it was possible to compensate for this by increasing Marina's workload. We were very pleased by the good and reliable cooperation of the staff and that Helga was able to rejoin the team in June.

The regular newsletters and informative news bulletins from the office hold the network together. We are very grateful for this!

We are also pleased that it was possible to balance the books once again in 2021. We thank, from the bottom of our hearts, all the donors and organisations who give us regular financial support.

### **Visits and Cooperation with Members and Partners**

In September, Antje and her husband Martin visited our members Heidi and Bruno Sägesser-Rich near Basel, among other things to thank Bruno again in person for his many years of service on the Board. During the AGM it had only been possible to thank him "virtually". During the visit, they all spent the Sunday together, attending worship with the Mennonite congregation, with sharing and prayer, and sharing a meal afterwards with the Sisters of Grandchamp at the Sonnenhof.

From 1-17 October, Heidi and Bruno finally made a visit to Southeast Europe that had been cancelled in March 2020. They met Ruben Sečen and his family in Rijeka, Croatia. In Zagreb and Sesvete, Croatia, they visited Otto and Ana Raffai, and also RAND. They then visited Manda and Ivan Prising in Sombor, Serbia. The last stop was with Gyula Simonyi and his family in Székesfehérvár, Hungary. Gyula was very involved in the Bokor movement, which is a longstanding member of Church and Peace.

### **German Region** (Antje, Elisabeth)

In Germany in the autumn, attention turned to the Bundestag elections in September, which led to the formation of a new SPD/Green/FDP coalition government. With this coalition came the hope of greater support for civil crisis prevention and conflict transformation. In the run-up to the election, Church and Peace campaigned on this issue by contributing to a list of questions which candidates were invited to answer and other campaigns. All efforts in this area are currently suffering a severe setback, as the Ukraine war has made it clear that non-military options have little support among the population. Many people are not aware that such options exist. Antje, acting on behalf of Church and Peace as part of a broad alliance, co-organised a large demonstration in Berlin against the war in Ukraine on 27 February and further demonstrations in five German cities on 13 March.

Immediately after the start of the war, Chancellor Scholz called for a "new era" ("Zeitenwende") on 27 February and announced that Germany would provide €100 billion to rearm the Bundeswehr. Within the churches, too, there have been calls for a "Zeitenwende" in peace theology and peace ethics. And there have been discussions at many levels – often online – to which Church and Peace has been asked to contribute.

For several years, Church and Peace has been a guest at the annual peace conference of the Protestant Church in Germany – in the person of Antje, who has contributed a European perspective. Now the relationship has been officially established and Antje, as Chair of Church and Peace, has become a co-opted member.

### **Rethinking Security** (Elisabeth)

The activists' meeting of Rethinking Security (SND) in July, in which Antje and Elisabeth took part, showed in an impressive way that the initiative has gained a foothold in many regions and has made inroads into church and other peace movement groups. In addition to educational work and the search for allies/partners, the aim of the initiative is to exert direct political influence by talking to politicians and making them aware of the ideas and demands of peace movement groups and organisations. In mid-March, after the invasion of the Ukraine, SND published a paper entitled "Ideas for a resolute and level-headed response to Putin's war" and was thus one of the few voices in the public arena to take a self-critical stance, especially on the eastward expansion of NATO, and to call for a quick negotiated solution. SND is currently leading a campaign, "Strengthening Germany's Civil Peace Capabilities", which aims to convince members of the Bundestag to advocate for more funding for crisis prevention and peacebuilding in the upcoming budget debates.

### **Southeast Europe region** (Ruben)

As a new board member (Ruben Sečen) and representative of the Balkan region, I realised how privileged I am to be part of an active, caring, amazing peace network. The peace work in the Balkan region is very active. Some examples of the work that is happening through our members (trainings, conferences, podcasts, jubilees, peace gatherings, work with Roma kids, work with marginalised people, etc.) are evident through the reports I have received from Ana Raffai (Croatia), Manda Prišing from (Sombor, Serbia) and Branka and Želimir Srnc (Belgrade, Serbia). A newly published book, "Dragica from Berak. Grass-roots peacemaker", is a highly recommended read and we are looking forward to having the author Dragica Aleksa with us in Crikvenica to share about her peace work.

If you follow the news, the Balkan region is not resting in conflicts, hatred, and political games either. Recent events in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina are a reminder that peace, nonviolent solutions and reconciliation is needed so much. In the midst of all this, pastors, volunteers, Church and Peace members, local church members are working hard to be salt and light in their country and community.

In the future, I plan to visit more of the Church and Peace members in the region and organise online meetings to strengthen the network, be informed about what is happening elsewhere and create a possibility to encourage, pray and care for each other. Please pray for the Balkan region for a visible peace and reconciliation and active nonviolence in this fragile region.

### **French-speaking Region** (Étienne, Maria, Salomé)

In spite of our busy schedules, we did our best in 2022 to maintain our monthly Zoom meeting. These meetings are a time of deeper connection for the francophone members, during which we can share

struggles in our personal lives, peace concerns in our own contexts, and theological and ethical reflections. About 12 people attend regularly. We have, however, observed the spread of "zoom fatigue": Participating in online meetings seems to require more energy than in-person meetings.

Thankfully, we were also able to meet in person! On 11 June 2022, two days before the beginning of Eurosatory 2022, the francophone network gathered both in Paris and in Strasbourg.

In Paris, Church and Peace members participated in the conference "Rethinking Security in Europe". Between 50 and 60 people attended, mainly from Christian peace movements: FOR Europe, Quakers, Stop Fuelling War, Pax Christi, Iustitia et Pax, and some individual participants.

Participants appreciated the excellent contributions at a Round Table event. The texts will be published in one of the next *Cahiers de la Réconciliation*. From Maria's perspective, the international presence helped the French to listen first. Jean Arnold de Clermont and Michel Roy helped to transfer Rethinking Security into a French context. Jean Arnold outlined both the awareness and commitment to security of the World Council of Churches, and Michel Roy helped us in conclusion to take the next practical step.

At the same time, in Strasbourg, the Peace Committee of the French Mennonite church, along with individual members of Church and Peace, hosted the exhibition "Stop Fuelling War" on Place Kleber. This square is in the centre of the city and the exhibition led to some interesting conversations with passers-by, most of whom were not aware of Eurosatory. Calling for the laying down of arms in the context of the Ukraine war raised questions for the visitors. The public exhibition was followed by an ecumenical celebration at the Temple Neuf, where we listened to testimonies and prayed for all the people impacted by the arms trade. May the light of Christ grow in this region and may the peace of God break down the many walls between people.

Another highlight of our network: many of us were actively involved in the ecumenical colloquium, "Peace of the Churches: Peace of the World", organised by ISEO (Institut Supérieur d'Etudes Oecuméniques), at the ICP (Institut Catholique de Paris), on 9-11 March 2022. These three days of academic discourse included several debates around just peace and the updating of Catholic doctrine on this matter. These were three days of precious meetings which served to arouse the interest of academic circles in the relevance of experiences of nonviolence and research into nonviolence.

### **Britain and Ireland Region**

Since Barbara Forbes stepped down, the Board lacks representation from this region. The General Secretary is maintaining contact and was engaged in the preparation and implementation of the regional meeting in Birmingham on 2 July, which some of us attended via Zoom.

There is a special relationship through the regular Friday evening Zoom prayers in the context of the war in Ukraine, which Church and Peace hosts jointly with the Fellowship of Reconciliation in England, Scotland and Wales, and the Methodist Peace Fellowship.

### **Participation in Events as Representatives of Church and Peace**

- 15.9, Potsdam, Germany: Steering Group Potsdam Peace Discourse, Topic: European Security Architecture including Russia - Antje
- 17-18.9, Kassel, Germany: Study day on the discussion on Israel and Palestine in Germany (Action Committee Service for Peace) - Gordon Matthews
- 2.10., Hamburg, Germany: 25th anniversary of the Bread and Rose Base Community - Antje
- 1.11., online: Protestant Academy Days 2021 "In the future... disarm - How is a life without nuclear weapons possible?" - Antje
- 8.11., Berlin, Germany: Prayer for the PeaceDecade - Antje
- 9.11., online: Working group on peace work of the Protestant Church in the Rhineland - Antje
- 16.11., Göttingen, Germany: "Reach Peace and the Peace Project Europe" Lecture on the PeaceDecade - Antje
- 17.11., Göttingen, Germany: Sermon at the Prayer Service for Peace in the PeaceDecade - Antje
- 28.1., Austria: Presentation - Maria
- 29-30.1., Zell an der Pram, Austria: Seminar – Maria
- 1.-2.2 Participation in the preparatory group of the study day "... and let the peoples learn with you" (Mt 28, 19) - Just peace and coming to terms with the colonial heritage - a gap? - Antje
- CEC Thematic Reference Group "Economic and ecological justice and a sustainable future" – Kees

- 18.2., Angers (IRCOM): Colloquium on civil peace interventions – contribution by Maria (available online)
- 25-26.2., online: European Regional Pre-Assembly of WCC 11 Assembly – Antje, Kees
- 27.2., Berlin, Germany: Stop the war – Peace for Ukraine and Europe! Demonstration alliance incl. Church and Peace – Antje
- 9-11.03.: Peace of the churches, peace of the world? The basic question is: Can ecumenism have an impact on world peace and how? - Maria
- 13.03: Peace Demonstrations against War in Ukraine in different German cities; participation in coordination group – Antje
- 29.04., online: Peace Ethics and Ukraine – Antje
- 15.05., online: International Conscientious Objectors Day online remembrance event – Kees
- 25 -29.05. Stuttgart, Germany: Catholic Church convention (Katholikentag) – Elisabeth
- 13-15.06., online: 2022 ECEN Assembly.'Challenges we are living in.'; contribution at panel with two MEP's and the work of CEC working group – Kees
- 13.-15.06., Bonn, Germany: "Christianity as source of peace and conflict" Annual conference of Weltkirche und Mission of the German Bishop's Conference – gewaltfrei Handeln, Sicherheit neu Denken, Josef Freise (Church and Peace)
- 31.08.-08.09., Karlsruhe, Germany: 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, Germany "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity"; participation as representative or observer, ecumenical encounter programme – Antje, Kees, Lydia

In addition to this there have been articles, sermons, interviews, and workshops - in parishes and at the international level.

## European Union

**Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE):** In the autumn, we published a press release which proposed three ideas for the CoFE (<https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/2021/11/on-the-future-of-europe>). These ideas were put forward via the digital platform for consideration in the CoFE. There was only minimal interaction with one of three posts. The final report was published on 9 May 2022 (<https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/reporting>). Amid the many proposals and suggestions, the crucial question is whether or not and how they will be implemented.

The **EU taxonomy** will serve as a standard classification for sustainable investments throughout Europe in the future. It lays down clear rules and conditions governing the concept of sustainability and guidelines for determining whether a company is operating in a sustainable or environmentally-friendly manner. Despite protests, gas and nuclear power are considered "green". The debates on the ecological and social taxonomy should include weapons production and nuclear energy. We entered into a discussion process with other organisations, initially in Germany, at the beginning of 2022, but these discussions have been pushed into the background by the war in Ukraine.

## Conference of European Churches (CEC)

Two papers were developed by the Thematic Reference Group (TRC) on Ecological and economic justice and a sustainable future, which Kees moderates. These papers on green economy and theology will be published in a CEC document entitled "Every Part of Creation Matters".

The future of TRCs in CEC remains uncertain, since at the end of 2021, CEC circulated information about a broad restructuring process which will affect all of CEC's programmes. The decision-making process and lack of communication with members and partners of CEC in this regard was criticised by many. Church and Peace has sent a letter to the Governing Board of CEC.

In June, CEC approached Church and Peace, as an organisation in partnership with CEC (OiP), with a request to produce a written agreement on what this partnership means for both partners, should we wish to continue it. Following correspondence with other OiPs, we answered that we are interested in continued partnership and asked CEC to organise a meeting with all OiPs to discuss our future role within CEC.

## World Council of Churches

At the end of August, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Globethics published "Seek Peace and Pursue It – Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Europe"

(<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/seek-peace-and-pursue-it-pjp-series-4>). This publication includes an article written by Antje and Lydia, "The European peace church network Church and Peace on the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace", which describes some of our steps in response to the pilgrimage.

The 11th WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe was an impressive ecumenical gathering with diverse participation and contributions from Church and Peace members (<https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/2022/08/church-and-peace-involvement-in-wcc-assembly-in-karlsruhe-2022-focuses-on-peace-justice-and-role-of-the-churches/>).

In the run-up to the WCC Assembly, together with other organisations, we launched an appeal to the host churches in Switzerland, France and Germany, "War is contrary to the will of God", which was signed by more than 5,100 people. Among other things, this appeal demanded that the host churches take a clear and public position calling for their countries to join the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons without delay and for a rededication of the billions spent on armaments in favour of a social, peace-promoting and climate-friendly society. The letter was also sent with a cover letter to the Assembly through the WCC general secretary and staff.

The final statement on "War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region" includes a Church and Peace 'footprint' after an intervention: "In response to increased militarisation, confrontation and weapons proliferation, we *call* for a much greater investment by the governments of Europe and the entire international community in searching for and promoting peace, and in strengthening non-violent conflict resolution, civil conflict transformation and reconciliation processes, rather than in escalating confrontation and division." <https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/war-in-ukraine-peace-and-justice-in-the-european-region>

### On behalf of Church and Peace we co-initiated, signed and/or supported the following:

- Open Letter to UK Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Justice: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (September 2021)
- Nuclear weapons ban in the coalition agreement, 4 October 2021: <https://www.atomwaffenfrei.de/home/artikel/ab4ec34df8c2c7b7c67c58c6639ad490/atomwaffenverbot-in-den-koalitionsvertrag.html>
- 'War is Contrary to the Will of God' – An Appeal for Peace for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 11 October 2021: <https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/2021/10/appeal-for-peace-wcc-2021/>
- Appeal for an Arms Export Control Act in Germany, 25 October 2021: <https://www.ohne-ruestung-leben.de/nachrichten/article/aktion-aufschrei-appell-ampel-fuer-ruestungsexport-kontroll-gesetz-467.html>
- 40 organisations demand: No arms exports for entire Yemen military coalition, 16 November 2021: [https://aufschrei-waffenhandel.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dokumente/offener\\_brief/2021\\_11\\_16\\_of-fener\\_brief\\_ruestungsexportverbot\\_\\_jemen-militaerkoalition.pdf](https://aufschrei-waffenhandel.de/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumente/offener_brief/2021_11_16_of-fener_brief_ruestungsexportverbot__jemen-militaerkoalition.pdf)
- Friends World Committee for Consultation: Christian call for peace in response to the war on Ukraine, 2 March 2022: <https://fwcc.world/christian-call-for-peace>
- Statement by peace, anti-nuclear and environmental organisations: Ukraine war: Coal and nuclear energy are no alternatives to Russian gas. Energy independence now!, 04 March 2022: <https://www.gew-ansbach.de/2022/03/ukraine-krieg-kohle-und-atomenergie-sind-keine-alternativen-zu-russischem-gas/>
- As part of an alliance of civil society organisations in Germany, Church and Peace calls for demonstrations in major cities in Germany on 13 March "Stop the war! Peace and Solidarity for Ukraine": <https://www.church-and-peace.org/2022/03/grossdemos-fuer-den-frieden-am-13-maerz-2022/>
- Letter to President of Finland to call for OSCE Summit in 2025, 25 April 2022: <https://www.nais-etrauhanpuolesta.org/an-urgent-need-for-a-new-osce-summit-in-2025-a-meeting-with-the-foreign-minister-pekka-haavisto-on-the-22nd-of-april-2022/>

- Joint Interfaith Statement to the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), August 2022: <https://cdn2.assets-servd.host/un-sgi/production/assets/downloads/Interfaith-Statement-to-the-2022-NPT-RevCon-rev.pdf>
- Europe-wide call for protection and asylum for deserters and conscientious objectors from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Appeal to European Parliament and Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, 9 June 2022: <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-3577>
- 'Focus on overcoming all wars' – Peace organisations write open letter to the Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 22 August 2022: <https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/2022/08/focus-on-overcoming-all-wars-peace-organisations-write-open-letter-to-the-assembly-of-the-world-council-of-churches/>
- Campaign "Strengthening Germany's Civil Peace Capability" on the 2023 Federal Budget, September 2022: <http://www.frieden-stark-machen.de>

*September 2022*

*Maria Biedrawa, Etienne Chomé, Elisabeth Freise, Salomé Haldemann, Antje Heider-Rottwilm, Kees Nieuwerth, Ruben Sečen*