

2022.10.21 Opening of the Conference:

I warmly welcome all who have gathered here this evening for the opening of the Church and Peace 2022 Conference. We are very happy that we can meet again, talk face to face, reflect, pray and agree to go further on the path of nonviolence.

We are especially happy to be here in Croatia, in this beautiful region of Europe.

We are happy to be your guests, dear members, dear friends and guests of Church and Peace from the region and beyond.

When we sent out the invitation to this conference, Russia had invaded Ukraine, there was war in Europe - and there still is. We are all aware of the threatening, for so many people deadly dynamics of daily violence in Ukraine, the impact on countries all around, the conflicts in many regions of the world, the Corona crisis as an example of dangerous diseases, the worsening of the climate and food crisis, the boom of the arms industry, the rise to power of authoritarian systems and populist movements and much more.

We are all affected by this, we are all challenged in our often decades-long commitment.

We are supposedly so naive that we have still not grasped reality - or as it is called in Germany: the 'Zeitenwende'.

In this situation, we invite you to a conference on the theme of Division.War.Nonviolence.

In this situation a conference under the provocative word of Jesus: *First take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your sister's or brother's eye.* (Luke 6: 42)

In this situation, a conference that begins with the experiences in this region - thank you very much to all participants - and tomorrow morning focuses on dialogue as an active form of non-violence. Is dialogue still appropriate in these times? We will find out!

And the workshops will be an opportunity to explore dimensions of Division. War. Nonviolence.

Thanks already to all those who have prepared as well as those who are offering workshops - and to the team of the International Office of C&P.

On the subject of Corona: Some of us mourn the loss of people who have died due to the pandemic. We all know people who have suffered or are suffering severely from the disease. Many of the participants in the World Council of Churches Assembly in Karlsruhe have brought home a Corona infection.

The same happened to me.

Therefore: Let us do everything possible to prevent this:

Please test yourselves regularly. Marina and Lydia have brought plenty of tests.

Please wear masks indoors, if possible.

Please wear masks when singing - unless we are singing outside.

Yes, many of us were in Karlsruhe at the WCC Assembly in early September, when more than 4,000 people from around the world gathered in Europe, in Germany, to face the challenges of this time, to wrestle for ways forward, and to entrust them to God in prayer and worship.

Yesterday we told each other about this moving event.

And we brought liturgical elements and songs with us. For we continue to wrestle with the issues here and we also want to continue to pray, united with the worldwide community that came together in Karlsruhe.

And so I invite you to pray together with the opening prayer of the Assembly and to place ourselves in the Latin American tradition in intercession by calling out 'presente'.

L: Loving God,
We gather from all over the world
from diverse contexts, every
one of us created in your image.

L: We share the hope of meeting each other
in the warm embrace of Christ's love, that
moves us to reconciliation and unity.

L: We share the hope that our faith might
be kept alive and that our commitment
to your promise of a new world might be
renewed.

Silence

L: We share the burden and the pain of
this time of the Covid pandemic. We
share the burden and the pain of armed
conflicts and their consequences in deaths,
destruction and forced migration. We
share the burden and the pain of the preexisting
plagues of injustice, structural
poverty, violence, and a creation that
suffers.

L: We bring to you the memory of the
victims of all these pandemics. Their
names are written in our hearts and are
not forgotten by you. Let us commit
them into your hands by saying together –
PRESENTE!

L: For all the victims of the pandemic:

C: Presente!

A bell is rung.

L: For the refugees fleeing conflicts and oppression:

C: Presente!

A bell is rung.

L: For all those displaced by rising waters and draught:

C: Presente!

A bell is rung.

L: For all who are in need and suffer in our world today:

C: Presente!

A bell is rung.

L: Merciful God, your divine grace gathers us as a global ecumenical family,

and we meet around the oasis where your hospitality offers us refuge, rest and restoration.

L: We gather, like the thirsty, around the pure waters of the scriptures, the spring of the living Word.

L: We gather to pray in the unity of the Spirit, to talk and to listen, to share and to build. We gather to sing your glory and to be blessed by your love.

L: We gather and leave our burdens and sufferings in this safe place you invite us to.

L: For all this we give you our thanks and pray:
Let this gathering stir in us your joy.
Amen

- Now I would like to extend a special welcome to our guest, Archbishop Uzinić, Archbishop of Rijeka. Your clear words and actions on reconciliation, ecumenism, the role of women in the Church, the reception of refugees, the dignity of homosexuals and the summer schools of theology have also reached Germany. (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mate_Uzini%C4%87)
How great of you to offer a word of greeting, I cordially invite you to do so.

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Thank you, Archbishop, for your words, which express that we can feel at home here in your diocese with our themes and our commitment.

- A warm welcome to Pastor Vedran Obućina. You are an Old Catholic priest and President of the Center for Interreligious Dialogue.
Please welcome us with a short greeting.

- And I am glad that you are with us, dear Giorgio Grlj, Baptist pastor and member of the Ecumenical Council of Rijeka.

- Song

Now I give the floor to Salomé Haldemann, Mennonite pastor from France and member of the board of Church and Peace for moderating our first panel discussion.

Antje Heider-Rottwilm, Chairperson