



Church and Peace

Internationale Geschäftsstelle

Church and Peace e.V. ist der ökumenische Zusammenschluss von Friedenskirchen und friedenskirchlich orientierten Gemeinden, Kommunen und Friedensorganisationen in Europa.

Learning from Central and East European Experiences of Transformation: Church and Peace Conference in Herrnhut, Germany

Herrnhut, 29 October 2025 – Last weekend, the Herrnhut Moravian Church welcomed around 120 participants from 19 countries to the 2025 European Conference convening under the heading “Don’t let yourself be hardened in these hard times ... Resist, reconcile, transform”.

In her words of greeting, **Herrnhut’s pastor Jill Vogt** recalled Bishop Johann Amos Comenius, who in 1667 circulated the memorandum *angelus pacis/Angel of Peace*. **Antje Heider-Rottwilm**, the retiring chair of Church and Peace, praised him as a peace diplomat, peace educationist and founder of a peace ethic.

Marie Anne Subklew-Jeutner from the Institute of Peace Church Theology (University of Hamburg) and **Benigna Carstens**, pastor of the Moravian Church in Dresden, recalled the hardened time of the Cold War when, in 1981, Pershing II missiles in the West stood facing SS-20 missiles in the East. **They gave very impressive accounts of what helped them not to become hardened, but to get involved: the years of doing peace theology in the congregations, spiritual community – open to all – in the church buildings, and the clear statements of church leaders.** Other factors were the rejection of the spirit, logic and practice of deterrence and the conviction that conscientious objection is one of the clearest signs of Christian service to peace.

In the same spirit, the conference participants underlined the **call for all European member states, and beyond, to enshrine and protect the right to conscientious objection to military service as a human right, as recognised by the United Nations**, particularly in view of the current debates about compulsory military service. Instead, they said, alternatives such as peace services and social defence, similar to civilian service, should be urgently expanded.

“When did we Germans ever successfully carry out a revolution – without bloodshed, without war and victory and humiliation of other human beings and nations? It is a miracle of biblical dimensions, says the theologian in me. It was the multifactorial interplay of configurations at home and abroad, says the political scientist in me. Both are true, I say from experience,” stated Marie Anne Subklew-Jeutner.

Benigna Carstens described reconciliation, according to Comenius, as “the return of two or several parties to their original love after suffering hurt,” in order to shed light on the situation of the two former German states. In eastern Germany, people did not get the feeling that there was proper appreciation of what civil society had contributed to bringing down the Berlin Wall, so that a critical attitude developed after the political system changed. She warned against our “despising the ‘masses’ from the ‘right standpoint of peace’ in view of their growing readiness to subject themselves to powerful, violent men”.

Roman Zábrodský, Hussite theologian from Prague, Czech Republic, spoke in his Bible study on Ezekiel 36:26 (“...I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh”) of the necessary inner transformation that leads to a new identity of the person and society. This new identity allows them to realise their own share in violence and to deal with violence differently than merely exercising counter-violence; it leads to resisting violence and showing solidarity with the oppressed.



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Bishop Friedrich Kramer, peace spokesman for the EKD Council, commented on the song that inspired the conference theme, “Du lass’ dich nicht verhärten” (by singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann, 1968) from the perspective outlined by Jesus in the Beatitudes. He named the challenge of not hardening our hearts today, either; it is crucial to diminish hate every day in order to see God’s face in other people. Referring to the new peace memorandum of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) due to appear in November, Friedrich Kramer noted that “it maintains the ideal of just peace”.

The various **Ted talks**, which participants dealt with more closely in workshops, raised challenges for nonviolence from European contexts and the eastern Congo.

Bienvue Matumo presented the occupation of the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by the M23 rebel group with its impacts on the population and the resultant nonviolent actions of LUCHA, a mainly student organisation.

Marija Parnicki and Mariana Ajzenkol from Novi Sad, Serbia, gave information about the biggest nonviolent European movement against corruption and for a change of policy which is currently operating in Serbia (see Church and Peace’s press release on Serbia).

Ieva Rūkė, coordinator of the Centre for Dialogue and Conflict Transformation from Lithuania, spoke on democratisation processes and opportunities for individuals and groups to engage in political advocacy.

The Ostritz Peace Festival, a Saxon initiative for democracy, open-mindedness and tolerance, presented its strategy of taking a firm position through entertainment (“Haltung durch Unterhaltung”); based on cooperation between the local authority, civil society and an educational foundation, it had been most successful in countering rightwing extremism and xenophobia and promoting solidarity in the town and general public.

Natallia Vasilevich, Orthodox theologian and coordinator of “Christian vision” and “Christians against war” described the impacts the Russian invasion of Ukraine had had for Belarus. The slightest civic engagement is regarded as ‘extremism’. Repression and detentions follow. Yet the initiatives do not stop documenting human rights violations and supporting conscientious objectors.

With a moving worship service, Church and Peace farewelled Antje Heider-Rottwilm and Elisabeth Freise, who had left their mark on the activities of the European ecumenical peace church network for 16 years as chair and treasurer. They will both continue to represent Church and Peace: the former in the Conference of European Churches and the peace work of the EKD, the latter in the Initiative “Rethinking Security”.

The network welcomed as its new chair Anja Vollendorf, pastor, deputy dean and member of the Laurentiuskonvent, Mike Zipser from the Quakers in Germany as the new treasurer and Siniša Klem from Youth for Christ, Croatia, as a further board member.

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