



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

Church and Peace calls churches to nonviolence on Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Path to 'just peace' must overcome logic of violence and investing in war step-by-step

WETHEN, 29 June 2018 - Church and Peace has called the churches to make nonviolence their point of orientation on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

Meeting under the theme of Psalm 85:10 "*Justice and Peace shall embrace*", the European ecumenical peace church network's Annual General Meeting (AGM) and international conference on 21-24 June in Hoddesdon, UK, took participants further on the ecumenical journey from 'just war' to 'just peace'.

The gathering assembled 93 ecumenical pilgrims from Albania to Ireland, from France to Russia, with the aim of "journeying together for reconciliation in a fractured Europe". They came from all corners of a Europe which is increasingly putting up walls of division and prioritizing a militarized quest for security. The delegates, representing a range of church traditions and organizations, were hosted by the Britain and Ireland region where Brexit is exposing and widening societal fractures and injustice.

Changed by the journey

Vancouver. Basel. Corrymeela. Graz. Harare. Strasbourg. Porto Alegre. Sibiu. Bienenberg. Kingston. Busan. Arusha. Hoddesdon. Church and Peace Chair Antje Heider-Rottwilm and fellow Board member Kees Nieuwerth led participants in the footsteps of fellow travellers on the broader ecumenical pilgrimage since the start of the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in 1983.

Participants shared how the peace church pilgrim path had interwoven with and left a footprint of nonviolence on the World Council of Churches' Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women and Decade to Overcome Violence, as well as the European Ecumenical Assemblies in 1989, 1997 and 2007, and countless other encounters both large and small, international and local.

Being on this journey together would transform each individual and the churches as whole as they confronted the wounds of violence and injustice, Heider-Rottwilm said.

Justice, not violence

Keynote speaker and Methodist minister the Revd Inderjit Bhogal traced his own pilgrimage of justice and peace from his origins in the Punjab through Kenya to the UK, where he has worked tirelessly for justice and to build cultures of welcome through the City of Sanctuary movement.

He noted that the most crucial issue facing society today was one that ran throughout the whole Bible, one of journeying and movement – migration. 'How we relate ... in particular to people seeking sanctuary and safety ... will be the measure by which we shall judge personal, national and international morality and spirituality.' Referencing Jonathan Sacks, he underlined that the churches must develop a 'theology of the sacredness of the other'.

Bhogal noted the close link between violence, unjust peace and forced journeying. Migration was driven overwhelmingly by conflict, and poverty caused in large part by the investment of resources in war was the

biggest killer, he said. Both the theology and practice of nonviolence were needed, rooted firmly in a commitment to 'learn war no more'.

Nonviolence in action

Panellists Janet Benvie, Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, and Hansuli Gerber, Mennonite, International Fellowship of Reconciliation, joined Bhogal to delve deeper into the ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace as a path of the churches to celebrate gifts of life, visit wounds of broken relationships and work to transform injustice.

Benvie shared of APF's efforts to put forward nonviolent alternatives, in particular advocating for the churches to urge the UK government to sign the UN nuclear weapons ban treaty. She said, though the group was small in number, 'we hope that we like the mustard seed will grow as we journey on this pilgrimage to transform injustice.'

Gerber underlined the often-challenging nature of the pilgrimage. 'This journey is more of a combat than a pilgrimage of encounter or rest. It is a struggle.' Pilgrims must accept their fragility and shortcomings, yet still not let go of hope, he said.

Workshops offered the chance to share experiences such as: teaching the art of peace to children; de-escalation and dialogue in the midst of armed conflict in the Ukraine; just peace in the marketplace; embodied prayer, contemplation and action for peace and reconciliation; Christian hope versus nuclear 'deterrence'; providing sanctuary in Europe; the language of biblical nonviolence and just peace for advocacy for peace; and multiple identities.

The Kingdom of God is justice and peace

The fractured Europe of today needed a new vision of the future, in which all sorts of people could find a place for themselves, and the vision underlying the conference theme of Psalm 85 provided exactly that vision, said Revd Karen Hinrichs, Evangelical Church of Baden, in her sermon during the closing worship service.

According to the Psalm, justice and peace belonged together, intimately in an embrace, she noted. This was the Kingdom of God. God's people journeying together on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace were at work building this 'culture of nonviolence'.

Nonviolence as 'ultima ratio'

The AGM welcomed the commitment of the recent Conference of European Churches (CEC) Assembly to move in the direction of nonviolence as the preferred response to conflict and violence. At the same time, the members challenged the churches to remove from the table the option of war or military intervention as "ultima ratio", or the last resort, and instead to journey, step by step, towards nonviolence as both a first and last resort.

In a statement on EU budgetary priorities outlined in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the AGM expressed deep concern at further planning to boost spending on military instruments instead of investing in civilian peacebuilding and nonviolent means of strengthening civil society.

The network also voiced concern about the increasingly hostile approach to movement of people, which took painful form in the refusal of the visa application of its Board member from Kosovo to attend the gathering. A letter to the UK Home Office has urged implementation of 'visa and entrance procedures of integrity' and called on the UK government to respect commitments made in European and international agreements.

In addition, members responded to the news of legislation in Hungary criminalising assistance to migrants by affirming the commitment to welcome all people in need as fellow children of God.

Welcoming new peace church pilgrims

The network welcomed the Tertiary Community of the Community Christusbruderschaft Selbitz (Germany) as a corporate member and the UK-based Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CCND) as an associate member, as well as six new individual members from Belgium, Denmark, France and Germany.

Maria Biedrawa was elected as a new member of the Board. She is a member of the French branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and a graduate of the peace diaconate training programme of *gewaltfrei handeln*.

Read the [Statement on EU budgetary priorities driving militarisation](#)

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