

**UCC**

Newsletter

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Dear Friends:

The year 2005 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kirchengemeinschaft (Full Communion) between the Evangelical Church of the Union/EKU (now the Union of Evangelical Churches) and the United Church of Christ (USA). It was in May, 1980 that delegates from the ECU (East) gathered in the former German Democratic Republic to affirm what has proven to be a remarkable expression of the unity of the Church. In June of the same year, in West Berlin, the ECU (West) took similar action. In 1981, at the UCC General Synod in Rochester, New York, delegates voted to enter into Full Communion with the ECU (East and West). These were moments some of us shall remember for as long as we live.

This past November, at the famous Johannesstift in Berlin, the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK) hosted a memorable theological colloquy in celebration and gratitude for twenty-five years of Kirchengemeinschaft. A delegation of thirty persons, headed by General Minister and President, John Thomas, and including a number of Conference Ministers, represented the UCC. The delegation was welcomed warmly and treated graciously by the UEK delegation, which also included thirty persons devoted to Full Communion between our two churches. The theme of the convocation was the vocation of the Church in the quest for just and lasting peace in the world.

This issue of the UCC-UEK Newsletter presents the major addresses given during the course of the three day colloquy, November 11-13, 2005. It is the hope of the UCC-UEK Working Group that all who read these documents may reflect on their message and take to heart the meaning of our baptism in relation to the summons to "Just Peace" in our violent and troubled world. In various ways throughout the colloquy, those present were reminded of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous words of August 28, 1934 in which he said to the delegates to the ecumenical conference at Fano, Denmark that "Peace on earth is not a problem, but a commandment given at Christ's coming. There are two ways of reacting to this command of God: the unconditional, blind obedience of action, or the hypocritical question of the serpent: 'Yea, hath God said...?'"

To read all of the presentations in their entirety, you are invited to turn to the UCC website at this address: [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org) then, click under “Global Ministries.”

May grace and peace accompany us all into the new year ahead.

Frederick R. Trost, Chair  
UCC-UEK Working Group

### **An Invitation to Support This Newsletter**

It has been said that “Full Communion” between the UCC and the UEK involves not only breaking bread at the Lord’s Table. “It is also sharing in life, work, and witness; nourishing one another in prayer, challenging one another through conversations, enriching one another with ideas.”

For more than twenty years, these newsletters have been sent as a gift to those interested and supportive of “Kirchengemeinschaft.” Until now, the Working Group has not needed your help with the publication or mailing of these booklets. But now, we do. If 200 of you would send \$10 annually, or 100 of you would send \$20 each year, or 50-75 of you would send \$30 or more, we could meet the expense involved in producing the newsletter.

We invite gifts of support in any amount. They can be sent to:

Wider Church Ministries, UCC  
700 Prospect Avenue E.  
Cleveland, Ohio 44115-1100 (Please mark your check UCC-UEK newsletter)

Thank you for considering this invitation to help with this important expression of “Full Communion.” We are also grateful to the Mission House Center at Lakeland College in Wisconsin for the in-kind services it provides, without which we likely would not be able to continue publication.

The Working Group would welcome suggestions you may have with regard both to the newsletter and to other aspects of deepening “Kirchengemeinschaft” as we observe the twenty-fifth anniversary of this vital expression of the unity of the Church.

May the gift of “Full Communion” remain a vital expression of faith for many years to come!

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Frederick R. Trost

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## **This Most Urgent Time**

A Sermon on the Occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Celebration of Kirchengemeinschaft  
Berlin, November 15, 2005

John H. Thomas  
General Minister and President  
United Church of Christ

Texts: Psalm 50: 1-4, 6; Luke: 16.1-9

Two summers ago the delegates to the 17<sup>th</sup> General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches left the meeting rooms of the University of Ghana in Accra and journeyed to Elmina Castle along the West African coast, a pilgrimage site for many on both sides of the Atlantic whose lives have been affected by the slave trade and the infamous “Middle Passage” that transported human cargo to the Americas. Five hundred years ago Portugal built Elmina Castle as part of its growing commercial empire, but shortly thereafter Elmina was turned over to a more sinister use, a place where captured Africans were imprisoned by Portugal and the Dutch as they awaited transport. We saw the dark, hot, humid cells where they were kept, many succumbing to starvation and illness before they even began their journey. We saw where the governor selected young women for his personal sexual pleasure each night. We saw the doorway - the “doorway of no return” - where the captives’ bare feet touched mother Africa for the last time before getting into the boats that would take them to the auction blocks of the Caribbean and North America.

We were disturbed, however, by more than these anguished sights. Over the dungeon where the women were kept was a large room in Elmina Castle converted to a Dutch Reformed chapel. Here the Dutch merchants and soldiers gathered to sing the Psalms in our Reformed way, unrighteous stewards, dishonest managers, deaf to the cries below and blind impending judgment. Before entering the Castle the delegates joined in worship and we sang the old African American spiritual, “Over my head, I hear music in the air. Over my head, I hear music in the air. Over my head, I hear music in the air. There must be a God somewhere.” Could the women in their suffering hear the music over their heads, the songs of Zion sung without regard to the anguish and the dying below, sung by those oblivious not only to human suffering, but also to the urgency of the moment, to the peril of their own souls?

Luke’s parable is a puzzling one. What are we to make of Jesus’ apparent praise of the manager’s dishonest methods to extricate himself from his predicament? Should we try to squeeze the text into an exhortation about universal jubilee, an economic plan for debtor nations? Is it to be read as encouragement to be shrewd, even resorting to unethical business practices, the ends justifying the means? And what are we to make of the two applications? Is the manager to be praised for being shrewd, or for making friends by means of dishonest wealth? Perhaps Luke himself is a bit puzzled. “If you’re not taken with the first explanation, try the second!”

Context helps us with the interpretive task. Tonight’s parable is preceded in Luke’s Gospel by the much beloved parable of the prodigal son, the waiting father, and the older brother, in which the turning point marks a moment of moral and spiritual realization that the situation is dire, urgent, a moment of crisis. It is about a man who “comes to himself” in his recognition of the urgency of his physical hunger and moral emptiness. Tonight’s parable is followed by that of the rich man dressed in fine purple and the poor man

named Lazarus, which reaches its culmination in the urgent recognition of a last and lost opportunity to seize the moment for redemption when even scraps from the table could have fed Lazarus and restored the rich man's soul. But now it's too late, and a great gulf, a huge chasm has opened between the embrace of Abraham and the torment of Hades.

We live, these three parables tell us, in urgent times, times of moral and spiritual danger when we ourselves may fail to see the approach of God to demand an accounting of our management, our stewardship of the creation. It is time to act, resolutely, bravely, with determination - to return to the father for mercy, to feed Lazarus, even to "cook the books" as we say in the United States, altering the accounts to prepare for the audit. As one interpreter puts it, "The decisive turning point is just ahead, and we must act, staking all on the future." It is time no longer to sing the Psalms of praise over the heads of the suffering, but to hear the Psalmist's warning: "The mighty one, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. . . . Our God comes and does not keep silence."

Almost twenty-five years ago I was a young pastor attending my first General Synod in Rochester, New York. I watched as Avery Post, Martin Kruse, and Joachim Rogge exchanged chalices and promises establishing Kirchengemeinschaft. Those were urgent days, days of crisis when the Wall through this city symbolized the ominous divide between East and West, when Germany played host to foreign armies and when very real weapons of mass destruction were poised to unleash a fury that would end life on this planet. For some this partnership between our two churches was a celebration of shared histories in the old Prussian Union and the Evangelical Synod. For some it was and is one more precious sign of the unity of Christ's church, an extension of the vocation given to us by Christ and found on our United Church of Christ emblem, "that they may all be one that the world might believe." But in truth it was an act that recognized the urgency, the crisis of our times, a bold and courageous refusal to allow the Wall with its nuclear weapons to define the church or the creation. The border crossings of Christa Gregel and Reinhard Groscurth may have seemed pitiful in the face of the armed might massed on both sides of the Wall. But in the end they helped undermine the apparatus of destruction and fear. As Luke puts it after our parable, "whoever is faithful in a very little, is faithful also in much."

Today the crisis is different, but the urgency remains. No longer is the world divided between East and West; now we have reverted back to the North - South divisions of an earlier colonial time. Africans from Elmina and the wealth of the Gold Coast are no longer transported to Europe and North America, but the global economic crisis is stark and the suffering of those in the South intensifies. The delegates to the Accra General Council last year entered into a "covenant" for justice amid this global crisis, and declared that the injustices of our current globalized economy are not merely moral categories, but go to the very confessional heart of the Gospel itself. The oppression of the people who make our coffee, who stitch together our clothes, who manufacture our footballs and athletic shoes is a judgment that puts our very souls at risk, that puts the integrity of our proclamation of the Gospel itself at risk. The imperial designs of the United States through our invasion of Iraq which have destroyed so much remind us of how oblivious we can be to the urgency of this time even as it exposes the folly of a search for security that ignores the oppressive weight of poverty in the world. Before coming to Berlin this week with its memory of the Wall, four of us from the United Church of Christ spent a week in Jerusalem and Palestine. There, a new wall rises dividing communities in the elusive search for security and the sinister reach for land, a wall that separates and controls, protects and occupies. Isaiah's voice cries out: "Woe to you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you." Even in our own countries the chasm is revealed, most pointedly as we watched the desperate faces of poor, black Americans left behind in New Orleans during

Hurricane Katrina by the rupture of our nation's social contract. When will we hear the words of the parable spoken to us: "What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager anymore."

We Christians may be tempted to spend our time debating the ethical implications of the dishonest steward's strategy. Was it right or wrong to alter the accounts, to secure the friendship of the debtors at the expense of the manager? Is it better to be shrewd, than good? But these questions miss the point. Sixty years ago in his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer pressed Christians to "give up. . . the two questions. . . , 'How can I be good?' and 'How can I do something good?'" Instead, "Bonhoeffer said," we must ask the wholly other, completely different question, "What is the will of God?" This twenty-fifth anniversary is the moment for the decisive turning of the attention of our two churches, bound in the life of Kirchengemeinschaft, from the proclamation of the will of God amid the East - West divide to that of the North and the South. The urgency remains; the fate of our planet surely just as imperiled. The integrity of our confession, the integrity of the Gospel is at stake. For us, as for the dishonest steward, the condition of our souls hangs in the balance.

The Ghanaian woman who guided us on our tour through Elmina Castle ended with a brief and poignant reflection. "The Dutch who worshiped in this chapel believed they were faithful to the will of God as they understood it. We cannot ignore this reality. And the African captives, in their own ways and traditions also believed they were faithful to God's will. We must accept this truth. And yet, you see what happened here. Our task," she told us, "is to learn how to write love on a larger board." As Bonhoeffer was developing his *Ethics*, he famously wrote in his Christmas letter, "the ultimate question is not how we might heroically extricate ourselves from the affairs of the day, the ultimate question is how will the coming generation live?" In that writing of love on the large board of the globe together, may we respond to the plea for life from the coming generation throughout the world. In so doing, may we seek not so much to be good, or even to be seen as good; may we together seek the will of God for this most urgent time. Amen.

**Shaping the Future:  
The Reformation heritage and the relation between Europe and the USA  
November 15, 2005**

Bishop Wolfgang Huber  
Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)

**I.**

In 2004 in the USA, more than 200 Christian theologians and ethicists signed a statement protesting against the misuse of the Christian faith in political decision making in the USA. In connection with the presidential election last year, this statement was printed on October 20<sup>th</sup> 2004 in Sojourners Magazine under the title, "Confessing Christ in a World of Violence". When the General Synod of the United Church of Christ (UCC) met at the beginning of 2005 in Atlanta, the participants had this in mind.

The first point of the statement is as follows:

*"Jesus Christ, as witnessed to in the Holy Scriptures, is not limited by any national borders. People who confess his name are found throughout the world. Our faithfulness to Christ takes priority over any national identity. Wherever Christians identify with an empire, they discredit the gospel of Christ.*

*"We reject the false teaching that any state could ever be described with the words, 'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not comprehended it.' These words from the Holy Scriptures refer exclusively to Jesus Christ. No political or religious leader has the right to link them with the function of war." (\*)*

The structure and reasoning of the statement is very similar to the Theological Declaration of Barmen. It is a courageous attempt to renew the confession of Jesus Christ in a contemporary situation. In this sense, the influence of the Barmen Theological Declaration goes far beyond the borders of Germany and Europe, as this example demonstrates.

**II.**

Allow me for this reason to take a look at the Reformation heritage as expressed in the Theological Declaration of Barmen.

The Barmen Theses of 1934 form a powerful, impressive document. Even today, they still provide an excellent source of guidance for Protestants. Their arguments are derived from the heart of Christian theology and their core relates to important questions that are central, the answers to which determine whether the Church will stand or fall. They are a key document for how Protestants understand themselves.

These Theses confess Jesus Christ as the only Lord of the Church alongside whom no other authority can make higher demands on believers. The message of God's grace is emphasised as the foundation of the Church which determines everything. For this reason, the central task of the Church is described as conveying this message to all people. Not only the Church's message but also its outward form should be devoted exclusively to this aim. So the Church must not be subjected inwardly to social or political goals, nor be compelled from outside to submit to them.

The Barmen Declaration is therefore a document of evangelical freedom. It commits the Church to take advantage of this freedom and it expects the state to respect this freedom. It reminds everyone, political representatives just as much as individual citizens, of their responsibility before God and their common duty of standing up for good governance and peace.

The Reformation's rediscovery of the central biblical message has often been summarized in the fourfold "*alone*": Christ alone, the Scriptures alone, grace alone and by faith alone. The Barmen Theological Declaration put this Reformation insight into new words with a special clarity and firmness that point the way. It is *Christ alone* whom we confess as the Word of God, "which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and death," (as the Barmen Declaration states). In *Holy Scripture alone* we find the source of insight into God's revelation. *Grace alone* underlines God's mercy as the center of our faith – with the consequence, to quote Barmen again, that "the message of the free grace of God [must be proclaimed] to all people." *By faith alone* points to the dignity and uniqueness of each human being who is addressed as an image of God and to whom God gives the ability to respond to this address.

In connection with the Barmen Theses of 1934, it has often been asked whether they should not have taken a more decisive stand on the hostility to the Jews in the National Socialist state. Time and again, regret has been expressed at the lack of a seventh thesis which should have dealt with the covenant with God's chosen people which God has never renounced and with Jesus of Nazareth's belonging to that people. Looking back now, it would seem very desirable for the confession of Jesus Christ as the one Word of God to have been linked to the fact that this Jesus was a Jew and therefore, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated later, was on the side of his weakest and most defenseless brothers and sisters, namely the Jews. We probably have to recognise that the members of the synod at Barmen drew up a document which is still of significance today, not because they were able to deal with the problems of their time but because they knew it was their duty to concentrate on the gospel. Admitting that this confessional statement, however relevant it was, did not demonstrate the necessary intellectual awareness of all the aspects of the situation at that time, demands that we not only look back critically but, still more, calls for such presence of mind in our own situation. The whole of the Christian life is witness, as Martin Luther said. So the Church always needs convincing forms of witness related to the contemporary situation.

### III.

That is something which links our church life in Europe and in the USA. In the light of the Reformation message, how do we see the relations between our churches and their political contexts today? How do we understand the relationship between religion and politics in the USA and in Europe? A brief review, which is all that is possible in this address, cannot take account of all the aspects. So I am well aware that this will be somewhat one-sided.

In 1952, Reinhold Niebuhr, the well-known North American theologian of German extraction, published a book on the "Irony of American History." For him, the irony lay in the fact that a nation, which had developed from a small group of refugee pilgrim fathers and mothers who had hoped to find the "promised Jerusalem" on the other side of the Atlantic, had been led astray to relate this promise to a claim to global power. Niebuhr was thinking about the excesses of the McCarthy era when militant anti-communism was allied to a North American sense of being chosen. He voiced a warning about reacting to fundamental challenges in a fundamentalist frame of mind. He considered it preferable to go on being aware of the "irony of American history" and not to allow an awareness of being chosen to reinforce claims to a hegemony over world politics.

The belief in the religious vocation of North America has taken a number of different forms in the recent history of the USA. The view was summarized in 1963 in the sentence, "I have a dream". The Baptist pastor, Martin Luther King, Jr., conjured up the people's dream of freedom and equality. This dream was not linked with a particular claim to domination but rather with the demand for equal rights for those previously oppressed and with an appeal for non-violent resistance. It was a vision which transcended continents and religions.

Since those days, the role of religion in North American politics has undergone a profound change. Only three decades ago, religion was still not considered to have any key significance for political developments. But, once Jimmy Carter had been elected in 1976 as the first "reborn Christian", the situation changed. In the second half of the seventies, religious fundamentalism came to the fore worldwide. It brought a new recognition of the potential for mobilization found in a religiously conservative, evangelical type of Protestantism, such as existed especially in the "Bible Belt" of the Southern States. Then the religious right-wing interpreted civil religion in a way completely exempt from Niebuhr's irony. The USA was presented as the "shining city upon the hill" and as "God's chosen nation". The sense of mission based on this was contrasted with a "religion of secular humanism" that was considered to be the dominant spirit of the times. Or, to use an expression from Jürgen Habermas, the "secularization which empties" had essentially created the space for religious fundamentalism.

The high hopes of the religious right, which had been further encouraged by the election of Ronald Reagan, were quickly dashed. A policy centered above all on fiscal, economic and security activities could also not meet the expectations expressed in Germany at the same period under the heading "mental and moral transformation" which were equally disappointed.

Towards the end of the eighties, the agenda of the "reborn Christians" shifted. Its dominant emphasis was no longer the struggle against "secular humanism" but the re-establishment of a culture of law and order, no longer a struggle against the supporters of abortion but commitment to a comprehensive right to life, no longer criticism of the school curriculum but support for the doctrines of creationism in the name of a freedom to teach and learn. This contributed a lot to giving the evangelical type of churches a growing resonance also among people who had previously supported the mainline Protestant churches.

Since then, there has been an amazing growth of this type of North American spirituality. Its symbols can be seen in the enormous evangelical congregations of Willow Creek or Saddleback Mountain, for example. Now the mega-churches are developing into "giga-churches" which gather ten thousand people or more for worship. That is where the religious right fits in, all the more since it was possible to avoid its becoming further radicalized. But it has meant that a religio-political rhetoric has become more direct when it is attacking the supposed or real enemies of the USA. "Crusade" was a word used in the fight against communism as it is in the fight against terrorism; Ronald Reagan spoke about the "empire of evil" and George Bush Jr. speaks about the "axis of evil". Often without any self-criticism, belief in God is used to support such a Manichaean worldview; the "irony of American history" has vanished from consciousness.

In the United States, the term "civil religion" is used to refer to the link between religion and politics despite their simultaneous institutional separation. The sociologist, Robert N. Bellah, uses it to mean the sources, which are not themselves political, of a morality that is necessary to hold the social and political life of the community together. So civil religion constitutes one of the ways in which religion and politics can be inter-twined in

society and can thus contribute to the stability of society. Institutional cooperation can be another form. The former is what we find in the USA, the latter in Germany. North America can stand a lot of civil religion but very few institutional connections between church and state. Germany can put up with the churches having a strong public position but not with much civil religion.

#### IV.

The civil religion in Germany, where hardly anyone counts themselves among the “reborn Christians”, is a negative civil religion. Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, a constitutional lawyer, put this most clearly in his now famous sentence: “The freedom-loving, secularized state lives off prerequisites which it cannot guarantee itself.” So the state itself refrains from defining the prerequisites which allow the renewal of the awareness of freedom and the readiness to accept responsibility. But the state is not indifferent to the existence of institutions devoted to defining the content and to transmitting such prerequisites.

The state considers it must be religiously neutral. But it has good grounds for linking this religious neutrality with an attitude that encourages religion. The state’s religious neutrality gives it the fundamental duty to respect the freedom of all religions to the same degree. But it cannot be indifferent to the kind of relations existing between the religions and the structure of the free, secularised state. In this sense, the state has a special, inherent affinity for the distinction between state and religion which forms an indispensable prerequisite for the enlightened secularity of the legal order.

When one describes this constellation, it becomes clear why different answers are given in the USA and Germany to the religiously plural situation of the present. In the USA, people have no difficulty about all religions having the same institutional standing, because in any case it will be a standing beyond the “wall of separation”. Hence, the state’s laws have very little to say on the equal standing of religions any way. Nevertheless, the content of statements made by religions is very carefully examined to see to what extent they fit into the dominant civil religion. There was a clear example of this in the large ceremony to commemorate the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup> at the Yankee Stadium in Harlem. Every person who spoke, Christian or Jew, Muslim or Sikh, joined in praising the United States as the chosen nation and asked for God’s blessing on its future destiny. In the face of the challenge from terrorism, they demonstrated their affiliation with a civil religion which had never before in North American history been defined so clearly in a way that transcended different religions.

In Germany, on the other hand, the conception of equal religious liberty for all must also have an institutional expression. The structural provisions of the German law on church and state are designed for religious groupings which are themselves structured in a way that allows them also to become corporations under public law.

#### V.

There can be no doubt that the relationship between religion and violence is a major focus of public interest at the present time. Violence is even discussed mainly in reference to its religious justification. This happens whenever terrorist violence is the subject. And, in reverse, when the spotlight is turned on religion in this way, it is also seen mainly as having a potential for and an inclination to violence in both the historical and the contemporary context. From this point of view, September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 has acquired a paradigmatic importance. The witness to the importance of religions for peace, which was expressed by so many voices a few days later at the inter-religious memorial ceremony for the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>, has faded completely behind the overwhelming impression that the revival of religion is linked with the occurrence of terrorist violence as the greatest threat to peace in our time.

There are more nuances to the relation between violence and religion than the occurrence of extremist acts and their treatment in the media can convey. Invoking religion to justify violent killings exists side by side with the criticism of violence in the name of religious conviction. Both are known in Christianity and in the European tradition. No consideration of the relation between religion, politics and violence can neglect the diversity of positions ranging from pacifism to bellicism, from *just war* to *just peace*. But we are dealing with a quite different level when suicide attacks or the terrorist use of force are defended and justified by religious motives. So we are becoming increasingly aware that we can no longer have an inter-religious dialogue which does not also discuss such developments.

On the stage of world politics, one can see relationships between religion and the political exercise of power in many contexts, although they had appeared to have been almost overcome from a European or, more precisely, Euro-centric perspective. The renewed strength of Hindu nationalism in India is just as much an example of this as the Islamic link between religion and power. The new proximity of church and state in certain countries where Orthodoxy predominates also points in this direction, as does the new proximity between religion and politics which has evolved in the USA, irrespective of the “wall of separation” for which the Constitution provides. Religion, politics and violence are not just European issues. But we must examine critically the extent to which the European development has produced a model that is able to survive and, in addition, whether this model can also be considered binding on others. When one religion decides to refrain from using state means to obtain recognition, can this also be binding on other religious traditions? Does the enlightened secularity of the European legal order determine the criteria for the globalized world? Is the combination of democracy, religious liberty and a secular state a useful model? Might it perhaps even be an indispensable prerequisite for peace between the religions as well as for peace between states? Europe should confidently contribute its own conception to the debate on the relation between religion and politics.

## **VI.**

This is where we come full circle. Not drawing the line against the USA but self-confidently formulating its own position, should constitute the European conception of trans-Atlantic relationships. The dialogue needed today has two requisites: a deeper understanding of the North American religious culture which can explain the increased importance of religious attitudes for North American politics over the past two decades, and new reflection on the different type of relationship between religion and politics in Europe. Differences in definitions of the relationship between religion and politics do not need to deepen the gulf between the USA and Europe. On the contrary, they can form part of the dialogue which is so urgently needed today. Naturally, a critical approach to the North American developments will have its place in this dialogue. But what is more important is for Europe to define its own position on the issue.

## **VII.**

The Christian churches can make a major contribution to the debate. Their voice must be clear and stand out among the variety of different religious expressions. Reflection which looks back to the Reformation heritage combined with a search for convincing ways of witnessing to the faith in relation to the present situation are the indispensable conditions for this. Reflection on the Reformation roots of our churches calls upon us, according to my firm conviction, to engage in critical debate about all ways of using religion for political aims; the fourfold “alone” of the Reformation is just as much a critical norm for this as is the witness of the Barmen Theological Declaration derived from the principle that Jesus Christ is the only Word of God “which we have to trust and obey in life and in

death". I believe the time has come to bring this critical potential of our theological tradition into our contemporary debates with one another.

To this end, the partnership between the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Church of the Union – now the Union of Evangelical Churches – can be of exemplary significance. We can draw on and benefit from our common experiences which certainly did not only start when the seal was solemnly set on our church fellowship. Ever since the founding synod of the United Church of Christ (UCC) in 1957, there has been regular interchange between our churches. The confirmation of the church fellowship in the resolutions of the Eastern ECU synod at its meeting from 16-18 May 1980, of the Western ECU synod at its meeting from 12-15 June 1980 and of the General Synod of the UCC at its meeting in June, 1981, gave binding shape to this dialogue which was then deepened over the following 25 years and to which we are still committed.

The church fellowship between the UCC and the Evangelical Church of the Union, which was established in 1980/81, was a special contribution of the Evangelical Church of the Union when it became part of the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK). That took place in 2003. The intention of the UEK from the very beginning was to strengthen the communion between all the member churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany. For this reason, both the work and the existing links of the UEK are to be integrated into and continued within the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). This is also the purpose of the bond between the EKD and the UEK which we plan to establish from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 but are already preparing. On both sides of the Atlantic, we are linked by the expectation that, in the midst of these changes, the church fellowship between the UCC and the UEK will be especially valued and developed further. I personally also feel committed to this goal.

The General Synod of the UCC in 2003 invited the churches which were not members of the ECU but are now members of the UEK to enter into this bond of church fellowship. One point on the agenda of the bond is our responsibility for just peace. Both of our churches are living out the commission to bring about reconciliation and facing the challenge of overcoming violence. In this, we are united with the ecumenical movement worldwide.

The special characteristics of the connection between the UCC and the UEK relate to their common historical roots and to both sides being committed to the Barmen Theological Declaration. We are concerned that this church fellowship be given life time and again in the everyday context of our churches at the "Gemeinde", "Kirchenkreis" and "Landeskirche" level or in your congregations, Conferences and the General Synod. The working group on the UCC side and the UCC Forum of the UEK are important instruments for theological reflection as well as of organizational activities and for coordinating regular exchanges and common projects. We shall need these instruments in the future as well.

We gain significant insights from our theological dialogue which we need in order to witness to the gospel before the world, to gain assurance in our own faith in reference to the church's confessional documents and for relevant witness to the faith in our different situations. One example is the reason given for church unity, namely mission. "World mission is a driving force for unity," was a statement made at the 5<sup>th</sup> consultation of United and Uniting Churches in 1987 in Potsdam-Hermannswerder. All Christian churches together have the task of giving public witness to Jesus as the Christ. Their diversity is not an obstacle to this but rather an expression of the many facets of faith. With all their differences, the churches are called to communion in the faith and in witnessing to the faith. They contribute their different theological, cultural, national and social traditions to the dialogue on common witness and common service. The aim of this

dialogue is to make church fellowship possible and to deepen it. Honest and open dialogue deepens the understanding of what we have in common; so it also helps us to understand what is ours better. Hence, our churches can be true witnesses of the gospel together and each in their own place. They can stand up “For Justice and Peace”, which was the main theme of the consultation at Erfurt in 1983. Deepening the visible fellowship in the faith and witnessing together before the world are tasks which unite us in a lasting way.

### **VIII.**

Since we call one another into our fellowship of churches, we have the duty to be continuously self-critical.

The foundation of our church fellowship is God’s word which is the only support for this fellowship. By this we mean a fundamental agreement on the understanding of the Christian faith. In the Preamble to the Constitution of the EKD, it says, “The foundation of the Evangelical Church in Germany is the gospel of Jesus Christ as given to us in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. By recognizing this foundation, the Evangelical Church in Germany commits itself to the One Lord of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” Only where the characteristics of the true Church of Jesus Christ are recognizable can church fellowship come into being and be acknowledged.

Another feature of our church fellowship is that we expressly witness to this foundation and grant one another fellowship in word and sacrament. The Protestant understanding of the ecumenical goal of the visible unity of Christ’s church continues to be that of reconciled diversity; churches which do not deny their own profile for the sake of the fellowship but contribute it to the dialogue for the sake of their sisters and brothers. Reconciled diversity is the basis for an ecumenism of profiles in which respect for and recognition of each church’s profile goes hand in hand with giving shape to church fellowship.

So it is also part of our church fellowship to put the fellowship into practice. In the fellowship, it is a question “not only of faith but of believers, not only of sacraments but of disciples who are fed by these sacraments and of servants who administer them, not only of ethics but of the discipleship of those who are called”, as a Catholic, Anton Houtepen, once put it.

Theological work on the foundation of our witness and the continuous translation of our witness into common and missionary action are lasting commitments that follow from our common Reformation heritage. Therefore, church fellowship is a common path, a path which leads in the same direction. We are aware of our common origins and our common goal. On the basis of this certainty and trusting in God, we can shape the future together.

## 25 years of Kirchengemeinschaft

Vikarin Elga Zachau

Please allow me to begin with three preliminary remarks:

First, a formality: when in the following I use the term "Kirchengemeinschaft", I use it referring to the relationship between our two churches, between EKU, now UEK, and UCC.

Second, I will speak about the present situation, where UCC and UEK meet as denominational partners.<sup>i</sup>

Third, I regard the issue from two intersecting viewpoints: one relating to personal experience and the other one to critical analysis.<sup>ii</sup>

And here I stand before you: a contemporary witness, one of the younger people in our churches, for whom the experience of Kirchengemeinschaft has been a special blessing in her life, and also as an observer. Since Kirchengemeinschaft is a living relationship between people here and today, I think it's impossible to approach it in an exclusively academic and neutral manner. In the following, I would like to interweave some analytical aspects, some personal experiences, as well as some of my own wishes for the future of our relationship.

### 1 What is EKU/UEK-UCC Kirchengemeinschaft?

If I would like to pass this question on to you, I am convinced we would hear as many different answers as we are people gathered in this room. And each answer would be justified; because it is its great scope and its many dimensions that constitute Kirchengemeinschaft. This has been a fact from the very beginning. There has never been only one interpretation of what Kirchengemeinschaft is and what its goals are.

*In the official documents, like the resolutions of our synods of 25 years ago, we find very diverse approaches to the term Kirchengemeinschaft:*

- Theologically, Kirchengemeinschaft is interpreted as a "Covenant in Mission and Faith"<sup>iii</sup> in the Presence of the Lord.
- Kirchengemeinschaft is gratefully celebrated as a "gift from the Spirit"<sup>iv</sup>.
- In regard to its inner-church implications, Kirchengemeinschaft is determined to be a mutual acknowledgement of "the integrity of mission and faith"<sup>v</sup> of the partner church.
- During the preparations for the synods in 1980/81 one thought became very prominent: Kirchengemeinschaft was regarded as the long existing relationship between our two churches which had developed over decades; the former and current encounters were recognized as a way of experiencing Kirchengemeinschaft.
- In the context of the ecumenical movement, Kirchengemeinschaft is seen as a conscious deepening of the relationship of individual United and Uniting Churches with one another.

- Both churches regard Kirchengemeinschaft as a common task, as a “mandate for renewal in mission and faith”<sup>vi</sup>.

Next to these written testimonies, there are numerous personal interpretations. Related to the written and personal approaches I see different dimensions of Kirchengemeinschaft. It is my concern today to introduce to you ten of these many dimensions.<sup>vii</sup>

## 2 The diverse dimensions of Kirchengemeinschaft

### 2.1 The dimension of family relationships

*In 1994, my own relationship with the UCC began with the knowledge of having “church relatives” on the other side of the Atlantic. To say it right away: I do have “real” relatives in the USA, but they belong to other Protestant denominations. It was through them that I got to know US-American church life when I was a youngster in the 1980s.*

*Several years later, already a student of theology, I wished to deepen my impressions of that time. I wanted to complete a practical study of parish life in a US-American congregation. When I began my practical planning, the following thoughts entered my mind: On the one hand, there were the positive memories I had of the Baptist congregation that my family in California belongs to. But on the other hand, I could remember from confirmation class that our Westphalian Church had a special relationship to the UCC in the USA. And so I thought: This time I will not visit the denomination of my relatives again, but instead a denomination which is a “relative” of my own denomination. I was looking not only for the experience of North American church life in general, but I wanted to get involved in this church-family-relationship. I simply had the feeling that the UCC would be the church in the USA which I as a Westphalian divinity school student should go to. I was curious and excited to meet this “relative” in the USA.*

*My practical studies at Trinity UCC in Canton, Ohio, in 1995, were mentored by the Rev. David Schoen, who is now leader of the Evangelism Ministry Team of the UCC. The experience was among the most impressive ones in the course of my studies. My church relatives welcomed me with open arms like a family member. In the life of this congregation of the former Evangelical and Reformed Church, I discovered many familiar features and much that I could relate to. Many members of German origin were glad that, through me, they could get back in touch with their own family tradition and hear about life in church and society in Germany today. For both sides, these encounters had the nature of a family reunion.*

*And in yet another sense I felt like I had found a family in the US. I stayed with a wonderful family from the congregation, who had a 13-year-old daughter by the name of Abbey. Abbey also had two elder brothers. She was happy about my presence in the family and soon adopted me as her big sister. For me, an only child, this was an unforgettable experience. I enjoyed my new role and tried to do my best. Abbey’s dream was to become a ballet dancer. I accompanied her to rehearsals and performances.*

*One year later, Abbey was diagnosed with bone cancer in her leg. She was immediately operated on. I spent my vacation with her while she was between chemo therapy and physical therapy. During the next 4 years, Abbey and I stayed as close as possible while living so far apart from each other. She shared her dreams and joys with me – in fun teenager e-mails and very serious letters. Her illness progressed inexorably. These days, as I write these lines, Abbey has been dead five years.*

*Kirchengemeinschaft has given me a little sister; only for five years, but with everlasting memories. Kirchengemeinschaft means to share life as a family in good times and bad.*

## **2.2 The dimension of prayer and worship**

At all times of our relationship, all parties have always stressed that for them, common worship services, common Bible studies, and a shared spiritual life represent the deepest dimension of Kirchengemeinschaft. When we are gathered together around the communion table, we can feel that it isn't us who call one another to Kirchengemeinschaft, but that the relationship is God's gift to us. We experience ourselves as being called to common service; we hear God's promise to be with us and God's assurance that the covenant of Kirchengemeinschaft is grounded in God's covenant with us.

These days, we celebrate worship services with each other and pray together and for each other. I hope that the experience of this dimension of Kirchengemeinschaft will strengthen us for the path ahead, but also that it will be a relief of our burdens. A relief, insofar as we will not expect and demand everything of ourselves and each other, but are reminded of who is the Lord of the Church and of Kirchengemeinschaft.

## **2.3 The dimension of the ecumenical bond between United and Uniting Churches**

Kirchengemeinschaft is a way for churches to shape individual bilateral (or trilateral) ecumenical relationships. Kirchengemeinschaft is not a model for churches to maintain all their ecumenical relationships.

Decades ago, United and Uniting Churches, gathered under the roof of the World Council of Churches (WCC,) made the conscious decision not to form their own world federation. At the same time they were looking for ways to deepen their relationships between individual United Churches worldwide. At the Consultation of United and Uniting Churches in Toronto in 1975, UCC President Robert Moss and Oberkirchenrat Reinhard Groscurth from the EKU could already look upon the developing bilateral relationships between EKU and UCC. They recognized a promising way for their respective churches, but also for all other United Churches. The consultation picked up the recommendations of Moss and Groscurth that United and Uniting Churches should maintain intensified bilateral relationships with one another. EKU and UCC continued on the path they had set out on – the results are known to us. And we celebrate them in great gratitude today.

In the years following the declaration of Kirchengemeinschaft, this impulse towards Kirchengemeinschaft coming out of the ecumenical movement was given less priority.

In both churches there were critical voices, questioning Kirchengemeinschaft, indeed, turning it into a justice issue: "Can it be justified to invest much more strength in one ecumenical relationship than in others? How will our different partner churches react to this?" The fact that EKU/UEK and UCC were both churches of the northern hemisphere doubtlessly intensified the issue.

I think it is very important to stress: Kirchengemeinschaft between EKU/UEK and UCC is not a depreciation of other ecumenical relationships of our churches. The UCC-resolution to the EKU-UCC Kirchengemeinschaft in 1981 expresses this in an outstanding way by pointing to other partnerships of the UCC as well. At the same time, however, the resolution emphasizes that Kirchengemeinschaft with the EKU "offers us new possibilities among the pathways of global Christian witness to the truth."<sup>viii</sup>

I think that against the background of the Toronto-Declaration, it is appropriate to view Kirchengemeinschaft like this: with gratitude for the variety of possibilities that can be found in an ecumenical relationship that covers all church levels and at the same time with the unemotional assessment that we can live a relationship of such depth only as an example and with a very small number of partners - even if we wished it might be otherwise.

We can, however - in the ecumenical context - tell other churches about our good experiences and encourage them to intensify individual relationships in a similar way. Even today, we can remind the churches worldwide of the appeal of Toronto from 1975!

#### **2.4 The dimension of mutual theological acknowledgement**

In the context of worldwide ecumenism, we often experience how much many churches differ in their theological core issues - even between churches linked with the WCC. These experiences can be very, very painful. That is why it is so important to know that there are churches that are spiritually and theologically very close.

The synod declarations of 1980 and 1981 were preceded by years of theological dialogue, where representatives of both churches stated that there are no "theological (...) grounds that would prevent full communion between ECU and UCC"<sup>xix</sup>. As mentioned above, our churches maintain many ecumenical partnerships on the national and international level. But the mutual recognition of baptism, communion and ordination still expresses a special form of closeness.

Everything that has developed between our churches during the last 25 years stands on this foundation. Whenever new contacts developed among our churches, no elaborate research was needed as to who exactly this other church was. The synod declarations told us: We have pulpit and table fellowship with this church. We can be grateful that the mothers and fathers of Kirchengemeinschaft began the theological work and carried it this far. Thereby they gave us the opportunity to build on the existing, diverse forms of encounter.

But at the same time, they've left us the task to continue and intensify Kirchengemeinschaft by "accountable theological conversations concerning the common understanding of the Gospel"<sup>x</sup>.

Theological thinking is never static; Christians of every generation are called to be witnesses of the Gospel in their time and to face the challenges of their present. Kirchengemeinschaft accounts for this fact in a special way: From 1977 on until today, they have asked for "Sound Teaching"<sup>xxi</sup> under ever new aspects.

In all the years of Kirchengemeinschaft, the task to intensify theological thinking has proven a great chance for all involved, in both churches. Especially the consultations, which take place every few years in regular intervals since the 1980s are a good place for such theological work. Our consultation is - depending on which count - the eleventh in this tradition.

During the first years of Kirchengemeinschaft, the theological interest of the UCC in its talks with the ECU was directed particularly towards Reformation theology, the theology of the Confessing Church, and, in the 1980s, the question of "The Church under Socialism."

The EKU very gratefully picked up impulses in social ethics from the UCC. The publications and resolutions about "The Just Peace Church" and "Christian Faith and Economic Life" have been influential and well-known in the EKU.

The resolutions of these consultations were widely received in our churches. One could witness the birth of a new form of theological-ecumenical work; the commitment of Christians in the USA and in both parts of Germany courageously standing up against the political and economical "Zeitgeist" and for reconciliation and more social justice.

In the early 1990s, people thought about the issue of Christian Education. What was the nature of our hopes as Christians, and how could we pass them on to the coming generations? Being at home in both churches, the German-American theologian Frederick Herzog lived Kirchengemeinschaft like nobody else. He hoped that one might be able to write a catechism for the present, completely different from traditional catechisms.

In the mid 1990s, issues like "Diaconal Ministry" and "Spirituality" moved to the center of interest. In 1998, the question of "The Congregation in the Secularized Society" was discussed. In 2001, at the consultation in Cleveland, issues like the challenges of economic globalization and poverty, racism, gender identity and sexual orientation were named as burning issues.

What are the challenges in our world today? The political situation calls our attention to the Middle East and particularly to the situation in Iraq. We are aware of the difference in attitudes of the people in our societies and in our churches particularly on that issue. That is why, at this place, it is so important to me to point out one dimension of Kirchengemeinschaft that has been a central one from the start and that still is very much up to date:

## **2.5 The dimension of constructive dialogue and reconciliation**

To this day, the topics of "World War II and the Holocaust", the "role of the USA in the liberation of Germany from NS-Dictatorship, and in the time after 1945" have great relevance in our encounters. People realize that their fathers and grandfathers fought against each other. During city tours, North American visitors ask with concern about the extent of the destruction caused by Allied bombers. In the course of the Young Ambassador Programs, teenagers from Germany and the United States get together to visit memorial sites at former concentration camps and deal with the different forms of genocide past and present.

For the young people in our churches today, it is probably hard to imagine how enormously important the encounters between Christians from East Germany with Christians from West Germany and the US were in the 1970s and 1980s, and what it meant to experience, in common communion, how the political walls of hostility ceased to exist.

And in the debate on peace-ethics in Western Germany in those years, it was very important to perceive the critical voices from the UCC on the NATO dual-track decision and the nuclear arms race and the courageous "Swords into Plowshares" struggle in Eastern Germany.

Yes, it was important for both parts of the EKU to maintain their common contacts to the UCC. Christians in East and West Germany did not only get in contact with brothers and

sisters in the UCC but also with one another. I would like to stress that even today, I still consider this a very important aspect. Some of my most memorable experiences of the Cleveland Consultation in 2001 were the discussions with younger theologians and pastors from the former East of the EKU about differences in our regions and Landeskirchen in the past and today.

## **2.6 The dimension of the familiar from a new perspective**

It was a very good idea to name the youth exchange programs of Kirchengemeinschaft “Young Ambassadors”. That is exactly how we feel in our encounters – we become ambassadors of Christ, of faith and mission of our church and also of our own denomination, and ambassadors of our nations and cultures – whether we are in support of their politics or at a critical distance.

Here in Germany, there are no Sunday schools for adults and so there is too little opportunity to really discuss our faith with each other. In our encounters with the UCC, however, such talk about faith often develops automatically. Joint mission projects like the Young Ambassadors Programs or German volunteers participating in UCC camps, often turn out to be key experiences for the unity of faith and mission – according to a motto of the UCC: “To believe is to care. To care is to do.”

It isn't always easy to be an ambassador of one's own church, especially if one is inexperienced in the matter. But it can turn out to be an incredibly enriching experience.

*In my experience, it was through the encounters with the UCC that my relationship with the EKU gained a new depth I had not been aware of before. Before practical studies in Canton, Ohio, I had met with Ralph Quellhorst, Ohio Conference Minister at that time, at a UCC-forum in Westphalia. Being a 21 year old theology student talking with a Conference Minister spontaneously was exciting and challenging. Ralph Quellhorst had a list of topics about which I should prepare presentations. One theme was: “My United-Church identity.” To be honest: up to that moment I had never thought about what was so special about Westphalia belonging to the EKU, other than from a church-historical perspective. I was far from having a united-church identity, but I still had a few months until my journey to Ohio. So I prepared my papers and concentrated on studying the EKU. It would be an exaggeration to say that in 1995 I arrived in the UCC with a united-church identity, but I think that in the meantime I have acquired one - and experiencing how the UCC lives the perspective of being “united and uniting” has contributed a good deal.*

Our encounters challenge us to deal with the features of our own church from a new perspective.<sup>xii</sup> Particularly those aspects of our church life that we like to leave in the dark are inevitably brought into light in our common discussions.<sup>xiii</sup> We urgently need this mutual and critical perception. It is only by open and trusting talks beyond all diplomatic phrases that we can help each other effectively and can pay more attention to critical developments in our churches in order to give each other advice as brothers and sisters.

There are many areas where we can learn from the respective special competencies and experiences of the partner church. For, as much as our churches may differ in certain structural questions, there are many similarities in our thinking, our idea of church structures, of church administration, of local church and wider church ministries.

*This past spring, I completed a study project in the Hawaii Conference, and visited new church starts that were formed by immigrants from the Pacific area. During my talks with the ministers of these congregations I suddenly realized that, in many cases, Cleveland and Berlin are much closer than Cleveland and Honolulu.*

*What I mean to say is: To understand the structure of the UCC was a special challenge for the ministers of Micronesia. Their idea of a church is quite different from that of our institutions. When I spoke with a minister of Pohnpei/Micronesia and drew a sketch for him of the new structure trying to answer some of his questions, he looked at me and said: "No wonder, you understand this whole system. You Germans think just like the Americans. That is a western church concept. In Polynesia, we live and understand church in a completely different way."*

In the UCC and EKU/UEK we have developed different competencies through which we can support each other, but in our western way of thinking and our church concept, we are so much alike that we can really understand and relate to the problems and challenges of our partner church. It is from this perspective in particular, that an ecumenical partnership between two churches of the so-called "First World" isn't only justified but downright essential.

## **2.7 The influence of political parameter**

It may surprise you, but I would find it easier to report on key events between our churches from the years 1957 to 1990, than on the last fifteen years of Kirchengemeinschaft, although I have been a part of this partnership for the last eleven years now. Why is that?

The beginnings of the relations between our churches were very clear. In the course of synods and at official encounters, individual theological leaders came together. It was in the mid-1970s that working groups were formed from experienced and committed individuals and staff members.<sup>xiv</sup> These boards have developed the theological and conceptual guidelines of Kirchengemeinschaft. Our relationship took time to grow.

An important reason why it is easy to keep track of our relations in the 1970s and 1980s should also be considered; namely the political parameter in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the considerable restrictions the churches in the GDR were subject to. For the younger members in our churches the enormous efforts that were required for church encounters and particularly ecumenical ones in the GDR are hardly conceivable.

The Eastern section of the EKU was trying to signal to the state representatives that their relationship with the UCC was stable and transparent and based on long-term planning and agreements between state institutions and the church, including representatives of the GDR and the UCC. Guests from the UCC were also received in the Department for Church Matters of the GDR.

And we mustn't ignore the other side either: The GDR did have an interest in demonstrating to the outside world that the churches could maintain independent western contacts and be ecumenically active. A special cornerstone was an interview that Erich Honecker gave in 1974 to a western press agency, where he pointed out the close relationship the churches in the GDR had to the UCC.

In the face of the political parameters in the Eastern section of the EKU, the West deliberately held back, or rather, in the first years, the West more or less allowed the Eastern section to go ahead and shape the relationship. Kirchengemeinschaft was always supposed to be an equal-rights partnership of three churches. Even if it had easily been possible for the Western section to expand the relationship with the UCC irrespective of the Eastern section, they refrained from doing this.

Looking back we can say that for many reasons, the circle of people closely connected to Kirchengemeinschaft until 1990 was considerable smaller than in the last 15 years.

## **2.8 Changing forms of encounter**

Kirchengemeinschaft is actualized in different forms of encounter. Some of these forms have been maintained since the 1950s, others have developed in more recent years. And I am certain, that the times ahead will also bring new impulses.

In the beginning, there were mutual official visits of church leaders at the occasion of synods. The classical form of encounter since the mid 1960s has been the annual EKU/UEK-UCC exchange delegations. The national working groups in both churches have been in constant contact, in correspondence as well as in person. They take a leading role in consultations on the national church level.

But these forms of encounter already show: Kirchengemeinschaft is a different category of ecumenical relationships than the top-level ecumenism of the World Council of Churches or the National Church Councils. From the beginning, Frederick Herzog coined the term "grassroots ecumenism" for Kirchengemeinschaft. Not only theologians and national staff people were supposed to get together, but the grassroots of our churches should participate in the partnership: Herzog hoped that experiencing personally what it meant to live in a "global village" would offer guiding impulses for the local churches and their members.

However, it wasn't until the systematic increase of partnerships between Landeskirchen and Conferences about fifteen years ago, that the possibility of firmly establishing Kirchengemeinschaft among the grassroots became a reality.<sup>xv</sup> There isn't time for me to present all forms of encounter that have been developed in the meantime. There are too many of them. And they vary from Landeskirche to Landeskirche, from Conference to Conference. And last not least, it is you who bring all your experience from where you come. Many of you have come to Berlin as experts in these regional partnerships.

I think one of the most important tasks during our consultation will be to study the survey on the present levels and forms of encounter that has been prepared for us. Perhaps we can add wherever something may be missing and discuss our thoughts: Which Landeskirche has what kind of experience with which project? What works well, where are there difficulties?

*Please allow me, as a Westphalian, to point to the core element of our UCC-work in Westphalia. I am enthusiastic about this mode of working, because it suits us, it suits Kirchengemeinschaft; it expresses what grassroots ecumenism can be: every fall, there is a three-day UCC-forum in Westphalia, where all who are interested are cordially invited. Visitors and lecturers from our partner Conferences (Ohio and Indiana/Kentucky) often attend these forums as our guests.*

*The forum is a bit like a UCC-reunion: friends from Kirchengemeinschaft meet, latest news is exchanged. Home-comers give their reports, and those about to go abroad receive first-hand information.*

*Every forum has its motto. This year (2005) the topic was "Religious Fundamentalism". So it often happens that some people register to participate out of their interest in the topic and through the forum acquire a taste for Kirchengemeinschaft.*

*Kirchengemeinschaft can be experienced in those three days: as a community of old and young, of people who travel to the UCC and those who experience the UCC from Germany, in worship service and prayer, in critical dialog und reflection, based on a long tradition and at the same time perfectly up-to-date and future oriented.*

## **2.9 Structures**

The current strength of Kirchengemeinschaft lies, without doubt, in a great range of forms of encounters on all levels of our churches. Because of the regionalization, Conferences and Landeskirchen are free to develop their programs in accordance with their interests and possibilities. However, I have the impression that these regional partnerships develop independently from each other. It is in this independence that I currently see a particular challenge for our relations. I think that we pass up many a chance to benefit from the experiences of other Landeskirchen and Conferences.

Particularly in the face of structural and financial changes within our churches, I am worried that we might lose sight of the identity of the Kirchengemeinschaft as a whole. Therefore, maintaining a network of structures including all regional and national levels is indispensable. I consider it very important that these structures communicate closely, consciously complementing one another, and perceiving themselves as part of the overall project that is the UEK-UCC Kirchengemeinschaft.

The UCC-EKU-UEK Working Group of the UCC and the UCC Forum of the UEK see themselves as parallel structures. However, they differ considerably in how they work. On the German side, a board of representatives of the Landeskirchen meets, representing the regionalized partnerships. On the US side, the circle of Working Group members has a wider definition: the moment of representing the denomination as a whole is more emphasized. The Working Group is more directed towards the theological foundation of, and the fundamental reflection on, Kirchengemeinschaft. We need both perspectives – in both churches!

By gathering on a national level, we can hear reports on what happens in the different regional levels; by passing on information and invitations from Landeskirche to Landeskirche, from Conference to Conference, we can keep and intensify the "corporate identity" of Kirchengemeinschaft as a whole.

In Germany, there is a growing awareness that not all local churches can offer everything, but that different congregations can distinguish themselves by specific focal points. I would recommend this to Kirchengemeinschaft: if not all the Landeskirchen are able or willing to offer, for example, an annual forum like we do in Westphalia, it would be great if interested groups or individuals from other Landeskirchen were specifically invited. Incidentally, this way the exchange of thought between the individual Landeskirchen would deepen as they once did between the East and West sections of the EKU.

## **2.10 Funding**

These days, financial issues are a central topic in our churches everywhere. Positions and programs are threatened by budget cuts. Even within our Kirchengemeinschaft-relations, this issue is of great relevance. The financial issues are a challenge we have to face with all our creativity.<sup>xvi</sup>

My generation is - in spite of all the problems we are confronted with - convinced that there is "Church with a Future"<sup>xvii</sup> if the Lord of the Church opens it for us. But we mustn't talk it to pieces, especially not when we experience our church in a state of

awakening<sup>xviii</sup>. And I definitely experience Kirchengemeinschaft as an awakening "God-Walk."<sup>xix</sup>

### 3 Personal conclusions and visions

Kirchengemeinschaft as grassroots ecumenism is ecumenism of experience. In the past 25 years, in the course of consultations between representatives of our churches, many resolutions were passed which took a clear position on current political, social and church issues. I consider these documents good, but I believe that wherever Kirchengemeinschaft deeply influenced people in their lives, their thinking, and their faith, it happened primarily through their personal experience of Kirchengemeinschaft.

Kirchengemeinschaft understands itself as a community of witnesses for God's mission to the world. Kirchengemeinschaft means to live this community in word and deed, and wants to address the people in the churches and the world community. I think the strength of Kirchengemeinschaft lies in our ability to connect word and deed and in a growing awareness of global contexts among our (participating) church members. If we can manage that, we have achieved very much.<sup>xx</sup>

Our concerted action in Kirchengemeinschaft is to be determined in relation to the action of local churches and program units on different levels. In some cases, UCC-UEK projects may serve as examples to fill specific resolutions of the national church or the Conference/or Landeskirche with life. In other cases, by Kirchengemeinschaft we may take up certain areas of responsibility on behalf of our denominations (e.g. working on reconciliation between the people of Germany and the US and offering "hope for the people of countries at enmity with each other today"<sup>xxi</sup>).

Kirchengemeinschaft has always dealt with the issue of justice in its many dimensions. I consider this orientation of our relationship very important. Looking at the current socio-ethical discourse, I am thinking, in particular, of the criterion of participatory justice. Kirchengemeinschaft is oriented on this criterion if it is inviting towards all levels of our churches, towards people of different talents, and if it offers these people room to contribute and shape the partnership. I consider the way in which we will develop the resolution for this conference a good example for truly participatory justice.

I hope that the objectives we shall formulate for our relations will keep in mind all who participate in Kirchengemeinschaft; that members of a touring choir as well as delegates at a church consultation will know: what we are doing here is Kirchengemeinschaft in its fullest sense!

At the same time I hope that we continue to be visionary and critical in our choice of topics, to face the challenges in church and society with courage and conviction and that we each develop specific ways to take up these topics on the different levels of our partnership.

I hope that we will place an emphasis on giving teenagers and young adults the possibility to experience Kirchengemeinschaft. Equal opportunity for the young generation is one of the burning justice issues of our time.

*Until Reformation day, I served as minister in training in an inner-city congregation in Gelsenkirchen. This city has one of the highest unemployment rates in Germany. The job*

*opportunities for high school graduates are very poor. For over a decade, my congregation has had a partnership with First Congregational UCC in Alpena, Michigan. One special focus of the partnership is on youth encounters, which have a tremendous impact on the lives of the participants. In planning and managing the encounters, the youngsters experience what abilities they have. Someone places great confidence in them and so they, youngsters from disadvantaged regions, gain self-confidence. By this experience they are encouraged to face the challenges of life in a way they would not experience in their family or school environment.*

When we want to develop “strategies for witness in common tasks of justice”<sup>xxii</sup> we should have in mind how Kirchengemeinschaft can serve the youth of our churches, to obtain a higher degree of equal opportunity for their lives.

Finally I hope that we respond to God calling us to Kirchengemeinschaft gladly and with faith in God’s guiding presence.

In 1981, after adopting the resolution of Kirchengemeinschaft, the General Synod of the UCC sang the hymn “Now Thank We All Our God.” If I could sing, I would begin to sing from the New Century Hymnal “In the midst of new dimenstions, in the face of changing ways, Who will lead the pilgrim peoples wandering their separate ways? God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar, We your people, ours the journey, now and ever, now and ever, now and ever more.”

## **Just Peace**

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite

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“Courage in the struggle for justice and peace” is one of the powerful affirmations in the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith. It is central to the identity of our church. It is one of our most ardent prayers and richest blessings. To be part of the United Church of Christ is to be part of the struggle for justice and peace.

In June of 1985 the Fifteenth General Synod, meeting in Ames Iowa, took two important actions to strengthen this identity. They declared justice and peace to be two of the priorities of the church for the next four years. And they passed a Pronouncement “Affirming the United Church of Christ to be a Just Peace Church.”

This Pronouncement, and an accompanying Proposal for Action were produced after four years of work by a Peace Theology Development Team as it sought to discover and develop the theological roots of the peacemaking identity of the United Church of Christ.

This process began in 1981 when the Thirteenth General Synod, appealing to “the traditional stand of the UCC [which] has called for its members to be peacemakers and to work diligently for justice, human rights, and peace within the family of nations,” voted to “become a peace church.” The resolution had been brought to General Synod by Roger McDougle, a youth delegate from the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference. The original wording of the resolution called upon the United Church of Christ to declare itself a pacifist church. The Synod amended the resolution, calling instead for the United Church to become a peace church.

The word pacifist was a source of concern to the Thirteenth General Synod. Two years later, at the Fourteenth General Synod, even the words peace church were a source of concern, and a resolution on the floor was amended to read “peacemaking church.” Both Synods were signaling that peace is central to the identity of the United Church of Christ. Both also seemed unclear about what peace means and what it means for the United Church of Christ to become more intentional in this identity.

Although the Thirteenth General Synod called for the United Church of Christ to “become a peace church,” it did not spell out how this might happen. The UCC Office for Church in Society appointed a Peace Theology Development Team to begin reflecting on the meaning of peace and its centrality to our identity. Two years later this team was commissioned by the Fourteenth General Synod to consider more fully the bases and ramifications-of becoming a peacemaking church.

The first draft of what became the “Just Peace” document was published in October, 1984 and circulated widely throughout the church. Many people and groups reacted to

*this draft, sending in hundreds of pages in response.* The first draft and the response to it became the basis for the Pronouncement and the Proposal for Action, which were sent to the Fifteenth General Synod. The debate and the action of that synod have, in turn, provided a basis for the redrafting of this final version of *A Just Peace Church*.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

In declaring itself to be a “Just Peace Church” the United Church of Christ made several important declarations.

- The church as church made a specifically biblical and theological affirmation: it affirmed that making peace and doing justice are the task of Christians given to them by God in the shalom vision.
- This United Church of Christ further developed a new theological language or theological paradigm of peace theology, moving beyond the historic three peace paradigms: pacifism, just war, and crusade.
- *A Just Peace Church* placed the United Church of Christ in opposition to the institution of war.
- *A Just Peace Church* placed the United Church of Christ in opposition to doctrine of nuclear deterrence, joining the larger church in the process of withdrawing moral sanction from this doctrine and insisting that new doctrines of common security be developed.
- *A Just Peace Church* defined a Just Peace as *shalom*, the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence, underlining the linkage between peace and justice with the phrase “a Just Peace,” and insisting that the search for disarmament conflict resolution must be accompanied by the search for justice.
- *A Just Peace Church* affirmed that all humans have a right to their basic human needs, including food, health care, housing, employment, and education.
- *A Just Peace Church* affirmed that the struggle for a Just Peace must be seen from and must learn from the perspective of the poor who are in the struggle for liberation.
- *A Just Peace Church* stressed the critical historical moment in which we live and call upon the church *specifically as church* to recognize God’s calling to an essential role in this moment.

In the years following the adoption of the Just Peace pronouncement, many churches throughout the United Church of Christ declared themselves “Just Peace Churches” and engaged in a wide variety of activities to widen and deepen that concept. Since the attack on Iraq there has been renewed interest in the book “A Just Peace Church” and it was re-issued by Pilgrim Press.

**Just Peace in Christian Ecumenism:** The United Church of Christ is not the only Christian denomination to have considered deeply and at length what the church and individual disciples are called to be and do in a warring world. The United Methodists, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Lutheran Church in America and the American Catholic Bishops all issued statements and pronouncements during the 1980’s addressing various aspects of the human condition and positing theological and biblical responses.

For example, in their pastoral letter “The Challenge of Peace,” the U.S. Catholic Bishops say: “Recognition of the Church’s responsibility to join with others in the work of peace is a major force behind the call today to develop a theology of peace. Much of the history of Catholic theology on war and peace has focused on limiting the resort to force in human affairs; this task is still necessary,....but it is not a sufficient response. A fresh reappraisal which includes a developed theology of peace will require contributions from several sectors of the Church’s life: Biblical studies, systematic and moral theology, ecclesiology, and the experience and insights of members of the church who have struggled in various ways to make and keep the peace in this often violent age.”

Official statements of the Presbyterian Church, United Methodist Church, and United Church of Christ proclaimed similarly that while the two predominant paradigms limiting the resort to force, just war theory and pacifism, are still necessary, we also need a positive theory of just peacemaking. In addition, several Christian ethicists from different denominations, both just war theorist and pacifist, authored books calling for the development of a just peacemaking theory.

During the mid-1990’s an ad hoc group of twenty-three scholars – Christian ethicists, biblical and moral theologians, international relations scholars, peace activist, and conflict resolution specialists, got together in meetings of the Society of Christian Ethics, by research and correspondence between meetings, and in major working conferences at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky, and at the Carter Center in Atlanta. We, and I was one of them, worked completely under our own auspices, though many of us had been part of our own denominational efforts to articulate the church’s response to justice and peace for a very long time.

The results of our work were published in the book “Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War”, edited by Glen Stassen. I have often presented this document to groups by saying that the real subtitle should be “How to end war in your spare time” for the great emphasis we put on grassroots and lay activism in the strategies for “Just Peacemaking.”

Over the five years we worked together, we attempted to develop a road map for actions that actually participate in effective forces that are turning major parts of our world from war to peace. When actions participate in these world-changing forces, they are not mere ideals; they are isolated and random; rather, they are forces multiplied in strength and effectiveness.

We elaborated an approach called “practice norms”. Practice norms are an approach to peacemaking that eschews theory in favor of the normative nature of practices that have a proven track record in helping to reduce violence and increase the presence of peace. One of the most attractive aspects of practice norms as a guiding premise is that our final list of “ten peacemaking practices” engages more in description than prescription. Each practice is introduced with a verb, the historical development and specific instances in which it has been used are described, our rationale for inclusion in the list of ten is included and the use of this practice norm in the future is briefly described as well. Practice norms completely by-pass the way in which peacemaking is often dismissed: the “well, that’s nice but it’s not possible.” Practice norms come out of the possible and lead to greater possibility. They are:

- Support non-violent direct action.
- Take independent initiatives to reduce threat.
- Use cooperative conflict resolution.

- Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness.
- Advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty.
- Foster just and sustainable economic development.
- Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system.
- Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights.
- Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.
- Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.

Thus the ten just peacemaking practices in our consensus model were not merely a wish list. They are empirical practices in our present history that are, in fact, spreading peace. They are engendering positive-feedback loops, so they are growing in strength. They are pushing back the frontiers of war and spreading the zones of peace. We, the authors of “Just Peacemaking”, came to believe that because these emerging empirical practices are changing our world for the better and pushing back the frontiers of war, they are moral as well as empirical guides for all responsible and caring persons. They call all persons of good will to lend their shoulders to the effort. They give realistic guidance for grassroots groups, voluntary associations, and groups in congregations.

Several historical forces produced the rationale that went into our work that produced “Just Peacemaking”. It is interesting and very instructive that these forces, so powerful in the mid to late 1990’s have now almost been completely eclipsed by newer historical forces, though forces that find their point of origin often in the historical moments we identified.

We noted that after World War II, the world was stunned by the devastation of the war and the threat of nuclear weapons. The reality of that universally perceived threat persuaded people and institutions to develop new practices and networks to prevent another world war and the use of nuclear weapons. Now in the more than sixty years that have passed, we have so far avoided those two specters. Yet, more recent developments have shown that nuclear proliferation is a grave threat in the middle of the first decade of the new millennium.

We were writing at the end of the Cold War and anticipating the turning of the millennium. What we saw was the ending of the hostile rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their mutual nuclear escalation; we thought we knew who we were as peacemakers in a Cold War era. Our question was, who are we in the post-cold war? Even then, the problem seemed much more diffuse. We sensed at the time a growing frustration that the divide continued between just war and pacifist paradigms. That meant that the debate was always framed around whether or not to make war. The introduction of the practice norms approach was specifically *to increase the things that make for peace, i.e. prevention of war and reduction of harm within conflicts*. The theological development of the Just Peacemaking group was intentionally very open-ended. In the book, we wrote “We purposely fashioned the wording of the ten practices of just peacemaking so they could be adopted by persons of many faiths or no official faith. We wrote chapters explaining each practice so its basis can be seen clearly in what is actually happening in our time to change the world. We appeal to all people of good will to adopt these practices and work for them, grounding themselves in a commitment to change our world (or at least their own little briar patch) to peace rather than war and oppression. Each person can base these practices on his or her own faith. A Muslim or Buddhist or simply a social scientist or human being whose experience has led her or him

to care about making peace, not war, can say, “Yes, this is happening in ways I had not fully realized, and it is making a huge difference for good, and I want to support it.” We hope many, from diverse perspectives, will make these peacemaking practices their own.”

Yet, as events have unfolded, this now reads to me as naïve about other religions and romantic about our own intentions. Time has revealed a great deal more about other religions and peacemaking.

### **Terrorism and Just Peace**

September 11, 2001 produced a blizzard of reflection in the United States along a wide spectrum from national self-recrimination through national self-justification and even ideologies of victimhood for the U.S. A volume called *Strike Terror No More: Theology, Ethics and the New War*, edited by Jon L. Berquist, tried to gather the thoughts of the theological community. From apocalyptic to pastoral care, from just war to just peace 38 colleagues weighed in with their thoughts. I contributed the just peace perspective, “New Wars, Old Wineskins,” outlining how several principles of “Just Peacemaking” were particularly apt for the post-9/11 world. I wrote in conclusion: “There is nothing new under the sun,” says the prophet, and in many ways that is true. But this war on terrorism is new in the sense that we have not seen this scale of terror before in human history. A threshold has been crossed, and we will not be able to go back to the norms of conventional wars. Christian moral thinking on war and peace must respond. The tenets of just war theory no longer apply in terrorism. There is no recognized authority, there seem to be no definite combatants, and we, at least, seem blind to the distinction between combatants and noncombatants. Pacifism challenges us, as always, to refuse violence. But it does not tell us how to actually achieve the things that make for peace on a global scale. The just peace paradigm offers ten practical strategies that have proven effective in reducing violence and creating long-term structural changes that will eliminate the conditions that produce terrorism. The thinking of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. loom large in the creation of just peace norms. When the world needed it, they showed that seemingly intractable violence could be transformed into greater justice and peace. Terrorism appears to be such intractable violence. But it is not. Peace is always possible. We can always take a step toward it. These steps are not without risk, but war is a profound risk. Jesus cries over Jerusalem, ‘Would that you knew now the things that make for peace.’ We do know some of the things that make for peace. And shame on us if we do not employ them.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

But I spoke in that chapter as a Christian, specifically as a Christian, and completely eschewed any implication that I was speaking for more than one part of the spectrum of theological and biblical interpretation in Christianity. I believe I now know two things post 9/11 (at least). One is that we cannot go it alone either politically or religiously. But we also know that it is arrogant and dangerous to assume what others in other faiths think. Theological reflection on Just Peace, therefore, must become an interfaith reflection.

### **Newer Directions in Just Peace: Interfaith Work**

In May of 2005 a group of religious leaders and scholars, primarily Christians and Muslims, was convened at the Pocantico Conference Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund by The Islamic Society of North America, the Managing the Atom Project of the Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Churches’ Center for Theology and Public Policy to discuss what their traditions had to contribute to the question of the nuclear weapons danger at this time in history. The consultation produced a consensus statement called “We Affirm Our Belief in the One God: A Statement Regarding Muslim-Christian Perspectives on the Nuclear

Weapons Danger” which religious leaders of all faiths have been invited to endorse subsequent to the meeting. To date 1529 religious leaders have signed.

The very fact of this conference illustrates one of the core concepts of Just Peacemaking, **Take Independent Initiatives to Reduce Threat**. The Churches Center for Theology and Public Policy took an independent initiative and contacted the other groups in order to do a conference with an interfaith group and on a topic that had never been done before.

Just Peacemaking principles were used to conduct the conference and the resulting statement illustrates several of these tenets. **Cooperative Conflict Resolution** methods guided the leaders and the conduct of the event. The document produced was a consensus document that had input from all parties and produced a remarkable degree of advancement. Active listening, group reflection and both Christian and Muslim peer group reflection, brainstorming of alternatives, and the constant return to the theme of seeking common ground were key elements in this successful meeting.

The statement begins with asserting common theological ground: “We affirm our belief in the One God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. We agree that the Christian and Muslim traditions are unambiguous on the sanctity of human life and on the protection of all forms of creation, including the environment. We believe in the dignity of all human beings and their roles as trustees and humble custodians of the earth and their responsibility for the needs of future generations.”

The document also rejects a “Just War” argument for weapons of mass destruction: “We believe that chemical, biological and particularly nuclear weapons do not discriminate between combatants and non-combatants and inevitably destroy innocent human life, even as they destroy other forms of life such as animals and vegetation, cause irrevocable damage to the environment for many generations to come and cause human suffering and disease. Therefore, we hold that these weapons are contrary to our religious and ethical principles.”

Furthermore, the document unambiguously supports the Just Peace principle that we **Strengthen the United Nations and International Efforts for Cooperation and Human Rights**: “We agree that the ideal response to the nuclear threat is a total and universal ban on all such weapons, including low yield tactical nuclear weapons, their development, production, possession, acquisition, deployment, use, and the threat of use. We hold further that any weakening of the nuclear "Non-Proliferation Treaty" is a setback for world peace. We agree that all nations, without exception, must abide by international treaties, agreements and other international covenants of which they are signatories.”

The Just Peace principle to **Reduce Offensive Weapons and Weapons Trade** is likewise strongly affirmed: “We further agree that the possession of nuclear weapons is an unacceptable risk for the human community in these times and is a continuing threat to the entire planet and its fragile ecosystem. The risk of theft of nuclear weapons or materials by non-state actors for nuclear terrorism as well as the continuing risk of accidental use of nuclear weapons by nation states themselves makes even the possession of nuclear weapons a danger to God’s creation.

We agree that the enormous resources spent on nuclear weapons can be put to much better use to deal with the problems of poverty, disease and ignorance and to promote a peaceful pluralistic civil society, free of hate and prejudice.”

Finally, the document asserts the Just Peace principle **Encourage Grassroots Peacemaking Groups and Voluntary Associations**: “We encourage engagement on the part of civil society in the debate and policy making decisions relating to nuclear weapons.”

The document ends with a re-affirmation of the consensus beginning point: “We therefore believe that the common position held by both of our traditions, expressed as the sanctity of human life, leads us inexorably to say that the only real security for the world and the most responsible position for people of faith in our two traditions is to call upon the United States and other countries of the world to, gradually and in a verifiable manner, finally eliminate these weapons from the face of the earth.”

#### **More Interfaith Work on Just Peace Needed**

It was clear to all the participants in the Pontantico conference that further interfaith work was needed. A proposal has been written called “**Religious Perspectives on Alternatives to War**” that will bring representatives of the three Abrahamic faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, together again to explore the religious grounding for alternatives to war. This proposal builds on the unprecedented success of the meeting that produced “We Affirm Our Belief in the One God.”

The proposal summarizes several of the Just Peace principles that enabled the Christian-Muslim dialogue to produce concrete results. One is of course the parity among participants. Another is familiarity with Just Peacemaking principles and a willingness to engage, improve, but also change them where necessary.

The current proposal is that a small group (no more than 6) of Jewish, Christian and Islamic scholars and religious leaders examine the Just Peacemaking document as well as other statements from each group that provide guidance from each of the Abrahamic traditions on alternatives to war. This group will then create the agenda for a spring, 2006 general meeting of 12 representatives from each of the three Abrahamic faiths.

Using the same successful Just Peacemaking process, the goal of this new conference is to create an “Abrahamic Perspectives on Alternatives to War” final document. Such an ambitious plan will require an outline created at the conference and a follow up writing team. The intent is that, based on an outline created at the meeting itself, a draft document will be written and after several rounds by email with all participants, be ready for publication in fall 2006.

It will then be the responsibility of all faith groups participating, including the United Church of Christ, to bring this document to their faith bodies for consideration and hopefully ratification.

#### **Just Peace is Acknowledged as a Fourth Paradigm**

There are now four paradigms under which religious bodies consider the religious response to peace and war, Pacifism, Crusade, Just War and Just Peace. The twenty-first century has seen unprecedented challenges to the human community in peace making and indeed, in war making. Terrorism is a significant challenge to the just peacemaking community and we must find ways to respond that continue the practice norms concept: what works?

<sup>i</sup> Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, ed., *A Just Peace Church* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1986).

<sup>ii</sup> Glen Stassen, ed., *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998).

<sup>iii</sup> Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, “New Wars, Old Wineskins,” in Jon L. Berquist, Ed., *Strike Terror No More: Theology, Ethics, and the New War* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2002), 276-277.



**Peace Movement within the Churches in the GDR  
and Kirchengemeinschaft - UCC-EKU**  
Christa Grengel, Oberkirchenratin, EKU (East) and Referent,  
Middle East Commission, EKD (retired)

**1. Kirchengemeinschaft as service for peace**

Let me start with an observation that is very important for me: "Communion of churches" is in fact a true peace-keeping reality and has been, therefore, always part of the Church's work for peace in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Without communion with the worldwide ecumene it would have been impossible to conceive what I am referring to as Church's "peace movement". Immediately after the terrible destruction of World War II, the ecumenical community, not least in the USA, saw that we, the children, did not starve. This experience has been etched on the memory of the older generation. The hand of the worldwide ecumene, willing to bring reconciliation, let the churches in the guilty Germany, draw hope again spiritually for a new community. When the "East-West-conflict" and the division of our world into two stronger military blocs came into existence, it was again the community of churches that helped cause the "iron curtain" to tear and the "Berlin wall" to crack and that built up bridges of communication over the deep political gap. This experience put its stamp on the peace discussion in all phases of post-war history. Also the cooperation of church-representatives from the GDR in ecumenical committees and the initiatives and questions coming from the ecumene, sustainably influenced the Church's work for peace in the GDR.

This is also true for German-German relations. It has been essential for the *one* EKU as well as for the "special spiritual communion" between Federation and EKD. The mandate of Christ to seek possibilities of peace-making over dividing walls has been crucial. This became clear especially in the "Common Statements," for instance in 1979, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of World War II and again in 1985 when we observed the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II. This corresponded to a dense network of partnerships between congregations, in which "communion with those over there" was experienced concretely and with great joy for decades. This communion across the wall and through the East-West-conflict has been a solid spiritual reality which cannot be estimated highly enough as a source for overcoming the East-West-conflict.

Nevertheless, Kirchengemeinschaft with the UCC has been something special because it constitutes a particularly intensive form of church community and because its representatives came from the country of the superpower that threatened with its nuclear weapons from beyond the Iron Curtain. There had been a regular annual exchange of delegations for many years. The declarations of Kirchengemeinschaft 1980 / 81 strengthened and deepened this already existing communion. They were declared in a period in which the peace question within the churches in the GDR had become again highly controversial. The introduction of military curriculum into schools, the invasion of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, the threat and later the realization of deployment of nuclear warheads in both German states right on the border between East and West had again made urgent the question of the authentic peace witness of Christians over the borders. The spiritual experience of community in the Church's worship and in the life of the local congregations brought change, because while talking with each other; singing, praying and celebrating Holy Communion, we all became aware that we were together

under the same Lord. Given such community, how could one shoot at each other on any day? Experiencing concretely this communion, it became clear that everything had to be done to preserve it despite the “curtain” and the “wall”!

## **2. Struggle for the appropriate peace witness in the GDR**

### **The EKU and the “social world peace”**

The EKU set up an institute for Church peace research on October 1, 1968. This institution dates from the EKU Synod in February 1968 and resulted from the requests of the “Bausoldaten”. Clearly inspired by the World Council of Churches’ (WCC) conference “Church and Society” in 1966 and the preparation for the WCC Assembly which took place in Uppsala some months later, the EKU Synod clearly recognised the unjust structures present in North-South relations as a peace issue and an ethical problem and therefore as a challenge for the churches.: “The cry for bread, justice and peace is obvious .... We are shocked, that the gap between the rich and the poor peoples is increasingly extending. This cannot be the will of God ... The price for peace is so high that it can be paid only by a general mobilization ....”

The beginning was meager: The “institute” was renamed more modestly a “desk” engaged in “peace questions”. As a staff person I was warmly welcomed in the EKU headquarters at Auguststrasse 80 but also with a bit of a smile as a “peace angel.” The situation was at first depressing, because in contrast to the visionary hope of the Synod in the spring of 1968, the invasion of the troops of the Warsaw Pact (which included GDR soldiers too) in August 1968, was a terrible shock to us. All hopes for a political opening of the system were ruined, and the non-violent resistance of our Czech friends and also parts of the CPC were brutally crushed.

We owe it especially to President Reinhold Hildebrand and Bishop Johannes Jaenicke that the EKU did not give up in that situation. Both fought with high energy so that also in the GDR attention would be given to both the theoretical and foundational dimensions required to shape a peace ethic independent of chance or ad hoc formulation.

### **The “clearer witness”**

The concrete question of how the individual Christian should act in view of the military threat ran like a bright thread through the Church statements in the GDR. Coming from the deep conviction of the post-war time that “War is not in accord with God’s will” (WCC Amsterdam 1948) and a belief that each military confrontation at the time would lead inevitably to a nuclear war and, therefore, the insight that the ethical criteria required to conduct a “just war” (CA 16) can no longer be applied, the refusal to do war-service was recognized as legitimate consequence that was required by faith. On the other hand, a kind of balance of military potential on both sides was seen as still tolerable as long as such “stability” prevented a war. Therefore, the participation in military service was seen as possible. But because military service in the event of war had been excluded, therefore, the training with weapons seemed to be unnecessary (“refusal of weapon service”). With the “Order of the National Defense Council of the GDR for the training of troops ...” in 1964, the GDR-leadership reacted precisely to that argument and allowed young men who were liable for military service the possibility of a service without weapons within the army (the “Bausoldaten”).

The justification for the “Bausoldaten” (or “construction soldiers” who did not bear weapons) could not be classified within conventional peace ethical concepts. This was not a pacifism of principle. It was at most a “pacifism because of nuclear war.” The “conscientious objectors” understood their refusal to bear weapons as “peace service” and asked the churches to express their position on it. This happened for the first time in

1965 with a “statement” whose first sentence pointed out that the refusal in the present situation was a “clearer witness”. The statement differed from the “Heidelberg Theses” which had expressed the view that the different witnesses were of equal value in the present time. The “clearer witness” remained a matter of church discussions in the years that followed because it was clear to all people involved that this question was not a matter of church protection of minorities but rather a central question of the Christian peace witness in general. Also the “construction soldiers” experienced again and again that though their witness may have been “clearer,” it was nevertheless not “unambiguous,” as for instance in the case of building military facilities. Therefore, young Christians requested an increasingly bolder and more public and unambiguous alternative, namely a “social peace service.”

### **Political mandate and peace witness**

After the foundation of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (Federation) it was agreed that questions of “church and society,” including the peace questions, should henceforth be worked out on the level of the Federation, because the evangelical regional churches wanted to speak as far as possible with *one* voice in the basic questions of the political mandate of the churches, distinct from the centralist ideologically oriented state and the society dominated by the state. This position, in distinction from the GDR-state, had also another consequence. In the Marxist-Leninist perspective the “basic questions of power” were clear. This meant that the Church had a subsidiary task. Church was to be a “private matter”. It was to be a “help for weak people”. Therefore, every word the Church spoke to problems of the society was understood as “interference” in the genuine tasks of the state. The churches, on the other hand, unanimously put forward the view –not least because of the second article of the Barmen Declaration that God in Jesus Christ is related to the whole life of men and women and that, therefore, the church has to speak where she sees herself provoked to witness and service from her own roots and norms. But this meant that the churches permanently had to make clear for themselves and for the state itself, that speaking and acting were theologically well-founded.

The leading question was related to Romans 12:2: “What is the will of God? What would the Lord have us do today?” But this was not as easy to discover as the simple wording of the question might presume. The evangelical theologians in the GDR came from different traditions, which especially in regard to the question about the limits of the political mandate of the churches, caused conflict. A doctrinal commission, especially called to address this problem, came to the conclusion in 1979 that the Lutheran doctrine of the “two kingdoms” and the Calvinist doctrine of the “Lordship of Christ” hermeneutically interpret and complement each other. Briefly stated: The “kingdom of the world” should not be left to its “own laws.” It has to be seen as subject to God’s will and should be questioned about certain problems from the realm of the Church as necessary. On the other hand, it shouldn’t be imagined that the Church can construct the kingdom of God in the still unredeemed world. In spite of this helpful insight and further useful ideas presented by the church committees, (for instance the Barmen interpretations of the EKV), questions remained about the Church’s political mandate, and controversy marked the inner-church discussions. Again and again individuals were accused of “going too far;” of crossing the limits. Obviously, the limits could not be set, but they could be commonly found always again through “listening to the word of God”. It is nearly a miracle that, despite everything, the Church came to unanimity in such important statements as “confessing in the peace question”.

## **Rejection of the spirit, logic and practice of deterrence and confessing in the peace question**

The threat with Eurostrategic weapons and finally the actual deployment of nuclear weapons in the midst of Europe in the 1980s made the peace question again a hot theme for all synods. The question became increasingly urgent in the congregations because of a growing fear that a war with nuclear weapons was coming dangerously near. When the catastrophe of the Chernobyl reactor showed how dangerous highly developed technology could become, the conviction was lost that deterrence with highly sensitive military technology could guarantee “security” and “stability” in the East-West-conflict. Therefore, the churches recognised also “deterrence” as sin (as earlier the “war”). The annual synods of the Federation had commented on this since 1982. Discussion focused not only on deterrence as a fact, but on the deeper dimension of the “spirit and logic of deterrence”. Using the term “rejection,” they went back deliberately to the old liturgy of baptism (with its rejection of evil and sin). The crucial issue for the Church was not simply political comment but rather giving expression to a foundational element of Christian thinking. Rejection has something to do with separation. Therefore, it was not surprising that the Federation took also into account the request from the Reformed side to declare the “status confessionis”. The Federation, however, chose another way. It did not want to formulate only a “rejection” but also to describe at the same time a position of the peace witness. This happened in 1987 with a statement called “Confessing regarding the peace question”. The Synod understood it as a “topical confessing” deriving from the obedience of faith and from discipleship in a question of highest priority for churches and congregations. The Synod made a commitment to the love of God which is valid for all men and women, especially the weak and the oppressed; liberation from slavery to fear, and acknowledgement of the gift of God’s justice in Christ. Deriving from this “position” the negative conclusion was made: rejection of the spirit, logic and practice of deterrence. Because the concrete conclusions were of a political nature, this document became very controversial.

## **Confessio Augustana (CA) 16 “just war” again under discussion?**

In connection with “Confessing regarding the peace question” the question about the criteria of the “just war” again came under discussion. “Nuclear pacifism” had lost its urgency because in the meantime military concepts had been worked out, according to which also smaller and limited wars had become possible again. Could the original intention of CA 16 “to support the peace and to save the right by seeking to prevent and to limit wars” be used after all for the ethical discussion of peace? This was stated in a comment drafted by the Federation and revised on the basis of proposals from the Leuenberg churches and the EKU which said: “However, under the present conditions situations cannot be excluded, in which it will become necessary to oppose violators of peace first by ‘threat’, but then also by ‘exerting force’ (Barmen V) against them with conventional military weapons.”

## **Conciliar process for justice, peace and integrity of creation**

The “Conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation,” set in motion by the WCC Assembly in Vancouver in 1983 following a motion presented by GDR participants, gained momentum in the GDR after initial difficulties. Participants included not only the evangelical regional and free churches but also the Roman Catholic Church. In the GDR the process was named “Ecumenical Assembly for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.” The theme was addressed in 1988 / 89 at three major conferences, in many working groups and by the drafting of resolutions to which everybody could contribute. The Ecumenical Assembly took up the peace concepts that had been worked out up to that date, and tried to summarize them. In content this was in accord with the

biblical demand for “conversion” (*metanoia*) to the “shalom of God” and with that to the commitment of churches and Christians to “create justice for all discriminated against and oppressed people”, to serve the peace with non-violent means” and “to protect and to support life on this earth”. In the “peace question” (document 7) the Ecumenical Assembly went so far as to call the participating churches to become a “peace church”.

The Ecumenical Assembly managed to reach a surprising and very deep agreement within the GDR regarding life and death questions. It remained painful, however, that a common Eucharist still was not possible.

The Ecumenical Assembly brought together the church-leaders and grassroot-groups from the congregations which often were in tension with each other, urging them to sit around a table and to formulate common expressions. This became an essential spiritual experience for both sides during these politically very difficult times.

The Ecumenical Assembly offered hope and encouragement to the participants and to many people in and outside the churches in the GDR in an extremely difficult time. There is no question that this process contributed to the “change,” or *Wende*, that took place in 1989, especially in regard to “remaining peaceful” during the turbulent weeks. The Ecumenical Assembly can really be named with the word *peace-movement* because it altered the stiff structures within our churches and congregations. It was able to get despondent GDR-citizens out of their niches and brought the essential content of the biblical message into discussion. The fact that a great deal of this later fell back into “normality” brought bitterness to some of the participants and remains as a question for the present generation.

### **3. UCC and EKU together on the way**

The declarations of Kirchengemeinschaft 1980 /81 demanded that the communion should be deepened by theological consultations. I want to mention the two most important ones.

#### ***The importance of the justification and the covenant-traditions for just peace***

The most important event in connection with our theme was the consultation “Reformation Theology for Today: the Importance of the Justification and the Covenant-Traditions for Just Peace” in Erfurt in June 1983. The consultation brought into dialogue the two essential traditions of the EKU and the UCC and focused on the most important questions of the present time, namely questions about peace and justice. At the same time it was agreed attention would be given during the Luther-year (1983) also to the other traditions of the Reformation. For this same reason, representatives from other united churches were invited additionally.

The consultation was exciting in many respects and from my point of view its reception is not fully complete even today. Regarding the content, this consultation anticipated interestingly a great deal of what came to play a role some weeks later in Vancouver and then in the conciliar process.

The original focus on “justice and peace” was changed to “just peace”. This wording, with its emphasis on an ethic of peace, addressed not only the unity of the the East-West-conflict and the North-South-Problem. It also lifted up the goal of a “just peace” as over against the formula “just war”. In the peace ethic discussion in which war in a nuclear age had to be refused in general, a “just war” now had to be questioned. Could the criteria of that formula (“just war”) from the 16th century be made so to speak as “conditions for peace” in the nuclear age?

The traditions of "Justification" and "Covenant" were both recognized as essential and completing each other with the result that for the peace discussion in the GDR the concept of "Covenant" became important as God's covenant and as commitment for peace in the discipleship of Christ. In his reaction to the UCC-speech about covenant (Stackhouse) Professor Dembowski proposed to unite the two traditions in one model under the biblical basic term "shalom". This model was deepened especially by the representative of the Czech Brethren with the advice of the eschatological perspective of each Christian action concerning the "cry for just peace".

The report sought in an impressive way to sharpen the two traditions and the "Yes of God to the world" and God's "No to the sin" to the concrete world situation. It concluded with "practical considerations on the way to peace", which I cannot quote because of the time-limitation. But I recommend that you read them.

It is undisputed that this consultation and the statements of the Federation (which I have already described) have had a stimulating effect on each other right down to the wording. The report is relatively unknown as a text. But the participants in the consultation went on to contribute and to develop its thoughts in their respective places. This has been a highlight for the EKU-UCC relationship in which we can, in my opinion, continue today.

#### **Consultation in Process: "The Justice of God"**

For the continuity of work it was decided to have a "Consultation in Process" (CiP) with many smaller conversations. The theme chosen was "The Justice of God". Each partner (EKU East, EKU West, and UCC) was asked to develop the theme for its respective situation. The whole process was accompanied by a group of reflectors from the three partners who participated in all events and finally wrote a report. It was very exciting to see which issues the three partners faced as the most urgent problem of justice in their region.

Once the EKU West and the UCC (one in EKU West and seven in USA) had spoken especially about questions of economy and law as the main problems of injustice in their regions, the region EKU East significantly identified the lack of "possibilities for participation" as the most harsh injustice in the GDR. Our discussion took place in Erfurt at the end of August in 1989 when premonitions of the upheavels of autumn already were clearly being felt. While most of the working groups presented encouraging results, the working group dealing with "participation in local politics" became so depressed about the real possibilities for participation, that they were not able to present anything. Some weeks later, following the "Wende," participants, especially of that group, took up political offices and were active in shaping the new situation in the GDR.

Regarding the content, I would say that all CiP conversations concretely addressed the structures of injustice in their respective regions. However, it might be asked, how far were these injustices seen in connection with the worldwide perspective? To have done that probably would have required a summarizing and pursuing common conference. In the GDR, the final recommendations went "under" in the whirlpool of events that followed with dramatic swiftness at the time of the "Wende" in November, 1989. In each case, the "Consultation in Process" was a valuable experience for Kirchengemeinschaft between the EKU and the UCC because many members of congregations participated in this process and because in this way the communion of confessing and world-responsibility were experienced as foundational to the life of congregations.

**Final remarks**

Briefly, and in conclusion, I have several hopes to share:

I hope that our churches would work together more intensively in relation to world peace (globalization) and in special disaster areas, for example in the Middle East. It always is nice to meet UCC-people by chance. But I am convinced that we could be more helpful, if we would work more closely together in such areas.

I hope, that a request of Frederick Herzog could come alive again, namely to intensify the relations between us in such a way that we would be able to “interfere” in each other’s church affairs. This would mean developing courage and an ability to ask mutually questions that are possibly uncomfortable but questions that would really help.

I hope that as many members of local congregations as possible might have the opportunity in the future to experience Kirchengemeinschaft in a similarly intensive way as we had the chance to do in the past.

Thank you.

## PEACE AND JUSTICE:

### CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCHES IN GERMANY TODAY

Pfr. Christine Busch, Evangelical Church in the Rhineland

*Christ says: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:27)*

“The goal to which Christian ethics points can only be peace and not war.”<sup>i</sup> That is a key sentence of the Protestant ethics of peace which was formulated by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in 1981 at the peak of the re-armament debate in its memorandum “Frieden wahren, fördern und erneuern” (Maintaining, promoting and renewing peace). This memorandum is a clear statement against war as a political instrument. It calls for an international order of peace based on global socio-political and ecological reforms. But the important question is whether it is really conceivable and permissible that Christians should participate in safeguarding peace in freedom by the use of atomic weapons. Are Christians allowed to support the strategy of nuclear deterrents? The EKD gives a positive answer. “Even today, the church must ... recognise participation in the endeavour to safeguard peace in freedom by means of atomic armaments as a way of acting which it is still possible for Christians”.<sup>ii</sup> At the same time, it lists steps to come closer to peace: by removing the causes of crises and conflicts, by agreements on concrete disarmament measures, by developing instruments for conflict prevention and non-violent conflict resolution.

One year later, in 1982, the Federation of Protestant Churches in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) adopted a resolution on “Rejecting the spirit and logic of deterrents” which could hardly have made the point more clearly. For Christians in the GDR, nuclear deterrents were completely unacceptable.

One year after that, in 1983, the 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Vancouver decided to launch the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. It was understood as an alliance of mutual commitment and mutual accountability, as a “crucial test for faith” (as Konrad Raiser called it) in view of the threats to peace, the environment and society. In both East and West there was one major, common denominator: to analyse the reality of society, to interpret the signs of the time in the light of the gospel and to take a stand.

These three resolutions on peace ethics by the EKD, the GDR churches and the WCC in 1981, 1982 and 1983 were adopted in the early days of our church partnership which was established in 1980/81. To what extent was peace ethics a common topic for our churches at that time? In Germany, we are aware of and are challenged by the fact that our sister church defined itself in 1985 as a Just Peace Church.<sup>iii</sup>

**I have chosen the approach of the EKD in order to spell out the current challenges of peace ethics for our churches. The resolutions mentioned form the context of the understanding of peace and justice which still has its effects today. Its framework of reference is the ecumenical movement and the conciliar process,** two important life streams in the worldwide community of churches. In those days – in the 1980s – neither side saw their community as stopping at the “iron curtain”. Its German expression, the Berlin wall, was permeable for the ideas that were simmering in our heads. I was working

at that time as a study director in the western part of the Church of Berlin-Brandenburg and can only confirm how dynamic and constructive the effects of the “rejection of the spirit and logic of deterrents”, which led finally to the concept of a “just peace”, were in both the East and the West.<sup>iv</sup> But many peace groups and people committed to the conciliar process felt marginalised by the EKD memorandum.

### **1. The conciliar challenge**

At the 1<sup>st</sup> European Ecumenical Assembly in May 1989 in Basle, Switzerland, the conciliar reform movement came together around the idea of “conversion to the future”. In the GDR, that stimulated the non-violent resistance which also produced the peaceful revolution. In the FRG and Western Europe, it was the stimulus for the Agenda 21 which was adopted in Rio in 1992 as the UN catalogue of tasks in the fields of ecology and development; the gap between the North and the South had long since been recognised by the conciliar movement. The guiding theological principle was conversion to shalom as peace for the nations; this corresponded to the preferential option for non-violence, for the poor and for the protection and promotion of life.

The conciliar process kept visions alive and sharpened consciences. When the borders were opened and the wall came down (1989), when people were streaming to the West and experiencing the freedom to travel, it was more than obvious that Europe really does not stop at the borders of the European Union. It was necessary to make another attempt at solidarity, brotherli/sisterliness and the use of imagination; it was important to overcome ideological clichés but also to share the resources available. The Christian West, the Old World, was making a new start and changing. What did peace, justice, reconciliation and safeguarding the environment mean in a Europe which had changed politically and on a world scale? This question is still an important ecumenical background to the work of our churches. **They have set out to be churches for peace and now have to face the question whether they have really become churches for a just peace.**

My own church, the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, is hesitant about the answer although it is committed to the conciliar process in its constitution. Its statements on peace ethics and peace policies refer expressly to the “Leitbild” of a just peace and their language is clear. Just about now, some guidelines for the debate on work for peace are being published which discuss the approaches of the EKD and the Church in the Rhineland and take them further so that the Reformation principle *semper reformanda* can have an effect and cause healthy disquiet.

### **2. The challenge of the *prima ratio* (first resort)**

Where does the EKD stand on the question of whether it wants to be a church for peace or a church for a just peace? In its Peace Memorandum of 1981, it maintains the view that, “To maintain, promote and renew peace is the command which every political responsibility must obey. All political tasks are subordinated to this command of peace. The goal to which Christian ethics points can only be peace and not war.”<sup>v</sup> On this basis, the doctrine of just war which can be traced back to St. Augustine is suspended. The systematic criteria for it, as set out by Thomas Aquinas, are also affected: for the right to warfare (*ius ad bellum*) these comprise, among others, the criteria of a just cause (*causa iusta*), legitimate authority (*legitima potestas*) and good intention (*recta intentio*) and, for justice in a war, the appropriateness of the means (*proportionalitas*) and the appropriate form (*debitus modus*). However, the consequence of the criterion of good intention, *ultima ratio* (last resort), still remains as an important argument for war as the final means after all other possibilities have been exhausted. This view has given rise to a lot

of criticism of the EKD from the pacifist wing. They claim that it has kept an escape route open instead of giving a clear witness and that it has approved of nuclear deterrents.

Following the merger of all the German Protestant churches in the EKD, in 1993 – just at the time when the disagreement over the structure of military chaplaincy was coming to a climax – the Council of the EKD submitted a statement entitled “Schritte auf dem Weg des Friedens. Orientierungspunkte für Friedensethik und Friedenspolitik”<sup>vi</sup> (Steps on the way to peace. Pointers for peace ethics and peace policy). It was intended to combine the approaches in the East and the West. In the same year, the EKD synod confirmed “that all possible room for manoeuvre is being developed and exploited in order to deal with the causes of conflicts preventively and non-violently, so that the borderline case of military action really remains a borderline case”, and it called for a clear UN mandate for German Federal troops involved in UN peace keeping missions. The paradigm of just war was thus separated from non-violence as the primary means for avoiding conflicts and reacting to violent disputes: **non-violence as the first resort**. It had been understood that the doctrine of just war does not limit wars but that, on the contrary, its criteria can serve and have served to justify wars; therefore this doctrine should be set aside. To be consistent, a war can and must never be envisaged at the beginning of a dispute but, at most, at the end after examining all other possibilities.

This is also the line followed by the most recent EKD document on peace ethics of October 2001 entitled “Friedensethik in der Bewährung – eine Zwischenbilanz” (Peace ethics on trial – an interim evaluation). It examines the tasks for Germany, Europe, NATO and the United Nations in relation to classical and asymmetrical wars, crises and terrorism. It particularly emphasises civil conflict management and a preference for civil instruments in safeguarding peace. Humanitarian intervention is accepted as an example of a last resort provided provisions under international law and the UN mandates are observed. Looking back at the war in Kosovo, it refers to the task of the Church: should it work on ethical criteria that allow military force to be limited or should it deny any legitimation for military force? At the level of a fundamental ethical discussion, this interim evaluation considers that the controversy has not been and cannot be resolved.<sup>vii</sup> But precisely that is a thorn in the flesh of the conciliar process which wants to hear a call for a decision. The conciliar process focuses on the reconciliation which comes from God and makes peace possible without the use of force. Because the dividing wall of hostility has been torn down (Eph.2,14), the seed of peace and justice can sprout in everyday life. If this is your vision, you want clarity, unambiguousness and resoluteness. The disappointment of many people about the positions of the EKD is related to the fact that they are primarily Christian reflection on contemporary political stands (following the correct premise of not engaging in politics but making politics possible).

### 3. The doctrine of just peace

**This understanding of the doctrine of just peace provides an ethical perspective which embraces all areas of life and uses the key concept of non-violence as the “first resort” to bypass the fundamental question of Christians renouncing violence or indirectly to answer it negatively.**

Bishop Huber has stated, “The doctrine of just peace does not remove the significance of all the elements of the doctrine of a just war. On the contrary. Certain elements, such as the criteria for the traditional doctrine or the conception of *ultima ratio* (a last resort), can be reconstructed within the new paradigm and are thus conserved to this extent. It can therefore be said that there is no complete discontinuity between the two doctrines. Indeed, there are some grounds for understanding the doctrine of a just peace as a further

development of the doctrine of just war by systematically broadening the former's horizon and aiming at more agreement on how to understand the basic terms."<sup>viii</sup>

In this sense, one can also establish a link with a key sentence of the ecumenical ethics of peace which stems from the founding of the WCC at Amsterdam in 1948: **“War is contrary to the will of God.”** Although this is normally understood today as rejection, a witness against war and violence, it was used in those days in the context of trying to limit violence.

There can be no question about the continuing task of spelling out a consistent doctrine of just peace. The conciliar groups and the EKD agree to that extent. *“Si vis pacem para pacem”* is the maxim used by the peace researchers Senghaas and Senghaas-Knoblach as a deliberate variation on the classical idea, *“Si vis pacem para bellum”* – if you want peace, prepare for war. In its place, therefore, if you want peace, then prepare for it!

That then requires a sustainable peace policy as demanded and supported by the EKD and its member churches as well. The central concept, just peace, underlines the interdependence between peace, justice and the law, not as a description of a situation but as a dynamic process, a continuous programme. It aims to achieve the preferential option for the poor, for justice, for promoting and protecting life, by reducing and overcoming the causes of a lack of peace. In practice, it is a question of finding ways out of poverty, violence, unfreedom and destruction. The higher aims are to strengthen human rights and democracy as internationally valid norms, to strengthen civil society and the community of states within the United Nations and to bring about a worldwide internal policy and a policy to order the world as a whole. In case of conflict, it must be possible to act coherently even when there are different partial interests.

The conciliar process goes beyond these dimensions. Its thinking starts from “the one context of the reality of God and the world” (Bonhoeffer) in which something new and unexpected, the irrational and visionary force of the kingdom of God that is already dawning, has a changing and renewing effect. “For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life” (Rom.5,10). The cross is the sign that God renounces violence; it brings reconciliation and attracts people to Jesus’ non-violent way so that discipleship means sharing in this way (not *imitatio*). Understood like that, the church is a community of discipleship and witness which sets aside the rules of this world. Conciliar groups miss this emphatic connection between christology and ecclesiology in the statements of the established churches or the EKD and they do not tire in calling for it; they see the non-violent approach as the appropriate way to peace and justice according to the gospel.

#### **4. The political reality**

Looking at the situation today, we must recognise that the parameters for peace ethics changed completely with the political changes of 1989/90. The benefit added by disarmament, détente and development policy should have been peace in security. But, following the end of the confrontation between the blocs, what evolved was not a peace dividend or an international order of peace; on the contrary, the predominant outcome was a large number of violent conflicts over ethnic and religious issues.

When the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Ecumenical Assembly was held in 1997 at Graz, the concern was Europe’s search for reconciliation – reconciliation after the collapse of socialism, after the end of the cold war, after the wars and the disintegration of ex-Yugoslavia. **What**

**does safeguarding peace and establishing justice mean in a globalised world that is suffering under turbo-capitalism and now has only one superpower whose strategy is perceived as unilateral?** That is still the question for European churches and denominations today. They are still challenged to be peace makers and have to face the question whether they are able to get people to listen to this urgent question. A unilateral policy of interests that uses military power can only prejudice the goal of a global community of nations based on justice.

The wars in the Gulf region, in the Balkans and against Iraq have contributed to a new justification of the logic of war. German soldiers were involved in the Kosovo war under the heading of “humanitarian intervention”, and this was approved by the EKD and the German Bishops’ Conference whereas the WCC and the Vatican voiced their disapproval. Later on, the chairman of the EKD Council at that time, Manfred Kock, revised the EKD position and admitted that this war should not have been conducted. The civilian infrastructure had been bombarded in contravention of recognised international law. NATO had made air attacks on Yugoslavia from a great height without a mandate from the UN Security Council; it was only later that mass expulsions and genocide ensued.

Following September 11<sup>th</sup>, it was the war in Afghanistan and the Iraq war, namely the war on terrorism and the preventive strike, which gave rise to widespread debate on the legitimacy of wars and the use of military force. The arguments of the large churches against the Iraq war were directed particularly to the lack of an authorisation under international law and to the consequences for the civilian population and the region as a whole. The dispute over terrorist violence is mainly concerned about its supposed religious justification. Therefore, in addition to defining the church’s stand between “first resort” and “last resort”, between bellicism and pacificism, there is also the question of the relation between religion and force; we need a new, binding position for inter-religious dialogue.

We are experiencing a militarization of politics in Europe as well. In the framework of the common foreign and security policy, sanctioned by the EU constitutional treaty, a military agency is being planned for whose operational activities a mobile unit of 60,000 soldiers is to be created. There is still no clear outline for the peace agency which is also being planned. The EU’s goal of promoting peace is based on the concept of military strength and one cannot deny a readiness to use it.

## **5. The ecumenical challenge: overcoming violence**

At the beginning, I mentioned the conciliar process and the ecumenical movement as related points of reference which, in my view, have helped to develop and clarify the understanding of peace and justice in our German churches. Special significance must be attributed to the Decade to Overcome Violence which was resolved by the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC for the years 2001-2010. Its aim is “By means of practical steps towards overcoming violence at the various levels of society, to build up a culture of peace and encourage the churches to play a leading role in the use of non-violent means such as prevention, mediation, intervention and education”.<sup>ix</sup> Hence the intention and task of the decade is to transpose the preferential option for non-violence formulated in the conciliar process from the realm of ethical definition to the field of concrete, purposeful, committed action. In so doing, it is as much a question of concrete, local steps as of international campaigns – child soldiers, small arms, trafficking in human beings - in the awareness that such measures can promote the formation of an alternative culture of peace and reconciliation.

These matters require one to take sides. The guiding principles for working for a just peace are justice and solidarity; action must be inspired by respect for human dignity and the highest priority is to promote the welfare of all. The work done on conflicts should start preventively wherever possible, namely at a stage before they become violent.

In the context of the conciliar process, the EKD and the ACK (National Council of Churches)<sup>x</sup>, we evaluated the decade in April 2005 and identified seven important issues.

**1. Launching the ecumenical process “Economy in the service of life”**

This takes up the debate on the neo-liberal economy – a special form of structural violence – in reference to the resolutions of the WARC at Accra in 2004, the Soesteborg Conference of 2002 and the AGAPE paper of the WCC. “A conception of growth and enrichment based entirely on the market is a profound contradiction of the biblical understanding of life and divides not only societies but also the body of Christ.”<sup>xi</sup> In other words, there is an alternative to globalization. A different world is possible.

**2. Peace policy aiming at non-violence and the prevention of violence**

This should be promoted rather than a policy which prefers reflection on criteria for the use of violence. In this context, the understanding of security needs to be clarified.<sup>xii</sup>

**3. Human rights, justice and international law must be strengthened**

In this case, it is finally a question of an ethics of international relations in relation to rights to security as basic rights without which other rights cannot be enjoyed, and of understanding the indivisibility of human rights.

**4. The churches should work on their own history of guilt**

They must face up to their own involvement in structures of violence (holocaust, colonialism, racism, etc.). “Today they are being tested to see whether they can fulfil their prophetic calling as watchmen in favour of the victims of violence.”<sup>xiii</sup>

**5. Inter-religious dialogue must be encouraged**

“Understanding for other religions enables us to discover common roots and differences as an enrichment and supportive force in our common life and inspires us to live as brothers and sisters.”<sup>xiv</sup>

**6. The sustainability of an ecological economy must be strengthened**

“The participation of individuals in an ecological economy reflects an image of the kingdom of God in which animals, plants, human beings, air and soil cooperate productively for the welfare of all...”<sup>xv</sup>

**7. The equal importance of and justice in relations between women and men become a reality**

This takes up demands from the first decade of “Churches in Solidarity with Women” and recalls the biblical promise of equal dignity for women and men.

I consider the Decade to Overcome Violence to be a **tremendous ecclesiological challenge**. The ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) and the practical task of making peace (Mt. 5:9) are set before us – as a public mandate and as characteristics of the church. Here there is still much to be done, whether in the form of exemplary projects like EAPPI in the Near East or in basic courses on conflict management deliberately sponsored by a church to provide training in methods and skills. Dealing non-violently with conflicts does not mean simply passive toleration of violence but actively

transforming aggression and confrontation into cooperation. **A church which does not only preach this outside but puts it into practice inside as well will also change.**

## 6. Conclusions

Just peace is a vision that is not just our idea. It is inspired by the promise of our faith. Over against experiences of a lack of peace and of violence, we relate justice as presented in the norms for human rights to establishing and safeguarding peace. Peace, justice and rights are indissolubly inter-related. We can come closer to them by means of non-violence. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King are witnesses to this.

“The renewal of the world can come only from the impossible. This ‘impossible’ is God’s blessing,” said Bonhoeffer. Our vision does not stand on feet of clay; it is a flexible stimulus for our path in discipleship. I believe and hope that, in the course of time, we in Germany can become clearer and more united when we have to face the challenges of non-violence and of refraining from violence along this path.

There are several points on which we need greater clarity.

(1) It will do us good if, despite the obvious need to make careful distinctions, we are able to regain the ability to say “yes” or “no” clearly. Coming to a public rejection of the spirit and logic of a phenomenon, as a result of the freedom of the gospel and according to its criteria, can set us free to discover alternatives.

(2) We need to reach agreement about the foundations and economic consequences of globalization if we wish to succeed in regaining a primacy for policy over the economy.

In the Scriptures, we find an economy of “enough for all”. In the dominant neo-liberal economic system that has no place. Therefore we must clarify openly and soon how we can speak on the dominant structural violence of the economy and on a process for running the economy in the service of life – this can range from appeals to public witness.

(3) The global power of the 60,000 transnational enterprises may be a moral issue for us but, first and foremost, it is a question of a violation of justice for the countries of the South.

Our churches which preach God’s option for the poor are challenged to be convincing: to show their readiness to share, their view of wealth, their way of handling the money entrusted to them, etc.

(4) How much and what form of security should protect a state? What are the limits to surveillance?

Safeguarding the “European fortress” is based on a concept that wishes to exclude migrants and refugees and to defend the resources of the EU against the homeless and the have-nots. A security of “enough for all”, on the other hand, relies on people participating in the good things of life. So it will analyse the threats to security and work to remove their causes. We are called to defend this understanding of security openly.

(5) The *ultima ratio* (last resort) of using military force is a lasting challenge to our churches. It cannot be right to approve of force because there seems to be no alternative; on the contrary, practical alternatives must be tried in a committed way. We must stand for the effort to use the instruments of non-violent conflict management.

Other points could be added to this list. In each case, it is a question of putting forward a Christian alternative and a Protestant position to change things, pointing to the limitations of unpeaceful means and of violence, of injustice and destruction, despite appearances and against the trend. Our witness is needed. We are not the only ones but it also depends on our entering into concrete conflicts and voicing and moulding the yearning for healing and reconciliation.

How can a binding plan be derived from these reflections? We need to exchange opinions in the context of our fellowship of churches. There is an ecumenical insight that “paper doesn’t work”; at least, paper doesn’t work on its own. Perhaps we need a conference on the subject every five years; perhaps we shall dare to adopt a bilateral stand during these days here. We can undertake our evaluation of the Decade to Overcome Violence as mutual accountability, and exchange living letters between our churches in order to learn how others see things and be able to follow our paths here and there more consistently. The path that lies before us is a challenge; it challenges our belief that another kind of world is possible in this world. We believe the world can be changed because we have long since experienced it; because God has the last word for it and in it; because God repeatedly gives glimpses of the new world in this world’s transitoriness and beauty.

“Another World Is Possible”:  
The Vocation of a Just Peace Church in a Globalized World

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“The word of the love of God for the world sets the congregation in a relation of responsibility with regard to the world. . . . Whenever this responsibility is denied, Christ, too, is denied; for it is the responsibility which answers to the love of God for the world.”<sup>1</sup>

With this claim, from a section entitled “On the Possibility of the Word of the Church to the World,” Bonhoeffer establishes what he saw as a necessary movement from grace to ethics – and, in this case, the ethics of the church’s public witness. The larger chapter from which these words are taken, probably written in Tegel Prison at the close of his life, offers a penetrating insight into his vision not merely for the church’s responsibilities but for its renewal.<sup>11</sup> But this was light rising from the darkness: he admitted with blunt honesty that “the social, economic, political, and other problems of the world have become too much for us; all the available offers of ideological and practical solutions are inadequate.” He went on to describe the human plight as being like “a car. . . caught in the mud: the wheels are rotating at the highest possible speed, but they still cannot draw the car clear,” and admitted that the church had “so far failed to master the social, economic, political, sexual, and educational problems” such that she had compromised the church’s public witness and turned many of the faithful away. He longed for a new evangelical and ecumenical commitment to address the public crises of the times so that the church might “fulfill her mission and restore her [lost] authority.”<sup>12</sup>

It is this desire to set the church “in a relation of responsibility with regard to the world” that lies at the heart of the pronouncement declaring the United Church of Christ to be a “just peace church,” passed at the Fifteenth General Synod (1985). With this declaration, we publicly confessed that we intended to become “a countervailing power to those forces that divide, that perpetuate human enmity and injustice, and that destroy,” and committed ourselves to living our vocation as a church opposed to war and violence, in pursuit of “the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence.”<sup>3</sup> We confessed that we were committing ourselves, in the posture of our Reformed heritage, to bringing faith into lively engagement with public matters, and with the concerns of the state. We were affirming, with Bonhoeffer, our conviction embodies our “answer to God’s love for the world.”

This pronouncement, which formalized the preparatory work at the two preceding synods, had much in common with our commitment at the Thirteenth General Synod (1981) to enter into *Kirchengemeinschaft* with the Evangelische Kirche der Union (EKU). Key leaders within the United Church of Christ saw the matter of the church’s commitment to justice and peace, and its mission to deepen our ecumenical life, as expressions of the same truth: that we were called by Jesus to unity of faith and life. As churches sharing a common heritage, we committed ourselves to living into a common future, one shaped by an east/west bond that bridged the Iron Curtain. This “full communion” partnership took shape in a world destabilized by the threat of nuclear arms, with Europe at the heart of this volatile political contest. A zone of intimidation and fear ran between western democracies, on the one hand – the United States and its democratic allies in “Old Europe” – and countries aligned with the former Soviet bloc, on the other.

Since that time, much has changed in our nations, and in the world. Together we witnessed the “Autumn Revolution” in 1989, with the opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November and the rapid dissolving of geographic and political boundaries that had hardened through more than four decades of the Cold War. Together we listened to the triumphant music of Beethoven’s great Ninth Symphony, performed at the Brandenburg Gate by the Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of the American conductor Leonard Bernstein, and heard it as an acclaim of freedom. Together we hoped that these changes would usher in a more peaceable world order than the post-war generations had known. Together we knew that the friendship and communion of *Kirchengemeinschaft* constituted an important expression of this peace-making work.

But sixteen years after “die Wende,” and despite such dramatic changes, much remains the same, with destabilizing variations on familiar themes of this “old” world order continuing to threaten the prospect of global peace. These include:

- the ongoing threat of nuclear weapons and the fear of their deployment in regional conflicts.<sup>4</sup>
- the withdrawal of the US, under the Bush administration, from the 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, even amid widespread international calls for its strengthening;
- the looming shadow of the environmental crisis, with increased demands for fossil fuels pressuring oil production and distribution and the specter of further “oil wars” on the horizon;
- scarcity of water resources as a significant and growing threat to regional peace and security in large parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia;
- and, rising levels of violence exacerbated by increasing poverty, racial and ethnic tensions, pressures from varieties of religious conflicts, and the increase in political movements and paramilitary groups linked to religious and ideological fundamentalism.

During this period, the US has also emerged as an unrivalled super power. Charles Kupchan has suggested that this “new American map of the world” is inherently unstable not because of the singularity of US power but because the stark realism driving the current administration is not tempered by larger commitments to internationalism and to a shared vision of peace: “Realism can and must be tempered by idealism,” he asserts, by which he means “belief in the potential for reason, law, values, and institutions to tame material power – if the future is to be less bloody than the past.”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> But such idealism in the current US administration and Congress is in short supply, outpaced by a political climate shaped by consumer-oriented goals and distracted by an electorate dominated by patriotism and largely contemptuous of genuine engagement with the necessary complexities of international affairs and domestic policy. Catherine Keller suggests that the current political landscape in our country is marked by a “messianic imperialism [that has] accelerated into full gallop,” with the threat of terror used as “endless pretext for global military hegemony and preemption – and thus for an empire garbed in the messianic whiteness of Christiamerican rightness.”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

Events of the last four years, since 9/11, support such concerns:

- the invasion of Iraq without the support of the United Nations and in defiance of the majority of our European allies, a preemptive war justified by the pressure of alleged “weapons of mass destruction” (WMDs) which proved to be based on faulty or fabricated intelligence;
- the ongoing threat of further unprovoked military actions against nations belonging to an “axis of evil” – to recall President Bush’s favorite metaphor;
- the continued detaining of political prisoners without indictment or charges at Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere, in denial of international conventions and US law;
- the justification and use of torture in the so-called “war against terror,” defended on the grounds that suspected terrorists are not covered by the Geneva Conventions,<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> the United Nations Convention Against Torture,<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> or current US military policy as clarified in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>
- the significant abrogation of civil rights and the constitutional right to privacy, under provisions of the US Patriot Act.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

The injustice of such circumstances prompted Noam Chomsky, one of sharpest critics of the US quest for global dominance, to suggest recently that there are at present

. . . two trajectories in current history: one aiming toward hegemony, acting rationally within a lunatic doctrinal framework as it threatens survival; the other dedicated to the belief that ‘another world is possible,’ in the words that animate the World Social Forum, challenging the reigning ideological system and seeking to create constructive alternatives of thought, action, and institutions. Which trajectory will dominate, no one can foretell. The pattern is familiar throughout history; a crucial difference today is that the stakes are higher.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

Global politics in this era of a presumptive American hegemony become even more complicated by the threat this poses to international law and justice. But the economics of this new order are driven by other factors as well, above all the new market realities of globalization. In the web of fiscal interdependence characterizing this new Globalism,

economic policies are no longer driven primarily by nations and their politics. Robert Kaplan describes this the destabilizing pressures of the new world order in a recent essay, “Was Democracy Just a Moment?”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> In this piece, he recognizes that global economic forces now lie primarily in the hands of transnational corporations and international markets, and are only secondarily dictated by the most powerful nations and their structures of power. Thus, for example, among the world’s ranked economies, more than half of the leading one hundred belong to transnational corporations; the economic activities of the largest five hundred corporations account for 70 percent of world trade. As he suggests:

*Corporations are like the feudal domains that evolved into nation-states; they are nothing less than the vanguard of a new Darwinian organization of politics. Because they are in the forefront of real globalization while the overwhelming majority of the world's inhabitants are still rooted in local terrain, corporations will be free for a few decades to leave behind the social and environmental wreckage they create – abruptly closing a factory here in order to open an unsafe facility with a cheaper work force there.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>*

All of this reminds us that attention to the policies and politics of nations may miss, in other words, the most dominant and pervasive power in this globalized economy: viz., the role of transnational corporations.

What, then, is the place of a “just peace” – or, as some have suggested, of a “justice-seeking in order to be a peace-making” – church in a world as complex as ours? How does the gospel compel us to bear witness to what Jesus referred to as the “reign of God” (βασιλεία θεου), that strangely inverted “world order” in which the first are often last and the last first, the poor have “good news” preached to them, and the oppressed are set free (Lk. 4: 18 – 19; cf. Isa. 61: 1 – 2, 58: 6)? How does such a life envision, in the language of the World Social Forum, that “another world is possible?”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> These are questions before us as we consider the matter of our church’s commitment to living out our vocation as a just peace church. They call us to interpret with sober realism the complex global realities governing our lives – not only at the national level, but also in our towns and cities, in factories and in the high-tech industry, in the “rust belt” of the old industrial Midwest and in rural areas pressured by the policies of agro-business. They compel us to bear witness to a different “idealism” over against the realistic logic of the market, which sets corporate profit and the value of stock portfolios above environmental concerns regarding the “integrity of creation” or the vulnerabilities of the workforce.

What does this vocation call us *toward*? I suggest that our willingness to live into this identity, to invigorate this vocation, and to share this witness in the communion of our churches, depends on three distinct but related commitments. First, this vocation calls us *to be a church that questions any peace without justice*, particularly when arguments for “peace and security” (cf. 1 Thes. 5: 3) are used to truncate or abrogate a state’s commitment to justice. Second, this vocation calls us *to imagine that another world is possible*, and to challenge any “messianic imperialism” that places the state above the rule of law and the demands of justice. And, third, this vocation calls us *to live an ethic of solidarity*, a way of living with others that identifies our future as joined to the most vulnerable in our communities and in our world – in a word, a way of being church that honors our care for the “one household” (οικοῦμενη) that constitutes this earth. This is the foundation for an “ecumenism” committed to the responsibilities of “just peace.”

*A church that questions any peace without justice*

Ignatius of Antioch, writing at the end of the first century of the Common Era, declared that Jesus was “God’s word issuing from the silence.”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> This “word” became present in history, incarnate in the form of human life, through Jesus’ witness to the claims of God’s justice. Such acts embody this “word” of divine love in and for the world, refusing the silences that otherwise mute its truth. A just peace church, following Jesus’ way, will refuse the finality of any such silence. It seeks to *become* the word that still speaks by opposing the power of violence in society. The actions of such a church arise from a heart that joins its life to the cry for justice that often arises from the suffering crucible of silence. It will “call sin by its name,” as Bonhoeffer put it, particularly those sins that disrupt what he called “the outward justice” that government is meant to defend.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

Such actions do not presume to enforce upon the state a Christian ethic. Rather, they insist that “God so loved *the world*,” and that every person made in the divine image – and, indeed every creature and the earth itself – is inherently precious. This respect establishes the minimal threshold upon which a free and just society stands. Our commitment to “just peace” is thus not simply a political strategy. It expresses, rather, a deeper theological affirmation that guides our way of living in society and relating to the state.

A church committed to “just peace” will question any peace for some that tolerates injustice for others. Since the events of 9/11, matters of this “outward justice” have often taken a back seat in the US to covert and illegal actions defended because they protect domestic security and maintain US global dominance. *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis recently noted that the steady erosion of civil rights under the pressure of arguments for peace and “homeland security” have created a political atmosphere in which “morality is outweighed by necessity.”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> Andrew Bacevich has also suggested that the American struggle for international hegemony articulates “the imperative of America’s mission as the vanguard of history, transforming the global order and, in doing so, perpetuating its own dominance [guided by] the imperative of military supremacy, maintained in perpetuity and projected globally.”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> In such a climate, the vocation of a “just peace church” calls into question political rhetoric, military strategies, and economic policies that violate the human rights of all persons within its jurisdiction. This vocation also guides congregations – the ἐκκλησία, or “assemblies,” those “communal harbingers of new empires to come”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> – in their attempt to receive the word of God such that this reception sets them “in a relationship of responsibility with regard to the world” (Bonhoeffer). It will call into question the presumption that faithfulness is a private matter between God and the self. It will call Christians to discern how they are to live as responsible stewards of the gospel in their communities, and how they are to make professional decisions that may reach far beyond the immediacies of their workplace.

*A church that imagines a just peace*

Leave your windows and go out, people of the world,  
go into the streets, go into the fields, go into the woods  
and along the streams. Go together, go alone.  
Say no to the Lords of War which is Money  
which is Fire. Say no by saying yes  
to the air, to the earth, to the trees,

yes to the grasses, to the rivers, to the birds  
and the animals and every living thing, yes  
to the small houses, yes to the children. Yes.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

It is the role of the questioner to say “No!” to the Lords of War. But this is only the first impulse of those seeking justice. The second beckons us toward an affirmation, calling us from the “No!” of indignation to the “Yes!” that affirms life – and particularly at the places of human vulnerability. Such a call invites others to join us in this work, asking not “Why not?” but rather “What now?” Together we wonder, with faith in the possibility of “a new creation,” whether another way, a different world, is possible. We imagine a freedom stronger than the strategies of Money and Fire. And we move from questioning toward constructing, living out our own reconciliation by extending its hope to others (see 2 Cor. 5: 18 – 20). We do so knowing that the state, in times of uncertainty and in times of confidence, often lacks the courage of an imagination for justice and too often tends toward conserving a peace that upholds existing structures of power and privilege. The imaginative vision necessary for genuine leadership is too seldom the work of the state – since, as Bonhoeffer suggests, “government cannot itself produce life or values; it is not [in this sense] creative.”<sup>ii,iii</sup> In this void, the church serves a critical function in insisting that the conditions of justice are necessary for a true and sustainable peace.

It is this witness in the state’s darkness to the light of Christ that grounds the church’s confession, awakening us to a vocation that points us again and again toward what the apostle Paul simply calls “the new creation”<sup>ii,iii</sup> – which is to say, the act of envisioning, beyond the duties of the law, the possibility of a political reconciliation. Our yearning for such change recognizes that faith calls us in community toward a social vision not driven by the deadly logic of vengeance and retribution. Such an imagination lifts the church, in its aspiration for a just peace, from criticism toward the needed work of reconstruction. As theologian Catherine Keller properly warns, Christians cannot and should not abide “a theopolitics that chokes the spirit, that, however presumably progressive, cultivates a condition of chronic moral indignation.”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

This vocation calls us into the divine imagination which we call love – a love which invites us to taste of the life we are invited to offer others. On the strength of this extravagant love, the church cannot look away from the face of unjust suffering and violence; it asks, as a matter of love, whether this is “the only world possible.” It looks unflinchingly at the realities of the world – disclosing, in the words of UCC theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, “the human situation in its starkness,” but turns from this assessment to affirm “the framework of meaning which the gospel discloses”: love as gift (“Gabe”) and responsibility (“Aufgabe”).<sup>i,ii,iii</sup> This is the theological insight that grounds the church’s commitment to just peace. Its origin is in a radical act of receptivity; its continuance is in the imagination that sees this gift as an offering we have received but which is now meant primarily for others. It is this movement that inspires Paul’s claim that the divine light arises *out of darkness* (cf. 2 Cor. 4: 6): our imagining that “another world is possible” derives from the gift we discover in the shadows of injustice and the night of sin. It is the radical “Yes!” of God’s love for the world that whets our appetite for justice. This is the source of the imagination that calls us into the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5: 18).

#### *The church that lives an ethic of solidarity*

The commitment to being a just peace church is not primarily a political strategy or a call of duty. It is a response to the gift of Jesus, the gift of life poured out in faithfulness to love. A church that questions injustices, and dares to dream that “another world is

possible,” is not yet a just peace – or, rather, a just-peace-making – church. For this to find visible form, for the church to incarnate its prayer that God’s reign might come “*on earth as in heaven*,” questioning and imagining are but the prelude to real commitments in the world we inhabit. A church that seeks to live by a vision of the “oikoumene” in our day, that seeks to form communities of solidarity across the boundaries of nation, race, and ethnicity, will commit itself to living by a different creed than that of a peace secured through domination and violence. Such communities will bear witness to the common “household” we share in this world with all others – our friends and our opponents; our allies and our enemies. We will be willing to explore what it means to live in solidarity with the most vulnerable persons, nations, and creatures of this world. We will recognize our complicity in the global disorder in which the security and provision of the affluent nations and peoples come more or less directly at the expense of the poor. We will seek to live out Jesus’ mandate, in local and global terms, when he reminded his followers that “just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” (cf. Mt. 25: 4). We will recognize, with Bonhoeffer, that whenever we ignore our responsibility to others in this world, whenever we fail to see our solidarity with those who are suffering, we are not only failing in our moral duty. We are denying Christ.

A church that lives an ethic of solidarity will look beyond the needs of particular nations and their aspirations to build empires, and ask rather about what Jesus simply called the “kingdom of God” (*basileia theou*). It will dare to take him at his word, despite the political foolishness of such a stance, when he admonished his followers to “love your enemies.” A church living out this ethic of solidarity will ask what it means in global terms, to take seriously Jesus’ call that we should “lend, expecting nothing in return” (see Lk. 6: 27 – 36). Such a church will live out its life as a vivid and practical counterpoint to the dominant logic of the global market. It will imagine, with Jesus, the possibility of a different “oikoumene” than what this market naturally expresses, one in which the “last” are granted the privilege of divine favor and earthly flourishing – and others join to work with them to realize such an order.

#### *When Changing Directions Is Not Enough*

In one of Franz Kafka’s strange and provocative parables, published posthumously in 1931, we sense the stifling atmosphere of political peril facing “old Europe” during the unstable years following the First World War:

“Alas,” said the mouse, “the world is growing smaller every day. At the beginning it was so big that I was afraid, I kept running and running, and I was glad when at last I saw walls far away to the right and left, but these long walls have narrowed so quickly that I am in the last chamber already, and there in the corner stands the trap that I must run into.” “You only need to change your direction,” said the cat, and ate it up.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

The political circumstances of our day are vastly different, of course, than those Kafka faced. But this fable of entrapment captures something of the desperation that seems to be deepening in the era of Globalism: the cat’s taunt rings with a tragic irony of misguided power, and the mouse’s fate echoes the unheard cries for justice in our own day. Clearly, finding a way of building a more equitable world order, and learning to live peaceably with those who threaten us, will not be possible simply by “changing our direction.”

The realities of the world we inhabit, shaped as these are by the very political structures we have constructed, are inherently unstable: viz., a world dominated by one superpower which has taken upon itself the singular ambitions of empire; an economy destabilized in the new Globalism, with already staggering disparities between the affluent and the poor becoming even more exaggerated; and, a transnational political horizon unsettled by escalating violence and the growing fear of terror. And, just as clearly, the presumption to bring about some change in such pressures seems an immense if not also impossible dream. Working for change given the momentum of these crises will require something more than strategies, plans, and pronouncements. It will require that we learn to work toward structural changes that enhance the life of the most vulnerable, and find the courage and will to curtail economic and political forces that threaten the existence of the poor. The effectiveness of such work depends on forming communities committed to a deeper mutuality of life such as finds expression through the communion of *Kirchengemeinschaft*. Through such real relationships, we begin – in the words of Bonhoeffer – to “make room for the gospel in the world.”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

Finding a way of living peaceably in our world will not be possible simply by “changing our direction.” The very structures of the world we have made – a world dominated by ambitions of empire, destabilized in the new Globalism by already staggering and now increasing disparities between the affluent and the poor, and unsettled by the fear of terror and violence – require something more than this. They compel us to work toward structural changes that enhance the life of the most vulnerable, and curtail economic and political forces that threaten the existence of the poor. They call us into new forms of transnational partnerships, such as the communion of *Kirchengemeinschaft*. They remind us – in the words of Bonhoeffer – to “make room for the gospel in the world.”<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

Our work toward realizing our vocation as a just peace church is not the end of our journey. It is an ongoing witness to the gospel, a path we have chosen to journey together as a church in faith. It is one means by which we come to know, and embody, the presence of Christ in our world. It is a responsibility, as Bonhoeffer aptly put it, which “answers to God’s love of the world.” It is not simply a desperate attempt to “change direction.” It is, rather, a commitment to imagine that “another world is possible,” and a hope to join in communion with others who also seek to live into that vision. It is the invitation that summons us to walk together in the way of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. by Eberhard Bethge (ET: New York, 1955), 357.

<sup>2</sup> Eberhard Bethge suggests this, at any rate; see “Editor’s Preface,” in *Ethics*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ethics*, 354.

<sup>4</sup> For the full text of the “Just Peace Pronouncement,” see <http://www.ucc.org/justice/jpc.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, “ElBaradei Given Nobel Peace Prize,” in *Boston Globe* (Saturday, October 8, 2005), A6.

Charles Kupchan, *The End of the American Era. US Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 2002), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Keller, *God and Power. Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis, MN, 2004), 37, 105.

<sup>8</sup> For this documentation, see: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/91.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> For this documentation, see: <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cat.html>

<sup>10</sup> For this documentation, see:

<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ucmj.htm#SUBCHAPTER%20II.%20APPREHENSION%20AND%20RESTRAINT>

<sup>11</sup> The documentation for this congressional act can be found at: <http://www.epic.org/privacy/terrorism/hr3162.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival. America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (New York, 2003), 236.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Kaplan, “Was Democracy Just a Moment?” *The Atlantic Monthly* (December, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> For the full text of this piece, see

[http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Democracy/DemocracyMoment\\_AM.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Democracy/DemocracyMoment_AM.html).

<sup>15</sup> For information on the World Social Forum, see: <http://www.wsfindia.org/>. The World Social Forum is not an organisation, not a united front platform, but "...an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a society centred on the human person". (From the WSF Charter of Principles). The World Social Forum is not an organisation, not a united front platform, but "...an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a society centred on the human person". (From the WSF Charter of Principles)

<sup>16</sup> See Ignatius of Antioch, "To the Magnesians" 8. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 350.

<sup>18</sup> See "Guantánamo's Long Shadow," in an op/ed piece in the *New York Times* (June 21, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 215ff; author's emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> See Steve Patterson, "The Relationship of the Church to the State: A Theological Perspective," *21rism. A Theological Forum for the United Church of Christ* 19 (2004): 6.

<sup>22</sup> Wendell Berry, "Look Out," *Given. Poems* (Washington, DC, 2005), 124.

<sup>23</sup> *Ethics*, 210.

<sup>24</sup> I.e., καινη κτίσις; see, for example, Gal. 6. 15 and 2 Cor. 5. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Catherine Keller, *God and Power. Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis, MN, 2005), 136.

<sup>26</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Problem of Justice and the Power of Love," in *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ*, vol. 7: *United and Uniting* (Cleveland, OH, 2005), 77.

<sup>27</sup> Franz Kafka, "A Little Fable," in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York, 1946), 445. First published in *Beim Bau der chinesischen Maue. Ungedruckte Erzählungen und Prosa aus Dem Nachlass*, ed. Max Broad and Hans Joachim Schoeps (Berlin, 1931).

<sup>28</sup> *Ethics*, 357.

<sup>29</sup> *Ethics*, 357.

## **Declaration: 25 Years of Kirchengemeinschaft**

### **United Church of Christ (UCC) and Union Evangelischer Kirchen (UEK)**

**Berlin, 13.11.2005**

#### **Our Current Context**

(1) Delegates from the UEK and the UCC gathered 11-13 November, 2005 in Berlin, Germany to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Kirchengemeinschaft, a covenant in mission and faith, rooted in our common call, heritage and commitments to justice and peace. We remember with gratitude this fellowship which bridged the world's political and economic poles divided by the Berlin Wall. This communion has striven over the years to overcome human separation and to promote church unity.

(2) Kirchengemeinschaft is a model of ecumenical fellowship, cooperation and worship. It is a special gift in a context of other forms of international and ecumenical unity. We reaffirm our commitments:

- UEK Churches belong simultaneously to the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) based on the Leuenberg Agreement;
- the UCC is a partner in "A Formula of Agreement," a relationship between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and three Reformed Churches (the UCC, the Presbyterian Church [USA], and the Reformed Church in America).

We are grateful for the growing degree of unity and fellowship among Protestant churches. Within the framework of the EKD, the communion of EKD has grown into that of UEK. At its 24<sup>th</sup> General Synod (2003), the UCC affirmed its historical relationship with the EKD and expressed its readiness to continue that relationship of Kirchengemeinschaft with the UEK within the EKD. We are thankful that the Evangelical Churches in Baden and in Hesse and Nassau have already committed themselves to active participation. We invite the other churches to join in this life and work.

(3) Set in the context of these ecumenical achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and always conscious of our global context in which we strive for ever broader Christian unity, our relationship of full communion has included personal encounter, common theological work, congregational partnerships, Conference and Landeskirchen exchanges, diaconal consultations, prayer, common witness and the sharing of resources.

(4) Shortly after our 2001 consultation, the reactions to the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> ushered in a new US policy of preemption leading to a war in Iraq and the practice of diplomatic isolationism. During this period, the crisis of global economic injustice has intensified. All of this has escalated the spiral of violence affecting the most vulnerable in our world. In this context we reaffirm our commitments to justice and peace.

#### **Just Peace**

(5) The focus of our consultation explored what it means to be a church of peace makers who are hungering and thirsting for justice (Mt. 5: 6 and 9). We shared our visions of working together, in our separate societies and within the communion of Kirchengemeinschaft, for a peace rooted in justice. We expressed our desire to become ever more vigilant in securing this justice for the most vulnerable in our societies as the necessary condition of a true and lasting peace. We recognized the church's vocation to voice the importance of this way of life for the sake of all peoples as indeed for the integrity of creation itself. We remembered the history of those who bore witness to the hope of this peace during the period of the Cold War, in East and West Germany and in the US, and worked to "beat swords into ploughshares" (Mic. 4: 3). We explored what it means to be ambassadors for Christ who gives us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5: 18-20), particularly in a world of escalating violence. We agreed that Kirchengemeinschaft calls us into a mission that resists every unnecessary recourse to force and opposes every idolatry, including militarism in every form. We agreed to continue seeking to be communities working to overcome violence, which calls us to strive for an appropriate lifestyle within our churches, modeling an economy of enough for all which will mean scarcity for none.

#### **Affirmation and Invitation**

(6) Ecumenical relationships are never formed for their own sake but for the sake of the mission and ministry of the church. In partnerships and exchanges through the past 25 years, members of the UCC and the UEK have discovered deeper expressions of service and witness in a broken world. We have learned from each other's diaconal ministries and educational programs. We have been challenged to hear the voice of the marginalized and to seek justice and peace for all of God's creation. We have been nurtured and inspired by each other's ministry of music. We have seen hope in the eyes of each other's youth and wisdom in the eyes of our elders.

(7) We believe that Jesus Christ calls us ever more urgently to form and sustain ecumenical relationships within and beyond our national borders. We urge leaders in regional and local settings to nurture expressions of our full communion and give witness to Christ's prayer that we all may be one (Jn. 17: 21). We call on the national leadership of both churches to maintain their strong commitment to Kirchengemeinschaft because in it we have known the courage to overcome bonds of injustice and to confess that another world is possible.

(8) As we look to the future, we propose that we undertake the following joint projects meant to deepen our communion:

- (a) Extending the experience of Kirchengemeinschaft to include more regional churches and local congregations, engaging also the structural changes within the EKD;
- (b) increasing the participation of youth and young adults in our common work;
- (c) continuing diaconal consultations;
- (d) challenging each other to more faithful stewardship;
- (e) sharing in interfaith dialogue and cooperation;
- (f) engaging in theological reflection and continuing dialogue on key challenges of our time. In the area of peace with justice these may include
  - racism and sexism;
  - issues related to migration and multi-cultural realities;
  - sexual identity;

- the environment;
- the economy;
- all forms of violence.

(9) Kirchengemeinschaft is a gift from God and an invitation that calls us to common vocation in mission and ministry. We pray for God's blessings upon our unity in Christ.

The UCC-UEK Working Group, 2005

Frederick Trost, Chr. and Convener, Middleton, Wisconsin  
Mark Burrows, Vice Chr., Newton Centre, Massachusetts  
Lydia Veliko, Secretary, Cleveland, Ohio  
Richard Edens, Chapel Hill, North Carolina  
Robert Hedeman, Evansville, Indiana  
Randall Hyvonen, Spokane, Washington  
Andrew Lang, consultant, Cleveland, Ohio  
Vilma M. Machin-Vazquez, Cleveland, Ohio  
F. Russell Mitman, Collegeville, Pennsylvania  
Richard Olmsted, Acton, Massachusetts  
Stephen Patterson, Webster Groves, Missouri  
Tobias Schlingensiepen, Executive Committee, Topeka, Kansas  
Bryan Sickbert, Cleveland, Ohio  
Peter Makari, Area Executive, Middle East and Europe Office, WCM-UCC,  
Common Global Ministries Office, Cleveland, Ohio (staff to the Working Group)

### **Peace Must Be Dared**

There is no way to peace along the way of safety. For peace must be dared. It is the great venture. It can never be safe. Peace is the opposite of security. To demand guarantees is to mistrust, and this mistrust in turn brings forth war. To look for guarantees is to want to protect oneself. Peace means to give oneself altogether to the law of God, wanting no security, but in faith and obedience laying the destiny of the nations in the hand of Almighty God, not trying to direct it for selfish purposes. Battles are won, not with weapons, but with God. They are won where the way leads to the cross. Which of us can say he or she knows what it might mean for the world if one nation should meet the aggressor, not with weapons in hand, but praying, defenseless, and for that very reason protected by 'a bulwork never failing'?"

Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
1906-1945

### **The Impossible Dream**

... As a church we have prayed for peace, but there is no peace. As a church we have hoped for peace, but hope has died. As a church we have worked for peace, but a night seems coming where we can work no more. "Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod, Felt in the days when hope unborn had died. Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet Come to the place for which our mothers (and fathers) sighed?"

We confess that we have not labored enough for the Prince of Peace. We have not believed enough that he is our peace and the peace for all humankind. Give us the strength to become peacemakers in his name. Give us the will to dream the impossible dream that someday human blood will no longer flow in war.

Frederick Herzog  
1925-1995

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# UCC E WORKING GROUP K

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(\*) Translator's note: This is a free translation from the German and not the original quotation.

<sup>i</sup> On principle, my wishes for the future refer to the time when the UEK as an independent factor will no longer exist. The concrete form of the present structures and their place within the EKD will be determined in due time.

<sup>ii</sup> For one, it's been for eleven years that I have participated in many encounters between EKU/UEK and UCC. I am from Westphalia and therefore the regional partnership between Westphalia and the Ohio and Indiana/Kentucky Conferences had a formative influence on me. This personal experience had such a deep impact on my life, and the issue of Kirchengemeinschaft fascinated me so much that, in the context of a research project, I began to approach our two churches and Kirchengemeinschaft from an analytical perspective.

<sup>iii</sup> Resolution on Toward a Covenant in Mission and Faith: The United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Church of the Union, German Democratic Republic and Federal Church of the Union (General Synod 13, 1981).

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid. with reference to the EKU resolutions from 1980.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> In my presentation, I decided not to give you a chronological account. In your conference materials, you will find the historically oriented paper, presented by Reinhard Groscurth at our churches' consultation in Cleveland in 2001: "Kirchengemeinschaft between the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Church of the Union – a short summary of events and developments." As head of the Ecumenical Department of the western part of the EKU, Reinhard Groscurth shaped and assisted Kirchengemeinschaft relations for over 20 years. There are only very, very few people, who have as good an overview of events and developments as he does. Here in our midst, two other such people I have in mind are Christa Gregel and Frederick Trost.

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In the following, I will refer to some historical data in consciously adding to Reinhard Groscurth's paper. I will offer you my own vision of the history and meaning of Kirchengemeinschaft, including some practical suggestions for our future work.

<sup>viii</sup> Resolution on Toward a Covenant in Mission and Faith: The United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Church of the Union, German Democratic Republic and Federal Church of the Union (GS 13, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> Final English version of the EKU resolution (letter from Reinhard Groscurth to Avery Post, July 18, 1980; EZA 8/91/1989)

x Ibid.

<sup>xi</sup> Toward the Task of Sound Teaching in the United Church of Christ, ed. Office for Church Life and Leadership of the UCC, 1977 (EZA 108/92/1343). The document was also widely received in the EKU.

<sup>xii</sup> Often Germans in the USA have to explain what the church tax is and that nevertheless we are not a state church. And North American ministers are often asked, if their sermons were in any way influenced by the fact that they were financially depending on their congregations.

<sup>xiii</sup> Visitors from the US react with great concern to the poor attendance at German worship services. They ask us how much longer we mean to rely on the church tax system. In UCC congregations, an open discourse on some specific issues sometimes starts only when guests from the EKU respond to resolutions of the General Synod with interest and enthusiasm after those same resolutions have been met with rejection in the UCC congregations.

<sup>xiv</sup> The UCC-EKU Working Group of the UCC and the UCC-Subcommittee in the Eastern part of the EKU.

<sup>xv</sup> Numerous church-to-church partnerships were established. Choirs toured the partner Conference or the partner Landeskirche. There are exchange programs for different occupational and age groups. Several institutions cooperate closely, like our Pastorkollegs with the corresponding institutions of the Conferences. Individuals travel as well as groups. Working groups were formed on different levels. There is no way anymore to survey the personal contacts that have developed. And is not an exception anymore for private guests to travel to the partner church for a wedding or a similar event.

<sup>xvi</sup> For example I could imagine fund raising for consultations with a clear thematic concept. We will have to work towards greater publicity and face the challenge of concretizing our visions of joint projects in a way that their objectives are clear and can be evaluated. Then we could apply for support through foundations. I am also optimistic that specifically at the grassroots of our churches, there will be people willing to support specific projects, for example the Young Ambassadors.

<sup>xvii</sup> Title of the "Reformvorlage 2000" of the Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen.

<sup>xviii</sup> The Westphalian Praeses Alfred Buss spoke in regard of the future of the church of "Aufbruch statt Abbruch" ("awakening instead of demolition") (Unsere Kirche Nr. 11; March 7-15, 2004, 10).

<sup>xix</sup> Frederick Herzog used the expression "God-Walk" as an opposite to "God-Talk".

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<sup>xx</sup> In these past weeks, I have once more read the papers and final resolutions of former EKU-UCC consultations. Theologically I completely agree with them. And yet, I think that trying to make worldwide challenges the central objective of Kirchengemeinschaft endeavours is aiming very high. Please, don't misunderstand: I do consider it inevitable and in accordance with our mission that the churches take a clear position on issues like the "troubling burden of poverty (...) within and beyond our societies", "the continuing ecological crisis" or "the enduring idolatry of racism" (to name just a few examples from the final resolution of the Cleveland Consultation in 2001). I think it is right for us as Kirchengemeinschaft to try to "bear witness to God's mission of justice" in relation to these burning issues, but I think it can only succeed in small, practical examples.

<sup>xxi</sup> Affirmation of Kirchengemeinschaft with the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK) in Germany (General Synod 24, 2003).

<sup>xxii</sup> Resolution on Toward a Covenant in Mission and Faith: The United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Church of the Union, German Democratic Republic and Federal Church of the Union (General Synod 13, 1981).

<sup>i</sup> Church head office of the EKD (ed.), *Frieden wahren, fördern und erneuern*, Gütersloh (1981) 1982, p.48.

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid.* p.58.

<sup>iii</sup> In our files, I found an indication that the General Synod of the UCC had debated as early as 1981 whether it could declare itself a pacifist church. How did the EKU of the time perceive this process which took several years? What effect did it have on its member churches?

<sup>iv</sup> The addresses by Christa Grengel and Joachim Garstecki will deal with this approach in greater detail.

<sup>v</sup> *op.cit.* p.48.

<sup>vi</sup> Kirchenamt der EKD, *Schritte auf dem Weg des Friedens. Orientierungspunkte für Friedensethik und Friedenspolitik* (1994), 32001

<sup>vii</sup> Rat der EKD (Hg), *Friedensethik in der Bewährung. Eine Zwischenbilanz*, in: *Schritte auf dem Weg des Friedens*, *op. cit.* p. 90

<sup>viii</sup> Wolfgang Huber, *Rückkehr zur Lehre vom gerechten Krieg? (Return to a doctrine of just war?)* Lecture on 28.04.2004, unpublished manuscript.

<sup>ix</sup> WCC (homepage)

<sup>x</sup> According to its mandate, the ACK is the counterpart to the National Council of Christian Churches in the USA; unfortunately it has a minimum of funding and authority.

<sup>xi</sup> *Gerechter Friede – Leben in einer Gefährdeten Zukunft*, (Just peace – Living in an endangered future), epd-Dokumentation no.30/31, p.7.

<sup>xii</sup> In the meantime, more attention has been devoted to dealing with experiences of violence. Looking at the balance between victims and perpetrators makes a new basis for cooperation possible, going beyond a definition of right and wrong to the benefit of both sides. In the follow up to a war or conflict, the work must

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relate above all to traumatic experiences and aim to make trust possible so that regret, admission of guilt, search for truth, forgiveness and reconciliation are given their due place.

<sup>xiii</sup> *ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>xiv</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>xv</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

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