

Thirdly, the national anthem. This song was tainted forever by the Nazis, and should not be our national anthem. What actually changed in the West? A few new postal codes and car license plates, and apparently even that was asking a lot! Here in the East, everything changed. It was bound to go wrong.

**The Nikolai Church still holds peace prayers for a range of issues from Africa to the environment. Wouldn't it be better to concentrate on one issue than to introduce a new one each week?**

Every year, we hold three peace prayers on the subject of unemployment. In 1992 we set up a discussion group on the subject at the Nikolai Church, at a time when people were demonstrating against job cuts. It means a lot to the public. We also have many initiatives against the rise of the neo-Nazis.

One neo-Nazi from Hamburg had applied with the authorities for permission to organize neo-Nazi demonstrations in Leipzig on every May 1 and May 7 until the year 2014. These took place from 2001 to 2007. A group from the church always organized an anti-demonstration - a peaceful one, of course. And in 2007, they actually gave up.

We are also active in other cities. Colditz in Saxony experienced ongoing problems with neo-Nazis and the town was living in fear. We felt the church could help, and got together with the authorities to organize an event called "A City Fights Back," including a peace prayer in cooperation with the local church. We made our point.

## A READING for October 12, 2009: Remembering on the First Monday - Prayer for Peace at St. Nikolai Church in Leipzig (October 9, 1989)

Opposition movements in East Germany, especially the independent peace movement and the ecological movement, sought support from the church, the only institution in the GDR not controlled by the state. The church offered opposition groups meeting rooms and a forum for voicing their concerns. Since 1982, the church had been holding prayers for peace, demanding not only a peaceful resolution to the Cold War but also respect for human rights. The church's message stood in stark contrast to the one put forth in official GDR peace propaganda. After about 1,200 anti-regime protesters gathered on the square in front of Leipzig's St. Nicholas Church [*Nikolaikirche*] after a prayer for peace on Monday, September 4, 1989, similar demonstrations became a weekly event in Leipzig. At first, the police and the Stasi tried to suppress these "Monday demonstrations" with violence, but they were unsuccessful. The photo below was taken during a prayer for peace and non-violence in St. Nicholas Church on October 9, 1989. After the service, 70,000 people demonstrated throughout downtown Leipzig for reform in the GDR. Photo: Waltraud Grubitzsch.



After prayers for peace in four Leipzig churches on 9 October 1989, some 70,000 people gathered in the city centre carrying candles in order to demonstrate for their human rights and more freedom in the GDR, in spite of the threat that police would be ordered to open fire on them. Thousands of police and soldiers were in position, ready to break up the demonstration by force, but everything proceeded peacefully. As a result these events, which came to be described as the Peaceful Revolution, became a major milestone on the way to the fall of the Berlin Wall, to German reunification and to a unified Europe.

### **What are your first thoughts after reading this account?**

#### A READING for October 19, 2009: Remember on the Second Monday - The Triumph of Nonviolence in Leipzig (October 9, 1989)

A contemporary witness recounts the events of Monday, October 9th in Leipzig, beginning with the GDR regime's early-morning preparations for the city-wide demonstrations scheduled for later that day. As author Wolfgang Schneider recalls, local communist authorities and police forces anticipated violence and prepared themselves accordingly. In the end, however, 70,000 "fearful yet unyielding" demonstrators remained calm and peaceful in the face of massive security forces, and local leaders opted for restraint. This opened the door for further protests under the slogan "we are the people."

A first person account:

A great deal has been written and even more has been speculated about the course of events on that fateful Monday. It is still unclear whether a special order to shoot was in place on October 9th in Leipzig. The clarification of this question, still pending, is not even of decisive historical relevance, since Secret Order No. 8/89 (decreed on September 26 by the Chair of the National Defense Council, Erich Honecker) was still in force with no restrictions. With respect to the expected "riots," it clearly stated, "They are to be prevented from the start." And there was yet another clear instruction: "hostile actions should be prevented offensively."

emerged who wanted to leave the country.

There was a unique atmosphere at the church, which mobilized the masses. The people who came to demonstrate on Oct. 9 came from all over the GDR. A cross-section of the entire country gathered together in the Nikolai Church. Without Leipzig, Nov. 9, 1989, would never have happened, let alone reunification on Oct. 3, 1990.

**As you look to Oct. 31<sup>st</sup> and the Protestant Reformation that began in the very area of Germany that gave rise to the Peace Walk, how can our church be a reforming movement?**

- **in practicing a life of prayer?**
- **in gathering others to study the Bible with us?**

**A READING for November 2, 2009: Remembering on the Fourth Monday – As We Approach the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Fall of the Wall**

**What remains of the peaceful revolution of 1989?**

Today we need to rediscover the courage - the civilian courage - to get involved. We can't expect things simply to work out, we have to take responsibility for our country ourselves. We Germans have made many pointless sacrifices, and now is the time for sacrifices that make sense: We must get involved, however uncomfortable this might be, on behalf of reunified Germany and democracy.

I believe we should stop complaining and looking for problems, which Germans tend to do, and say: This is our country, and we want to be actively part of the 10 democracy we fought so courageously for. The best way

Just how literally the Leipzig police leadership, chaired by the acting 1st Secretary of the SED district leadership, Helmut Hackenberg, took this order was already evident early that morning. Factory employees were warned against entering the downtown area after 4pm; mothers were supposed to pick up their children from inner-city day care centers and kindergartens by 3pm; schoolchildren and students were threatened with expulsion should they participate in "actions." The city was abuzz with rumors. There were furtive whispers about gunmen on centrally located buildings, fears about the deployment of paratroopers, and it was understood that the NVA\* helicopter squadron in Cottbus had been put into "command-readiness." Reports about security-force bases in Küchenholz and Rosental were more reliable, as were those on preparations being made at the agra fairground in nearby Markkleeberg for the internment of "the delivered" (this had already been rehearsed on October 7). Churches were to be kept open for escapees, and a medical station was set up in St. Thomas posthaste. Emergency beds were set up in hospitals, and particular attention was given to the staffing of surgical and intensive care stations. Thousands of additional units of stored blood were ready and waiting.

That day Leipzig resembled an armed camp. According to later testimony from the riot police, officers had been told that morning that a peaceful outcome to the demonstrations was unlikely, and that they should prepare for possible acts of violence. Accordingly, they wore riot gear: helmets with visors and neck protection, shields, gas masks (tear gas had been acquired in large quantities), truncheons, and so-called RKWs\*\*; officers were armed with pistols, and dog teams were also deployed. On the courtyard of the VP\*\*\* District Authority, "munitioned up" armored trucks stood ready, huge steel giants with bulldozing capacity; the drivers were armed with submachine guns and sixty shots of ammunition apiece. The police troop numbered three thousand men, twelve hundred of whom had been brought over from the Halle and Neubrandenburg districts. In addition, there were five squadrons of Factory Combat Groups [*Betriebskampfgruppen*] and a special police task force from the Ministry for State Security. The number of those called in ran into the four figures, and their arsenals contained more than just handguns. Six important Leipzig personalities issued a call for calm, which was read aloud during peace 3.

devotions in St. Nicholas Church [*Nikolaikirche*] and three other churches: "Our common concern and responsibility has brought us together here today. We are taken aback by the developments in our city and are searching for a solution. We all need a free exchange of views about the continuing development of socialism in our country. Therefore, the public figures whose names are being read today promise all citizens that they will apply their full power and authority to advancing this dialogue, not only within the district of Leipzig, but also with our government. We urgently request that you remain calm, so that a peaceful dialogue is possible."

This joint appeal by cabaret artist Bernd-Lutz Lange, *Gewandhaus* music director Kurt Masur, and theologian Peter Zimmermann, along with secretary of the SED district leadership Kurt Meyer, Jochen Pommert, and Roland Wötzel was also broadcast at 6pm by the *Sender Leipzig* television station and about an hour later by the local radio station. This request to speak, as committed as it was courageous, undoubtedly contributed to the day's peaceful development, though it did not play the decisive role prematurely attributed to it. Only the concentrated power of the 70,000 fearful yet unyielding people who occupied the downtown and lined the city ring forced the ultimate retreat of the armed units at around 6:25pm. It was undoubtedly these anonymous people that Christ of Hein had in mind when he proposed naming Leipzig the GDR's "City of Heroes." –

On October 9th in Leipzig, the German Democratic Revolution of 1989 triumphed. On that Monday, the cry "We are the people" became the material force that gave rise to and accelerated every hesitant concession by the party and government from that point on."

Source: Wolfgang Schneider, "Oktoberrevolution 1989" ["October Revolution 1989"], in *Leipziger Demontagebuch*. Kiepenheuer Verlag: Leipzig and Weimar, 1990, pp. 7-8; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann and Georg Wagner, eds., *Das gespaltene Land. Leben in Deutschland 1945-1990* [*The Divided Country. Life in Germany 1945-1990*]. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1993, pp. 438-40.

Translation: Jeremiah Riemer

What are your prayer-thought on this night?

- what are your fears in this moment?



The GDR wouldn't have collapsed without the events in Leipzig, says Fuehrer

**You urged the demonstrators to remain peaceful and told them not to be daunted by the tanks. What made you so confident that the peaceful protests would work?**

We were not in the least confident. We were afraid day and night, but we had the courage of our convictions. The Bible had taught us the power of peaceful protest and this was the only weapon we had. Resorting to violence makes us no better than our enemies, and then we are no longer blessed. This is what I told the young people at the peace prayers and, incredibly, it was a message they understood, and they rejected violence.

It still moves me today to recall that in a secular country, the masses condensed the Beatitudes in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount into two words: No violence! And then they practiced what they preached. If miracles happen, this truly was a one. It was the first successful revolution, and it was a peaceful one.

**Do you believe that the GDR would have collapsed even without the events in Leipzig?**

I don't believe so. Things were happening in Leipzig that were not happening anywhere else: The regular peace prayers that had been taking place every week for many years and a large community of people had

countries. The '9th of October' will be the central theme of the artistic activities, with around 20 creative interpretations of the Peaceful Revolution using the media of light, audio and video. Musically, Light Festival will be accompanied by a choir, orchestra and soloists under the direction of Jürgen Wolf, Cantor of St Nicholas's. The 2009 Light Festival is a commemorative event, but it also goes well beyond this in acting as a symbol for unity, peace and the breaking down of borders. The route of the demonstration is divided into stages: from Augustusplatz Square it continues along the inner ring road to the former headquarters of the State Security Police, today a museum at the "Runde Ecke". The stations along the route are dedicated to the themes of uncertainty, breakthrough, passage to freedom and revolution.

In addition to the Peaceful Revolution and its significance for Leipzig, the thematic content of the Light Festival also covers the European dimension of the autumn of '89, and Leipzig's twin cities have therefore been invited to participate with their own projects. The cities of Frankfurt am Main, Hanover, Lyon, Krakow, Brno and Travník are contributing to the commemoration with their own events. The general artistic direction will be in the hands of Jürgen Meier who has, together with the participating artists, dedicated himself to the themes of freedom, democracy, non-violence and civic commitment.

### **How might you give expression to peace?**

- **in your life?**
- **in your family?**
- **in the world around you?**

### **[A READING for October 26, 2009: Remembering on the third Monday – An Interview with the Pastor of Nikolai Church in 1989](#)**

**DW-WORLD: On Oct. 9, 1989, exactly one month before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the largest impromptu demonstration ever witnessed in the GDR took place in Leipzig. Some 70,000 people protested against the ruling SED, and the party was powerless to stop them. What was the trigger? 6**

Christian Fuehrer: That's a very difficult question to answer. The Nikolai Church had been holding peace prayers every Monday evening since 1982, attracting lots of people who were politically dissatisfied and unable to voice their concerns. Word of the peace prayers had got out.

On May 8, 1989, the authorities barricaded the streets leading to the church, hoping to put people off, but it had the opposite effect, and our congregation grew. On Sept. 4, the day of the annual Leipzig Autumn Fair, western camera teams had been granted permission to film all over the city and lots of them had gathered outside the church. When we came out, some of us unrolled our protest banners and managed to hold them up briefly before the Stasi (the East German secret police) tore them out of our hands - and the cameras never stopped rolling.



Pastor Fuehrer got things started

We were on West German TV that night, so not only people in the West saw what was happening in Leipzig, but everyone in the GDR, too.

**And then came Oct. 7, 1989, the 40th anniversary of the GDR.**

There were hundreds of arrests made among the crowds in front of the Nikolai Church. Honecker himself

had declared that the church should be closed. The police used brute force against the demonstrators.

There was an article in the newspaper announcing that the counter-revolution would be put down on Monday, Oct. 9, "with whatever means necessary." The day before, the church was visited by doctors who told us that hospital rooms had been made available for patients with bullet wounds. So we were absolutely terrified of what might happen.

### **And how did the demonstrations then go on Oct. 9?**

Around 6,000 to 8,000 people were crammed in to the churches in central Leipzig, and a total of 70,000 people had gathered in the city. Everyone was holding a candle, a symbol of non-violence - you need to hold a candle with both hands to keep it from going out, which makes it impossible to throw stones.

Later, a member of the SED Central Committee said: "We had everything planned. We were ready for anything - except candles and prayers." The police had not been briefed for this possibility. Had we thrown stones, they would have known what to do: They would have attacked. But the tanks had no choice but to withdraw without a single shot being fired, and that's when we knew that the GDR would never be the same again.

We had a sense that something extraordinary had happened, but we only really understood the enormity of it later.

- who is a voice of calm for you?
- who is encouraging you, supporting you?



The picture shows the Monday demonstration on 16th October 1989  
Copyright: Gerhard Gäbler

On 9 October 2009 all activities in Leipzig will be focused on the city's commemoration of the Peaceful Revolution of 1989. After prayers for peace at St Nicholas's Church the high point and official close of the event will be a Light Festival from approx. 18:00 to 24:00 hrs. Along the historic demonstration route around the inner ring road the City and Location Marketing Department of Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing GmbH (LTM), the City of Leipzig and the Autumn '89 Initiative will be organising a commemorative walk covering twenty-one stations. For the event the inner ring road will be closed to traffic and the streetlights will be dimmed.

The Light Festival is based on the theme of the 20th Anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution and European Unity. It involves architects, lighting planners, designers and artists from a number of European

## **Have the neo-Nazis disappeared in Colditz?**

They are bound to reappear, but the public refusal to be intimidated by them is progress in itself. The public should never allow itself to be terrorized by a bunch of hooligans who look stronger than they are, who thrive on people's fear. They take advantage of a fear of unemployment and other social problems. When it comes to issues like these, the peace prayers can still be extremely effective.

Interview: Julia Elvers-Guyot (jp)

### **How do these points apply to you?**

- **personally?**
- **nationally?**

**On Sunday night, Oct. 8<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 PM – the Eve of 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, come to church to remember, reflect, and be in prayer with our partner church in Germany where they will be celebrated in worship and candle light processions, beginning on November 8<sup>th</sup> and on into November 9, 2009.**



*The Peaceful Revolution*  
waged with the Weapons of  
*CANDLES and PRAYER*

A Month of Monday Readings  
to remember and relive the march  
that began on Monday, Oct. 9, 1989 in Leipzig,  
went on to Dessau,  
and ended in Berlin on Monday, Nov. 9, 1989