



# Church and Peace

## International Office

Church and Peace is an ecumenical network  
of Christian communities, churches and organisations in Europe  
committed to the peace church vision.

## **God of life, make us instruments of your peace and justice**

A Peace Church contribution to the WCC's Just Peace Process:  
From Kingston to Busan and Beyond  
from the Church and Peace Theological Working Group

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We wish to commend the WCC for having planted promising seeds for the Just Peace process. The message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston 2011 Glory to God and Peace on Earth concludes with the call to make Just Peace, in all its dimensions, a key priority of the churches. We support this goal and agree that it is an urgent matter that calls for both short-term and long-term contemplation, discernment and action by the churches. Indeed, we must become instruments of God's peace and justice, guided by the Holy Spirit.

There is a great deal within the message of Kingston and the Just Peace Companion with which Church and Peace wholeheartedly agrees. These young seedlings need to grow now: for example the call to strengthen peace education at all levels and the urgent call to support communities threatened by deadly violence.

We are convinced that the churches can play a key role in implementing the Just Peace vision. We urge the WCC to help the local churches come to the conviction that they are called to live out just peace in concrete ways. Nonviolent intervention has proven effective and should be put to the test on a large scale. Non-military concepts to find answers to questions of security should be worked on, so that nonviolent interventions to rescue populations at risk might become the rule instead of military intervention.

### **The Foundation of Just Peace is Jesus and Discipleship**

The Kingston message states: „We as churches are in a position to teach nonviolence to the powerful, if only we dare”. We can do this as followers of one who came as a helpless infant, told us to lay aside our swords, taught us to love our enemies, died on the Cross and was resurrected from the dead. <sup>1</sup> We affirm this and wish to emphasize the centrality of discipleship for Just Peace. We are the followers of the one who not only died for us and for the way of peace; he is also the teacher of the way of peace. How is Jesus the model and inspiration for the peace work of the church?

<sup>1</sup> Glory to God and Peace on Earth: The Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation.

The heart of Jesus' life and message is that God loves all people without exception unconditionally (Lk 6:27-36, Mt 5:43-47). He extended compassion to those who broke social and religious rules (John 8:1-11). He taught his disciples to live in communities of healing and transformative love. The only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend is love; the only force that can overcome fear is love. We are called to be disciples who, having learnt from Jesus, are being sent out to humanity to testify to his shalom.

Jesus began his ministry by doing grassroots work for the oppressed in the social world of rural Galilee. He sought out disenfranchised and victimised people and integrated them into an alternative social movement that challenged the social structures of the day. His teachings and healings are directed toward transforming powerless communities.

Jesus spoke as a prophet to those in power. Those who associate with Jesus learn to challenge convention and the powerful (Mt 23:8-12). They are allies to the powerless, the needy and those on the margins of society. He encourages them to develop alternative lifestyles in their communities, while soberly warning them that this could be life-threatening behaviour that leads to the same fate Jesus suffered.

The countercultural community of Jesus involves deep reflection on how structural evil is maintained by systems, ideologies and conventions that use violence in all its forms. We need to resist the use of violence and the structures which are inherently oppressive and evil. In many parts of the world - especially those troubled by armed conflict - sisters and brothers are engaged in reconciliation, trauma healing and restorative justice (John 8:1-11).

## **The Church as Advocate for Just Peace**

The church is the learning, celebrating, serving and witnessing community of those who strive to follow Jesus, thereby anticipating the Kingdom of God. When the church is at its best and succeeds in being faithful to Jesus, it models and already lives the coming Kingdom. The church witnesses to the world and transforms it. That is, as a church we live within the world, without being like the world.

The church is a major factor for change in society. The church stands in direct relationship to both the powerful and the powerless. Because it is based on voluntary membership from the local population the church has the means to empower the powerless. Acts of nonviolence of small groups lead to the transformation of social structures. At the same time the church reminds the powerful of their need to heed the call for justice and peace. Its advocacy for minority rights and the protection of the weak is a central aspect of its prophetic witness. In the church there is room for difference and alternative lifestyles, but there is no room for violence.

The church is spread widely throughout the world and is present even in the most remote places. Local congregations are often part of a wider network of international contacts and meeting places. Therefore the church is in a position to train many people in disciplined, nonviolent, transformative actions for justice and peace. If the church dares to take up the option for nonviolence that Jesus taught, it can even opt out of war: the most pragmatic and rational course of action is to seek out alternatives to war.

## **Recommendation for Two Just Peace Ministries of the Church**

We call on the WCC Assembly at Busan to continue the process on the road toward Just Peace. The message of Kingston concludes that many more practical aspects of Just Peace still require discernment and elaboration. It calls on the churches to develop and strengthen Just Peace ministries. Church and Peace agrees, offering this paper as our contribution to that process, focussing on two major paths towards peace. We propose that these two journeys be part of a joint seven year pilgrimage for peace after Busan.

### **Peace education**

In acknowledgment of the peacemaking capacity of young people, the message from Kingston emphasises the need to strengthen peace education at all levels. Many churches, especially in the Global South, run schools for the majority of the younger generation of their countries. We propose that nonviolent conflict resolution be included in their curricula. In this way the younger generation can become remarkable instruments for justice and peace.

There have been significant developments in the professional analysis of conflict along with the development of new techniques for transforming conflicts nonviolently: the results of this peace research should also be imparted to all students of theology worldwide. This should begin at the Ecumenical College of the WCC in Bossey. Toward this end we recommend cooperation with established peace education programmes, for example at the Centre for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, Virginia and the United Nations University for Peace in Costa Rica and at The Hague.

### **A credible alternative to R2P**

The concluding message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston stated the possible misuse of the concept of R2P (Responsibility to Protect). The WCC was asked to further clarify its position on adequate ways of protecting people threatened by their own government. Those in support of the R2P policy have emphasised the non-military aspects of this policy and argued that the use of deadly violence would be an exception at the time it was tabled in the UN. And yet the use of R2P language to justify military intervention in Libya in 2010-2011 confirms our conviction as Peace Churches that the Responsibility to Prevent and the Responsibility to Rebuild have definitely not been part of the strategy at work of such interventions.

The WCC should propose that the UN develop a credible and sizeable civil peace service as an alternative to R2P intervention – protecting responsibly and nonviolently. This peace service should also be regarded as the ultima ratio, the last resort. Otherwise, in the absence of such an agency, in each new armed conflict situation faced by the international community military intervention would still be understood to be the last resort.

The proposed civil peace service could incorporate experiences gained in this field by a growing number of organisations like Christian Peacemaker Teams, Peace Brigades International, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme (EAPPI), Women Peacemakers Program, programs which deserve the (financial) support of the WCC and its member churches. These organisations provide tested models for practical training in conflict transformation, as well as in active nonviolent intervention and resistance, and can be called on by the churches for their peace ministry.

May God make us instruments of his justice and peace! Amen.

Schöffengrund, 14.05.2013

**Bible texts cited in this document (NRSV translation)**

**Luke 6:27-36** 27 “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.[a] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

**Mt 5:43-47** 43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters,[a] what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

**Mt 23:8-12** 8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students.[a] 9 And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.[b] 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

**John 8:1-11** 1 while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 4 they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6 They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.[a] 9 When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 She said, “No one, sir.”[b] And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”