

Leaders of Mennonite churches in Europe and international guests met in Buhl, France Oct. 23-25, 2015. In this meeting the decision was made to express the concern of the leaders present about the refugee crisis in Europe. The following text was adopted:

History repeats itself. We, Christians standing in the Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition, see the old stories of God and man come alive again in the faces of the refugees currently walking into and through Europe, seeking peace and safety. Stories from the Bible, stories from our own Mennonite history. Stories of flight, of being evicted, of being hopelessly estranged. Stories of dying and suffering, of torture and animosity. Stories of generations disappearing, of families being broken and torn apart. These are stories of ancient terrors that cause man to rise one against another, to forget compassion, to cause God, Himself, to disappear.

But remembering these stories, we also remember how people reached out, were angels of mercy, like friends we had yet to meet. We remember how children were taken care of - food, clothes, blankets being provided. How money was raised to create the possibility of a new start. In darkest despair a light shone gently, and a new future was made possible. We remember. Even, or maybe especially, in the deepest darkness, God walks with you, wherever you go. You are not alone. Never.

The refugees of our time remind us of biblical stories of power and fragility and the constant possibility of a new beginning. In these people we recognize ourselves, a long time ago. In these people, fleeing now, we recognize the vulnerable face of God Himself. In the people entering Europe, we recall the unexpected courage of life despite everything. In the people entering, we see an unexpected future moving our way. A future that is, in spite of all things happening, precisely that: a future all the same. As the people enter, we are once again encouraged by the promise of our God; I will go with you, wherever you go.

Our history made us part of a global family of believers. Our brothers and sisters made us aware how our western way of life puts severe pressure on all global resources. We recognise the enormous impact of the weapons industry on the global economy, putting profits before human lives and thus escalating every possible conflict. We are also taught that *our* way of life is but a way, not necessarily *the* way. So we call for a humble, conscious and nonviolent way of life, trying to decrease our part in all conflict, economical or political.

Despite all our global differences, we all believe in a God who will be with all human beings, wherever they go. We believe in Jesus, who, in life and suffering, taught us to stand with the poor and helpless, with those who have no voice at all. We believe in the Holy Spirit, binding where humans divide, healing where people devastate. We believe in people, reaching out to each other and living together despite all differences. We believe that peace is the only way.

Within Europe we hear the grim sound of a rising helplessness, dividing all people. On the one hand, there is the impotent feeling of never being able to do enough, to make things work, to really help, always falling short. The realization it will always be 'too little - too late.' A conflict that seems endless and far removed from the influence and reach of ordinary people. Rules and regulations that seem heartbreaking, well-intentioned and necessary as they may be. On the other, we see people flabbergasted when their small village is doubled in size overnight. People feel that they are not being heard, or seen. People that feel left out, overruled, sacrificed for the 'greater good.' People who do not wish to deny someone else a better future, but who are afraid it will happen at the cost of their own children.

This powerlessness is tearing people, society, Europe apart. It is becoming 'us' against 'them', whichever side one is on. The vulnerable people on both sides get the worst of it. This hopeless discord becomes visible along the path of the refugees in our midst. They become tossed to and fro as a ball in a game.

So, recognizing, remembering, we appeal to the compassion in all people of Europe. Look. Really look at each other. Take care of each other. Listen to each other. Do not immediately jump to conclusions, but listen. Everybody has a story, everybody has a heart, eyes, hands. Not just the refugees, not only the open-hearted, not only the troubled. We are not powerless, even though it may feel that way. We are not powerless as long as we have a voice to tell our stories, as long as we have ears and hearts and souls to listen to each other. We are not powerless as long as we are willing to live with each other: fellow men.

May God be with us all.

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