

CAREE Communicator

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CAREE Conference, 2000

The plans for CAREE's March 10 & 11, 2000, conference are finally completed. The conference is entitled, "CAREE: Whence and Whither?" It will meet on Friday afternoon and early evening, March 10, and Saturday (morning and afternoon), March 11. The conference will be held in New York, at the InterChurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive (corner of Riverside Drive and 120th Street). This issue of the *Communicator* focuses entirely on the conference.

The Executive Committee genuinely hopes you will come to and participate in this conference. This meeting is of critical significance for CAREE. It will look carefully at what CAREE has been and could be now, in a situation dramatically different from the one CAREE originally faced. It must also consider whether there is desire and will for CAREE to continue.

In that regard, allow me to pose a few questions which I hope will get you thinking about CAREE's past, its future, . . . and your involvement with CAREE. Why did you join CAREE? What have you seen as CAREE's purpose? In the drastically changed situation introduced during the last decade in Eastern Europe, has CAREE become moribund, or does CAREE still have a valuable role to play? The answers to these questions may vary among us. What we need to do at the conference is to come, collectively, to some conclusions about CAREE and the future. Can we articulate a new vision for CAREE's role in and for Eastern Europe?

To help us all think through these questions, I invite you to read over and reflect on the following summary of our organization's history, some of its contributions, and some issues which invite continuing engagement.

CAREE

Who We Are and Whence We Have Come: A Brief History

It all started in the Cold War. It is hard to remember those days as the new millennium dawns. It is even harder to imagine oneself back into it. A world in which two great ideological systems, one Communist, the other pluralistic, open and less self-confident, confronted each other with nuclear weapons across an Iron Curtain, seems like a distant nightmare. But that was the world until ten years ago. We are still living with its consequences. In Europe at least we are still building on its ruins.

Believers too were divided by the cold war. Across the Soviet world, from Germany to Siberia, established churches, Orthodox and Catholic, Lutheran and

Reformed, were attacked, marginalized, infiltrated and suppressed. Minority churches, Baptist, Methodist, Mennonite and Pentecostal, fared no better. Atheist humanism was the ideology in power. It was enforced by the police, taught in the schools, and enacted in collectivized factories and farms. Christians from that world sent confusing signals as they struggled to survive and find their witness. Many Christians in the west reached out to them in this struggle. Peace church groups were among the first with their practical, nonjudgmental serving witness. Others tried where they could. But how and to whom should one reach out? Whom could one trust? How should one understand what one hears in a society where few could speak openly? How should one act so as to help, and not hurt, believers and the church?

It was in this context that Josef Hromadka formed the Christian Peace Conference in Prague, and invited Christians in the west and the third world to participate. He was one of the few who could do so. A Czech theologian of world-wide reputation who affirmed the revolution in his own country, his aim was twofold: to provide the churches in the east with a Christian voice for peace not dominated by the Soviet-organized World Peace Council, and to open relationships and dialogue with Christians in the rest of the world alongside the official contacts of the World Council of Churches. He knew the ambivalence of the project. Political authorities who must approve it had another agenda: support by churches in east and west for Communist governments and Soviet foreign policy. Christian faith wrestled with political infiltration, intimidation and sometimes coercion at every CPC meeting and in every report or resolution it produced. Still, Hromadka and many others believed that open dialogue and serious theological work which the CPC made possible were worth the wrestle.

Many in the west and the third world agreed with him, and in the early years, from 1964 to 1969, their confidence was wonderfully justified. There were constant negotiations and struggles over the language of resolutions, over the agenda of study and working committees, and over policy decisions made in Prague, but influenced by Moscow. The United States Committee for, not of, the Christian Peace Conference was formed in 1965 to organize and promote American participation in its work while maintaining our independence of its politics. But the participation was fruitful beyond our dreams. Thousands of personal friendships were formed, in which Christians from east and west shared each other's burdens and strengthened each other's faith. Honest dialogue took place in the Communist world about Christian faith, and about freedom, justice and peace. Christians met Marxists and, around the edges of CPC meetings, then independently, Marxist-Christian dialogue began.

It all came to flower during the Prague Spring of 1968. Czechoslovakia was transformed, and its spirit radiated into all of eastern Europe. Only Soviet churchmen and a few hard-bitten Germans seemed untouched by it. Moderate Communists committed to "socialism with a human face" in an open democratic society came to power. Ideological domination melted away. The secret police were no longer feared. Christians and their churches were freed of restrictions and invited to play their part in building the new order. Hromadka's hope seemed fulfilled. The CPC Assembly in Prague that year, over which he presided, was a celebration of this new reality. Many east European Christians spoke freely in public for the first time, in the presence of west Europeans, Americans, Africans, Indians and Japanese. Assembly resolutions were almost free of Soviet political jargon. New committees, more international and less

political, were formed to carry on the work.

Then came the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in September. The political reform was crushed. The new Working Committee of the CPC condemned the invasion despite vigorous objections from Soviet church members. Hromadka wrote an eloquent public letter of protest to the head of the Soviet state. For another year the struggle for control of the Christian Peace Conference went on. Then, in September of 1969, Soviet control, led by the Russian Orthodox Church, reestablished itself. The Czech General Secretary, Jaroslav Ondra, was dismissed. Hromadka resigned the Presidency in protest; he died three months later. For the next three years the new Russian leadership tried to revive the organization it had so damaged, finally turning to the Hungarian leader Dr. Karoly Toth as General Secretary with a program emphasizing dialogue and downplaying political statements.

The United States Committee for the Christian Peace Conference played a unique role in these events. Several national committees outside the Soviet bloc--the French, the German, the British and the Dutch--broke with the CPC after the 1969 Russian power-play. The Japanese Committee split. In each case the result was dissension, conflict and rival groups. The U.S. Committee pursued a different tactic. We protested vigorously. We attended only those meetings where we could make our voice heard. But we did not withdraw. Rather, we broadened our contacts with churches and Christians in eastern Europe through other channels and in 1972 changed the name of our group to "Christians Associated for Relationships with Eastern Europe (CAREE), an Ecumenical Association to Promote World Justice and Peace," to which we added as a subtitle, "and for relations with the Christian Peace Conference." For years in this way we held partisans and severe critics of the post-Hromadka CPC together in one organization with a broad agenda of which the CPC was only a part. We developed academic relations with theological faculties and pastoral relations with congregations. We sponsored east European visitors from schools and churches. We helped initiate a series of official meetings between American church leaders and those from eastern Europe outside the Soviet Union--known as the Karlovy Vary meetings from the city where the first took place. We participated in Christian-Marxist dialogues when they again became possible. We have become in recent years, and now are, an unofficial study and support group for the Europe Committee of the National Council of Churches.

In the 1990s CAREE diversified its activities. A number of our annual meetings were held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and attracted a good attendance, with diverse guests and participants from Europe and Russia. At one of our annual meetings we listened to the voices of young seminarians who had come to study in the USA as a result of the removal of travel restrictions. Due to initiatives by members of CAREE a study group was formed by the American Academy of Religion dealing with "Religion in Eastern Europe and the former USSR." Cooperation with two Vienna institutes, The Vienna University Center for Peace Research and the International Institute of Peace, resulted in about a dozen meetings of Christians and Marxists working for peace. These meetings commenced in the middle of the 1970s; three of them took place in the USA (Rosemont, PA, Detroit, MI, and York, PA).

The war in the former Yugoslavia elicited a response by many members of

CAREE who became engaged in various facets of peace-making. One such effort brought about the cooperation of CAREE with the Ecumenical Study Center in Budapest and the Hungarian churches, resulting in a conference in Kecskemet, Hungary, where church leaders from throughout the region sought to explore ways to deal with ethnoreligious conflicts.

Three publications emerged out of CAREE. The oldest and still continuing is the *Caree Communicator*, our newsletter, published occasionally. The second was *the Christian-Marxist Newsletter*, that had a sporadic publication schedule and ceased publication by the late 1980s. The most significant is *Religion in Eastern Europe*, which appeared in 1981 under its original title *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*. This is a bi-monthly publication that features serious analyses of religious developments in all former socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and is currently the sole publication on the subject matter in the U.S.A., and only one of three in the world.

Today the whole scene has changed. Soviet power and Communist ideology are gone. So is the Christian Peace Conference. But central and eastern Europe face challenges greater than ever before. Ethnic and religious divisions, rooted in centuries of history, are tearing some countries apart. Economic life is in turmoil, often because of the reckless invasion of western capital into the void left by the breakdown of the securities and the rigidities of the socialist system. Each nation faces its own crisis of identity in relation to its neighbors. Each church, whether majority or minority, is struggling to rediscover its ministry and its mission in a world of new religious conflicts overlaid by a new form of secular power. How can Christians in America be of help? What can we learn from their experience that will help us be more faithful witnesses? These are the questions we need to explore.

--Charles West and Paul Mojzes

Basic Conference Information

CONFERENCE HOTEL: We have worked out a favorable accommodation rate for conferees at the **Hotel Edison**. (The information is on the last page.) You should contact the hotel directly to arrange your accommodation: the toll-free number (for reservations only) is 800-637-7070. **Please note that you must mention "CAREE" to get the special rate.** (Conferees are welcome, of course, to make arrangements for accommodation elsewhere, if they so choose.) Hotel Edison is just off Broadway, a couple of blocks from Times Square. The quickest way to the InterChurch Center (where the conference will take place) is the subway, only a short walk from the hotel. (Hotel staff can advise you where to catch the subway).

REGISTRATION: Since the InterChurch Center is a controlled-access building, we need to give the names of all those who will be attending to the reception desk. Consequently, if you are planning to attend the conference, please advise me (Jim Payton, the Executive Secretary) no later than March 8, so that I can put you on the list. Even if you have not yet firmly decided whether you will attend the conference or not, please let me know of your interest, so that I can include your name, allowing you access if you come. Get in touch with me via my e-mail address (listed on the first page) or regular mail (but note that letters from the U.S.A. to Canada can take as long as a week to arrive).

CONFERENCE LOCATION: The conference will be held at the InterChurch Center,

475 Riverside Drive (corner of Riverside Drive and 120th Street), New York. If you come by subway, use the IRT #1 or #9 trains and get off at the 116th Street station. Walk north to 120th Street and one block west to Claremont Avenue (where the entrance to the InterChurch Center is). Enter at the door on Claremont Avenue, proceed to the reception desk, and identify yourself; the attendant will have the list of registrants. We will be using rooms on the sixth floor. For meals, we will either send out for food or recess and get meals at neighborhood restaurants.

IF YOU CAN'T COME . . .

We realize that some of you will not be able to attend the conference. Even so, we would appreciate your comments on the conference themes and issues: we need and value your input. So, please send any and all such comments to me (Jim Payton, Executive Secretary), so that they can be put before the conference and contribute to the discussions. Whether your comments are extensive or brief, in favor of a new and vigorous vision for CAREE or convinced that CAREE has outlived its usefulness, please pass on your viewpoints. I will need to receive them no later than March 8; they can be sent either by e-mail or regular mail (but note that the latter needs a week to arrive.)

Conference Schedule

Session 1

Friday, March 10, 4 p.m.-7 p.m.

**Presentations by church leaders with experience
and insights into the church scene in Eastern Europe:**

(1) Leonid Kishkovsky has been asked to speak on the Orthodox churches' current attitudes regarding ecumenical endeavors and the situation in Eastern Europe; (2) Paul Wilson will speak on the ecumenical scene in the region; and (3) Duncan Hanson will reflect on what western churches have experienced in their endeavors to help in Eastern Europe. Questions and answers will follow, with further discussion about ecclesiastical connections in Eastern Europe.

Session 2

Saturday, March 11, 9:30 a.m.-11:15 a.m.

**Presentations by academics who by vocation and experience have given
their lives to thinking and living in relationship with Eastern Europe:**

(1) Paul Mojzes and (2) Walter Sawatsky will present some of their insights into the needs and possibilities for service by CAREE in the region. Question and answers, plus discussion follow.

Session 3

Saturday, March 11, 11:30 a.m.-1:45 p.m. (over lunch)

Discussion, brainstorming, and interaction by conferees:

We will consider questions such as: should CAREE continue? if so, what should we focus on? has CAREE served its purpose? is there more we can do? is there interest among us in doing it,

and in continuing CAREE? We hope to come to some solid conclusions which will direct our way for the future.

Session 4
Saturday, March 11, 2 p.m.-3:30 p.m.
CAREE Annual Meeting

We need to elect executive committee members, deal with the treasurer's report, and the other details our organization normally handles then. The materials for the meeting will be available Friday evening; we will also deal with whatever arises from our discussions in Session 3.