

Hundreds Convene for Reconciliation Meeting Aimed at Praying for Europe

Organizers believe God is positioning the church for 'a new Europe'

by restoring the continent's' apostolic and prophetic foundations'

A Channel Islander-whose homeland was the only part of the British Isles to be occupied by Nazi forces-found himself praying with a German. He conferred a "blessing" on a nation that his own people had despised as a wartime enemy.

That was just one of the moving scenes at Target Europe-a recent event that drew nearly 400 people from 20 nations to the strategic naval port of Portsmouth, England.

"The last thing I expected was to be praying with a German church leader," said attendee Ray Tostevin, who was born on Guernsey.

Now an idyllic island retreat, Guernsey once was part of Hitler's frontier. Back in the 1940s, swastikas were draped from civic buildings, Jewish businesses had to display a yellow notice and listening to the BBC on a clandestine radio set was punishable by imprisonment.

"My father and grandparents lived through five years of that," Tostevin explained.

"My father might be forgiven for feeling a sense of harshness toward the German people. Far from it.

"It's a real irony that, 60 years on, my father recently found himself in a German hospital being operated on for a serious spinal condition by a German surgeon. The operation was a complete success."

Tostevin, who runs an independent TV company called GRACE Productions, said he participated in the event because he wanted to express his thanks for the way German people cared for his father. He ended up praying with Michael Schiffman, a leading German pastor.

"I didn't realize who this guy was only that his lapel badge said he was from Germany," Tostevin said. "I prayed that God would bless the German people, thanking Michael, as their representative, for the kindness they'd shown toward my dad."

Tostevin's personal story summed up the Target Europe event-which was officially opened by the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth Jason Fazakerley. Uniting former enemies and praying blessings on one another's nations was high on the agenda at this conference. "This event is for those following the Spirit," said speaker and writer Roger Mitchell, who was one of the key facilitators for Target Europe, "as He positions the church for a new Europe."

Delegates packed out a meeting suite overlooking the English Channel, a narrow stretch of water that separates Great Britain from the rest of Europe. But people were also crossing more symbolic gulfs as they prayed and worshiped together. The event was jointly hosted by a French mission group called

Cibler L'Europe, which is translated Target Europe, and an English network dubbed Building Together. The aim was to play their part in "restoring the apostolic and prophetic foundations of our continent."

That included praying for reconciliation between Europe and Africa and sending a representative group to attend the Make Poverty History protest event that happened to be under way at the same time in central London.

Among the intercessors at Portsmouth were Dutch intercessory leader Pieter Bos, national coordinator for Holland's City Prayer Movements; and Martin Scott, author of Gaining Ground, which discusses prophetic intercession. "We lift up the cross this day into the very heavens above," Scott cried out, "and we thank You that the cross speaks of justice. It speaks for an end-and it speaks for a new beginning."

Mitchell described the effort as "a kind of rallying cry-not an organization." The initiative had resulted from various groups and networks working together. "I see some incredibly exciting new expressions of the body of Christ happening across Europe, with the help of the faith of Africa, South America and Asia," he said. "I see seeds that make me incredibly hopeful." In particular, he believes the spiritual landscape of France has been changing, an observation other Christian leaders have been making recently.

"There is a lot of encouragement in France now, but we sense that the Lord is making a shift," said French Christian leader Samuel Rhein, another Target Europe facilitator. "There's a lot of disappointment at the same time

because it's not the breakthrough that we were waiting for. But still we see a lot of changes."

Rhein cited one example as the fact that he had brought 70 French people to the conference. "That's a major thing," he said with a smile. "I thought I was the only Frenchman in love with England."

CLIVE PRICE IN PORTSMOUTH, ENGLAND