

Global Christian Forum News

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Editor: Kim Cain. Email: kimcain@globalchristianforum.org



Taizé celebrations include GCF

The well-known Christian community of Taizé, based in central France, celebrated a special occurrence of dates recently. The GCF was present with representatives of churches, Christian organisations and interfaith leaders to give thanks.

On Sunday, 16 August, under the leadership of Brother Alois, Prior of the Taizé Community, there was worship, prayer, hospitality and fellowship to mark the 75th year since the founding of the community. This year also coincided with the centenary of the birth of the man who began that original work, Brother Roger. And it was also the tenth year since his death.

The Taizé community leaders used the occasion to reach out to other Christian traditions, including those not so familiar with the Taizé

story and worship style, especially Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. It was an intentional gesture of Christian goodwill.

A full list of those attending as wider church leaders includes Interdenominational Christian Organizations, the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Old Catholic Church, Protestant Churches, Evangelical Churches, and Pentecostal Churches.

Inter-faith representatives were also present, including representatives from Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish and Islamic faiths.

Larry Miller, GCF secretary offered a word of greeting at the celebrations,

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Introduction

Welcome to the third issue of **GCFNews** for 2015.

In this issue you will find stimulating reports on recent activities close to the heart of the Global Christian Forum, including:

- Reports of a significant coming together of Pentecostal Church leaders from across Brazil. It led to the signing of a historic document, the 'Ipiranga Statement'.
- We also report on the GCF's presence at special celebrations of the Taizé community in mid- August.
- GCF attendance at a special commemoration of the 'Armenian genocide'.



Taizé celebrations include GCF

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which took place at Taizé, the village where the community is located and from which it takes its name.

The GCF served as a conduit between the community and leaders of the World Evangelical Alliance and the Pentecostal World Fellowship so that those traditions could be present. The WEA sent a high-level delegation while a number of Pentecostal World Fellowship members participated (International Church of Pentecost,

Pentecostal Assemblies of Bangladesh, Yoido Full Gospel Church Korea) and as did a primary leader of the Sojourners movement (USA).

During the two days following the Sunday event, Taizé leadership hosted these representatives and several others, including Revd Dr Neville Callam (Baptist World Alliance general secretary) in conversations designed for Taizé, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals to learn to know one another better.

The Taizé community is now a global Christian phenomenon which particularly attracts thousands of young people to its gatherings on all continents, as well as hundreds of international guests coming to stay for short terms at the founding monastery for worship, study, reflection, prayer and work. Taizé-style worship, which is ecumenical, international and involves a melodic, repetitive chanting feature, has occasionally been used at GCF gatherings.

GCF present at Armenian genocide centennial events

The Global Christian Forum has been represented at commemoration events in Lebanon, hosted by the Armenian Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia), to mark the centenary of the Armenian genocide.

Prof. Dimitra Koukoura, member of the GCF international committee (representing the World Council of Churches and the Ecumenical Patriarchate), and Larry Miller, Secretary of the GCF were present in Beirut, on 18-19 July to participate in memorial events which recalled the persecution and death of 1.5 million ethnic Armenians between 1915 and 1923. The tragedy occurred during the time of the collapse of the Ottoman

Empire and the establishment of the Turkish state.

Koukoura and Miller said the invitation to take part in the events was a “distinct honour and rare privilege” for the Forum. In their message to His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, and the other church leaders present, they said that in the ‘Year of Remembrance’ undertaken by the Armenian Church, the rest of the world church, as represented through the GCF, “consider you ... to be an inextinguishable light shining brightly through the penetrating darkness of persecution”.

Koukoura and Miller noted that

the Armenian Orthodox Church, Catholicosate of Cilicia, would be participants in the forthcoming global consultation on “Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together” (Albania, November 2015). The GCF is the initiator of the gathering.

“Your representatives will hold before our eyes and in our deliberations the vision of the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian Church, whose witness we are committed to receive and to cherish as we, like they, seek to follow Christ together on the hard but miraculous path through the Cross to the Resurrection”, Koukoura and Miller said.

Historic meeting of Pentecostal leaders in Brazil marks a new liberation from colonialism

In May of this year, at Ipiranga (São Paulo), where Brazilian independence was proclaimed in 1822, a group of Pentecostal leaders from across the country gathered to consider vital concerns facing the church. They discussed difficult issues in depth. This included matters such as 'power and hierarchy,' 'race, ethnicity and gender,' 'theology,' and 'Christian unity.'

After three days of fellowship they signed a joint message affirming the need for Pentecostal churches to face institutional, theological and social challenges together.

Called the Ipiranga Statement, the message came from the Brazil consultation of the Pentecostal Forum of Latin America and the Caribbean (FPLC), which the Global Christian Forum (GCF) has accompanied. [See Page 5 for full text of the 'Ipiranga Statement'.]

Pr Dr David Mesquiati de Oliveira participated in the consultation and here reports on the historic gathering.



The Brazilian consultation of the Pentecostal Forum of Latin America and the Caribbean was part of a process that began in 2011 when a group of leaders of Pentecostal churches in Latin America came together in response to the call of the Spirit for Christian unity.

One of those meetings resulted in the formation of the FPLC. It was greatly encouraged by the Global Christian Forum (GCF), which has continued to fully support the process.

In order to succeed in bringing together so many and diverse Pentecostal leaders from such a vast region, the FPLC organized meetings within large geographical blocks, sub-dividing the Latin American region and Caribbean region into four sub-regions: Southern Cone (2012), Andean (2013), Central America / Spanish-speaking Caribbean (2014), and Brazil (2015).

The latest of these was the three-day consultation in Brazil (27-29 May) that attracted 64 participants who

sharing together, forming a close heterogeneous group. Those present included Pentecostal pastors and leaders. Others were scholars of Pentecostalism. [See sidebar on Page 4 for church and organizational participants]

For three days, they sat with one another in a circle, engaging in an intensive program while exploring major issues. The discussions took place under the central theme of 'Pentecostalism and Unity: Institutional, Theological and Social Challenges.'

The time together consisted of a variety of panel discussions, which included debate on major challenges to Christian unity.

After dialogue and exchange, the group produced ***The Ipiranga Statement, São Paulo 2015***.

Noting that Ipiranga, the area where the consultation was held, was also the historic location of Brazilian independence in 1922, this "second Ipiranga" of Brazilian Pentecostals

marked a new liberation and independence from colonization – the symbol of the imposition of models which deny diversity – in the search for new agendas, cooperation, and unity in diversity.

The participants, who came from the five major geographical regions of Brazil, felt inspired to preserve and continue the bonds that were initiated at the historic gathering.

Additionally, the women present (17 out of 64, close to 27%) resolved to strengthen their relationships, as well as to invite other Pentecostal women to join them in order to voice their concerns.

They outlined a program of action, proposing themes and soliciting support to pursue their aims. One of their projects is to publish before the end of this year a book called: *Women Evangelicals Promoting Their Voice and Participation: Gender in Debate*, edited by Valéria Christiana Vilhena.

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It was very encouraging to see Pentecostal women organizing themselves and developing their own reflections.

The forum in Brazil has also resulted in the publication of a book with the different lectures presented at the consultation (*Pentecostalism and Unity*, 278 pages).

In sum, it was a historic moment of sharing and fellowship between Brazilian Pentecostals and an inspiration for new encounters and projects.

For health reasons Huibert van Beek, GCF consultant accompanying the FPLC and former GCF Secretary, could not attend. In his place Pastor Fausto Vasconcelos, member of the GCF Committee representing the Baptist World Alliance and himself Brazilian, was present on behalf of the GCF. He also took part in the FPLC committee meeting which preceded the consultation.

Pentecostal churches and organizations present:

The representation of independent Pentecostal churches ranged from the Assemblies of God (in its different "ministries" and from various states), to the Church of God of Brazil, the Pentecostal Church God is Love (IPDA, neo-pentecostal), the Christian Congregation of Brazil, the Wesleyan Methodist Church (IMW, charismatic), the Pentecostal Church of Christ in Brazil, Bethesda Church, Baptist Attitude Church (charismatic), the Renewed Presbyterian Church, the Gilead Ministry Apostolic Church, the Root of Jesse Evangelical Church, God's Harvesters Church, Worshipper Generation Evangelical Church, Living Water Apostolic Church and the Christian Alliance Congregational Church in Brazil.

Also represented were large churches and organizations belonging to the national Brazilian scene and interested in the issue of unity with Pentecostal churches, e.g. the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the Anglican Church, the National Commission of Bishops, the National Council of Christian Churches (CONIC), and the Commission for Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue of the Vatican.

Ipiranga Statement, São Paulo 2015

A group of Latin American Pentecostal leaders - pastors (men and women) of different Pentecostal churches of Brazil, young people, women and scholars of Pentecostalism in Latin America - met from 27 to 29 May 2015 in Ipiranga, São Paulo, Brazil. The meeting was held at the initiative of the Pentecostal Forum of Latin America and the Caribbean (FPLC), under the auspices of the Global Christian Forum and some Brazilian Pentecostal denominations. The theme of the meeting was **Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Institutional, Theological and Social Challenges**.

Based on the presentations and the discussions, the forum affirmed the following:

On institutional challenges:

1. To oppose the tendency in religious institutions to concentrate on self-preservation which leads them to be held back (closed) by their own limitations;
2. To rethink the relationships of power and hierarchical ecclesial structures, and move towards greater participation in church decision making;
3. To take positions on contemporary issues, such as gender, ethnic and racial questions;
4. To invest in leadership formation of new generations to effect change - going beyond 'apparent reforms' and investing more in the cooperation with other churches.

On theological challenges:

1. To develop a Pentecostal theology that values the hallmarks of Pentecostal experience and is able to be in dialogue with other schools of thought;
2. To bring advances in academic theological insights closer to the life of the churches;
3. To foster Latin American theological publication and production initiatives;
4. To promote the sense of belonging of the Pentecostal churches to the fellowship of Christians around the world.

On social challenges:

1. To see Pentecostals as a part of society who have their peculiar demands like any other group, which need to be understood and discussed in the wider society;
2. To search for theoretical frameworks which awaken the social responsibility of Pentecostals in different contexts;
3. To create opportunities for dialogue with other social movements on questions of gender, youth, poverty, violence, politics, corruption, public health etc.;
4. To open up new spaces for youth and women in the church, building communities of faith based upon participation and openness to the society, and so able to hear the voices of our time and to contribute to the formation of citizenship.

Ipiranga, São Paulo (Brazil), 29th May 2015

'Under Caesar's Sword'

As the Global Christian Forum continues in planning for a consultation in November on the contemporary persecution and martyrdom of Christians – as indicated in earlier copies of GCFNews – we have learnt of many other projects interested in this topic.

One such project, 'Under Caesar's Sword – Christian Response to Persecution' operates out of the Centre for Civil and Human Rights, University of Notre Dame, USA, and the Religious Freedom Project at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University (USA). Scholars connected with the project will be holding a conference in Rome, December 10-12, releasing key findings of their research.

According to the Under Caesar's Sword website, the total project, running over three years, has been investigating "how Christian communities respond when their religious freedom is severely violated."

It has been financed by the Templeton Religion Trust.

The research centres around three core questions: 'How do Christian communities respond to repression?', 'Why do they choose the responses that they do?', and 'What are the results of these responses?'

The project has seen 14 researchers travelling to some 100 Christian communities in over 30 countries to learn of the people's experience of persecution. The results of the research will be presented at the Rome conference and is open to those with an interest in the topic.

More information: <http://humanrights.nd.edu/research/ucs/>