



Introduction

Welcome to the latest copy of *GCFNews*.

In this edition:

- reports from *the international committee meeting in Moscow*, and
- *Middle East consultation* hears of growing trust between churches.
- Plus more.

Affirmation of continued role for GCF

Important reflections on the future shape and work of the Global Christian Forum saw a firm affirmation of the continued need for the global body at the annual meeting of the GCF's international committee, late February.

The international committee, at a meeting held in the Russian Orthodox Church Department of External Church Relations, Moscow, took considerable time to reflect on the 20 years of the GCF's life, its current work, and the unique contribution it has to offer the global Church.

The committee is the group of 24 international church leaders that offers oversight and direction to the work of the GCF, and was graciously hosted by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Looking into the next decade, it was vital to consider key questions as the Forum faces the future.

These included, 'how does the GCF engage with the continual changes in the shape and composition of world Christianity', 'who is still not present at the GCF table', 'how do we continue to engage other Christian groups

and churches' and 'what distinctive contribution does the GCF have to make in the changing world of Christianity'?

Practical questions of how best to do its task, financial considerations, and maintaining strong relations with participating bodies, were also discussed.

This led, naturally, to deep reflection and analysis, all occurring alongside other dimensions and responsibilities for the meeting, such as reports on recent activities and regional consultations, issues arising from the recent (successful) global consultation on 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' in Albania, and the forthcoming third GCF 'Global Gathering'.

As a result of the three days of discussions, the committee affirmed:

- the continuing need for the Forum and its current activities, including its work on the issues of 'Mission and Proselytism', the Global Gathering III, and further theological reflection arising from the experience of the Forum;

- the continuing need of reconciliation between churches and the GCF's role in helping overcome divisions within traditions and between traditions;
- the importance of paying close attention to, and engaging with, new and emerging realities of the global Church;
- the task of passing on and transmitting the life of the GCF to younger people, educational institutions, and those working at local levels; and
- the readiness to respond to new initiatives and engage in regional consultations and other contacts.

The discussions also confirmed the importance of close relationships with the global Christian bodies that help make up the GCF, as well as working intentionally to ensure deep connection with and between various traditions such as Orthodox, Pentecostal and other churches, including those from the global south.

For reasons of accuracy, the English translation of this edition of GCFNews has been updated from a previous version, which had featured a different Page 1 story.

Global Catholic-ecumenical community releases video on GCF

Net for God, the global media network of the Chemin Neuf community, has released a twenty-eight minute documentary on the formation, work and aims of the Global Christian Forum.

The video, now on YouTube and downloadable through the *Net For God* website, is in 20 languages. On its own website, the GCF will provide a link to the video.

The Chemin Neuf Community is a Catholic ecumenical faith community in which Christians from all walks of life live and work together in their Christian faith regardless of which church they attend. Some members are ordained, some are lay.

The community's main founder is the Jesuit priest Laurent Fabre, who helped shape the group through charismatic prayer gatherings beginning in 1973 in the French city

of Lyon. It has currently around 2,000 members in 30 countries, including people from non-Catholic traditions.

Each month *Net for God* releases a thirty minute video on a topic of interest to Chemin Neuf members and other Christians around the world.

The documentary on the formation and life of the Global Christian Forum reflects Chemin Neuf's ongoing commitment to Christian unity and ecumenical understanding and engagement.

With each video Chemin Neuf groups draw together people from a variety of Christian traditions in some 20 nations to what they call 'Net Points' to view the documentary, as well as share in hospitality, prayer and reflection.

There are about 680 such 'Net Points' creating an audience of about 25,000 people for each documentary.

The GCF documentary covers the



reason

for its formation, its style of meeting and gathering, as well as noting some of its special activities, such as the global consultation 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' in Albania in November 2016.

The *Net for God* documentary on the GCF can be accessed on the GCF website, the *Net for God* website (<http://netforgod.tv/en/home/films/56a35558c445ec10018b5f02/global-christian-forum>) and Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0t-PEyY1ZXo>).

GCF representative offers greetings to Anglican Consultative Council

As the April meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC-16), met in Lusaka, Zambia, Revd Dr Femi Adeleye, GCF Committee member, was in attendance representing the GCF, one of nine ecumenical partners associated with the gathering.

Dr Adeleye offered greetings from Larry Miller, GCF secretary, and in doing so outlined the formation and nature of the GCF.

Noting that the GCF has come into being at a time of significant changes in world Christianity, he said the GCF was "convinced that our churches and organizations could benefit greatly from a Forum where they could speak with one another face to face, pray for one another directly, learn from one another, and together gain insights into common problems that could help all to respond to them more effectively."

He said the "Global Christian Forum appreciates the significant involvement of the Anglican Communion both on the international committee of the GCF and in all the global gatherings held so far, from Limuru in 2007 to

Manado, Indonesia, 2011."

Dr Adeleye also informed ACC participants of the recent 'Discrimination Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' consultation in Albania (to which the ACC had sent representatives) informing them of church leaders' offering "repentance" for times when churches had "persecuted each other and other religious communities in history"; and, their call to churches "to urgently strengthen the solidarity of all Christians."

He noted the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Most Revd Justin Welby, (who also chaired the ACC meeting), "[T]he Church, when it is visibly united, speaks more powerfully to the world, by the grace of the Spirit of God, than we can ever begin to imagine."

In a series of recommendations the ACC-16 noted the "growth of Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches globally and the emergence of the Global Christian Forum."

It also "urged the ACC 'Department for Unity and Faith and Order' to explore the potential for dialogues with Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches." [Rec.16.22]

Moscow Greetings

The international committee of the GCF received visits and greetings from two significant Orthodox leaders during their meeting in Moscow:

Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov)

Vice-chairman of the Russian Orthodox Church Department of External Church Relations, in bringing the greetings of chairman of the department, Metropolitan Hilarion, reported on the historic meeting between His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and the Catholic Pope Francis, in Cuba, from which he had just returned.

Philaret said, the meeting was ten years in the planning and sent powerful messages of hope to the world. "One meeting cannot change the world", he said, "but it can create an atmosphere". This meeting, he believed, possibly helped set a tone for peace initiatives in Syria, for example.

Philaret said, the extensive document signed by the two leaders was significant: it speaks to a number of important issues – refugees, Christians under persecution, religious liberty, moral values, Ukraine, etc. – but also called for a united effort for peace and justice in the Middle East.

He hoped the meeting would help "motivate churches to unite their voice" – bringing attention to the church's position, making the important issues difficult to ignore. He also addressed the question of how best to transmit what is learned from ecumenical activities to a church's own 'faithful'. This takes time – we cannot expect people at every level to understand ecumenical efforts as it requires explanation. The ROC is looking for the way to undertake this task.

Metropolitan Nifon Saikaili

Representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch and All East in Moscow, delivered his greetings, saying he was glad to meet the GCF and take the "opportunity to enrich myself with what you are dealing with so I can continue to learn something new every day."

Archbishop Nifron shared about his life in Russia, since 1977, working through the tough Communist era, where his Orthodox community was one of the few churches free to baptise without resistance from the government. It was, he said, a time of "pure Christian living in dark times. Despite everything, you feel that faith is great in this country."

He shared his concern about current events in Syria, saying what began as a reform movement has evolve into "an anti-Christian war". This was not something anybody expected.

He said the concerns for Syria and the region should be at the centre of our activities: it is not defending Christians only, "but defending the virtues of the world. There is no Christianity without virtues, no Islam without virtues."



Larry Miller (left), shares a gift of appreciation with Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov).



Metropolitan Nifon Saikaili

Two new and recent members of the GCF Committee

The membership of the GCF international committee revolves as positions change in its constituent churches and organisations. As well as farewelling some, (see 'Transitions', page 7) we welcome others. New faces at the GCF table, include:

- **His Eminence Mor Chrysostomos Mikhael Chamoun, the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch (Syria)**
- **Revd Canon Dr John Gibaut, Anglican (Canadian based in UK)**
- **Revd Christo Greyling, Senior Director Church & Faith partnerships for development, World Vision International. This is the first time WVI has been represented on the GCF Committee.**
- **Prof. Dr Thomas Schirmmacher, World Evangelical Alliance (Germany)**
- **Revd Dr Paul Gardner, World Council of Churches (Jamaica). Dr Gardiner joined the GCF Committee in 2015.**

Here we offer up two profiles of new members, and the remaining ones will be in the next edition of GCFNews.

Thomas Schirmmacher (Prof. Dr)

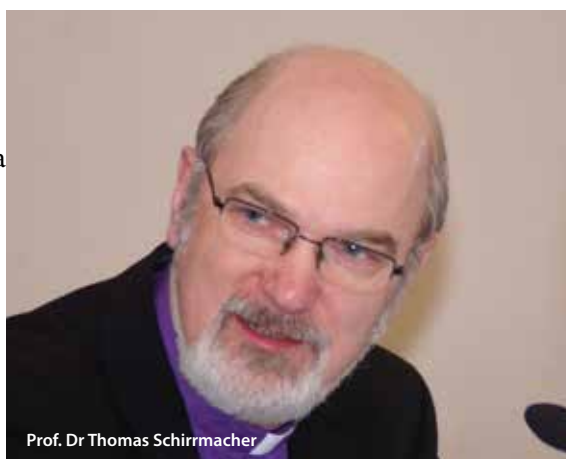
Representing the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), Dr Schirmmacher is executive chair of the WEA Theological Commission and WEA Ambassador for Human Rights. He serves also as the president of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights.

As an academic, Dr Schirmmacher is professor of the sociology of religion at the State University of the West in Timisoara (Romania) and Distinguished Professor of Global Ethics and International Development in Meghalaya (India). He is also president of Martin Bucer European Theological Seminary and Research Institute with campuses in Berlin, Bielefeld, Bonn, Hamburg, Innsbruck, Linz, Pforzheim, Zurich, Prague and Istanbul, where he teaches ethics and comparative religions.

In terms of his personal journey Dr Schirmmacher says that, coming from a very conservative evangelical background, "I would not even enter

Catholic or Pentecostal churches or mosques or temples. I never expected that I one day would:

- attend two Vatican synods,
- arrange contact between the World Council of Churches and the WEA,
- be called 'the Pope's most loved Protestant' by the German press and at the same time be labelled as



Prof. Dr Thomas Schirmmacher

'traitor of evangelical theology' and 'pathfinder of the anti-christ' on many 'last day' websites.

"My change came for several reasons, including my activities on behalf of persecuted churches.

"In 2005 we started the

International Institute for Religious Freedom and I found myself defending people of all religions, but also all churches and confessions. Here I was sitting and praying for protection for Christians, whom I still thought to be unbelievers.

"I was also changed though the joining of 'spiritual experience and friendship'. Theology followed later: strange for a professor of Systematic Theology. But still it's the truth.

"The years of diligent work around the globe changed my perception of the Catholic Church and the WCC and made me a champion of the goals that are now central to the GCF."

Schirmmacher says it was not by chance that he was involved in the GCF global initiative, 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' in Albania last year. "It was the peak of what I have been praying for a long time.

"This is what I told the media: 'The consultation is historic for two reasons: firstly, it was the first ever global meeting of any kind in which representatives of virtually all Christian confessions gathered around the topic and listened to witnesses from dozens of countries from all continents. And secondly, for the first time ever World Christianity apologised for having persecuted each other in history.'

"Both steps are a historic move, both for ecumenical relations between churches as well as for the larger fight for religious freedom worldwide."

Speaking about his first committee meeting in Moscow, he said, "The meeting proved to me, what I knew from other meetings already: here we do not avoid hot topics for the sake of peace, yet even they are discussed in a spirit of love. We deal

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with each other with respect, listen to each other, try to understand the questions and problems of each other.

“Moscow proved this to be the case. I believe, that we need the GCF

because of this much more than ever: here we can discuss things on a more informal level and not just formally as would be the case if it was at a structured global church level, and here we can bring Christian leaders

in a more informal way, whose bodies are not yet fully open to official ecumenical relations.

“If the GCF did not exist, we would have to start it today!” he said.

Paul Gardner (Revd Dr)

Originally a teacher, and with experience as a theological professor, Dr Gardner represents the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the GCF Committee since 2014.

He is a pastor of the Moravian Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. Ordained at the age of 25, he is currently President of the Moravian Church in Jamaica and Cayman Islands with responsibilities for administration.

Dr Gardner, has served as President of the Moravian Church Worldwide (2009-2012). He has lectured on Pastoral Counselling and Comparative Religion at the United Theological College of the West Indies (2005-2010) and is the author of “Counselling Principles and Theory”, prepared for undergraduate students at the United Theological College of the West Indies.

Dr Gardner has had long and abiding involvement in ecumenical relations between churches: “I have been a member of the Central Committee of the WCC since 2006



Revd Dr Paul Gardiner

and a Vice-Moderator of the 13th WCC Assembly Planning Committee. Currently, I am a member of the Executive Committee and the Finance Committee of the WCC. I was also the

president of the Jamaica Council of Churches.”

Of the most recent meeting of the GCF Committee, he said, ‘I believe the meeting in Moscow in February further demonstrated the important role that the GCF plays in the conversation about our common commitment and how we can work in a collaborative way to enhance the mission of our Lord.

“With the many challenges and experiences of the different streams of the Christian church, there remains the need for a common space where matters of the ‘faith’ can be discussed and greater understanding and tolerance can be achieved.

“This I believe will foster greater ecumenical relationships among the partners.”

Preparing a global conversation on ‘Mission and Proselytism’

Reflecting its calling to provide space for churches worldwide to “explore common challenges together”, the GCF Committee affirmed preparations for the next major initiative convened by the GCF, ‘Call to Mission and Perceptions of Proselytism: a Global Conversation’.

After a broad and lengthy explorative process during 2012-13, the international committee committed to convene global conversations on two challenges facing the world church today: ‘discrimination, persecution and martyrdom’ and ‘mission and proselytism’. For both conversations,

the Forum works closely with the Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance.

The first conversation concluded in November 2015 with the global consultation in Tirana, Albania, ‘Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together’ (see *GCFNews* Edition 01, 2016). The second conversation is now moving to centre stage.

A working group composed of representatives appointed by the five partners is preparing the ‘mission and

proselytism’ initiative. Present plans include a small global consultation on the theme (March 2017), a succinct statement on ‘Christian Witness in a World of Many Christian Churches and Communities’ (title subject to modification), and resources for reconciliation and healing of memories between churches who have experienced conflict as a result of different practices of mission.

The working group and the task groups responsible for each activity will meet in October in Rome, hosted by the Pontifical Council, to move the projects forward.

Transitions: appreciation and farewell

The Moscow meeting included a service of farewell for some of the most significant people in the development of the GCF. It was a moment that marked an important transition to new representatives in the GCF Committee to help take the GCF forward.

Hubert van Beek, embodied the first and central aspects of the GCF from the original vision articulated by WCC General Secretary Konrad Raiser at the WCC General Assembly in Harare, in 1998. Working tirelessly, he garnered support and contacts for what would become the GCF. He was founding Secretary, serving in that capacity until the end of 2011. Since that time, he continued on staff as a part-time consultant, with involvement primarily in Middle East and Latin American events. He will continue in this capacity until the end of November 2016.



Robert Gribben, from Australia, as representative of the World Methodist Council was present at the inaugural global gathering in Limuru, Kenya, in 2007, joining the international committee in 2009. A committed seeker of Christian unity, his work with the GCF brought his long-held respect of the Orthodox stream of Christianity together with that of the reformed tradition.

Rolf Hille, from Germany, was a representative of the World Evangelical Alliance. He too was present at Limuru and joined the international committee in 2008. His deep respect for the spirituality of fellow believers in Christ and his understanding of the need for a new way of engaging ecumenically through the GCF insured that he contributed to the discussions the committee on many occasions.



Joy Lee, as administrative assistant and event coordinator ensured that the second global gathering (Manado) and the 'Discrimination, Persecution Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' consultation occurred so smoothly and efficiently. She brought excellent communications support and strong administrative backing to the GCF working alongside two secretaries (Hubert van Beek and Larry Miller) as well as bringing a committed, insightful, and youthful voice to the GCF discussions.

Not present at Moscow, but now leaving the Committee though greatly appreciated as a vibrant contributor to the GCF's work, was **Sarah Rowland-Jones**, representing the Anglican Communion. She offered thoughtful leadership, writing the narrative history of the GCF, as well as being a member of the GCF Facilitation Group, which gives guidance to the Secretary between annual Committee meetings. Sarah was present at both Global Gatherings, having become involved in the formative stages of the GCF and serving on the Committee since 2003.



GALLERY IMAGES FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING



Rev. Dr. Prince Guneratnam



Dr. Dimitra Koukoura



St. Basil's, Moscow



Rev. Fr. Mikhail Gundiaev



(L-R) Terri Miller, Joy Lee, Revd Dr. Richard Howell



KimCain/GCF



Entrance to Danilov Monastery, Moscow. The Russian Orthodox Church hosted the GCF Committee meeting.

GCF Middle East consultation hears of growing trust amongst churches as regional difficulties continue

In a region so often beset by great difficulties and sad news it was a case of good news as a growing sense of Christian unity and trust seemed to be emerging in the region, according to church leaders who participated in a Global Christian Forum-convened Middle East consultation held in Lebanon in May 2016.

The Middle East Council of Churches worked in close partnership with the Forum to plan and implement the consultation.

The consultation, coming some three years after the first such meeting, took place at the convent of “Our Lady of the Well”, near Beirut, from 25 – 28 May.

Thirty-three church leaders from six Middle Eastern countries participated. Two others from an additional country could not come due to visa problems. Most significantly, the consultation brought together leaders of churches who seldom meet, those established in the Middle East for centuries and those which have come much more recently.

In a communiqué released after the

meeting, participants said they were aware of “improving relations between the various churches in the Middle East. They stressed the necessity to be open and to deepen mutual knowledge amongst the churches, as well as to increase coordination between them as much as possible.”

Moreover, the statement said they discussed “methods to strengthen ecumenical ties and to nurture a spirit of fellowship and solidarity in order to convey peace and justice among all citizens of the Middle East countries.”

This led to “sober and frank dialogue among the participants which amplified the feelings of belonging to the one body of Christ, to the church of God, and the commitment to the one message of Christ through a common endeavour to attain one and the same witness.”

During the meeting, according to the statement, the participants were informed of the latest activities of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), “and they praised it for its key role in strengthening Christian presence and communication between the churches in the region.”

Furthermore, they discussed ideas and suggestions for how the MECC could facilitate dialogue and convergence among the churches of the Middle East.

In relation to the continued suffering in the region, the church leaders “appealed to all church leaders and workers in relief organizations to intensify their efforts to alleviate the suffering and lessen the people’s pain, particularly of children and women.”

Overall, due to the success of the gathering and its format, the participants “recommended bringing this ecumenical experience to all churches” so they could “benefit from its outcome(s) and to spread the spirit of unity that is in accordance with the will of God.”

They also agreed to “continue these consultative meetings following the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

The GCF was represented by Secretary Larry Miller and GCF consultant Hubert van Beek.

2nd Middle East Consultation, Global Christian Forum Lebanon, 25 – 28 May 2016

Final Communiqué

With the cooperation and coordination of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), the Global Christian Forum invited a group of bishops, priests, pastors, and lay people from various Christian traditions (Orthodox, Catholic, Evangelical) to a second consultation, held at the convent of “Our Lady of the Well” (Lebanon, Maten), 25–28 May 2016. The first consultation took place in Amman, Jordan, 8–9 April 2013.

The participants discussed the challenges that the churches face in the critical and turbulent situations of the region. They considered the cooperation among churches to proclaim faith that is based on the one Christian message. They deliberated on methods to strengthen ecumenical ties and to nurture a spirit of fellowship and solidarity in order to convey peace and justice among all citizens of the Middle East countries.

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The delegates renewed their deep sympathy and solidarity with the victims of war, violence, terrorism, and with displaced people, particularly of Syria and Iraq. They appealed to all church leaders and workers in relief organizations to intensify their efforts to alleviate the suffering and lessen the people's pain, particularly of children and women.

The representatives drew attention to the problem of the severe emigration taking place for many years, which has led to a massive loss in the region of the most resourceful and constructive elements necessary for rebuilding nations and communities. Hence, Christian presence has decreased enormously and this, in turn, has damaged the church's ministry and role in the region.

The present consultation reaffirmed the Amman Appeal issued in 2013 and urged the participant churches "to implore their societies, governments, institutions, and international assemblies to support Christian presence in the Middle East in partnership with other religions, and work to achieve full citizenship with equal rights and duties among all people, in accordance with international treaties and agreements, and within the framework of fair laws and truly modern democratic systems".

During the meeting both pastors and lay persons gave much attention to improving relations between the various churches in the Middle East. They stressed the necessity to be open and to deepen mutual knowledge amongst the churches, as well as to increase coordination between them as much as possible. The participants were informed of the latest activities of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), and they praised it for its key role in strengthening Christian presence and communication between the churches in the region. Furthermore, they discussed ideas and suggestions for how the MECC could facilitate dialogue and convergence among the churches of the Middle East.

The sober and frank dialogue among the participants amplified the feelings of belonging to the one body of Christ, to the church of God, and the commitment to the one message of Christ through a common endeavor to attain one and the same witness.

All participants commended the significant efforts of the Global Christian Forum and the Middle East Council of Churches, which made this meeting possible and ensured its success.

Finally, the participants recommended bringing this ecumenical experience to all churches in order for all to benefit from its outcome and to spread the spirit of unity that is in accordance with the will of God. They also agreed to continue these consultative meetings following the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the grace of the Lord Jesus for the glory of God the Father.

New GCF appointment: Magali Moreno

The GCF welcomes Ms Magali Moreno to its small group of staff in the position of Events Coordinator.

Ms Moreno, who hails from Paraguay, will fulfil the role so vitally needed as the GCF prepares for its Global Gathering 3, in 2018.

She is fluent in Spanish and English and has working abilities in French, German and Italian.

Coming from a Mennonite background, she has previously served the church in a number of

administrative capacities, including for several large global conferences.

She has a Master's degree in Communication Science and a Bachelor's degree in English language.

Magali will begin in mid-September, initially with an orientation program alongside Larry Miller, GCF secretary, then she will work full-time based in her native Asuncion, Paraguay.

Ms Moreno succeeds Ms Joy Lee, who has served the GCF so well in many capacities (See 'Transitions', page 7).

