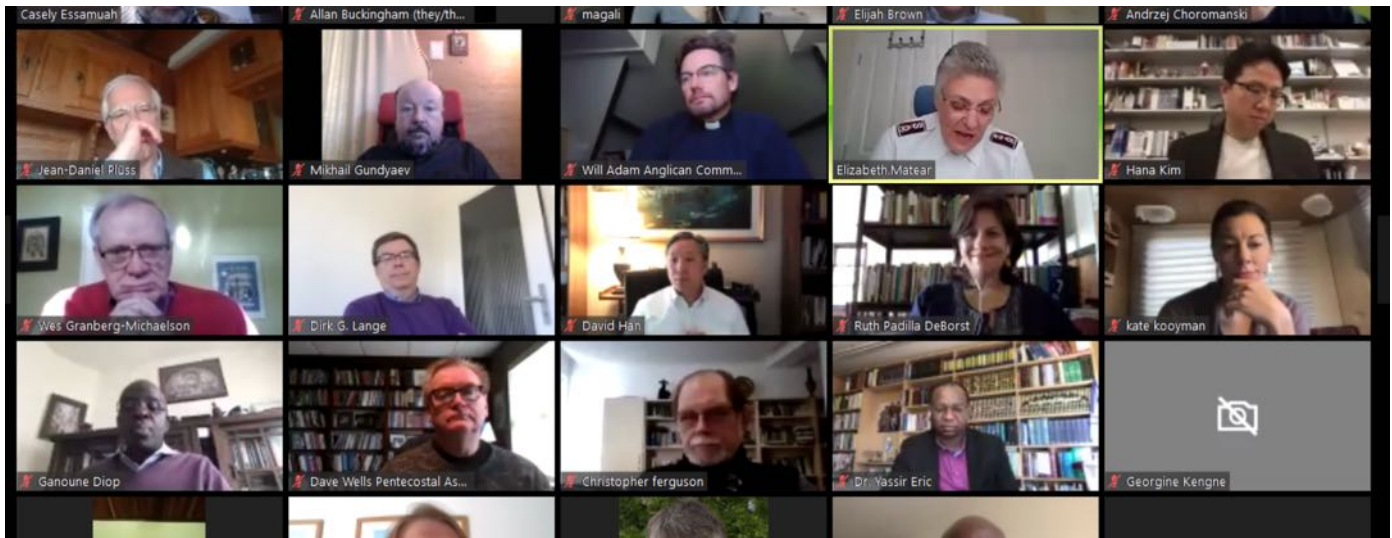


Global Christian Forum News

2020 Edition 01



Facing COVID-19, virtually

The Global Christian Forum's International Committee met virtually on April 23. Solidarity and deep connection emerged as stories of COVID-19's impact on the church were shared.

The Church is facing new challenges and redefining ministry. In regions where healthcare resources are abundant and strong, some are experiencing a shifting of their fast-paced life, a forced solitude, and a new appreciation for contemplative rhythms.

Others, like those in the continent of Africa and in Latin America, struggle with fears about a lack of capacity to respond — fragile health systems, extreme inequality, and in some places the impossibility of social distancing. Prayers of concern and solidarity were shared as the body of Christ suffers in many parts of the world.

Yet members of the committee also took time to celebrate signs of hope and calling. Pastors in many communities are helping to spread truthful, factual information to combat fear and the spread of the virus. There were many stories of charity and outreach as Christians are courageously meeting the immediate needs of those who are vulnerable. Creative "virtual churches" have emerged around the world, and people's access to Bible study, mutual encouragement, and Christian community have increased in many surprising ways.

This moment is revealing a longing for a new "normal" — a change in the systems that create disproportionate suffering and vulnerability. We pray that this may be so.

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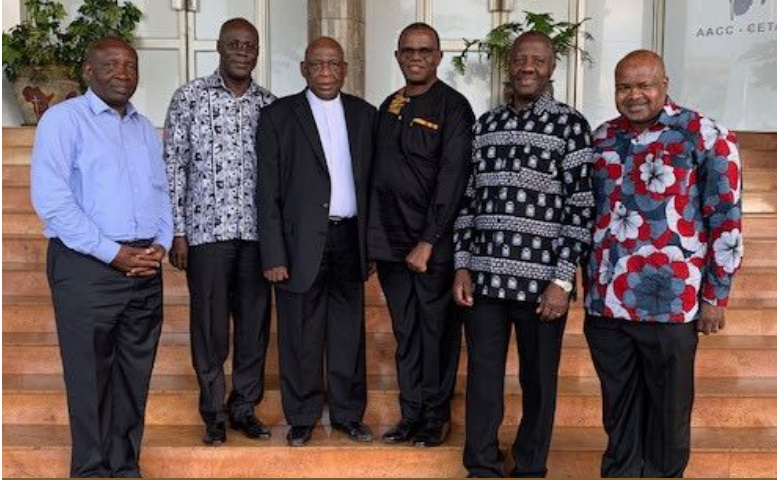
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Broad Group Comes Together in Africa



A broader group of leaders than had come together before. From L to R:

- Rev. Nicta Lubaale, Gen. Secretary, Organization of African Instituted Churches
- Venerable J.W. Kofi De-Graft Johnson, Gen. Secretary, Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa
- Rev. Fr. Terwase Akaabiam, Gen. Sec., Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar
- Rev. Dr. Aiah Foday-Khabenje, Gen. Secretary, Africa Evangelical Alliance
- Rev. Dr. Fidon Mwombeki, Gen. Sec., All Africa Conference of Churches
- Rev. Dr. Casely Essamuah, Secretary of the Global Christian Forum

Secretary Essamuah met in Kenya with a significantly diverse gathering of Christian leaders in January. The group intended to explore beginning an Africa Regional Consultation of the Forum — a gathering of leaders from many Christian traditions to discuss common goals and challenges.



Secretary Essamuah congratulating the newly appointed Gen. Secretary of Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa, the Venerable Kofi DeGraft Johnson.

Those gathered shared personal faith stories, and named the ways that God is working in their respective communities. These practices, common to Global Christian Forum events, helped build relationships and trust between the leaders.

A key next step was enthusiasm for a larger, more formal gathering, which will convene the widest possible representation of church leaders in Africa, including youth and women. While COVID-19 may impact this meeting, planned for November of 2020, the seeds which were planted of trust and collaboration will most certainly bear fruit.

New Committee Member



Rev. Dr. William Adam

is the Director for Unity, Faith, and Order and the Ecumenical Adviser to the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was ordained in 1994 and served in parishes in the Church of England until taking up his role with the Archbishop in 2017.

Will has been committed to Christian unity since he was a student at the WCC's Bossey Graduate School. He has served on Anglican-Methodist dialogue in England and in his current role is responsible for the oversight of the Anglican Communion's ecumenical work, including theological dialogue and liaising with ecumenical bodies. He was part of the Anglican Communion delegation at the Global Christian Forum's gathering in Bogota in 2018.

Will retains an active academic interest in Law and Religion and is the editor of the Ecclesiastical Law Journal, an international comparative journal of law and religion. He continues to serve as a priest in a group of rural churches in the South of England.

"It is an honour to be part of the Global Christian Forum who demonstrates the unity of the Body of Christ. Together we can bring healing and hope in our broken world."

A Pandemic Plan



Every ministry is pivoting during the COVID-19 crisis. Global Christian Forum is no exception.

We plan to continue our focus on building relationships across denominations and differing expressions of the Christian faith — but relying more heavily than ever before on our online tools.

Be sure to "like" us at [facebook.com/GlobalChristianForum](https://www.facebook.com/GlobalChristianForum) to see new content, which we post regularly.

We also are adding new resources to our website, [GlobalChristianForum.org](https://www.GlobalChristianForum.org). We hope they will be useful even in times of social distancing.

We are also excited to announce a new resource that we think the Forum is uniquely poised to provide. As church leaders all over the globe adjust to this new ministry context, we believe that we can learn, and gain greater hope, from listening to voices from all over the world about their COVID-19 ministry life.



Beatriz Sarkis, of the Foculare movement in Italy, shares on YouTube.

To this end, we are hosting regular "touchstone conversations" in with leaders from an array of context around the world. These leaders are finding ways to respond to the challenges and the opportunities that this time presents. You can watch the conversations on [YouTube](#) (search for "Global Christian Forum" to find us), or you can watch the [website](#) for regular postings of the conversations in text form.

As we face this pandemic, the Holy Spirit is working to unite us ever more closely to one another.

New Committee Member



Prof. Dr. Dirk G. Lange

is Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations at the Lutheran World Federation and Fredrik A. Schiotz Chair of Christian Mission and Professor of Worship at Luther Seminary (USA). He is an ordained ELCA pastor and was a brother of the ecumenical Community of Taizé (France) for almost 20 years. His experience covers a wide spectrum, but all under one umbrella: liturgy and reconciliation in the lives of people. He has written extensively on topics in liturgical theology and ecumenism. His book *Trauma Recalled* is on Luther's sacramental theology. A forthcoming book (Augsburg Fortress Press) focuses on a spirituality of baptism: *Today, Everything is Different: An Adventure in Prayer and Action*. Prof. Lange was the North American Lutheran representative on the International Joint Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Commission. He is one of the authors of The Common Prayer for the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the 500 Years of Reformation, and was the Project Officer for this commemorative liturgy celebrated on October 31, 2016 with Pope Francis and the Lutheran World Federation.

Canada Churches meeting



The Canadian Council of Churches invited the Global Christian Forum to participate in their Governing Council meetings in November. Board members called it the highlight of their meeting in a survey at the end. The language used during that session — “relational” not “positional,” and “asking who is not here” — and in general the vision that was shared helped to shape the strategic direction that the council mapped out for the coming years.

The Canadian Council of Churches plans to pay closer and closer attention to the Forum's methodology and increase its participation and engagement, as well as begin to practice faith sharing among its leaders. "It was encouraging to know that what the Global Christian Forum shared will be useful to them as they endeavor to work across denominational boundaries in the great country of Canada," said Rev. Dr. Casely Essamuah, the Forum's secretary.

New Staff Member



Rev. Kate Kooyman

is the new communications associate for the Forum, working ten hours per week. Kate lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is a minister in the Reformed Church in America. She has ten years of experience working in Christian Reformed Church's Office of Social Justice. She also played a role on the board of Christian Churches Together, a U.S.-based ecumenical organization. In addition to her ministry work, Kate is a writer and has worked as a freelance editor over the years. We are happy to have her join our team!

Reflection:

Son and Daughter of Encouragement



Jean-Daniel
Plüss,
President,
Fondation du
Forum
Chrétien
Mondial

"There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement')." (Acts 4:36)

In the last part of the second chapter of the book of Acts we read that the early Christians in Jerusalem shared from what was theirs so that no one had to suffer any need.

Now that we are all affected by a global pandemic, we may ask ourselves, "What can I contribute to ease someone's need? Can I respond to someone's loneliness? Does someone I know need some help?"

In verse 36 we find a beautiful remark that is presented as an afterthought. Joseph, a Christian from Cyprus, had been given a nickname because of his lifestyle. He had become a "son of encouragement."

Are we not all called to be sons and daughters of encouragement because Jesus Christ has given us new life and new hope? In Christ we have a unique motivation, we are being refreshed by the Holy Spirit, we are not alone in difficult situations because God is with us.

Ask God, in what concrete way you could be an encouragement to others today.