



## Take up the challenge of 'Mutual Love' as witness for peace, unity and discipleship: Global Christian Forum

*Christians are called together to take up the challenges of peace, unity and costly discipleship in a closing Message issued at the Third Global Gathering of the GCF, Bogotá, Colombia.*

The Forum, which connects the broadest range of global Christianity, held its third Global Gathering in the Colombian capital from 24-27 April, under the theme 'Let mutual love continue' (Heb 13:1).

It brought together the widest variety of Christian traditions, with 251 church leaders from nearly every stream of global Christianity and 55 nations.

Against the backdrop of growing division in the world, the meeting itself became a message of careful listening and respectful engagement across barriers of old enmities and historic separations.

In recognition of the churches of the host nation, the Message said participants "have listened to, and been inspired by, witnesses working for peace. We pray that the peace process may continue in Colombia and bring hope and reconciliation to those who are suffering and struggling."

Participation in the Global Gathering included delegations from the *Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity)*, the *Pentecostal World Fellowship*, the *World Council of Churches*, and the *World Evangelical Alliance* together with those of many other Christian World Communions and international Christian organisations.

The retiring Secretary of the GCF, Revd Dr Larry Miller, said participants repeatedly affirmed the Forum as an indispensable instrument for promoting Christian unity and

engaging in conversation on the challenges Christian communities worldwide face today.

"The existence of the GCF as a place where churches and church leaders

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### Introduction

Welcome to **GCF News**.

This edition highlights the successful Third Global Gathering of the GCF held in Bogotá, Colombia (24-27 April).

Over the four days about 250 church leaders from every continent and representing nearly every family of global Christianity shared deeply, connected honestly and prayed often – all around the theme, 'Let mutual love continue' (Heb. 13:1).

[Click here to view the video wrap of the gathering \(15 mins\).](#)

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who are often strangers to each other come together in ‘mutual love’ is a realisation of the shared yearning for healing in the wounded body of Christ.”

At the close of the Global Gathering, leaders of confessional bodies commented on the role and value of the GCF within the wide world of global church relationships.

- Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said, “This gathering is the third in a series. It has been a moment of tremendously improved relationships between all the participants, which reflects a new era of collaboration among the churches.

“I think the Global Christian Forum has shown that we do have a way forward, which is that we must not use our differences to stay apart and refuse collaboration. We need to see them as a certain contribution of richness to the whole Christian mission in the world,” Farrell said.

- Pentecostal World Fellowship Vice Chairman, Revd Dr David Wells said, “As a result of the Pentecostal World Fellowship’s ongoing privilege of being at the table of the Global Christian Forum, deeper bonds of respect and love continue to develop with fellow Christians from other communions.

“The Bogotá Gathering reinforced the PWF’s continuing commitment to participate in the Forum in a fully engaged manner while recognizing the hard work yet to be done.”

- World Council of Churches Deputy General Secretary, Father Dr



Ioan Sauca, said, “Through prayer and sharing, the Spirit has led us, during this Global Gathering, to greater mutual love and to the experience of a real though imperfect communion in Christ despite and beyond our persisting ecclesial divisions and estrangements. This means that the Global Christian Forum is fulfilling its original calling.

“But the GCF will not have accomplished its mission unless we leave this global gathering firmly committed to encourage the churches we represent to walk together towards greater mutual love, mutual support and engagement in the struggles for reconciliation and just peace, starting in Colombia, extending through Latin America, and to the end of the earth.

“Only in this way will the churches we represent be able to address what prevents us from fully manifesting the One Church that anticipates the one reign of justice and peace.”

- World Evangelical Alliance Associate Secretary General, Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, “Bogotá was the Global Christian Forum at its best! To hear in small groups the personal faith stories of high-ranking Christians from all confessions — a mark of the GCF — was moving and eye-opening.

“At the same time, plenary presentations by the major expressions of Christianity on the future of ecumenical relations proved how much more friendly our relationships have become. We have matured to the point where we are more eager than ever to overcome major differences, yet without compromising our identities and Biblical convictions.

“If the GCF did not exist, we would have to invent it today! Bogotá also proved that it was the right decision of the World Evangelical Alliance to endorse the future of the GCF when last year we reviewed its 20 year history.”

## Some snapshots: Third Global Gathering, Message to the churches

Church leaders present at the Third Global Gathering of the GCF in Bogotá released a message to the churches reflecting the nature and work of the four day meeting. Here are some snapshots from the Message.

(The full text of the Message can be found at: <https://gcforum.worldsecuresystems.com/news/take-up-the-challenge-of-mutual-love-urges-gcf>)

Sharing in prayers across traditions.



Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell



Dr Robert Baah



### **Founding principle:**

The theme, “let mutual love continue”, expresses the spirit and practice of the Global Christian Forum since its inception in August 1998... (in accordance to its founding principle), “To create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and interchurch organizations, which confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in His divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges.”

### **Witness to peace in Colombia:**

“Gathered in Jesus’ name, praying together has nourished and sustained us... Indeed Jesus has been present among us as we have praised God and prayed for peace, reconciliation and all those who suffer persecution, poverty and injustice (Matthew 18:20)... we have listened to and been inspired by witnesses working for peace. We pray

that the peace process may continue in Colombia and bring hope and reconciliation.”

### **Witness with historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification:**

We have heard testimony from the Lutheran World Federation, the Catholic Church, the World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Anglican Communion about their Churches’ journeys to embracing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999). We hope and pray that retelling our histories and our stories together may lead our Churches to a fuller recognition of each other as Christians.

### **Suffering and sacrifice:**

We call on all Christians to remember ...our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. We also call Christians to join with those who pray for peace and justice in Jerusalem.

In the bond of Christian unity, we call on all Christian communities to remember in their daily prayers all who suffer persecution and martyrdom.

### **Let Mutual Love Continue in a life-generating work of the spirit:**

“We cannot be content with ‘polite ecumenism,’ but rather let our narratives be redeemed in the Spirit, confessing that our division openly contradicts the will of Jesus Christ, scandalizes the world and harms our mission to share the Gospel.

“In our sharing the struggle of authentic Christian witness in our world, we heard and applauded strong warnings to resist the captivity of the Gospel by any national or ideological powers. We desire to hold one another in support and accountability united in one body, transcending all attempts to weaken the truth of our witness to Jesus Christ.



His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch, All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, addresses the GCF gathering.

## Christians often not welcome for putting other out of comfort zone: Syrian patriarch at GCF global forum

*The Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church has told the Third Global Gathering of the Global Christian Forum in Colombia that Christians are often made unwelcome due to putting others outside their comfort zone.*

His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch, All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church addressed the gathering in Bogotá on 25 April while participants were discussing 'discrimination, persecution and martyrdom' as one of the challenges facing the global Church.

"Christianity is not welcomed in the world because it puts people out of their comfort zone. It challenges their worldly philosophical convictions with the simplicity of faith," said Patriarch Aphrem II addressing the 24-27 April gathering.

The meeting received a report about a 2015 consultation in Tirana, Albania titled: "Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together."

It was organised by the GCF together with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Roman Catholic Church), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Evangelical Alliance, and the World Council of Churches.

### ***Tirana consultation***

A book on the 2-4 November 2015 Tirana consultation co-edited by GCF Secretary, Revd Dr Larry Miller and its founding secretary, Huibert van Beek was also received.

Van Beek said that at the time of the meeting Christian persecution was "high on the agenda" due to what happened then in northern Iraq, although the situation in Iraq has since improved.

"But many Christians who have fled the area have not been able to come back," said van Beek. "The Christian presence in the Middle East continues to diminish because many see no more future in the lands where their communities used to live for centuries."

Attention is now focussed on Syria where seven years of conflict have ensued, and the gathering also discussed the abduction and disappearance of two clerics five years ago from near Aleppo.

"The abduction of Mor Gregorius Youhanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yazigi, we believe, was a clear message targeting the Christian population of Aleppo, in particular, and of Syria in general," His Holiness Patriarch Aphrem II said.

"It constituted a threat to the Christians, rooted in their homeland in the countries of the Middle East and reinforced the position of the terrorists whose 'not-so-hidden' message to Christians was: this land is not yours, leave or you will be killed."

### ***Firm believer in the forum***

Mor Gregorius was a firm believer in the Forum and its mission, Patriarch Aphrem II said.

"Today, we continue to suffer

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persecution at the hands of terrorist groups such as ISIS, Al-Nusra and others, who are targeting Christian congregations and have completely destroyed many of our churches and other institutions,” he said.

The patriarch said Iraq has lost more than 80 percent of its Christian population in the last 15 years and the Christian population of Syria has decreased according to “our estimation by more than 40 percent since the so-called Arab Spring ‘blossomed’ in our land.”

Patriarch Aphrem II said that is clear that military means are used for political and economic goals “at the expense of the innocent civilian people”.

He noted that followers of the faith have high expectations. “We ask you to be our voice in your communities, as the unbalanced media is suffocating our voices.”

Professor Dimitra Koukoura, a GCF committee member for the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Ecumenical Patriarchate shared more about the life and character of Metropolitan Gregorius.

“He was a spiritual leader and politically minded, daring to address the global community regarding the injustice and hypocrisy of the powerful in the Middle East,” said Koukoura.

“He was a selfless devoted pastor and at the same time an ecumenical personality ready to participate in inter-faith and inter-Christian dialogues for the sake of peaceful co-existence of all people on earth.”

In a moment of tribute the auditorium was moved to silence as a series of images from Mor Gregorius’ life, including his presence at GCF meetings, was shown. The sounds of a single flute, played by fellow GCF committee member, Dr Ganoune Diop, drifted across the gathered participants as a fitting memorial.

Dr Gina A. Zurlo  
(Photo: Peter Kenny)



## ***New factors emerging in global Christianity, researcher tells GCF gathering***

***Three factors emerging in global Christianity are Africa’s new place in it as of 2018, the rise of Independent Christianity and Christians who self-identify separately from Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants.***

These aspects are in research by the Massachusetts-based Center for the Study of Global Christianity.

It has new research showing levels of denominational affiliation that the Center is calling ecclesiastical “families,” Gina A. Zurlo told the third gathering of the Global Christian Forum meeting in Bogotá, Colombia.

Her talk was enthusiastically received at the gathering that drew participants from every strand of Christianity to Bogotá.

Zurlo is the Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, in the United States, an academic research centre that monitors worldwide demographic trends in Christianity, including outreach and mission.

She addressed participants on “Global Christianity: Continuity and Change” on 27 April, noting, “Our 2009 Atlas of Global Christianity reported that 35 percent of the world

was Christian in 1910, and roughly 32 percent was Christian in 2010.”

***Center for the Study of Global Christianity***

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity collates and analyzes data on church membership and Christians’ activities around the world in addition to other religious demographics, to provide a reliable picture of global religious adherence.

From 2007–2009 Zurlo was a research assistant and is now associate director of the centre.

“We provide a comprehensive collection of information on the past, present, and future of Christianity in every country of the world.

“Our data and publications help churches, mission agencies, and non-governmental organizations to be strategic, thoughtful and sensitive to local contexts.”

One of the Center’s main projects currently is the Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity, which is a 10-volume series highlighting regional trends and issues in Christianity throughout the world.

It features articles written by local Christians everywhere.

The first volume on sub-Saharan Africa came out last year, and this

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## New factors emerging in global Christianity, researcher tells GCF gathering

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year's volume on North Africa and West Asia was published in April.

The second big project is the third edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia, which will feature all new data, updated articles on the history of Christianity in every country of the world, and a full-colour online version.

In 1910, unsurprisingly, Christianity was concentrated in the historic areas of 'Christendom' in Europe and North America.

### **100-year decline of Christian affiliation in the 'north'**

"However," said Zurlo, "over the 100-year period, Christian affiliation has decreased slightly in the North and increased substantially in the South."

This is the case in sub-Saharan

Africa and in 2010, you could also see large concentrations of Christians in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and India.

Considerable changes in Christian demographics have taken place in sub-Saharan Africa between 1970 and today.

"Sub-Saharan Africa was home to 134 million Christians in 1970 and grew to an astounding 621 million Christians by 2018," said Zurlo.

Her research shows a rapid growth of Christianity in the region from 1970 to 2000 and an easing of growth since the turn of the 21st century.

"In a sense, we can conceptualize Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa as 'continuity' over the 48-year period. Christianity continues to grow, although now at a slower rate," said the American researcher.

And contrasting the continuity narrative in sub-Saharan Africa is the

narrative of change in North Africa and West Asia (the Middle East).

"This region (the Middle East) was home to 12 million Christians in 1970 and 25 million in 2018, but these figures hide the tragic exodus of historic Christian communities in the region, despite roughly 400 years of Christian stability in the region before the 20th century," she noted.

"Looking at the two dates comparatively reveals a downward trend of Christian affiliation due to war, strife, and persecution.

"It is critical to keep the story of Christianity in the Middle East at the front and centre of discussions of world Christianity to prevent the narrative of 'growth' from overcoming the narrative of struggle and survival," explained Zurlo.

## **Pope Francis says Global Christian Forum fosters respect and human dignity, in Colombia message**

**Pope Francis extended greetings to participants of the Third Global Gathering, saying the Global Christian Forum provides solidarity that fosters respect and esteem, mutual forgiveness, and that defends human dignity.**

Father Juan Usma-Gomez, head of the Western Section of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and originally from Colombia, read the message on 26 April, the third day of the 24-27 April gathering.

Reflecting on this year's theme of 'Let mutual love continue', Pope Francis emphasised that "humanity is in great need of such solidarity, which fosters respect and esteem, mutual

forgiveness and the effective defence of human dignity in every situation."

Pope Francis expressed his gratitude to God for the occasion to gather together "as the Forum is a grace-filled opportunity for representatives of many Christian communities to meet as brothers and sisters and journey towards the fulfilment of Jesus' prayer that all may be one so that the world may believe (*cf.* Jn 17:21)."

He referred to the GCF's unique role as the most comprehensive gathering of global Christianity today and as a safe space for conversation across boundaries of Christian traditions.

Pope Francis said: "I pray that the Forum may be a time to share personal and ecclesial faith experi-

ences and provide an open and respectful space to address together new contemporary challenges, by promoting Christian solidarity and cooperation in a fresh and innovative way."

"I assure you and all present of my spiritual closeness during these days, and I invoke upon you Almighty God's blessings of wisdom, courage and strength," he concluded.

The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity is one of the four 'pillars' of the GCF, and has been an important contributor in the journey towards better understanding among different Christian traditions and the exploration of how common challenges can be addressed together.

# From presentation to proclamation, bishop guides GCF on 'mutual love'

***There are moments in a conference when it feels as though a speech moves from presentation to proclamation just by its tone and content.***

Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, stepped forward to address the topic of "Envisioning the Journey Ahead".

Surprisingly, he began with a journey of division: that of the story of the man born blind in John chapter 9, interweaving it with a forthright reflection of where the Church is on the journey to unity.

As we travelled further with Bishop Farrell, we found along the way he transformed into a homilist.

In his exposition of that man who could not see, we discovered in the end, the reality that the man in the story has lurched through a series of abandonments because of his engagement with Jesus.

By the time he had concluded his speech, Farrell had listed a six-point wish list of what the GCF may do to help the churches. [See next page, *Envisioning the Journey Ahead: a Bishop's Wish List*]

But not before he had made clarion clear comments on the spiritual basis of the church's life.

## ***Rejecting light***

At the start of this journey, Farrell asked, 'Who is this man born blind... could it (he) be the church?'

Farrell named for us an uncomfortable truth for our churches: "Christians like us, who claim to

believe in Christ ... are living in a situation of division which is a form of 'unloving': we don't love one another, at least not enough.

"In the past, Christians have persecuted one another and waged wars against each other. Even today in places, there is rivalry and mutual rejection.



Bishop Brian Farrell

"Our concern here though is not about our sins or who is to blame... let us concentrate on the Spirit-filled transformation that turns the blind man into a courageous follower of Christ," he explained.

Firstly, he noted, that in the story of the healed man, the neighbours are disbelieving.

Farrell put the question: "How hard it is to recognize and accept God's works!"

He went on: "Is there some wonderful work of God happening in the Gatherings of the Global Christian Forum?"

In his exposition, Farrell also highlighted the rebuffs experienced from the religious leaders and his parents: "Nobody around the man wants to believe that there is something wonderful happening here. But he knows there is!

"... They expel him. But the man is now a believer. And while he is rejected by those around him, he has found his Saviour."

Bishop Farrell sees a link here with the dominant themes of modern culture, suggesting then as now, "faith and religion are unwelcome intruders" in the world.

"Jesus had given him his sight, but he had left him in real trouble: separation from his family, expulsion from his community. There is a price to be paid for the gift of faith."

And so Bishop Farrell has described us to ourselves,

uncomfortably: "We may be women and men of faith, but we are living in a broken, sinful situation.

"We are not one as we are supposed to be, as Jesus and the Father are one — in mutual love. We are divided. Still, most of us are conscious that some form of visible unity is what Jesus prayed for," he said.

Bringing us back to our gathering, Bishop Farrell says, "If the Global Christian Forum stands for anything worthwhile it is... to create the conditions for a new era of friendship and solidarity between all Christian communions, emphasizing the

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## From presentation to proclamation, bishop guides GCF on 'mutual love'

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grace we share and not harping on the differences that divide.

“Only in this way can we fulfil the Lord’s command to preach the Gospel to the nations, ‘so that the world may believe. Let us not be afraid of one another.’

### **Love**

But there is more on offer in this presentation.

We were reminded of the bedrock of the living Church and ecumenical hope: love brought by Jesus, and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is the only energy and force that we Christians have for

advancing God’s Kingdom on earth.”

“We will succeed”, Bishop Farrell said, “Only if Christians and their churches stand together, speak with one voice, and work together in mission, evangelism and service.”

***“let us concentrate on the Spirit-filled transformation that turns the blind man into a courageous follower of Christ”***

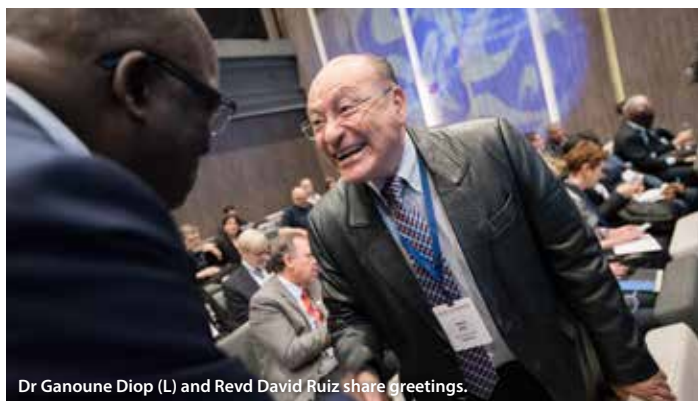
“Nothing of what our churches hope to do and seek to do will be achieved without a renewal of our personal faith and our commitment

to follow Jesus. In other words, Christians and Christianity have no future without holiness of life.”

So, now we are back with the man who cannot see, discovering light and holiness.

“Our hope and prayer should be that our communities and all of us personally, have the same transforming experience as the blind man: to hear the voice and feel the touch of Jesus, leading us out of darkness into the Light.”

– Kim Cain



## Envisioning the Journey Ahead: a Bishop’s Wish List

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity’s secretary, Bishop Brian Farrell, asked, “Do I have a wish list for the years ahead? I hope and pray that that the Global Christian Forum will help us to do the following:

1. Call the mainline churches to take the new Pentecostal, Evangelical and Charismatic communities seriously;
2. Call the new religious bodies to deepen their theological base to avoid uncritical understandings of Scripture and its implications for Christian witness and mission;
3. Concretely, this means renunciation of all open or hidden proselytizing; it implies respect for one another as Christians, including mutual recognition of our baptism wherever this entering into communion with God and into the Christian community is performed in the biblical way: through water and the Trinitarian formula;
4. That Christians who have been suspicious of the ecumenical movement will recognize it is a movement rooted in the Gospel and inspired by the Holy Spirit; the primarily spiritual and theological nature of the ecumenical movement be reaffirmed; that the goal of our ecumenical efforts be the full unity willed by Jesus;
5. That we move on from sterile discussions on structures and governance to a new appropriation of our shared Gospel faith;
6. That our churches not place obstacles to doing together much more than we actually do.



## *Role of churches in Colombia's peace process affirmed at Global Christian Forum gathering*

Colombian capital, Bogotá



***Bringing greetings to the Third Global Gathering, an official of the Colombian government praised the Christian community and other religious groups for the role they played in the South American country's peace process.***

The Colombian Deputy Minister of Political Relations, Héctor Olimpo Espinosa Oliver, offered greetings in the opening session of the Third Global Gathering.

Oliver spoke of the Colombian peace process for which the country's President, Juan Manuel Santos, was awarded the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to negotiate and sign peace accords with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas, after 52 years of violent conflict.

"All the churches and faith-based organisations have contributed significantly with their sacrifices and their many contributions to peace building and reconciliation," said Oliver.

### ***'Influence of churches'***

Oliver spoke of the "influence of

churches" and their role in economic inclusion and in "debate, orientation, listening, training, dialogue, prevention, so that our brothers and sisters can walk the good path, the path of goodness."

In his message in the next session of the Global Gathering, Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, returned to the theme of working for peace in Colombia. "We hope and pray that the peace process in Colombia will continue and will lead to just peace for the people of this country who have suffered from violence and war for more than 60 years."

He said, "We are working closely together with our member church, the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (PCC), and our local partners Justapaz of the Mennonite Church and the ecumenical platform DiPAZ, the Interchurch Dialogue for Peace."

Tveit said that visits by a WCC team "have shown that this is a very critical moment in the Colombian peace process."

He noted that while the peace accord has been signed by the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces

of Colombia) "after six years of negotiations in Cuba, the negotiations with the ELN are still in process, and other smaller guerilla groups have not been directly addressed."

The WCC leader also alluded to reports demonstrating that violence is still prevalent in many areas with the killing of community leaders.

"Displaced people who want to return to their land are being threatened and attacked.

"The current post-peace accord context in Colombia sees a unique Truth Commission that seeks to examine the root causes of complex situations of violence. But other points of the peace accord are only partially implemented, and the government does not deliver on all of its promises," said Tveit.

He observed that despite the efforts of the ecumenical group DiPaz, part of the Colombian population view with suspicion churches that are not reconciled among themselves and sometimes argue against each other.

### ***'Ministry of reconciliation'***

"Ours is the ministry of

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## Role of churches in Colombia’s peace process affirmed at Global Christian Forum gathering

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reconciliation. ‘Let mutual love continue’ – also when we address the issues that are still separating us so that we come closer and closer to each other because we come closer and closer to Christ among us,” said Tveit.

Lorena Ríos Cuellar, Director of the Office of Religious Affairs in

Ríos Cuellar said that the churches in Colombia have supported peace in the country long before the peace accords.

“At one stage there were a lot of concerns that churches had about the accords.”

She said, however, that in nine of the 32 Colombian provinces she has visited, the “churches I have seen are

“Because we talk about reconciliation between the churches, we talk about purifying our image of the other, in other words of the people who are in opposition if you wish.”

He said he is always convinced that these are the same principles and values that help civil society and



Dr Ruth Padilla DeBorst

Colombian Deputy Minister of Political Relations, Héctor Olimpo Espinosa Oliver (L) officially welcomes GCF Secretary, Revd Dr Larry Miller.



His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox London

Georgine Kengne Djeutane

Bishop Richard K. Baawobr

the Colombian government, who is a member of the Assemblies of God church in Colombia said the “interreligious sector” in “time of reconciling and constructional change has a historical role to play that it has never had before.”

She said, “Reconstruction of the new Colombia is on the churches shoulders. So, the church has to understand and take that role very seriously.”

all united” around the peace process goal, “and this wasn’t necessarily the case just a few years ago.”

The Colombian official said, “I am excited to see that they understand that this is a moment when they need to lead on reconciliation.”

For Bishop Brian Farrell, secretary of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, “It is providential that the Global Christian Forum is here.

political society “to solve the problems that create tensions in the countries”.

“If we can apply this in the political way, then I think many of the problems that are ongoing that are still taking place, even here in Colombia with the peace, could be seen in a new light. And maybe there would be a new impetus to really reach a final agreement,” said Farrell.

## World Evangelical Alliance extends greetings to Global Christian Forum, reaffirms commitment



Dr Thomas Schirrmacher

***Bishop Efraim Tintero, Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance, sent his greetings to the participants of the Global Christian Forum.***

Delivered by Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, WEA Associate Secretary General for Theological Concerns, Bp Tintero expressed his appreciation for the GCF, describing it as “a precious gift from God to all of us at the WEA”.

He reaffirmed WEA’s support for its continuation into the future.

Serving a constituency of some 600 million evangelicals around the world in 129 nations, WEA is one of the earliest participants of the GCF and is considered one of the four “pillar organizations” together with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Council of Churches and the Pentecostal World Fellowship.

With the GCF’s global gathering held in the Americas and in a Spanish-speaking country for the first time, Tintero thanked the hosting churches

in Colombia for their generosity and hospitality.

He expressed his hope that “this Global Gathering will build stronger connections between the Latin American Church and the worldwide family of believers.”

Referring to the gathering’s theme “Let mutual love continue” taken from the Biblical passage in Hebrews 13:1, Bishop Tintero commented: “We take seriously Jesus’ call to mutual love and unity among all who recognize him as Savior, but we also know that we must avoid compromises that would undermine our faith.”

He went on to affirm that “the GCF is a place where we can go with confidence, knowing that our collaboration with brothers and sisters from church bodies around the world will uphold the historic truths of the Christian faith and will strengthen God’s kingdom on earth.

“May the sharing of your respective faith journeys mutually encourage and edify each other and enrich our appreciation and respect for one another.”

One of the most significant recent gatherings of the GCF was held in Tirana, Albania, on the topic of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom where there were prayers and calls for solidarity in the face of religious persecution.

There was also an expression of apologies and repentance for times when Christians of different traditions have persecuted each other.

“We saw the GCF’s unique effectiveness in bringing together believers of many traditions at the powerful 2015 Tirana conference on the persecution of Christians.

“The GCF has helped us raise worldwide awareness of this crucial concern. It has enabled us to achieve consensus and collaboration on key issues while providing a platform for us to openly discuss sensitive matters, such as the current GCF process on proselytism,” Tintero noted.

He acknowledged the leadership transition taking place at this year’s gathering in Bogotá with Revd Dr Larry Miller handing over the role of GCF Secretary in July to Revd Dr Casely Essamuah, a Ghanaian evangelical pastor who has served in the United States for the past 13 years.

“We are deeply grateful for the service that Larry Miller has provided as GCF Secretary for the last six years. With grace, respectfulness, and responsiveness, he has achieved amazing things and made enormous contributions to the GCF’s effectiveness. Larry, the WEA will miss you very much! We wish Larry Godspeed in his next steps and look forward to being equally blessed by the service of incoming Secretary Casely Essamuah,” Tintero said.



Dr Billy Wilson

## Pentecostal leader, Billy Wilson, says GCF is platform for learning from one another

***A leading American Pentecostal preacher has acclaimed the Global Christian Forum (GCF) as an “important platform” for world faith leaders to come together and learn from each other.***

Dr Billy Wilson, the president of Oral Roberts University and a member of the Pentecostal World Fellowship executive committee was speaking in an interview on 27 April during the third gathering of the GCF from 24-27 in Bogotá, Colombia.

“The Global Christian Forum diffuses any kind of animosity between movements and shows us a way to be more together into the future of Christianity,” said Wilson.

“When you know someone, and you are already in a relationship with him it is hard to fight against him, and in that sense the GCF is becoming more and more an important platform for world faith leaders to come together in Christianity and share their perspectives, learn more about one another.”

Wilson is also the global chair of Empowered21, a Pentecostal

and charismatic group seeking the empowerment by the Holy Spirit in all aspects of life.

“Our living witness should be strong,” said. Wilson. “We need to live what we speak, and we need to speak what is the truth about Jesus Christ.

“All over the world leaders understand today that when a Christian lives out his belief he can make a real difference in the world. As Christians we are here to make a difference in peoples’ lives and this is the future for global Christianity.”

Pentecostals are the fastest growing Christian religious movement in the world, and the Pentecostal World Fellowship has become one of the GCF’s so-called ‘pillars’.

David Wells, vice-chair of the Pentecostal World Fellowship, a GCF Committee member and general superintendent of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada also attended the gathering.

He highlighted the PWF’s deep appreciation and gratitude to Larry Miller, GCF’s outgoing secretary, who has served seven years at the helm

of the GCF and extolled his tireless work on the integration of Pentecostal churches to the Forum.

Various strands of the Pentecostal movement had a strong presence at the Bogotá gathering.

Lord Elorm Donkor, district pastor of the Church of Pentecost and principal of the Birmingham Christian College, shared a testimony of love in his context.

He said, “This gives me hope that our God is bigger than an individual’s or one organization’s talents and gifts. So, we need to be open to others and to let mutual love continue.”

Jean-Daniel Plüss, chair of the European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association and also of the Fondation du Forum Chrétien Mondial, invited the participants to think about the future of global Christianity.

“As we have been reflecting together these days in our common faith journey, we invite you now to think even further on the challenges and hopes that are most relevant in your context.”

# Global Christian Forum builds trust, says WCC general secretary

**World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary, Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit told participants at the Global Christian Forum's Third (GCF) Global Gathering in Bogotá, Colombia that the GCF is remarkable in building trust among participants and opening ways for new forms of cooperation.**

The director of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission Revd Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus delivered a message from Tveit on 24 April, the opening day of the forum gathering which has the theme "Let mutual love continue" (Hebrews 13:1).

The third GCF Global Gathering took place April 24 – 27, bringing together some 250 church leaders reflecting the breadth and depth of world Christianity.

In his message, Tveit outlined the development of the WCC in the GCF noting, that GCF's trust building among its participants has enabled the opening of new forms of cooperation.

The WCC general secretary said that the trust had "notably improved" and there were more extensive relations and cooperation between partners that had "few or difficult relations before".

## **'Broadened participation'**

He noted that 2018 is a year of anniversaries for the WCC. It is the 20th anniversary of the first steps to create the Global Christian Forum and the WCC is celebrating the 70th anniversary of its founding in Amsterdam.

Tveit said that in August 1998,

before the WCC's Harare assembly a group of 28 "visionary and committed people" met at the Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey, near Geneva to develop a proposal for a "forum of Christian churches and ecumenical organizations".

They represented the WCC, Christian world communions, regional ecumenical organizations, national councils of churches, international ecumenical organizations, and churches that were not associated with ecumenical structures from Evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic traditions.

"They recognized that fellowship in Christ transcends membership in a fellowship of churches such as the WCC," said Tveit.

Mutual love, he said, cannot be reserved to my community, to my faith tradition or nation.

"It flows out of God's love for this world like the rivers of life in the beautiful image of the new creation in the book of the Revelation to John," said Tveit.

He observed that the intention of the GCF was to broaden the circle beyond existing structures, but not to create a new movement and that the constitutional basis of the WCC was to become the common ground for participation in the forum envisaged.

The participating groups declared, said Tveit, "Participation will be based on confessing the Lord Jesus



Revd Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus

Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and seeking to fulfil together the common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

## **Taking stock of the journey**

Taking stock of their journey together over the last 20 years, representatives of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), the WCC, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and the World Pentecostal Fellowship (WPF) met last year near Geneva.

"They affirmed the character of the GCF as a shared space, a forum, gathering people to build relations, to address issues of common concern and interest and to stimulate better relations between partners involved," said the WCC head.

He added that it would be misleading to look at it as an organization or a group with a mandate to pursue alternative ecumenism or make statements on behalf of the partners.

"I am confident that we will experience again here in Bogotá the great gift of the GCF for building trust, renewing the commitment to cooperation and experiencing the bond of mutual love in Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit," said Tveit.

Induction: Dr Casely Essamuah (L) is welcomed as GCF Secretary by Committee members, Revd Nicta Lubaale (C) and Revd Wesley Grandberg Michaelson (R).



## Dr Casely Essamuah is new GCF Secretary

*Dr Casely Essamuah was inducted into the position of Secretary of the Global Christian Forum during a joy filled and moving worship event on the final day the third global gathering in Bogotá, Colombia.*

Dr Essamuah takes the position following the retirement of the Revd Dr Larry Miller who has led the GCF for the last six years. Larry Miller and his wife Eleanor were also thanked and farewelled during the gathering.

Dr Essamuah was originally ordained in the Methodist Church, Ghana, and has worked for the last 13

years as Global Missions and Local Outreach Pastor of the Bay Area Community Church, Annapolis, Maryland, USA.

Dr Essamuah describes himself as “evangelical and ecumenical.” Coming originally from Africa and now ministering in North America, he views himself as a “bridge-builder” between the churches in the global north and global south.

Dr Essamuah said his initial reaction to his appointment was one of “humility and surprise”.

“I thought I would never come this far in the process, and had to come to

a place of surrender: if this is what the Lord wants me to do with my life, I found myself saying, ‘I’m ready to do it.’”

Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, co-chair of the original Search Committee, said: “In a time when the majority of the world’s Christians now live in the southern hemisphere, creating new tensions and challenges in the life of world Christianity, Dr Casely Essamuah is uniquely equipped to serve the cause of unity in the global body of Christ in the role of Secretary of the Global Christian Forum.”



Revd Dr Larry Miller

### Farewell to Larry Miller

*The GCF community gathered and embraced Larry and Eleanor Miller in a final and overwhelming display of thanksgiving to God for the work and vision of them both as it came time to farewell Larry from the position of Secretary.*

Miller, who succeeded founding GCF Secretary, Huibert van Beek in 2011, has led the GCF through times of substantial change in the global religious landscape, seeking deeper as well as wider connections and foundations for the GCF.

Amidst a plethora of achievements with the GCF, particular mention was made of the global consultation, ‘Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together’, in Tirana, Albania; and the continuing work on ‘Mission and Proselytism’ as a divisive issue of global concern for churches.

Farewell words gave deep regard for Larry’s humility, integrity and constancy in the position, and to Eleanor’s unwavering support and inspiration.