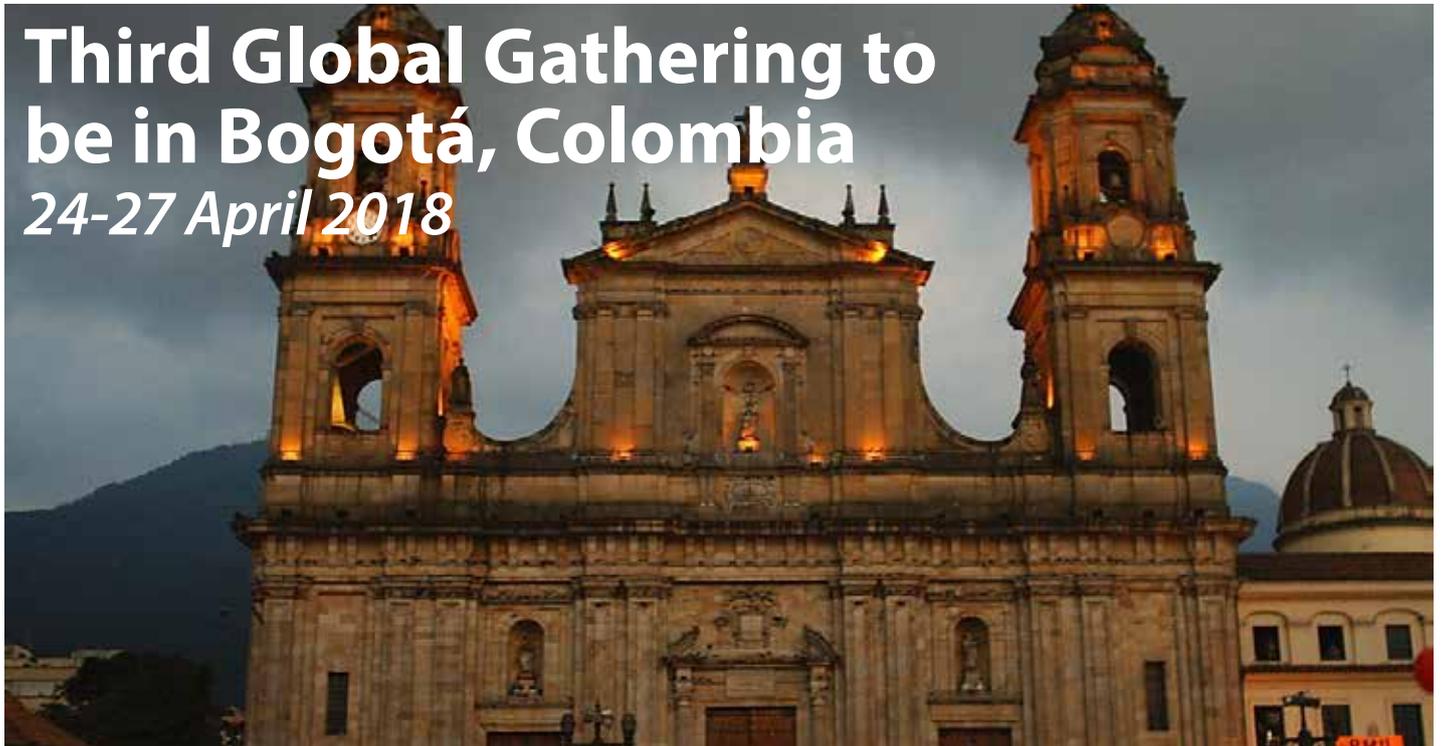


Third Global Gathering to be in Bogotá, Colombia 24-27 April 2018



In a series of firsts, the city of Bogotá, capital of Colombia, has been chosen as the location for the next Global Gathering for the GCF, where it will meet in its widest international and confessional entirety.

It is the first such GCF Global Gathering in either North or South America and the first in a Spanish-speaking nation.

The two previous GCF Global Gatherings were in Africa (Kenya, 2007) and Asia (Indonesia, 2011).

The theme of the four day conference is, 'Let mutual love continue' (Hebrews (13:1)).

In setting the scope of the conference the international Committee of the GCF said that it would be 'relational, testimonial and missional' in style and process.

Bogotá was chosen by the international Committee in part to:

- acknowledge the rapid and diverse growth of Christianity in Latin America;
- address inter-Christian relationships on the continent (as elsewhere in the world),
- continue to hear from the 'Global South' and their insights and experiences of world Christianity,
- recognize the influence and impact of the Spanish-speaking churches in global Christianity.

The Committee was also aware of the recent signing in November 2016 of the peace accord between the Government of Colombia and FARC rebels.

The Global Christian Forum itself reflects this breadth of Christian experience, as it is one of the world's most diverse global Christian 'spaces' in which at least six streams (traditions) of world Christianity can come to discuss matters of common concern. In doing so, they also express a commonality in Jesus Christ.

Secretary of the Global Christian Forum, Revd Dr Larry Miller, said the Third Global Gathering offers a unique platform for exchange between church leaders at this significant time

Continued on Page 2

Introduction

Welcome to **GCFNews**.

In this edition we cover three major items of interest:

- The date, place and theme of GCF Third Global Gathering (*Pages 1 and 2*)
- The GCF international Committee meets Havana, Cuba (*Pages 3-6*)
- The Global Consultation on 'Mission and Proselytism' in Accra, Ghana (*Pages 8-12*)

Plus more, on the GCF connecting with a number of important ecclesial gatherings.

Continued from Page 1
in world Christianity.

“The GCF is a ‘forum’, a place for leaders from across the spectrum of Christianity globally to meet for inspiration and insight on matters of common interest as they face the future together.

“We will hear also of what has occurred in the Forum since our last global gathering, especially developments of significance for all churches”, Miller said.

This diversity of the GCF is reflected in the fact that at the Bogotá gathering it will bring together leaders from Anglican, Catholic, Evangelical, Holiness, Independent, Orthodox (Eastern and Oriental), Pentecostal and Protestant traditions, as well as

many regional and global Christian organisations.



Four world organisations, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Vatican), the

Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Evangelical Alliance and the World Council of Churches, are also key ‘pillars’ of the GCF, and will be present at Bogotá.

Participation in the Global Gathering will be shaped by a series of balances, including a 50:50 ratio between leaders of ‘older’ churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant) and ‘younger’ churches (Evangelical, Pentecostal, Independent).

The GCF will issue invitations based upon recommendations from global churches and communions as well as international and regional church-related organisations.

Miller said, “The gathering will involve careful conversation, listening, and prayer as we put directly into practice the theme of the gathering, ‘Let Mutual Love Continue.’”

Global Gathering Jubilee Fund established to help ‘Mutual Love Continue’

A special fund to support and enlarge worldwide participation in the next GCF Global Gathering in Bogota has been launched.

To put into practice the theme of the global gathering — ‘Let Mutual Love Continue’ — and inspired by the biblical teaching of ‘Jubilee’ (for example, in Leviticus 25), the Global Gathering Jubilee Fund will enable leaders of churches and Christian organisations who otherwise could not be present to be present.

The aim is to put into action the Apostle Paul’s words to the Corinthians:

There is no question of relieving others at the cost of hardship to yourselves; it is a question of equality. At the moment, your surplus meets their need, but one day your need may be met from their surplus. The aim is equality; as scripture has

it, “Those who gathered more did not have too much, and those who gathered less did not have too little.” (II Corinthians 8.13-15)

The estimated average cost of travel and attendance of a participant from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, or Latin America is US\$1850.

Participation of leaders from all Christian traditions and parts of the world, thanks to the Jubilee Fund, will not only enrich those receiving from the fund, but also make the gathering richer in diversity and depth for all participants and their churches.

Individuals, churches, congregations and organisations are invited to make donations.

Secretary of the GCF, Larry Miller, said that the impact of this gathering of world church leaders could be profound. “At a time of deepening division in the world and sometimes

in the churches, it offers a rare and unique space for Christian leaders from all streams of world Christianity and from all continents to share in prayer, conversation, and discernment, growing in oneness in Christ and responding together to common challenges.”

All Global Gathering participants are urged to contribute to the fund. Other Christians and churches are encouraged to take their own initiatives in support of the Global Gathering Jubilee Fund.

Donors may indicate which ‘Christian family’, global region, or invited church leader they would like to support.

Contributions can be made online (<http://www.globalchristianforum.org/donate.html>) or by contacting the GCF secretary (LarryMiller@GlobalChristianForum.org).

Cuba conversations

The International Committee of the GCF held its annual meeting in Cuba, in March earlier this year. They were graciously hosted by the Fr José Miguel González Martín and his staff at Casa Sacerdotal in Havana.

Three matters dominated discussions:

- *planning the **Third Global Gathering**,*
- *the shape of complimentary roles with the four 'pillar' organisations that support the GFC (page 7),*
- *hearing the evolving story of the churches in Cuba.*

The Committee engaged in three perspectives on the contemporary situation of the churches in Cuba: from that of the Catholic Church, the Cuban Council of Churches and hearing from the Government.

Brief reports of those encounters, plus a story on a special prayer service, follows.

• Church state relations: a bumpy road, getting better: government official

It is almost six decades since Fidel Castro's Communist Party came to power in the Caribbean island nation of Cuba. A lot has happened to the churches in that time. In the last 15 years, in particular, much has changed.

The GCF international committee met with government and church leaders about the current state of play for churches in Cuba. All agree it's a lot better now, though there have been "bumps" along the way, and there's much more to do.

Cuban head of Religious Affairs of the Communist Party of Cuba, Ms Caridad Diego Bello, told the GCF participants that it had sometimes been a "bumpy road" in church-state relations over the years, but said the government was "working hard to change this."

It was a sentiment shared by leaders of both the Cuban Council of Churches and the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Cuba.

Ms Diego Bello said there had been a profound change in the nation's constitution that moved the country from an 'atheist state' to a secular one,

and this now promoted the right of a person to express their religion, to change their religion, or not to have a religion.



Gratitude: Larry Miller offers a token of appreciation to Ms Caridad Diego Bello, Head of Cuban Religious Affairs.

It is her aim, she said, to facilitate good relationships between the churches and the state, in order to create a better place for all.

She wanted it to be a situation where "we can resolve problems in a 'natural way'"; when there are misunderstandings, we want to work well together to fulfil the patriotic

duty for the full betterment of our Cuban community.

It was commonly agreed, she said, that the appearance of 'un-registered churches' was a difficulty, and they were working on a more streamlined registration process. There were also issues with the church owning property and the influx of many 'unknown' groups.

Despite that she noted that the nation had issued at least 10,800 religious visas in the past year – for religious leaders to attend gatherings, meetings, missions and assemblies.

It seems, she opined, that there was a lot of interest in how Cuba was going to cope with this new religious freedom. She also noted that Cuba was one of only a few countries that had greeted all three of the recent Popes.

Diego Bello also referred to the natural spirituality of the Cuban people, their slave background and its impact on their religious beliefs. She said the government had also welcomed the establishment of Jewish and Islamic worshipping communities in the country.

Concentration: GCF Committee members at work in Havana.



(c) KimCain/GCF

• Cuban Council of Churches: time of growth and change

These are times of tremendous growth and change for the church in Cuba, said Revd Tony Santana who led a delegation from the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) to a session of the GCF Committee meeting in Havana.

“We are living in different times,” said Santana, “especially since the dramatic changes to the Cuba Constitution in 1992, there has been growth in all churches in Cuba – historical churches, Pentecostal churches and the Catholic Church.”

Santana said, “Prior to the 1990’s the church was repressed by the government, but now we live in a country that is in constant change and transformation, and the church itself as a part of the change. For instance, all churches are growing.

“We believe the church has a critical role to play in this transformation.”

Santana said the impact of this major growth in the church and of the number of churches is still not clear.

“We don’t know yet what it will mean.”

The Cuban Council of Churches has 29 full members, which include evangelical churches, historical churches, Pentecostal churches and Charismatic churches. The Orthodox Church has recently moved from associate status to full membership.

The Cuban Council of Churches, he said, has a good working relationship with the government and is working to help with the registration process for ‘un-registered’ Christian groups.

In assessing outstanding issues the delegation members said there is a big need to strengthen theological education (including in the area of Pentecostal theology). The delegation also saw the need to ensure that the Cuban experience of being church – through the long years of repression and now with growth – should be valued so as to enable the local church to have a contextual nature.

As one member put it, “It was not always the best for the church in the past, but because the church in

Cuba had this experience, we have learnt that the Cuban church has to be ecumenical and led by Cuban people, not dominated by people from abroad.”

The CCC, as part of its joint ministry, has 14 ecumenical centres and 10 ecumenical ministers working with teams across two main areas: Diaconal Ministry, and Formation and Study.

This is a strong lay ministry emphasis, and the CCC is aware of the need for spiritual education of its population, and to be of service to the wider community. They had recently added ‘prison ministry’ (working alongside the government), to its diaconal services in health, disabilities and emergency assistance.

To be permitted to be working in prisons, within government buildings and offering services, was seen as a significant breakthrough, since Churches had been banned from government instrumentalities and

Continued on Page 5

Continued from Page 4
services to this point.

It was acknowledged that the churches faces a complex time, with so many groups coming into the country with different perspectives and theological approaches. There is dialogue with the Catholic Church, but they are not members of the CCC. Within all these variations, there is hope for closer engagement as “there are more things that unite us in Christ, than separate us,” Santana said.

Discussion: Cuban Council of Churches delegation members hear a question from GCF Committee member, Rev Dr. Femi Adeleye.



• Catholic Church in Cuba; living testimony helped a church survive



Greeting: Larry Miller (R) with Archbishop Garcia.

The GCF committee received a warm visit from the Catholic Church, led by Archbishop Dionisio Garcia of Santiago de Cuba, the president of the Cuban Catholic Bishops' Conference, who likened the cooperation within GCF as “the ideal situation” for churches everywhere, including for Cuba.

In similar vein to other Christian churches and groups in Cuba, Abp Garcia said the Cuban church had been deeply hit through the years of the Communist revolution, which immediately resulted in an exodus of many hundreds of priests and nuns to Spain or the USA.

“We were on our own” in those years, he said. Over the next five decades, however, the Church learnt to survive “by being itself”:

showing Christian witness in acts of love, generosity and welcome to all, through the dark days. This was our witness to Christ.

Now, in the new, more open political environment, the Catholic Church – like all other churches in Cuba – is growing.

There is freedom: “not just in freedom of worship but in the way we can be the church; not by confronting government, but by being in dialogue with them.”

Abp Garcia said, still now, we are at a beginning – there is a long way to go – and we many not see it (full freedom) come to fulfilment but we are thinking of those who come behind us.

In this new environment, Abp

Garcia said, “there is open space for the Church’s social work, to share hope with the people, to be with those who feel difficulties, misery and, who dream of new life together and in Christ.”

In the journey through the difficult days the church has learnt to become a Cuban church, he said. In those past days it was important to “preserve the charity of the church by the way we lived, inspired by the Holy Spirit. That is all we had, but we had to be faithful, and learn how to be the church by being ourselves.”

Abp Garcia, said the Catholic Church has now set out three broad areas for its work in:

1. Spirituality: to acknowledge our relationship with Christ, our only saviour;
2. Community: if we are Christian then we will give testimony in how we live - in unity and service for others.
3. Communication: we must reach out to the world; we cannot keep the message of Christ or our communion to ourselves.

The Archbishop acknowledged there was much more work to do on inter-Christian relationships. It had surprised him, for example, that when the Catholic Church partnered

Continued on Page 6

Continued from Page 5
 with a non-Catholic group from the USA on a public exhibition on the Bible (which included a theological component about the Reformation), that some Cuban Christian groups

suggested their members should not attend.

“This was a surprise to the organisers and the church,” he said.

But said, Abp Garcia, we cannot lose the desire to express our unity,

we must overcome this gap between us and other churches. And that is why he called the presence of the GCF in Cuba an example of the “ideal situation” of the church in here (in in this meeting) and for the world at large.

Together: CGC Committee members and Cuban Religious Affairs.



Worship: Dr Kathryn Johnson preaches and Magali Mareno translates.



Churches worship together during GCF visit

A special moment occurred during the GCF Committee meeting in Havana, Cuba, when leaders of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Cuba and leaders of the Cuban Council of Churches came together with GCF delegates for an ecumenical evening prayer service.

Meeting in the chapel at Casa Sacerdotal, Havana, the Catholic ‘hostel and priests house’ which generously hosted the GCF meeting, all participated equally in sharing prayer, song, and reading the Scriptures.

The reflection was delivered by Dr Kathryn Johnson, who represents the Lutheran World Federation on the GCF international committee.

In Cuba at the moment, the Catholic Church is not a member of the Cuban Council of Churches, so a time of fellowship and prayer became a distinctive moment of shared witness to the centrality of Jesus Christ even amidst our diversity and separateness.



Praying together.

Catholic Bishops Conference members and GCF leaders.



'Greater Oneness in Christ' and complementary roles produces historic meeting

The GCF International Committee meeting in Havana agreed to engage in a collaborative process to explore on how 'the Forum' relates to the four primary global church bodies that connect most closely to its work, and how it could be a "common instrument" in relationship with them.

The four world organizations are the World Council of Churches (WCC), Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU - within the Vatican), the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF), and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

The resulting meeting, held at Bossey, Switzerland in mid-May, produced an historic outcome: for the first time all four organisations came together in the continuing journey to overcome internal divisions separating Christians.

The consultation enabled the top leadership of each entity to spend two days together in facilitating their support of the Global Christian Forum, and in the process discuss their 'Oneness in Christ', complementary roles as global Christian organisations and developments in world Christianity.

About 25 participants considered key questions, that originally arose in the 2016 GCF/WCC evaluation of their mutual relationship:

- Where are we on the path of Christian unity in the world church today, two decades after the WCC called for a new forum for encounter and conversation between churches?
- What does the answer to that question suggest about next steps on the journey of churches towards greater oneness in Christ and the complementary role of each participating church and organization?

Those present were deeply appreciative of the discussion and sharing:

Dr David Wells, who serves as the vice-chair of the Pentecostal World Fellowship, said, "Our time at Bossey has provided an excellent opportunity to further understand one another and the vital role the GCF has, as we move into the future together.

"The Global Christian Forum provides an effective relational platform to listen and learn from one another's historic and current story of faith."

Revd Wes Granberg-Michaelson, former General Secretary of the Reformed Church in the USA and serving on the GCF's leadership team, said, "The meeting at the WCC's Bossey Ecumenical Institute, has been hoped for by many for years. The power and credibility of global church's witness and service to the world is strengthened immeasurably by healing our tragic divisions. In my decades of ecumenical work, this time together is a hallmark."

Bishop Efrahim Tendero, General Secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance, remarked that, "The Global Christian Forum brings us together in a spirit of faith, to meet and build up each other."

Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, spoke of a "great meeting", encouraging participants to "continue on this path of understanding and collaboration. May the Spirit complete in us what he has begun (cf. Philippians 1:6)."

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC General Secretary opined: "A very good meeting with a lot of common understanding of how the Global Christian Forum has had positive effects.

"We have been reflecting on developments in world Christianity and, in this context, the question of how the different instruments in the search for Christian unity can complement each other. We have also articulated the role of and responsibility for the GCF as a shared instrument of unity if the GCF is faithful to its identity as a forum."

Rev. Dr Larry Miller, GCF Secretary, reflected on the beginning of the GCF and the current discussions, noting that the call for a new forum came first from the WCC at a meeting held nearly 19 years ago, was also at Bossey.

Pointing to the relational distance since covered between the two meetings Miller said, "That the Catholic Church, the PWF, the WCC, and the WEA, who together represent in some sense nearly all of world Christianity, are now ready to work hand-in-hand in a common forum is reason for profound gratitude for the past and high hope for the future."

The meeting is seen by participants as a "consultative body" preparing for the next meeting of the GCF international committee in Taizé, France, 8-13 February 2018 and the next GCF global gathering in Bogota, Colombia, 24-27 April 2018.

The main discussion was focused on the role and structures of the Global Christian Forum with a clear core identity as a forum, how best to follow up Forum events, the methodology for theological reflection, enhanced communication strategies and how to include mega churches and migrant churches in the work of the GCF.

Global Consultation on 'Christian Mission and Perceptions of Proselytism' takes place in Ghana

A unique meeting of leaders, drawn from many traditions and experiences, share, discuss and pray together around the sensitive issues of Christian mission and perceptions of proselytism.



A further step in a global process to examine, and potentially produce a joint statement, on the difficult issue of the 'call to Christian Mission and perceptions of proselytism', took place when some 30 theologians and leaders of churches, ecclesial bodies and Christian organisations met in Accra, Ghana, last June.

A Communique was issued after the meeting.

Reflecting the time of deep sharing the group said, "participants... acknowledged ways in which each of their traditions had been complicit in improper behaviour", but also affirmed a "strong commitment to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ", and stressed "the need for ongoing Christian formation in all communities."

The honest sharing of experiences "told of both divisive and reconciling experiences, and expressed hope that this historical moment offers

unique opportunities for progress together toward common witness", the communique said.

The consultation was planned and implemented by the Global Christian Forum together with the Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity/PCPCU), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance.

It was generously hosted by the Church of Pentecost, Ghana at their headquarters on the outskirts of Accra.



Larry Miller addresses guests of the Church of Pentecost, with global consultation members behind.

Read:

- the Communique – page 12,
- quotes and insights as they talked – page 10-11, and
- the round-up story, this page.

The consultation process was held in part to help offer insight and reflection for members of a task group that has been working on a document on the call to mission and perceptions of proselytism. The task group shared aspects of their work and early draft material. This was seen as a way of strengthening and testing the draft statement as it continues.

It is hoped the document will be accepted by global ecclesial and church bodies as a guiding statement on the nature of proselytism as the church in its many traditions, engages in the mission of God globally.

The Global Christian Forum instigated the process as part of its commitment to a number of common challenges facing the churches globally.

Glimpses from keynote addresses



David D. Ruiz

A reminder from the book of Jonah

“The call to mission is always heard in the middle of tension, challenge and crisis. The first time the disciples heard the call to mission was not an exception, they were in the middle of challenges and tension. Fear, doubts and sense of failure is the context of the first call to mission. Fear is the first feeling in the background of the Great Commission’s passage in Matthew 28.”

“The church today is always hearing the call to mission in the middle of challenging contexts. We are facing terrible challenges that confront the call to mission and sometimes make us fear and doubt.”

The challenges include, said Ruiz, ‘moral relativism’, the ‘advance of Islam’, ‘increasing secularism’ and, ‘the self-centred society’.

Using the OT story of Jonah as a typology of mission, Ruiz said, in the situation of the prophet Jonah “the call to mission is a call to self-examination”: What have you done? (Jonah 1:10)

This is now the question facing us in the church, Ruiz said. It is “about (asking) how we gradually moved away from the mission of God and began to live according to our will, to satisfy our own desires and interests and, above all, to bringing glory to us and to our organization, instead of obeying a simple, clear and direct instruction from God: ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel.’”

David D. Ruiz, World Evangelical Alliance, World Missions Commission Executive Director, Guatemala



Dr Katalina Tahaafe-Williams

The question of ‘nominalism’ in proselytism

The local congregation’s ability to inspire and form its own members lies at the heart of the issue of proselytism, said Dr. Tahaafe-Williams.

“In my own experience, too many churches assume that the average regular church attender is fully cognizant of what it means to be Christian, and have an adequate knowledge and understanding of the Christian Faith. Further, that such a person in choosing to be a follower of Jesus is quite satisfied to be fed sugary cornflakes as their daily diet with very little (if at all) wholesome vegetables and/or meat.”

“As such, many congregations are poorly equipped and have very little capacity to be the church in the wider community and society”, she said.

“Surely a hermeneutic congregation is the means to re-inspire and re-invigorate Christians in faithful discipleship, to reactivate dormant Christians to take their place in the gospel story, and to attract those who do not know Christ so they would want to know and be part of that gospel reality! Surely this is the mission we are called to.”

(But) “It is precisely, (the)... interior health problem and diminished vitality that makes the church so vulnerable to corruption and to the forms of corrupt evangelism we are here engaged with. It could be said that such vulnerability to proselytism is the consequence of baptizing persons for far too long without the necessary work to convert them to the gospel, and to bring them into a personal encounter with Jesus as Saviour.”

Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, Tonga/Australia



Comments along the way..

Fr Andrzej Choromanski, Catholic Church (PCPCU), Vatican:

[Introducing the session] This is a time of conversation. We are trying to talk to each other, but there are two dangers: first, that we are not honest enough, for fear of offending others. We need to be frank, so that we can work toward solutions. Second, the danger is that we are being too aggressive and accusatory toward one another, not remembering that we are in the same body of Christ.



(L) Apostle Dr. Opoku Onyinah, Chairman, Church of Pentecost.



Dr. Petros Vassiliadis (Greek Orthodox) task group member



Bishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox, UK/ Egypt:

Maybe we can pursue the idea of complementarity. If I go into my brother's house and disagree with how he does things, do I take his family home with me to teach them the right way? My Church (Coptic) does not use the word 'heretic' against any other Christian. We do not deny their faith. Can we find a way to strengthen each other? Are we willing to say, 'I would love to make your people better Catholics,' rather than trying to convert them?



Prof Catherine Clifford, Catholic, Canada:

The Catholic Church has embraced the principle of religious freedom. Prior to 1960 a non-Catholic spouse had to promise to raise children in the Catholic faith. Now, the church respects the conscience of the spouse, and we cannot use marriage as a means of proselytism. We try to educate our priests to be aware of this, but inter-church couples receive very little support. Most inter-church couples who try to maintain a presence in two churches find within five years it is easier to move to just one.



Dr Mel Robeck, Pentecostal USA:

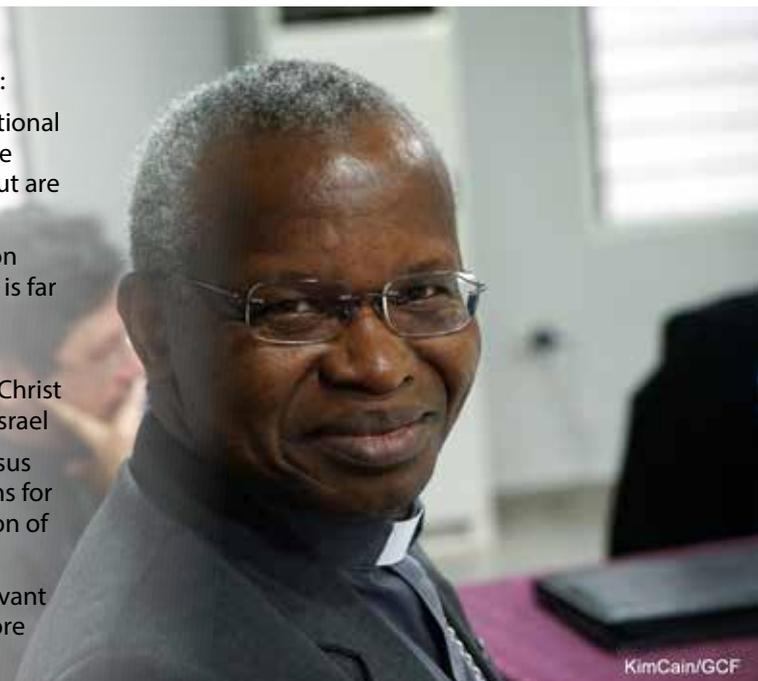
There can be many factors unnamed when we talk about proselytism. We deal with it theologically, but there are many social factors. I think there are two major factors we must face: ignorance and fear. We Pentecostals are sometimes asked if we are Protestant. Sometimes we say no, because we were not around at the Reformation. But you could say that we are great-great grandchildren of the Reformation. My students know little about Catholics and nothing at all about Orthodox.

Bishop Richard Kuuia Baawobr

On the rapid growth of New Religious Movements in Africa:

- Neo-primal movements: seeking to revitalise the traditional religions through the influence of Christianity...replace traditional gods and spirits with one Supreme ruler...but are anti-Christian.
- Syntheists: blending elements of the traditional religion with Christianity to create a new 'reality' --the new mix is far from both Christianity and Traditional Religion.
- Hebraists: take inspiration from the Bible and the Old Testament in particular... no real recognition of Jesus Christ as saviour. Rather, draw heavily from prophets of old Israel
- African Christian churches: giving a central place to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Founded 'in Africa by Africans for Africans'... believe they are a more authentic expression of the Christian faith for Africans today.

Commonly, these groups see their mission to be more relevant to the people than that of the mainline churches....therefore not surprising that relationships are often far from cordial.



KimCain/GCF



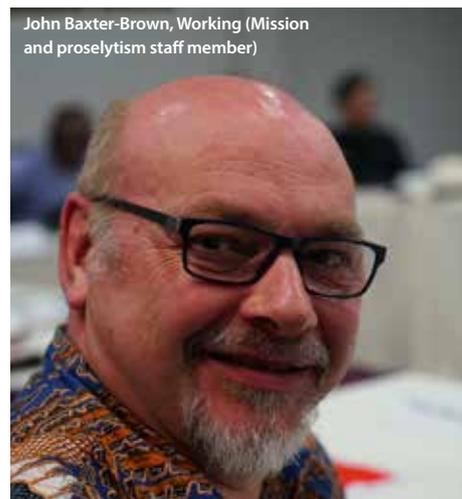
Revd Asa Michael Kain, Pentecostal, Bangladesh:

As a Christian, I live as a minority.... We rarely get members from other churches, but mostly from non-Christians. So we have little proselytism. As minorities, our churches come together. If we have an evangelism campaign, the first thing we do is consult or gather with all local churches. Why do we do that? One, we live in a situation where Christians are just 1.5% of the population. The harvest is too big for any one church. Second, we face persecution. All Christians share in this suffering. We live in fear of death daily. And our persecutors do not care what denomination we are.



Revd Dr Janet Corlett Methodist, UK:

...When we approach people, listen to where they are at. What is their longing and hunger, what in their lives has brought them to where they are? Sometimes if we just have a message, and we want to create a hunger, we are not listening to how God might be sparking something in them.



John Baxter-Brown, Working (Mission and proselytism staff member)



Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell (UK/Brazil)



Mission and proselytism discussed around the table: Anglican, Coptic, Orthodox, Methodist, Pentecostal: working on it.



13 June, 2017

COMMUNIQUE

Global Consultation Discusses Issues Concerning the Church's 'Call to Mission and Perceptions of Proselytism' Accra, Ghana, 8-11 June 2017

'Go then to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptise them in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey all I have commanded you.'
(Matthew 28:19,20)

An international consultation of some thirty theologians and church leaders from a wide range of Christian traditions gathered in Accra, Ghana, to explore 'perceptions of proselytism' in the exercise of the universal mandate to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

The gathering was convened by the Global Christian Forum, whose purpose is to provide space in which Christians from a wide variety of churches and traditions meet together to foster mutual respect and address common challenges. In these conversations, experiences and perceptions of 'proselytism' have emerged as major themes. 'Proselytism' is defined in multiple ways but is often understood as unethical or unfaithful practices in evangelizing those who are in some way already members of other churches or Christian communities.

Planning and implementation were undertaken together with Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance.

Beginning from a strong commitment to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ, the consultation heard keynote addresses which examined 'the call to mission in today's context' and stressed the need for ongoing Christian formation in all communities.

Examining the situation in a wide variety of global contexts, participants also acknowledged ways in which each of their traditions had been complicit in improper behaviour. They told stories of both divisive and reconciling experiences, and expressed hope that this historical moment offers unique opportunities for progress together toward common witness.

The consultation is part of an ongoing process working toward a common Statement to be signed together by the four co-sponsoring bodies, with others invited also to join in support. A working draft was considered, and further steps identified for the next year.

The consultation was generously hosted by the Church of Pentecost at its Convention Centre.

GCF leader addresses Christian Reformed Church in North America synod



Photo credit: Karen Huttenga

Revd Dr David Han recently represented the Global Christian Forum at the annual Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), explaining the Global Christian Forum's purpose is to bring together a broad range of Christian denominations and ecumenical organizations to address common challenges.

Dr Han, who is a minister and lecturer of the Church of God (Cleveland) and on the

GCF international committee, informed the large crowd of the two key challenges to the church worldwide taken up by the GCF: persecution of Christians, and the perception that some churches are proselytizing Christians from other churches.

In response to the issue of persecution, he said the Global Christian Forum held "a global consultation of 150 church leaders,

half of whom were leaders of churches suffering persecution and the other half were leaders of churches and agencies in solidarity with them."

"It was the first time in the modern history of the church that a gathering consisting of nearly all streams of global Christianity coalesced around the issue of persecution of Christians," said Han.

In prayer for the GCF and Dr Han, CRCNA Synod's first clerk, Rudy Gonzalez, said "Father we can say it is only by the power of your hand that you bring about these gatherings where people who wouldn't normally come together come together... We pray that your name would be honoured and glorified as they fellowship with one another."

Grace filled greeting to Lutheran World Fellowship

Global Christian Forum committee member Revd Dr Aiah Foday-Khabenje, General Secretary, of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, highlighted the grace of the Gospel, when he offered GCF greetings to the Lutheran World Federation 12th Assembly in Namibia, 10-17 May 2017.

In his message Foday-Khabenje said, "The theme of the LWF 12th Assembly: "Liberated by God's Grace" could not be more apt as the church revisits the Reformation era.

"The grace of God brought Luther

to the place where he had the urge to call the church's attention that grace is a priceless and free gift from God,



as the only means for our redemption and was not a commodity to be

sold for money. This sparked off the Reformation movement.

"Luther's countryman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the middle of the last century, called the church's attention to the tension between what he saw as 'cheap grace' and 'costly grace'; free but priceless grace."

For Bonhoeffer, said Foday-Khabenje, "Discipleship is to respond to the call of Jesus... (to) pick up the cross and follow Christ. Above all, grace is costly to have the Son of

God take on humanity and lay down his dear life on the Cross."



Revd Wes Granberg Michaelson address WCRC
General Council, Wittenberg, Germany.

Leader offers greeting to world Reformed body with 'sweet-bitter' reminder of Reformation

The Revd Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, member of the GCF international Committee, offered greetings to the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) at its General Council, in Wittenberg, Germany early July.

Granberg-Michaelson, a retired Minister of the Reformed Church of America, said the GCF “extends its deepest gratitude, on this day and in this place, for its partnership with the World Communion of Reformed Churches, recognizing your own call to ecumenical engagement as one of your strategic priorities.”

The greeting came in a special worship service in the home church of Martin Luther as the WCRC signed on to the Catholic

and Lutheran ‘Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification’, which was originally agreed to in 1999.

The service also included a message from Pope Francis who said he welcomed the signing with great joy, and that the formal act would bring “new challenges and responsibilities in our pursuit of fidelity to the Gospel and unity in truth.”

Granberg-Michaelson acknowledged the significance of the WCRC signing the statement in the 500th year since the beginning of the Reformation: “We have joined together in an offering of worship, marking this 500-year moment with words of celebration, lament, confession, witness, and commitment.

“We have done so mindful that

the courageous actions of witness which initiated the reformation of the church not only brought the gifts of theological insight, biblical enrichment, and spiritual renewal.

“But this also brought the unintended consequence of rending the body of Christ into unending divisions, continuing to this day, with a legacy of over 43,000 separate denominations throughout world Christianity.

“The Global Christian Forum was initiated as a modest but hopeful response to this enduring and sinful reality.

“From the beginning (in 1998) the World Communion of Reformed Churches... has been a firm and faithful partner in this effort”, Granberg Michaelson said.