

Global Christian Forum News

2019 Edition 01



Global is Local

By: Jean-Daniel Plüss

French-speaking Christians of all churches in Europe met in Lyon, France, October 28–31, 2018 for a Francophone Christian Forum. It was the first time that more than 200 church leaders and delegates from Belgium, France and Switzerland, including Global Christian Forum Secretary, the Revd Dr Casely B. Essamuah, and two former Secretaries, Revd Dr Larry Miller and Revd Hubert van Beek, met to celebrate and share their common faith in Jesus Christ. The event was well prepared and fully supported by the Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and independent churches.

Central to the meeting was the willingness to listen to each other's faith journeys. Although differences in various church traditions were not glossed over, there was an overwhelming agreement that all participants shared an essential faith in Christ. In their final message the participants stressed, "We also understood that what we have experienced here could be shared much more widely among our communities and places of worship. That's why we invite you to experiment with this fruitful approach and to meet Christians of different expressions from yours. Share with confidence what Christ is for each one of you! Seek to discover each other in truth! Pray and listen to the Word of God."

A follow up meeting by the organizers took place in Paris on May 10, 2019, to assess the impact of the event and possibly plan for a second Francophone Christian Forum.

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Lots Completed, Lots to Do. From the 2019 GCF Committee Meeting



“We have gone through a period of transition and have now taken significant steps towards a common understanding of where we are going and how to get there.” states Global Christian Forum Secretary the Revd Dr Casely Essamuah at the end of the 5-day meeting of the Global Christian Forum Committee in February 2019 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. “We bring back plenty to consider from this meeting. We have also have identified multiple issues which need further discussion”

Hosted by Revd Dr Prince Guneratnam, chair of the Pentecostal World Fellowship and Global Christian Forum Committee member, and his team at the Calvary Church (Pentecostal), the Committee sought to identify priorities for the next number of years based on the outcomes of the Third Global Gathering that took place in Bogota, Colombia, in April 2018.



Global Christian Forum operates differently than other international Christian bodies as it's a network, not an institution. This means constantly justifying its existence by initiating high-value consultations and inter-church gatherings where fresh ideas are tested, and creative

thinking can flourish.

“We offer a neutral platform, where people have the opportunity to meet peers they probably wouldn't have met otherwise. We bring people together and initiate new dialogues”, Essamuah explains.

The Committee decided on three main areas to concentrate its focus. Regional gatherings, the first of which to be held in Asia next year. Increasing the involvement from younger ecumenists, and strategic communications.

The Committee's dialogue and direction setting also came with an opportunity to meet with local churches and church leaders, and to learn about their experiences as Christians in a Muslim majority country. The informal meetings and conversations often being as powerful to Committee members as the formal ones.

“I am leaving Kuala Lumpur in a very good and hopeful mood.” Says Essamuah. “Not only did we have a productive meeting, we have enjoyed the hospitality of Revd Dr Prince Guneratnam and his team at the Calvary Church, who helped us organize things and took extremely good care of us. We all highly appreciate that”.

Highlights from the Committee Meeting in Kuala Lumpur



The Apostolic Nuncio to Kuala Lumpur, Archbishop Joseph Marino, was presented a stole by the Global Christian Forum Secretary the Revd Dr Casely Essamuah.

The Facilitation Group was honoured to have lunch with the Apostolic Nuncio, Fr Andrzej Choromanski, PCPCU representative on the GCF Committee, as well with the Moderator of the World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos.



Host, the Revd Dr Prince Guneratnam, invited regional denominational leaders to a Chinese New Year dinner celebration with members of the Global Christian Forum Committee.

Discussions ranged from social and ethical questions, to secularization, to the challenges of being a minority religion, as well as persecution. It was an honour for the Committee members to be so warmly hosted and to be able to learn about day to day life for Christians in the region.

New Committee Member



Revd Dr Hana Kim, Lead Pastor of Myungsung Church, South Korea

The Revd Dr Hana Kim had an upbringing that truly reflects the global nature of his current ministry at Myungsung Church, the largest Presbyterian church in the world. Born and raised in Seoul, Korea, he spent his adolescent years in New Jersey where he attended high school before enrolling at UMass Amherst. He returned to Korea for seminary before going on to receive his Th.M from Princeton Seminary and his Ph.D at Drew University with a dissertation focused on American church history. In 2012 he was honored by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, which named him to their Young Global Leader Forum. In early 2017 the Search Committee of Myungsung Church nominated him to be their new Lead Pastor, and he was subsequently voted in by an overwhelming majority of the congregation. He spends most of his free time with his wife raising their three loving children, but remains an avid basketball player.

His commitments to the universal body of Christ include sitting on the boards of Sojourners International and Princeton Theological Seminary. He is honored to serve in the Global Christian Forum as it seeks to be a crucial component of the worldwide ecumenical movement.

New Building Facilitates New Relationships

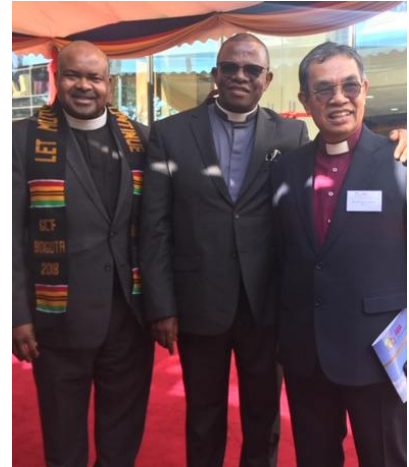
The Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) celebrated the grand opening of the new AEA Plaza on the 11th of April 2019, in Nairobi, Kenya. Over 300 global leaders drawn from various organizations and Church traditions were present at the event including Global Christian Forum Secretary, the Revd Dr Casely B. Essamuah, and the General Secretary of the Organization of African Instituted Churches and Global Christian Forum Committee member, the Revd Nicta Lubaale.

Dr Goodwill Shana, President of the AEA and Chair of the International Council of the World Evangelical Alliance, highlighted that the AEA Plaza building is a testimony and symbol of how the evangelical church is more than a pulpit church, but one that is progressive, institutional and infrastructural. He added, "This moment is the culmination and offspring

of the movement and momentum of many previous contributions over the 52 years of AEA's existence." The AEA General Secretary, Revd Dr Aiah Foday-Khabenje, looking back at the genesis of the project, said the AEA leadership sensed it is crossing over time for the AEA, "To move from stagnation to a revitalized, visible and vibrant organization."



"Africa your time has come," was the prophetic proclamation made by Bishop Efraim Tendero, Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) at the grand opening. He made this remark looking at Africa's past hurts of colonization and forcible exploitation of its mineral and human resources. He added, "Symbolically, Evangelicals in Africa are standing tall around the world, because throughout the World



Evangelical Alliance, AEA is the only regional alliance with a headquarters such as this and this is the manifestation of goodness and guidance of God."

The opening of the AEA Plaza, is an important milestone in the unfolding witness of the evangelical movement on the continent. The AEA plaza memorializes the dedication of AEA leaders who have gone before, and points ahead to victories yet to be won by succeeding generations of Christ followers serving in Africa and globally.



Our Continuing Work



A preliminary consultation was held in January with church leaders in Ghana hosted by Trinity Theological Seminary. Discussions were held on the history of the Global Christian Forum in Ghana, and work continues to convene church leaders in Ghana to revive Global Christian Forum Ghana. Present were Dr Asamoah-Gyadu, President of Trinity Theological Seminary, and Dr Femi Adeleye, former Global Christian Forum Committee member.



A cross section of denominational leaders from Indonesia met with the Revd Dr Casely Essamuah, Secretary of the Global Christian Forum, to express their appreciation for the Forum and its ongoing work. Hosted by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, the gathering shared, among other things what they felt was one of their secrets to being successful: Meeting for prayer once a month. They expressed how that allowed them to get to know each other better, and to think of how it would be to do ministry together.

New Committee Member



Revd Dr Chris Ferguson
General Secretary of the
World Communion of
Reformed Churches

The Revd Dr Chris Ferguson is a pastor, theologian, and social justice advocate from the United Church of Canada. Prior to becoming the General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches Chris worked in Colombia with the Program for Ecumenical Accompaniment in Colombia (PEAC) as international ecumenical advisor. Ferguson has also worked for the World Council of Churches, including as WCC representative at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City.

"I am very blessed and honoured to be part of the Global Christian Forum Steering Committee. For the WCRC, the Global Christian Forum plays a crucial role in God's plan for the unity of all Christians. The Forum is an irreplaceable place for spiritual sharing, building trust and common understanding so that we may move closer to serving God's mission together in spirited unity. This broken, violent world which God so loves requires us to hear the call to maintain the 'unity of the spirit in the bond of peace'".



In September 2018, the Global Christian Forum Facilitation Group, and four other nominated members formed a Task Force, and met in Thessaloniki, Greece to evaluate the Third Global Gathering. With great gratitude to former Secretary Revd Dr Larry Miller and his team of staff and volunteers, they gleaned the results of Bogota to be a multi-year focus on youth engagement and regional consultations. The Task Force was graciously hosted by Dr Dimitra Koukoura, Global Christian Forum Committee Member representing the World Council of Churches and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Very meaningful and impactful pilgrimages were made to biblical sites such as Berea, Philippi and the baptistry of Lydia.

More Continuing Work



At the invitation of Dr David Wells, an exploratory team looked at facilitating a Global Christian Forum regional consultation in Canada. Attended by Global Christian Forum Secretary, Revd Dr Casely Essamuah, encouragingly most church leaders came with youth representatives making the meeting more intergenerational.



Coptic Orthodox Archbishop Angaelos of London, met with Secretary the Revd Dr Casely Essamuah in December 2018.



Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and former Global Christian Forum Committee member, Dr Kathryn Johnson met with Secretary Revd Dr Casely Essamuah in October 2018.



The Vatican welcomed Global Christian Forum Secretary the Revd Dr Casely Essamuah, as guest of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Reverend Essamuah greeted Pope Francis at the end of the December 5th General Audience.

The Revd Dr Essamuah also met with Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and many other Vatican Officials.



Global Christian Forum Secretary Revd Dr Casely Essamuah visited the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva in October. There remains a continued commitment to the mission of the Global Christian Forum to bring together Christians that would otherwise not be in relationship with each other. In the picture Revd Dr Essamuah is with WCC General Secretary, Revd Dr Olav Tveit, WCC Deputy General Secretary, Fr Dr Ioan Sauca, and Faith & Order Commission Director, Revd Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus.



The Secretaries of World Communions, met in Chambesy-Geneva, Nov 5-9, 2018. Global Christian Forum Committee members present at the event included: Fr Andrzej Choromanski from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Seventh Day Adventist/Honorary Secretary to the CSWC Dr Ganoune Diop, Commissioner Elizabeth Matear from the Salvation Army; Revd Nicta Lubaale from the Organization of African Instituted Churches, Prof Dr Cecil M. Robeck, Pentecostal from Fuller Theological Seminary, Revd Dr Chris Ferguson from the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and Global Christian Forum Secretary, Revd Dr Casely Essamuah.

Engaging the Changing Landscape of Global Christianity

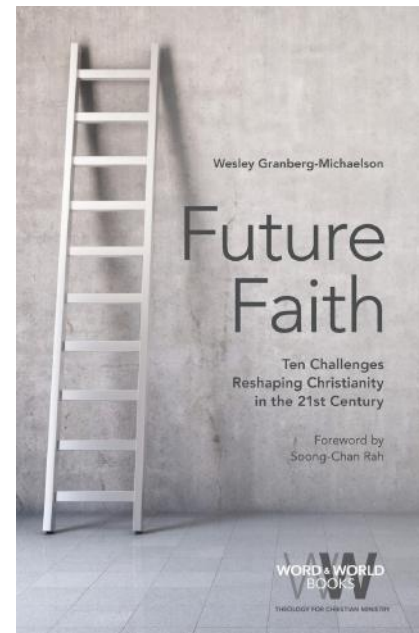
The world is becoming more religious, not less. Faith from diverse traditions grows as population expands throughout most of the Global South. Last year, nearly 50 million more Christians were added in Africa, making it the continent with the most adherents to Christianity in the world, 631 million. Latin America is not far behind, and in five years the Christian population in Asia will swell to 460 million. Christianity is recentering its footprint and becoming a non-Western religion. For 400 years, the faith has been molded by the largely European culture that came out of the Enlightenment. But today its vitality is coming from emerging expressions of Christianity in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

These new influences are raising new questions about the relationship of the individual to the community, rational versus nonrational pathways to perceiving truth, and the interplay of the spiritual and material realms.

As the yearning for authentic spiritual experience often moves from the head to the heart in this new environment, spirit-filled communities are flourishing. Today, one of four Christians in the world identifies as Pentecostal or charismatic, with Pentecostalism growing at roughly four times the rate of the world's population itself.

The popular image of Pentecostals as television preachers extolling a prosperity gospel and flitting around on private jets obscures the real causes for much of the movement's explosive growth: small Pentecostal communities among the marginalized in the Global South that are providing empowerment and social transformation.

In wealthy Western countries, a strong spiritual driver is the visible impact of climate change. After centuries of a Western Christian cosmology that empties the material world of spiritual value, care of creation is becoming a foundation of Christian faith and practice, as Pope Francis proclaimed in his prophetic encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Saving the earth has become a spiritual calling.



"In Future Faith: Ten Challenges Reshaping Christianity in the 21st Century (Fortress Press), I explore how these issues and more must be addressed by Christians from all parts of the globe. The white Western Christian bubble that has powerfully shaped Christianity for the past four centuries is now beginning to burst. Future expressions of Christian faith will be shaped by interactions with non-Western and nonwhite cultures. This underscores the critical role which the Global Christian Forum must play in providing a space where the traditional and the newly emerging expressions of the church can gather as equals to ask how the Spirit is shaping our future."

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson is President of the Global Christian Forum Foundation and served 17 years as general secretary of the Reformed Church in America. Future Faith was named "Book of the Year" by Ecumenical News.