

## ***Towards a Cuban Christian Forum***

*A wide range of churches in Cuba have resolved to begin a journey to work together to establish a new Christian grouping – the Cuban Christian Forum – on the island nation.*

About thirty representatives of a broad range of churches in Cuba (Presbyterian, Catholic, Episcopal, Pentecostal, Baptist, Moravian, Mennonite, Independent, etc) came together on 20 – 22 May 2014, at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas, for a meeting on the Global Christian Forum.

The Council of Churches in Cuba was also involved.

The initiative for this first Forum event came from Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega, a former President of the World Council of Churches who took part in the second Latin America meeting of the GCF in San José, Costa Rica, in 2010 and who spoke at a workshop organized by the GCF during the 10th assembly of the WCC in Busan, South Korea in October 2013.

Hubert van Beek, GCF Consultant responsible for GCF Latin American activities, was present at the Cuba event and introduced the GCF to the participants. At the close of the meeting the group approved a document expressing its findings and its resolve to work towards the establishment of a Cuban Christian Forum.

The document declares:

“In the spirit of searching for new ways to foster the unity of the Body of Christ, we have been thinking of a movement that might enrich the life of the churches, just as Dr Konrad Raiser once said, that ecumenism should be understood as a process that goes beyond the organization of the World Council of Churches.

We have seen the need to put in place a forum that constitutes a space where relationships can be nurtured which include not only the various existing ecumenical entities and member churches of the Cuban Council of Churches, but also all those churches and organizations which are willing to join the quest for unity and Christian love, to live out a faith of practice in service, building bridges of forgiveness, peace and hope.

Starting from our pilgrimage of faith as church in Cuba, we see the need to open such a space in the life of the church and the Cuban ecumenical movement, having in mind all that the Global Christian Forum has accomplished in its journey in various parts of the world, with the goal of creating spaces where churches accompany one another towards unity, in their diversity, based on the words of the gospel in John 17:21: ‘May they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me’, and II Cor. 5:18-21 ‘Our faith in a reconciling God’.

It is our wish that a relationship of understanding and trust may extend, grow and deepen between the churches of the older Christian traditions (Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed, Baptist, Methodist,

## **Introduction**

Welcome to the mid-year edition of GCFNews. In this edition you will read about;

- The exciting news of the move towards establishing the Cuban Christian Forum
- Latin American church leaders meet – a continent of fertile ground for ecumenical dialogue
- Reports from GCF presence at ‘Receptive Ecumenism’ conference in USA
- A quiet but significant first encounter between GCF and some European Church groupings
- Meet new members of the GCF committee

All this in a CGF time of preparation for future gatherings and conferences!

Anglican, Friends, Anabaptist, Moravian, etc) and those of more recent traditions (Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, independent and newly emerging non-denominational churches).

We have been exhorted to reflect on Christian unity at three levels that cannot be dissociated one from the other:

1. Unity of the churches;
2. Unity of humanity created by God;
3. Unity with creation.



Leadership:  
Rev. Obed Martinez  
(left) presiding  
a session, and  
meeting initiator,  
Ofelia Ortega  
(right).

Our foundation is in the indivisible unity of the Trinity. The Triune God is communion, mutual love in God's self, in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the Trinity there is no hierarchy, no dimension of superiority, in the Trinity there exists a mutual relationship of love. Only in the inter-relationship of each person of the Trinity does eternity exist.



God is action, but God is also passion, and it is only in keeping alive the work of the Holy Spirit that we will know how to act appropriately as children of God, created in his image and likeness.

Diversity cannot be used as a justification to prevent the search for unity. We are called to achieve unity and to do so neither with prejudices nor stereotypes, but from the vision we proclaim to unite the church as a faithful servant of God's word. We pursue unity within the diversity in an organic way.

We worked in two groups on the following questions, which helped us to reflect on this process in our country:

1. What would be the relevance of the existence of a Cuban Christian Forum for the churches in Cuba?
2. What would be the objectives and aims of this movement?
3. What would be the possible contributions of a Cuban Christian

Forum to the churches and the national ecumenical movement?

A Christian Forum today in our country would help to create spaces facilitating the unity between the churches and the various ecumenical entities, accompanying one another without rivalry or competition.

As objectives of the Forum we would like to:

1. **Analyse the questions** we are facing as church and society in Cuba.
2. **Create spaces** where we can reflect on generational problems, with the participation and experience of our young people, and develop an ethical standpoint in response to the various social and religious manifestations that are emerging in our country.
3. **Go deeper** into the history of the Cuban churches, taking into account the material from the conferences and meetings of the Missionary Heritage.
4. **Try to foster respect** and trust, recognizing that we do not have the absolute truth. In this way we are learning from one another.
5. **Overcome the divisions** between the churches which are committed to the ecumenical movement and the churches which do not carry this same vision.
6. **Make the Forum** an instrument of dialogue and mutual nourishment, so that all may be able to learn from our common experiences.
7. **Fraternize in love**, searching to give witness to our oneness in Christ.
8. **Develop a new style** of meeting and debating, more spiritual, in order to

follow God's calling of his people.

9. **As a first step**, to concentrate our reflections on what we have in common, and not so much on what divides us.

10. **Reconcile and restore** our relationships between the churches and the ecumenical movement, in the conviction that the blood of Jesus Christ is source of healing for the wounds of division.

The sense of the Forum is the proclamation of a message of hope, based on the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as a project of life for the journey of the Christian people in building the Kingdom of God.

In order to establish the Cuban Christian Forum of which we dream, we have formed a continuation committee.

In the love of our Risen Lord of Unity”.

### Continuation committee for a Cuban Christian Forum established

*The committee that was set up at the close of the meeting is composed of five members, from the Episcopal, Catholic, Pentecostal and Moravian traditions.*

*Dr. Ofelia Ortega and Pastor José Aguiar of the Pentecostal Church of Sovereign Grace, who attended the second global gathering of the GCF in Manado, Indonesia, will accompany the committee as advisers.*

*Rev. Obed E. Martínez Lima of the Moravian Church was elected president of the continuation committee.*



## Netherlands Christian Forum welcomes new participant and together face 'unity in mission' issues

*A year after its formation, the Netherlands Christian Forum gathers for retreat and to greet new members*

About 45 representatives from a wide range of Dutch churches, including a new representative from a church usually associated with the conservative Calvinist tradition, came together at Hotel

the witness of their churches and faith communities in the highly secularized society of the Netherlands.

The other highlight of the program was a presentation on 'Unity and Mission' by Dr Eddy van der Borgh, a Belgian theologian, professor at the Free University in Amsterdam and moderator

A recently-formed, culturally diverse and rapidly growing church in Amsterdam was used as an example of this new form of unity leading to renewed and vibrant witness. There was a strong sense that this was a common challenge to the older, "established" churches as well as the evangelical and Pentecostal churches



Jan Wessels, General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance in the Netherlands gives a testimony.



Marieke van den Berg, member of the Dutch Focolare Movement.

Mennorode on the Veluwe, the sand and forest area in the centre of the country, for the annual retreat of the Netherlands Christian Forum (NCF), on 18 – 19 June.

The NCF was officially formed a year ago, after several retreats of an informal group called 'We Opt For Unity'.

The steering group of the NCF has intentionally maintained the retreat model because it offers a more spiritual approach to dealing with relationships between churches than formal meetings.

Similar to last year, the sharing of faith stories was a central part of the 24 hour event.

Again this took place in small groups, which were invited in a second round to expand this intimate exercise into an exchange of thoughts and experiences on

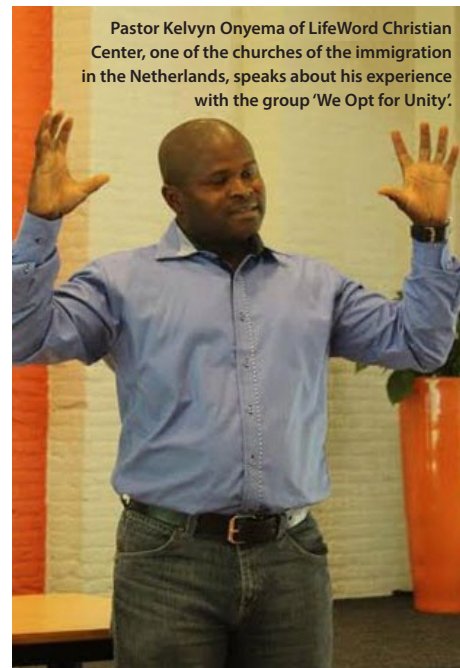
of the Synod of the United Protestant Church of Belgium.

This issue of unity and mission is likely to become a central theme of the NCF.

In the discussion that followed participants faced the challenge of moving from a multi-cultural "ecclesial landscape" (co-existing autochthonous and migrant churches) to "inter-cultural" faith communities.

that come together in the NCF.

It remains a priority of the steering group to make the NCF more fully representative of the totality of churches in the Netherlands, particularly the family of conservative Calvinist churches. This year we rejoice in welcoming one more church belonging to this group, being present for the first time.



Pastor Kelvyn Onyema of LifeWord Christian Center, one of the churches of the immigration in the Netherlands, speaks about his experience with the group 'We Opt for Unity'.

## GCF meets Receptive Ecumenism: two new roads becoming well-travelled

*A major ecumenical conference offers a time and place for 'newer' voices to engage - By Kim Cain*

*Two strands of recent expressions of the ecumenical journey came together when Global Christian Forum leaders presented papers and sat on panels at the third international Receptive Ecumenism conference, held in Connecticut, USA, between 9-12 June.*

GCF Secretary, Larry Miller, and Rev Dr Sarah Rowland Jones (GCF committee member) both had input through papers and panel presentations, drawing similarities and differences between the GCF and Receptive Ecumenism as two newer ecumenical initiatives, attempting to give fresh expression to inter-church relationships.

The Receptive Ecumenism conference, held at Fairfield University, drew people from across denominations and many parts of the world. [For more information see note below 'and box on page 5.]

In a closing panel reflection Miller noted that the GCF and Receptive Ecumenism arose at more or less the same time at the end of the 20th Century in response to what had been missing or at least insufficiently present at that time in what has sometimes been called the 'one ecumenical movement'.

Said Miller, as the Receptive Ecumenism leaders tell their story, "the weakness they perceived in the ecumenical movement had something to do with ecumenical method or ecumenical process.

"What was missing was a vision, a strategy, a method, and a name for a next phase, for a third phase in the ecumenical journey... in which the churches needed to find a way to cut away the 'hardwood' of lasting substantive differences".

"Initially at least, the weakness which Receptive Ecumenism wanted to overcome had more to do with 'what' than with 'who': it had more to do with 'what' was being done — or not being done — than with 'who' was doing it or not doing it."

By contrast Miller said, "the missing element that gave rise to the GCF... had more to do with 'who' than with 'what'; it had more to do with the participants in the ecumenical movement or, more precisely, with the churches who were not

participating in the ecumenical movement, with those churches who were missing from the ecumenical table and often opposed to it."

Rowland Jones, who noted the same difference, went on to say that from the GCF perspective, it cannot presume that participants in its gatherings have any substantial prior relationship, and so its "primary concern is to catalyse encounter" which can then "become the basis for more substantive exchange among Christians and the bodies from which they come."

While retelling some of the story of the formation of the GCF, Rowland Jones also commented on some of the outcomes of the GCF's meeting style and practises.

For example on the common practise of 'faith sharing' which takes place at all GCF meetings, she notes that while it has a 'testimony' basis which is common in Evangelical and Pentecostal circles, it "bring(s) recognition of living faith in those from very different — even superficially alien — confessions, cultures or backgrounds.

Seeing Christ in those whom we had not previously known as brothers and sisters in Christ changes our relationships, and, importantly, their basis and their dynamic. They are now, clearly and distinctly, rooted in acknowledging one another as being 'found in Christ', and led by the Spirit.

Acknowledging a shared identity in Christ moves us on from where we might say 'How can they claim to be Christians, and say/do X?' to saying instead 'Given that you are my brother/sister in Christ, please explain how is it your tradition says/does X?' The challenge then comes to live together in new and deeper ways, both within and beyond GCF meetings."

According to Rowland Jones, this experience has led to discussion of mutual concerns.

Through it all, she said, some of us recognise an implicit challenge: "to ask ourselves whether we should be receiving from others additional, enriching perspectives, on what it means to do theology."

She suggested it is important to be aware of any, perhaps subconscious, assumptions

that once we have established relationships of trust, we will resort to traditional debates. "This would be to discard the lasting riches we have received."

In his plenary reflection Miller noted the mutual learnings and experiences between the GCF and Ecumenical Reception movement, and there is even a kind of shared 'criticism of the two movements:

"Though our vocations... are different, our cultures are close and our dialects mutually understandable without extensive interpretation".

He said, "We have even been subject to similar concern or criticism from others.

If Receptive Ecumenism — and with it Spiritual Ecumenism — has at



Above: Rev. Dr. Sarah Rowland Jones

least once or twice been referred to as 'soft' ecumenism, the Global Christian Forum has occasionally been called 'thin' ecumenism — and even though we live in age of obesity, this was not meant as a compliment!"

Criticism aside, Miller said he takes "all of these affinities between us as a call to relationship with one another and to ecclesial learning from each other."

The GCF, he said had much to learn from Receptive Ecumenism: "Most importantly... Receptive Ecumenism calls the churches in the ecumenical movement to enter 'third-phase' ecumenism, a phase characterized not only by an ecclesial examination of conscience but then ultimately by actively seeking and receiving what it needs from the other churches."

## GCF leader in Library of Congress webcast

*The Global Christian Forum has itself been forming during a time of extensive and profound change in the shape and structure of world Christianity.*

One GCF committee member who has been at the forefront of thinking about the impact of these changes has been GCF committee member, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson.

The Library of Congress in the United States has now posted a full webcast of a seminar of leading scholars and researchers discussing Granberg-Michaelson's latest book, *From Times Square to Timbuktu* with particular reference to World Christianity, Immigration, and the U.S: The Non-Western Church Comes to America.

The first thirty minutes or so is an illuminating introduction by Granberg-Michaelson, introducing the topic.

## ABOUT RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM:

*The Receptive Ecumenism movement began through a conference when Catholic theologians began asking "How can the Catholic Church, true to its own integrity, learn and receive from other Christian traditions aspects of faith ...which belong to the whole Church, but of which the Catholic Church has been deprived, owing to the fact of separation between Christians.*

*"(And) by the same token, (how can) other Christian churches and communities... learn and receive, with integrity, from the faith, order, liturgy and spirituality of the Roman Catholic Church?"*

*The conference took place in January 2006, when the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University UK, hosted an international research colloquium on the theme 'Catholic Learning and Receptive Ecumenism' to mark the awarding of an honorary Doctorate of Divinity to Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The colloquium brought together a critical mass of internationally established theologians, ecumenists and ecclesiastics from across the traditions in order to explore a fresh way of conceiving the ecumenical task.*

The whole discussion, moderated by Laurie Goodstein from the New York Times, is now online and can be accessed on the Library of Congress website:

[http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature\\_wdesc.php?rec=6276](http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=6276) or on Youtube: <http://youtu.be/hnw4P1MB5fk>

## Latin America is fertile ground for inter-church dialogue, GCF regional meeting hears

*Quito, Ecuador, was the location for a meeting of general secretaries of Latin American church bodies convened and facilitated by the Global Christian Forum in April.*

The group of nine people, reflecting a diversity of Christian traditions and church organisations, gathered in order to get to know one another better, to inform one another of the perspectives and purposes of their organisations, and to be informed on the vision and experience and purpose of the GCF.

The GCF was represented by Larry Miller, GCF Secretary, and Hubert van Beek, GCF consultant responsible for Latin American activities.

It was an opportunity to garner a 'snapshot' of current regional relationships and forms of cooperation in the Latin American continent. The group also served as a 'sounding board' on the possibility of holding a third global gathering of the GCF in the region sometime in the future.

Leaders representing a broad range of Latin American Christianity were present. World Vision Latin America, Latin American Council of Churches, Latin American Episcopal Council, Pentecostal Forum for Latin America and the Caribbean, Latin Evangelical Alliance, and Theological Fraternity of Latin America representatives attended the meeting.

The gathering was exploratory in nature but provided important contact points across a broad range of traditions and experiences from those present. Participants also engaged in worship and faith sharing together.

Members of the group welcomed the GCF culture of relationship and participation. One leader stated that he liked very much the non-institutional character of the GCF, commenting that it is a good starting point for

a new time of inter-relationships in Latin America. The Forum, he said, could help to get many more churches around the table.

Other participants said that Latin America is fertile ground for ecumenical dialogue, underlining the great diversity of Christianity in the region, where there is nevertheless a sense of living together and a desire to practice and share the faith. Reference was made also to the teaching of Pope Francis on dialogue and peace.



## Secretaries of European church bodies meet with GCF encouragement and participation

*It was a quiet, but historic first when GCF and four leaders of European church groups met*

It was a 'low key' but intentional meeting that took place in Geneva earlier this year and as a first, it was 'historic'.

The meeting of the Secretaries of four European 'groupings' of churches: European Evangelical Alliance, Pentecostal European Fellowship, Council of European Bishops' Conferences, Conference of European Churches took place on 27 February, with the encouragement

and participation of the Global Christian Forum Secretary, Larry Miller.

The structure, vision and place of the GCF were also discussed, including the need to inform European churches of the nature of the GCF. It was agreed that at least an annual meeting would be beneficial. Furthermore, it was felt the four secretaries could convene a similar meeting with additional leaders from the

constituencies of the four bodies, including leaders who represent geographical regions and leaders of continental "communities".

The participants joined in Bible study, mutual faith sharing and each offered an introduction of the respective bodies.

The Secretaries also considered future meeting possibilities and reflected on the situation facing European churches – such as increasing secularism.

## GCF sharing at Taizé

*Current and former GCF secretaries, Larry Miller and Hubert van Beek enjoyed worship, table fellowship and conversation with members of the Taizé community, located near Mâcon in central France, in early March.*

It was an opportunity to thank Brother Alois, Prior of the community and successor to its founder Brother Roger, for the spiritual support they have given the GCF.

Taizé style worship has often been accessed by GCF participants at their gatherings, including during the second global gathering in Manado, Indonesia in 2011. On these occasions the Taizé style prayers, chants and worship were an inspiration to many participants who themselves came from a diversity of traditions and whose worship practices from across the world were very diverse.

The unique Taizé worship is ecumenical in nature and many people have discovered that it allows them to engage on common ground in coming together in their own language and at their own pace.

During their meeting Brother Alois and the two GCF leaders discussed continuing connections and possible resources for GCF gatherings.

The Taizé community was founded in 1940 in the village of Taizé by Brother Roger who at the age of 25 left Switzerland to create a faith community. In the midst of the war, they sheltered refugees, offered hospitality and developed their community life. Today many thousands of mainly young people attend Taizé worship on every continent.



ABOVE: Brother Ghislain (left) who helped with Taizé worship at Manado, with Hubert and Maria van Beek (centre) and Eleanor and Larry Miller (right).



LEFT: Brother Alois, Prior of the Taizé community, with Hubert van Beek looking over a copy of a book outlining the formation of the GCF.



BELOW: Table fellowship at Taizé.

## Introducing new GCF council members

**The GCF international Committee has two 'new' members. One, a recent Catholic appointment by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the other a Salvation Army Officer from International Headquarters.**

### *Polish ecumenical theologian is new Catholic representative on GCF Committee*

The GCF has a new member on its International Committee with the nomination of Fr Andrzej Choromański by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, where he serves on staff as an ecumenical officer.

Fr Choromański 47, comes from Poland where he has been Assistant Professor in the Chair of Ecumenism at the University of the Cardinal Wyszyński, Warsaw, since 2011.

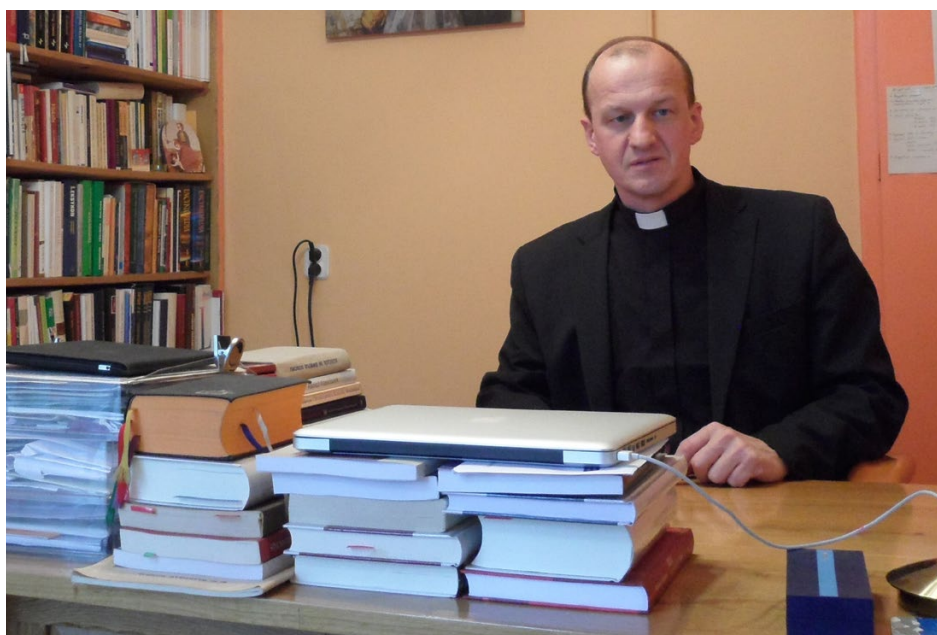
After his initial seminary training, Fr Choromański spent time in Switzerland studying French and ecumenism. He gained his Masters degree from the Université de Fribourg (Switzerland) in 1998 and his PhD in 2004, with his thesis on 'The Church as Communion: Towards a Common Ecclesiology in the Age of Ecumenism.'

During this time he visited the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva and the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey many times.

Fr Choromański has been involved in the pastoral ministry working mostly with young families in Warsaw. Pastoral work has been a feature of his ministry, during his time in Switzerland and upon his

return after his doctoral studies.

Between 2006-2008 he paid several visits to Cameroon in West Africa, as a Guest Professor teaching ecumenism and ecclesiology at the International University of Bertoua and to Catholic seminarians.



Speaking to *GCFNews* Fr Choromański said, "From the time of my ordination to the priesthood in 1993, I have been involved in the ecumenical movement both at the academic and pastoral levels.

I must admit, however, that the GCF

was until now almost unknown to me, although I had heard about it a few times.

Now, I am discovering this ecumenical forum with growing interest and esteem. I am glad that I will be directly involved in its work."

"I greet all the people, Christian communities and ecumenical organizations participating in the GCF, believing that together we will move forward toward deeper unity among our Churches."

### *New Salvation Army (International) member of GCF Committee*

Commissioner William Cochrane is now the Salvation Army (International) member of the GCF International Committee.

In addition to corps appointments, in a 26-year working history with the Salvation Army Commissioner Bill Cochrane has served in various roles at United Kingdom Territorial Headquarters (THQ), including Community Services Secretary, External Relations Officer and in the cabinet as Secretary for Communications.

In these THQ appointments in particular he was able to use skills and experience

acquired in his previous career in national and local politics and government.

He was appointed Salvation Army Chief Secretary in the United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland in 2006 and International Secretary to the Chief of the Staff at International Headquarters (IHQ) in 2009.

In this role he heads the Administration Department at IHQ which is responsible for all matters with which the Chief of the Staff deals.

He is also Secretary for Salvation Army International Ecumenical Relations and has been appointed as a member of their International Doctrine Council.



## GCF makes contact with both 'church and state' in the USA

*As one part of, and an expression within, the global Christian community the GCF has been engaging with leaders from many shades of the Christian spectrum including at denominational and governmental levels.*

In May this year GCF contact was made with senior American government officials in Washington D.C. and later that same month GCF secretary, Larry Miller, visited the headquarters of the Church of God (Cleveland) in Tennessee.

The Washington trip involved Miller, along with GCF committee member Rev Wes Granberg Michaelson, meeting:

*Melissa Rogers, Special Assistant to the President, Director, White House Office for Faith-based and Neighbourhood Partnerships; and,*

*secondly, with Shaun Casey, Special Advisor, Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, to Secretary of State, John Kerry.*

In the conversations the GCF delegation highlighted the GCF's formation and special characteristics – especially that of being a forum that provides a space for the broadest links within world Christianity.

Also in the conversations the GCF spoke of its two main emerging global initiatives: The first is internal to the Christian world—perspectives on proselytization and mission.

The second is external—persecution and martyrdom of Christians, which is connected to religious freedom.

In the longer meeting with Mr Casey, the GCF sought his insights into what he understood to be the major issues facing the global Christian community. He listed global poverty, climate change, and political chaos as the obvious concerns.

Mr Casey also expressed appreciation for the convening power of GCF, given its connection with the broadest range of Christian groups, globally.

Meanwhile at the Christian denominational level, Miller spent time with the Rev Mark Williams, General Overseer of the Church of God (Cleveland) and

Dr Sang-Ehil, who is their representative on the GCF Committee. Through the church's seminary where Dr. Sang-Ehil is Vice President for Academics the church has also given further support to the GCF by offering staff time of doctoral student Florentin Ghita (from Romania) for several hours per week.

The Church of God (Cleveland) is an international church with a world-wide membership of over 7 million people, with a presence in nearly 180 countries. It is a "movement" which describes itself as Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic.

**Support: Dr. Sang-Ehil (left) with the Rev Mark Williams, General Overseer, of the Church of God (Cleveland).**



## Understand, pray, support

*The Global Christian Forum invites your engagement in this new initiative in Christian unity:*

**Understand** more by reading our latest publication, *Our Unfolding Journey*.

A reflection on the GCF experience which invites discernment on the purpose and promise of the Forum.

(Downloadable from the GCF homepage: [www.globalchristianforum.org](http://www.globalchristianforum.org))

**Pray** with us by joining in our weekly Prayer Cycle. Start at any time. Connect to the cycle at [www.globalchristianforum.org/weekly-prayer-cycle.html](http://www.globalchristianforum.org/weekly-prayer-cycle.html)

Or check our Facebook for an update.

**Support** the GCF though a tax-deductible donation: CHF and Euro donations to the Fondation du Forum Chrétien Mondial are tax deductible in Switzerland.

USD contributions to the Global Christian Forum Foundation are tax deductible in the USA... Your gift will enable the GCF to do its work. Go to : [www.globalchristianforum.org/donate](http://www.globalchristianforum.org/donate).

