



Global Christian Forum

GCF Newsletter September 2024

Greetings from the Global Christian Forum! Our hearts remain full of gratitude, as we give God thanks for the Fourth Global Gathering where participants gathered under the theme "That the World May Know" from John 17:23.

One of the greatest gifts of any GCF gathering comes from the amazing men and women who share their faith-stories, theological perspectives and biblical insights with us. In this newsletter, you will find highlights from the opening day of the Fourth Global Gathering where the Rt. Rev. Lydia Neshangwe gave a powerful sermon and Dr. Gina Zurlo offered an informative presentation on the trends in global Christianity.

May the world know the good news of Jesus Christ through our love and fellowship!



Opening Worship Service

During the opening worship service, the Rt. Rev. Lydia Neshangwe laid the foundation for the Fourth Global Gathering through a sermon entitled “Unlikely Partnerships.” Her sermon was drawn from Acts 13:1-3 where the Holy Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul to serve together on the first missionary journey.

Rev. Neshangwe highlighted the puzzle that emerges from the pairing of Saul and Barnabas. These two were complete opposites! Barnabas was a long time believer; Saul was a virtual newcomer to the community of believers. Barnabas had a basic education; Saul had the highest levels of education. Barnabas was brought up in the Jewish homeland and culture; Saul was from Tarsus where he learned Greek and Roman culture. There is a high probability for irreconcilable differences, disagreements, conflict and division between the two. Practically, theologically, socially, spiritually, these two do not belong together. Yet the Holy Spirit has called them into service together, to share the gospel together.

The Global Christian Forum brings together the most unlikely groups of believers: Evangelicals and Reformed Christians, Orthodox and Pentecostal, Roman Catholic and mega-churches, from the Global North and the Global South, from persecuted communities and large cathedrals. It is the Holy Spirit who calls us together; it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the gift of each other, so that we might know and experience the grace of God through one another. Ultimately, God gathers us together for a shared purpose: so the world may know Jesus Christ through our witness and fellowship.



Rt Rev Lydia Neshangwe preaches during the opening worship service in Accra. Rev. Neshangwe serves as the moderator of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) and the president of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).

Trends in Global Christianity by Dr. Gina Zurlo

Dr. Gina Zurlo shared a presentation about the dramatic changes that have taken place in Christianity in the past 150 years. In 1900, roughly a third of the world was Christian; in 2020, roughly a third of the world is Christian; and by 2050, it is estimated that roughly a third of the world will be Christian. In 1900, roughly 82% of Christians lived in Europe and North America and 18% of Christians lived in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. Today, 33% of Christians live in the global North and 67% of Christians live in the global South. Christianity has become a truly global religion which means that the language, culture, worship styles, priorities, theology and mission have all expanded to reflect the diversity of the Christian family.

Another shift in Christianity has involved the major traditions. Globally, 49% of the world's Christians are Catholic, 23% are Protestant, 16% are Independent, and 12% are Orthodox. Today, 73% of all Catholics live in the global South, a dramatic change for a church which was concentrated in Europe for 1900 years.

The Protestant church formed in the 16th century, and today, 44% of Protestants worldwide are African. It is a much different context than could have been imagined by the European reformers.

Evangelicalism emerged in the 18th century as a renewal movement within Protestantism. It too shifted to the global South over the 20th century. Even though the United States is the country with the most Evangelicals in the world, 4/5ths of all Evangelicals worldwide are people of color.

The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement formally emerged at the beginning of the 20th century as a fully global South faith. Pentecostal/Charismatics are hugely diverse, found in classical Pentecostalism such as the Assemblies of God, the Catholic Charismatic movement (concentrated in Latin America), and other Charismatic movements that may bear little theological resemblance to older forms of Christianity. Where ever Christianity spread in the 20th century, the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement spread with it.

In his 2018 book, Lalsangkima Pachuau made this statement, "Christianity exists between the universal claim of its message and the particular way of practicing the faith." Dr. Zurlo's presentation offered a glimpse into the tremendous diversity that exists within World Christianity. Despite all the diversity and particularity represented, Christians around the world are united by faith and the universal claims of the Christian message.



Gina Zurlo, Ph.D. is currently a Yang Visiting Scholar of World Christianity at Harvard Divinity School and Co-Director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary.



Rev. Dr. Richard Howell serves as the Principal of the Caleb Institute in Delhi, India.

“The African experience with Global Christian Forum: the vibrancy of faith, the vulnerability of colour.”

The Rev. Dr. Richard Howell published a reflection on the Fourth Global Gathering entitled “The African experience with Global Christian Forum: the vibrancy of faith, the vulnerability of colour.”

In his article, Dr. Howell begins by highlighting the purpose and vision of GCF:

“Throughout its existence, the GCF has carved out a unique and inclusive space where every major stream of Christianity converges for encounter and prayer. This forum stands as the broadest expression of Christian faith, reflecting the significant shift of the majority of churches from the global north to the vibrant, growing communities of the global south. This inclusivity mirrors the Imago Dei, where every person is valued and honoured. The Gathering was more than a mere conference; it was a vibrant display of hospitality and generosity revealed by the Triune God.”

He also reflected on the pain and injustice suffered by Black communities from the transatlantic slave trade through the death of George Floyd. He concludes with a call to action for faith communities:

“The contradiction of belief that promotes the vibrancy of faith alongside the vulnerability of colour can be overcome if the Church community actively obeys God's word and upholds the principles of the Kingdom of God, Imago Dei, and transformative discipleship. By doing so, the Church can truly embody the transformative power of faith, promoting justice, equality, and the inherent dignity of every person.”

You can read Dr. Howell's full article [here](#)

...so that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

-Romans 1:12

