

## **GLOBAL CHRISTIAN GATHERING IN LIMURU – MY STORY**

All my life I have been a member of an African Independent Church – a church tradition that is largely misunderstood and the one that has suffered various levels of persecution and stigmatization by Christians of other Church Traditions. Much of the persecution and stigmatization came as a result of misinformation about the activities of these churches. Though there have been attempts by the AICs to get involved in ecumenical meetings in their local settings for mainly political reasons there was need for a platform that will enable more and deeper interaction among members of all church traditions, at a global level, for a better understanding of who we are, what we are called to be in Christ and how to respond to issues that confront the body of Christ.

This platform was provided by the Global Christian Gathering at Limuru in Kenya, East Africa in 2007. For the first time, the AICs were actively involved in the preparation for a large global Christian gathering and a large section of AIC leaders attended on invitation. As a matter of fact, leaders of AICs, identified with the practice of telling stories of our faith journeys because in Africa story telling is a major means of communication in all spheres of life. It gave members of all the Christian Traditions opportunity to interact with one another in an atmosphere of fraternal love. The bible study groups and the discussion groups gave opportunities to church leaders to listen to each other tell their stories of our journey with Jesus Christ, our reconciler. During the conversations that took place over meals and during coffee/Tea breaks, I observed that participants were happy to share experiences and opinions on matters of common concern. Mutual suspicion was beginning to give way to mutual understanding, mutual trust and mutual love among leaders.

One of the high points at the Limuru gathering was the day that the AICs were asked to lead the morning worship. On that day, hearing the sound of African drums and standing at the pulpit in the midst of leaders of a cross-section of Christian Traditions to share the word of God, I came to a conclusion that things have changed – things have changed for good, forever. A miracle had just happened! As we all happily celebrated our Lord Jesus together, all our differences seemed to have disappeared. I prayed that this type of fellowship should continue for the disappearance of our differences to become a reality.

My discussion with some leaders in that gathering that brought together more than 240 church leaders revealed that all Christian Traditions have a lot to contribute to the expansion of the kingdom of God. We only needed to sustain what happened in Limuru and even improve on it. The experience of Limuru raised the hope of a deeper fraternal engagement and support on issues of common concern in this broken world.

On a general note, the Global Christian Forum is the widening of the space that we all hoped for. I see it as a genuine and concerted effort to bring about healing, reconciliation and mutual love in the body of Christ. A move that broke away from the period of exclusion, superiority/inferiority complexes and name-calling. May I, at this time salute the deep insight, the wisdom and the courage of people like Hubert van Beek, the Founding Secretary of Global Christian Forum and many others who worked very hard to organize the First Global Christian Gathering in Limuru.

Finally, Limuru gathering was a wake-up call for all of us to see what is left for us to do. There, I saw the willingness of leaders to work together with mutual respect and a great sense of inclusiveness. I therefore left Limuru with the resolve to go get ready for a more engaging relationship with our brethren in other church traditions.

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