

Global Christian Forum News

2015 Edition 01

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International planning group for the Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom initiative, (from left) Thomas Schirmmacher, Andrzej Choromanski, Ingolf Ellsel, Christof Sauer, Joy Lee, Larry Miller, Heilke Wolters, Richard Howell, Pirjo-Liisa Penttinen, and Mikhail Goundiaev.

Introduction

This edition of *GCFNews* comes to you as the first for 2015. The focus in this issue is to report on the meeting of the GCF international committee, including on two important global initiatives. There is also the announcement of the re-appointment of Revd Dr Larry Miller as GCF secretary, plus other items.

GCF helps churches to face discrimination, persecution and martyrdom of Christians together

In a world where discrimination, persecution and violence directed against minority religious groups is being viewed with increasing concern, the GCF is convening a global consultation focused on Christians suffering and responding in these situations. The theme of the consultation is, 'Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom: Following Christ Together'.

At the conclusion of the 2nd global gathering of the GCF in Manado, Indonesia in October 2011 delegates said they would like to see the GCF address concerns common to churches worldwide. The issue of discrimination, persecution and martyrdom has since been discerned as one such.

A primary goal of the consultation is to give leaders from churches experiencing discrimination and persecution the opportunity to meet one another, join their voices together, and have their stories heard.

Another important goal is to provide opportunity for leaders of global, regional, and national churches and

Christian organisations to hear, reflect and understand the complex mix of issues involved in this Christian suffering, so that they will be then be enabled to make appropriate responses together.

Research prior to the consultation will try to capture a clear picture of the global scene as well as work on a document that will help accurately describe and understand the language of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom.

To prepare the consultation, the GCF has convened a planning group that includes representatives appointed by the Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity), the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Alliance and the Pentecostal World Fellowship.

The consultation will take place in Tirana, Albania at the beginning of November, 2015. The venue was chosen as religious groups in the Albanian nation have experienced both oppression and 'resurrection' after oppression. People of all faiths, including Christians and Muslims, were exposed to systematic and

sustained pressure and persecution during the Communist era, which concluded in March 1992.

Larry Miller, Secretary of the Global Christian Forum, said "The GCF exists to enable churches of all traditions to face common challenges together. It is highly fitting that the first of these initiatives is to support Christians around the world as they face discrimination, persecution and martyrdom in their communities."

Rev Dr. Hielke Wolters, Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches said, "It is a strong sign of hope that churches and ecumenical organisations with such a diverse background are ready to work together to support Christians that go through difficult times. Religious freedom is important for all of us, whether Christian, Muslim or adherent of any other religion.

The leaders of the suffering churches will also be invited to say what message they would wish send to the global body of Christ.

Of the overall initiative, Wolters said,

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GCF helps churches to face discrimination, persecution and martyrdom of Christians together

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“This joint initiative is very much in line with the WCC’s efforts to accompany Christians and churches in countries like Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Nigeria. We are grateful that we can strengthen this important work in cooperation with churches and organisations from the Catholic, Pentecostal and Evangelical traditions.”

The Planning Group’s representative from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Fr Andrzej Choromanski, said “We are walking today on a new ecumenical path that Pope Francis has called the ‘ecumenism of blood’. The new initiative of the GCF will explore how we should answer together the current challenge of discrimination and persecution in a Christian way.”

Pastor Ingolf Ellssel, representing the Pentecostal World Fellowship executive committee, said he was “excited about this initiative of the Global Christian Forum bringing world Christianity together and lifting up the voices of those suffering discrimination, persecution and martyrdom. I hope it is the beginning of a new process of unity in the Body of Christ.”

GCF initiates a global conversation on the painful and divisive issue of ‘mission and proselytism’

Opening up a global discussion and making resources available for understanding, healing and reconciliation in one of Christianity’s most enduring and complex issues – that of mission and proselytism – was begun at a Global Christian Forum convened meeting in Strasbourg, France on 11-12 September 2014.

A working group of representatives of the Catholic Church, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance along with several GCF committee members and staff developed a series of aims and an approach for a global conversation tackling concerns associated with mission and proselytism.

The concept of ‘mission’ is well understood by churches and Christian organisations; however proselytism – when understood as an accusation that one Christian tradition, church or denomination is ‘converting’ or taking members from another Christian group – is often contentious and divisive.

There are quite detailed definitions of what ‘proselytism’ may mean but at a popular level it is often referred to as sheep-stealing. In the context of the mission of the church this charge has led to hurtful and deep-seated ruptures between Christian traditions and



The Mission and Proselytism working group: (from back to front rows, left to right): Joy Lee, Larry Miller, Mor Geevarghese Coorilos, Rosalee Velosso Ewell, Mikhail Goundiaev, Cecil (Mel) Robeck, Andrzej Choromanski, Thomas Schirmacher, Nicta Lubaale and Sarah Rowland-Jones.

communities over many years.

The GCF-based initiative will take the form of a global ‘facilitated’ conversation over several years. It follows and builds on the conjoint work of the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance, which resulted in the widely used statement ‘*Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*’ (2011) in mission among those of different religions and those who do not profess any religion.

Importantly, one of the aims of this new process will be to encourage reconciliation and ‘healing of memories’ between Christian churches and communities who have experienced tension with one another and pain due to conflicting perspectives and practices on mission

and evangelism in Christian contexts.

The working group has set out a three year time timetable and aims to:

- Collect existing documents, papers, statements and case studies;
- Distribute a questionnaire to gather opinions, perspectives, experiences and stories from GCF participant churches and communities worldwide;
- Produce a number of draft documents in time for discussion by participants at the next GCF global gathering;
- Test, review and focus the material, including resources for reconciliation and ‘healing of memories’, for global launch in 2018.

It is the goal of the working group to produce a number of significant documents, including one with suggestions for good relationships between churches engaged in mission and evangelism in contexts where

Christian churches already exist.

It is hoped this document would contain an appendix listing concrete steps that can be taken to achieve tangible, practical outcomes.

Another document will provide a fuller background for study and deeper consideration.

This will include reference to existing statements and agreements as well as offering Biblical and theological reflection. Together with case studies this will provide helpful illustrations of both difficulties and how they may be overcome.

Members of the working group come from a variety of traditions: African Independent Churches, Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Evangelical, Lutheran, Orthodox (Eastern and Oriental), and Pentecostal. They originate from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Latin America and North America.

The decision to undertake the work on 'mission and proselytism' came after considerable preparation by the GCF committee as the issue has been divisive and painful in some communities.

Despite the complexity and sensitivity of the issue, it was agreed to explore it in response to the directions set for the GCF by participants at the second global gathering of the GCF in Manado, Indonesia, 2011.

In a guideline from that event, under the title of "topical issues" participants agreed: "We have heard the Spirit calling us, not only to foster respect for one another, but now also to move forward together in addressing common challenges." We believe, they said, "that the Forum has the potential to be a space for discussing relevant issues, even and perhaps especially where we are not in agreement with one another."

This article is based on a press release, September 2014.

Central American and Spanish-speaking Caribbean Pentecostal leaders discuss challenges and diversity

The third of four sub-regional meetings of the Pentecostal Forum of Latin America and the Caribbean (FPLC), this time for Central America and the Spanish speaking Caribbean Pentecostal churches, took place in Pachuca, Mexico in September and October last year.

The GCF has had a 'facilitation' role in journeying with the FPLC, which has since its foundation in Lima, Peru in 2011, been working to create contact and discussion across Pentecostal churches in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Central American and Spanish-speaking Caribbean subregional meeting was hosted by the Independent Christian Church of Pentecost (ICIPAR) and brought together 25 church representatives from Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama and Puerto Rico.

GCF consultant, Mr Hubert van Beek, was present in support of the consultation.

The discussions included reporting and input from four different speakers on the experience, history and the diversity of Pentecostalism in the region.

This included comment on relations with other Christian families in the area and also noted differences and distances in style and focus between classical and 'neo-classical' expressions of Pentecostalism, as well as difference and similarities with Independent and some mega churches.

While there were common aspects to all the Pentecostal churches, such as baptism in the Holy Spirit, it was observed that some of the differences were theological and /or sociological. For instance, it was suggested that

the emphasis on the 'prosperity Gospel' by 'neo-classical' churches was based upon making a response to the social changes of post-modernity and therefore set out to appeal to the middle and upper classes.

However, a common observation was that all churches dealt with deep socio-economic challenges, and while Pentecostals know well how to change lives, and can assist poor people, most lack experience in developing ways to respond structurally to such endemic social issues.

It was affirmed that Pentecostal unity was possible but requires a change of attitude. Obstacles to closer unity were said to include leadership, denominational pride and lack of education and theological formation.

The best hope for churches to grow closer to one another seemed to be in areas of common interest, such as worship and social services.

Notably, the leaders present from El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Belize, Costa Rica, Panama and Mexico all planned some similar kind of Pentecostal 'forum/discussion/gathering' in their own nations in 2015, inspired by this experience.

The fourth of the planned gatherings is planned for Brazil in June 2015.



Revd Dr Richard Howell

'My mind has been stretched and life enriched...'

A letter from India: experiencing the Spirit in the ecumenical life

Revd Dr Richard Howell, Global Christian Forum Committee member representing the World Evangelical Alliance, reflects on the spiritual joys and deep learnings through the work of the Forum and spiritual encounter in his country of India.

In 2009 three prominent Indian Christian entities – the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), the National Council of Churches of India (NCCI) and the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) – signed a document forming the National United Christian Forum of India. Dr Howell who is EFI General Secretary, acts as the National Christian Forum of India secretary.

In a recent letter to Bishop Mar Demetrios, who is Metropolitan of the Delhi diocese of the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church, and Father Dominic Emmanuel, head of the Catholic Church's Delhi Diocese' Ecumenism & Dialogue Commission, Dr Howell shares his story of the riches in the ecumenical encounter:

"I have gratefully followed your conversations. My mind has been stretched and life enriched by ecumenical encounters.

God has given me the privilege to know and learn from Church leaders with rich traditions of Christian

spirituality and a long and deep history of faithfulness to God in the midst of most trying circumstances. Indeed, Christian spirituality unites.

These spiritual encounters were made possible as the Global Christian Forum invited the newer movement of Evangelicals and Pentecostals to the table along with historical churches. Seated there I repented of my prejudice and ignorance, stepped out of my self-righteous bubble and was liberated to see God at work. God was shattering the box within which I had placed him.

We discovered the Triune God at work in our lives as we shared our faith journey around the table. Coptic Orthodox Bishop Serapion left a lasting impression on me. He is a medical doctor who became a monk in order to serve God and His people. His faith journey, disciplined walk with God plus the rich Orthodox heritage of spirituality spoke volumes. Near Cairo I had the privilege to visit the Monastery of St Macarius and was blessed to hear about the spiritual disciplines they followed. The writings of Father Matta El-Meskeen have blessed me as he opened Scripture and new dimensions of spiritual life.

The Catholic traditions of spirituality have particularly enriched me as well

as my conversation and relation with the Bishops and the Archbishops. The writings of St Teresa of Avila are a blessing to this day. Here is one quote from her: 'May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.'

The National United Christian Forum (CBCI, NCCI, and EFI) once organized a meeting of about twenty young people. A Catholic lady shared her testimony of how the Lord called her for service and she gave up her professional career to serve Christ and witness. If her membership in the Archdiocese of Delhi had been unknown to us, we would have imagined she was Pentecostal. An Orthodox lady also shared her faith journey, blessing us.

The Evangelical and Pentecostal youth were pleasantly surprised and enriched. While the Catholic Church

has accepted Charismatic people into their fold, some other mainline ecumenical denominations have rejected Pentecostal and Evangelicals as part of their denominations.

We are living in a new day; God has interrupted His Church's slumber, breaking down walls separating us. Some sadly desire to live in the comfort zone of their self-created walls, rather than follow a God of adventure who is calling His Church to unity.

Miraculously, we created history on 30 June 2011 as a historic document 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' was jointly issued by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). It provides sufficient theological bases to work together for common witness.

Creating space by inviting others to the table to share their faith journey will mutually enrich us, help overcome ignorance and prepare for common witness. Our Lord prayed for this. Will we obey or disobey?"

• **Richard Howell is General Secretary, Evangelical Fellowship of India**

GCF WELCOMES APPOINTMENT OF BISHOP EFRAIM TENDERO AS SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

The Secretary of the Global Christian Forum, Dr Larry Miller, has warmly welcomed the appointment of Bishop Efraim Tendaro, as the new Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

The WEA is an important participant in the GCF – it is indeed one of the key 'pillar' organisations. Its representatives have been present in foundational meetings of the GCF and currently serve in its international committee.

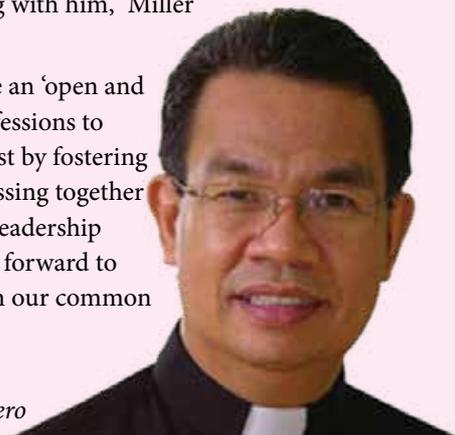
In extending his congratulations, Dr Miller said he looked forward to meeting Bishop Tendaro as soon as possible and working closely with him in the many areas of common interest for the WEA and the GCF.

Miller noted that Bishop Tendaro has been a participant at the inaugural global gathering of the GCF in Limuru, Kenya in 2007, and again at the second global gathering of the GCF, held in Manado, Indonesia, in 2011.

"I extend to Bishop Tendaro my congratulations and support on his appointment and look forward to working with him," Miller said.

"The vocation of the GCF is to provide an 'open and safe space' for Christian leaders of all confessions to come together and share life in Jesus Christ by fostering mutual understanding as well as by addressing together common challenges. The presence of the leadership of the WEA is essential in this task. I look forward to joining with Bishop Tendaro and others in our common pilgrimage."

Bishop Efraim Tendaro



Global Christian Forum Secretary: Miller appointment extended

The international committee of the GCF has unanimously agreed to extend the appointment of current GCF Secretary, the Revd Dr Larry Miller, for a further three years to 1 July, 2018.

Miller, who has been in the position since 1 January 2012, was formally introduced to GCF participants at the second global gathering at Manado, Indonesia in October 2011.

The Facilitation Group of the GCF, charged with reviewing and bringing the recommendation to the wider GCF Committee, commented

on Miller's deep commitment to the vision of the GCF and his ability to communicate enthusiasm for that vision in diverse settings.

They said they deeply appreciated Miller's "vocation for Christian hospitality", his ability to assemble and inspire an able team for the GCF and they affirmed the breadth and coherence of the work of the Forum under his leadership.



Revd Dr Larry Miller

Members of the GCF Committee gather.



GCF Committee members consider preparation for key events

“Tilling the ground and preparing the soil for future activities” is how the year of activity of the GCF was described at the annual meeting of the GCF international committee mid-October 2014.

It was said at the meeting, that much of what happened in 2014 was of its nature connecting, preparing, establishing and planning for future events and as well as building strong relationships.

The focus of the year included preparatory work of the two global initiatives [see elsewhere in this *GCFNews*], consideration of the next global gathering and the constant task of deepening relationship with global church bodies, communions and organisations.

This is the deep and careful work of leadership - but often the less noticed effort, with harvest itself still to come.

The meeting was held in the convent of “Bethanien” located near the village of St. Niklausen, about 25 km from Lucerne (Switzerland). The facility is administered by the ‘Chemin Neuf’ community – a Catholic and ecumenical community rooted in the charismatic movement. So, in keeping with the setting, in addition to their deliberations the Committee

entered into ‘pockets of retreat’ at the beginning and end of each day, conducted in the Chemin Neuf tradition of prayer, song and stillness.

The discussions included:

- Planning the forward activities of the GCF;
- Reviewing the ‘timetable’ for significant global Christian consultations and events for the next two years, with an eye toward a third global gathering of the GCF

– in Latin America in late 2017;

- Rotation of membership of the GCF Committee so as provide a variety of voices and yet keep a balance that reflects all of the broad streams of the global church;
- The desire to have representation more balanced in terms of gender and youth;
- Reporting of GCF activities of the last 12 months, including from Latin America, Asia, the Middle East,



The GCF Committee at work

Africa and Europe (most of these initiatives have been reported in previous editions of *GCFNews*);

- Reception of financial, communications and administrative reports;
- Exploration of the identity of the GCF as a 'forum' as a unique space where Christian leaders meet for discussion, enrichment, and probing challenges the church faces globally; and
- Staffing and administrative issues. It was unanimously agreed to extend the appointment of Larry Miller as GCF Secretary for three more years, to July 2018. (See separate story)



Revd Dr David S. Han making a point during the discussions.

Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative second meeting has GCF 'thread'

A gathering of Evangelical and Orthodox church leaders for the second Lausanne - Orthodox Initiative (LOI) consultation in Tirana, Albania last September, had a GCF thread to its life.

The GCF Secretary, Larry Miller was present, as were Femi Adeleye (Evangelical), Dimitra Koukoura (Orthodox), and Cecil M. Robeck (Pentecostal), all of whom represented their own traditions – but who are also on the international committee of the GCF.

The LOI is a significant gathering of Orthodox and Evangelical Christians, who wish to respect each other's beliefs, learn from each other, and support one another as all obey the call to share in God's mission.

The initiative was established after the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2010

The 2014 consultation featured sixty senior church and mission leaders, ecumenists and theologians from many parts of the world who came together for the initiative's second consultation.

The meeting in mid-September,

2014, was held at the Orthodox monastery of St Vlash in Albania.

A communique realised at the close of the five days of discussion said representatives had explored topics such as "conversion and spiritual transformation, the relationship between ecclesiology and mission, and ethical evangelism and proselytism.

"Participants reported on how the two traditions have already found ways of collaborating in mission in various parts of the world," the communique stated.

The Lausanne Facilitator for Orthodox-Evangelical Relations, the Revd Canon Mark Oxbrow, said in reflecting on the process and the important issues faced: "Discovering that another Christian tradition is less of a threat and more of a potential enrichment for my own tradition has been an experience of the grace of God in my own spiritual pilgrimage.

"Our differences are real, historical, important and painful, that is why those who met at St. Vlash monastery in September needed to come in humility and with a God-given spirit of kenosis.

"It is also why we know that the journey we have begun together is not destined to be a pleasant day trip but rather a life-long pilgrimage of discovering God more deeply in one another."

The communique concluded that, a "remarkable sense of unity was evident, even when discussing contentious issues" and relationships forged here "should foster mutual respect and co-operation in the missionary task of our respective Christian traditions."

The gathering was hosted by His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios and the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania. It was chaired by Bishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church and Mrs Grace Mathews of the Lausanne Movement.

GALLERY IMAGES FROM GCF COMMITTEE MEETING, 2014



Committee members join with Chemin Neuf community for prayer.



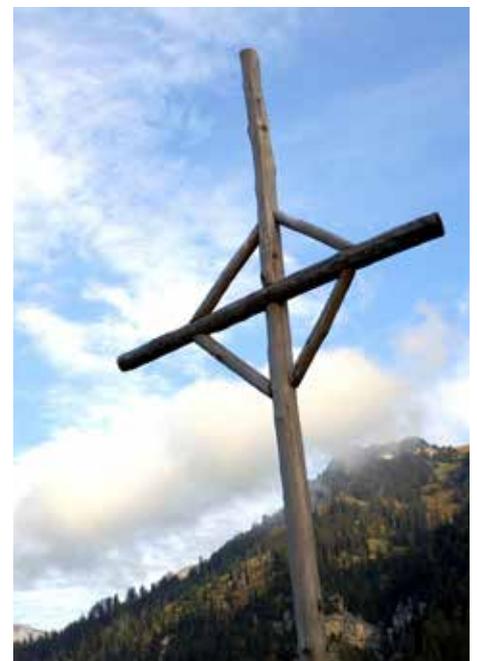
Fr. Andrzej Choromanski



Dr Dimitra Koukoura



Revd Dr Sarah Rowland Jones, Eleanor Miller and Ms Joséphine Ntihinuzwa.



From the right: Dr Femi Adeleye, Rev Dr Paul Gardner, and Dr Rolf Hille



Joy Lee, GCF Events Co-ordinator.



Ms Christine House, was a visitor.

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