

REPORT OF THE GLOBAL CHRISTIAN FORUM

Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, WCRC representative

It is a privilege to offer this report to the WCRC executive committee concerning the Global Christian Forum. My only regret is that I am not with you personally to do so. You are trusted ecumenical colleagues, and some are close personal friends as well. However, it makes far more sense for the Global Christian Forum's secretary, Larry Miller, to be with you at this meeting of the executive since he also needs to visit with Cuban church leaders. By far, he is the best single person to share all aspects of the Global Christian Forum's activities, budget, mission, and future plans. I know you will enjoy a fruitful discussion with him.

The guiding purpose statement of the Global Christian Forum, formulated at an initial meeting in 2002, and affirmed by the first Global Gathering in Limuru, Kenya in 2007, is as follows:

To create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and inter-church organizations, which confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in His divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges.

The need for the Global Christian Forum was initially articulated most clearly by Dr. Konrad Raiser, then general secretary of the World Council of Churches. Identifying four main global Christian "families" as Catholic, historic Protestant, Orthodox and Pentecostal/evangelical, he proposed a new "ecumenical space" that would draw together leadership from all those traditions into fellowship and an exploration of common witness.

The Global Christian Forum has evolved since that time, first through a series of regional consultations throughout the world to test this initiative, and then in two global gatherings, first, as mentioned, in Limuru, Kenya in 2007 and then in Manado, Indonesia in 2011. An extensive list of smaller meetings, visits, consultations and working groups as well as communication efforts provide an ongoing foundation for this work. The Global Christian Forum committee, comprised of 24 members broadly representative of major supporting bodies (the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the WCC, the World Evangelical Alliance and the Pentecostal World Fellowship) and of the Christian World Communions provides guidance and oversight to the Global Christian Forum. I serve as the WCRC's representative on this committee.

The Manado Global Gathering directed the GCF to build on its foundation of creating fellowship and trust between divided parts of world Christianity, and address "common challenges." Extensive consultation with the GCF's major supporting bodies identified the reality of the church's suffering and persecution in various parts of the world as a challenge which needed to be addressed ecumenically and convened by the GCF.

This resulted in the global consultation on "Discrimination, Persecution, and Martyrdom: Following Christ Together," held in Tirana, Albania from November 1-5, 2015. It was the first time that a gathering of leaders and representatives from so broad a range of the global

church gathered to hear the voices of churches in situations of serious persecution and suffering. A commitment to fresh expressions of solidarity resulted.

In general, this consultation exceeded the expectations of its planners and was received with strong affirmation by participating bodies. However, since Jerry Pillay was present at this consultation, I'm certain that the executive will want to hear firsthand of his impressions, as well as those of Larry Miller.

By far, the Tirana consultation was the most significant event of the Global Christian Forum in the period since the executive committee last met in Beirut. However, other activities have also been underway. The GCF committee met in Moscow in February, 2016, both to review past activities and approve future plans.

The most noteworthy event on the horizon will be the third global gathering. After extensive dialogue, the GCF committee decided to hold this gathering in Cuba, pending a final investigation of logistics and finances. That is the primary purpose of Larry Miller's visit to Cuba. This gathering is projected to be held in late 2017 or early 2018. Ongoing consultation with various ecumenical bodies and Christian World Communions are underway in order to finalize the date as soon as possible.

Another initiative undertaken following Manado has been to address the challenging and often divisive issues of mission and proselytism. Although long an ecumenical topic, the GCF was encouraged to address this matter because of its ability to convene Pentecostal, evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox and other churches into a direct and engaging dialogue. Several careful discussions have prepared the way for a meeting of the working group, to be hosted this fall by the Vatican in Rome.

When the GCF was established, the dramatic shift of world Christianity's majority presence to the Global South was also a primary motivation. Since much of the growth of Christianity in these regions is driven by Pentecostal, evangelical and other highly contextualized expressions of the Church which are largely outside of traditional ecumenical vehicles, the GCF has made a priority of engaging such groups in its life and activities.

One recent expression of this commitment has been for the GCF to facilitate a process of bringing together various Pentecostal groups in Latin America. Consultations to do so have proved fruitful and should serve to strengthen Pentecostal participation from this region in GCF activities, including the next global gathering.

A range of other recent activities include meetings, consultations, and visits in the Netherlands, the Middle East, Germany, Bangkok, Jakarta, Switzerland, Poland, South Korea and elsewhere. This also has included representation at various assemblies and gatherings where the voice of the Global Christian Forum has been welcomed. Several more are now planned for 2017, related to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Larry Miller can provide any further specific details desired by the executive.

Finally, Larry Miller's present term of service as secretary for the Global Christian Forum is scheduled to end at the middle of 2018, and he intends to retire. With this in mind, the GCF

committee authorized measures to establish a search process for a new secretary. Initial letters have been sent to major participating organizations sharing this information, and the next steps will be finalized when the committee's facilitation group meets this June in Trondheim, Norway.

Detailed information about the GCF's history, purpose, activities and plans, including its newsletters, may be found at its website: www.globalchristianforum.org

All this effort is carried out with a meager budget of about \$200,000 per year. The GCF deeply appreciates the support of WCRC and welcomes its input as future plans evolve.

Let me close by expressing my personal gratitude for the opportunity to continue serving as WCRC's representative to the Global Christian Forum, strengthening our partnership.