



Global Christian Forum

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GCF Newsletter:

April 2022

We are delighted to share updates from GCF's first in-person gathering since the pandemic began. We recognize that the pandemic season has not fully ended, yet we rejoice in the opportunity to join with one another in fellowship and prayer.

We thank God for your faithful commitment to the work of hope and Christian unity fostered by GCF, and we hold you in prayer always.

May you abide in the love of Jesus Christ, as we journey toward the cross and ultimately the empty tomb together during this Lenten season.





GCF Expanded Leadership Team Meeting in Rome

The Global Christian Forum (GCF) held a hybrid meeting for the expanded leadership group on February 6-8, 2022. A group of the participants gathered in Rome, where they were hosted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, while others joined the meeting virtually. Participants were given space to share their faith stories, to discuss plans for the upcoming Global Gathering in 2024, and to engage with scholars on the current trends in ecumenism and global Christianity.

This was the first in-person meeting since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the time together was a reminder of the power of gathering in a spirit of Christian love and unity.

The leadership team unanimously reaffirmed that we will have the fourth Global Gathering the week of April 15-19, 2024. More details will be coming soon!



Dr. Gina Zurlo: Trends in Global Christianity

Dr. Gina Zurlo offered two presentations on the current trends in global Christianity using data from her research at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Her first presentation focused on the fastest growing segments within Christianity, namely the church in the global South and the pentecostal, charismatic, and evangelical movements. Dr. Zurlo's second presentation focused on independent churches which are also growing and thriving throughout the world.

Dr. Zurlo challenged GCF to consider structuring the next Global Gathering in a way that is more representative of global Christianity by continually asking ourselves "who is not at the table?"



Rev. Dr. Jooseop Keum: Reconstructing Ecumenism

Rev. Dr. Jooseop Keum began his reflection with a reading from John 5:1-18 where Jesus offers healing to a man who has been suffering by the pool at Bethesda for 38 years. The system at Bethesda allowed only the first person to enter the water to be healed while all others are left in a state of suffering. Jesus demolishes this system by reaching out to one who has been marginalized and offering him complete healing. Jesus creates a place of healing and well-being for all who are in need.

Rev. Dr. Keum encouraged GCF to consider ways the ecumenical movement can be empowered by the Holy Spirit on the journey toward true and authentic discipleship. He challenged GCF to rediscover the gift of faith at the margins, in the same place God chose to inaugurate his kingdom. Finally, Rev. Dr. Keum proclaimed the good news that God's love has the power to defeat the current culture of hatred, stigma, and fear. The ecumenical movement must boldly proclaim the good news of the gospel that our Risen Lord has defeated death and offers life to all.

"The power of God's love can defeat the culture of hatred. The power of our Risen Lord has subjugated the power of death. How can we witness to God's love in ways so that our witness nurtures and protects and enhances life?"



Prof. Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst: That There May Be Equality

Prof Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst offered a presentation based on the call toward equality found in 2 Corinthians 8:14 where Paul is inviting the Christians in Corinth to give what they have in support of the Christians who are in need in Jerusalem. She also shared from Romans 15 where Paul is preparing to take an offering raised by believers in Macedonia and Achaia to the believers in Jerusalem. The offering that Paul has received caused some controversy in Jerusalem, as the believers in Judea viewed themselves as the “mother church;” they were the ones to give, not the ones to receive from others. It is through the equal sharing of gifts that community is created.

The parallels to the current global church are striking, where believers in the global South largely outnumber believers in the global North, yet resources remain concentrated in and controlled by the church in the global North.

Prof Padilla DeBorst encouraged GCF to consider whether true unity is possible without equality. Finally, Prof. Padilla DeBorst invited the GCF team to consider how we can center the voices that are usually marginalized, including refugees, women and young people, especially in relation to the next Global Gathering.

"What kind of daring reversal is God calling us to?"

Dr. Teresa Rossi: The Future of the Ecumenical Movement

Professor Teresa Rossi offered a presentation on the future of the ecumenical movement. She began by discussing the current status of the ecumenical movement, citing the tension that exists between remarkable ecumenical successes over the years and goals that have not yet been realized. She then offered her own reflections on the newer paradigms within ecumenism, including receptive ecumenism and relational ecumenism which take a pragmatic approach to relationships and community-building. These methodologies encourage Christians to walk together, recognizing that shared spaces can become spaces of communion where joys and difficulties are shared. She encouraged the movement toward visible relational unity within the global church, recognizing the decreasing space for religious voices within the world. Professor Rossi depicted relational unity as a way for Christians to present a more credible witness to the world in the name of Jesus Christ. Finally, Professor Rossi celebrated the GCF model of authentic faith sharing which acknowledges the blessedness of relationships and shared pilgrimage.





GCF's expanded leadership team had the great privilege to end their meeting in Rome with an audience with His Holiness, Pope Francis.

We thank God for the good work of prayer, discernment, and preparation that the GCF team has accomplished in Rome.

Sharing Faith Stories

The Rome gathering provided an opportunity for one of GCF's foundational practices: the sharing of faith stories among participants. Participants shared stories of loss and reorientation in the midst of grief and fragility, stories of hope and encouragement in the midst of uncertain times, and stories of faithful communities that have uplifted one another during this season of pandemic. Each of the faith stories testified to the God who walks with us in every season of our lives.

"The word I am choosing for today is hope, and specifically to hope beyond all hope. Within the Faith and Order Commission, I have been deeply moved by the efforts that people have made to listen to each other and understand each other, to try and try again even when nothing is necessarily resolved."

"What has ministered to me in the past months is the simplicity of faith in the rural area. It is Christ in the day-to-day life, supporting one another, praying for one another, caring for one another, living in harmony with one another."

"The word I will go with is fragile, fragile health, fragile relationships, fragile faith. It's been a really hard year of losing some really close friends. On the positive side of fragile, I have seen the fragility of things bolstered up by the prayers and the friendships of people all around the world."

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

-Colossians 3:14-15

