

GLOBAL CHRISTIAN FORUM

Third Global Gathering, Bogotá, Colombia 24-27 April 2018

MESSAGE TO THE CHURCHES 'Let Mutual Love Continue'

Greetings to all who call on the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and to all people throughout the world!

The third international gathering of the Global Christian Forum met in Bogotá, Colombia, from 24 – 27 April, 2018. We express our thanks to our Colombian hosts who have so graciously received us. We rejoice and give thanks that 251 participants from the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Evangelical Churches, the Historic Christian World Communion Churches, Independent and indigenous Christian Churches and communities, the Pentecostal Churches, the Roman Catholic Church from 55 countries came together to engage with one another on the theme, “Let mutual love continue” (Hebrews 13 : 1).

The theme, “let mutual love continue”, expresses the spirit and practice of the Global Christian Forum since its inception in August 1998, when a group of 28 visionary leaders met at the Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey-WCC to create a new space for broadening interchurch encounter and dialogue. The Guiding Purpose Statement of the Global Christian Forum was affirmed at the first Global Gathering in Limuru, Kenya, in 2007:

To create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and interchurch 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.

1. A “Cloud of Witnesses” (Hebrews 12 :1)

The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, “We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12). In our gathering, we listen to, and are nourished and challenged by many different witnesses of faith journeys in the mysterious and empowering presence of God.

Witnessing to Each Other Through Praying Together and Sharing Our Faith Stories

Gathered in Jesus’ name, praying together has nourished and sustained us on our journey as witnesses. Indeed Jesus has been present among us as we have praised God and prayed for peace, reconciliation and all those who suffer persecution, poverty and injustice (Matthew 18:20). Sharing stories of our journeys with Jesus Christ, which has become the hallmark of the Global Christian Forum, has helped us to recognize one another as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ and created an atmosphere of closeness and trust so that we can address issues that are still separating us.

Gathered in Jesus’ name in Bogotá, Colombia, we have listened to and been inspired by witnesses working for peace. We pray that the peace process may continue in Colombia and bring hope and reconciliation to those who are suffering and struggling.

Testimony to Repentance and Reconciliation Between Christians and Churches

We have heard testimony from representatives of the Lutheran World Federation, the Catholic Church, the World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Anglican Communion about their Churches' respective journeys to embracing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999). Along with them, we "give thanks to the Lord for this decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the Church" (JDDJ 44). What happened in the past cannot be changed, but what is remembered and how it determines our present can. We hope and pray that retelling our histories and our stories together may lead our Churches to a fuller recognition of each other as Christians on the same journey, sharing the joy and power of the Gospel, hearing what the Spirit is saying (Revelation 2:29), and witnessing to the mercy of God through proclamation and service, so that the world may believe (John 17: 21).

2. The Way of Jesus Christ, Suffering and Sacrifice (Hebrews 12)

"Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:3). Sharing the stories of our faith journeys testifies to our common faith in the salvific work of Jesus Christ. In sharing our faith in Christ, the participants have acknowledged that Jesus continues to call us to take up our cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

A readiness to follow Jesus, even to giving up our own lives as he did, is the condition of true discipleship. As such, we have honoured and pray for His Eminence Metropolitan Mor Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim, a devoted member of the GCF Committee and the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo Boulos Yazijy on the fifth anniversary of their abduction in Syria. We call on all Christians to remember them, as well as all of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. We also call Christians to join with those who pray for peace and justice in Jerusalem. In the bond of Christian unity, we call on all Christian communities to remember in their daily prayers all who suffer persecution and martyrdom for living their faith throughout the world (Matthew 5: 10-12).

We encourage our fellow disciples to persevere while looking to Jesus, with hunger and thirst for righteousness, and hope and joy in the Resurrection.

3. Let Mutual Love Continue in a Life-Generating Work of the Spirit

As disciples of Jesus, we acknowledge that sharing the Good News of Jesus to all nations is a joyful calling of all Christians (Acts 1:8).

As disciples of Jesus, we pray with and lift up in prayer all peacemakers (Matthew 5:9); those who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and visit the imprisoned (Matthew 25: 35-36); those who defend God's creation awaiting the revelation of the children of God (Romans 8:19); those who labour to free those who have been enslaved and put an end to human trafficking; those who strive to end violence and discrimination against women; those who serve migrants and displaced people; persons with disabilities and those who care for the sick.

To let mutual love continue on our journey as brothers and sisters in Christ, we need repentance and reform, encouraged and led by the Holy Spirit. We must first critically examine ourselves rather than others. The Global Christian Forum Consultation Message from Tirana, Albania, states, "We repent

of having at times persecuted each other and other religious communities in history, and ask forgiveness from each other.” We cannot be content with “polite ecumenism,” but rather let our narratives be redeemed in the Spirit, confessing that our division openly contradicts the will of Jesus Christ, scandalizes the world and harms our mission to share the Gospel.

We implore the forgiveness of our Lord and encourage one another to be bound together in our mutual love in Jesus Christ and journey forward together. As united, we now call upon Christian Churches around the world to take courage in facing together today’s challenges in various cultural and regional contexts.

As we journey together as friends of Jesus Christ, we must always make room for others by asking who is missing in our midst at the Global Christian Forum. Here in Bogota, we yearned in particular for the gifts of more women, young people, indigenous people and persons with disabilities.

We want to share and grow the joy we have experienced in Bogota, by extending the experience of the Global Christian Forum through regional and local initiatives rooted in the places where we live.

We are sent as disciples of Jesus out into the brokenness, pain and injustice of the world.

In our sharing the struggle of authentic Christian witness in our world, we heard and applauded strong warnings to resist the captivity of the Gospel by any national or ideological powers. We desire to hold one another in support and accountability united in one body, transcending all attempts to weaken the truth of our witness to Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Hebrews 13:20-21 blesses us “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus...make you perfect in every good work to do in his will”. Being together and sharing stories of our faith journey, we have learned to recognize and receive one another as gifts of God. We remembered and named the stories of our brothers and sisters who bear the suffering marks of Jesus in their bodies (Galatians 6:17). Our hearts were not dismayed but wondrously lifted in hope (Romans 8:35-38). We encourage one another to press on and continue in the spirit and works of love.

In strengthening and continuing mutual love, we are called upon to be the Church in and for the world, bearing faithful witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ and embodying his truth in our ordinary practices of Christian life. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus whose encounter with Jesus led them to recognize him as they shared together, we have gathered in a shared space praying and conversing with one another, feasting together on the Word of God. Being together, our eyes were also opened, and we recognized the living presence of Jesus Christ.

May the Spirit of God continue to gather us together in mutual love in Jesus Christ, encouraging and strengthening one another to stand firm in our shared faith and help us be the prophetic witness for the hurting world.