



‘Call to Mission and Perception of Proselytism’ A Global Conversation

Introduction

According to its Guiding Purpose Statement, a primary aim of the Global Christian Forum (GCF) is to provide ‘space’ for participants to ‘explore and address common challenges’. The second global gathering of the GCF (Manado, October 2011) called on the Forum to more fully realise this part of its purpose, especially in regard to themes ‘where we are not in agreement with one another’. Subsequent broad consultation with leadership of GCF participant bodies identified several priority common challenges for consideration together in space provided by the Forum. What can be summarized as the ‘call to mission and the perception of proselytism’ emerged at the top of the list of common challenges that continue to divide churches.

While leadership of all participant bodies agree that the church is called to mission and evangelism, powerful emotions and deep wounds rooted in experiences, perceptions, or accusations of proselytism between churches — understood popularly as the “stealing of sheep” from one Christian body by another Christian body — are widely manifest. At the same time, there seems to be little direct communication or possibility of direct communication between churches who understand themselves as victims of proselytism and those who believe they are falsely accused of proselytism. Some have suggested that GCF may be able to provide sufficiently neutral space for a process of conversation between churches on this matter.

After broad consultation and lengthy consideration, the GCF Committee decided in its September 2013 meeting to convene a global conversation on this theme and to do so in cooperation with other global bodies. Central to this decision was the clear and affirmative counsel received from an ‘exploratory group’ convened by the GCF to advise the GCF Committee in this decision. The exploratory group included persons representing and/or suggested by leadership of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, Orthodox, and the Organization of African Instituted Churches.

Plan

Aim

The goals proposed for a global conversation on this theme, as agreed by the GCF Committee, are:

1. Through a broad process of conversation with GCF participant bodies, to compose a statement on ‘Christian Witness in a World of Many Christian Families’ (provisional title) that includes suggestions for relationships between churches engaged in mission and evangelism, especially in areas where more than one church lives and/or works.
2. To encourage and facilitate work on reconciliation and ‘healing of memories’ between churches which have experienced tension and pain due to conflicting perspectives and practices on mission and evangelism.

3. To make available (information on) resources and services useful in developing the kinds of relationships recommended in the statement.
4. To encourage broad reception among GCF participant bodies of both the statement 'Christian Witness in a World of Many Christian Families' and the statement 'Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World'.

Approach

It is assumed that the initiative will take the form of a global 'facilitated' conversation process, accompanied or guided by qualified Christian facilitators or mediators, rather than as one or more major global consultations. Components of the facilitated conversation process and its structure may include:

1. A small 'Working Group' responsible for formulating a fuller plan for the process and overseeing its implementation.
2. A questionnaire on the theme created by the Working Group and addressed to GCF participant bodies.
3. An initial draft of a statement on 'Christian Witness in a World of Many Christian Families', formulated by the Working Group and taking into account the responses to the questionnaire.
4. Regional or local conversations on the theme, including discussion and discernment of the draft statement, in Forum-like settings where the theme is directly relevant and a wide range of GCF participants is willing to participate
5. Revision of the statement of the in light of the regional and local conversations.
6. Global distribution of the statement and implementation of the other goals of the process (see above Goals 2, 3, and 4).

Cooperation

While ready to convene the conversation process, in order to strengthen the conversation and extend its usefulness, the Global Christian Forum hopes to undertake this initiative conjointly, in cooperation with Global Christian Forum participant bodies (World Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance, Pentecostal World Fellowship, Catholic Church, other Christian World Communions). It is these bodies and the Global Christian Forum that will appoint or propose members of the Working Group.

Calendar

The Working Group will meet initially before the end of the first quarter of 2014 if possible, but in any case no later than the end of the second quarter, to develop a fuller plan as well as to set into motion the global conversation.