



Global Mission Network

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

From 14 to 23 February 2006 over 4000 national and international leaders of the ecumenical movement as well as representatives from numerous Church organizations and associations met in Porto Alegre, Brazil for the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Janice Price, GMN Network Secretary, describes the Assembly and its outcomes.



Archbishop Desmond Tutu addresses the assembly

World Council of Churches 9th Assembly



The worship tent, erected on a car park

I was told before I left for Porto Alegre that there is nothing like a WCC Assembly. Spoken by a veteran of several Assemblies, I found that statement to be true. Living as part of such a global gathering was exciting, humbling, energizing. The world seemed to shrink as distant regions became people who were sisters, brothers and friends in the body of Christ.

who are not full members. The Latin American context was the backdrop against which the Assembly did its work. That context was full of life, whether in the worship or plenaries or in meeting its people.

Each day comprised worship in the morning and evening, presentations, debates, ecumenical conversations, Bible Study and decision-making all

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This Assembly was, arguably, the most comprehensive in the Council's history. As well as the member Churches of the Council it included significant representation from the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal Church families

around the theme *'God in your Grace, Transform the World'*. Bible Study groups were made up of delegates and young people from all regions of the world. Mine included delegates from India, Namibia, Zambia, the

Netherlands, Sweden, Canada and the UK. Our studies and discussions were informed by the WCC *Springs of Living Water* which included Bible Studies written by representatives of all the world regions. This material was helpful but our group was at its best when

members surprise when we described the Western practice of caring for older people in specialist homes, not in the extended family. This led to an exchange about age and aging and how different cultures viewed their older members.

'Importance of including young people, ecumenical formation and working for transformation and justice.'

we were sharing experience from our home contexts. Our differing perspectives led to the most meaningful exchange. One example stands out. That was seeing our African

Ecumenical conversations were a new introduction which provided space for a focused conversation over three days for discussion on a specific area. I attended the



Janice Price with her Bible Study group

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Affluence, Poverty & Change in China



Rural China

China's economy is continuing to expand at an unprecedented rate. In March 2006, the National People's Congress kicked off its annual meeting in Beijing by reporting that China's economy has grown by almost 10 percent over the last year, resulting in China overtaking Britain as the world's fourth largest economy. For many Chinese, the continuous expansion of the economy has brought affluence and opportunities only dreamt of by

China's economy has overtaken Britain as the world's 4th largest economy

their ancestors. But the last 12 months has also seen increased unrest in China, particularly in the countryside where millions of farmers have been left behind by the market reforms, or are having their land taken

The last year has seen increased unrest in China, particularly in rural areas

away, or are suffering the pollution accompanying massive industrialization.

The Government has started to acknowledge the growing divide and has launched a new initiative called "the new socialist countryside", which aims to redress the balance and make the rural program the centrepiece of a new five-year

plan. But poverty is not just restricted to the rural areas. A report in China Youth Daily recently claimed that the proportion of urban residents living in poverty is now higher than that of rural residents.

With three-hundred million Chinese expected to migrate to the cities before 2020, this issue will only intensify.

In addition to government interventions how are Christians in China responding to the issue? Increasingly advocacy roles are being taken on by members of the underground Church particularly in the area of compensation for loss of land. Offering help to marginalized groups such as migrant

workers, those living with HIV/AIDS and the elderly, is increasingly providing other faith based groups, both registered and unregistered, with a reason to move away from their traditional pastoral roles and look outward and serve the society in which they are living. The recent 20th anniversary celebrations of the Amity Foundation provided a good opportunity to explore the phenomena of Christian response to development issues and the creation of civil society. The anniversary celebrations included field visits to current projects and ended with a 3-day conference on social development in which participants talked about future socio-economic trends within

China. Professor Sun Liping, a sociologist from Beijing's prestigious Qinghua University, pointed to the challenge created by China's huge income disparity between the rich and the poor – one of the widest in the world and a major threat to development. Amity, over the last few years, started basic advocacy work – something in its infancy in China – particularly with the development of a legal aid centre and training for church staff working in the area of HIV/AIDS. It is sharing its experience with other Christians both Catholic and Protestant running both grassroots programmes and national centres.

This summer there will be an opportunity for Christians here to learn more about the challenges facing China at a conference jointly run by GMN China Desk and the Friends of the Church in China. The conference "Affluence, Poverty and Change", will include a range of seminars and talks from experts, including Xinran (author of *Good Women of China* and *Sky Burial*) who will use her experience as a radio broadcaster in China.

For more information or to book a place at the conference, please contact Ruth Baker at rbaker@fish.co.uk or tel: 01235 520 447

Ecumenical Conference on Israel and Palestine 16 March 2006

Representatives from Churches and international agencies with involvement in Israel and Palestine joined together to hear three leaders of the Christian churches in Palestine plead for prayer and action. The conference was part of an international week of action for the region. The conference, sponsored by the Middle East Forum of GMN and organised by International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, was told that, 'Churches must stand up for Palestine and point out to the Israelis the nature of their oppression... Israel needs healing too.'

Dr. Bishara Awad, of the Bethlehem Bible College, speaking these words, went on, 'Our primary need is not for sympathy or charity... we call on the churches in the UK and Ireland to pray, intercede and fast for us, to be an advocate for Palestine in these countries.'

He described the Israeli-built security wall as 'a noose around our necks.'

The Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, the Rt Revd Riah Abu el Assal concluded that, 'life struggles to be meaningful under such political circumstances.'

In a Joint Statement the leaders of the Churches in Jerusalem called for, 'a two-state solution based on international law' and recognised that, 'The price of Occupation is unbearably high for those living in Israel as well' as for Palestinians.

This conference was part of a public witness for peace. Joint services were held in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah to mark the week on 12 March.

GMN has continuing involvement in the region through the Middle East Forum and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel.

Further information can be found on www.eappi.org and a copy of the Church leaders statement can be found on www.ctbi.org.uk/workareas

Welcome to Bob Fyffe

The Revd Canon Bob Fyffe has been appointed the new General Secretary of CTBI. He is currently Rector of St John the Baptist and Canon of St Ninian's Cathedral, Perth, Scotland. He has worked in this capacity for 14 years.

He is a member of the Conference of European Churches planning group for the Third European Ecumenical Assembly.

On his appointment Canon Fyffe commented, 'We are seeing the need for a deeper respect of one another's faith and traditions... This respect lies at the heart of inter church and

conversation about mission as healing and reconciling communities. Continuing the theme of the Athens 2005 conference it explored specific examples of mission as healing and reconciliation from Argentina and Korea among others. Small group work was used to explore our own contexts further. While these conversations were welcome this forum lacked Biblical input and a clear sense of direction.

In the first week of the Assembly the Plenary sessions were devoted to presenting the work of the WCC and major addresses by the General Secretary and Moderator of the Central Committee. Both these addresses focused on the inclusion of young people and young adults in the life of the WCC as well as the importance of ecumenical formation and the need to work for transformation and justice. These were supported by presentations which were excellently performed but sadly left little time for response from delegates. Many delegates expressed disquiet at the lack of time for their input and debate.

The Archbishop of Canterbury addressed the Assembly on the theme of Christian identity and religious pluralism. Among others who addressed the Assembly were Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the President of Brazil.



The 9th Assembly saw the introduction of consensus decision making. This was one of the main outcomes of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC. This process was well

people bringing their plight to the attention of the world and on human sexuality among others. In terms of outcomes from the Assembly the following was agreed on WCC ways of working:

'comprehensive attention be given to unity, spirituality and mission'

received and allowed a flexibility that is difficult to find with majority voting. The Assembly programme was enhanced by the presence of the Mutirao workshops. This was not part of the formal programme for delegates but provided a space for workshops where organizations and special interest groups could present their work and opinions. Here there was energy with workshops on controversial and not so controversial subjects packed with participants wanting to hear and take part. I attended workshops addressed by representatives of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Palestinian

- 'An integrated, collaborative and interactive approach to its work
- To lift up its central task of the churches calling one another to visible unity
- To keep in tension the work of dialogue and advocacy
- Articulating a clear theological basis for all its work
- Developing a comprehensive planning, monitoring and evaluation process that will include a clear time-line and goals'

(Taken from Report of the Programme Guidelines Committee and passed by the Assembly delegates.)

The Assembly agreed that, 'comprehensive attention be given to unity, spirituality and mission, both theologically and practically. This included looking at 'fresh ways of experiencing the Christian faith and the discovery of new contextual ways of proclaiming the gospel.' (From Report of the Programme Guidelines Committee.)

It was good to see mission featured in these three essential parts of the WCC's work as it had not featured highly in plenary presentations throughout the Assembly.

The Assembly has set the parameters for further change in the structure and ways of working in the WCC. Now follows a period of reflection and planning for WCC staff as they implement these principles in detail. GMN looks forward to continued working with the WCC and in particular the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism.



Further information about the WCC and the Assembly can be found on www.wcc-coe.org



Revd Gordon Holmes, GMN's Africa Forum Focal Person, recently attended the PROCMURA (Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa) conference in Nairobi from 26 January to 1 February 2006. Here he describes the event.

'Witnessing in a pluralistic landscape in Africa'

What timing! The Danish cartoon furore broke out just after the thirty PROCMURA staff, from countries across Middle Africa, returned to their Churches enthused by the meeting in Kenya. Phone calls from them to the PROCMURA General Adviser, Johnson Mbillah, stressed the importance of PROCMURA's work in bridge building and peace-making without compromising faith. By having the annual meeting of European partners

in Africa it was possible for the participants to be predominantly African and for the partners from Europe and North America to be made aware that while outside support is vital, PROCMURA is owned by the African churches. Local programmes are primarily financed locally.

A five-year strategic plan is being prepared and the first draft formed the main part of the agenda. It states PROCMURA's overall goal as 'To keep before the

churches of Africa their responsibility for understanding Islam and Muslims in view of the churches task of interpreting the Gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully in the Muslim world and the promotion of constructive engagements with Muslims for peace in society and peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims.'

PROCMURA has had a mediating role in areas of violent conflict such as Sierra Leone. The Women's and Education Programme has undertaken work in Benin, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. It has worked with the World Council of Churches and others on violence against women and with the World Lutheran Federation in a gathering entitled 'Mothers cry for a healthy Africa.'

For a fuller report of the meeting see www.ctbi.org.uk/workareas

inter faith dialogue. CTBI plays a crucial role in encouraging and resourcing new dialogue between the Churches and in the areas of racial justice and mission.'

He succeeds Dr. David Goodbourn who has been CTBI General Secretary for seven years.

Introducing Global Mission Network



Stephen Lyon, Moderator of GMN, introduces the thinking behind the changes.

On 3 May 2006, Churches Commission on Mission, becomes the Global Mission Network. This change is primarily about reflecting new ways of working as we seek to be responsive to the changed church and social contexts in which we minister. The changes concerning GMN also reflect wider changes in the ecumenical scene in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. In this new situation, CTBI becomes an agency of the four national ecumenical instruments. GMN is a full part of these changes even though the memberships of CTBI and GMN are not identical.

Put simply, GMN is an ecumenical space where the theme is mission. That is the role of GMN and our primary purpose. We seek to provide an ecumenical space to share experience and perspectives on mission that will be of benefit to Churches and agencies in their mission work.

How does that space work? First, it is **global**. That term is often the cause of some misunderstanding. For GMN

global means the whole of God's world including the four nations of Britain and Ireland. We seek the unity between mission in these islands and in the wider world. Gone are the divisions between home and overseas mission. This is reflected in the work of CCOM, now taken into GMN, with the co-ordination work that the Forums undertake as well as the work on mission accompaniment that has emerged from the Building Bridges of Hope research.

Second, our way of working is that of a **network**. Networks are light on bureaucracy and are concerned primarily with a purposeful flow of information. So, the key question for us in developing a network way of working is to discern what will help the Churches and agencies in their work and mission. What reflection needs to be done together? What work can be done together? We will be directed in this discernment by the new Management Group comprising the General Secretaries of the four national ecumenical instruments and of CTBI. We also need to hear from member Churches and agencies. This newsletter is an important part of a new communications strategy for the network. There will be further changes as we look at other areas of GMN.

This is an important step on the journey. That journey has taken various forms from the 1910 Edinburgh Conference to the present day. We look forward to the future with hope and expectancy as we embark on the next stage. ●

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in Britain and Ireland)

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... Centre for Mission Accompaniment

At the end of March 2006 Phase C of *Building Bridges of Hope* completes its work. The new Centre for Mission Accompaniment will take forward the findings of the research through the publication of a Local Church Pack for Mission Accompaniment. This is designed to encourage and enthuse churches to use mission accompaniment as a way of negotiating change and developing their mission. This will be published in September 2006.

In September 2006 the new Foundation Course in Mission Accompaniment will be launched at Cliff College in Derbyshire. A joint venture between Cliff College and GMN, the course is designed to train Christians in the skills and spirituality of mission accompaniment. Details and booking forms can be obtained from tessa.stawski@ctbi.co.uk ●

Future Church Conference 06

On the theme of **Becoming Communities of Learning**

Speakers: John and Olive Drane / Helen Cameron / Janice Price

19-20 October 2006

High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Herts.

Cost: £120 Further details from tessa.stawski@ctbi.org.uk



Terry Tennens at his farewell party with GMN staff, right to left, Tessa Stawski and Caroline Felder

Farewell to Terry Tennens

On 1 March 2006, the *Building Bridges of Hope* Development Group and CTBI staff joined together to say farewell to Terry Tennens. Terry has been Director of the BBH project for five years. Stephen Lyon, Moderator of GMN, said at the gathering, 'Terry has steered this project with great skill and dedication. He has shown himself to be

someone who can hold the overall vision for the project and be able to work it out practically. He has been a diplomat of the highest order and has always gently challenged when that was needed. We give thanks to God for Terry's time with us and all he has given us. We shall miss him greatly and wish him well for the future.' ●