

Concluding message of the Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE)

We, 86 theological educators, give thanks to God for the first meeting of the Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE), which met May 16-20, 2016 at Ferienstätte Dorfweil, Schmitten (near Frankfurt). We are grateful to the organizers for their bold vision and careful planning for this exceptional new global forum.

The GFTE's composition is unique: for the first time, key theological educators from the six major church confessional families—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Independent churches—came together in one united forum in order to learn from each other and to share about the current situation of theological education and ministerial formation on a global scale.

Drawing on reflections from the book of Acts, participants gathered in the Spirit of Pentecost, aware that the core conviction of Christians—from whatever strand of Christian tradition they come—is to witness to the reality of God's transforming love while standing together, not allowing anyone to become isolated. There was a clear sense that each had something to contribute to the common table.

The GFTE meeting was a unique moment, as it is the only time in the recent history of Christianity that such a diverse spectrum of leaders in theological education has joined together to underline the common tasks that face all Christian traditions. Some of these tasks include: building up new leadership for the mission of the church, strengthening the sense of unity between Christians, giving witness to justice with peace in the world, and supporting all aspects of theological education. The meeting was characterized by a deep sense of humility and of mutual openness in prayer and dialogue.

Participants realised with new urgency:

We are living in a critical stage of World Christianity. The landscapes of Christian traditions are changing dramatically—in some countries the existence of Christianity is under threat and Christian minorities are challenged to remain steadfast in hostile environments; there are institutional frameworks of theological education that are crumbling; there is growing religious illiteracy and ignorance that help foster prejudice and extremism; theological institutions are often under pressure to conform to government or other external forms of accreditation requirements. In our many contexts we realize again that unity and cooperation in theological education beyond the traditional divides are not a luxury or mere specialized vocation for some, but are essential to the future of theological education. Cooperation and dialogue in theological formation are required for the majority of settings in which the church finds itself in the 21st century.

We are glad therefore that the consultation in Dorfweil has provided an occasion to recognize each other as Orthodox, Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic or Independent theological educators contributing to a common task of theological education for the sake of God's reign in the world.

We are aware that we can complement each other and need each other with the different gifts we bring to the common table in the area of theological education. The need to overcome stereotypes and caricatures of each other is crucial not just for theological education but also for our witness in a world that is torn apart by wars, violence and so many types of injustice. We have been made aware of the need to continue conversations started in this first gathering, to foster friendships and collaboration birthed from our dialogue, and to seek together, as educators, to work toward transformative theological education that serves the churches and God's kingdom.

We recommend that the next gathering of the Global Forum of Theological Educators take place within the next two to three years – and that the Executive Committee undertake the necessary planning and develop increased communication among present and prospective participants.

With thanks to God—Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of Life.