

Global Forum of Theological Educators
Second Global Meeting
Orthodox Academy of Crete
May 20-24, 2019

The Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE) is a relatively new organization created to provide an opportunity for leaders in theological education from every Christian tradition to meet and learn from each other. The first global meeting was held in Germany in 2016; the second took place May 20-24, 2019, in Crete. The GFTE is not controlled by or aligned with any one group but brings together at a common table theological educators from each of the six Christian ecclesial families: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Historical Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Independent (from Africa and China). Participants engage in the GFTE as individuals rather than as formal representatives of specific groups or associations.

At the inaugural meeting of the Forum in 2016, the agenda included Bible study and brief presentations on theological education followed by table conversations, with individuals from each of the six ecclesial families at each table. The format for the second meeting (at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, located at Kolymbari, Kissamos, Chania, Crete) followed the outline of the first but with more substantial presentations in the belief that trust is built even as participants address issues on which there may be disagreement. The theme for the second meeting was “Vision and Viability in Contexts: Theological Learning and Formation.” Specific topics included: how vocation is recognized and fostered; how theological and educational methods shape outcomes; missional fidelity in changing, challenging contexts; sustainability in theological education; and human migration and the response of the church.

The primary methodological strategy for the conference was plenary presentations followed by sharing in table groups, with each table group including representatives from different Christian ecclesial families. Because all participants were experts in one or another area of theological education, plenary speakers did not take the majority of the time available but used their presentations to introduce and encourage discussion. The table conversations provided opportunity for broad dialogue on current visions of and practices in theological education. A copy of the program booklet, containing a detailed schedule and information on all participants is attached to this report. The more than 70 participants came from each of the six ecclesial families and represented 31 countries.

The final session was devoted to identifying what had been heard throughout the meeting. A listening committee, led by David Baer and consisting of representatives from the various ecclesial families (Daniel Ayuch, David Baer, Janet Clark, Gemma Cruz, Kirsteen Kim, Rufus Okikiola Ositelu, Zakale Shohe) prepared and presented a report, which is also attached. You will see there a detailed review of the presentations and the conversations generated by the presentations, as well as an evaluation of the insights and learning along the way. Seven specific learnings are named in the report: 1) Our Bible reading is inevitably located; 2) We must be dreamers; 3) We are changed by the people we meet on this road; 4) Hospitality is arguably the defining quality of GFTE; 5) Our capacity for empathy ... indeed for shared journeying ... is best enhanced by narrative ... by the sharing of our stories; 6) Theological education is best

understood as an enterprise on the move; and 7) We didn't learn new truths. We re-learned old truths in community.

In brief, the outcome of the meeting was as the planners had hoped: theological educators from different ecclesial families met and learned from their counterparts from parts of the Christian world they had not encountered before. A survey was distributed at the end of the meeting; approximately 75% of the participants responded. In addition to responding by selecting among the set choices, nearly all offered specific comments. Here are a few examples:

In response to the question "What did you find most helpful at the GFTE?"

- All was terrific, but especially the fellowship with people I would not normally talk with. I also learned a lot from meeting people from all traditions and places.
- To discuss with scholars from diverse traditions and background and to remove prejudice from different traditions.
- As I'm sure many will say, one of the most enriching and stimulating aspects of GFTE was the conversations that happened in the table discussions and over meals. I was deeply touched by these conversations. My heart is blessed, and my mind is crackling with ideas and insights I will take back to my home institution.

In response to the question "What would you like to have at the next GFTE?"

- Less "presentations" and more opportunities for collaborative dialogue. It was good the way we were "mixed up" into discussions groups each day, but there were too many presentations and not enough time to simply talk with one another.
- More reflection and conversation on theological education models and methods in different geographical and church contexts
- One specific theme related to theological education: shorter presentations, more panel conversations/respondents to keynotes reflecting the cultural and confessional diversity.

The survey responses were collated and reviewed by members of the planning committee as a planning tool in preparation for GFTE 3. The planning committee for GFTE 2 consisted of Dr David Baer (Evangelical), Rev Dr Steve Bevans (Roman Catholic), Rev Dr David Esterline (Protestant), Dr Rosalee Velloso Ewell (Evangelical), Rev Dr Wonsuk Ma (Pentecostal), Most Rev Dr Rufus Ositelu (Independent), Katerina Pekridou (Orthodox), and Rev Dr Lester Ruiz (Protestant). Rev Dr Daniel Aleshire, recently retired Executive Director of ATS, has since joined the planning committee.

We are attempting to establish as sustainable a model for GFTE as possible. While grant funding covered the majority of the cost of the meeting (including accommodation, food, and local transportation), we asked participants to cover their own travel expenses to Crete and contribute a registration fee of \$150. We were deeply grateful to receive generous grants from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), Danmission, Evangelischen Missionswerk in Deutschland (EMW), Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA), and Yoido Full Gospel Church (Seoul). Income exceeded expenses by US\$6808—which is being held for operation of subsequent meetings. Financial administration has been handled by the

business office of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, where David Esterline, chair of GFTE in 2019, served until recently as president.

The planning committee began preparing for GFTE 3 soon after the meeting in Crete and finalized plans for a meeting in June 2021 to be held at Yoido Full Gospel Church’s conference center (Youngsan Camp) north of Seoul. However, due to the Covid-19 public health crisis, the planners of what would have been our third in-person gathering decided to meet virtually in 2021. The executive committee of GFTE strongly believes that the effects of the pandemic have only underscored the importance of GFTE. A gathering in 2021, though virtual, will provide important points of reconnection and will serve as essential preparation for GFTE’s fourth global gathering, hopefully in person, sometime in 2022 or 2023.

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GFTE 2019 Crete
Income and Expenses

Income (in US\$)

Grants received:

Association of Theological Schools (ATS)	20,000
Foundation of Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA)	15,000
Evangelischen Missionswerk in Deutschland (EMW)	23,174
Danmission	2,313
Yoido Full Gospel Church, Seoul	7,000

Income from participants:

Registration fee of \$150 requested of each participant, with the exception of presenters and planning group members. Allowance made for those with hardship or low income.	5,700
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Total: \$73,187

Expenses (in US\$)

Lodging, meals, meeting expenses at the Orthodox Academy in Crete, including local transportation	36,279
Travel expenses for presenters and session leaders	21,255
Administrative support (including airfare)	8,845

Total \$66,379

Balance (held for use by GFTE 3) \$6808