PRELIMINARY REPORT

It's Finally Happening:

The Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE)
Nairobi 2026

November 2-6, 2026

Desmond Tutu Conference Centre

Hosted by the

All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

Doing Theological Education Together:
Building Bridges, Not Walls

A fellowship with a shared journey

The Nairobi gathering opens a new chapter in a conversation sustained across traditions, regions, and changing circumstances. To understand this meeting, we begin with the fellowship that brings its participants together and the four gatherings through which its shared journey has taken shape.

About GFTE

The Global Forum of Theological Educators is a fellowship of theological education leaders from across the global church. Participants gather as individuals, not as official institutional delegates, to listen, pray, learn and discern together. The Forum seeks relationships across Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Historic Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Independent ecclesial families and across the world's regions. The shared conversation is shaped through collaboration, mutual participation, and respect for the distinctive gifts of every tradition and context.

GFTE seeks to cultivate mutual learning, sustained relationships, leadership formation and possibilities for collaboration, recognizing that representation and mutual participation remain continuing aspirations.

Four Gatherings • A Shared Journey

2016 • Dorfweil, Germany

May 16–20, 2016. The inaugural gathering brought together 86 participants from 37 countries for conversations across ecclesial families, prayer, Scripture and contextual learning.

2019 • Kolympari, Crete, Greece

May 20–24, 2019, at the Orthodox Academy of Crete. Theme: "Vision and Viability in Contexts: Theological Learning and Formation." The meeting brought together 64 participants from 29 countries.

2021 • Virtual gathering

September 29–October 1, 2021. Theme: "Conversations on Theological Education as Formation: Practices, Contexts, Futures." Approximately 120 participants engaged through virtual conversations and shared resources.

2026 • Nairobi, Kenya

November 2–6, 2026. Theme: "Doing Theological Education Together: Building Bridges, Not Walls." The fourth gathering invites renewed relationships, practical imagination and shared commitment.

From a shared journey to a common purpose

The history of GFTE gives context to Nairobi; the five conference goals give direction to the encounter. They connect fellowship and intercultural learning with attention to political and social realities, contextual relevance, and the work of peace and unity. Together, they offer a framework for considering what this gathering hopes to make possible.

Five Goals of the Nairobi Gathering

Fostering Fellowship, Community Building, and Partnerships

A critical outcome is the cultivation of genuine fellowship and relationships among participants. By building strong networks, creating opportunities for collaboration, and fostering a spirit of mutual support, theological education can better equip leaders to address shared challenges collectively.

Embracing Intercultural and Global Perspectives

Recognizing the increasing interconnectedness of the world, theological education must prioritize global and intercultural approaches. This includes fostering meaningful partnerships, breaking down silos between cultures and denominations, and nurturing leaders who are adaptable to diverse contexts.

Engaging Political and Social Realities

Theological education must deeply address pressing issues such as nationalism, persecution, political unrest, and systemic injustice. The goal is to form leaders who respond to these challenges with wisdom, compassion, and a commitment to transformative action.

Prioritizing Contextual and Practical Relevance

Theological education must remain grounded in local realities while connecting these with global perspectives. By integrating context-sensitive approaches with practical tools, theology can meaningfully engage with and address real-world issues.

Advancing Peace and Unity

In a world marked by division—both within and beyond the church—theological education must equip leaders to work ecumenically. This includes addressing conflicts, advocating for justice and reconciliation, and fostering a spirit of unity in diversity.

From the goals to the program

These goals find practical expression in the program that follows. Prayer and Bible study, plenary conversations, facilitated tables, and regional networking provide different ways of listening, learning, and discerning together. The schedule records the planned process through which the gathering seeks to connect its convictions with shared practices.

Conference Program

October 28, 2026 • Program information is current as of the date of printing. Speaker participation and session arrangements remain subject to change.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2

Arrival, Registration, and Welcome

12:00–6:00 pm Participant Arrival and Registration

Registration Coordinators:
Praise Weru, GFTE
John Ngige Njoroge, AACC

6:30–8:00 pm Welcome Gathering and Dinner

Opening Prayer: Wonsuk Ma, GFTE Executive Committee
Welcome: Wonsuk Ma
Welcome: Fidon Mwombeki, AACC General Secretary
Review of Conference Goals and Process: Rosalee Velloso Ewell, GFTE Executive Committee, and Nairobi Conference Coordinator
Introductions and Table Conversations: Rosalee Velloso Ewell, Facilitator
Blessing for the Evening: Rufus Okikiola Ostelu, GFTE Executive Committee

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3

Theme: Reading the Signs of the Times
Purpose: To develop a shared understanding of the changing realities shaping theological education globally.

Convenor of the Day: James Moore

6:30 am Breakfast

8:30 am Morning Plenary: "Doing Theological Education Together: Why Bridges Matter Now"

Morning Prayer: Convenor of the Day
Bible Study: Laurie Brink
Table Conversations: Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

10:00 am Refreshment Break: Coffee and Conversation

10:30 am Thematic Session 1: "Global Changes in Theological Education: What Is Shifting?"

Panel Reflections
Africa: Esther Mombo
Asia and the Pacific: Wati Longchar
Europe: Tomasz Białokurec
Latin America and the Caribbean: Ary Fernándaez Albán
Middle East: Riad Ghobrial
North America: Dorcas Gordon
Plenary Discussion: Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

12:30 pm **Lunch**

2:00 pm **Thematic Session 2: "Listening for the Questions—Prospective and Retrospective"**

Facilitated Table Conversations
Group Facilitators and Rapporteurs

4:00 pm **Refreshment Break: Coffee and Conversation**

4:30 pm **Thematic Session 3: "African Voices in Theological Education: From Misleading Theologies to Life-Giving Faith—Theological Education and the Common Good"**

Co-Presenters:
David Tarus and Danson Ottawa
Respondents:
Barnabe Anzuruni
Opoku Onyinah
Plenary Discussion: Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

6:30 pm **Dinner**

GFTE Executive Committee Dinner Meeting (6:30 pm-8:30 pm, via Zoom)

7:30 pm **Open Evening**

Refreshments will be provided

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

Theme: Learning Across Borders
Purpose: To learn from innovative practices, contextual experiences, and global perspectives.

Convenor of the Day: Tatiana Gorbacheva

6:30 am **Breakfast**

8:30 am **Morning Plenary: "Pentecost and the Gift of Difference"**

Morning Prayer: Convenor of the Day
Bible Study: Jiri Moskala
Table Conversation: Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

10:00 am **Refreshment Break: Coffee and Conversation**

10:30 am **Thematic Session 4: "Decentering the West: Reimagining Theological Education Globally"**

Interviewer:
Tite Tienou
Interviewees:
Asia and Pacific: Limuel Equina
Europe: Pavol Bargar
Latin America and the Caribbean: César Marques Lopes

12:30 pm **Lunch**

1:30 pm **Conference Group Photo**

2:00 pm **Thematic Session 5: "Practices that Give Life"**

Concurrent Group Conversations
- Group 1: Doreen Benavidez, Resource Person and Facilitator
- Group 2: Tatiana Gorbacheva, Resource Person and Facilitator
- Group 3: Riad Ghobrial, Resource Person and Facilitator

Plenary Discussion and Summative Comments: Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

4:00 pm **Refreshment Break: Coffee and Conversation**

4:30 pm **Thematic Session 6: "Building Bridges that Last"**

Presenter:
- Malkaz Songulashvili

Respondents:
- Clayton Coombs
- Anathea Portier-Young
- Evangelos Thiani

Plenary Discussion and Summative Comments: Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

6:30 pm **Dinner**

GFTE Executive Committee (Dinner) Meeting (6:30 pm-7:30 pm) (via Zoom)

7:30 pm **Regional Networking Conversations**
Refreshments will be provided

Regional Group Convenors:
- Africa: David Fabusoro and Rufus Okikiola Ostelu
- Asia and the Pacific: Daniel Lim
- Europe: Arngeir Langås
- Latin America and the Caribbean: Convenor to be confirmed
- North America: John Ragsdale

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5

Theme: Forming for Bridge-Building
Purpose: To consider how theological education can respond faithfully and creatively to the realities shaping contemporary societies.

Convenor of the Day: Stephen Bevans

6:30 am **Breakfast**

8:30 am **Morning Plenary: "Forming for Bridge-Building"**

Morning Prayer: Convenor of the Day
Bible Study: Andrew Sterling
Table Conversations, Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

10:00 am **Refreshment Break: Coffee and Conversation**

10:30 am **Thematic Session 7: "The World Theological Education Is Called to Serve"**

Introduction: Convenor of the Day

Theme Presentation 1: "A World in Conflict – marked by war, violence, migration, displacement, trauma, and humanitarian crises," Wojciech Szczerba
Plenary Q&A, Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

Theme Presentation 2: "A World in Fragments – characterized by polarization, nationalism, social division, and declining trust," Esther Acolatse
Plenary Q&A, Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

Theme Presentation 3: "A World in Transformation – shaped by artificial intelligence, technological innovation, demographic change, and rapid societal transformation," Anathea Portier-Young
Plenary Q&A, Convenor of the Day, Facilitator

Summative Reflections: Convenor of the Day

12:30 pm **Lunch**

2:00 pm **Thematic Session 8: "Formative Theological Education for Bridge-Building"**

Panel Conversation
Rosalee Velloso Ewell
Michael Ortiz
Evangelos Thiani
David Wang
Plenary Discussion: Rosalee Velloso Ewell, Convenor and Lead Discussant

4:00 pm **Refreshment Break: Coffee and Conversation**

4:30 pm **Closing Plenary: "Building Bridges Forward"**

Facilitated Plenary Discussion
Co-facilitators:
Stephen Bevans, Chair, GFTE Listening/Writing Committee
Rosalee Velloso Ewell, GFTE Nairobi Conference Coordinator

6:30 pm **Closing Dinner, Celebration, and Worship: "The Body of Christ—Many Members, One Fellowship"**

Dinner
Words of Thanks: Rosalee Velloso Ewell, GFTE
Words of Thanks: John Ngige Njoroge, AACC
Presentation and Affirmation: "What We Are Hearing—Emerging Themes and a Mandate from Nairobi," Rufus Okikiola Ostelu
Closing Worship: Rosalee Velloso Ewell

8:00 pm **Cultural Celebration and Refreshments**

John Ngige Njoroge, AACC, Host for the evening
RAPALA Dance Ensemble

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6

Departures
7:00 am – 8:30 am **Breakfast and Departures**

From the program to the shared invitation

The program gives practical shape to the Nairobi gathering through prayer, Bible study, listening, and conversation. The stage banner that follows brings these activities under a shared invitation: doing theological education together by building bridges, not walls. Its visual language provides a common point of reference across the meeting's different sessions and perspectives.

GLOBAL FORUM OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATORS (GFTE)

Doing Theological Education Together: Building Bridges, Not Walls

2–6 November 2026 | Desmond Tutu Conference Centre | Nairobi, Kenya

Living, learning, loving, leading with dignity



HOST PARTNER
All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

From the shared image to its meaning

The banner presents the gathering's theme in words and image. The following explanation makes explicit the commitments carried by its colors, flowing strands, and circles: hospitality, dignity, rootedness, mutual learning, and belonging. Read alongside the program, the design offers a way of understanding how participants are invited to encounter one another.

THE MEANING OF OUR COLORS AND DESIGN

Doing Theological Education Together: Building Bridges, Not Walls



The GFTE design depicts distinct colored strands flowing together and crossing three outlined circles. It expresses our commitment to diversity, hospitality, mutual formation, and a shared calling—without erasing our differences.

THE COLORS: A SHARED VISUAL LANGUAGE

Cream — Hospitality and openness. A welcoming space in which different voices and traditions can be heard.
Forest green — Life and rootedness. Faith and tradition remain grounded while opening us to renewal and growth.
Earth brown — Context and belonging. The lived realities of communities, reminding us that theology takes shape in particular places.
Gold — Dignity, wisdom, and hope. The worth of every person and the shared hope for justice and peace.
Teal — Dialogue and connection. Partnerships across cultures and the transformation that comes from mutual learning.

THE FLOWING LINES: RELATIONSHIP WITHOUT UNIFORMITY

The strands travel beside, across, and through one another while remaining identifiable. Their crossings express encounter, cooperation, and reciprocal learning. No single tradition, region, or institution possesses every gift or all wisdom.

THE THREE CIRCLES: GATHERING AND SHARED BELONGING

The outlined circles evoke places of encounter—a shared table, hospitality, and community. They intersect with the strands without enclosing or absorbing them. The different sizes and positions suggest multiple contexts of gathering and belonging, not a single dominant center.

THE THEOLOGICAL INVITATION

Together, the circles and strands resonate with 1 Corinthians 12: one body, many members, each worthy of honor. The design invites GFTE participants to foster fellowship, embrace intercultural perspectives, engage social realities, practice contextually relevant theological education, and advance peace and unity.

Different voices. Shared dignity. Mutual formation. Bridges, not walls.

From the design to the fellowship gathering

The commitments expressed in the design take shape through the people who gather. The following registration profile offers a preliminary picture of the fellowship's geographical and ecclesial breadth. It also invites attention to uneven representation and to voices that may be absent. These figures describe registrations as of October 12, 2026; they should be read as a planning snapshot rather than a final attendance report.

GFTE NAIROBI 2026

Doing Theological Education Together: Building Bridges, Not Walls

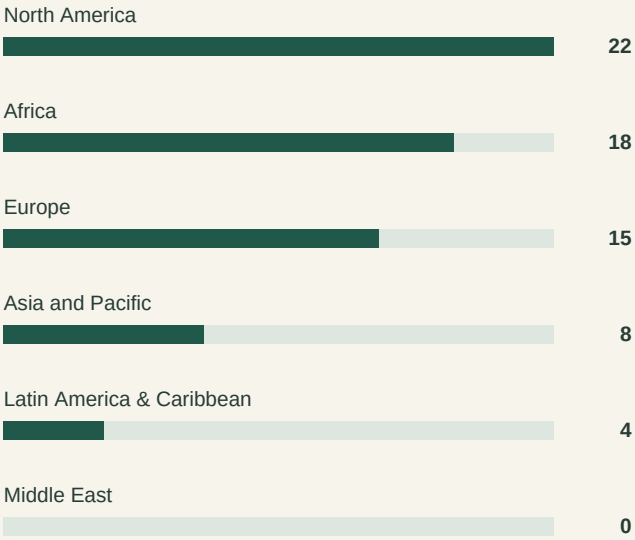
November 2–6, 2026 | Nairobi, Kenya

66
REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS

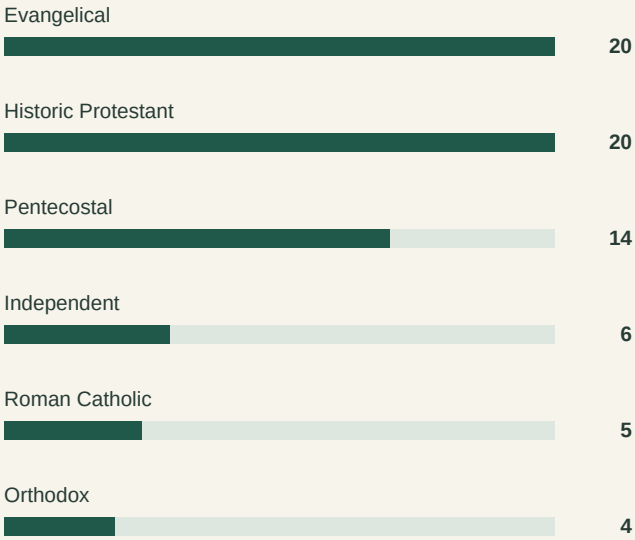
26
COUNTRIES

6
ECCLESIAL FAMILIES

Regional identifications



Ecclesial identifications



Counts are not mutually exclusive: some participants identified with more than one country or ecclesial family.

Why this gathering matters

GFTE's fourth gathering will bring theological educators to Nairobi from November 2–6, 2026, continuing a conversation begun in Dorfweil, Germany (2016), followed by Crete, Greece (2019), and a virtual gathering (2021).

The registration profile captures both the reach and the diversity of this fellowship. Sixty-six participants from 26 countries have registered, identifying with six ecclesial families. The regional and ecclesial distributions invite appreciation for the perspectives present—and continued attention to whose voices are less represented.

Under the theme "Doing Theological Education Together: Building Bridges, Not Walls," the meeting seeks to deepen relationships, encourage attentive listening, and explore collaboration across geographical, cultural, institutional, and ecclesial boundaries. Building bridges means honoring dignity and difference while addressing inequalities and exclusions that hinder genuine mutuality.

GFTE is a fellowship rather than an institution speaking for a single tradition. Its promise lies not only in exchanging ideas but in forming relationships that can shape how theological educators live, learn, and lead in their communities.

Registration snapshot as of October 12, 2026 • Hosted with the All Africa Conference of Churches

From the fellowship to those supporting it

A gathering across regions and ecclesial traditions depends on sustained work, shared resources, and local hospitality. The next document identifies the Executive Committee, conference planners, hosts, and supporters whose contributions helped make Nairobi possible. Their acknowledgment places the program and participant profile within the relationships and responsibilities that sustain GFTE.

The GFTE Executive Committee

Daniel Aleshire
Emmanuel Anim
Stephen Bevans
David Esterline
Rosalee Velloso Ewell
Ruomin Liu
Wonsuk Ma
Rufus Okikiola Ostelu
Katerina Pekridou
Lester Edwin J. Ruiz

Acknowledgments and Supporters

GFTE expresses its gratitude to the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Desmond Tutu Conference Centre for hosting the Nairobi gathering, and to the following supporters:

• Church of Pentecost—UK
• Evangelische Mission Weltweit (EMW)
• Foundation For Theological Education in Asia and the Pacific (FTEAP)
• Society of the Divine Word, Chicago Province (SVD)
• The Association of Theological Schools| The Commission on Accrediting (ATS)
• Individual members of the GFTE Executive Committee who made donations

Conference Leadership and Planning

Nairobi 2026 Conference Planning Committee

David Esterline
Rosalee Velloso Ewell
John Ngige Njoroge
Lester Edwin J. Ruiz
Layne Shaffer
Praise Weru

The Planning Committee gratefully acknowledges the contributions of other members of the GFTE Executive Committee throughout the planning process, as well as the assistance and support of staff from the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Desmond Tutu Conference Centre (DTCC).

From acknowledgment to a continuing invitation

The program, the gathering fellowship, and the work of hosts and supporters are held together by a shared commitment to hospitality, dignity, and mutual formation. These commitments give the Nairobi meeting its purpose and provide a basis for reflection as the gathering unfolds. They also invite participants to carry the relationships and learning nurtured here into their own communities and the continuing life of GFTE.