

Global Forum of Theological Educators to hold inaugural meeting

BY ELIZA SMITH BROWN

The Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE) will hold its inaugural conference May 16–20, 2016, near Frankfurt, Germany. The forum will bring together more than 100 individuals from 35 countries with a shared interest in Christian theological education.

The three-and-a-half-day agenda will include Bible study and table conversations, with a goal that theological educators will become better acquainted with one another, share thoughts and experiences related to the education of pastors and Christian leaders, and better understand one another's work and contexts. The program will focus on nine different areas of conversation and reflection including the contributions that different Christian communities and national contexts bring to Christian theological education, how theological education forms persons for ministry, integrity and leadership, and more.

Participants will comprise equal representations of theological educators from the six major Christian traditions: the Roman Catholic Church; the historic Protestant churches, WCC; the Evangelical Protestant churches, WEA; the Pentecostal churches; the various Orthodox churches; and the various indigenous/independent churches. They will have an opportunity to gather by geographical region, Christian tradition, and other areas



of mutual interest and engagement throughout the conference.

The GFTE executive committee consists of eight theological educators chaired by David Esterline, president and professor of cross-cultural theological education at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and Manfred Kohl, who serves as Ambassador with Overseas Council for Theological Education and Mission (OCE)—an organization that promotes Christian leadership training in the two-thirds world and Eastern Europe.

“I am extremely excited that—for the first time in the history of Christianity—theological educators from all the traditions are coming together to sit at round tables, equal in sharing their traditions, practices, and plans for the future,” said Kohl.

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is working on behalf of the GFTE to organize the event. Daniel Aleshire, ATS executive director and consultant to the

GFTE, explains the thinking behind the meeting: “The center of gravity in Christianity has moved from the Global North and West to the Global South and East, while significant resources in theological education remain in the North. As the world is changing, as the worldwide shape of Christianity is changing, as Christians in other settings are invited to engage in dialogue with other world religions, as theological schools across the Christian spectrum face ever more similar problems, it becomes increasingly important for theological educators across the Christian spectrum and around the world to know and understand one another.”

As a pioneering initiative in worldwide partnerships for theological education, the GFTE aligns with the Association’s 30-year commitment to global issues and a more recent strategic direction in global awareness and engagement endorsed by the Association’s board of directors. Not only is this commitment codified in the ATS Commission on Accrediting Standards of Accreditation, but ATS has also pursued global engagement through its longtime involvement with the various mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and Roman Catholic organizations with a particular interest in global issues. In addition, the Association has dedicated numerous issues of its *Theological Education* journal to the topic, implemented a planning initiative funded by the Henry Luce III Foundation that culminated in a number of meetings of theological educators from around the world, and took the lead in organizing the GFTE.



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