

A Celebration of Service: Honouring Geoff Tunnicliffe's 10 years of leadership in the WEA



Dr Tunnicliffe with Dr Schmirrmacher

The Rev Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe's tenure as Secretary General and CEO of the World Evangelical Alliance came to its conclusion on 30th December 2014. After 10 years of service to the WEA Geoff discerned that it was time to step down, to make room for new leadership, and to pursue other interests to which God has called him. As a tribute to his years as our colleague and friend, we look back at the last decade of his leadership and are grateful to God for Geoff's life and for all he has give the WEA family.

At least two things have to mentioned:

First, though he always called himself a 'generalist,' and as CEO he was responsible for everything: projects, networks, staff and an assortment of joys and challenges, he stated again and again that Evangelicals and the WEA must always be 'theology driven.' Thus good and sound Biblical theology was not something extra for him, but he expected us, as the Theological Commission, to be in the middle of all activities of the WEA, grounding the work and service in the Bible and in good Evangelical theology. This kept us very busy, but also allowed for our theological work to be very practical and down to earth. A secondary but fundamental result of Geoff's vision of theology is that it allowed the Bible to 'read us, as WEA' and to be guided by its words in our decision-making process, rather than an over-emphasis on pragmatism or even budgets. Geoff never let tensions grow between pragmatism and discussing theology.

That we are theology-driven became especially true in the WEA's ecumenical relations. Under Geoff's leadership, the WEA established and made official many formal relations with other Christian traditions and with the United Nations. This catapulted the WEA onto the world scene of official dialogues, joint ventures and collaborations for peace and justice. But all these were not achieved by doing less theology, but with more theology. Rather than set aside our Evangelical theology in order to converse with people of other confessions or traditions, we were challenged to think even harder and to offer an even more Evangelical theology that could address the issues at hand and be of service to our constituency and to the church worldwide. An example of this is the cooperation with the Catholic Church, which is built on years of solid work between Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the TC examining both what we have in common and where we differ. Geoff's speech at the Vatican Synod in 2012 was a unique, bold, and thoroughly biblical call to evangelism – that we witness in everything we are and do to the salvation we have in Jesus Christ.

Second, Geoff embodied the right mix between a self-confident CEO willing to lead and take over responsibility, with the humility to rely on experts and to listen to others as he prepared speeches or drew plans for a new project. For us in the TC it was joyful and great fun to work with Geoff and to know that in the end, his speeches always carried with them sound Evangelical theology and a good dose of biblical exposition while still mirroring his passion and personality.

One of the most important points of connection between Geoff and the TC was the project that led to the writing of *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*. As early as 2006 Geoff allowed Thomas Schirrmacher to negotiate with the Vatican and the World Council of Churches how the WEA would be involved in the process for this document. This was a great risk because no one knew where the process would lead or what its outcome might be. During the last years of the project the TC played a major role in the drafting group, working with others to ensure that the text was both biblically-based and mission-focused. At the official launch of the document in 2011 it became clear that by God's grace, not only had we achieved a major document, but that for Geoff, this document echoed some of the profound beatings of his own heart – that we as WEA and as TC are committed to God's call to mission and to the way of Christ as we follow this call in obedience and grace.

Geoff, we thank you for your years of service and for being an inspiration to us all.

By Thomas Schirrmacher & C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell