

Progress report from Re-Forma

by Reuben van Rensburg, Project Director

In the April Theological News, we reported on the role played by the WEA-endorsed Re-Forma project in addressing the Rwandan government's concerns about the problem of untrained pastors. Re-Forma is responding to the problem of insufficiently trained church leadership by evaluating candidates' responses on 35 aspects of pastoral ministry and awarding a Certificate of Biblical Training for Ministry to those who meet acceptable standards. Re-Forma's certificate represents the first-ever global standard for non-formal ministry training.

We asked project director Reuben van Rensburg to share an update on Re-Forma's progress.

Since Re-Forma began enrolling groups of students in the non-formal sector, who seek to be properly equipped for ministry and to earn the Certificate of Biblical Training for Ministry, we have enrolled over 2,000 groups in 86 countries on six continents. The 35 outcomes are available in 50 languages (see <https://www.re-forma.global/outcomes>). Over 1,000 students have successfully demonstrated fulfilment of the outcomes, and because of our exponential growth, this number is expected to increase rapidly in the coming months.

Most of the enrolled groups are from the Majority World, where the need is the greatest, but we have seen an increase in interest from leaders in First World countries as well. The need for a global standard for biblical, ministry training is clear, especially where malpractice, heresy and poor teaching are so prevalent. As we have conducted Quality Assurance Institutes in African and Asian countries, we have witnessed firsthand the poor biblical knowledge that pastors have, as they often are not able to give answers to very basic content-related questions. Many group facilitators have testified that the program has transformed their training and their ministry.

The Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) is currently implementing a project to increase the percentage of trained pastors in Africa by 20 percent, and they are intentionally involving Re-Forma in the research and the consultations with stakeholders, on an ongoing basis.

Last year, the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) focused on drawing the formal and non-formal sectors of theological education closer together. I served on the organizing committee for online seminars on this topic, and then for ICETE's November 2022 conference in Izmir, Turkey. Both sectors now have a greater appreciation of one another's contribution, and collaboration is beginning to be evidenced.

Re-Forma has learnt many lessons, all of which demonstrate how important this ministry is and the role it needs to play. One of the saddest lessons is the lack of integrity we have experienced among some pastors, an issue which we now address in every Quality Assurance Institute. On the positive side, we have great joy in attending graduation ceremonies (whether in person or online), seeing the fruit of the training the facilitators have conducted, and hearing their testimonies.

Each year, as God provides the resources, we will continue to expand our operations. We will soon appoint a national representative in India, to add to those we already have in Kenya and South Africa. We will conduct Quality Assurance Institutes in several countries and increase the number of



Reuben van Rensburg
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translated materials we provide to facilitators. As we do this, by the grace of God, we believe we will continue to address the greatest crisis in the global church, namely the fact that over 90 percent of all pastors are either untrained or undertrained.

WEA contributes to UN New Agenda for Peace

by Janet Epp Buckingham, Director, Global Advocacy

The WEA has contributed a [statement](#) affirming and offering several suggestions regarding the [UN New Agenda for Peace](#), an initiative linked to recognition of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The celebration of the UDHR reminds us that the United Nations was developed after the Second World War for the express purpose of preventing global conflict. It is readily obvious today that we still have a lot of work to do to get to a peaceful world! So it is vital that Christians affirm the important peace work of the UN.

WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher stated, “The WEA has, from its founding, engaged in peacebuilding. We have engaged in conflict resolution in many parts of the world. It is good to now have a statement on peace that contributes to the UN New Agenda on Peace.”

The first clause of the Preamble to the Universal Declaration states, “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” This statement resonates deeply with our Christian understanding that all people are created in the image of God and possess inherent dignity. There is also strong biblical support for promoting freedom, justice and peace in the world.

The WEA statement was drafted primarily by the WEA [Peace and Reconciliation Network](#) (PRN). This is a global network of Christian leaders committed to building capacity for peace in their regional and local contexts. They focus on training, restoration, assistance, initiative and networking. As Phil Wagler, global director of the PRN, commented, “The world needs the church sowing peace (Zechariah 8:12) and making peace (Matthew 5:9).”

The WEA statement calls for special attention to the following:

- Faith community participation
- Healing from trauma
- Peacebuilding education including women and children
- Investment in peacebuilding by government and business
- Publishing good news

The WEA statement concludes, “We encourage the United Nations to a collaborative and wholistic approach that does not ignore voices of faith but welcomes their contribution and participation as vital for the healing of the nations.”

This statement on peace provides a foundation on which the WEA can build in its ongoing UN advocacy and in working for peace and reconciliation in all parts of the world.

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ICETE adopts sweeping new manifesto to guide theological education

Forty years after adopting its first manifesto, the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) has now released a new 'Manifesto II' reflecting the many changes that are affecting the world of theological education.

The full text of the Manifesto II will appear in the August issue of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, along with an explanatory introduction by former ICETE board member Bernhard Ott.

The Manifesto II is organized around five main topical areas: foundational principles, contexts, processes, scope and institutions. Under those headings, it articulates a wide-ranging set of practical expectations—global dialogue, quality assurance, relevance to all occupational domains, and contributing to the 'shalom' of society, to name just a few.

Among the factors calling for a reorientation of theological education, ICETE cites the shift of the global church's centre of gravity from the West to the Majority World; the growth of multi-cultural and multi-religious societies; unprecedented levels of migration; the impact of information technology and distance learning, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic; and an array of threats to human functioning such as environmental problems, scarce resources, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and persecution.

In this challenging context, ICETE seeks to conceive of theological education in a broad sense that moves beyond the limits of formal institutional structures, academic focus and preparation for professional ministry.

In his introduction to the Manifesto II, Ott cited four major trends that have influenced ICETE's direction and shaped the manifesto:

1. *New relations between formal and non-formal education.* 'Especially in regions where the church is growing and new congregations are being planted every day', he said, 'our primary need is not highly educated theologians but evangelists, church planters and pastors with solid biblical and practical training.'
2. *The development of non-Western streams of evangelical theology.* As Ott stated, 'We have seen strong, progressive theological work by men and women in the Majority World who, in the sense of decoloniality, question Western traditions of theological education and propose their own models of education that have grown in context.'
3. *Theological education for people in all professions, not just ministry leaders.* Ott noted the pressing need for a 'public theology ... in which questions of society are reflected on and answered from a Christian perspective. These developments call for theological education with a horizon that looks beyond the classical church-related ministries.'
4. *Radical changes in the educational landscape,* which have expanded the possibilities for disseminating theological education but have also presented new pedagogical challenges.

The Manifesto II drafting team included representation from all eight of ICETE's geographic regions, with Ott, formerly chair of the European Council for Theological Education, as primary writer. Reading and reflecting on this document's implications for Christian education and engagement would be a worthy exercise for any Christian leader.



Bernhard Ott, primary drafter of the ICETE Manifesto II, presenting the document at ICETE's November 2022 in Izmir, Turkey © private

Asia Evangelical Alliance conference to discern fresh expressions of church and missions

For its 40th anniversary celebration on 24–27 October, the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) has called for an intergenerational consultation on how the churches of Asia are entering a new season in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Task forces on seven key themes have been commissioned to listen, inquire, and capture what the Holy Spirit is doing in the region. The seven themes are church, mission, family discipleship, younger generations, marketplace, media and technology, and leadership and theological education. Each task force's assignment is to identify, describe and evaluate initiatives and movements that point to emerging expressions of the church and mission in Asia.

The AEA consultation aims to open a space for discernment and collective prayer to identify new priorities and fresh ways of supporting and retooling the Asian church as it faces both the challenges and opportunities of a new landscape of ministry. It will take place at SICC Tower, Sentul City, Bogor, Indonesia, which also hosted the 2019 WEA General Assembly.

Founded in 1983, the AEA works in 25 countries with 18 national alliances. Theresa Lua of the WEA Global Theology Department and Rei Lemuel Crizaldo of the WEA Theological Commission are leading the task force on leadership and theological education. They are investigating new trends regarding how leaders are being formed and equipped theologically in Asia.



Remembering Tim Keller (1950–2023)

by Brian Stiller, WEA Global Ambassador

There are occasions when a person's peculiar skills and character add something so remarkable to the world around them that when news comes of their passing, our attention is seized by this loss.

Such is the case with pastor and Christian apologist Tim Keller, who died of pancreatic cancer on May 19 at age 72.

Keller, well-educated and obviously gifted in making sense of the gospel for his generation, chose New York City as his primary place of ministry nearly 25 years ago. He planted a church in Manhattan and subsequently helped others launch places of worship in high-density cities. Pastoral care reigned in his life, and from that pulpit he spoke to a wider world, showing how the gospel speaks to anyone, anywhere. For many years, Keller's sermons were my morning fare while I was exercising. Indeed, our first face-to-face meeting was actually side by side, as we both did our morning routine on treadmills at a Florida conference.

In the United States, where evangelicals still command a substantial percentage of the population and where evangelical leaders are popularized by publishers and electronic media, it is not surprising that Keller became well-known. But his mission remained centred on growing an evangelical church in Manhattan, a task not for the faint of heart. *(article continues on next page)*



Timothy Keller © Frank.Licorice

Keller was a great church planting strategist, but he was much more than that. At the heart of his preaching was his work as a Christian apologist, defending the faith to unbelievers and sceptics. His appearances in such publications as the *New York Times* and *The Atlantic* show how his thoughtful and understated style caught the attention of those immersed in the secular slant, a bias that tends to define much of today's media.

Just listening to Keller caused the mind to think more deeply than ordinary sermons do. His mind delighted in wider ideas. His research acquainted the listener with historic, philosophical, and literary references, adding spice to his Bible messages. I could almost hear his mind in gear, looking for ways to help his audience understand better the ways of God and to recognize how Christ's ways make more sense in this world than any others.

Within the highly charged political environment of recent years, Keller carefully outlined the life of Christ and the power and presence of the gospel without getting caught in the binary forces of religious political debate. Not unaware of the historical debates over the trustworthiness of Scripture, he was not reluctant to dispel the common liberal/progressive assumption that their biblical interpretations are above critique.

Keller's public celebrity attracted all sorts of comments and accusations—some hostile, others commending him—from conservative and liberal, fundamentalist and secular camps alike. Yet amidst the hype or overstatements that sometimes characterize our evangelical community, he demonstrated how literary allusions and references to contemporary culture gave both substance and flourish to careful biblical exegesis. For him, these were welcome tools used serendipitously by the Spirit to make Jesus of Nazareth known to our world, today and beyond.

Tim Keller, father, husband, visionary, pastor and fan of Jesus, now gone from us, will, by his many books and recorded messages, continue to nurture our hopes and ideas as we too seek to be worthy voices of spiritual well-being to the world around us.

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