

- Learn About Us
- Explore Our Work
- Get Involved
- Find Resources
- Give to Mission
- Connect with Us

Global Ministries and World Council of Churches Host a Lecture and Panel Discussion on "Mission from the Margins"

*Joy Kitanga**

On January 13, 2017, the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) together with the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, hosted "Mission from the Margins," a lecture and panel discussion at Grace United Methodist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. This event is part of a detailed planning meeting, being held January 12-17, in preparation for the 2018 World Mission Conference to be held in Arusha, Tanzania.

The 2018 conference theme, "Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship," is a reflection of a 2012 WCC statement, "Together Toward Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes," which emphasizes "Mission from the Margins." Both the lecture and the panel discussion went in depth about mission and evangelism, two critical subjects of discipleship, reflecting on the document, "Together Toward Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscape."



Photo by Cynthia Mack

The keynote speaker was the Rev. Dr. Deenabandhu Manchala, the Asia Area executive of the United Church of Christ, and former educator at a theological seminary in India. He recently served as the WCC co-coordinator of the Just and Inclusive Community program. In that capacity, he oversaw the theological and mission work done through networks of marginalized people that challenge discrimination and exclusion in various regions of the world.

Rev. Manchala, began his lecture with a brief description of the term "margins" used in the statement, "Mission from the Margins." He said this is a term that could be misinterpreted and misrepresented due to the way it is being used.

"Margin belongs to the language of the center. It seems to hold people as object and as category. By avoiding to name them as people, it takes the focus off the reasons why they are marginalized," Rev. Manchala added. He continued, saying, often "they are referred to as the poor but their faces and names are many."



Video by Jennifer Silver

Even though, he preferred to use the term "marginalized people" instead, he realized that there are still groups of people who are pushed beyond the margin line, and excluded and treated as "none-beings." Thus, he used the expression, "excluded also belonging to the margin."

Rev. Manchala reflected on his experiences in India with people struggling in life and experiencing injustice, yet seem to thrive despite these situations.

He asked, "What are reflections on discipleship [and what] will it mean to these abandoned group? What are emphasis on discipleship as a mode of mission [and what] will it mean to these who are already struggling for their lives free of injustice, indignity, fear and oppression?"

A panel discussion followed his lecture with participants that included: Rev. Dr. Deanna Ferree Womack, assistant professor of history of religions and multifaith relations at Candler School of Theology, Emory University; Metropolitan Dr. Geevarghese Mor Coorlis, bishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church and who also serves as president of Mor Adai Study Center; Rev. Dr. Janet Corlett, minister of Bermondsey Central Hall Methodist Church and Director of the South London Mission; Fr. Dr. Steve Bevans, priest in the missionary congregation of the Society of the Divine Word, and; Louis J. Luzbetak, Professor of Mission and Culture, Emeritus, at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago.



Photo by Cynthia Mack

The panelists brought an additional and diverse perspective to the 2012 WCC statement, "Together Toward Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes," which emphasizes "mission from the margins" for further reflection in preparation for the 2018 conference.

Dr. Womack began with a guiding question, "In what ways is 'Together Towards Life' a resource for reconciling a commitment to mission and evangelism with our calling to live as loving neighbors alongside people of many faith?" Such ways, she said, could be accomplished by doing mission of evangelism alongside and towards, or by making "others" partners and not the center of mission.

Dr. Geevarghese recognized and emphasized the presence of the Triune God, specifically the role of the Holy Spirit in mission. On that note, Rev. Corlett, shared her experience in her local church to demonstrate that "spirituality is paying attention to what God is doing" in mission.

Fr. Dr. Bevans brought the 2012 WCC article into the conversation with other such documents and concluded, saying, these articles do not reduce mission to conversion or to spirituality. Rather, they help us see that "Mission is the overflowing of love."

*Joy K. Kitanga Program Area Liaison-Communication

