

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

## WCC Kick Off 2018 World Mission Conference Planning With Emphasis on "Signs of the Times"

*Joy Kitanga\**

On January 12, 2017, the General Board of Global Mission, the global mission agency of The United Methodist Church, hosted members of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) at its headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. During this event, which ends January 17, this group will begin planning 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."



*Photo by Cynthia Mack*

### Signs of the Times

"Mission from the margins" is a concept that places emphasis on recognizing God's transforming power at work in the world and that the church is partnering with God in such activity.

"In order to understand the task of that mission today," according to the WCC CWME report, "Christians need to discern the 'signs of the times.'" The report references Matthew 16:3, "And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times."

The CWME report lists nine "signs of the times," with recognition that, "Some are grace-filled and some need God's healing, reconciliation and redemption."

These "signs of the times" are: 1) Growing conflicts and divisions caused by radical inequalities and the re-emergence of racism, gender discrimination; 2) the issues of migration, refugees and modern slavery; 3) the issue of isolation due to the obsessive, addictive and abusive use of modern technology; 4) religious extremism and terrorism; 5) the church in the midst of credibility crises seeks a revival in spirituality; 6) the positive and negative impact secularization has on the church; 7) the missionary movement that is thriving in one part of the world while declining in other parts; 8) the growing influence of the 'Prosperity Gospel'; and 9) creation care as a responsibility God gave human beings.

### Dialogue with Global Ministries Staff



*Photo by Cynthia Mack*

On the first day of the gathering, the WCC's CWME had reflection with Global Ministries' staff on the "signs of the times" and how some or all of them might be affecting their work. This session was introduced by Thomas Kemper, chief executive of Global Ministries, with a brief description of Global Ministries' history and a discussion of some of the reasons for the headquarters building location.

"(It) let us join space with a local church that celebrates its ministry in this community and with a social ministry in its neighbor" said Kemper, citing a main reason for joining space with Grace United Methodist Church in midtown Atlanta. It was a conscious and theological decision that helps the organization reflect on the "signs of the times" locally.

Global Ministries' staffs also shared some of the "signs of the times" that each of their units discerns about while doing ministry in the world: distribution of power, health issues, and refugee and migration.

While reflecting on the issue of refugee and migration, Rev. Yollande Yambo, area liaison-Africa, asked, "What (does) it mean to become a church of the stranger?" She said people do not want to be identified as refugees because of the stigma associated with the name, but would rather be welcomed as people of God.

Rev. Dr. Ester Widiasih, program executive, spiritual life CWME, said Global Ministries reads well the "signs of the times." She added that the move, not just global, but also addressing local issues in the United States, is a more comprehensive approach.

### Discerning Together

A bible passage, Galatians 5:25, referenced in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism report lays it out profoundly well: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." This also reminds us that as we discern together the "signs of the times," despite the chaos of human dis-unity, there are many signs of the Holy Spirit giving life and creating hope.

*\*Joy K. Kitanga Program Area Liaison-Communication*

