



# GLI LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE 2018

Narrative Report

*“We come as individuals but leave as a NEW ‘WE’. We come as strangers, but as we receive the vision of God’s mission of reconciliation, we hope to leave as companions”. Feedback about the GLI Leadership Institute from Emmanuel Ndikumana, outgoing chair GLI Board of Directors*

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## Leadership Institute Participation Highlights

The Great Lakes Initiative (GLI) Leadership Institute has been held each January for the past seven years. Once again, Christian leaders gathered at St. Mary's National Seminary in Ggaba, Uganda from 7<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> January 2018 for the 2018 Leadership Institute. The GLI board has intentionally chosen to return to this venue over the years. "Ggaba seminary, a place for training priests, is a beautiful and awe-inspiring worship and teaching space," noted one worship leader of the 2018 Leadership Institute.



One hundred and fifty-eight participants—clergy and lay people, professors and students, bishops and priests, men and women, the young and the old, Catholics and Protestants, Anglophones and Francophones—accepted the invitation to come see God's ongoing action in our world and join Him as pilgrims in His mission of reconciliation. First-time participants made up 50% of those gathered; 48% have come more than once. Six individuals have attended every year since 2006, when the 50 "restless Christian leaders" helped to start the GLI movement as they gathered in Uganda. As the GLI gatherings shifted to an annual Leadership Institute, this Christian movement has expanded into an ecumenical network across the Great Lakes region of East Africa.

**Denominational Diversity:** The 2018 Leadership Institute included 23 Catholics, 25 Anglicans, 22 Pentecostals, 12 Baptists, 6 Methodists, 18 Presbyterians, 17 Mennonites, 4 Lutherans, 4 Reformed Church of East Africa, 1 Seventh Day Adventist, 12 Non-denominational and 14 others. Country representation was as follows: 17 from Burundi, 28 from DR Congo, 20 from Kenya, 20, 18 from Rwanda, 26 from South Sudan, 5 from Sudan, 8 from Tanzania, and 18 from Uganda (10 participants and 6 volunteers). In addition, 17

participants from the United States of America and 1 from the United Kingdom were among those present. GLI's outgoing Board Chair Emmanuel Ndikumana reflected on why the GLI Leadership Institute is an important space for the Christian Leaders: ***“We come as strangers, but as we receive the vision of God’s mission of reconciliation, we hope to leave as companions. We come as individuals but leave as a NEW ‘WE.’”***



On the opening evening of the Leadership Institute, the mixed multitude recognized its diversity, as well as its common purpose in seeking to better understand Christian Reconciliation.

Then, Duke Divinity School Professor Dr. Warren Smith inspired the gathering of the “Church present” with stories of the “Church past.” In fascinating detail, he painted a picture of three episodes in the life of Ambrose, a bishop of Milan in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, as he related to two Christian Emperors. What happens when Christian leadership calls worldly leadership to account? Would Christian truth win out over cultural tradition? Would the church maintain independence, or would the faith be co-opted by worldly powers? And how was a bishop to confront a “Christian” emperor who was guilty of grievous sin, in such a way as to lead him to repentance and conversion? Smith’s portraits of Ambrose demonstrated that confrontation of the powerful can prove to be the first step towards reconciliation. The opening evening’s reflections paved the way forward into a carefully crafted set of themes for each of the following five days.

## Day 1: Reconciliation towards what? New Creation

In the opening morning plenary session, Father Emmanuel Katongole, Professor at the Croc Institute (Notre Dame) used Scriptural Imagination to bring to life the story of Esther. He drew the participants' attention to God's saving action in a time of violence and conflict, noting that "such a time as this" calls for strength, prayer, intentional listening, preparation and sacrifice. In addition, Esther needed creativity and imagination to picture the new world that God was inviting her to help create. And finally, Esther found the courage to take decisive action in obedience.

Fr. Katongole then called on witness speakers Drs. David and Kaswera Kasali, who gave powerful testimony about the process of founding the Congo Initiative and the Christian Bilingual University of Congo (UCBC). In their story, as exhibits of New Creation, they offered the GLI gathering real proof of the possibility of a 'New We'. The Drs. Kasali narrated the inner turmoil of their decision to leave the safety of excellent positions at a theological college in Kenya, to return to their home country to set up the UCBC in the midst of war. They linked Esther's story with their own experience of God's preparation, their fervent prayer for God's direction, and God's provision as they moved to Congo. The Drs. Kasalis pondered these questions as they prepared to embark on God's



call: ***“Why should we be safe, while our people are suffering? What have we contributed to Kenya for that security? Why can’t we build our own nation for future generations?”***

In July 2017, UCBC celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the Kasalis joyfully share: ***“What excites us is to see what is happening right now in Congo. It is not about numbers of how many people you are affecting. It is about reaching one person at a time. Most of our conflict is around land, but today our students are leading a revolution on land resolution.***

*We have a program at our school on resolving land disputes. The very presence of the university tells us why we should be excited. Those from outside Congo think we are from another world. In the midst of killing, life has kept going on. God is doing a new thing.”*

## Day 2: What is going on? Lament

2018 Leadership Institute Worship Leader Rebecca Mosley noted that “our second day compelled us to look critically at the world we live in, and to ‘see things which can only be seen with eyes that have cried.’ God is bringing about new creation, but our reality falls far short.” Father Jacob Onyumbwe, a scholar from DRC, unpacked the short prophetic book of Obadiah with two very different imaginative readings. On the one hand, we see the struggle between Edom and Israel as a family struggle between two brothers, Esau and Jacob. As “Jacob” is being destroyed by Babylon and taken into exile, “Esau” just stands by to watch, to mock and even to profit from Jacob’s defeat. How often do we just stand on the side-lines



*Witnesses on the day of lament: Moses (A police officer from Kenya serving as an Addiction Counsellor), Syza, (a lawyer serving in Eastern Congo in ALARM’s Peace and Justice Program) and Rev. Jacob, (South Sudanese Pastor studying Counselling psychology to address war trauma)*

while our brothers and sisters are suffering from war and displacement? On the other hand, Fr. Jacob pointed out that perhaps the nation of Israel, through the prophet Obadiah, is just looking for a scapegoat to explain his people’s suffering, blaming their problems on a nearby tribe, Edom, whom they already distrusted. He reminded us that “tribes exist, but ideology

about tribes is constructed and imposed upon us.” As we lament, we need to also examine our ideologies and make sure we are not blaming others for our suffering, simply because of the dogma we have learned.”

### Day 3: What does hope look like? Pilgrimage

On the third morning of the Institute, participants made a pilgrimage by bus to visit the Uganda Martyrs’ Museum at Namugongo in Kampala. Docents led small groups around the grounds and recounted the story of 22 Catholics and 23 Anglicans, pages in the royal court and new converts to the Christian faith, who refused to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ in 1886. They were then tortured and burned to death on the orders of the Baganda monarch. But the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church in East Africa; even their executioner was converted by the powerful testimony of the life and death of those young men.

After a time of rest and reflection, Dr. Celestin Musekura, a pastor from Rwanda and founder of African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries, challenged us to consider what it means to have real Christian hope. He drew inspiration from 1 Peter 1:3-13, as Peter addresses a Christian community that has suffered poverty, displacement and persecution. He asked a series of penetrating questions on “how to know if I am living in hope.”

1. Do I have an unquenchable joy? (v 6)
2. Do I value character growth more than feeling good? (v 7)
3. Am I doubting or deepening in my love for Jesus? (v 8 – 9)
4. Do I see the privilege of living in my time in history? (v 10 – 12)
5. Do I keep my eyes on the Prize? (v 13)

### Day 4: What Kind of Leadership?

On Thursday, two mature Christian leaders spoke to us about their life journeys and the kind of leadership they have been converted to. Violette Nyirarukundo, a trained Christian counsellor and GLI member who



has been participating since 2006, spoke about overcoming anger and resistance in her own heart, following the genocide in her country. She reminded us that “our suffering is precious. Don’t waste it. It can become a very important tool for God’s healing in the lives of others.”



Dr. Ken Butigan of DePaul University, who has taught seminars at three GLI Leadership Institutes, spoke about the future of Christian nonviolent response to

conflict in the region. He stated ***“I have heard the moving testimonies of nonviolent action in response to violent conflict by Christian leaders in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa in my three years of coming to the Leadership Institute. I confidently say I have seen the future and it is in East Africa.”*** Dr. Butigan gave witness to the practical mobilization of several different communities as they used campaigns of nonviolence. He pointed out that nonviolence works twice as well as violent campaigns to affect change, according to rigorous research. He stressed the need for training and discipline in nonviolent action. And he encouraged Christian leaders to share the gospel of nonviolence with others. Interestingly, many pastors did not seem to be familiar with the link between the gospel and nonviolence, but they were hungry to learn more.

#### Day 5: Why me? Why bother? Spirituality for the long haul

We were led in Scriptural Imagination through a personal rewriting of Psalm 73 by Rebecca Mosley, a Mennonite pastor serving with Mennonite Central Committee in Tanzania. After reflecting on the lament portion of the Psalm, she asked us to make it personal. “Can you identify with any of this in your own context? Can you also say, ‘I am not neutral. I have a side and a perspective, and Lord I am deeply offended by what you have allowed. I have no words, I just roar like a brute beast. I have become tired. I have nearly lost my footing.’ The psalmist wondered if he had wasted his time keeping his heart pure. Do you feel that way?”

However, whether we speak words of hope or despair, people WILL listen to us as leaders. Either we step away from our Lord and our calling as ambassadors of reconciliation, or else we do battle daily to stand firm in the face of our realities, still holding on to Christ in faith. Rebecca confronted us with tough questions: “How do we keep the faith? How do we keep believing in God’s love? How do we make sure we are standing on solid ground as we lead?” The answer comes at the turning point of the psalm: ‘When I came into God’s sanctuary’ (v. 17). As the Psalmist comes into God’s holy presence, everything changes. He suddenly sees his broken world from God’s perspective, he gains a solid footing and strength to go forward in ministry with a testimony of God’s faithfulness.

Making it practical, Rebecca called us to a simple discipline of Sabbath rest. When you feel like you are about to fall, when your feet are slipping, get into God’s sanctuary. Maintain Sabbath in high-stress situations. Be sure that Sabbath is a time when God is God, and I am not. She contended that though simple, it is not easy to maintain the gift of Sabbath. We must be like little children with nothing to prove, a hard discipline for leaders. Women must recognize the complexity of blending Sabbath with familial responsibilities and look for creative ways to rest in God’s presence away from those who need us. But as a bottom line, GLI Ambassadors of reconciliation were urged to “Get into the sanctuary of God.”

The 2018 Leadership Institute was a banquet of well-oiled spiritual dishes, from worship to scriptural imagination, from pilgrimage to seminars. Many participants brought their gifts of worship to the gathered body. All the presentations, witness testimonies and side conversations provided deep theological, practical and contextual resources for Christian Leaders for reconciliation. One first time participant aptly noted “The GLI leadership Institute 2018 has taught me ‘Never quit too soon nor settle for too little. Retreat into silence and waiting. Silence is good. Silence is eloquent. Press in on prayer. Pray for restoration.’”

The GLI expressed appreciation to the following partners and individuals for their financial and in-kind support, who made it possible to cover all the costs of the 2018 Leadership Institute: GLI Board of Directors, African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries, Catholic Relief Services, Duke Divinity School’s Center for Reconciliation, De Paul University, Mennonite Central Committee, Presbyterian Church USA, World Vision International, United World and self-paying individuals.