

The Great Lakes Initiative (GLI)



5th Annual Leadership Institute Report

Compiled by

Ms. Milcah Lalam

GLI Regional Coordinator

gliregionalcoordinator@gmail.com

Introduction:

The 5th annual Great Lakes Initiative (GLI) Leadership Institute held January 11–16, 2015, at St. Mary's National Seminary Ggaba, Kampala, Uganda, was a historical occasion in many respects. It was the 9th Great Lakes Initiative event and saw the first GLI Institute not-for-profit corporation meeting held. Additionally, the commissioning of the first GLI board of directors took place on the opening night of the Leadership Institute, as well as the introduction of the first Africa-based GLI Regional Coordinator. In addition to the usual diverse group of participants, this institute was attended by a mix of elders, who have been part of GLI from its inception, and youth, mostly newer members engaged in reconciliation work, and witnessed their joint participation in a special seminar facilitated by Fr. Emmanuel Katongole on lament and the ministry of reconciliation.

The Leadership Institute

"I didn't know a space like this existed. If GLI continues like this it is going to be the biggest and the most refreshing ecumenical space in Africa." These were the sentiments of a first-time attendee at the Institute. Another excited participant exclaimed, "It has been a week of developing relationships, powerful teachings, joyous worship and the movement of my heart and spirit towards action." Such expressions illustrate the continuing importance of the GLI Leadership Institute as a place of deep formation.

The Institute fostered Christian leadership through its plenary sessions, formal seminars, and informal gatherings for one hundred and twenty-two men and women representing twelve countries. The GLI's intentionally regional focus brought together seven East African nations. Fourteen participants came from Burundi, twenty from DR Congo, sixteen from Kenya, fifteen from Rwanda, eight from South Sudan, six from Tanzania, and twenty five from Uganda. Interested leaders from Ethiopia, Togo, Ghana, and Canada also attended. Six of the nine participants from the USA were affiliated with Duke University. Fifteen volunteers were drawn from Uganda.

The GLI continues to be a rare and holy space in East Africa, gathering Christian leaders across the Catholic/Protestant divide. This meeting saw participants who were Catholic (16); Anglican/Episcopal (14); Pentecostal (13); Baptist (7); Methodist (7); Presbyterian (5); Evangelical (4); Lutheran (2); Mennonite (2); Inter-denominational (21); Other (30); and Unknown (1). Reflecting the rich diversity of Christians gathered, worship was ecumenical and was led in varying styles and a multitude of languages. Morning plenaries offered theological reflection on each day's themes, rooted in both Biblical and contextual analysis, and also included witnesses who reflected on God's work of reconciliation in their particular contexts. These witnesses spoke to the reality that is the work of reconciliation—a work intermingled

with both lament and hope—and encouraged all participants to seek the “signs of hope” in their own context while also providing space for lament.

Highlights of the Leadership Institute

All plenaries and worship were bi-lingual (French and English), thereby reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of the participants.

Mama Angelina Atyam was the witness on the first day, speaking in depth on *“Reconciliation towards what?— New Creation.”* One participant’s comment on this witness says it all: “I was deeply touched because I have heard and now know how God truly works to turn impossible situations into possibilities for reconciliation.” Mama Angelina recollected the difficult journey of waiting seven years and seven months to be reunited with her abducted daughter. She retold of many tears shed, anguish expressed, anger with God, and questioning of God. She told of advocating for parents whose children had been abducted, and lobbying governments, organizations, and churches in North America and Europe for the release of her daughter and other children held captive by the Ugandan rebels’ Lord’s Resistance Army. She was told if she would stop advocating, she could have her daughter back; but she refused to give in and continued the pressure on the rebels to release all the abducted girls, proclaiming “Every Child is My Child.” Her life is a truly remarkable journey, life-altering yet essential if we are to become the “new we”—ambassadors of Christ’s reconciliation.



Mama Angelina testifies to the transformative power of Christ.

The second day’s theme—*“What is the story of where we are?”*—explored the discipline of lament. This plenary session was led by Fr. Emmanuel Katongole, who noted that lament is not a single sentiment but a whole range of disciplines and practices—seven in all. Among these seven gifts are *silence* and *waiting*, disciplines that help us to search and examine our own ways. Lament is *introspection*, for by looking within ourselves we can see that in the midst of violence we tend to blame others (with the result, for example, that ethnicity becomes easily exploited when it appears as if everyone else has failed). The seventh discipline—*longing for restoration*—is a desire by those who lament; a turning to God in recognition that only God can restore us to the same relationship and intimacy as before the violence. Fr. Emmanuel noted that lament is a gift, a strange gift—naming, studying, and crying out in the form of hoping in the midst of ruins.

The panelists for the day were Dr. Julia Duany and Bishops Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala and Samuel Peni Enosa from South Sudan, and they bore witness to the great lament of their people and the ongoing civil strife that has torn families and communities along ethnic lines. They shared how each of them has been personally and deeply affected by the conflicts for over five decades, lamented the squandered opportunities for lasting peace, but expressed hope for the new independent nation and the spirit that imbued the work of the churches with women, youth, and political leaders. As another participant remarked, "I realized that the leaders we expect tomorrow are those we are preparing through mentoring and guiding now. There is a great need to educate, mentor and equip children and youth for servant leadership now."



Panelists from South Sudan share their lament in plenary.

Mama Violette spoke on the value of hope in relation to suffering, addressing the question for the third day of *"What does hope look like?"* Violette explored how hope helps a suffering person make three choices: 1) choosing to let the pain be transformed; 2) choosing to look up; and 3) choosing to become a vessel of God's healing and comfort. She

inspired the leaders to see their sufferings as a refining furnace that strengthens souls and enables them to be transformed by God. In their transformed states they become the instruments God uses to plant seeds of hope, peace, and reconciliation.

The act of pilgrimage also was a highlight of the third day. Fr. Stephen Kiggundu facilitated this session. Pilgrimage is an ancient tradition whereby people take journeys to sacred places for physical but also inner reasons: for devotion, reflection, and repentance; to fast, pray, and gain graces; and to stand among the communities suffering persecutions and allow God's spirit to speak to them. For the 2015 Institute, participants made a four-mile pilgrimage from the Institute to Lake Victoria, the largest fresh water lake in Africa. The pilgrimage aimed to help us to remember our identity as a region and to concretely express our pain and lamenting. We recalled that while this lake had brought the missionaries, it also brought the bodies of our neighbors experiencing violence and genocide in recent times. Second, we lamented the incredible environmental degradation in the region. And third, expressed our longing for restoration as we beheld the poverty, especially the ghetto conditions, that we walked through on the way to the lake.



GLI elders lead the pilgrimage to Lake Victoria.

“What kind of Leadership?” was the theme of the fourth day. Dr. Femi Adeleye spoke on the “consumer leadership” manifest in Africa and its effects: devastation, destitution, hunger, exile and national failure.

He reminded the audience that 2015 was an election year in about twenty African countries, and that each of them was facing a difficult choice between consumer leaders and Christ-centered servant leaders.



Plenary sessions at Ggaba.

Dr. Celestin Musekura was the witness for this session. He shared his leadership journey to build the African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries - ALARM into a sustainable Institution for peace and reconciliation in the region.

The final day was themed: *"Spirituality- Why me? Why bother?"* Dr. Celestin contextualized Luke 10:25-37 in relation to justice for one's neighbors, comparing the Samaritan's response to the failure of the other characters in the parable, which he then applied to the need to give a righteous response to the tragedy witnessed in the context of the Great Lakes Region. Through this story he stressed that God turns situations around: the downtrodden can become the people who will help others who overlooked them.

The seminars held in 2015 included the following: "Embracing Reconciliation for Children," "Pastoral Leadership and the Reconciling Church," "Practical Spirituality to Sustain Peace Builders," "Pursuing Peace for Healing and Reconciliation of Multi-faith Communities," "Sacred Trust: Land and Community in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa," and "Restorative Justice in African Contexts." The seminars focused on encouraging, supporting, and deepening regional rootedness in reconciliation as God's mission, and also on our work mentoring, guiding, and forming young leaders in reconciliation ministry and expanding inter-country links for peace and reconciliation processes.

There were a number of new seminars offered, including "Pursuing Peace for Healing and Reconciliation of Multi-faith Communities." Ibrahim Dima, with support from Daniel Muvengi, highlighted the importance of taking time and making an effort to understand the worldview/theological assumptions of others of different faiths in our journey towards new creation. By so doing, we might replace suspicion, mistrust, and fear with trust, friendship, and mutual support.

In "Pastoral Leadership and the Reconciling Church," Dr. Esther Acolatse grappled with why the Word has lost its transformative power, yet in itself the Gospel is powerful, and on the need for the Church to lead with a clear vision of letting the Holy Spirit transform Christians. The seminar "Sacred Trust: Land and Community in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa," taught by Dr. Femi Adeleye and Dr. Ellen Davis, focused on what the Bible has to say with regards to the land, resource management as linked to city expansion, and the balance between land care and modernization. Muigai Ndoka and Liberty Muhereza again taught the seminar "Restorative Justice in African Contexts," which was enriched by the sharing of a participant who is well versed with the Acholi traditional reconciliation process *Mato Oput*. This process focuses on fostering restoration of a relationship between an offender and the victim through sharing a drink of a bitter root plant called Oput. He explained how this process had been used to heal relationships between parents and children, between clans, and between villages in the Acholi sub-region beset by the two decade civil strife of the Lord's Resistance Army. He suggested that participants look at their own ethnic communities to see what traditional processes can contribute to restorative justice and which elements can be borrowed as steps to reconciliation.

Impact of GLI

In line with its mission to create space for transformation and reconciliation, the GLI sought to ascertain if the 2015 Institute had had an impact on the participants' vision of reconciliation and identity. From the evaluations and one-on-one interviews, the following was shared:

- The institute has reinforced my understanding that I am first and foremost a Christian disciple of Jesus before anything else. That my identity in Christ supersedes my ethnic identity and therefore I must not seek reconciliation by itself without recognizing my new identity in Christ as its basis.
- I have learned to be a servant leader who is committed to doing things that are pertinent and selfless. I am going to begin by demonstrating this in my family first and later in the community.
- Leadership renewal is needed at all levels to work towards reconciliation. As I lead I will remember to take time for self-renewal and personal reflection on areas to improve as an ambassador for reconciliation.
- I got ideas to begin reconciliation at all times and I found that it is crucial to avoid pointing fingers or waiting for others. It has brought to the surface the things that cause conflict and renewed my understanding of God's promise that He shall work with the faithful, the available and the trustworthy.
- The institute has challenged us to take action on establishing steps for reconciliation in engaging with God, with his people and the people in pain.
- As members of the body of Christ the ministry of reconciliation is not an office. I have a role to play instead of complaining and relegating it to other people; I will be an instrument of reconciliation. The institute has helped us get focused, for in the middle of all this evil around us we need to grasp first the grace of God for it's stronger than sin and God's destiny for the world will come to pass.



The power of prayer. Praying as a community during the pilgrimage.

The seven countries represented at the GLI Leadership Institute met to reflect on the joys of the past year as a GLI chapter, the challenges experienced, and plans for the current year. Each chapter is self-organizing with its own set of partners who share a calling to God's mission of reconciliation. The country gatherings worked on the challenges and opportunities facing them as they pursue peace, justice, and reconciliation. Some of the common goals emerging from the country meetings of Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, South Sudan, DR Congo, Tanzania, and Uganda were to:

- organize visits to different places to learn in other societies and from each other.
- collaborate with different peace builders to document stories and share them at the next GLI Institutes.
- promote servant leadership in our families and schools, encourage the church to teach about servant leadership, and practice it so that those within the church working with the government or anywhere else become role models in their workplaces.
- identify the areas in the greatest need for lamentation and work together to support those areas through the church. Meet and train the pastors of various churches in order to help them assist their congregations through times of mourning.
- consolidate the engagement of the church as we move forward. There is peace in some of our countries for the moment and it is needed to engage the church in one voice. We need to establish a solid foundation for peace and prevent the sort of division that can easily occur again.
- hold workshops for faith leaders in the region.
- update email lists of past and current participants of GLI from our countries in order to improve communication and collaboration.
- clean our own houses—our own churches—and reconcile among other churches before working for peace and reconciliation in the wider community.
- implement a prayer network to dry the tears of all who are currently in conflict.
- train a community of farmers we work with about land management in our home countries.
- form community support groups to provide practical tools that will support the albinos.
- revisit the current status of our ministry engagement with the view of incorporating the insights and programmatic ideas gained from this institute.
- endeavour to practice forgiveness and servant leadership.
- appreciate the gifts of others and utilize the gifts of lament.
- look for opportunities and space to show what we have learned for our own continuous transformation of others around us.
- help our members live the new creation and show that the church is an inclusive community.

Looking Ahead

The GLI 2015 Leadership Institute continues to be more deeply rooted in the Great Lakes region and is increasingly led by African partners and theologians, such as Ambassador Wilfred Mlay, who this year acted as the daily general facilitator. The testimonies of personal transformation clearly bear witness to God's presence and that the Holy Spirit is using the GLI institute. To this end, the GLI Ambassador and Regional Coordinator will make follow-up visits and attend events organized by the GLI country chapters in the coming months.

GLI has been immensely fortunate in the funding it has received: this year our core partners, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), provided us with \$14,900, while World Vision East Africa and ALARM gave the Institute \$10,000 and \$10,147 respectively. The Duke Center for Reconciliation provided \$40,132 for the institute, including the GLI Ambassador's stipend, and the GLI Regional Coordinator's salary. Additionally, a total of \$17,685 came from self-funded participants, Compassion International, World Vision Rwanda, World Vision Burundi, and World Vision DR Congo.

As noted after the last two institutes, the GLI partnership continues to name this time as a time of significant transition for the GLI. The partnership had set as a goal that the 2015 Leadership Institute would be the final one coordinated from the Center for Reconciliation office. The newly appointed Regional Coordinator took on the majority of the tasks for running the Institute and is well placed to manage future institutes.

As of January 27, 2015, GLI is officially a legally registered entity in Uganda. With the Board in place and a Regional Coordinator appointed, working with the GLI Ambassador, regional rootedness is becoming a reality. We continue to pray for the GLI's continued resilience and regional rootedness and that God will continue to use the transformative spaces created for his Kingdom.



Introducing the newly elected and commissioned GLI Board. Our board chair is

Emmanuel Ndikumana of Partners Trust International.