The 2019 Great Lakes Initiative (GLI) Leadership Institute had the theme “Christian Leadership for Reconciliation in the Context of Forced Displacement.” The leadership Institute has been held each January for the past eight years. This year’s theme guided the focus of the institute on the issues of internal displacement, forced migration and refugees. Providentially, when this theme was chosen in August 2018 in partnership with World Vision East Africa Regional office, GLI did not know that it would also be the focus of the African Union (AU) in 2019. What a revelation that the theme God guided us to focus on is a top priority for the AU to address as well! Once again, Christian leaders gathered at St. Mary’s National Seminary in Ggaba, Uganda from 6th-11th January, 2019.

Welcome Program and Keynote Address: Compassion and Reconciliation
On the opening evening of the Leadership Institute, the mixed multitude were welcomed by GLI Chair Daniel Muvengi and GLI Ambassador Emeritus Wilfred Mlay. Prof Mlay moderated the opening session, inviting the participants to recognize the ecumenical and national diversity of the gathering. As a welcome note, Prof Mlay shared GLI’s impact on his life with the participants: “I have been coming to GLI annual gatherings every year for the last ten years. Every time I come, I am renewed, filled and re-formed. I leave here refreshed and re-energized for the journey of reconciliation.”
Open your hearts and receive gifts. I hope each and every one of you will leave here feeling that way too.”

Then, the Keynote address was delivered by Duke Divinity School Professor Dr. Warren Smith. He inspired the participants by drawing parallel stories of Compassion and Reconciliation from the Old Testament, the Church Past (Bishop Ambrose of Milan in the 4th Century) and Jesus Christ’s invitation to Christians to serve as his ambassadors of reconciliation. In fascinating detail, he painted a picture of how the ministry of reconciliation is both a binding of wounds of victims and a calling to repentance of oppressors. He explained that compassion is the how or manner of reconciliation, the compassion that will not let us rest as long as others are in suffering. Through the writings of Bishop Ambrose, the gathering was made to understand how compassion is in essence the extension of community. Embodied in this sense of community is justice and compassion.

The lessons of justice and compassion are clearly seen in the lives of the ancestors in faith Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David and Solomon. Quoting Ps. 111:5 we learn: “The just man is compassionate and he shows kindness”. The ancestors of faith understood that fulfilling the call to be just and compassionate is in effect an act of looking after the well-being of community and hence reconciliation. To the one who is wise and just belongs a whole world of riches. The just man holds that which is common as his own and what is his own as common.” Smith’s exposition on the parallels between Joseph and Jesus offers a model for compassion, a sign of Christian perfection when our hearts break because of the suffering of others. The parallels are:

1. The perfect man is not tempted to cause evil and revenge upon those who cause us suffering: evil is not repaid with evil but with good. Joseph and Jesus embody compassion by forgiving those who have harmed them.
2. Jesus gives his life so we may live. Joseph gives his brothers bread in the midst of the famine so they may live.

3. Joseph was compassionate towards his brothers who wanted to kill him not because they repented or merited it but because his father Jacob loved them and so he extends his love to them. We love those who have hurt us and are viewed as enemies not because they deserve our love but because God our Father loved them first and gave his son Jesus to save us all.

This motivating and rousing evening’s reflections on compassion and reconciliation paved the way forward into a carefully crafted set of themes for each of the following five days.

The Word Made Flesh Methodology: Five themes in Five days

The Word Made Flesh Methodology (WMF) is a theological, contextual and practical framework with a carefully crafted set of themes—New Creation, Lament, Hope, Leadership and Spirituality—that shape the five days of the annual leadership institute. The themes point to how Christian leaders can work towards God’s mission of reconciliation while at the same time participants are reminded that, since the fall of man at the beginning of creation, God has been reconciling the old and the new. God’s compassion is evident when he bridges the distance between himself and the unrepentant world through Christ.

First Theme: Reconciliation towards what? New Creation

Before he expounded on the New Creation theme, Dr. Edgardo Colón-Emeric, Associate Professor at Duke Divinity School and Director of Duke Center for Reconciliation recognized the role that the GLI has played in the formation of reconciliation initiatives elsewhere in the world such as the Duke Summer Institute for Reconciliation, the North East Asia Reconciliation Initiative and an upcoming Latin American reconciliation initiative. He noted that the continuing work of the CFR was in part due to the important work of the GLI in the Great Lakes region of East Africa.

In opening the morning plenary session, Edgardo shared examples from Latin America of colonial sin, of ethnic division, of the sad history of mestizo children, born from colonial sexual violation of Amerindian women by Spanish Colonizers, and the gift of seeing prophetically as in the case of Saint Oscar Romero, murdered Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador.
Edgardo drew participants’ attention to stories of the journey of reconciliation. The journey entail chapters of lament, hope, leadership and vocation. However we skip all these chapters and begin with the last chapter of the story — new creation —because we have the gift of seeing prophetically. “We begin with our destination of new creation and our guide to this end is the Bible. The journey of reconciliation in this time of forced displacement begins with the end,” Edgardo stated. Considering four scriptures (Colossians 1:15-20, Revelation 7:9-14, 2 Corinthian 5:16-20 and Isaiah 65) enabled the participants to see more clearly the end that God has for us. The key messages in the four texts are the following:

- Reconciliation only makes sense in the context of something being broken. God created a diverse universe so that many parts would sing in harmony. The original harmony of creation has been broken by sin, but the New Creation is like a choir gathered out of every nation in praise of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here at GLI, a microcosm of this choir is made visible. Participants have come from tribulation, from many nations, tribes and languages singing praise to the Lamb. This is a gift. But the participants are cautioned to be careful because, by itself, diversity is not enough. Diversity can serve either God or the devil. The end goal of reconciliation is to become by grace what God is by nature; but this transformation requires conversion.

- Reading the vision of new creation in Isaiah 65, it is clear that only God can bring about new heavens and a new earth. Still, preachers of the new creation must work for visible signs of new creation, including simple things like a just salary, an affordable house, and access to adequate health care.

Edgardo concluded his presentation with six lessons for the ministry of reconciliation in a time of forced displacements from the new creation.
• First, reconciliation is God’s gift. God surprises us by taking the initiative. All reconciliation is an imitation of God’s gift.

• Second, reconciliation is Christ-centered. If anyone is in Christ, new creation.

• Third, reconciliation is cosmic in scope. God through Christ is reconciling all things. All things include the inanimate creation: the land, the sun, the moon and animals. We are even called to reconcile those who build walls and shut doors on refugees and the displaced.

• Fourth, reconciliation is the mission of the church. In Romero’s words, Christ is the best microphone of God. The Church is the best microphone of Christ. Therefore we are called to serve as the voice of the voiceless.

• Fifth, reconciliation requires conversion. It may be especially difficult to sense how God’s justice and mercy can be in harmony. It requires unlearning to see things from a human point of view and learning to see prophetically.

• Sixth, reconciliation is costly. If you are a peacemaker, expect persecution, expect misunderstanding. Expect protests from sisters and brothers who call you a fool. After all, why should we welcome the refugee? Expect to be seen as a traitor. Christ had to die to tear down the dividing wall of hostility.

Following Edgardo’s plenary presentation, a panel of three witnesses from South Sudan shared about the signs of new creation in South Sudan following the signing of a tenuous, imperfect peace in September 2018. These signs include: Christmas 2018 and New Year’s Eve 2019 overnight celebrations without curfew and without fear of being shot; faithful service to provide relief items and trauma recovery training across conflicting ethnic groups in spite of personal danger and warnings from family and colleagues not to take the risk; farms being expanded and worked upon; roads and schools being opened up again. This is a testament to God’s faithfulness, a character of the reconciler who comes from God, a person who has been molded by God. These signs of new creation are very fragile and this is always true of the signs of new creation. That is why we need to be people who hope. There is need for the purification of memory which does not negate what happened but refuses to let the future be dictated by the past. The witnesses exhibited a trust in God for the time when the signs of new creation will not be fragile. For now, they wait patiently for that time.
Second Theme: What is going on? Lament

God is bringing about new creation, but our reality falls far short. The second theme in the WMF methodology brings us back from the vision of new heaven and new earth to look honestly at what is going on in our world. Dr. Celestin Musekura, a pastor from Rwanda and founder of African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries, challenged us to consider what it means to lament. He noted that sometimes Christians are afraid to lament. We fear that others will think we have no faith; that we doubt God’s power; or we think God will punish us if we question his ways. However, biblical lament is an honest and passionate response to sin and brokenness. Too many ministries of reconciliation come and go because they deal with pain in superficial ways. We need to embrace Christian lament, without fear, knowing that we can confront God with our questions and anger, knowing he is our Father.

Celestin shared deeply from his own experience of lamenting together with suffering and displaced people, the losses, and the healing that comes from honest and intimate conversation with God. Lament enables us to petition for God’s help and deliverance from grief, distress, suffering and pain. The lament prayer has the goal of persuading God to act on behalf of the sufferer who remains hopeful in the God who saves. “We lament because we know this is not the way God wants things to be,” Celestin said. “Lament is a tool to navigate pain and sorrow. Lament is an expression of things which are wrong in hope that the living God will listen and take action.”

In conclusion, Celestin stated “in lament let us remember well! Christians often assume our conflict with God was finished when we converted. At that point, we were enemies of God - indeed, we were and it was a great battle. But the battle is not over with conversion-though it is the decisive victory that assures the outcome of the war, it is hardly the last and final fight. Therefore, as Christians let us lament fully, courageously, boldly, honestly and with hope”.

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Third Theme: What does hope look like? Pilgrimage

On the third morning of the Institute, participants made a pilgrimage by bus to visit an urban refugee centre in Kampala managed by Inter Aid Uganda. This centre offers training resources and social support for refugees from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan and Somalia who have opted to live in the city.

Inter Aid Uganda staff and volunteers led small groups around the centre and recounted its history. They demonstrated the different programs offered to urban refugees including a three-month tailoring course, handicrafts making, beauty classes for make-up and henna decorations, traditional dancing troupes, making of long burning charcoal and its charcoal stove as well as a refugee driving association which teaches English Language and traffic rules for driving in Uganda.

After a time of rest and reflection, Mama Faith Mlay drew participants’ attention to what hope looks like in times of trouble, suffering and displacement. She noted that hope is among the three qualities which endure as stated in 1Corintians 13:13: faith, hope and love. When faith seems to waiver, hope comes along and says “keep going.” When love almost can’t love anymore, hope comes along and says “keep going.” Faith explored the story of the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-10), noting that at the threshold of hope, there is a deep sense of worship and a deep inner understanding that despite outward appearances, the place where we are standing is holy ground. She concluded that hope in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa looks like the burning bush which is not consumed, a mystery which beckons us to take a closer look, an invitation for personal responsibility and action. This hope is what
enables the peoples of our region to keep going while facing wars, genocide, brutality, injustice, stolen national wealth, stolen national elections and all manner of evils and pain.

Fourth Theme: What Kind of Leadership?

On Thursday, Dr Celestin Musekura returned to address the theme of leadership. He challenged the participants to think of how they can be the kind of leaders who follow God’s heart as reconcilers. He listed the qualities needed in leaders needed in the conflict - ridden Great Lakes region and the world.

These are:

1. A Visionary leadership
2. A Peaceful leadership
3. A Protecting leadership
4. A Responsible leadership
5. A Skillful leadership
6. Forgiving & Reconciling Leadership

Using the example of Nehemiah, Dr Musekura highlighted how Nehemiah lamented and repented on behalf of his people. Drawing wisdom from Nehemiah 2, he said Nehemiah prayed for several months, and during that time, drew up a plan of what he would ask for and do on behalf of his people. In fear and trembling, he prayed for an opening with the king, and finally he had the chance to speak. He was afraid, but he still spoke up. “Wise leaders have fear. Fear is a tool God puts in us to take precautions. Fear acts as our guard-rails”, stated Dr. Musekura. He challenged leaders to sit together and mobilize communities towards reconciliation. He said leadership is about being a visionary; focusing on the great end like in Ezra 7. “We need leaders with a prophetic voice. They don’t see the mountains; they see the God who made the mountains.” That leadership is about being protective of others as outlined in Proverbs 28:28. Wicked leaders cause the righteous to go into hiding.
A protecting leader may well be aware “of the danger the neighbor might pose, yet they still appreciate the importance of good neighborliness.” Participants heard his many examples of leaders who have put their lives on the line in order to build a national culture of respect and unity. He urged participants to mobilize everyone. Not just those who they call their own. Reflecting on the example of Ezra and Nehemiah, Celestin reminded the gathered leaders that the church is never in exile. That even though people may fall into refugee situations or be in displacement, “the church is never a refugee. Unlike other worldly positions, a preacher remains a preacher whether in a camp or a refugee settlement. A priest, a pastor, a deacon and clergy/clergywomen all remain within their roles even when they cross earthly borders. Church leaders are prophets of a country even when a country does not change.”

**Fifth Theme: Why me? Why bother? Spirituality for the long haul**

We were led in Scriptural Imagination through hymn 318 of Lutheran worship- *Hark, the voice of Jesus Calling* and reflection of experiences of discipleship by Mrs. Marion Ndeta Wasia, GLI Board Member and Interim GLI Executive Director. Drawing from the great commission in Matthew 28:18-20, Marion noted that this scripture is the beginning of faith in action for all Christians and a renewed personal call to all Christians to disciple all nations. She shared two moving testimonies of women who came into her life in the course of her work and how she discipled them towards Christ. One found Christ while serving a long prison sentence for drug trafficking; another was an ostracized young widow running a small shop in an informal settlement in a big city. Both her life and their lives were impacted by their calling to hear the voice of Christ. Participants were reminded that as leaders they should appreciate that service to others is a demonstration of love, which is loving without discriminating.

Marion encouraged the participants to make a difference by all means in the lives of the displaced, the refugee and the one who has lost their way because making a difference is for the glory of God. It is by no means easy to be Easter Sunday Christians in a Good Friday world. You see, Good Friday was filled with persecution, pain, anguish, uncertainty, and darkness. Easter Sunday came with the promise of eternity! The resurrection! Despite the troubles, Christ is simply saying “stay saved!” Stay the course and Jesus promises to be with us. “Do not lose focus on the Cross. The Old rugged Cross. Look and Live!” she encouragingly concluded.
Leadership Institute Participation Highlights: One hundred and thirty-five 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; 50% have come more than once.

“In bringing together a "new we" out of such ethnic, linguistic, and denominational diversity, GLI offers a snapshot of Pentecost in today's global church”, noted two-time participant James Jay Carney, Associate Professor of Theology at Creighton University, currently spending a sabbatical year here in Uganda.

The 2019 Leadership Institute was a varied banquet of rich spiritual food, 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. Jay aptly noted: “The GLI leadership Institute 2019 offered beautiful insight into the restless creativity driving so many ordinary peacebuilders in our conflict-ridden world.”

Testimony from a first time participant: Joice Jaka, Women’s President of the United Methodists in Uganda and South Sudan is a refugee from South Sudan living in Rhino refugee camp West Nile, Uganda. She was a first-time participant at the 2019 GLI Leadership Institute. She was so moved by the subject of the struggle of victims of war crimes and injustices to forgive perpetrators. Joice’s elder brother was burnt to death in the recent South Sudan conflict which forced her into refuge. Before she came to GLI 2019 Joice had been wrestling within herself on whether or not to forgive the perpetrators of this injustice. Following her time at GLI 2019 Joice wrote an article about how GLI helped her find a path to forgiveness and healing. The article has been published by Harper Hill Global who co-sponsored her participation. In part she wrote “Attending the Great Lakes Initiative made me realize that I was not the only one in such a situation. So many people in different countries have faced even worse than we have. I have
received encouragement, been taught to let go, to forgive – and most importantly – to share these gifts with my family. This way, we can move forward rather than holding resentment against these perpetrators in our hearts. I have taken the personal initiative to speak at my church to share the lessons I learned. I have also already been invited to speak at Grace Home, a children’s home, to share with the residents and staff all that I received from the GLI”.

**Denominational Diversity** at the 2019 Leadership Institute included 14 Catholics, 19 Anglicans, 14 Pentecostals, 6 Baptists, 16 Methodists, 11 Presbyterians, 14 Mennonites, 1 Lutheran, 2 Reformed Church of East Africa, 1 Seventh Day Adventist, 14 Non-denominational and 23 others (Restoration Movement, Evangelical Church of Chad, Congregationalist, Assemblies of God).

**Country Diversity** was as follows: 16 from Burundi, 16 from DR Congo, 15 from Kenya, 8 from Rwanda, 18 from South Sudan, 4 from Sudan, 8 from Tanzania, and 21 from Uganda (16 participants, 3 volunteers and 2 staff). In addition, 21 participants from the United States of America (11 working in Africa) and 4 from Chad, 2 from Canada, 1 from Angola, and 1 from Philippines (working in Burundi) were among those present.

**Seminar Highlights:**

There were seven seminars offered in the afternoons to build bridges between the morning plenary sessions - the “common journey” and the small groups sessions of 15 to 18 participants. The seminars were:

- **Christian Nonviolent Response to Forced displacement:** offered leaders an opportunity for communal and personal understanding of the principles, strategies, and methods of Christian nonviolence to transform violent responses and support peace in situations of forced displacement.

- **Child Protection and Ending Violence against Children in Forced Displacement Contexts:** strategies, tools and skills in the advancement of child protection in the displacement contexts were shared. This included approaches to ending violence against children and the Biblical guide that can be used by other actors to ensure children lead and experience life in all its fullness.

- **Community Health, Peace Making and Biblical Scriptures:** explored peace making and common health problems in the context of forced displacement in East Africa
through an examination of biblical narratives. The goal was to provide insights into faithful responses to situations that contribute to disease in forced displacements.

- **Nurturing Personal Resilience for Turbulent Times**: provided a framework for resilience, helped participants articulate their personal mission, have tools for self-care, know how to build a support system, learn from their own shocks of the past and anticipate shocks that may come in their lives, community, country and in the Great Lakes Region.

- **Psychosocial First Aid for Church Leaders in forced displaced contexts**: exposed participants to the tool and mechanisms of undertaking psychosocial first aid therapy. It enabled church leaders and other humanitarian workers to address secondary trauma among church leaders and contribute to sustainable skill-based approaches in reducing the distress and trauma.

- **Pursuing Peace for Healing and Reconciliation of Multi-Faith Communities in the context of forced displacement**: equipped participants with Biblical insights on peace-building in the light of escalating religious-inspired attacks that lead to forced displacement. Participants also reviewed their own practical theology of what it means to model Christ as peacemakers when their efforts are often not reciprocated by leaders of other faith traditions.

- **Restorative Justice in African Contexts**: looked at foundational principles of restorative justice, examined and asked questions about several examples from within African contexts, and imagined how participants might best shape a model of justice focused on involving victims of forceful displacement, offenders, and affected community members in putting things right.

- **Teaching Reconciliation: Developing a GLI Curriculum for Faculty**: Provide a detailed outline of the GLI’s methodology together with supporting curricular resources in a structure to be adapted by professors for teaching courses in reconciliation in universities and seminaries in East Africa to form and equip Christian leaders for the work of reconciliation.
Other Institute Highlights:

Retirement of GLI’s First Ambassador, Wilfred Mlay:

On Wednesday 9th January 2019, the GLI board of directors and participants held a magnificent celebration dinner for Prof Wilfred Mlay and by extension Faith Mlay. It was an occasion to celebrate all they have done for the GLI community, and to allow Wilfred to officially retire as GLI’s first Ambassador and become GLI Ambassador Emeritus.

Jean Serge Lumu from DR Congo, GLI’s first Board Vice Chair exuberantly led the gathering through the evening. He brought out the best in the African spirit of singing, dancing and ululating.

We had speeches from GLI elder Celestin Musekura, GLI board member Abi Riak, long time GLI worship leader Rebecca Mosley, GLI Regional Coordinator Milcah Lalam and, last but not least Wilfred and Faith Mlay. The speeches were warm and funny and wise. Wilfred was presented with an appreciation award and when they were asked to respond with some words, they had only a few: “To God be the glory!” The evening ended with a joyful, spontaneous dance party, singing, “I know who I am!” It was just a little foretaste of that banquet we will all enjoy one day at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Appointment of GLI Executive Director, Acher Niyonizigiye

Another highlight of the ninth leadership institute 2019, was the introduction of newly appointed GLI Executive Director, Acher Niyonizigiye to the gathering. Acher is an ordained pastor from Burundi who served for a number of years at the Bujumbura International Community Church and as a certified coach and facilitator for the International Leadership Foundation in Burundi. He has long been a part
of the GLI community, serving as conference interpreter French-English-French since 2008 and part of the worship team since 2017.

With the retirement of Wilfred Mlay in June 2018, the GLI board undertook a search process to recruit a person who would drive GLI growth and expansion to the next level. Out of five candidates who applied for the position, Acher emerged the successful candidate. His vision for GLI is becoming a hub where Christian leaders are transformed, re-energized, equipped and challenged to be selfless and willing to lay down their lives for those they serve.

**Appreciation to Partners and Supporters of the 2019 GLI Leadership Institute**

The GLI expressed appreciation to the following partners and individuals for their financial and in-kind support, which made it possible to cover all the costs of the 2019 Leadership Institute: GLI Board of Directors, African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries, Catholic Relief Services, Duke Divinity School’s Center for Reconciliation, De Paul University, Great Lakes Outreach, Harper Hill Global, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC Chad, DR Congo, Rwanda/Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan/Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Uganda), MCC Area Directors Southern Africa and West/Central, World Vision International East Africa Regional office, World Vision DR Congo, World Vision South Sudan, United World, Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo and self-paying individuals.
Appendix: GLI Leadership Institute Faculty and Staff

A. Plenary Teachers: Dr Edgardo Colón-Emeric, Dr Celestin Musekura, Mama Faith Mlay and Mrs. Marion Ndeta Wasia

B. Seminars and Faculty:
   - Christian Nonviolent Response to Forced displacement: Dr Ken Butigan and Flora Bringi
   - Child Protection and Ending Violence against Children in Forced Displacement Contexts: David Wamboko
   - Community Health, Peace Making and Biblical Scriptures: Darriel Harris and Rose Wani
   - Nurturing Personal Resilience for Turbulent Times: Christophe Mbonyingabo and Milcah Lalam
   - Psychosocial First Aid for Church Leaders in forced displaced contexts: Phiona Naserian Koyiet
   - Pursuing Peace for Healing and Reconciliation of Multi-Faith Communities in the context of forced displacement: Ibrahim Dima
   - Restorative Justice in African Contexts: Peter Durito and Oscar Nduwarugira
   - Teaching Reconciliation: Developing a GLI Curriculum for Faculty: Dr Warren Smith