

WSCF Calls for Prophetic Voices in Our World:

The 34th General Assembly in Montréal

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It will happen afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old people will dream dreams. Your young people will see visions. And also on the servants and on the handmaids in those days, I will pour out my spirit. Joel 2:28-29

WSCF after four Years

The 34th General Assembly of WSCF met in Montréal, Canada, August 1-9, 2008 and gathered students from around the world, from one hundred and five associated and affiliated movements in WSCF's six regions. The main task of the assembly was to review and assess the Federation's work at all levels for the coming quadrennium. The global ecumenical community was represented in the gift of the denominational and geographic diversity present at the Assembly.

The GA happily affiliated four new movements – Brazil, Timor Leste, Mexico and Iraq – and celebrated the re-birth and reopening of the North America Regional Office. The North America Region hosted the GA for the first time in twenty-eight years.

At the General Assembly we listened to regional reports from the six Regional Secretaries (North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa and Middle East), summing up their work over the previous quadrennium. After listening to these reports and to testimonies from the national

movements of Myanmar, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Philippines, Cuba and Belarus, all had a better understanding of the different regions, their contexts and difficulties, and of the universal problems that all the regions and national movements face. We were assured by the Honorary Treasurer, who reported that WSCF's finances had stabilized after the difficulties of the 1999-2004 quadrennium. The GA found WSCF to be in good financial condition at the end of the 2004-2008 quadrennium.

The Programme and Tasks

Two days before the General Assembly officially started, the delegates met in the Women's and Men's Pre-Assemblies. The main objective of the Women's Pre-Assembly was to encourage dialogue and to empower women for participation. It included a trip to the Canadian Senate chambers in Ottawa for a discussion with Nancy Ruth about women, power and politics. The Men's Pre-Assembly discussed the meaning of masculinity in today's world and took up the challenge of the "Men against Violence" campaign. These gender caucuses largely served to empower women and to give space to discuss gender justice, an issue that affects every aspect of the Federation's work. A wide range of exposure trips were planned for delegates. We could choose one from the thematic trips offered in Montréal: Women in Montréal, Organic Farm, Gay village, Indigenous Peoples. Each day of the General Assembly was accompanied by a midday Eucharist service and bible



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studies that brought together small cross-cultural groups to discuss and reflect on set passages from scripture. Morning worships were led by one of the six regions of WSCF and portrayed our diverse liturgical traditions and theological perspectives.

We, as the Assembly, had the responsibility to elect a new Executive Committee and General Secretary for the next quadrennium. In addition to the elections, many consensus decisions were made. Consensual decision making is often a very lengthy process, but it also is a very empowering experience of student and movement leadership and very appropriate since we, the Student Christian Movements, create the essential core of WSCF. Throughout the week, keynote speakers challenged us to be prophetic Christians in today's world.

Paving a prophetic Path of common Visions

The General Assembly formed four commissions including delegates, resource people, guests and senior friends. The commissions met throughout the General Assembly to re-envision the mission of WSCF. The four commissions were Raising up Prophets (Ecumenical Leadership Formation), Prophecy in Action (Advocacy and Solidarity), Radical Renewal (Biblical and Theological Reflection in the 21st Century), and Making the Vision Real (Capacity Building in the Student Christian Movement). Different themes emerged from the commissions' work and, following the example of the previous quadrennium, the regions may all adopt the WSCF annual themes for the 2008-12 quadrennium.

As we all came from such diverse geographical and confessional backgrounds, the experience in these commissions for our unity, prophetic visions and common good were enriching and challenging, but we also occasionally felt a bit lost in our diversity. All, however,

made sincere attempts to comprehend the background and honest intentions of others, even if differing conclusions were reached in some areas. In this way, our work was a true experience of ecumenical learning based on listening.

The work of the commissions was synthesised by a special committee into the following themes for WSCF for the coming quadrennium: interfaith engagement, environment and climate change, the Bible, economic justice (poverty, food crisis, fuel), diversity and discrimination (ethnic, indigenous, religious, sexual).

In addition to annual themes, the challenge of gender justice seemed to be of ongoing interest throughout WSCF's work and is a priority requiring commitment. This will be a key project and will include the evaluation of the current status of our work for women's empowerment and gender justice.

Senior Friends in Cooperation with Youth

At this General Assembly more than fifty Senior Friends gathered in a parallel meeting to share their experience and memories from their time in the WSCF. It was very beneficial to know how WSCF looked in the late 60's, and to hear about events like the influential Turku student conference of 1968. Their wisdom and stories, shared during speeches and discussions, deepened our view about the history of WSCF and better enabled us to envision the future.

The senior friends were also willing to support us (regional movements) in many ways. All students were offered help from Senior Friends and we began to think about how to trace this journey together.

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Being a Prophet in our World

At the end of the General Assembly each of us felt part of a large global ecumenical community with a long history and much potential for today. After experiencing such a global gathering and seeing people working for common good and for our unity, one begins to feel more committed to the work of WSCF. The various issues that we were dealing with were addressed to us, to radical Christians and *prophets* that shall *prophesy* in the world today.

At the closing worship, we listened to encouraging words, helpful to any who deal with burning issues and hear the challenge of the *prophetic* call. During the worship, Martin Bonde CHRISTENSEN from Denmark commented on Matthew 25:14-29: *“We all have talents, some of us are prophets, some are preachers, some are healers, and some of us have wisdom, but we are all God’s servants. And that is a huge responsibility. In a Danish hymn, we hear the following words: The God of life has no hands, therefore he sends you, when your neighbour is in need.”*

We all felt strengthened and encouraged to take up the responsibilities given to us as prophets, caretakers, preachers and healers: *“For the God has no hands, therefore he sends you, when your neighbour is in need.”*



ANETA KORDALA