

„Mission still possible?“

Global Perspectives on Mission Theology and Mission Practice.
A Conference of the United Evangelical Mission 20 Years after Internationalization”
Dumaguete, Philippines, June 26th – June 30th, 2016

Statement of the participants

“... that all may have life in abundance” (John 10:10b)

Taking this as God’s promise to his creation and all humankind, we, the participants of the UEM conference confirm our willingness to encourage our churches to continue to be united in mission. We, 27 representatives from the three regions of UEM communion – Africa, Asia and Germany – and a Muslim scholar were hosted by the Silliman University in Dumaguete City, Philippines. Looking back to 20 years of internationalization of UEM as a communion of 35 members in three continents and the von Bodelschwingh Institution, we realize that we have grown together closer. Over the years, the communion is not anymore just a vision but has been filled with life. Solidarity and equality have developed, ecumenical visiting teams strengthened the relations between churches. We are thankful for the sharing of prayers, ideas, resources and successful exchange of personnel. Partnership is intensively lived and we have reason to be grateful for what has been accomplished by sharing and serving each other during the last two decades. We recognize achievements in the struggles against human rights violation and in living out a common mission. We rejoice to see a generation emerging for whom our communion, the exchange and cooperation are a reality. This generation has been educated and formed through UEM programs and will continue the journey of internationalization.

Listening to contributions during the conference, we present some insights and recommendations to the General Assembly:

1. Mission: In our deliberations, we agreed that mission is still possible and therefore we confirm to continue to be united in mission. The conference confirmed the respective article of the constitution and the Corporate Identity spelling out mission in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, Development, Diaconia, Evangelism and Partnership (Constitution § 2, 2), 3), 4). However, the contexts for mission are changing and consequently the concepts have to be developed and contextualized. Hence, we recognize a diversity of understanding and of interpretation of the Corporate Identity and in which perspective issues are approached by member churches in their context:

There is a tradition of mission as defending and promoting justice, peace and integrity of creation. Beyond that, some highlight mission as sharing the Gospel with all as an invitation to trust in Christ; others highlight reconciliation; whereas still others stress journeying together with those of other faiths, e.g. Muslims or Buddhists, for justice and a dignified life for all.

This diversity has to be further explored; not to come to one understanding but in order to understand better how the presented concepts respond to the respective contexts and can enrich each other and our union in mission.

2. Life: A number of contributions referred to the promise of life in abundance and dignity for all. The salvific oikonomia of the triune God creates a space in which churches are invited to share with all among whom they live and serve in an inclusive way. Hospitality could be considered not only as description of an attitude lived out in relation to others but also as a metaphor for our mission. It opens, for instance, avenues to the issue of creation and climate justice as well as to human rights.
3. Journeying: We learned anew to look out among whom the UEM churches live and serve. Three groups which came into focus of our discussion are the Pentecostal movement and its diversity, Muslims and Buddhists in the various contexts. We can journey with those who promote a dignified life for all and fight against poverty and injustice. In that regard, the dimension of interdenominational and interreligious dialogue and the threat of religious extremism were addressed as urgent issues for our mission.
4. Representing also academic disciplines, we highlight the crucial role of theological education; not only for leadership training but for the whole people of God.
5. What should be developed further:
 - One of the crosscutting issues is Youth. The youths are not only our future but also part of our present. There are strong programs in UEM for and of the youth. We encourage UEM to expand these programs and give space as much of possible to Youth.
 - The other crosscutting issue is the role of women and the question of gender justice – questions which accompanied the UEM right from its beginning. Where are the member churches today and how did the communion contribute to further development in that regard?
 - How can we further develop a critical openness and sensitivity towards new religious movements which continue to come up?
 - We heard reports about members of our churches who have been killed as a consequence of their witness and mission. Do we pay enough attention to the dimension of suffering, experience of persecution and martyrdom?
6. We encourage the UEM:
 - To pay more attention in our discussions on mission to mission spirituality.
 - Explore Evangelism as living the Gospel in globalized contexts and in popular culture.
 - Foster empowerment and development of especially South to South exchange.
 - Encourage sharing of power in partnership between member churches including the grass root level.
 - Address the issue of refugees in all affected regions.
 - Initiate programs which assist UEM Churches to develop further to become inclusive towards marginalized and discriminated people in all three regions.
 - To enjoin UEM member churches to do more to prevent the degradation of ecological systems and to minimize the effects of climate change.
 - To instill more research in the years until the 25th jubilee.
Research, preferably done in intercultural teams, on:
 - Pentecostal and charismatic movements and charismatization.
 - Interreligious relationships.

- Intercultural topics / Cultural identity.
- The relation between diaconical work and church/congregations in the three regions (from mission period to contemporary diaconia).
- The virtual presence of faith/religions through internet and media as missionary tools.

We would like to express our gratitude to our hosting institution, Silliman University, to UCCP our hosting member church, and to UEM for inviting us to this conference.