

## International conference on sustainable health ends today in Bethel

Sixth cohort of the International Master of Arts in Diaconic Management celebrates successful completion

(Bielefeld-Bethel/Wuppertal, October 2, 2025) – With around 60 participants from 12 countries, the four-day international conference “Promoting Sustainable Health: Challenges and Opportunities for Churches and Faith-Based Organizations” comes to an end today at the Zion Church in Bielefeld-Bethel. The conference was organized by the “Institut für Diaconie Wissenschaft und Management” (Institute for Diaconal Studies and Management, IDWM) of the Bielefeld University, the Protestant University of Applied Sciences Darmstadt (EHD), and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM).

The conference brought together experts from science, churches, and practice to discuss current issues in health promotion, from HIV/AIDS and mental health to securing skilled workers and gaps in care to the challenges of demographic change. “Sustainable health as a cross-cutting issue connects scientific disciplines such as health sciences and theology, as well as theory and practice at the local level. Seeking these connections and building international networks—that is the great opportunity offered by this conference,” explained Prof. Dr. Ulrike Manz from the Protestant University of Applied Sciences Darmstadt.

### Churches worldwide as key players in health care

Participants from Africa, Asia, and Europe, including guests from Rwanda, Indonesia, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Germany, worked on strategies for sustainable health care. In many countries, churches and faith-based organizations make a crucial contribution to medical care, especially where state structures are weak. The aim of the conference was therefore to develop joint approaches and formulate country-specific work plans for implementation.

“By prioritizing health care, churches and religious institutions can address urgent problems such as the spread of transmissible and non-transmissible diseases, reduce stigma, and create more resilient communities,” emphasized Rev. Godwin Ampony, head of the International Diaconia of UEM, in his welcoming address. Responsibility for International Diaconia lies with Rev. Félicité Ngnintedem, Head of the Global Programs Division and member of the UEM Board.

## **Graduation ceremony for the international Master's program**

A highlight of the conference was the graduation ceremony for the sixth cohort of the International Master of Arts in Diaconic Management (IMADM) at the start of the event on September 29. Launched in 2009, the interdisciplinary program qualifies leaders from churches, diaconal and civil society organizations for leadership, management, and international networking.

The program, supported by UEM, the IDWM, and international partner universities, is characterized by the close connection between theory and practice in changing intercultural contexts. In 14 modules, students acquire business management skills, knowledge of business ethics, and theological foundations of diaconia. The face-to-face and online modules take place alternately at universities of UEM members in Germany, Indonesia, South Africa, Tanzania, and the Philippines.

## **Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals**

The conference sees itself as a contribution to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The organizers emphasize the special responsibility of churches and faith communities for equitable and sustainable health systems worldwide. "How do we develop sustainable health programs for local communities? What role do faith-based organizations play in resource-poor environments? And how do we accelerate international cooperation and knowledge exchange to advance SDG 3 'Good Health and Well-being'?" According to Prof. Dr. Christian Oelschlägel from IDWM, these questions were at the center of the discussions.

## **About „UEM“**

*The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) with offices in Germany, Indonesia and Tanzania is an international, equal communion of 39 members, including 32 Protestant churches in Africa and Asia as well as six Protestant churches and the v. Bodelschwingh Foundations Bethel in Germany. The UEM consistently pursues a holistic understanding of mission. This includes improving the living conditions of suffering and disadvantaged people while respecting their personal dignity and taking their cultural context into account.*