

Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Global Council: Building the Bridge between its Past, Present, and Future



Part One: The Global Council—Our Past

I am excited as we move toward the upcoming Global Council being held in Panama during the month of November 2010. To capitalize on this pivotal event and to maximize the effectiveness of our coming together I plan, for the next few months, to highlight the various aspects of the Global Council. Together, we will look at our purpose, policy, and plan as it relates to this meeting of our esteemed leaders from around the globe.

Specifically, I would like to look at:

- Our Past: Where we are coming from?
- Our Present: Where we are presently?
- Our Future: Where we are going to?
- Our Plan: What will be the format of Global Council 2010?

The development of our worldwide fellowship of the United Pentecostal Church International has been nothing short of phenomenal. Amazingly, in 1945, at the time of the merger, we had representation in nine countries with approximately 240 churches outside of the United States and Canada. The merger brought vision, purpose, and united efforts in reaching our world. The sacrifice has certainly reaped dividends. Today, the UPCI is established in 191 countries with more than 25,000 churches. In the past nine years alone we have seen an increase of forty-five countries. Goals are in place to establish a church in every country in the next few years. To God be the glory! He has done great things! What a privilege for us to be workers together with Him.

To sustain our growing fellowship; to promote revival, church growth, and missions; to preserve our apostolic doctrine and heritage, we sought for a way to develop a worldwide structure. Our mission binds us together. Our *International Articles of Faith* keep us biblically grounded and serve as a continual foundation for our growing fellowship. Each nation exercises an organizational framework that meets the needs of the people in that setting while remaining true to biblical principles. It is with this backdrop that we established and continue to develop the Global Council. We have not arrived at our final destination of where we want to go but we are well on our way.

Chris Johns, in the *National Geographic* tells of a photo he took while visiting Africa. It was of an incredible bridge built by the persistence of one man, Crispin. In 1971, five people lost their lives while crossing the Zambezi River. Crispin worked on a mission and vowed to stop further deaths by constructing a bridge. He had little resources and no knowledge in bridge building. He started reading books, gathering cable, and enlisting help. In five years a 1,000-foot walking bridge was ready, overcoming an impossible task of connecting two sides of the river. We are building a bridge, a connection between every nation where there is a representation of the United Pentecostal Church. It is the Global Council. It encourages the North American Church to join hands with the six other regions identified by our organizational setup to evangelize our world, maintain our apostolic doctrine, and unite together for missions.

I asked Brother Scism to give me his perspective on how we have arrived where we are and according to his account as the former General Director of Foreign Missions. He states: "When S. W. Chambers was the General Superintendent and T. F. Tenney, the Foreign Missions Director, the World Conference Plan was initiated....It was clearly stated that the North American church would take the initiative in starting the World Conference, but eventually capable leadership from other countries would lead the conference and make important decisions....The World Conference eventually became, as some called it, a North American Conference with some international speakers. By far the largest attendance at the World Conference was from North America....In Foreign Missions we realized that we were not meeting the increasing need for a truly international body that would not be...overwhelmed by the North American church. We were prayerfully seeking for the correct answer."

As a result of the desire of the Foreign Missions Division there was an initial Evangelism and Leadership Conference in Alexandria, Louisiana prior to the "Because of the Times" conference in January of 1998. Discussion was held, all were seeking for answers and plans were set in motion. I remember attending that meeting as a missionary from El Salvador with a leadership representation from our country. The need and initial plans for an international council began. This continued with a meeting in Paris, France in September of that same year. Under the leadership of Nathaniel Urshan, General Superintendent and Harry Scism as the General Director of Foreign Missions the policy was formed and plans were made for the first Global Council in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2000. There, Brother Scism, in his keynote address, "The Heart of the Global Council" explained that the Global Council is a man-made structure designed to serve as an avenue to communicate the gospel. He asked, "Why do we need the Global Council?" The answer is "SOULS." It is imperative that we unite our worldwide efforts to rescue perishing souls. As you can see this desire and burning passion is an extension of the same vision that gripped our church at the time of the merger.

Later, at the second Global Council, in Bangkok, Thailand, 175 attended, representing 110 nations, and 171 languages. Rev. Kenneth Haney said the United Pentecostal Church International exists for two fundamental reasons: to preserve doctrine and for evangelism. We do more together than we do separately. He also explained that "the Global Council was created as a vehicle to carry us where we need to go" and "the need of the hour is evangelism of our world with truth and power."

Missionary Sim Strickland provided an individual reflection on the Global Council, "It was a personal blessing to sit down at a meal or to go shopping with a brother from India, China, Venezuela, or Syria to talk about God's Kingdom. It is truly rejuvenating to know 'first hand' the news and to see the love for the gospel and doctrine of faith that we share is everywhere going forward."

Brother LeRoy Francis preached an outstanding message at the 2008 Executive Global Council in Argentina. It was entitled "Enabling Apostolic Globalization." Each time we come together as the Global Council or the Executive Global Council we leave better equipped to reach our world. We need each other!

The Gospel is spreading. Bridges are being built through cross-border evangelism, providing a powerful global connection. That is only a portion of the major aspects and purposes of the Global Council. Stay tuned. Lord willing, I will be back next month with the continuing story of building the bridge of the Global Council, joining every nation in the world, and bridging the gap between its past, present, and future. It surely does bring about a cross-cultural perspective.