Students of diverse faiths seek understanding at Bossey

WCC News by Theodore Gill, senior editor of WCC Publications

Religions as instruments of peace was the subtitle of the 2011 summer course on “Building an interfaith community.” Twenty-three students from more than a dozen nations assembled at the Ecumenical Institute for the course which ran from 4 to 29 July. One of the early lecturers admitted that many observers today see religions not as instruments of peace but as reasons for conflict. “Our hands as religious leaders are not clean,” said Rabbi Richard Marker of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations. The experience of too many nations and their governments, he added, “is that religion is a cause of divisiveness that works against shared values.”

Now in its fifth year, the institute’s summer course on interfaith relations brings together students of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions for a time of study, shared experience of one another’s sacred spaces and reflection on their own cultures, spiritualities and worldviews. The student body was made up of nine men and fourteen women. Ten were Christian, seven were Muslim and six were Jewish. They came from Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Australia. Three were sisters from religious orders in Colombia, Guatemala and Romania. Three students came from Israel, and three are Palestinians.

Danielle Antebi of Israel, whose academic background is in criminology and international politics, was eager to join the course after her brother’s positive experience as a student last summer. “He is an archaeologist who gives presentations on Israel in various places,” she says, “and he wanted an opportunity to meet people from different countries and hear their opinions of Israel and of the relationships between people of differing religions.” She concluded that a month at Bossey, overlooking Lake Geneva, would provide her “a great opportunity to meet and interact with people representing a number of cultures.”

Charlotte Lindhé heard of the course from her pastor in the Church of Sweden. Following her graduation from

In this issue:

Editorial

Director’s trip to U.S. finds alumni still inspired by Bossey experience

Alumni gathering in China

Bossey alumni in leadership at the WCC

News from the Faculty

Is there anyone who does not know Ginetta?

Visitors in Bossey

continued on page 2
**Editorial**  
Prof. Dr. Ioan Sauca, Director

*Through crisis towards a new beginning*

Dear Bossey friends and alumni,

The recent worldwide challenges and in particular the acute financial crisis did not spare the Bossey Institute either. To ensure the necessary funds for the continuation of our ministry, we had to increase our efforts of fundraising and in order to respond to the actual needs of the Churches we had to reshape both our programmes and structures. Thus, a new short term programme of continuing education is being developed. In addition, the organic farming project is also progressing well. The “blue angels” programme from the past is being revived but as the “green angels” programme. Our young people will be learning through hands-on learning and working in the organic farming project. The transformation of the old barn in a modern guest house of 21 rooms as well as the construction of a new conference room of 200 places have just been finalised. We are encouraged to see that despite the challenges of budget cuts and staff reductions, our partners continue their commitment to our institute. The Vatican committed itself recently to continue supporting a Catholic professor in Bossey and the three Mission agencies that have established a chair of missiology in Bossey (Council for World Mission, United Evangelical Mission and CEVAA-community of Churches in Mission) continue to support a Professor of Ecumenical Missiology.

The visit of our delegation to China in June was also a great encouragement. The Church there is blooming. There seems to be an incredible thirst for God and for meaning in life and the Gospel seems to be the answer for many there. I was moved to see that in this endeavour of renewal and transformation in Chinese society today that former Bossey students play a vitally important role: one is the dean of a famous theological institute; another one is responsible for theological formation on a national level; another one is the head of the printing department and proudly shared about the number of Bibles they have printed and distributed, others are professors in theological schools opened nowadays all over the country, others work in the External Church Relations Department or as pastors in the parishes. Bossey remains a unique and blessed place that continues to form ecumenical leaders in Churches all over the world. Please, continue keeping us in your prayers and let us stay united in our commitment to ecumenical formation.

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> from front page

secondary school, she began an ambitious programme of travel and backpacking that has taken her to China, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Future destinations include Greece, India and North America.

“I hope to learn more about my own religion in relation to the beliefs of others,” she explains, “and I hope to be able to share what I learn with my own parish and others when I return to Sweden.”

She says that her interest in inter-religious activity was awakened while visiting Israel and Palestine where she saw “religions existing side by side, yet not really living together.” Move beyond tolerance of differences to appreciation.

Mohammed Azhari of Australia, who pursued studies in Islamic teaching and inter-religious dialogue during his graduate work in Damascus, sees the course at Bossey as “a brilliant opportunity to come and encounter people of other faiths. Here, we will begin by building community among ourselves, hoping that this will be a first step toward some greater achievement.”

continued on page 7

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**BEYOND BOUNDARIES WISHES TO ALL ITS READERS MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR 2012!**

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Photo. Kelly Brownlee
Director’s trip to U.S. finds alumni still inspired by Bossey experience
by Kelly Brownlee

During a trip to the United States in May, Dr. Ioan Sauca discovered an interesting fact, that even after 50 years the Bossey experience is still strong in the hearts and minds of former students. Dr. Sauca, director of the Ecumenical Institute, and Kelly Brownlee, fundraising officer for the WCC, traveled together for nearly three weeks reconnecting with supporters and alumni and making new friends. They traveled to six cities and met over 200 people who were interested in hearing the current status of the Ecumenical Institute as well as its vision for growth.

A special thanks to the following individuals donated their time to make it all happen: Polly Hamlen (‘03, Boston), Robert Welsh (‘70, Indianapolis), Jean Hawxhurst (‘94 Louisville), Anne Glynn MacKoul (WCC Central Committee, Princeton), Prof. Dr. Charles West (former associate director of Bossey, Princeton), Evelyn Parker (WCC Central Committee, New York City), Cliff Kirkpatrick (WCC Central Committee, Louisville) and Dr. Leah Fitchue (President, Payne Theological Seminary, Wilburforce).

Dr. Sauca also met with leaders of five seminaries to discuss the potential of sharing the ecumenical learning experience at Bossey with current theological students in the U.S.

Alumni gathering in China
by H.S. Wilson

Since 1990 the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA) and the Ecumenical Institute have provided scholarships for Chinese church leaders to take part in the academic programmes offered at Bossey. So far a total of 25 Chinese students have graduated and 14 of them were able to be present for the first alumni gathering at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary 6-7 June, 2011. The current Director of the Ecumenical Institute Prof. Ioan Sauca, Prof. François Dermange of the Autonomous Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Geneva and Dr. H.S. Wilson, Executive Director of FTESEA were present.

It was heartening to learn both from the alumni and from the China Christian Council leadership that all Chinese Bossey alumni are in key leadership positions making significant contribution to the life and

continued on page 4
Rev Kinda Tegwende Leonard, the President of the Association of Evangelical Reformed Churches of Burkina Faso, an alumnus of the 58th Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies (academic year 2006-2007) and a current member of the WCC Central Committee had a discussion with Odair P. Mateus from the Editorial Team of Beyond.

BB: How do you describe the long-lasting significance of your ecumenical studies in Bossey?

One day during English class, the teacher split up the students into two discussion groups: the first had to defend, or rather to be in favor of death penalty; the second group had to argue against it. Personally, I never thought to defend the death penalty, but that day I had to do it. I mean by this story that Bossey made us think in different ways and by diverse means so that we become able to live out our faith being ecumenical.

BB: Could you give concrete examples of what you are saying?

One day I was asked to make a presentation about my country. And when I was going through the preparation material, I realized that more than 85% of my country mates are illiterate.

Another time the students gathered and we listened to each other telling the meaning of friendship according to one’s own background. Initiated by Ms Elisabeth Raiser, we shared about women in the early ecumenical movement, water as a daily need and its implication on women in the South. All these examples are extra-muros; combined with intra-muros courses which have enabled us to have a wider view on realities and challenges and ways of analysis. This acquirement of knowledge and understanding frees us to serve Christ and church unity. BB

Boundaries during his visit to Geneva.

BB: Which were the most challenging aspects of your studies in Bossey?

My struggle was to meet the academic requirement. This was a real double challenge for me: 1) I came to Bossey with English as my third language 2) The seminar from where I came is not internationally recognized so I was frustrated to be not directly registered at UNIGE. Finally, I graduated receiving appreciation from my professors. I’m grateful to God.

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▶ from on page 3

witness of the Christian community in China. The training and exposure for ecumenical ministry, which is received during their studies at Bossey has greatly impacted their vision for ministry in China. Therefore it was highly appreciated and recommended that the scholarship program continue.

The visitors, to whom this was the first exposure to China, were also very much impressed about the ministry of the Chinese church and the leadership that the Bossey graduates are able to provide. The Chinese alumni were also encouraged to consider applying for the longer study periods such as the Master of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies –degree. BB
The Academic Dean for the 2011-2013 academic years is Prof. Dr. Amélé Ekué from Togo. Vice-Dean for the same period is Prof. Dr. Odair Pedroso Mateus from Brazil.

A successor for Prof. Gervasis Karumathy has been appointed by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The necessary procedures for him to come and live in Switzerland are under way. In the meantime Prof. Dr. Hans-Jürgen van der Minde from Kassel/Germany (Old Catholic) is conducting the workshop on Intercultural biblical Hermeneutics as a guest lecturer. We are grateful to the Old Catholic Church, which is supporting this replacement financially.

For the academic year 2011-2012 we have welcomed 27 students from 17 countries. They represent the Roman Catholic Church, the (Eastern) Orthodox Church, the Reformed tradition, the Disciples of Christ, Evangelical churches, African Instituted churches, the Seventh-day Adventists. 11 among them follow the Master of Advanced Studies (MAS) in Ecumenical Studies - program, 5 are registered for the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies (CAS) – program, and 11 are enrolled in the program for the Complementary Certificate (CC) in Ecumenical Studies.

Is there anyone who does not know Ginetta?

BB: Ginetta, how long have you been working at Bossey? I came in 1973 or 1974. I cannot even remember exactly. When my children were born and were small, I remained at home. I came back to work in 1990.

BB: How did you come to Bossey? I came from Italy to Switzerland in 1951. My first work was as a gardener. But then a friend working in Bossey told me that they were looking for a cook, which was my professional formation.

BB: So, almost 30 years in Bossey... If I had not stopped in between, it would even be 40 years!

BB: ...and when we meet former students and share memories, practically all of them talk about Ginetta. Why do you think this is? I try to talk with students about what they like. Sometimes I even try to cook something they like. But they also like the Italian kitchen... At times someone looks at some food which s/he does not know and asks, ‘what is this?’ Then I explain. And when a student says, ‘I don’t like that’, I normally say: ‘You need to try. Just a small piece’. Often, afterwards, they come and tell me ‘oh, that was very good’. Bossey is for me somehow like home, like a family, and therefore also the students feel likewise. Sometimes they come and talk with me when they feel a bit lonely. I try to understand them.

BB: If you look back at your time in Bossey, what were the most touching moments or events for you? I would say the celebrations of Christmas together with the students, when we were sitting around the Christmas tree and sang Christmas songs and carols from around the world – these were touching moments.

BB: Do you have a story, which you would like to share with us? Oh, there is not much to tell. We are trying to make jokes. Once we had a mixture of sausages for lunch, and a student asked me, what it was. So, I tried to explain the mixture, that there were sausages from pork and from beef and from calf, etc. Then it just came to my mind, ‘these are ecumenical sausages’. They became, of course, a kind of winged words.

BB: I see, in a way your secret is, that you integrate ecumenical learning into your daily cooking! Can you summarize your recipe for this? Yes, you need patience, humor and the intention to try to understand one another.
Visitors in Bossey

Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) of the Vatican with his delegation visited Bossey 9 May 2011. A common prayer with the WCC General Secretary, some staff, the Bossey faculty and sisters of the Ecumenical Spirituality Course was held in the chapel.

All the Bishops of the Church of Norway visited Bossey 16 August 2011. They prayed in the chapel, discovered the park and campus, appreciated the creations of Bossey cooks and pledged to send students from Norway in the future.

Members and consultants of the Bossey Accompaniment Group (BAG), met 7-11 September 2011 to review and discuss matters in relation to Bossey. On the opening day they were joined by the WCC General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit.

The UK Friends of Bossey organized a visit to Bossey for a week in September for a group of ordinands from the United Kingdom. A different group visits Bossey every two years in order to deepen the ordinands understanding of the ecumenical movement.
Azharî sees the students asking themselves, “How do people attain peace through prayer, through their beliefs?
In coming to know one another as persons, we will learn to respect each other. In this way we can move beyond mere tolerance to appreciation, to acceptance even of what makes us different. And this is for the best, since it is ignorance that leads to conflict.”

During the first week of classes, Rabbi Marker was joined in discussing Judaism by Grand Rabbi Marc Raphael Guedj, president of the Fondation Racines et Sources (Roots and Sources Foundation).
Professor Fawzia Al-Ahmawi of the University of Geneva and Hafid Ouardiri, president of the Ta'aruf (Interknowing) Foundation, offered their expertise on Islam, and Christianity was interpreted by several staff members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) as well as by Professor S. Wesley Ariarajah of Drew University in the United States of America.
Professor Odair Pedroso Mateus of the Ecumenical Institute, academic coordinator for the 2011 summer course, champions this opportunity for “promoting encounter, not provoking conflict”, for asking hard questions and exploring the possibility of “dialogue as a means of peaceful change” in the world, for “encouraging community among civilizations, rather than a clash.”

The Ecumenical Institute administration is sensitive to the variety of dietary practices among the students, and spaces for worship have been arranged appropriate to each of the religious traditions represented.

Founded in 1946, the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey is the international centre for encounter, dialogue and formation of the WCC. It is related to the University of Geneva through a covenant agreement with the university’s autonomous faculty of Protestant theology. The summer course has been jointly organized by the Ecumenical Institute, the WCC programme on Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation, the Ta’aruf Foundation and the Fondation Racines et Sources.

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The Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey was founded in 1946. It is attached to the Autonomous Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Geneva and part of the World Council of Churches (WCC), an organization representing some 560 million Christians on all continents of the globe. Since 1946, thousands of women and men from numerous countries and most Christian confessions and cultures have come to Bossey for seminars, conferences and academic study programmes. Many have testified to life-changing experiences in this “ecumenical laboratory”. More information about the academic programme or how the contemporary hospitality facilities in splendid historical surroundings overlooking the French Alps may be of use to you can be found in: www.bossey.ch.

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