New accreditation agreement announced for Ecumenical Institute at Bossey

WCC News

A groundbreaking agreement was announced during the WCC’s Central Committee meeting 17 February, 2011 making all students attending the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Institute at Bossey eligible to receive an accredited certificate from the University of Geneva.

Since 2000, the institute and the university have been working together to find a solution for the growing number of students, particularly from the global South, who come to Bossey from schools that are not internationally accredited so that they can return home with a recognized academic certification for their studies at the Ecumenical Institute.

Praising the new agreement, Andreas Dettwiler, dean of the Autonomous Faculty of Theology at the University of Geneva, quoted the 3rd century Alexandrian philosopher Origen: “Are you on the way? If you are, then you are going in the right direction.”

“Doing theology means always being ‘on the way,’” Dettwiler said. “Religion can be used for better and for worse. Bossey is valuable for its academic rigour and sensitive approach. We both need each other.”

Founded in 1946 to develop leaders for the ecumenical movement, the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey has worked with the University of Geneva through its theology faculty since 1952. Bossey students who qualify have been eligible to receive academic credits from the university.

“Our cooperation with Bossey is among the oldest partnerships we have and is very important to us,” said University of Geneva rector Jean-Dominique Vassalli of the 452-year-old university. “This [agreement] is an extraordinary opportunity for us as we seek to be more international,” he added.

Until this agreement, students registered solely at Bossey for a one-semester programme received only an Ecumenical Institute certificate -- which was valuable within the church and the ecumenical movement but had no academic value.

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Dear Bossey friends and alumni,
Christ is Risen!

I have just returned to Bossey from a three week long work related trip in the USA. During this visit, I had the chance to meet with many Bossey alumni. Our meetings were always felt as a family reunion with nostalgic souvenirs and testimonies of the life changing experiences people had at Bossey. Most of them have been trusted with leadership positions in their Churches. And what struck me most was the fact that despite many years since graduation from Bossey, all the former students remained with a deep passion and strong commitment for the ecumenical vision. I felt encouraged by all those moving testimonies but became also more aware about the responsibilities which we have today in trying to always listen and adapt accordingly to the needs of the people and Churches of our times.

As you are aware, since 2000 Bossey has continually reshaped, sharpened and improved its programmes and curriculum. The growing number of students from the global South has presented new challenges, demands and expectations from us and has caused us strengthen further Bossey’s ministry of ecumenical formation for global Christianity. Yet, there is still a compelling need for further improvement and adaptation of our programmes. Two new subjects will be soon added to our curriculum: eco-theology and sustainable development with its implications towards the eradication of poverty. To support the teaching of such new subjects, an appropriate experiential “laboratory”, that is an organic farming project, is being created and it is to become a model to which our students will be exposed. Moreover, there is also a growing request from Churches that the life changing Bossey model of ecumenical formation be brought out of Bossey to other regions and together with people from a particular area organise courses that will be open to a much larger number of students than those able to come to Bossey every year. This June, I will make a first trip with this goal at the invitation of the Christian Churches in China.

Thanking you all for your love for and commitment to the ministry of our institute, I ask for your prayers, accompaniment and support as we humbly try to respond to and implement its vision and vocation.

BB
Global Transformation and the Ecumenical Movement

Dagmar Heller

From March 4-6, 2011 the Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey was the meeting place for a first research conference of its kind. A group of thirty-five scholars from different disciplines - history, sociology and theology - came to study the World Council of Churches as a player in the Cold War under the theme “The Globalization of Churches, Global Transformation and Ecumenical Renewal of the World Council of Churches in the 1960s and 1970s.”

Katharina Kunter and Anne-greth Struempfel from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (Germany), the initiators and main organizers of the conference, were interested in the interplay of “northern” churches with the global South in transforming attitudes and practices of the WCC and its member churches during the 1960s and 70s.

A highlight of the conference was a panel featuring three “perspectives from contemporary witnesses” within the ecumenical movement: Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana, Julio de Santa Ana of Uruguay and Dwain Epps of the United States. Now retired, all three served the WCC in the final third of the 20th century.

Oduyoye recalled the late Sixties and early Seventies in the WCC as a time when voices from the global South were heard more clearly and began to be given weight in decision-making. Santa Ana remembered that the ecumenical movement often wore “a conflicted face” at the time: the dream of full “organic unity” of the church was dying, and there was substantial friction between different elements of ecumenism within the WCC. Epps agreed that some tried to put barriers in the way of change, yet this eventually forced the various factions to engage one another in open,

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Good-bye 62nd Graduate School!

January 26, 2011 the Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey said good-bye to the students of the 62nd session of the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies. There were 21 students from 14 countries who successfully finished their studies either with the new Complementary Certificate in Ecumenical making. Santa Ana remembered that the ecumenical movement often wore “a conflicted face” at the time: the dream of full “organic unity” of the church was dying, and there was substantial friction between different elements of ecumenism within the WCC. Epps agreed that some tried to put barriers in the way of change, yet this eventually forced the various factions to engage one another in open,

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Christina Biere is a young trainee-pastor in the Church of Westfalia (United) in Germany, who will soon be ordained. She is also working on a doctoral thesis in New Testament studies. She participated as a youth delegate for the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in February 2006 at the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and was elected to the Central Committee.

She told Beyond Boundaries, that her participation in the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies during the academic year 2002-2003 gave her a better understanding of the ecumenical movement. It was especially important for her to meet with eye witnesses of important events and developments in the life of the WCC. One of the most important insights she gained from Bossey is the experience, that the cultural similarity is often more uniting than the confessional belonging. For her work in the Central Committee she wants the WCC to find a way to reach the world of young people. “This is not a question to the young people, but to the WCC as a whole”, she said. In Germany she is trying to help the church to find ways to feed insights from ecumenical theology into the church life. She was one of the pioneers for the foundation of MEET (More Ecumenical Empowerment Together), a platform and network for young people who are interested in or work for ecumenical questions.

BB

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Studies / Le Certificat complémentaire d'études œcuméniq"es (30 ECTS - European Credit Transfer System - credits) or Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) in Ecumenical Studies / Le Certificat de formation continue en études œcuméniques (25 ECTS credits).

These two new certificates, granted for the first time, continue the best academic elements of what has been known as the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies for the past almost six decades. The programmes comprise an intensive one-semester of study, research and community life, including lectures, courses, workshops and study visits to places of ecumenical interest, such as Vatican and Rome, Taizé community in France and local parishes of the Reformed Protestant Church in Switzerland.

The celebration started with a thanksgiving prayer and an agape at the chapel of Bossey and continued in the conference hall with a welcome by the dean of the Ecumenical Institute and greetings from the Autonomous Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Geneva. The students had prepared gifts for all the Bossey staff and performed a song in French to honour their French language studies. Prof. François Dermange as representative of the University of Geneva together with Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches and Fr Dr Ioan Sauca awarded the certificates to the students. The ceremony was finished by a festive fellowship dinner at the Orangerie dining hall. BB
See You, Father Gervasis

Odair P. Mateus

As my daughter Lorena and I walked every morning the Bossey allée on the way to the school bus stop at Petit-Bossey, we used to come across Gervasis, on his way to breakfast at the château and morning prayer at the chapel. His measured way of walking and quiet way of greeting suggested a serenity brought naturally by a deep spirituality nourished, in his case, by the East and the West.

Since the 2006-2007 academic year, I’ve been impressed by the number of students who were inspired by his way of teaching the Holy Scriptures. They were encouraged to experiment with lectio divina in a prayerful and communal attempt to go beyond the letter and the literature of the biblical text. They were also encouraged to share with others the insights that their respective cultural situations would contribute to the study of biblical texts.

I’m sure that Gervasis Karumathy’s scriptural life is inseparable from his deep sense of justice and his deep concern for the most vulnerable. Every

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Meet a Colleague

Bossey is pleased to be working with a new colleague Kelly Brownlee. As a fund raising officer for the World Council of Churches, Kelly is now delegating part of her time to fund raise for the Ecumenical Institute. She was originally from Nashville, TN in the USA and has previously worked for Habitat for Humanity, Belmont University, and the Nashville Film Festival. She holds a Masters in Higher Education Administration from Vanderbilt University and two Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and Psychology from Belmont University. She has been a fund raising professional for 19 years. “Bossey is such a wonderful atmosphere to work in with so many people from different cultures and backgrounds. To me, it represents the true essence of ecumenism”, she says.

In talking to potential donors, she plans to share the stories of Bossey alumni who are doing great things in their communities. “Bossey attracts a different caliber of student, people who have the ability to think beyond the box. After their training at Bossey, that ability becomes magnified, that is what makes this place so special.” She further adds, “I am looking forward to continue meeting the alumni of Bossey”. “I have already spoken to many interesting people who came to school here and it is clear to me that Bossey changes lives. I want to be a part of making this opportunity available for future generation of church leaders”.

One of her ideas is to start up a congregational giving program to support the Bossey Scholarship Fund by partnering with alumni and friends who are leaders in their church. “The desire to help Bossey is strong among our supporters. I am personally very touched by the level of support and enthusiasm I see happening for Bossey. I want to be a part of helping the Institute reach beyond boundaries”.

If you would like to be in touch with Kelly, she can be reached at Kelly.Brownlee@wcc-coe.org
News from the Bossey Friends

There aren’t too many people who can say they twice attended school at Bossey, let alone almost 30 years apart. But that is exactly what John George Huber did in 1972 and 2000. Although his decision to attend in 2000 was plagued by three fears: 1) his church was not a member of the WCC, 2) he was 70 years old, and 3) he had already attended in the 1970’s, but his application was wholeheartedly accepted. Although a member of the ecumenically conservative Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, Rev. Huber has maintained a longstanding commitment to Christian unity. This is what partly attracted him to complete the Master of Arts in Ecumenical Studies program. “The second time was more intense as there were major papers to write and my thesis was over 100 pages long” Huber said. It was also a time in which Huber produced many papers on ecumenical themes which would later be part of the Ecumenical Collection of John George Huber at the newly constructed David Allan Hubbard Library at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, USA, which will officially launch later this year.

The collection consists of many articles, papers, theses, numerous books on ecumenical themes, and a big plastic tub of memorabilia (which he is currently cataloguing) from his days at Bossey which includes publications, papers and correspondence which all relate to the ecumenical movement.

Rev. Huber is very committed to Bossey and been a consistent financial supporter of the Ecumenical Institute, and has even included Bossey in his will “I feel the need to pass the ecumenical torch to a younger generation. Bossey was such a fulfilling experience on so many levels. I am grateful for the two experiences I’ve had and want to be supportive of the Ecumenical Institute because in doing so I am making a contribution to Christian Unity”. BB

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Bossey and Facebook?

If you are a Facebook user, you may have already come across a group page “Bossey Friends”. This site was created by Noël Suministrado from the Philippines and alumnus of both the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies (1998) and Master of Ecumenical Studies (2000-2001).

“After my graduation, I began to keep in touch with former classmates. Some responded and we are still in communication. When Facebook was introduced, I created the Bossey Friends page.” he told Beyond Boundaries.

It has been space and a medium for all the people who have gone to Bossey and also those who have been touched by the Bossey ecumenical spirit. To continue the successful work of Noël, exploration and preparations are currently being made to open in the future an “official” Facebook page for the Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey, where alumni and friends could join and share stories and information dedicated to all things Bossey. Keep your eyes open! BB
honest debate and to start anew on the path toward Christian unity.

Other contributions were studying the transformation which happened through the increasing role of mass media also in the churches and the ecumenical movement. The developments of the programmatic work of the WCC during this time in the Commission of Churches in International Affairs, in the Programme to Combat Racism as well as in the Commission on Faith and Order were subject to further papers and discussions. Some case studies from local churches complemented the picture.

Three Bossey alumni attended the conference: Noël Suministrado from the Philippines, Rotimi Omotoye from Nigeria and Antti Laine from Finland.


BB

Upcoming events

13 June -1 September 2011: English as a Tool for Ecumenical Formation: Intensive English Summer Course

4 - 29 July 2011: Building an Interfaith Community

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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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