

Christian leaders plot ecumenical future in Indonesia

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(RNS) An estimated 275 Christian leaders are meeting in Indonesia this week (Oct. 4-7) to plot an ecumenical future in what one veteran of the ecumenical movement called a watershed gathering.

Leaders of the fledgling Global Christian Forum will gather evangelical, Pentecostal, mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians in Manado, Indonesia, to assess recent changes in global Christianity.

"We plan to examine the global trends that are changing Christianity, listen to the reports of developments and struggles of the church in various regions of the world, and discuss how our fellowship can be strengthened for the purpose of our common witness," said the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, a GCF organizer and adviser for ecumenical relations at the Reformed Church in America.

Rumors of the demise of Christianity are premature, said Granberg-Michaelson, especially across Africa and Asia.

"The fact is that today there are probably 560 million Pentecostals, meaning one out of every four Christian is of a Pentecostal background," said Granberg-Michaelson.

"Christianity in Africa in the last 100 years has grown from just a few million to 375 to 380 million (adherents), making Christianity in Africa the fastest-growing center of Christian witness."

Granberg-Michaelson called the GCF an all-embracing ecumenical fellowship. It was founded during the World Council of Churches' eighth assembly in Zimbabwe in 1998, but is more representative than the WCC.

"The World Council, as it exists, only includes one-fourth of global Christianity," said Granberg-Michaelson, who was the WCC's director of church and society from 1988-1994. "As great as the World Council is, it's unable to build a table that is broad. This is the only place that will have the full breadth of world Christianity represented in a meaningful way."