



# Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

*Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship*

8-13 March 2018 – Arusha, Tanzania

Document No. **PLEN 05.6**

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## **Missional Formation: Leadership Training**

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The call of Jesus – “follow me” - is at the heart of the Gospel. By this call, Jesus initiates the relationship that is the essential component of discipleship. More than an expression of piety, discipleship is an act of God within a context of human cooperation. Though it involves attention and action by the disciple, discipleship is the personal and communal embodiment of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As we follow Jesus, the transforming presence of God definitively shapes our imagination and behaviour. Discipleship, therefore, is the matrix and manner of our formation in Christ. As such, it is the primary and indispensable location of the development and practice of leadership in Christian community.

In today’s emerging global context, there is a great challenge to Christian discipleship. This is seen most clearly in the conflict between our formation as disciples in the living Word of God and our formation as possessor-owners in a globalized market society. The tension here is not between Christian faith and a form of economy. Rather, it is the way the ideologies, images, and institutions of market society form human life. Here we find the site of one of our most consequential encounters with the powers and principalities that seek to dominate humanity and Creation. The centrality of these issues to our world and to our souls makes this a central focus of our formation as disciples and the development of leaders in Christian community.

Though the struggle between these contrasting patterns of formation is not new, many features of our globalizing market society make it particularly threatening. The culture of money seeks to define and dominate every aspect of human activity and every creature of God’s world. It forms possessor-consumers to be compliant constituents of an economically constructed world. This formation influences both thought and behaviour. Capturing individuals and communities, it aspires to draw a comprehensive map of our human and ecological future.

Formation in the market society has consequences across a broad spectrum of life experience. When the life that is primarily shaped by economic forces gathers as a global community, it creates forces that threaten the quality and character of our eco-sphere. The human soul and human community are stunted by the institutionalization and amplification of greed in an unrestrained market society. The impulses and behaviours of a growing culture of possessor-consumers penetrate and control much of the structure of human society and its interaction with the environment. The integrity and well-being of Creation is directly and dangerously threatened. Though market society has created some wealth for some people and massive wealth for a very few, in its wake is a growing poverty around the world. The hard edges of market ideology have created a culture that is hostile to the poor.

Our electronic and digital devices provide the interface and the medium for this world assembled by economics. They accelerate its reach and impacts. They play a growing role in the formation of possessor-consumers. Though our devices have contributed to many aspects of life in ways that are commendable and beneficial, they come with a steep cost. We have the appearance of ownership and control of our

devices, but we now see that they shape much of our vision, our community, and our life. Embedded in our personalized technology and social media are the values, ideals, and world view of the culture of money. As our experience is increasingly filtered by our technology, we have failed to calculate, much less comprehend, the ways our capacity for truth and love have been influenced.

We may identify idolatry as an almost unavoidable tendency in market society's project of moral and spiritual formation. The reach of the culture of money is almost universal. In the face of this, the agenda for those of us who would be faithful to God emerges with clarity and urgency. We must engage in a determined attempt to present, for this generation, a faithful alternative to the spiritual formation offered by the culture of money.

Spiritual formation, by discipleship and for discipleship, is now the place where we imagine and articulate our vision of justice, peace, and life. This must not be an attempted escape into an individualistic and other-worldly piety. The means and goal of our discipleship is the embodiment of the living Word of God in human and ecological community. It must be thoroughly practical and this-worldly to be effective. Together, we must learn how to live in this world in love, satisfaction, and service.

As an example of what this might look like, I turn to my Land. Known among Indigenous Peoples as Turtle Island, you are used to it being called North America. There, a growing number of Indigenous People have made discipleship the goal and means of leadership development. Mostly but not exclusively Anglican, this commitment is called Gospel Based Discipleship. Engaging the Gospel in prayerful gathering is the focal practice. It is recommended as a daily practice for everyone, with weekly gatherings of two or three together expected for those committed to leadership or leadership development. A Gospel appointed for the day is read three times at the beginning of every gathering. This happens, whatever the purpose of the gathering, whether for prayer, Eucharist, business, education, or leadership formation. With each reading, there is time for discussion, applying the Gospel to the life situation of the group. The Gospel provides the structure and texture of the gathering. Very often, we find the Gospel providentially relates to the agenda and focus of the gathering.

The Gospel is placed in the centre of "the sacred circle," which is the gathering of two or three in the Name and promised presence of Jesus, as proclaimed in Matthew 18:20. The circle is sacred, by the presence of Jesus and the acknowledged presence of God in the culture and history of the people. This affirmation is a pointed contrast to colonialism's assessment of Indigenous life. The missions sought to replicate the institutions of Western churches in Indigenous communities. In many cases, stating openly the intention to entirely displace Indigenous culture and lifeways.

Gospel Based Discipleship is a serious attempt to provide Gospel formation in an Indigenous context. This takes place in a challenging environment. As is found around the world, the dispossession of Indigenous People from the Land in Turtle Island is accelerated by climate injustice, continuing extreme poverty, and a new type of colonialism associated with the despotic reach of the culture of money. It seeks to be a prophetic alternative to the culture of money, living Gospel values in the non-market society of Indigenous cultural life. We pray that it is a part of a larger global movement of the Spirit.