



Connections After the Fall of the Wall

A History of Cooperation
between Methodist-related
Theological Schools in Europe
since 1989

by Michael Nausner

MTSE

Methodist-related
Theological Schools in Europe



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Methodist Global Education Fund for
Leadership Development – Europe
(MGEFLD-Europe)

Subdivision of
General Board of Higher Education
and Ministry of The United Methodist Church
(GBHEM)

MTSE

Methodist-related
Theological Schools in Europe



History and Statement of Purpose 2017

Connections

After the Fall of the Wall

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United Methodist Theological Schools in Europe (UMTSE)

The history of UMTSE started with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the following opening of the Iron Curtain in the fall of 1989. NATO and the Warsaw Pact changed in such a way that the politics of the Cold War came to an end. Europeans at that point increasingly experienced the forty years of division and its economic and political consequences as unbearable. Protest movements and flight emerged in Eastern Europe. They eventually led to an opening of the borders and a peaceful transition in the Eastern countries toward free and democratic societies. A group from Reutlingen School of Theology (Western Germany) went for a regular visit to the Theological Seminary Bad Klosterlausnitz (Eastern Germany) just a month after the fall of the Wall. They could experience the first peoples' gathering – a roundtable as it was created in many places – with the goal to achieve a reform of the political system in the region.

Europe's Division in East and West

After the end of the Second World War, Germany lost its territories east of the rivers Oder and Neiße. Germany and Austria were divided among the four allied countries – France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States of America. By 1949 two German states were created. The three western zones became the Federal Republic of Germany. The Soviet zones became the German Democratic Republic. As a neutral state, Austria regained its unity and independence in 1955, and it has played an important role for East-West relations. In Central and Eastern Europe, in as much as it was under Soviet rule, freedom of religion was curtailed, and the work of Christian churches was restrained or even forbidden. The congregations in this region of what later would be The United Methodist Church were severely weakened through war casualties, deportations, incarcerations of members and leaders. Many had fled to Western

Europe or the United States of America. In many parts of the Soviet Union church work was forbidden altogether.

There were no Methodist theological seminaries or schools in the countries of the Warsaw Pact any more. Annual Conferences – as far as they still existed – had to train their ministers in special programs through cooperation with other churches or with state owned universities. They could not evade the indoctrination of the communist regimes and the pressure that was exercised upon Christians and churches.

Until 1951 German-speaking candidates for ordained ministry from Switzerland, Austria, Germany, and other central European countries did their training either in Frankfurt (Methodist Church) or Reutlingen (Evangelical United Brethren). Both cities were situated in Western Europe. Therefore, the authorities of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1951 prohibited the return of students and their employment in the GDR. In 1952, the East German Annual Conference of the Methodist Church founded its own theological seminary, where also students from the Evangelical United Brethren were welcome to study: The Methodist **Theological Seminary Bad Klosterlausnitz** came into being.

However, the relations between the three seminaries, its teachers, and students in the two German states never broke down entirely. Not even the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961) and the heavily guarded border between the European states in the East and the West could entirely stop the contacts. Until 1970 East and West Germany belonged to one Central Conference with one bishop, Dr. Friedrich Wunderlich. Only after the creation of The United Methodist Church, the Annual Conference in the GDR was forced to create its own Central Conference with a bishop of its own.

Worldwide Connections Among Methodist Churches

One cannot understand the emergence of UMTSE (and later MTSE) without looking at the lasting relations and the new structures of the fellowship of Methodist churches in Europe – including the British one. The four Central Conferences – Northern Europe, Central and Southern Europe, German Democratic Republic, and Federal Republic of Germany – created the **European Council of (United) Methodist Churches** and its branches **European Methodist Youth Council** and **Methodist Theological**

Commission. These were important venues of encounter also between professors and students at the Methodist theological seminaries. The general agencies of The United Methodist Church (GBHEM, GBGM) together with British Methodist agencies have supported this cooperation and also sent delegates to participate at meetings.

The engine of the cooperation between the Theological Seminaries in Western Europe (Gothenburg/Sweden, Bergen/Norway, Reutlingen/Germany – after the foundation of The United Methodist Church, Reutlingen had become the only Methodist seminary in Western Germany) were the regular meetings of the professors. Occasionally even professors from Bad Klosterlausnitz could participate at the meetings in Reutlingen or Gothenburg. In that way, an authentic exchange of information between East and West became possible.

Regular mutual visits between students and professors at Reutlingen School of Theology and **Wesley College in Bristol** were conducted. Of course, the **Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies** which took place every fifth year, was an important venue for exchange for professors from various Methodist traditions. A rich program with excellent keynote speakers and various workshops on Methodist and ecumenical theology is offered at these institutes, and due to economic support representatives from seminaries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America could participate as well. Members from the “communist” countries only occasionally could come before the fall of the Wall and the emergence of new seminaries in the Eastern countries.

In 1986, the seminaries in Washington DC and Bergen/Norway (Dean Gerald Mustard) started a joint D.Min. program. The participating ministers were joined in intercontinental pairs, so they could get to know each other's working environment. Even the congregations had an advisory function in the project. The course ended with a written thesis and - if it was successful - with the bestowal of a D.Min. degree at **Wesley Theological Seminary**. The first course ended in 1989. After a gathering of professors in Reutlingen, the seminaries in Gothenburg and Reutlingen joined the project. There was a growing awareness that the changed cultural conditions also needed strengthened intercontinental cooperation. Twice the gatherings in Reutlingen were extended to include visits to Prague, which also included participants from former Soviet countries (Ukraine, Russia, Baltic States). The costs were carried by United Methodist general agencies.

Also in the 1980s two series of events were started in Austria under the leadership of superintendent Helmut Nausner and in cooperation with the afore mentioned general agencies. They were instrumental for the cooperation between existing theological seminaries and the foundation of new theological seminaries. The faith conferences (*Glaubenskonferenzen*) were supported by GBGM and the international consultations by GBHEM.

The **faith conferences** began in 1984 and continued in 1988, 1992, and 1997. They drew people from all European Central Conferences of the UMC. Speakers came from the US and already in 1984 from both Eastern and Western Europe. The participation of several UMC bishops, ecumenical guests and politicians contributed to a good networking between decision-makers and resulted in quite some attention on part of the media. Above all participants from the communist countries (German Democratic Republic, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary) reacted positively. They could travel to their non-communist neighboring countries. That people from differing societal, political, and economic environments got to know each other led to an increased awareness and willingness to take responsibility in church and society.

In 1991, amidst dramatically changing political and social conditions in Europe, the **international consultations** of the UMC began to gather in Vienna. The Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe hosted the consultations. This was the Central Conference that throughout the Cold War had united conferences from both sides of the Iron Curtain. GBHEM and GBGM supported the effort, which was led by Bishop Heinrich Bolleter (Zurich) and superintendent Helmut Nausner (Vienna). Participation was limited, but it included high-ranking representatives such as diplomats, politicians, and ecumenical and Methodist church leaders. At this first consultation in May of 1991 three observations were made: 1) The breakdown of communist regimes has opened new possibilities for cooperation that need to be discovered and practiced. 2) At the same time, old tendencies toward nationalism and an increase of intolerance towards foreigners and people of others faiths can be seen. In addition, churches try to regain "old privileges". 3) In Europe, one does not need to start from scratch, since within the UMC reliable structures have developed, which can be used in the spirit of connectionalism. – The question was asked: "What can be done to strengthen theological education to prepare students for this new mission situation?" The spirit of the

consultation was characterized by mutual interest in the concrete situations in the various contexts and a willingness to mutual support. That spirit lasted also throughout the following four consultations until 2006, and several projects arose out of them.

The Beginning of United Methodist Theological Schools in Europe (UMTSE)

A first gathering of the leaders of the European Methodist seminaries took place in the new **Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary in Tallinn/ Estonia in 1994**. It had shortly before started its work in one of the few facilities that had remained in the church's ownership during the Soviet regime. The hopeful atmosphere among teachers and students alike let all participants forget the remaining obstacles. The first steps had been taken and the hope for a continuation and development was tangible.

The seminaries in **Tallinn** and **Moscow** started with very limited space and resources. But with the support of the worldwide church they soon had better facilities at their disposal. The Baltic Mission Center in Tallinn was built as a new construction, and in Moscow a building was purchased that could house the seminary as well as the bishop's office and a Korean congregation.

The study program in **Waiern** and **Graz/Austria** had already started in 1986. It was geared toward students from the Balkans in coordination with a Lutheran course for diaconal ministries. The study program started with one year of language studies in Graz and ended with a theological training program and a qualification in diaconal ministry. The program was directed by Wilfried Nausner, minister in Graz, and Helmut Nausner, district superintendent for Austria.

Due to the linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe a greater number of seminaries and study programs came into being. At the same time the awareness of belonging to a larger Methodist connection grew and the desire to strengthen ties on a personal and institutional level.

The foundational meeting of **United Methodist Theological Schools in Europe (UMTSE)** happened in conjunction with an international consultation in Vienna in 1999. Dr. Patrick Streiff, then the leader of the

French-speaking study program in Lausanne/Switzerland, formulated the following press release on May 1, 1999:

The eight deans and directors of the Theological Schools of The United Methodist Church in Europe have established an Association of "United Methodist Theological Schools in Europe" (UMTSE) at their 4th meeting in Vienna, in April 1999.

The meeting in Vienna was linked to a gathering with the deans and presidents of the 13 UMC Theological Schools in the United States (AUMTS). On their trip to Europe, the latter had visited the Theological Schools in Central and Eastern Europe. Most of these schools have only started in recent years. The eight European institutions saw the need for a stronger link among them. The newly established association of UMTSE will meet this need. It will establish cooperation and compatibility of curricula among the European Schools, encourage exchanges of professors and students and help to improve theological education. It will apply for official relations with the association of the 13 US schools (AUMTS) and with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the UMC (GBHEM)... Manfred Marquardt (Reutlingen) was elected president of UMTSE and Roar Fotland secretary.

On April 30, 1999, there were eight seminaries among the founding members of UMTSE. The three theological seminaries that already existed before the fall of the Wall – Reutlingen (MEC since 1858 and EUB since 1877), Gothenburg (since 1926), Bergen (since the 1970s) – two seminaries that came into being because of regional needs in the 1980s – Lausanne/Switzerland (Centre Méthodiste de Formation Théologique, 1988) and Graz & Waiern/Austria (1986) – and the three additional seminaries in the former socialist countries – Warsaw/Poland (Jan Laski Theological Seminary), Tallinn/Estonia (Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary, 1994), and Moscow/Russia (United Methodist Theological Seminary in Moscow, 1995)

The intended **exchange of students** only happened in rare cases. An **exchange of professors** had consisted mainly in the form of block seminars at the seminaries and occasions of continuing education for ministers in Central and Eastern European countries. Most of the guest professors had come from the United States of America, where also the economic

support for the Eastern European institutions came from. Also, Dean Manfred Marquardt from Reutlingen Theological Seminary visited the seminaries in Tallinn, Moscow and Gothenburg and later the programs in Graz/Waiern, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary where he gave guest lectures.

The deans of the seminaries in Gothenburg (Ireblad), Reutlingen (Marquardt), and Warsaw (Puslecki) intended to connect UMTSE to the **Association of United Methodist Theological Schools (AUMTS)** in the United States of America. An attempt to make this happen in Cleveland, at General Conference in Cleveland, Ohio, USA in 2000 met with interest. But the many differences between the European and the American seminaries prevented integration of the European seminaries into AUMTS.

However, the support of the Eastern European seminaries in terms of finances and human resources through the general agencies remained, and a new paragraph (§ 1427) was added to the UMC "Book of Discipline", in which the theological seminaries from the UMC Central Conferences now are listed alongside the 13 theological seminaries in the United States of America.

UMTSE/MTSE Meetings since 2000

The **second UMTSE meeting** was scheduled for August 2000 in **Warsaw/Poland**. Members from the Czech and Slovak Republics were included. The four-day meeting consisted of mutual information about the various institutions. The eleven representatives (Cervenák/Prague, Dietze/Moscow, Fotland/Bergen, Ireblad/Gothenburg, Kleszczynski/Warsaw, Marquardt/Reutlingen, W. Nausner/Graz & Waiern, Norak/Tallinn, Prochazka/Banska Bystrica, Puslecki/Warsaw, Streiff/Lausanne) formulated expectations regarding the cooperation. Representatives from AUMTS were Norman Dewire, and from GBHEM Mary Ann Moman and Robert Kohler.

Several opportunities for networking and cooperation were planned: a two-week program for American students to visit a European seminary, and for European students to visit Wesley Theological Seminary. Above all a second D.Min. program to start in 2002 was decided. In addition, participation in the following international Methodist gatherings was encouraged: IAMSCU (International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges, and Universities) Conference in Belfast 2001, the World Meth-

odist Conference in Brighton 2001, the Theological Conference in Zurich 2002 (a follow-up of the consultations in Vienna), the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies 2002, and the Historical Conference in Tallinn 2004.

The participants exchanged theological ideas and talked about opportunities for cooperation in a Europe where cultures grew closer to each other; but also on the last day visited the concentration camp in Auschwitz and the city of Cracow. The meeting was closed with a worship service.

The **third UMTSE meeting** took place in February 2002 in **Liebfrauenberg** in Alsace/France. The topic was "Theology on the Agenda of the Church". Bishop Bolleter, who had closely followed the emergence of UMTSE, gave an important key note address. Jörg Barthel and Christof Voigt presented reflections on the relation between faith and reason. The rector of the deaconesses' house in Basle, Josua Buchmüller, shared reflections from his experience with the final discussion round dedicated to the significance of theology for the ministry. Manfred Marquardt was confirmed as president for an additional two years, and Roar Fotland as secretary. Manfred Marquardt was one of the leading persons in developing the UMTSE cooperation. He retired as dean in Reutlingen in 2001. Jørgen Thaarup (Gothenburg) was elected to serve as president from 2004 with Andrus Norak (Tallinn) as secretary. The meeting was concluded with a worship service in the Zion United Methodist Church in Strasbourg and streichen a sightseeing tour through the city.

The **fourth UMTSE meeting** took place in 2004 in Tallinn/Estonia under the new leadership of Jørgen Thaarup and Andrus Norak (host). Ten leaders from the European seminaries were present as well as representatives from AUMTS and GBHEM. At this meeting the idea of starting "theological education by extension" was presented by Patrick Streiff for the first time. A second emphasis of the meeting was to discuss the significance of the Social Principles under the leadership of Neil Christie from the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS).

Planning a Europe wide Theological E-Learning Program (Methodist E-Academy)

The **fifth UMTSE meeting** occurred in Reutlingen/Germany in 2006. It was the biggest meeting to date. For the first time, not only deans, but

also professors from the different seminaries were invited to join. Altogether 30 persons gathered, 20 deans and professors, the new (Patrick Streiff) and the old (Heinrich Bolleter) bishops of the Central and Southern European Central Conference, six representatives from the general agencies of the UMC, and for the first time a representative from the British Methodist Church (Colin Ride). – Also, the program was enlarged to include two theological keynote lectures in addition to the business meeting. Roar Fotland presented his dissertation *Christology in Context*. Michael Nausner presented his dissertation *A Theological Boundary Hermeneutics*. Both dissertations were defended in 2005. In addition, the second joint M.Div. program between Wesley Theological Seminary, the Methodist Seminary in Gothenburg/Sweden, and Reutlingen Theological Seminary/Germany was evaluated. A third joint program was announced for the years ahead.

A heated discussion emerged regarding the funding of the several small Methodist seminaries in Europe. The 2004 General Conference decided a radical cut in funding, and especially the seminaries in Eastern Europe (Moscow, Tallinn, Warsaw) had to restructure their work. A restructuring of the UMC Global Education Fund was envisioned with the goal of more reliable funding for theological education in Europe. For the could not time an in-depth discussion was conducted regarding the possibilities of e-learning for the many small churches in Eastern Europe that could not afford to develop their own theological education. Minnis Ridenour was present to present plans for fundraising for a “virtual platform” for theological training. Robert Kohler (GBHEM) informed on behalf of the worldwide UMC about the plans to raise funds for theological education in the Central Conferences. He expressed his support for an e-learning program that could link the efforts of theological education in Eastern and Western Europe. The coordinating center of the e-learning effort was planned to be the office of the new bishop in Zurich, Patrick Streiff. The plan was supported by the participants of the meeting. Participants were encouraged to join the Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies in August 2007.

The **sixth UMTSE meeting** was an extraordinary one and took place in Reutlingen/Germany again in February 2007. Tobias Dietze (Moscow) replaced Andrus Norak as secretary at this meeting. It had strong representations from the UMC general agencies as well as from European United Methodist seminaries. Three of the four European bishops (Streiff,

Växby, Wenner) were present. 20 participants were gathered. For the first time, Mark Abbot from the United Evangelical Seminary in Madrid/ Spain joined UMTSE. The attempt to involve representatives from the British theological seminaries and the general church was not successful (yet). The major items to be discussed at this meeting were related to the “virtual platform” for e-learning, choice of the software, venue for the on-site block-seminars, budget, curriculum, accreditation of the course etc. In addition to these general discussions about the planned e-learning platform, a group of an additional 10 professors from various seminaries stayed a day longer to discuss the content of courses in Methodism to be taught via the virtual platform.

In an introductory address, bishop Streiff described the challenge to provide quality Methodist theological education in Central Conferenc-es where many languages are spoken and the churches are small. The e-learning project he envisioned would run in two languages (English and German), which would help the participating students to communicate beyond their native context. Bishop Streiff introduced the South African theologian David N. Field, who had moved to Switzerland. Field had done some preparatory work in terms of software and curriculum. In first introduction he also highlighted the benefit the e-learning courses would bring to the Methodist connexion. The e-learning program is not designed to replace but to substitute regional forms of training. For both the English and the German version of the course European accreditation in accordance with the Bologna rules was formulated as a goal. David N. Field provided a technical introduction course for those interested. The question whether or not to run a fourth joint D.Min. program with Wesley Theological Seminary was discussed. Dean Holger Eschmann committed to do some research in terms of recruitment, funding, and time frame.

Participants were encouraged to advertise and join the European Methodist Festival in Bratislava in August 2008.

The **seventh UMTSE meeting** came together in Moscow in February 2008. It gathered 11 participants from European seminaries and general agencies. Among them were two representatives from GBHEM (Kohler, Moman) and Dean Maxine Beach (Drew Theological School). For the first time the UMTSE meeting now took place in conjunction with a meeting of the board of the e-learning program. At this meeting, it was reported



Methodist E-Academy Block Seminar Rome 2017

that an agreement was reached among the United Methodist Seminary in Oslo, Reutlingen School of Theology, and Wesley Theological Seminary to run one more D.Min. program to start in 2009. Five European candidates were welcome to join the program. Holger Eschmann was chosen to be the European coordinator of the program. The name of the e-learning platform was agreed to be **Methodist E-Academy**. From the beginning this effort was not only supported by GBHEM, but also by GBGM in the form of

scholarships for students from Eastern Europe. The "missional" value of this training program was seen and acknowledged in this way.

Mariann Moman reported from educational networks from other continents and also on the progress in developing a global fund for Methodist education.

Several meetings were advertised: Theology Week on "Christian Formation" at Reutlingen School of Theology in October 2008; the Meeting of the European Historical Society in Budapest in August 2010; the 13th Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies at Christ Church College in Oxford in August 2012 (due to the Olympic Games it materialized first in August 2013).

The new officers for the quadrennium 2008-2012 were elected: Jörg Barthel/Reutlingen (president) and Sergei Nikolaev/Moscow (secretary)

Foundation of MTSE

The **eighth UMTSE meeting** was convened in Oslo/Norway in February 2010. It took place under the leadership of Jörg Barthel in freezing temperatures with significant amounts of snow. Even though only slightly more than ten persons participated, this meeting showed the first fruits of the concrete cooperation of the E-Academy. It was the starting point of a continuous participation of British Methodist professors (in this

case Angela Shier-Jones) and representatives from the British Methodist Church. For the first time a representative from the newly founded Stockholm School of Theology (Baptists, Mission Covenant Church, Methodists) participated in a meeting (Dean Owe Kennerberg). The E-Academy had its steering committee and its board meeting, and the UMTSE representatives took the important step to change the name of the network to mirror the actual reality of the cooperation, i.e. that several Methodist-related institutions and churches were involved. The new name **Methodist-related Theological Schools in Europe (MTSE)** was approved, and an **Exchange Agreement (later: Statement of Purpose)** was drafted (see Appendix).

The ninth **MTSE meeting** met again under the leadership of Jörg Barthel in Reutlingen in February 2012 and gathered about twenty-five representatives. The network seemed to stabilize, and the E-Academy was an integral part of the meetings. For the first time the British Methodists sent a professor (Helen Cameron/Queens Foundation, Birmingham) and a representative of the teaching network of the church (Sion Rhys Evans) to actively play a role in the formation of MTSE. The US presence was strong again with representatives from AUMTS (Jay Rundell, Myron McCoy) and GBHEM (Rena Yocom) as well as one of the fundraisers for the E-Academy (Minnis Ridenour). For the first time the Czech teaching network was represented in the person of Ivana Prochazkova. Also for the first time the Italian Waldensians were present. A keynote presentation was given by a member of the Waldensian Faculty in Rome, professor Fulvio Ferrario, who talked about the role of prayer in and for theology.

After the reports from the various seminaries, a significant part of the conversations circled around the question of sustainable theological education around the globe and how the finances for such sustainability should be secured. The plan to start a Global Fund for Methodist Education beginning with the 2012 General Conference was presented. The goal of this fund is to provide support for Methodist Global Education according to the principle of *shared vision, shared responsibility, and shared cost*.

Two documents served as background material for a wider conversation on theological education: the report from the Episcopal Task Force on Education "A Wesleyan Vision for Theological Education and Leadership Formation for the 21st Century," and the recent document on theological formation of the CPCE "Training for Ordained Ministry in the Com-

munity of Protestant Churches in Europe". Both documents seemed to many of the gathered participants not to sufficiently reflect on the vast variety of circumstances under which theological training is undertaken in the different countries in Europe. Also, an engaged discussion around the necessary component of spirituality in the training for ordained ministry ensued. On the last day of the meeting an extended discussion was conducted on the mission statement/statement of purpose of MTSE. A drafting group for presenting a revised version of this statement was installed.

MGEFLD-Europe Office Opens

In 2013, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) started a small office for Europe as an effort to decentralize the work of the agency and to take decisions on support of projects aimed at Methodist Global Education closer to the proposed projects. The leader of the office is Michael Nausner/Reutlingen, the administrative coordinator Maria Khristina Manuelli/Reutlingen. One of the main venues through which MGEFLD-Europe channels funds is MTSE. Soon after the inception of the office, Maria Khristina Manuelli created a webpage for MGEFLD-Europe² to which also all MTSE institutions are linked.³

Extending the Network and Intensifying the Theological Conversation

The **tenth MTSE meeting** took place in February 2014 in the Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary in Tallinn/Estonia. Freezing temperatures again. In absence of MTSE president Jörg Barthel, Michael Nausner from Reutlingen School of Theology presided. This time general faculty was invited to the meeting again, and all in all 23 participants attended. The British Methodists had by now become a part of the network for real (a dean and a professor from the Queens Foundation, and a representative from the teaching network in London), and the UMC general agencies were represented with the new representative Amos Nascimento in addition to the long serving Rena Yocom. A widening of the circle of

¹ www.gbhem.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/PUB_WESLEYANVISIONTHEOEDUCATION.PDF

² <http://mgefild.wixsite.com/mgefild-europe>

³ <http://mgefild.wixsite.com/mgefild-europe/mtse>

attendants consisted in the participation of the dean of Edgehill College in Belfast/Ireland, Richard Clutterbuck. And not least the Nazarene community was represented for the first time in the person of Geordan Hammond from the Nazarene Theological College in Manchester/UK. The meeting opened with a devotion led by Bishop Alsted, bishop of The United Methodist Church in Northern Europe.



MTSE Participants in Tallinn 2014

This meeting had as an extra component a whole day called *Study and Reflection Day*. It started with two lectures. Meeli Tankler from The Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary/Tallinn presented findings from her field study under the title *Ministry Needs of The United Methodist Church in the Baltic Countries*. Helen Cameron from Queens Foundation/Birmingham talked on the topic *Being Formed for Ordained Ministry in the British Methodist Church: An Exploration of Nature and Grace*. The afternoon consisted of discussions in working groups around topics such as accreditation, adjusting structures due to contextual changes, concrete forms of cooperation and the themes of the two keynote speakers. The outcome of the Study and Reflection Day were several recommendations consisting of a strong encouragement to faculty and student exchange, to develop modes of coordinated research, to start a Wesley research group, and to develop and expand MTSE's online presence. One group was formed to work with online questions, and one to prepare the next MTSE meeting that should have a strong theological component to it. The meeting ended with the election of two new officers: Helen Cameron (Queens Foundation) as president of MTSE, and David N. Field (E-Academy) as MTSE secretary. The election of this leadership showed that MTSE had fully embraced the wider Methodist/Wesleyan family (the British Methodist Church is not part of The United Methodist Church) and that the E-Academy had become an organic part of the MTSE network.

Due to Helen Cameron's election as assistant general secretary of the British Methodist Annual Conference, she was not able to fulfill her role

as president of MTSE and asked in 2015 to accept Sam McBratney as interim MSTE president until the next ordinary business meeting in 2016.

The **Eleventh MTSE meeting** in February 2016 was the first meeting in the United Kingdom. It took place in Methodist Hall, Coventry. The format



MTSE Meeting in Coventry, February 2016

this time was a new one. The compact one-day business meeting of the MTSE leaders was followed by a three-day theological conference. During the business meeting, again the issue of state accreditation was discussed as a major strain on the institutional life of several institutions in the network, above all in Estonia, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom. The keynote presenter, Üllas Tankler, spoke on behalf of GBGM on his vision of an *Institute for Multicultural Ministry*. It envisions

a sustained training program for ministers in increasingly intercultural contexts all over Europe. The meeting ended with the affirmation of a new version of the *Statement of Purpose* and the election of an extended leadership team: Sam McBratney from Queens Foundation/Birmingham was elected president, Michael Nausner from Reutlingen School of Theology/Reutlingen was elected vice-president, and Meeli Tankler from Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary/Tallinn was elected secretary.

Coventry 2016 – Making Connections for Reconciliation

A New Model – Theological Conferences with Student Participation

The first MTSE Theological Conference was a wonderful outcome of a vision that started to take form before and around the time MTSE met in Tallinn in early 2014. The vision was to enlarge the MTSE meetings and to grapple with serious theological-ethical questions in addition to the traditional “business meetings”. This vision came into fruition in a convincing way during this theological conference that had been prepared with a lot of effort by an international planning team meeting regularly via “Skype”. So MTSE has evolved into a lively network of theological institutions in

the wider Wesleyan-Methodist connection providing fellowship and “food for thought” for a growing constituency.

The first concrete step toward the conference was taken during Sam McBratney's visit to Reutlingen School of Theology in May 2015. Thereafter the planning team included David N. Field (E-Academy), Maria Khristina Manuelli (Reutlingen), Sam McBratney (Birmingham), Michael Nausner (Reutlingen), Sergei Nikolaev (Moscow), and Donna Pryor (Birmingham). The idea was to draw together representatives from Methodist-related schools of theology all over Europe and let them be involved in a lively spiritual and theological exchange around a topic of general interest. For the first time an active student involvement was planned and organized. Support was provided from the Methodist Church in Great Britain and the Chaplaincy Program of the UMC General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM).

The result was a multi-faceted theological conference on the topic of *Making Connections for Reconciliation* that gathered more than one hundred participants from over a dozen countries, among them thirty students.

Reutlingen School of Theology prepared for the conference by offering an elective course for students interested to participate. John de Gruchy's book *Reconciliation* served as preparatory reading. The students from Reutlingen started on February 3 with a study visit to Coventry Cathedral. It gave them the chance to see and experience the results of the reconciliation process initiated by Provost Howard soon after the bombing of Coventry by the German Luftwaffe in 1940. In addition to a detailed tour through the bombed and the new cathedral, they had the chance to be in conversation with the staff of the reconciliation center at St. Michael's House. The day was concluded with a visit to Queen's Foundation where the Reutlingen students took part in a class and had table fellowship with the students.

The student conference on February 4 (attended by roughly thirty students and with presentations from over a dozen students from the Congo, England, Germany, Russia, Switzerland, and Zimbabwe) was organized largely by Maria Khristina Manuelli (Administrative Coordinator of the Methodist Global Education Fund for Leadership Development-Europe,



Participants in the student conference during the MTSE meeting in Coventry in February 2016.

based in Reutlingen) and gave all students the chance to share their thoughts on reconciliation and to listen to other approaches. The presence of Jane Craske (Queen's) and Wesley Ariarajah (Geneva) as mentors was a very valuable contribution to the quality of the conference.

To have the MTSE business meeting, that took place simultaneously with the student conference for the first time not hosted by a United Meth-

odist seminary, symbolized an important step of the network towards a wider approach. This widening of the scope could already be seen in the above-mentioned election of Sam McBratney (Methodist Church in Great Britain) as new president of MTSE for the period starting in 2016.



Student Conference at Coventry

The MTSE Theological Conference *Making Connections for Reconciliation* was open to the public and lasted from February 5 to 7. A number of thought-provoking and challenging presentations on reconciliation came from various perspectives and cultural and religious contexts. Three examples: The live encounter between Jimmy Dube (from the Ndebele tribe) and Mapfeka Kudakwashe Tsaurayi (from the Shona tribe) honestly and publicly conversing about the existing grievances in

today's Zimbabwe was one of the most powerful moments at the conference, maybe with a small step toward real healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. Richard Benda from Rwanda reminded the participants that reconciliation presupposes a recognition of existing hegemonies, and he – as a Christian – shared the vision of the Mufti of Rwanda and his proposal of a “jihad of reconciliation” (against ignorance between Hutu and Tutsi). Indeed, it is an act of reconciliation to recognize that one can learn

from the religiously other. Benda also highlighted resistance and lament as necessary parts of the process of reconciliation. Finally, Wesley Ariarajah in his lecture lamented that reconciliation in the church often is limited to the private sphere, whereas it needs to be seen as a process that God initiates with all of creation and calls humanity to participate in. Based on this, he suggested an alternative understanding of all of mission: mission as participating in God's work of reconciliation rather than trying to make people to become like ourselves. Ariarajah brought a most challenging message for many when he suggested for Christians not to focus too much on the "Great Commandment" in Matthew 28:18ff (which so often has led to conflict) and instead to look at texts such as 2 Cor 5:17-19 (let yourselves be reconciled!) as key texts for mission.

The sermon in the final worship at Methodist Hall in Coventry by Jimmy Dube, secretary of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, pulled all worshippers into the struggle for justice, healing, and reconciliation of the Methodists in Zimbabwe.

Rome 2017 – Being the Church in the 21st Century

The success of the theological conference in Coventry 2016 inspired the MSTE leadership to plan for a quick follow-up with involvement of students. A planning committee (David N. Field/E-Academy, Geordan Hammond/Manchester; Maria Khristina Manuelli/Reutlingen, Sam McBratney/Birmingham, Amos Nascimento/Nashville, Michael Nausner/Reutlingen, Dona Pryor/Birmingham, Meeli Tankler/Tallinn, Janet Un-



Theological MTSE Conference at Casa Valdese, Rome in February 2017

sworth/Belfast) took up work soon after the Coventry conference ended. This conference was smaller, but the discussions were good and intense. More than thirty participants gathered. It took place at Casa Valdese in Rome February 17-19, 2017. The theological conference started with a thorough discussion of various documents on the divisive topic of the sexual diversity in the church. In two parallel sessions ten students from six countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, United States)

discussed mission related issues for the 21st century under the leadership of Tina Manuelli. The main day of the conference saw three keynote speakers and a final panel discussion in the evening.

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner in her presentation referred to the new ecclesiology document of The United Methodist Church *Wonder, Love, and Praise* with its three emphases that God's love is for all, transforms our lives, and creates community. She also passionately made the case for a culturally diverse church and gave examples of such lived diversity from three of the United Methodist Churches in Germany. Finally, she suggested boldly that the church of the 21st century needs to expand its

fellowship beyond the boundaries of Christianity.



Participating students at the MTSE conference in Rome, February 2017.

The Nazarene theologian Giovanni Cereda from Sicily gave a rich presentation on the history of Protestantism in Italy and identified as a major challenge to the church not so much secularization or pluralism, but the *inner fragmentation* of Protestant Christianity. There is a rift between the historic Protestant churches and the Evangelicals (including the Charismatic-Pentecostal versions of Protestantism). Mr:

Cereda criticized political Christianity and suggested a stronger emphasis on Biblical and Trinitarian roots of Protestantism as a strategy for the 21st century.

Finally, Tim McQuiban let the participants know what he thought twenty years ago about viable ways forward for the church in the 21st century. An overall emphasis of his presentation was the church's vocation to be a *church for all*. After sketching the advent of Methodism to Italy in the time of the *risorgimento* in the 19th century, he encouraged his listeners based on his personal faith experience (Line in a Wesley hymn: "Thou, oh Christ,

art all in all...”) to be a church for all, embracing cultural and sexual diversity. And as vehicle for a truly inclusive church, he suggested among other things to rediscover the inclusive pathos in *Wesleyan hymns* and in Methodism’s *connectional ecclesiology*.

The conference ended with a worship service in the English-speaking Methodist Church at Ponte Sant’Angelo led by Tim McQuiban and with a sermon on holiness by Sam McBratney. Even this conference saw a strong presence (Amos Nascimento, Shannon Conklin-Miller, and Matt Charlton) and a strong support from GBHEM.

Michael Nausner
March 2017⁴

⁴ I am deeply indebted to Manfred Marquardt (pages 4-10) and Jørgen Thaarup (minutes from various meetings up to 2008 etc.) for the detailed material on the history of UMTSE they provided me with. Thank you, not least, to Matthew Laferty for his proof reading!

MTSE Statement of Purpose and Practice (2016)

- I. MTSE is a platform of institutions and organizations of higher theological education from several Methodist, Wesleyan & Uniting traditions in Europe.

2. GENERAL PURPOSE:

In times of continuous change in the ecclesial and educational landscape of Europe, an increased networking between the institutions of MTSE in the spirit of the Wesleyan connection is of vital interest for a theologically and culturally sensitive training for global Wesleyan leadership. It promotes theological education in a Wesleyan spirit. Such education integrates academic rigor, reflective praxis and spiritual formation. It situates theology in the life of the church; it draws from the heritage of the Methodist, Wesleyan & Uniting traditions; it is enriched by ecumenical dialogue, and it directs theology toward the mission of the church in our diverse contexts. The training of future leaders is seen by MTSE as a common task and therefore implies mutual support between the different institutions.

3. MODE OF OPERATION:

- a. The participating institutions and organizations are committed to continuous cooperation with each other. This includes:
 - I. exchange of information,
 - II. exchange of students and teachers,
 - III. development of joint programs,
 - IV. sharing of resources,
 - V. exploration of new methods of cooperation made available through the development of computer technology.
 - VI. enhanced cooperation with similar regional bodies in other continents and with regional and international bodies

In addition, MTSE shall aim to cooperate with the organization of a theological conference or forum for faculty, students and others at least once every two years.

- b. Heads of the institutions and/or designated representatives from the institutions/organizations shall meet every second year hosted by one of the institutions in order to confer together and plan for continuous cooperation. This shall be known as the MTSE Forum Meeting.
- c. Officers shall be elected by the forum to serve MTSE for a two-year period: These officers shall include:
 - I. President
 - II. Vice-President
 - III. Secretary

These officers, with up to four other representatives, shall constitute the MTSE Coordinating Group, who shall convene regular meetings to initiate and coordinate communication and cooperation, and plan future conferences and meetings. To facilitate this, at least two members of the Coordinating Group shall be representatives of any future host institution.

- d. Other Task Groups may be established by the MTSE Forum or Coordinating Group to take forward specific areas of work.
- e. Funding for the activities of MTSE has to be organised by the participating institutions/organisations.

4. PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS:

- a. **CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATION:** All Wesleyan, Methodist-related and Uniting institutions of higher theological education are encouraged to participate in MTSE. Individual institutions may approach the President or Coordinating Group at any time to request membership. The institution may be granted interim membership to be confirmed at the next full meeting of the MTSE Forum. Institutions which agree to this statement and show a willingness to support the work of MTSE will be invited to join.

b. Current participating members are:

- Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary – Tallinn, Estonia Cliff College
- DMLN of the British Methodist Church
- Department of Theology and Religious Education, Banská Bystrica, Slovak Republic
- Edgehill Theological College, Belfast
- The European Nazarene College – Büsingen, Germany et al
- Institute of Church Education – Czech Republic
- Jan Laski Higher Theological Seminary – Warsaw, Poland
- Methodist Church of Portugal
- Methodist E-Academy
- Nazarene Theological College – Manchester, UK
- The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, UK
- Reutlingen School of Theology – Reutlingen, Germany
- Russia United Methodist Theological Seminary – Moscow, Russia
- Stockholm School of Theology – Stockholm, Sweden
- United Evangelical School of Theology (SEUT) – Madrid, Spain
- United Methodist Theological Seminary – Oslo, Norway
- Waldensian Faculty – Rome, Italy

Affiliated institutions:

- Association of United Methodist Theological Seminaries (AUMTS)
- General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM)
- General Board of Higher Education and Ministries (GBHEM)
- International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (IAMSCU)

MTSE is an affiliate member of the European Methodist Council

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