

INTERNATIONAL BRETHERN CONFERENCES ON MISSION (IBCM)

SUMMARY REPORT BY THE CONFERENCE ORGANISERS ON THE IBCM5 CONFERENCE STRASBOURG, FRANCE 13 – 17 JUNE 2011

'I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH'

The fifth IBCM conference was held in Strasbourg, France, on 13 – 17 June 2011, at the buildings of the International Pentecostal Church of Strasbourg. The conference was organised in conjunction with the *Communautés et Assemblées Évangéliques de France* (Evangelical Communities and Assemblies of France) which unites over 100 Brethren churches in metropolitan France.

Purpose

The purpose of the IBCM conferences is to bring together national leaders in the worldwide Brethren movement for mutual encouragement, networking, fellowship, strategic thinking and hearing from God, with a view to stimulating the churches and parachurch bodies with which they are connected in their home countries to more vibrant spiritual life and activity for the Lord.

Numbers

Previous conferences were held in Singapore (1993), Rome (1996), Sibiu, Romania (2003) and Wiedenest, Germany (2007). The conferences continue to grow: whereas there were 57 countries represented in Romania and 77 in Germany, 90 countries were represented in Strasbourg. Across all the conferences, at least 100 countries have now been represented at IBCM conferences. In Strasbourg, including local helpers and attenders, there were some 480 participants, compared to 420 in Germany in 2007. It was encouraging that the proportion of younger leaders was higher than at earlier conferences, though work remains to be done in this respect.

Feedback from participants

Feedback about the 2011 conference has been very positive indeed. The great majority of those responding to the feedback form rated the conference as 'excellent' or 'very good', and the main aspects of the conference were similar rated. The following are among the extensive individual comments received from participants:

- 'This conference...was magnificent. What a work.' *A French church leader*
- 'It was very worthwhile, particularly to get a flavour of what God is doing globally, the good workshops and excellent networking opportunities.' *A leader from the UK*
- '...what a joy it was to gather in His name and to see Brethren from many parts of the world...You may not know what you have done now, but we shall see many fruits from this conference.' *A Zambian leader*
- 'It was a wonderful conference.' *A Pacific leader.*
- '[We] were greatly blessed, and made many new friends and contacts. This conference will bear much fruit...' *From the USA.*
- 'Congratulations for the IBCM 5, as I have been greatly blessed by its works! A great inspiring event, praise God!' *A Romanian leader*
- 'It was also a wonderful experience and encouragement.' *Leaders from Myanmar*
- '[We] greatly appreciated and enjoyed the conference. It was so well run and contained so many good things: great worship, stimulating and transforming talks, superb networking opportunities...wide workshop choices...[and] opportunities to renew contact...' *UK parachurch body leader*
- 'It was superb...May we continue in the work of the Lord which HE has given to us & fulfill our responsibilities with the encouragement and strength received during the IBCM5 conference.' *An Indian leader.*
- '...we have returned home with not only good memories but good contacts and prospects for the global involvement of our Argentinian assemblies.' *An Argentinian leader.*
- 'It was a very strategic time and we feel very privileged to have been there.' *Australian workers in Europe.*
- 'For me it was a great experience...I treasure the exposure for much knowledge gained and friendships made. It was truly a wonderful event...' *A Jamaican worker*

- 'I was truly blessed beyond my imagination during my times with IBCM5.' *A leader from Malaysia.*
- '...a very big thank you for the IBCM5. It was another great event and time.' *An Australian leader.*
- 'I really enjoyed IBCM5...my first IBCM experience; I pray that it will not be the last.' *A younger leader from the West Indies.*
- 'IBCM...was unforgettable.' *A South American missionary in West Africa.*
- '...it was unforgettable and very important for our life and ministry here in Brazil-Rio de Janeiro.' *A Brazilian leader*
- 'Wonderful networking opportunity and platform for meeting counterparts from around the world such as Emmaus, CEF, etc. So much expertise—biblical and otherwise—in the movement; what an incredible resource to tap into.' *From a response form.*
- 'Good teaching, fantastic networking, significantly encouraging; able to see the direction of the Brethren as a whole are taking—this is very useful.' *From a response form.*
- 'I honestly did not know the Brethren movement was so widespread.' *From a response form*
- 'IBCM has been a great blessing to me as an individual and I will never be the same in my ministry.' *From a response form.*

Many have told us that the personal spiritual challenge that they received at the conference, and in particular sessions. It is known that some have been challenged to launch out personally in cross-cultural mission.

If there were criticisms and suggestions for improvement, they centred on the desirability of more consistency and coherence in the morning bible readings, and of the need for greater control over content and timetable in the evening report sessions. (Many detailed suggestions were made for future conferences and these will be considered carefully in planning the IBCM6 conference.)

Results

As usual, participants rated most highly the opportunities for networking with people from other countries, and much mutual learning took place. Among the results of the conference were decisions

- by African participants to hold a third Pan-African Brethren Conference on Missions in August 2013 in Nairobi, Kenya
- by Spanish-speaking participants to hold a Hispano-American conference of Brethren in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in August to October 2013
- by Portuguese-speaking participants to confirm the plan to hold a conference in Rio de Janeiro in September 2012 for participants from countries where Portuguese is an official language
- by participants from the Caribbean to explore the possibility of hold a further pan-Caribbean conference in the near future
- by participants from South and East Asia to hold a further Pray in the Harvest conference in 2013.

It is also known that the conference is leading to a number of visits by individuals to other countries, for ministry, training and encouragement. As with earlier conferences, it is only gradually that the results become known, and then by no means fully so.

Programme

MP3 recordings of the main sessions and addresses and a wide range of photos can be reached by following the link on the home page of the IBCM website (www.ibcm.net) or by going direct to the page on the CAEF website at <http://caef.net/spip.php?article279&lang=fr>. It is hoped to add the workshop notes on the page.

Funding

Some 140 of the participants from a wide range of countries were only able to come to the conference because they received financial support from the organisers (and, in some other cases, other bodies and individuals are known to have provided financial support). IBCM conferences are expensive undertakings, and they would not be possible without the very generous financial support of individuals and bodies in a number of different countries. Gifts and donations to IBCM (i.e., excluding those given direct to participants by other individuals and bodies) to assist participants to attend amounted to some 85,000 €. In addition donations towards administrative costs amounted to some 15,000 €. The organisers can only express their grateful thanks to those individuals and bodies which gave such substantial financial support.

Next IBCM conference

An IBCM6 conference will be held DV in 2015. The date and venue are still under discussion and an announcement will be made in 2012.

Organisation

The IBCM5 conference was organised by the IBCM International Planning Group (comprising Fares Marzone (Italy – Chairman), Paul Joshua (India), Reynald Kozycki (France), Annette Nickel (Germany – Conference Administrator), Kelvin Samwata (Zambia) and Neil Summerton (UK – Secretary), in conjunction with a French national team comprising Reynald Kozycki, Claude Grandjean, Matthew Glock, Francois-Jean Martin, Marcel Reutenauer assisted by Sylvie Martin and a team of local assistants. The IBCM International Planning Group extends its thanks to all these, and in particular to Annette Nickel for all the effort which she put into organising the conference over the three years preceding it.

Publications

Two books were produced for the IBCM5 conference:

Ken Newton and Andrew Chan (editors), *The Brethren Movement Worldwide: Key Information*, Third edition, OPAL and Partnership. This includes information on Brethren work in 94 different countries, together with latest statistics globally, continent by continent, and country by country for more than 130 countries.

Neil Summerton, *Learning from the Past, Facing the Future: Essays for 'Brethren'*, Partnership.

Additional copies of both books are available from Neil Summerton (neil.summerton@ruralinternet.co.uk), each priced at £9.00 including postage and packing in the UK, and £7.00 **plus** postage and packing for orders from elsewhere.

For further inquiries about IBCM, please contact neil.summerton@ruralinternet.co.uk