



**TRACKING GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY**

A closer look at Christian churches and networks in the Middle East



**AT THE CENTER**

Presenting our research on religious demography and the global Church landscape



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# THE INQUIRY

NEWS FROM THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

## An Up-and-Close Look at Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula

In late April, Senior Research Associate Bert Hickman traveled to multiple countries in the Middle East to interact with leaders from a broad range of Christian communities — underground Christian networks, expatriate churches of various denominations, and mission societies.

His first meeting (location cannot be identified here for security reasons) was with representatives from networks of what many in the West call Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) or Believers from Muslim Backgrounds (BMBs), but who themselves prefer to be called simply followers of Jesus. Besides hearing their personal stories of faith, shared with them principles of conducting quantitative research and participated in lively discussions on how research done well can help their networks be more effective in their ministries.

**Believers from Muslim backgrounds prefer to be called simply followers of Jesus.**



Traffic to church on Friday in Doha, Qatar. The IDCC (center) and Anglican (right) buildings are visible.

He then traveled to Oman and Qatar in the Persian Gulf region, countries which are home to large populations of expatriate Christians—mainly workers from places such as India, the Philippines, and many African nations. In these and most other Gulf states (except Saudi Arabia), Christians are allowed to worship but are limited for the most part to locations set aside by the government for that specific purpose. The government provides a designated parcel of land on which a “recognized church”, which often has a long historical connection in the country, can erect a building. These recognized churches are then the official intermediaries between the government—for whom the wide variety of Christian denominations is quite baffling—and the other congregations that also meet in the facility (commonly 50 or 60 over a weekend).

**In most of the Gulf countries, Christian congregations from different denominations share church building facilities.**

In Muscat, the capital of Oman, the Rev. Ken Bradsell of the Protestant Church in Oman (PCO) arranged a historic meeting with pastors from more than a dozen “sponsored congregations” that share their facilities, spanning the spectrum from Orthodox to Pentecostal. Bradsell indicated that it was, to his knowledge, the first time the leaders of the various congregations had gathered together and that they looked forward to more such gatherings in the future. Bert also visited with pastors of churches that meet under the PCO’s sponsorship in Sohar, a city two hours up the coast from Muscat.

The Christian churches in Qatar are found mainly in the “Religious Complex” on the outskirts of Doha, the capital. Hosted by the Venerable Canon Bill Schwartz, Anglican Archdeacon for Cyprus and the Gulf, who is based in Doha, Bert was able to meet with leaders of four of the six registered churches: the Anglican,



Historic meeting between pastors of congregations that worship in PCO’s facilities in Muscat.

Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox churches and the Inter Denominational Christian Church Complex (IDCC), which houses more than a dozen congregations, mostly Pentecostal, with roots in India. Discussions with the leaders focused on the work of the churches in the country and updating figures from the CSGC’s *World Christian Database*. (continued on pg. 4)

# LATEST FROM THE CENTER

Dr. Todd Johnson will be on sabbatical in Chiang Mai, Thailand until June 2017, writing and editing for the *World Christian Encyclopedia* as well as meeting with church and mission leaders in Southeast Asia.

If you are in the area, feel free to contact him at [tjohnson@gordonconwell.edu](mailto:tjohnson@gordonconwell.edu)



## Gina at Pew Research Center Conference

In March, CSGC Assistant Director Gina Zurlo presented at the first-ever religious demography conference, hosted by the Pew Research Center in Washington, DC. Over 100 sociologists, economists, anthropologists, students, and professional researchers gathered to hear about the latest trends in the demographic study of religion. The range of attendance showed a growing interest in learning about how, why, and where religion is changing around the world. Gina presented on the CSGC's work in detailing sub-traditions within religions, such as Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Independent Christians; as well as the value of having both historical and contemporary data — elements of the CSGC's research that set us apart from any other organization doing similar research.



## Todd at the United Bible Society

In May, CGSC Director Todd Johnson presented at the United Bible Societies global leadership meeting in Philadelphia. His talk, "The Global Church Landscape", highlighted trends in global Christianity, global religion, and global mission. Five hundred leaders from 150 countries attended the conference. With the sponsorship of the Thai Bible Society, Todd will also be giving this talk on October 1 at Bangkok Christian College in Bangkok.



## Todd at University of Lucerne

In March, Todd presented at a conference at the University of Lucerne in Switzerland on "Estimating the Religious Composition of Europe: Religious Statistics, Methodology, and Algorithms." The conference was sponsored by the newly-formed Swiss Metadatabase of Religious Affiliation in Europe (SMRE). His paper was titled "Census and Survey: Building a More Detailed Profile of Religious Demography in Europe".

Our research is used worldwide by churches, mission agencies, NGOs, and international media outlets.

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## An Up-and-Close Look at Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula (continued)



Bert, pictured with the Anglican Archdeacon for Cyprus and the Gulf, Bill Schwartz, and his wife.



Bert pictured with Archbishop Makarios (right) and Father Sabba (left) of the Greek Orthodox Church in Doha, Qatar.

In both Oman and Qatar, Bert also interacted with representatives of the Bible Society in the Gulf, which partners with churches and parachurch organizations to ensure Bibles are available in the languages of the many people who live and work there.

This was Bert's second trip to the region, coming after a 2014 visit to speak to the Gulf Churches Fellowship, an umbrella group linking the recognized churches in the Gulf nations of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

## CSGC Lunch Forum Series on Global Religious Diversity

Over the past year, the Center for the Study of Global Christianity has hosted multiple lunch forums at Gordon-Conwell exploring different aspects of various religious traditions from a global perspective. Guest speakers have included Kristine Haglund, former editor of *Dialogue, a Journal of Mormon Thought*; Buddhist Shastri Nick Kranz, Founder of MindfulintheMidst.com; Rob Leikind, Director of American Jewish Committee, Boston, and Brian Stiller of the World Evangelical Alliance.

For more info on upcoming events, including our lunch forums, please visit [www.globalchristianity.org](http://www.globalchristianity.org).



## NOTABLE CITATIONS

- NPR blog: [Growth of Nepalese Christianity](#)
- National Catholic Register: [Christian denominations worldwide](#)
- World Religion News: [200,000 Zoroastrians in the world](#)
- National Geographic: [Atheists & agnostics geographically](#)
- Christian Post: [Top 5 trends in global mission](#)

## PUBLICATIONS

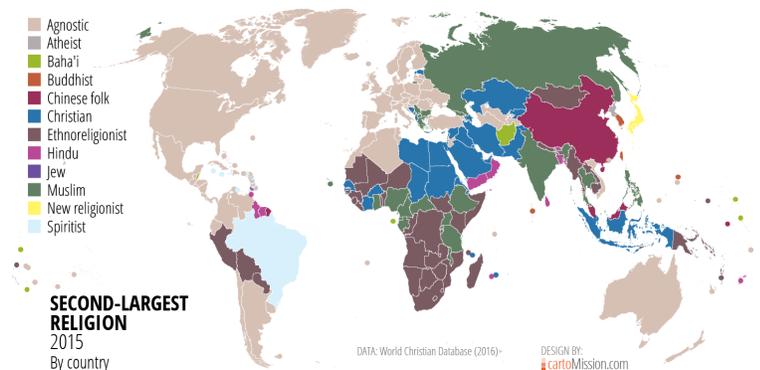
Gina A. Zurlo, "Migration, Diasporas, and Diversity: A Demographic Approach." In *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, eds. Sadiri Joy Tira and Tetsunao Yamamori. Wipf and Stock, 2016.

Gina A. Zurlo, Michele M. Sigg and Eva M. Pascal. "Indigenous and Vernacular Christianity." In *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*, eds. Lamin Sanneh and Michael McClymond. Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

Brian Grim, Todd Johnson, Vegard Skirbekk, and Gina Zurlo, eds. *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2016*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016.

Gina A. Zurlo and Todd M. Johnson, "Unaffiliated, Yet Religious: A Methodological and Demographic Analysis," In *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, vol. 7 (2016): 50–74.

## MAP HIGHLIGHT



For more maps and infographics using our data, please visit our website [www.globalchristianity.org](http://www.globalchristianity.org) and click on "Resources and Downloads".

# ABOUT US

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity is an academic research center that monitors worldwide demographic trends in Christianity, including outreach and mission. We provide a comprehensive collection of information on the past, present, and future of Christianity in every country of the world. Our data and publications help churches, mission agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to be more strategic, thoughtful, and sensitive to local contexts.

## LEADERSHIP TEAM



Todd M. Johnson  
Director  
tjohnson@gordonconwell.edu



Gina A. Zurlo  
Assistant Director  
gzurlo@gordonconwell.edu

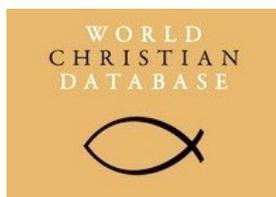


Albert W. Hickman  
Senior Research Associate  
ahickman@gordonconwell.edu

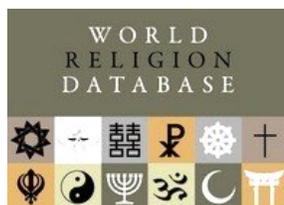


Peter F. Crossing  
Data Analyst  
pcrossing@gordonconwell.edu

## DATABASES



[worldchristiandatabase.org](http://worldchristiandatabase.org)



[worldreligiondatabase.org](http://worldreligiondatabase.org)

## CONTACT US

**Email:** [info@globalchristianity.org](mailto:info@globalchristianity.org)

**Website:** [www.globalchristianity.org](http://www.globalchristianity.org)

**Phone:** (978) 468-2750

**Address:** 130 Essex Street, Box 228, South Hamilton, MA 01982

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# UPCOMING EVENTS

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

# OPEN HOUSE

THURSDAY  
**OCTOBER 20**

5:00-6:30 PM  
**Building D**  
Lower Campus

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## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

### OCTOBER 3-7

Bert at World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission Global Consultation in Panama.

### OCTOBER 21-22

Gina at the annual meeting of the Eastern Fellowship of the American Society of Missiology in Maryknoll, NY.

### OCTOBER 28-30

Gina presenting at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Atlanta, GA.