



Bridging the Divide 2014 Consultation Report

Finalized July 8, 2014

We gathered for a fourth year to discuss critical issues for the purpose of "Bridging the Divide" over the differences related to ministry practices among Muslims. In an environment of prayer, worship, vigorous discussion and personal relationships we gathered to listen to one another, to find areas of agreement and to explore the areas of ongoing disagreement. More than twenty percent of participants this year were brothers and sisters from Muslim backgrounds, and all of us profited especially from their significant contribution to our discussions.

During our days together we gave special focus to appropriate use of Scripture, "The Nature of Islam and its Sources of Authority," and "Taking the Long View: Church, Disciple-making and the Next Generation." We were able to find consensus on the following items:

1. Those of us who have shared in the history of this forum rejoice in the increasing trust and mutual respect among us. Caricatures have decreased and understanding has increased as we've gotten to know each other and our different philosophies and approaches to ministry.
2. The greater participation of Muslim-born believers who self-identify as Christian or as Muslim followers of Jesus has expanded the range of our missiological insight. All have been enriched by hearing their individual spiritual and missional journeys, varied self-understandings and their spirited interaction.
3. Some of us have expressed caution regarding the practice of labeling (MBB, BMB, MFJ, etc.) while affirming the usefulness of such labels as important descriptors in some discussions.
4. From the outset of BtD we have been concerned by the way we sometimes use Scripture inappropriately to justify or defend our philosophies and models of ministry. This year we have been challenged to identify and avoid some of the faulty assumptions that skew our understandings, interpretations and applications of Scripture.
5. We value the contribution of biblical, historical, linguistic and other scholarly disciplines to our BtD conversations. We also recognize the need to better translate the fruit of scholarship into practical relevance.

6. We have reviewed various perspectives on Muhammad and the Quran and we recognize that we represent a broad spectrum of positions, each of which has profound implications for ministry among Muslims.
7. We recognize that each local Muslim context carries a unique configuration of Muslim political, cultural and religious authority. We affirm the importance of providing a safe setting (such as BtD) where we can hear and interact openly and honestly with first-hand descriptions of how new believers live and work out their identities as the *ekklesia* (community of disciples of Jesus) in these diverse contexts.
8. We have been challenged to consider the vital role of the *ekklesia* in the life of believers in the New Testament and throughout history, and believe it is God's intention that spiritual growth (sanctification) take place within gathered communities of faith in Christ.
9. We have heard some encouraging reports about the overcoming of tensions, difficulties, suspicion and, in some cases, the rejection that can arise between previously existing churches and new and different approaches, *ekklesia* or movements among Muslim populations. We were encouraged to consider more regional and national forums which would attempt to "bridge the divide" in those contexts.
10. In taking a longer view of *ekklesia* among Muslim populations, we have felt a universal bond as we have shared concerns that cross all divides, and especially the challenge of raising godly families. Sustaining spiritual growth through the generations is particularly challenging as identities are constructed, negotiated and contested.
11. We have all heard an expressed need to be attentive to, and to encourage, the theologizing that believers are undertaking in local and regional cultures of the Muslim world as they dialogue with historical theologies.