

Leaders From 70 Nations Meet in Sweden for Pentecostal World Conference

A cross-section of Pentecostal-charismatic leaders from more than 70 nations met this week in Stockholm for the 22nd Pentecostal World Conference.

Hosted in Sweden for the first time in 55 years, the triennial event was held Tuesday through Friday with a focus on equipping churches for spiritual leadership in the next century. Speakers included Brian Houston, pastor of Hillsong Church in Australia; Young Hoon Lee, pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea; and German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke.

“We need the wind of the Spirit to sweep over the Pentecostal movement to renew the evangelistic zeal and empower us for the challenges of this century,” said Bishop James Leggett, former general superintendent of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) and chairman of the host organization, the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF).

Members of most of the classical Pentecostal denominations were present, including leaders from the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), Church of God of Prophecy, Assemblies of God (AG) and IPHC. Jack Hayford of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, spoke during daytime sessions, along with Oral Roberts University President Mark Rutland, Swedish pastor Ulf Ekman, and Magnus Persson, pastor of United church in Malmo, Sweden, and Copenhagen, Denmark.

The Pentecostal World Conference, held at Stockholm’s historic Filadelfia Church led by Niklas Piensoho, drew roughly 2,000 participants, including a sizable number of emerging leaders.

“It was impressive to see a large number of young adults

attending this gathering of leaders from most of the worldwide Pentecostal organizations and movements,” said Doug Beacham, executive director of World Missions Ministries for the IPHC. “There was much emphasis and prayer from older Pentecostal leaders toward mobilizing and releasing younger Pentecostal men and women as effective communicators of the gospel in this century.”

Leggett agreed. “One of the major issues facing Pentecostals is to make sure that 100 years after Azusa Street, we are faithful in passing on to the next generation the reality and the power of Pentecost,” Leggett told *Charisma*. “The Pentecostal movement will need continual renewals of the Holy Spirit to be effective in the 21st century.”

For the first time, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) addressed the Pentecostal gathering. Olav Fykse Tveit said Pentecostals and the broader Christian community need one another.

“I do believe that we share in a great hope that the search for Christian unity will grow and that the World Council of Churches and Pentecostal churches will find new ways of witnessing to our unity in Christ and sharing in God’s mission,” he said. “That you have welcomed me here today is one such sign of hope.”

Pentecostalism, which grew out of the Azusa Street Revival in 1906, has become one of the largest Christian movements in the world, representing a quarter of the world’s 2 billion Christians. In the U.S., roughly 25 percent of all Christians identify themselves as Pentecostal or charismatic, according to a Barna Group study released earlier this year.

Today most of the movement’s growth is in Africa, Asia and Latin America, an area known as the Global South, but it has slowed in the West.

“We see a huge growth in Africa, Asia and Latin America, but

in the U.S. and Europe, it is still or going backwards with some exceptions,” Leggett told the Swedish Christian newspaper *Världen Idag*. “To reverse the trend in the West, we must come up with an alternative to what this world offers.”

During his address on the opening night of the event Tuesday, Leggett challenged Pentecostals to reclaim their faith in the Holy Spirit.

“We need an experience like the disciples [who] were in the Upper Room at Pentecost,” he said, according to *Världen Idag*. “And then we also need to leave the church and take to the streets and give of what we got. ... We as a movement was created and formed in the supernatural, and we must continue to live in it.”

In what some see as another sign of a leadership shift taking place from the West to the Global South, the Rev. Prince Guneratnam, senior pastor of Calvary Church, an AG congregation in Malaysia, was named chairman of the PWF after Leggett stepped down at the close of the gathering Friday.