

THE GREAT LAKES INITIATIVE  
DUKE CENTER FOR RECONCILIATION

For Such a Time as This  
*Politics, Leadership and the Christian Calling*

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## Introduction

Welcome to the fourth Great Lakes Initiative (GLI) Gathering. We gather at a critical time in the history of many of our countries. Burundi's national and presidential elections take place in May. Rwanda's presidential elections are scheduled for later this year in August, followed by local (March 2011) and parliamentary (October 2011) elections. Uganda is also preparing for national and presidential elections in 2011 amidst growing concerns of violence and political intimidation. In April, Sudan will hold national elections, marking the end of the transitional period and setting the stage for the much anticipated 2011 referendum that will determine the future of Southern Sudan and the nation as a whole. The Government of National Unity in Kenya is maintaining a tenacious power-sharing arrangement while edging towards national presidential elections in 2012, with the horrific events of 2007 still fresh in people's memories. To date, the fighting in Eastern Congo, one of the largest and richest countries in Africa, has left more than 4.5 million people dead, and displaced millions more.

## The Kairos

This Gathering is occurring at a critical time for the countries in the Great Lakes region as millions of our people feel expectancy and anxiety, frustration and anticipation, hope and despair. We can understand this time as a **kairos** moment, a moment of "crisis and truth."

Such a moment is described in the South African *Kairos Document* written at the height of apartheid in 1985:

The moment of **truth** has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations. There is every indication that the crisis has only just begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come. It is the KAIROS, or moment of truth, not only for apartheid but also for the Church.

As a group of theologians, we have been trying to **understand** the theological significance of this moment in our history. It is serious, very serious. For many Christians in South Africa, this is the KAIROS, the moment of grace and opportunity, the favorable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action. It is a dangerous time because, if this opportunity is missed and allowed to pass by, the loss for the Church, for the Gospel and for all the people of South Africa will be immeasurable. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He wept over the tragedy of the destruction of the city and the massacre of the people that was imminent, "and all because you did not recognize your opportunity (KAIROS) when God offered it" (Lk 19: 44).

A **crisis** is a judgment that brings out the best in some people and the worst in others. A crisis is a moment of truth that shows us up for what we really are. There will be no place to hide and no way of pretending to be what we are not in fact. At this moment in South Africa, the Church is about to be shown for what it really is and no cover-up will be possible.

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The present *kairos* moment has deep theological significance. It invites us, perhaps even commands us to step back from our busy schedules, listen, and pay attention to what is going on. We gather not only to learn and name what is going on, but also to imagine new models of leadership that God may be calling us to embody for such a time as this.

A *kairos* moment is not only a moment of truth and crisis. It is also a moment of hope. Our Gathering is defined and shaped by our firm belief in God's promise of peace and hope for God's people in this part of the world. This is the same promise God gave to the people of Israel who were in exile, a people who wondered whether God still cared about them.

**Jeremiah 29:11:** For, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare not for evil, to give you a future of hope.

In this spirit of hope, our Gathering is also an opportunity to name signs of hope, to identify and learn from inspiring leaders, and to rediscover our joyful calling as “ambassadors of God's reconciliation.”

We know that the realization of God's promise of peace is always tied up with the social, historical and political developments of the places where we live. That is why our calling as “ambassadors” is a politically charged assignment. As ambassadors, we must understand the whole range of practices, mechanisms, and visions that shape and drive the politics of our nations. A good reading of what is happening on the political front invigorates and sustains the Christian call by providing context for the tactics, strategies, models, visions and skills required for this time of crisis and truth.

### **The Theme**

#### *For Such a Time as This: Politics, Leadership and the Christian Calling*

The phrase “for such a time as this” is taken from verse 4:14 of the Book of Esther, which will serve as our guiding text for the Gathering. The situations Esther and her people found themselves in are strikingly similar to those of the Great Lakes Region. Furthermore, the ways in which Esther responded to those situations offer us models and practices of leadership that are urgently needed for such a time as this in the Great Lakes Region (see more below).

The theme, “for such a time as this,” has an added significance and a sense of urgency for the journey of the Great Lakes Initiative (GLI), which began four years ago with a gathering of 40 leaders outside Kampala in November 2006. As we have reflected on this journey together with our partners, we realized that we need to build upon

the unique gifts of the GLI through an annual Reconciliation Institute. Among other things, such an Institute will provide an opportunity for leadership development and intensified study of the holistic vision of reconciliation through the Word Made Flesh methodology.

### **The Methodology**

Throughout the Gathering, we will adopt a methodology that we refer to in short form as “Word Made Flesh.” It is a methodology that seeks to engage the topic in a way that is at once theological, contextual and practical.

- **Word:** “In the beginning was the word”. This is the key conviction that **reconciliation is God’s gift**. The journey of reconciliation begins with remembering God—and whatever we are about must be connected to and placed within God’s wider story. Our conversations and discussions are both informed by and engage scripture in a lively fashion. The spirit of our Gathering is shaped and sustained through worship.
- **Made Flesh:** The moment of incarnation. At a particular time in history, **God became man** and was born of a woman in the village of Bethlehem. History and geography matter. Our conversations and discussions must be placed within a specific context that considers the geography and history of our region, of each country, and of each of our lives.
- **Dwelt Among Us:** Christ dwelt among us. We saw him, touched him, ate with him. What does it mean for God to dwell among us here and now? To dwell here means developing patterns and skills that sustain Christian life over the long haul. This is the practical angle which points to stories, practices, examples and experiments that help to shape and sustain both the imagination and our lives.

The fact that each framework (theological, contextual and practical) can be identified does not mean that we will engage them sequentially. We will seek to weave them together; we will move back and forth through these frameworks in a way that fosters a deep practical conversation around the issue of reconciliation and leadership.

The Institute will provide a week-long space of intensive study, fellowship and formation through a combination of plenary sessions and elective seminars or workshops. Though the Institute will start next year, we have designed this year’s Gathering with the Institute in mind. The afternoon time of the Gathering is dedicated to seminars, and each participant is asked to sign up for only one seminar, which will meet on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. There will be no seminars on Thursday, which is a day of pilgrimage

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to *Maison Shalom* (see below). The list of seminars and their facilitators, as well as short descriptions of each, will be provided in your participant packet.

### **The Guide**

#### *The Book of Esther*

The book is the story of Esther, a young Jewish orphan taken in by her cousin, Mordecai. They live in Susa, one of four capitals in the great Persian Empire. A hundred years previously, the Jewish people had been overrun by the Chaldeans and taken into exile in Babylon. Fifty years later, Babylon was conquered by the Persians and the Jews were allowed to return home. But some Jews chose to stay where they were. They had discovered something very important. God did not just live in the land of Israel. God was in Babylon, too. Mordecai and Esther were among those Jews who stayed.<sup>1</sup>

The book opens with a lavish banquet hosted by King Ahasuerus that lasts for many days. The King orders his wife, Vashti, to come to the banquet in order to display her beauty before the guests. When she refuses, Ahasuerus becomes very angry and removes her from power. He then orders all the beautiful young girls of the kingdom to be presented to him, so he can choose a new queen to replace Vashti. One of the young girls presented to him is Esther, who finds favor in the king's eyes and is made his new wife. Esther keeps her Jewish identity a secret.

There are two other characters in the story: Esther's older cousin Mordecai, who adopted her as his daughter, and Haman, a high official of the king. They are at odds with one another, especially when Mordecai, a Jew, refuses to bow down before Haman as the king had ordered. Haman persuades the king to decree the destruction of all the Jews in order to get back at Mordecai for his disobedience. In fear and with great anguish, Mordecai sends Esther a copy of the decree and asks her to go to the king in order to advocate for her people's safety. She points out to Mordecai that anyone who goes to the king without being summoned is put to death, unless the king holds out his gold scepter toward the one who enters. In the only place in the book where Mordecai is actually quoted, he says these words to her:

**Esther 4:13b-14:** "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to the royal position for such a time as this."

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1. Samuel Wells. "For Such a Time as This." Sermon preached at Duke University Chapel, Durham NC, October 1, 2006.

Mordecai's words so moved Esther that she responded to him with a determined plan of action:

**Esther 4:16:** “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

### **Three Days, Three Movements**

In reflecting on this exchange between Mordecai and Esther, as well as the unfolding of the story and its final outcome, we can identify a number of significant lessons for our work in the Great Lakes Region. We will explore some of these lessons in three movements during the three days of the Gathering.

**Day One:** Time—“For such a time as this.”

**Day Two:** Mordecai—“Do not think that you will escape . . . who knows?”

**Day Three:** Esther—“I will go to the King. If I perish, I perish.”

Each morning, you are encouraged to reflect in solitude about the Scripture and theme. We have provided writing space and some guiding questions to guide you as you reflect about what God is revealing to you and how this *kairos* time may be affecting your life.

*Please take advantage of the space in the book.  
We are eager to see what God teaches us during this time!*

**Day One: Time**

“For if you remain silent *at this time*, relief and deliverance will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to the royal position for *such a time as this*” (Esther 4:13–14).

**Personal morning reflection: Meditate on Esther 4:13–14**

How is God’s time different from our time?

What might God be calling me toward? In my work? In my ministry?  
With my family?

**Plenary Session:**

- King Ahasuerus & his time (politics)

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- The significance of “this time” in the Great Lakes

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- Keeping silence at this time

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- Who knows . . . .

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- Discovering your calling

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**Activity:** Discussion around “such a time as this.”  
From a panel discussion in the plenary, participants learn “what is going on”  
around the Great Lakes region.  
This learning is deepened in Country Meetings.

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**Notes about context in Great Lakes region countries:**

Burundi:

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DR Congo:

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Kenya:

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Rwanda:

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Sudan:

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Tanzania:

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Uganda:

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## Day Two: Mordecai

### Personal morning reflection: Mordecai's life

Please reflect on Mordecai's life, character, and leadership.

### Plenary Session:

- Older cousin, mentor, adoptive father

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- Wise reading of time

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- Stubbornly proud and politically “foolish.” (What was he thinking in getting in trouble with Haman? He is somehow responsible for the genocidal decree?)

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- It is not about you and your safety.

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- Perhaps you have been given what you have “for such a time as this.”

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- Naming mentors

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**Day Three: Esther**  
“I will go to the king; if I perish, I perish.”

**Personal morning reflection**

Please reflect on Esther’s life, character, and leadership and how God might be calling you to serve at “such a time as this.”

**Plenary Session:**

- Mobilize community

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- Prayer and planning

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- Bound and free

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- The obstacles she had to overcome

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**Activity:** Learning from Celestin Musekura.  
Celestin is founder and international director of African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries (ALARM). He will discuss practical models, lessons, examples, disciplines and skills that sustain Christian leadership in politics in general, and for “such a time as this” in particular.

**Notes:**

- Practical models

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- Examples to emulate

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- Ideas for Christian leadership

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*Information about the seminars and faculty will be available at the Gathering.  
Please look for a listing of options upon arrival.*

