

POSTINGS

ARTICLES FOR CHURCH MISSIONS LEADERS

Don't Ignore Half of the Great Commission

WILL YOUR CHURCH
PRIORITIZE QUALITY
TRAINING FOR
INDIGENOUS
DISCIPLE-MAKERS?



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We all know that Jesus commissioned His disciples to be “witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). But in our haste to get the message to the furthest reaches of the globe, it may be easy to miss His unequivocal directive that His followers “make disciples of all nations, baptizing...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Our Great Commission task is not finished until the scope of Jesus’ teachings are being understood, absorbed, and increasingly put into practice by those who come to believe the good news. Paul teaches that pastors and other godly teachers and leaders are the primary agents God designs to fulfill this task (Eph. 4:11-13). The implication seems clear: Our missions mandate must

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The Global Alliance for Church Multiplication (GACX) has a vision to have one church for every one thousand people by 2050. This translates into roughly 10 million congregations. If that were to be achieved, those churches would need 10 million pastors! A study conducted a few years ago indicated that likely no more than 5% of pastors and priests had received formal theological training.¹ So the vast majority of current pastors lack training, not to mention the need to prepare millions of additional leaders for churches yet to be birthed!

FORMAL TRAINING. A growing number of *formal* seminary programs, many with highly-regarded quality and accreditation, exist on every continent. The global network **ICETE** (International Council for Evangelical Theological Education) alone connects more than a thousand of them. The demand for such first-rate academic programs will only increase as the global church matures.

NON-FORMAL TRAINING. In addition to these formal seminaries and schools, tens of thousands of *non-formal* programs offer training to church leaders who cannot relocate or dedicate years exclusively to preparation. **Re-Forma**, a ministry that defines pastoral-training outcomes and

global standards primarily for non-formal programs, alone currently resources 7,000 of these.

Well designed and assessable non-formal programs focusing on biblical knowledge and pastoral leadership skills are relatively easy to scale up with indigenous teachers and virtual learning options. Therefore, quality non-formal programs are essential if the Church is to prepare anywhere close to the number of trained pastors needed.

INFORMAL TRAINING.

Meanwhile, many Western churches are involved with a third level of pastoral preparation categorized as *informal* training which generally takes the form of individual seminars or conferences that are not connected to any extended program and do not involve systematic assessment.

Dr. Michael Ortiz, executive director of ICETE, describes a familiar scenario: "It's not uncommon for a church or ministry to say they are training pastors in some country overseas.

This often takes the form of seminars or workshops offered over the course of a few days or a weekend. Local pastors who attend may have mixed motivations. They want training but they also like to come to these events because they provide a retreat setting with decent meals and a chance to rest a bit, spend some time with friends, etc. So if soon thereafter, they are invited to attend another one by another visiting teacher, they will likely go. Pastors may attend a number of such training programs, but these sessions often lack an overall plan or defined outcomes."

Multiple organizations offer structured and proven avenues for Western churches to support and participate effectively in all three types of pastoral preparation—formal, non-formal, and informal. We highlight just four at the end of this article including ICETE and Re-Forma. But first, we share two real-life, church-engagement stories and five principles.

GRACE FELLOWSHIP TRAINS TRAINERS

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AN INTERVIEW WITH LEAD PASTOR MATT MURPHY



Grace Fellowship Church here in Johnson City, TN, has always had a heart for missions. But it became more personal for me five years ago when several of us went with **BeMultiplied** to see their training in action.

Several things impressed us: the commitment to training indigenous pastors to become trainers, the interactive learning style, and the focus on servant leadership. They didn't position themselves as the master teachers but as facilitators preparing these indigenous leaders with biblical truth they could contextualize. I left this training convinced we wanted to be part of it.

Initially we accompanied BeMultiplied's instructors so we could learn from them, but they soon trusted us to teach on our own using their curriculum and approach, with their guidance along the way as needed. We committed to lead three trips per year for three years to teach the level 1 courses to a group of students in rural Kenya.

Our executive pastor and I each take one team per year, and we recruit another competent trainer to lead the third trip. Each team also includes staff, lay leaders, or elders who are mature believers and able to facilitate effectively. They may not have a seminary education, but

they have lived experience with Jesus as well as practical wisdom.

These weeks with our Kenyan students have made me a better pastor and leader. It's just healthy for your soul to go and serve in a different context. I learn from our students as much as I teach. They are all bivocational pastors and serve with limited resources without complaining; I am humbled by their joy and faithfulness.

Our church has been positively impacted too. Relationships are built as we invest in the same pastors every time, and because we return and share stories with our church community, they connect to these pastors too. They pray for them by name; they send notes with us for them. These connections stimulate our people's generosity which makes it financially possible for us to send teams three times a year.

Students often tell us, "This training has changed my life because I have not just learned, I have learned how to teach it to others." I come home from these trips physically exhausted but also emotionally and spiritually renewed. Our students, their students, our staff, and our whole church are enriched by this initiative.

Five Ways to Wisely Engage in Training Indigenous Pastors and Church Leaders

- 1 Recognize the crucial importance of quality theological and practical training for church leaders even in areas of the world technically considered “reached.”** Many leaders, especially across Africa, fear that a vast number of new churches will not survive into the next generation because of lack of solid biblical foundations. The only way to ensure that churches endure is to have well trained pastors and leaders. While reaching the unreached is essential, giving indigenous pastors a strong foundation from which to teach their people is equally important or the “reached” areas could quickly become “unreached.”
- 2 Support efforts that springboard from existing, proven materials and which meet high standards of ministry outcomes.** This can avoid wasteful duplication and encourages wise stewardship of time and funds. Excellent training curricula already exist and are often shared at little or no cost. Rather than starting from scratch, partners can be encouraged to customize existing resources and training. See several sources listed below.
- 3 Affirm, train, and resource indigenous pastoral trainers who are equipped to multiply additional trainers.** Godly, experienced local leaders have the language and cultural affinity that make them better teachers and trainers than those from the West. Focus on ways to prepare and resource these men and women, coming alongside them in a supporting role rather than as the main trainers.
- 4 Take into account that one of the needs in formal theological education is faculty development and better-trained administrators.** Many seminary leaders around the world were educated as scholars in particular disciplines, but they were never trained to lead or administer a school. If your church has been blessed by having higher education leaders in your congregation, challenge them to consider training and encouraging their peers abroad. Or perhaps your church could fund the cost of courses and seminars for administrators who need to build missing skills and keep up to date on educational methodologies.
- 5 Encourage leaders seeking advanced degrees to study in their own country or region.** Many gifted younger men and women come to study in the West and do not return, or they and their family struggle to reassimilate back into their own culture when they do go back. Consider granting a financial scholarship to qualified students to attend one of the excellent theological training programs now available at the highest levels on every continent.

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COLLEGE CHURCH'S MISSIONS FOCUS ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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AN INTERVIEW WITH MISSIONS PASTOR CURT MILLER



Theological education has been a missions focus here at College Church in Wheaton, IL, for many years because we want to see local churches everywhere become healthy and grow to maturity. We also place a high value on the Bible as authoritative and sufficient for all of life, which grounds our desire to invest in global training. We want to encourage church-based ministry leaders to develop their ability to handle God's Word well and to teach it accurately.

Of course, it helps that we are located next to Wheaton College and some members of our congregation teach or study at the college. A passion for Christian higher education is just a part of who we are. Therefore, we invest in theological education in five ways:

1. We support scholarships through partner organizations like **Mesa Global** (previously Overseas Council). We appreciate the vetting that they provide, although we always do our own evaluating too. We enjoy hearing about the progress of students, but we want their allegiance to be focused in their local geographic area. Having Mesa Global as our

liaison enables us to hear about the progress of the students without them feeling indebted to us for their education.

2. We support residential missionaries who serve full or part time as professors or in related areas such as training indigenous missionaries or counsellors, etc.
3. We support non-residential missionaries and members of our pastoral staff to provide training on site or sometimes online. We appreciate the vetting and preparation offered by **Training Leaders International** for those we send on these types of assignments.
4. We sometimes help to sponsor physical or virtual libraries.
5. Occasionally we will send members of our congregation to help with an administrative project such as improving a school's accounting system or better organizing their library.

We look for validation from several directions that the program is not just focused on academic achievement but develops graduates' skills in fostering gospel impact.

Assessing results is notoriously difficult, so having a missionary partner at the school helps us stay informed. But we also want to hear from administrators, teachers, students, and local pastors regarding the caliber of the training. We look for validation from several directions that the program is not just focused on academic achievement but develops graduates' skills in fostering gospel impact.

To exercise good stewardship, we want to avoid duplication of effort wherever possible. Sometimes, despite the fact that there are already training programs available, an onsite missionary or indigenous leader may say they want to develop their own because of nuances in theology or methodology. Before we get behind it, we want them to be aware of other organizations that have materials they could customize. Warning: A desire for autonomy and self-appointment to leadership should raise red flags! We don't want to support someone who is unwilling to submit to the authority of others.

When we are approached with a request to help fund a new training program, we resist feeling rushed. Partnerships should be built on trust, rather than on financial gifts. It helps that we have established values and priorities in advance. Even when we do choose to partner, we start small and see what happens.

However, we do engage with new programs. Since we here at College Church highly value our pastors and ministry leaders who provide rich spiritual nourishment each week, we want to remember that many churches around the world have untrained leaders. Some lead without even a high-school education, much less seminary training. Pastoral training is worth the investment!



Four Organizations Serving the Global Theological Training Context

The following organizations are certainly not the only ministries serving with distinction in this space, but they are respected agencies with sturdy track records offering churches different resources and ways to engage.

Mesa Global—Building theological training capacity where the Church is growing fastest

To effectively lead the churches multiplying across the Majority World, pastors and ministry leaders need theological education that is contextual, sustainable, and owned by the Church. By walking alongside local leaders and educators via a team of experienced, non-Western theological-education leaders, Mesa Global supports a collaborative network of 130+ seminaries along with non-formal training organizations and churches. Select U.S.-sent scholars and trainers contribute specific academic and leadership expertise in supporting roles.

Mesa Global helps churches like yours by:

- Identifying carefully vetted students in Majority World pastoral training programs who are deserving of scholarships. They also manage all financial transactions on your behalf, so giving is simple and accountable.
- Connecting you to partnership opportunities with indigenous training programs and educators so that you can engage more deeply in leadership formation alongside global sisters and brothers.

BeMultiplied—Multiplying biblically trained servant leaders around the world. BeMultiplied (formerly BEE World) equips pastors and church leaders in limited-access regions through a three-year, modularized, biblical-training program designed to work across denominational and cultural boundaries. Combining individual study with in-person, facilitated learning, the program equips leaders to study, interpret, and apply Scripture in their own language and ministry context. Through mentoring and multiplication-focused training, every student is equipped to train others—creating sustainable national training networks and generational impact.

BeMultiplied helps churches like yours by:

- Offering opportunities for spiritually mature believers with ministry experience and theological training to invest in one region of the world through recurring trips that strengthen and mentor indigenous training networks.
- Providing pathways for women from North American churches to help train and mentor indigenous women serving and leading in their local churches and communities.

Re-Forma—Providing non-formal curricula, standards, and facilitator trainings. Re-Forma serves non-formal training programs worldwide by providing a free, outcomes-based standard for education that defines the essential knowledge, skills, and character every pastor and ministry leader needs. These 37 assessment areas focus on leading like Jesus, handling Scripture accurately, reaching and making disciples, and shepherding God's people. Currently over 7,000 groups are implementing Re-Forma's assessment-focused training approach in 97 countries, with the standards for proficiency in these 37 outcomes available in 84 languages.

Re-Forma helps churches like yours by:

- Providing free access to extensive curricula and other training resources, much of it right on their website, to focus your cross-cultural training on essential outcomes.
- Offering preparation for indigenous pastoral trainers whom your church supports so that they can then customize and facilitate quality training programs for their own people or language group.

ICETE—Creating a global network of training programs concerned with quality, connections, and impact. ICETE is a global network of seven regional member associations involved in the quality assurance of evangelical theological education of more than a thousand theological schools across the world. As a global community ICETE advances quality and collaboration among its constituents who are training nearly half a million students each year through a wide range of programs in both formal and non-formal contexts. ICETE also hosts global gatherings of theological-education leaders.

ICETE helps churches like yours by:

- Providing information and ways to assess theological education worldwide that meet their standards and best practices criteria. Pointing students into quality programs produces better trained graduates and, in turn, stronger churches.
- Connecting you to regional networks and theological education training programs in geographic areas of special interest to your congregation.

Is your local church commissioned to carry the gospel and establish churches all the way to the ends of the earth? Yes! But at the same time, you are also commissioned to invest in seeing the believers

in those churches nurtured into biblically mature, enduring disciples. Therefore, a very significant part of your Great Commission task is investing in the development of qualified pastors and leaders

who are equipped to disciple their churches today and prepare them for the challenges of the future. Does quality pastoral training have the prominent place it deserves in your missions engagement?

¹. The most recent global assessment of pastors' theological education seems to be data collected over a dozen years ago by the **Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC)** in collaboration with several other entities. However, they warn that that data was incomplete.