

## Embracing the New Mission Paradigm with Joy

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### *Abstract*

The last command of Jesus to be witnesses to the ends of the earth now rests heavily on the Majority-World church. Cornelius, the executive director of Mission Global, the sending agency of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, shares insights into who the Western and non-Western can work together to fulfill the Great Commission. This will include humility, unity, and working as partners in the harvest. When both sides come to value the gifts and contributions of the other in this partnership, the goal is achievable.

### *Introduction*

The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) recently welcomed two missionary families from Côte d'Ivoire. Sent by the Assemblies of God and focused on Quebec, they represent a new sending nation responding to the Great Commission. The PAOC sent two families to Cote D'Ivoire about 40 years ago and now we have received two families – Missions Full Circle (see photo). This should not be a surprise and is a most welcome reality. More Christians live in the Majority World than the West and most of them are Pentecostals and Charismatics. More than 80% of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship (WAGF) family live in the Majority World.

The last command of Jesus to be witnesses to the ends of the earth now rests heavily on the Majority-World church. If the WAGF is going to make a significant contribution to finishing the task and offer back to Jesus one million churches by 2033<sup>1</sup>, we need the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world. The view of “missions” as primarily Western countries sending to the rest of the world is a paradigm of the past. The mission agenda, as set by the

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traditional sending church, must no longer dominate the present missional agenda. That agenda needs to be a collaboration that engages traditional and new sending nations.

In this article, I will offer three reasons why traditional sending nations, like my own Canada, must embrace and welcome the burgeoning of new sending nations. With joy and with humility we must welcome these new sending nations and collaborate so that all may hear the good news and the whole earth be filled with God's glory.



*The Joy of Renewed Spiritual Vitality*

I have often heard it said that the African church is a mile wide but only an inch deep. This rather pejorative statement is simply not true. This assumes that the only measure of maturity is theological acumen. Our tendency in the West is to measure maturity purely in terms of intellectual depth. While the West may have historically focused on theological correctness and written more theology, it may not measure up as mature in the practice of prayer and

devotion, and it certainly has not developed the maturity that is rooted in suffering and enduring hardship and persecution for the sake of the gospel. The missionaries landing on the shores of Canada and other Western nations bring a spiritual life that has been forged by “suffering grief in all kinds of trials” (1 Peter 1:6). They arrive with an urgency to evangelize and an expectation that God will authenticate the witness with ‘signs and wonders’.

The primary emphasis of the early church and early Pentecostals rested in being sent by Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit resulting in a dependency focused more on the leading of the Spirit than on formal structures. As with the early church, the Majority World church is not hindered by the fact that they may be marginalized and relatively poor. With an expectation of the soon return of Christ, and with an urgency because time is short, the church has passionately multiplied, particularly in Latin America and Africa. This living faith and passion for witness can help revitalize our routinized Western churches that have lost their outbound passion to reach the lost.

#### *Increased Access to Reach the Unreached*

Finding and developing landing platforms that provide access to the countries with the most unreached people groups is increasingly difficult. New sending nations may at times have easier access to hard places than traditional sending nations. Countries with a history of communism may not require work visas to certain places in the world. Since many nations are now sending, we can strategize collaboratively with respect to which nations can most easily send workers into restricted contexts.

In addition, there are many positive examples of cross-cultural mission endeavors in the WAGF family among near culture and proximate peoples. The church in Ethiopia is an excellent example as they send missionaries into neighboring countries where cultural and language barriers are not as formidable and immigration access is possible. The tent-making sending model also opens doors to places that traditional sending nations may find difficult. With migration so prevalent, it is possible to train and encourage people to live with missional purpose, to be witnesses and to plant churches “as they go.” We must not be limited to only one sending model. New sending nations can develop multiple sending structures.

A further opportunity for the church today is to send new immigrants, that came to our Western nations, back home to their own countries or to serve as cross-cultural missionaries.

People who come to Canada through migration as immigrants or refugees may also receive a call from God. It may be a call to go back home to what may be very restricted contexts, or it may be a call to serve in a neighboring country amongst their own people or it may be a call to be cross-cultural workers. Regardless, the opportunity to build diverse and inclusive missionary agencies must not be missed. New sending nations can open new doors for the gospel.

*The Opportunity to Build Multi-national, Multi-agency Teams*

The early church modeled their new and unique identity on the incarnate Christ by demonstrating love, justice, and mercy for all. They embodied their beliefs, made room for diverse ethnicities, races, gender, and socio-economic classes to worship and fellowship together in unity and in the bond of peace. In his commentary on Acts, William Jennings observes that “the deepest reality of life in the Spirit depicted in the book of Acts is that the disciples of Jesus rarely, if ever, go where they want to go or to whom they would want to go. Indeed, the Spirit seems to always be pressing the disciples *to go to those to whom they would in fact strongly prefer never to share space, or a meal, and definitely not life together*. Yet it is precisely this prodding to be boundary-crossing and border-transgressing that marks the presence of the Spirit of God” (2017, 11). If the church is to be a model of diversity and inclusion, then our teams of workers who go across cultural and linguistic barriers should also be marked by inclusion and diversity.

The new reality that in the WAGF we have many sending nations provides all of us the opportunity to build teams of workers from multiple nations, representing multiple countries and languages. These teams will serve to demonstrate obedience to the command of Jesus to love one another and “by this everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:35). In a world that is increasingly divided on racial and religious lines, the church must be counterculture and show the opposite. A multi-racial team demonstrates the unity in diversity that Christ envisioned for his church.

In Luke’s expansive theological vision, race, gender, and ethnicity are central to his view of the Church. Eric Barreto suggests that Luke does not erase ethnic difference through the creation of a new ethnicity but uses the flexible bounds of ethnicity to illustrate the wide demographic ambitions of the early church (2010, 3). Biblical scholar, Larry Hurtado describes how the uniquely trans-local and trans-ethnic identity of being “in Christ” created the first

multiethnic religion in history, because Christian conversion relativized cultural and social identities without effacing them (2016, 90). The impulse from the Spirit was to “form a broadly connected and cooperative trans-local and trans-ethnic religious movement” from the start (Hurtado 2015, 1).

The Pentecostal and Charismatic movement today has that same unique opportunity. Just as the Greco-Roman cities of the first century were prone to riots because of deep-seated racial conflicts and hatred (Stark 1997, 158), so the cities and nations of our world today are marked by ethnic conflicts, racial discrimination, and marginalization based on sex, religion, race, culture, and ethnicity. Into this racialized world, the church can send multi-cultural, multi-racial teams that embody the love of Christ. When the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples in the upper room and they began to speak in tongues and to preach publicly, God performed a miracle that was an intentional reversal of the judgment of Babel.

As we develop multi-cultural, multi-racial teams, it is important that traditional sending nations do not automatically assume leadership and simply co-opt new senders into their vision and strategy. To co-opt, the root for cooperation, carries the implication that we look for people to join what we are already doing and serve into our purpose. To co-labor, the root for collaboration, implies that people join hands and determine together the purpose and mission. The opportunity for collaboration, to co-labor, demands a humility from all that will allow our God-given gifts to determine our roles and for leadership to be gift related, not culture, or race related. The different racial and cultural backgrounds on the teams will provide different gifts and the more varied the team is, the more adaptable they will be to the context they are resident in.

Forming teams may be simple, but bonding into true family is much harder. We will need to take time to understand each other, to accommodate and respect our cultural differences. We will need to foster humility and grace. But the opportunity before us to demonstrate to the world that we love one another must not be missed. We must build multi-cultural, multi-racial teams of Asians, Africans, Latinos, Europeans, Indians, and North Americans for the glory of God.

*Fostering the humility to receive and collaborate*

Finally, the West must foster a humility to receive missionaries to our countries and we must submit ourselves and our gifts to serve on multi-national teams. We must ask these important and perhaps hard questions.

1. Are we prepared to work on teams led by Majority World team leaders?
2. Are we prepared to humbly welcome workers from other countries to our own shores to help us in our own nations?
3. Can we submit to being followers, to release control of the vision, to share our resources and collaborate for the sake of the Kingdom?

Let us covenant together in the WAGF to be a missionary movement and do all we can to bring the gospel to those with little or no access to the good news. This kairos moment in history must not be missed. We can and we must collaborate that all may hear that Jesus died for them.

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1 The World Assemblies of God Fellowship (WAGF) has adopted a vision to offer back to Jesus one million churches in 2033. This initiative is called MM33. Currently there are approximately 370,000 churches.  
<https://mm33.global/>