

Engaging an Emerging Generation of Global Mission Leaders

by Nana Yaw Offei Awuku, Ghana

A new generation of African younger leaders is rising to the challenge of missions. Many young professionals and university students are responding to the call to serve in strategic areas of missional engagement.

Missions from Africa

It is common practice in Ghana now for thousands of Christian university students of diverse denominational affiliations to spend about three to four weeks of their summer vacations involved in Students-In-Church Evangelism (SICE) programmes. They are contributing in dynamic ways to indigenous church planting and foreign missions.

The Church of Pentecost, originating in Ghana in 1962, today has a growing student movement and association of young professionals (Pensa ITI). It is reported to have established 2,681 international missions out of its 18,426 church congregations (called assemblies) by mid-2015.¹ This is a contemporary example of African churches in mission to the rest of the world, and the story can be multiplied for many other denominations across many other African countries.²

Collaborative global missions

Any careful reflection on leadership for the twenty-first century church will involve, among many complex issues, significant consideration of the transitions and transformations taking place in the church in Africa and other global South continents. Samuel Escobar rightly observes that '*Christian mission in the twenty-first century has become the responsibility of a global church. It is clear that the God who called Abraham to form a nation, and who revealed himself finally in Jesus Christ, intended his revelation to reach all humankind.*'³

This reality strengthens our joy in sharing in collaborative global mission efforts as we earnestly continue to pray 'your kingdom come'! The global diversity of the church as the community of God's people presents the challenge of interdependence, relationships, and structures that need to be nurtured for effective partnerships for the mission of the church.

A global faith community with a common global mandate

Jesus tells the disciples: 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come' (Matt 24:14). The Great Commission is, 'Go and make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28:19). Our common mission arises out of our common identity in Christ. This must inform all reflection on a biblical paradigm for effective mentoring of emerging leaders and partnering for mission.

¹ The Church of Pentecost, *2015 Mid-Year Statistical Report* (Updates can be accessed at <http://thecophq.org/overview.php>).

² *Editor's Note:* See article entitled '[Engaging the Church in Africa in its Key Mission Issues to 2050](#)' by Rudolf Kabutz in the November 2015 issue of *Lausanne Global Analysis*.

³ Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2003), 12.

The experience of Peter recorded in Luke chapter 5 is insightful. It was evident that one of the essential lessons that Peter learnt in the quest to *fish for people* is the need for partnerships. After the miraculous catch of fish, Luke records: ‘So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them’ (Luke 5:7). This priority for partnerships should be normative for the mission of *fishing for people* if the global church is to carry out effectively its God-given mission across cultures and regions in this century.

Five global mission partnership priorities for 21st century emerging leaders

Each generation will need to reflect afresh on the nature of the partnerships that emerging leaders will need in carrying out the Great Commission. Andrew Walls, reflecting on the work of David Barrett, observes:

*Christian history has seen many changes in the centre of gravity of the Christian world. Three of these have been crucial, for each of them led to a transformation in Christian expression. The third has come to a climax in our own century; it has been the massive movement towards Christian faith in all the southern continents—sub Saharan Africa, Latin America, certain parts of Asia, the Pacific Islands—which means that Christian profession in the southern continents now outnumbers that in the northern.*⁴

1. New effective models of geographical partnerships

First, this shift creates the need for *new effective models of geographical partnerships* between the church in the global North and the church in the global South. Paternal relationships must give way to a new paradigm of kingdom partnerships of trust, mutual respect, and sharing of resources and leadership, with a common commitment to the one mission of the gospel. Triumphalism must be buried in its various expressions in both the North and the South. Escobar remarks that ‘despite the shift of Christianity to the South, in the coming decades Christian mission to all parts of the globe will require resources from both the North and the South to be successful’.⁵ This calls for a renewed emphasis on intentional cross-cultural engagements in the humble spirit of the Christ.

2. New models of structural partnerships for global mission

Secondly, there is the need for reflection on *new models of structural partnerships for global mission*. Timothy Tennent touches on a significant structural issue when he observes, ‘Since the nineteenth century, protestant missions strategy has often been conceptualized around the priority of evangelizing individuals rather than planting churches, which brings together the nucleus of a new community of believers. On the sending side of missions, the role of the specialized parachurch missions grew more and more dominant.’⁶

In his careful biblical reflection on the two structures of God’s redemptive mission in relation to the church at Antioch and Paul’s missionary band, Tennent makes two vital observations: ‘Firstly, Paul’s missionary band was a distinct structure from the local church. Secondly, Paul’s missionary band was accountable to the church at Antioch and beyond that to the senior leaders based in Jerusalem.’⁷

⁴ Andrew F Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, 1st ed (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 68.

⁵ Escobar, *The New Global Mission*, 18.

⁶ Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), Kindle loc 4911.

⁷ Ibid, Kindle loc 4981.

Many emerging leaders in the global South church are directly impacted by the relationship between the local church and the mission agencies. There is a fresh opportunity to explore new structural partnerships with the current resurgence of church planting movements seeking to re-emphasize the role and involvement of the church at the cutting edge of mission, particularly in the global South regions.

3. Effective generational partnerships for mission

Thirdly, there is the need for reflection on *effective generational partnerships* for mission. When Jesus commissioned his first disciples with the promise, ‘And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ (Matt 28:20), there was in that promise an implicit commission to disciple the next generations also.

For the church to remain vibrant and faithful in its obedience to global mission through all generations till the ‘end of the age’, a key focus must be on leadership development and transitioning of kingdom leadership from one generation to another in stewarding the fulfillment of God’s promises in the global mission of the church. If the church has a unique mission, then it needs in each generation leaders of a certain kind. *The Cape Town Commitment* observes:

*The rapid growth of the church in so many places remains shallow and vulnerable, partly because of the lack of disciplined leaders, and partly because so many use their positions for worldly power, arrogant status or personal enrichment. As a result, God’s people suffer, Christ is dishonoured, and gospel mission is undermined.*⁸

How does the global church adequately develop mature Christ-like next-generation leaders for its mission in an increasing diverse context? Faithful stewardship of inter-generational leadership transitions as an intentional partnership for the gospel and global mission will raise up new leaders at various levels across the global church.

4. Authentic cross-cultural friendships

Fourthly, effective partnerships for global mission will grow out of *authentic cross-cultural friendships*. These would be friendships that exemplify and strengthen our foundational relationship in Christ. On the final night, Jesus said to his disciples, ‘I have called you friends’, and gave them the affirmation, ‘I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last’, re-emphasizing, ‘*This is my command: love each other*’ (John 15:15-17).

Friendship has a very significant impact on partnerships for the gospel. Dana Roberts shares a concern: ‘Does anyone have time to make friends today, or is cross-cultural service a kind of global networking that looks good on a résumé? Is friendship now defined by Facebook rather than by walking in someone else’s shoes?’

She observes that ‘In today’s world of instant communication, short attention spans, and material development as mission, the sacrificial practices of friendship stand as evidence for the kingdom ethics of God’s love for all people.’⁹

⁸ Chris Wright, ed, *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (South Hamilton, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), II-1-C.

⁹ Dana Roberts, ‘Cross-Cultural Friendship in the Creation of Twentieth-Century World Christianity’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/2011-02/2011-02-100-robert.html>, accessed 25 April 2016.

5. The ultimate partnership with God in the *missio Dei*

I conclude with a challenge for the church to re-emphasize and re-engage the priority of the *ultimate partnership with God in the missio Dei*. As we celebrate the dynamic growth of the church in Africa and the global South, it is of utmost importance that we remind ourselves that ‘mission is first and foremost about God and his redemptive purposes and initiatives in the world, quite apart from any action or tasks or strategies or initiatives the church may undertake’.¹⁰

This relationship to God should be the foundation for all other partnerships in relation to the global mission of the church. Jesus emphasized this truth to the disciples by saying, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples’ (Matt 28:19).

Conditioned through modernism, secularization, and postmodernism, the upcoming generations of mission leaders need to hear afresh Jesus’ instructive words to the disciples, ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing’ (John 15:5). Tennent reminds us that theory and practice of missions can be summarized as, ‘The Father is the sender, the Lord of the harvest; the Son is the model embodiment of mission in the world; and the Holy Spirit is the divine empowering presence for all mission’.¹¹

The kingdom of God is established only through the power of God. This ultimate dimension of partnership with God can accomplish the faithful finishing of the global mission (Rev 7:9-10). As we celebrate the dynamic growth of the church globally, it is time to engage the new generation of global mission leaders in embracing the challenge and beauty of kingdom partnerships for the gospel.

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Source: <https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2016-11/engaging-an-emerging-generation-of-global-mission-leaders>

¹⁰ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, Kindle loc 492.

¹¹ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, Kindle loc 718.