

**EMPOWERED TO GROW: A THEOLOGY AND
MISSIOLOGY OF CHURCH PLANTING IN THE
WORLD ASSEMBLIES OF GOD FELLOWSHIP**

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Executive Summary

It was during the 2017 WAGF Congress in Singapore that the late Dr. George O. Wood gave a prophetic word that, “If the Lord tarries his return until 2033, by faith, the World Assemblies of God Fellowship will consist of one million churches!” That prophetic word resonated with many in the room who believed that the Holy Spirit was giving the WAGF a vision for the work he was calling us to do as we approached the commemorative 2,000-year anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit at the Feast of Pentecost. We believe that God is calling us to celebrate this anniversary in 2033 alongside sisters and brothers worshipping in one million Assemblies of God churches throughout the world, and we have committed by faith to do so.

We recognize that the task to which God has called our global Fellowship is significant in scope; the realization of this goal would more than double, in the next ten years, the number of churches to which the WAGF has grown in a little over a century. However, we believe that an essential quality of what it means to be a people of the Spirit is to have an unwavering reliance upon the direction and power of the Holy Spirit to carry out the work that he has called us to do.

God’s mission to reconcile the nations unto himself (*missio Dei*) is just that—God’s mission. We are called and invited to participate in his mission in partnership with the working of the Spirit in the lives of those yet unreached by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, a Spirit-directed vision is necessarily one that requires reliance upon the Spirit for the vision to come to fruition.

This Spirit-directed vision led to the formulation of the MM33 initiative as a covenantal commitment of the WAGF. The MM33 is a critical and catalytic initiative that will foster effective participation within the WAGF to see this one million church vision come to pass.

We recognize that a key catalyst of the missionary expansion of the church—both in the New Testament church and in our own Assemblies of God Fellowships—has been church planting. If we are to see the vision the Spirit has given us to see the WAGF grow to one million local churches scattered throughout the world come to pass, participation in this vision necessarily involves the planting of more churches. This is the impetus behind the formation of the Church Planting Commission, both in pursuit of the MM33 initiative and in the years that follow its completion.

Overview of White Paper

As the world undergoes unprecedented changes, we recognize the unique position Pentecostals play in the global mission of the broader church. In 1900, there were less than one million Pentecostals and Charismatics in the world. Today, that number has grown to over 650 million, with Pentecostals and Charismatics representing upwards of thirty percent of global Christianity.¹ The growth of global Christianity in the twentieth century was in no small part due to the growth of Pentecostalism worldwide.² While the story of twentieth century Christian expansion is largely a story of Pentecostal growth, the story of Pentecostal growth cannot be told without rigorous church planting efforts throughout the world.

In moving forward, we must reflect upon God’s work in the past: both in the missionary activity of the New Testament church and the characteristics and missional postures that have contributed to the explosive growth of global Pentecostalism throughout the last century. Further, we would do well to learn from one another, recognizing that our diversity is a great blessing and an invaluable resource to the WAGF—one which allows us to glean wisdom, passion, cultural

¹ Bryant Myers, *Engaging Globalization*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 199; Pew Research, “The New Face of Global Christianity” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project*, April 12, 2006. <http://tinyurl.com/ycyuuht>.

² Myers, *Engaging Globalization*, 196. Myers, citing Oliver Roy, notes that major Christian growth in the twentieth century was due to Pentecostalism, which globalized its footprint in less than a decade after its emergence in the early twentieth century (199).

aptitude, and best practices from one another. We must leverage the collective wisdom and experience God has given his people to catalyze church planting efforts, both now and in the years to come.

To that end, the WAGF Church Planting Commission (CPC) is executing research for the compilation of a White Paper that seeks to gather insight and offer analysis and best practices for the express purpose of inspiring and equipping WAGF member Fellowships to catalyze church planting efforts in their respective regions. The CPC White Paper draws from three streams of research, which are applied within its three sections.

The first section draws on biblical theology to ascertain the nature of church planting in the New Testament church, specifically identifying it as a Spirit-filled and directed endeavor that empowered all people for participation in mission through the multiplication of churches. This includes an examination of both those churches whose genesis was facilitated by the missionary work of the apostles and those which were more spontaneous and decentralized. The desire of this section is to root our future efforts in carrying out the MM33 vision in Holy Scripture—not in order to be bound to the methods of the New Testament church, whose time and place in human history is different than our own, but to understand those timeless missional principles that can inform our own strategies and postures in church planting today.

The second section analyzes and identifies key characteristics of church planting efforts within the Assemblies of God in particular. While innovation for the future requires that we not become entrenched in “yesterday’s manna,” we also anticipate that there are characteristics of WAGF church planting efforts that have contributed to its global growth and are necessary to understand in order to retain those essential components of what makes us a Pentecostal movement. We also recognize that the last century of church planting work has given us a wealth of missiological wisdom and insight, both through theological reflection as well as learning from past mistakes, that we would do well to carry forward. One such example is the shift from a “From the West to the Rest” approach to missionary work and church planting in non-Western

parts of the world toward a “From all to all” approach that better leverages our unique callings, collective wisdom, and bonds of unity to carry out the Great Commission.

The third section explores current church planting models and best practices in operation within WAGF regions today. The intention of this section is not to recommend any particular model or approach as the “right” model. Instead, we hope, through the sharing of collective best practices, to inspire approaches that glean wisdom from the models and best practices of one region to be recontextualized and used in another.

Finally, in the fourth section, we coalesce best practices, highlight potential opportunities that exist, and provide recommendations for implementation or consideration. Such analysis will be intended to inform and inspire, rather than dictate and direct.

Conclusion

In 1 Samuel 7, following a victory over the Philistines at Mizpah, Samuel set a stone between Mizpah and Shen, calling it *Ebenezer*—a recognition and declaration that “thus far the Lord has helped us” (1 Sam 7:12 NIV). Samuel did not stay at Mizpah but continued the journey to which God had called him. However, the Ebenezer stood as a testament to the timeless truth that just as God has been faithful until now, so too he will be faithful to carry us in the future.

Our prayer is that this White Paper would function as an Ebenezer of sorts: a reminder of God’s faithfulness in and through the ministry of both our spiritual mothers and fathers in the New Testament church, as well as in the sacrificial ministry of those who have labored in partnership with the Spirit to see the WAGF grow to what it is today. Additionally, we want to capture and commemorate some of the best of what is taking place in this present moment within our Fellowship. But this White Paper is not simply a reminder of the past or a celebration of the present, it is also intended to equip and inspire us for this next phase of growth in the World Assemblies of God Fellowship—calling us all to reflect on the timeless truth that just as God has

been faithful until now, he will continue to be faithful as we partner with him to multiply his church.

Section 1

A Biblical Theology of WAGF Church Planting

Introduction

The task ahead of us is daunting: the goal set by our MM33 leadership team is to plant one million churches by the year 2033. There is a lot of work that is already being done. The leaderships of the different regions of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship are taking stock of how many churches already exist within the Assemblies of God network family. Meanwhile, there have been many efforts taken to draw up strategic plans to accomplish this massive faith goal that has been set before us.

While we sift through various strategies and reflect on various models for church planting, we must look deep into the Scriptures, which are the foundation on which our movement stands. Oftentimes, as we have looked for models to plant churches, we have considered the New Testament as one of the models that we can adopt; however, we need to understand that the New Testament has its own cultural context and its church planting model cannot simply be lifted off its ancient pages and implemented in our modern culture. Rather than simply seeing the New Testament as a model for church planting, we must take a little time to unearth the broad-based transcultural principles that are found in Scripture to help plant and multiply churches that are aligned to biblical principles, procedures, patterns, and practices. At the end of the day, we need to be planting churches his way: according to the principles of Scripture, rather than just adapting pragmatic/utilitarian approaches which may be deviant from the principles of Scripture.

While we desire to plant churches the biblical way, we need to overcome the challenge that not all that is described in the New Testament can be adopted as a prescription for us to follow. Thus, we must carefully work through the whole of the Scriptures to arrive at broad-based principles that would have “n” number of forms and applications as we seek to implement

them in our different cultures across the world. To do so, we need to have a grasp of the metanarrative of Scripture, a definition of the church from simple, biblical derivation, and a holistic understanding of the Great Commission – the mission that Jesus commissioned all his disciples to follow. From this, we will lay out a set of broad-based New Testament principles and patterns that will help us prepare the ground for planting and multiplying churches his way.

Grasping the Metanarrative of Scripture

God has revealed his heart to us through his Scriptures that have been handed down to us. The metanarrative of Scripture is that God is setting apart a community for himself for all eternity. This community—the People of God—are invited to join him in his reconciliatory mission in the world, to expand the family of God to include all the nations of the earth.

The narrative expands with God setting apart Israel to be his community—a tribe of tribes—so that his people would be a light to the Gentiles. In the fullness of time, the Father sent Jesus through Israel, so that through His life, death, burial, and resurrection God would break the dividing walls between the Jews and the Gentiles, to build his church community, against whom the gates of hell shall not prevail. With Jesus’ accession, God sent his Spirit to empower his community to go and continue to build his church community across the whole wide world. At the culmination of the ages, Jesus will come back to gather his church community and he will be with them forever and ever.

Church Community—A Simple Derivation

The metanarrative of the Scriptures gives us the broad derivation of the church as God’s community. The New Testament defines the church broadly as a community of disciples who mature in the teachings of Christ to become God’s own family that reflects Christ to the watching world. This needs to be highlighted because the church today has become a religious institution gathering within a building with a set of rituals, programs, and activities. According to

the New Testament, the church family is not just a community when it's gathered in a particular location or on a particular day but continues to be his family even when it's scattered throughout the week.

The centrality of this whole metanarrative rests in the setting apart and the building of his community, the church, that breaks through all the divides that sin has brought forth into the world. The walls between God and Man, between ethnicity, gender, and class have been broken to build his one new humanity, his church.

In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul states that God's eternal plan is that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God would be revealed to the rulers and authorities of the heavenly realms (Eph. 3:10). The church is the community for which Jesus died, rose, and is coming again; it is central to his eternal plan. If we truly love Christ, we must love his church and build the church that Christ is building.

While numerous images and metaphors of the relationship between Christ and the Church are found throughout the New Testament, perhaps the most significant are those that are familial in nature—namely the apocalyptic image of the Church as the bride of Christ (Rev. 18:23; 19:7; 21:2,9; 22:17, c.f., OT images in Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Song of Songs). This central image requires that we view the relationship between Christ and his Church through relational terms primarily and serves as a guiding metaphor for the centrality of relationship in the task of Christian mission. An expanded view of the bridal image was used extensively in the writings of the church fathers, who spoke of the Church as “mother,” from whom new Christians are birthed, nurtured, and protected.³

³ See Robert Webber, *Journey to Jesus: The Worship, Evangelism, and Nurture Mission of the Early Church* (Abingdon Press, 2001).

Our Mission: Holistic Understanding of the Great Commission

If the central theme of the metanarrative is the community that Jesus is building, then the mission that he commissioned should naturally reflect the multiplication of his community, not only in Jerusalem but into Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world.

In today's Christianity, the understanding of the Great Commission is varied. Predominantly, the Great Commission is understood only in terms of going into all the world and sharing the gospel. This sharing of the gospel is done through various forms that range from mega-crusades and televangelism to the distribution of tracts and Bibles, hospital visitations, and personal evangelism. Stephen Neill states, "If everything is mission, nothing is mission."⁴ We need to have a holistic understanding of the Great Commission to fully grasp the mission that Jesus commissioned.

Careful observation of Matt 28:16-20 helps us understand that the Great Commission passage is not only about going and evangelizing the lost, but baptizing those who are saved and teaching them to observe all the things that Jesus has commanded us. So, this is about much more than evangelizing. Oh, yes, we must disciple because the passage asks us to make disciples; however, our understanding of discipleship is sometimes limited to one-on-one mentoring around a curriculum or a program. The Great Commission passage is not only found in Matthew but also in Luke. Luke 24:46-49 states:

He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

While the commission was given to the disciples of Jesus, they were asked to wait for the Spirit to empower them, and then go and do what Jesus had commissioned them.

The Gospel of Luke is just the first volume of the two-volume catechetical history that Luke writes. Luke states in the Gospel of Luke that all Jesus began to do and teach continues in

⁴ E.g., Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension* (London: Edinburgh House, 1959), 81.

the book of Acts, the second volume of what Jesus, in and through the Apostles, continued to do and teach through the Spirit. Although the Gospels hold the commission in its stated form, the unfolding of the Great Commission is fully understood only when we observe what the Apostles continue to do after they had been empowered by the Spirit.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart, in their book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan 2014), help us to look at the book of Acts through six panels. As the Spirit continued to progress the gospel forward—starting from Jerusalem (the Jewish center) and moving to the uttermost, Rome (the Gentile center)—, the Apostles preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, and people believed and embraced it. They did not just stop with evangelizing; those who were saved were baptized, and those who were baptized were gathered in church communities. In these church communities that were planted, the disciples taught the people to observe the teachings of Christ: to fellowship, pray, break bread together, and truly care for one another. Such churches multiplied, replenished, and were networked together under the sphere of apostolic teams that led them like fathers caring for their children.⁵ David Hesselgrave states:

The primary mission of the church and, therefore, of the churches is to proclaim the gospel of Christ and gather believers into local churches where they can be built up in the faith and made effective in service; thus, new congregations are to be planted throughout the world.⁶

Hesselgrave outlines a step-by-step process to plant churches from the book of Acts which he calls the Pauline cycle.

If we truly understand the Great Commission as seen not only through the statements found in the Gospels but also through the unfolding of it in Acts, we will be able to holistically grasp it as the Spirit's progression of the gospel by the planting, establishing, entrusting, and multiplying of local churches worldwide.

⁵ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read*, 112-31.

⁶ Hesselgrave, David J. *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*. 2d edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 17.

The Great Commission is For All and From All to All

Now that we have holistically grasped the Great Commission, we also need to understand that the Great Commission is not limited to a few going to plant churches; every disciple must understand that as they mature, they are committed, commissioned disciples of Christ. The whole church needs to take the whole gospel by planting churches in the whole wide world. When Jesus commissioned the disciples, he asked them to wait in the upper room for the Spirit to empower them. It was not just the eleven who waited in the upper room but at least 120 of them waited and were empowered.

Not only is the Great Commission for all to participate in, but the Great Commission is to reach all people: every nation, tribe, tongue, and ethnicity. There is no limit to who one should reach; the commission is going into all the world. This throws open the idea to not only evangelize and plant churches within our own culture and ethnicity but to be engaged in cross-cultural church planting. The biblical mission is not monocentric but polycentric; it was not only one church, in one part of the world that sent and planted churches, but several churches sent people to be part of the apostolic missionary teams, as the Spirit set them apart.

Preparing the Ground to Plant and Multiply Churches the New Testament Way

Now that we have clarity on a broad, simple derivation and definition of the Church as a community of disciples of Christ that reflects Christ to the watching world and an understanding that the mission that Jesus commissioned simply is the progression of the Gospel by the multiplication of churches, we must prepare the ground to plant and multiply such simple church communities worldwide. There are a few broad-based principles and repeated patterns in the New Testament that need to be considered by the Assemblies of God movement to accomplish this God-given mandate of planting and multiplying to one million churches by the year 2033. The scope of this paper does not allow us to go into the depths of this subject matter, but we will have a brief discussion on these broad-based principles and repeated patterns.

Empowered by the Strategic Spirit

The Early Church had its origins in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As a movement, we too have had this unique origin of the empowerment of the same Holy Spirit amidst us. It is important for us to believe that as we have crossed through a century of our existence, we need the Spirit much more than ever before.

Effective Spirit Strategies

If we were to ask many Pentecostal believers why he or she needs the Spirit, the answer would be, “We need power;” and if we were to ask many why he or she needs more of the Spirit, the answer would be, “We need more power.” We have embraced the powerful Spirit: the Spirit that gives us the boldness and the Spirit that gives us the gifts. Charismatic gifts have been the primary focus of our movement at large, but we have missed out on the strategic Spirit that has been given to us to reveal what Jesus could not reveal when he was on earth. In John 16:12-15, Jesus said:

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.

So, the Spirit was sent to guide us into all truth and tell us what is yet to come. If we truly see, what happened with the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2 is seen to be the guidance of the Spirit in giving a clear strategy of how the early apostles ought to continue the work of Jesus in building his church by fulfilling his mandate—the Great Commission.

The missionary Spirit led the early apostles to progress the gospel and plant churches across strategic cities of the then-known Roman world. The Spirit opened and shut doors and directed the early apostles. Acts 16:6-10 explains how the Spirit was the one that led this mission of planting churches:

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So, they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

The Spirit guided the church at Antioch to set apart Paul and Barnabas for a worldwide mission, and they went to strategic locations, evangelized them, established local churches, developed elders, entrusted those churches to them, and went on to other locations to do the same. By the end of the 3rd century, this strategic plan, guided by the Spirit, helped saturate the whole of the Roman Empire with churches.

Jeff Reed summarizes three core elements of the ten-step process that David Hesselgrave identifies as the Pauline cycle. This, in essence, is the broad strategy of the Spirit delivered through the apostles from Jesus, based on the core principles found in the Great Commission. This is a repeated pattern throughout the ministries of Peter, Philip, and Paul in the book of Acts that implements the Great Commission.

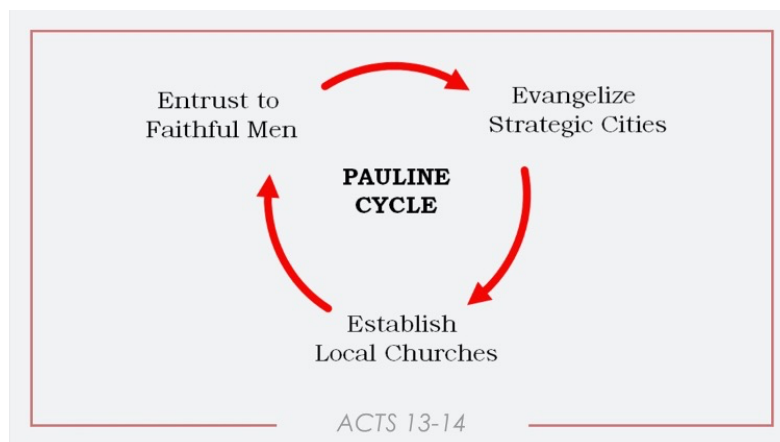


Figure 1: The Pauline Cycle
(Hesselgrave 2000, 42-54)

If we follow the Spirit's strategy found in Acts, we too will be able to saturate our world with healthy, reproducing churches.

Earnest Prayer and Complete Dependence

To follow the Spirit's direction and strategy, the early church was completely dependent on the Spirit. This was evident through the earnest prayers done as a community. They prayed when they were threatened. They fasted and prayed, and the Spirit set apart apostolic leaders. Paul asked the church at Colossae to pray for open doors for the gospel and that they would communicate the gospel with clarity. Paul prayed for the churches to be established well. Prayer in the early church was core to their existence and exhibited their complete and total dependence on the Spirit.

The churches in certain parts of Asia and Africa are growing and replenishing the territories; if we ask local leaders why church planting and multiplication are happening in these locations, they will always ascribe the reason for such growth to consistent, continuous, and earnest prayer.

Romans 8 is crucial in understanding the centrality of the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers. Paul highlights how the Spirit works both in intercession and empowerment, extending beyond individual edification to the collective mission of the church. Romans 8:26-27 describes how the Spirit intercedes for believers with groanings too deep for words, aligning their prayers with God's will and inviting them to participate in God's redemptive work in the world. The Spirit of adoption in Romans 8:15-17 offers a sense of identity and security, calling believers to embody a reconciliatory posture of a member of God's family beckoning others to be reconciled into God's house.

Expecting the Miraculous

The miraculous was considered normative in the early church. We too have had signs, wonders, and miracles as the hallmark of our movement, for the Spirit backed up the preaching of the gospel with the demonstration of his power. Miracles open doors for the gospel.

While Scripture, church history, and modern history alike attest to how the working of signs and wonders can be abused or used for personal gain, it is imperative that Pentecostals retain a reliance on the Holy Spirit for the working of signs and wonders as a testimony to the truthfulness of the gospel message. Without the Spirit's powerful demonstration, we will struggle to cut through the post-modern world that we live in to plant churches his way.

Establishing Our Church Communities Well

In several regions of the World Assemblies of God movement, the idea of the established church is when the congregation has a certain number of baptized members and in some cases has a credentialed minister attached to it. Our present sense of being established is more quantitative than qualitative. We believe that an established church has a good music team equipped with an excellent sound system, good media, a good speaker gifted with oratorical skills, and systems in place that help the church be organized well; but in the New Testament, the word *sterizo*—which means to establish or strengthen—is used by Paul in his writings to state that the church must be rooted well in the teachings of Christ and must be strengthened to become mature and fruitful. In the early church context within the Scriptures, the idea of being established is more qualitative but still does not exclude being quantitative.

When Jesus went through the towns and villages, he saw the crowds and he was moved with compassion. This was because he saw them harassed, helpless, homeless, and headless (leaderless/shepherdless). He looked to his disciples, and he said the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. He said pray to the Lord of the harvest so that he may send the workers. The idea of the workers in the context of this passage is “shepherd workers”. As long as there are

crowds who do not have a home to belong to and a shepherd to care for them, they remain helpless and harassed; in other words, they would either be weak, faint-hearted, or unruly in their lives.

Many churches today are filled with crowds and the environment is not suitable for the development of a community where people belong and are disciplined. The Great Commission states that we need to help everyone not only to embrace the gospel and know the teachings but also to observe all that Jesus has commanded and to be presented as fully mature in Christ. This is a daunting task ahead of us. If we established our churches well according to the way and plan passed on by Christ through the Spirit's inspiration to the apostles, evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, church planting, and multiplication would be as natural as breathing is.

If this were the case, after someone embraced the gospel, they would be baptized to be part of the church community, and they would begin a whole journey of becoming a disciple of Christ, mentored and shepherded well within the community. The church maturing as a community of disciples of Christ in the holistic teachings of Christ is the only way by which each of its members would be established in the holistic understanding of the Great Commission and grow to become committed, commissioned disciples of Christ. This is so crucial for our churches to be engaged in church planting. Once we have committed, commissioned disciples of Christ, wherever they go, the gospel will go, and their homes will become a base for the expansion of the gospel and the planting of churches.

The crux of the matter is that our local churches, when established in the way of Christ and his apostles, will become healthy, reproducing churches that are well engaged in the world, painting a beautiful picture of Christ to the watching world. For this to happen, we need to create the right environment to build a community and have enough shepherds to care for and establish these communities.

Eating Together

We might first take note of the centrality of the table in both the New Testament and among many cultures today as a key method that provide the right environment for members of early church communities to grow into a family. In the cultures of the New Testament, homes were the primary place of table fellowship, thus much of this relationship building took place within the home. We might also remember that the New Testament practice of the Lord's Supper was, in its earliest form, a meal at the table.

When the early church gathered, they gathered around a meal. This was the Lord's supper: a "love feast" where the bread and the cup were part of the whole meal. The meal was understood as Jesus himself being part of the community that broke every dividing wall to become this one body of Christ. We would do well to consider how community meals provide the right environment for establishing our discipleship as well.

Equipping the Priesthood of All Believers

When we look to the New Testament church we need to recognize that we are looking at a collection of churches scattered throughout the Roman world, with a vast array of varying practices, customs, and theological orientations (we only need to look at the mediation of controversy between Jewish and Gentile believers in Paul's letters for several clear examples). But one consistency that we see throughout churches of the New Testament period was a view of spiritual formation that oriented people toward being equipped for mission in their communities. From this orientation we might note several characteristics that are worthy of consideration.

First, the first Christians were not reliant solely—or even primarily—upon Sunday services for the discipleship of the congregation. The centrality of the sermon in Christian worship is a product of the Protestant Reformation, whereas the Lord's table was the key, central focal point for the worship of the first Christians. Discipleship took place in the natural rhythms of life among a community who was with each other daily (Acts 2:46), drawing from the

discipleship wisdom of the Torah (e.g. Deut. 6:7; 11:19). Discipleship was not a matter primarily concerned with pedagogy, but with relational proximity.

Second, Paul's charge for the Ephesians to equip the saints for the work of ministry (4:11-12) indicates the primary discipleship duty of the church leadership is in the training of Christians within their care for the purpose of missional engagement. Mission, it would seem to place "out there" (i.e., outside of the church gathering) more than it took place "in here" (i.e., in Sunday services). Thus, training for mission was not a peripheral exercise but central to the church's formation task.

Third, while the example of the New Testament's approach to equipping is significant, we would do well to also consider the New Testament's view of the priesthood of all believers. No longer was the priesthood relegated to a professional class of men, but the outpouring of the Spirit signaled the expansion of the priestly task to be the task of every believer, irrespective of socio-economic class, ethnicity, geographic origin, age, or gender. The New Testament believers carried forward the ministry pattern of Jesus, who himself defended the right of women to learn alongside men (Luke 10:38-42) and declare his gospel (John 20:17-18), the right of children to be heard, seen, and in his presence (Matt. 19:14), and for all to have the right to participate in his mission (e.g. John 4:29-43). Luke records that Jesus had women on his team, moving through towns and villages with him in the process of building his kingdom.

After the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost we witness a continued breakdown of the divides that relegated the priesthood to adult men alone. Lydia of Thyatira, who became the first known Christian in Europe, also likely hosted the first European church in her home. Philips young daughters functioned in prophetic ministry (Acts 21:9), and Paul's employment of women throughout his ministry included leaders such as Junia, Priscilla, Phoebe, and more. Paul was not against women being part of the expansion of the church. Likewise, the whole of the New Testament gives plenty of evidence of women being an integral and active part of the mission.

As those who believe in the full testimony of Scripture, and who hold the Spirit has indeed been poured out on our daughters and sons, young and old alike in fulfillment of Joel's prophesy, we must continue in the pattern laid out for us by Jesus, handed down to us by the ministry of the apostles, and fully empower and release the priesthood of all believers for the fulfillment of mission.

Enduring Through Persecution

The early church in the New Testament was a persecuted one. Likewise, so are our churches in the majority world. The New Testament Scriptures do not support the popular belief that the church will not be persecuted: day in and day out, the churches in Asia are recorded going through persecution, and this would become a worldwide phenomenon. As soon as Paul evangelized and planted churches, he equipped people to stand strong through persecution. Acts 14:21-22 states:

They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said.

The future of church planting is all about planting churches in persecuted regions of the world and we will do well if we have this realization in our minds as we establish more churches.

Emergence of Apostolic Leadership Structures

When a movement stops moving and settles, it usually ends up as a monument in a mess. Today in several places across Europe, the church that was at one time thriving is now the mere remains of the buildings in which the church once gathered and they have become monuments and museums. If we look deep into the issues that caused this shift, we will discover that the church stopped sending teams to evangelize new locations and stopped planting new churches.

The way the church stays alive without becoming merely traditional and nominal and entering a slow process of death is to continue to move and not become settled.

The early church moved by the prompting of the Spirit in setting apart apostolic teams to evangelize and plant churches in new, strategic locations. The broad biblical definition of being apostolic is simply being sent out. If they did not move by the prompting of the Spirit, then the Spirit would still scatter them—sometimes by taking the opportunity brought about through persecution. In essence, the church that does not send out missionaries becomes stagnant and dies.

The early church did not send individual missionaries, but they sent out missionary teams. When these teams were sent, they did not go and do some sporadic good works or work toward cultural transformation; instead, they primarily evangelized and planted simple churches that engaged in good works and cultural transformation, becoming Christian communities that were living out kingdom culture. We need to critically review our missionary sending paradigm and align ourselves towards this model: focusing our cross-cultural missionaries on primarily planting churches and/or aiding the process of strengthening and multiplying churches.

Ralph Winter traces through the whole of Scripture and the whole of church history emphasizing that there are two parts to missional structure: one is sodality—a team that is mobile and moving—and the other is modality—a team that is stationary and grounded. Both sodality and modality are necessary for the mission to be accomplished. While we as an organization have grown over the last one hundred years, we have become more modal in our structure, confining ourselves to stationary denominational structures. We have been slowly losing ourselves to nominalism because we do not have dynamic, apostolic sodal structures in place.

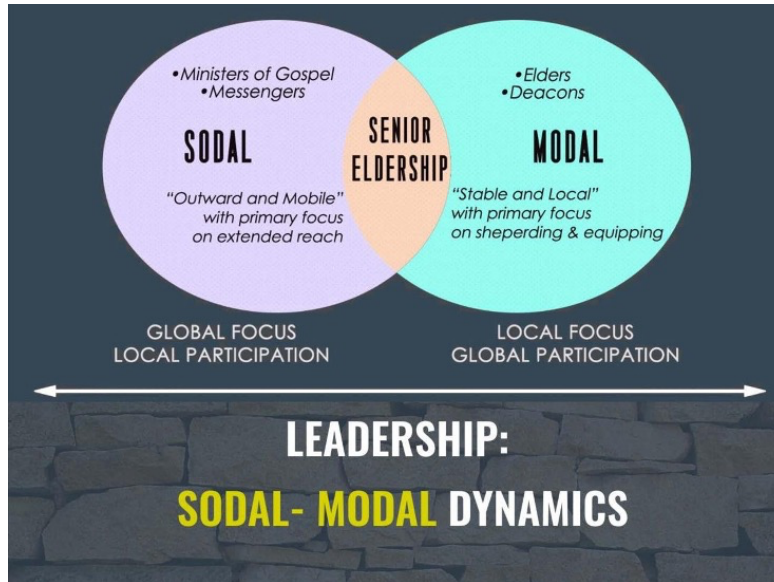


Figure 3: Leadership: Sodal—Modal Dynamics
(Winter: 220-229)

Pairing these sodal and modal structures, we need teams that are set apart from the network of local churches in strategic locations and sent out for the expressed purpose of evangelizing other strategic locations in order to plant and establish local churches, raise and develop leaders, and entrust those churches to local elders. These teams must form a new network of churches in these locations to identify strategic churches to again set apart and send people who will join the apostolic teams to further expand the network of churches.

Such apostolic teams in the early church equipped the saints for works of service, emphasized the preservation of sound doctrine, and encouraged unity and one-mindedness amongst the network of churches. We need teams that are accomplishing these same goals today.

Expanding the Eldership Base

One of the key responsibilities of the apostolic sent-out leadership is to look out for potential elders who manage their households well and have good reputations amongst the community to develop them as elders to shepherd the churches that have been planted and

established. Practically, we will never be able to plant or multiply new churches if we do not raise up enough elders to effectively operate and shepherd these newly established churches.

Roland Allen in *Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* states that we multiply churches by multiplying our bishops. In other words, unless we increase the leadership base of those who are taking care of the stationary, local churches, we cannot expand beyond the current location of the church. We must prioritize the intentional development of elders as a core process for church planting and multiplication to happen.

Enabling the Next Generation

The Scriptures talk about young Timothies and Tituses joining in with apostolic teams and being mentored and shaped by leaders to become master craftsmen, leading new teams, as the baton is being passed on from one generation to another. The training and releasing of the next generation is a much-needed exercise for the whole of our movement, in all regions. Prioritizing this would enable the inter-generational task force that is needed for the planting and multiplication of our churches.

Engage in the World to Exponentially Multiply Churches

The Assemblies of God movement's roots are well embedded in the Holiness movement, and we have always called the church to come out of Babylon and to live holy lives. "Do not be conformed to the patterns of the world" (Rom 12:2) has been the clarion call of our movement. While we are called to be not of the world, the Scriptures emphasize that we need to be in the world.

Jesus' high priestly prayer is that we be redeemed from the world, be sanctified by his word, be part of his community, and then be sent back to the same world that we have been redeemed from. Our call is not to be the pillar saints or to be shut off in caves to practice holiness but to be truly engaged in the world.

Exemplary Lifestyles

The call is to live an exemplary lifestyle. The Pauline Epistles continue to emphasize not to live how the people of the world live. The Ephesian letter emphasizes individual transformation in our thoughts, words, deeds, and the wise usage of time, as we live amongst the people of the world (Eph 4:17-5:21). Paul's letter to Titus, who is in Crete to set the church in order, states that our individual lives must adorn the gospel (Titus 2:3-10).

Excellent Families

As we live in this world, we are encouraged to build solid families, according to the teachings of Christ. Husbands are to model their love for their wives according to Christ's love for his church and wives are to honor their husbands and co-work as their allies in building a godly family. Children are being built up in the ways of the Lord. Managing the family well is to be extended into leading the larger church well and, in turn, it is meant to impact the world around us.

Empathetic Good Works

We are called to be and become benefactors—good works communities. Every individual and family, and the larger church family ought to engage in good works within the church community and the world around them. The world around us must see our good works and glorify the Father in heaven.

Entrepreneurial Good Occupations

There is also an emphasis in the Scriptures to be engaged in good occupations, to meet the pressing needs of people (Titus 3:14). Lydia, Aquila, and Priscilla were each entrepreneurial in what they were doing. The Scriptures do not encourage the secular/sacred divide which we

often ascribe to. Every disciple was engaged in the watching world, providing the necessary finances for the spontaneous expansion of churches.

Eternal Good News

While we live good lives, build good homes, engage in good occupations, and do good works, we are called to share the eternal good news with all and help people embrace the truth of the gospel.

Expanding Holistic, Transformational Churches

When a church community is engaged in the world together, each member's life work becomes a bridge between the world and the church community. Since we are empowering the priesthood of all believers, each one is engaging in the marketplace, bringing people to their homes, eating together with them, and answering questions that arise in their hearts because of the way we live. Sometimes this may even require one to defend their faith in love when others ask antagonistic questions. This whole process aids in the progression of the gospel, through the planting and multiplication of churches, to transform the world around us for Christ.

As we grasp the simple definition of the church and have more clarity on the mission that Jesus commissioned, we need to prepare the soil once again, within our Assemblies of God movement, to plant and multiply churches his way. In this process, we need to get back to scriptural principles and repeated patterns to establish our churches well, follow the Spirit's strategies, and restructure our leadership to engage in the world to bring about a worldwide multiplication of churches. Additionally, we must bathe this whole process in prayer and operate in complete dependence on the Spirit as we work towards reaching the goal of planting and multiplying one million churches by the year 2033.

Section 2

A History of WAGF Church Planting

In this section, we turn from a biblical and theological perspective on church planting to a historical one. What strategies did the Assemblies of God employ in the past, and why? To answer these questions concisely, we delimited our investigation in three ways:

First, we focused on the period between the founding of the Assemblies of God in 1914 and the founding of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship in 1989. Although the 1957 General Council of the AG (USA) broached the idea of an international AG body, three decades passed until the idea was realized. The timing was intentional. Both the AG (USA) and other AG national churches declared the 1990s to be “The Decade of Harvest” and devoted considerable effort to evangelism and church planting worldwide. The WAGF’s founding thus represented a new phase in the worldwide AG family, providing an institutional means whereby national AG churches could collaborate on initiatives important to the entire global Fellowship, including evangelism and church planting.⁷

Second, we focused on Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM), the missionary arm of the AG (USA).⁸ The primary reason for doing so was that AGWM’s efforts during the delimited timeframe (1914-1989) have been documented by Gary B. McGee’s two-volume history, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached*.⁹ Another reason was the outsized influence AGWM historically has played within the global AG family generally and in the formation of the WAGF particularly. However, by focusing on AGWM, we did not mean to discount the work of other

⁷ For a brief history of the WAGF, see William Molenaar, “The World Assemblies of God Fellowship: United in the Missionary Spirit,” *Assemblies of God Heritage* (March 2011): 40–47.

⁸ Earlier names for AGWM included Foreign Missions Department and Division of Foreign Missions.

⁹ *This Gospel Shall Be Preached*, Vol. 1, *A History and Theology of Assemblies of God Foreign Missions to 1959* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1986) and *This Gospel Shall Be Preached*, Vol. 2, *A History and Theology of Assemblies of God Foreign Missions Since 1959* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989).

AG national churches and missions bodies. Our intent was simply to highlight an important thread of WAGF history without claiming that it represented the entire tapestry.

Third, we focused on AGWM mission strategy during this period. John Mark Terry and J. D. Payne argue that mission strategy includes two elements: “future orientation” and “plan for process.”¹⁰ They define *mission strategy* as “the overall process describing what we believe the Lord would have us accomplish to make disciples of all nations.”¹¹ Strategy, so defined, incorporates the desired end and the required means. Understood that way, AGWM strategy during the timeframe under investigation can be summarized in a sentence from Melvin L. Hodges’ *The Indigenous Church*: “New Testament preaching and practice will produce a New Testament church in any place where the gospel is preached.”¹² The indigenous church strategy prioritized evangelizing individuals and planting self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches. However, the term “radical strategy” could also be used of AG missions efforts.¹³ The two terms are conceptually distinct, though historically related in AG missions.

With these delimitations in mind, we turn to the historical currents that influenced AGWM mission strategy (“From the West to the Rest”). Then we examine how AGWM articulated and employed that strategy on the mission field (“From Dependence to Responsibility”). Finally, we evaluate the demographic growth of the WAGF and the opportunities it poses for evangelism and church planting in the 21st Century (“From Everywhere to Everyone”).

¹⁰ John Mark Terry and J. D. Payne, *Developing a Strategy for Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 3.

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹² Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church: A Complete Handbook on How to Grow Young Churches*, 2nd ed. (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), 14.

¹³ Gary B. McGee, “The Radical Strategy in Modern Missions: The Linkage of Paranormal Phenomena with Evangelism,” in *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics*, ed. C. Douglas McConnell (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997), 69–95. McGee expanded on this analysis in his magnum opus, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism*, American Society of Missiology Series, No. 45 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

We might first briefly note the unique role of the Decade of Harvest in the history of the WAGF and how it informs our cooperative mission work today as the WAGF undertakes the MM33 vision. The Decade of Harvest initiative of the 1990s provided an incredible conceptual groundwork around which member fellowships of the WAGF could rally around a common missional initiative—a scale of which was unprecedented within the movement. The Decade of Harvest set a precedence for common initiatives that laid the groundwork for MM33.

Reflective analysis of the impact of the Decade of Harvest initiative also requires us to identify the improvements that can be made for present collaborative missional work, such as MM33, along with any future initiatives the WAGF undertakes in the years to come. While the Decade of Harvest oriented member fellowships around a common goal, it did not possess the strategic sophistication that can be the characteristic shape of current and future work. The Decade of Harvest came about in the nascent years of the formation of the WAGF, gifting the movement with a common purpose while it cultivated a unity of relationship. Today, we are poised to take the next step, honoring the legacy of unity of relationship cultivated in those years, but moving into common unity of mission—strategizing and collaborating with one another in tangible, practical ways. This unity for the sake of common mission is the next step in the ongoing maturation of the WAGF as we seek to respond to global challenges and missional opportunities with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

From the West to the Rest

Pentecostalism was born in the final years of what Kenneth Scott Latourette termed the “Great Century” of Christian missions (1800–1914). That century witnessed an unprecedented geographic expansion of the Faith from the West to the rest of the world. “Christianity was now taken to more peoples than ever before and entered as a transforming agency into more cultures

than in all the preceding centuries,” Latourette explained.¹⁴ From the start, Pentecostals were advocates for and practitioners of missions, especially evangelism and church planting.¹⁵

The Great Century bequeathed three legacies to Pentecostal missionary efforts: *pathways* to the mission field, a *problem* to solve, and *precedents* for solving that problem. Let us consider each in turn.

Pathways to the Mission Field

Regarding pathways to the mission field, Andrew F. Walls notes that the modern Western missionary movement was coterminous with “the great European migration” of the last five centuries.¹⁶ This migration took Europeans not to the “New World,” but to worlds new to them in North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. It established trade routes and ports of call for Europeans on the move. Western missionaries—first Catholic in North and South America, then Protestant in Africa and Asia—followed these trade routes and used European outposts as bases for missions to the indigenous people.

A Problem to Solve

Because these pathways were typically forged by imperial powers, however, they created a problem for Western missionaries. This problem had to do with the way Western missionaries approached indigenous peoples. Walls speaks of “two modes of Christian expansion”: the “crusading mode” and the “missionary mode.”¹⁷ He describes their similarities and differences as follows:

¹⁴ *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. 4: *The Great Century, A.D. 1800—A.D. 1914, Europe and the United States of America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 7.

¹⁵ Allan Anderson, *Spreading Flames: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

¹⁶ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement from the West: A Biography from Birth to Old Age*, *Studies in the History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2024), 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

They grew up in the same areas in the same period; they coexisted and went on side by side. But they are totally different in concept and in spirit. The crusader may invite, but in the end, he is prepared to compel. The missionary cannot compel; the missionary can only demonstrate, explain, entreat—and leave the rest to God. But if the missionary is to demonstrate, invite, and explain, then the missionary has to gain a hearing.¹⁸

In another place, he writes:

If the missionary cannot compel, then entrance is possible only with the consent of those to whom the missionary goes. It is necessary to find a place, a niche, within the society. The fundamental difference between the crusader and the missionary is that the missionary lives and works on someone else's terms.¹⁹

The two modes were conceptually distinct, but missionaries often muddled them in practice. For example, missionaries could eschew compulsion in their evangelism and church-planting efforts, even as they exhibited racist attitudes and paternalistic actions in their dealings with indigenous peoples. No wonder, then, that while the geographic expansion of Christianity during the Great Century was rapid, the demographic expansion of Christianity lagged. One critic compared the century's missions efforts to a "tortoise racing with a railway train; the longer the race continues the further the tortoise is left behind."²⁰ With so much missionary energy expended on so few conversions, something had to change.

Precedents for Solving the Problem

Two changes in missionary thinking served as precedents for Pentecostal missiology: the indigenous church strategy and the radical strategy.

The indigenous church strategy initially arose in the mid-nineteenth century. It described the goal of planting churches characterized by what came to be called the Three Selves: self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating (or self-extending). In other words, missionaries should plant churches that develop their own leadership structures, finance their own ministries,

¹⁸ Ibid., 13–14.

¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

²⁰ Quoted in McGee, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism*, 19.

and engage in their own ministries of evangelism and church planting. Once they have done that, they move on to a new field of service.

Historians credit Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society (UK) and Rufus Anderson of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (US) for independently but simultaneously articulating this strategy in written form.²¹ Venn outlined the strategy in three papers to the CMS: “The Ordination and Employment of Native Teachers” (1851), “The Organisation of Native Churches” (1861), and “Review of Progress made toward Native Church Organisation” (1866).²² Anderson’s articulation of indigenous church principles can be found in the committee report he authored, “Outline of Missionary Policy” (1855).²³

Venn and Anderson developed the indigenous church strategy in part as a pragmatic response to realities on the mission field. Alice T. Ott argues that two concerns predominated: “shortage of funds” and “dearth of missionary candidates.”²⁴ “Not only were native teachers and catechists cheaper than Western missionaries,” she writes, “but they were also inured to the climate and considerably more effective.”²⁵ This pragmatic basis explains why there is little biblical exegesis or theological analysis in the seminal papers that first articulated the indigenous church strategy.

That deficiency was filled by Roland Allen, an Anglican missionary to northern China, in his 1912 book, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?*²⁶ He mined Acts and Paul’s letters for guidance about how the apostle Paul planted churches. “In a very few years,” he wrote, “[Paul]

²¹ For a brief history, focusing on Henry Venn, see Alice T. Ott, *Turning Points in the Expansion of Christianity: From Pentecost to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2023), 181–204.

²² William Knight, *Memoir of the Rev. H. Venn* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880), 305–321. Available online at <https://archive.org/details/memoirofrevhvenn00knig/page/304/mode/2up?view=theater>.

²³ *Forty-Seventh Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1856* (Boston: Press of T. R. Martin, 1856), 51–67. Available online at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015073264940&seq=270&view=2up>.

²⁴ Ott, *Turning Points in the Expansion of Christianity*, 183.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* (London: Robert Scott, 1912). Available online at <https://archive.org/details/missionarymethod00alle/mode/2up>.

built the Church on so firm a basis that it could live and grow in faith and in practice, that it could work out its own problems, and overcome all dangers and hindrances both from within and without. I propose in this book to set forth the methods which he used to produce this amazing result.”²⁷ Paul’s results contrasted sharply with the Great Century’s missionary efforts, which after more than 100 years, had produced comparatively little.

The Venn-Anderson formula of self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches quickly became dominant in Western missions, at least in theory. Due to the inherent difficulty of planting indigenous churches, institutional inertia, and racist and paternalistic attitudes on the part of some missionaries especially, the indigenous church strategy was more often honored in the breach than the observance. Even so, it became the common inheritance of Protestant missions, including those of early Pentecostals. But as we will see, it was Allen’s form of indigenous church strategy that influenced AG missions, in particular.

Gary B. McGee has argued that Pentecostals were heirs of “the radical strategy” in contemporary missions.²⁸ This is the second precedent Pentecostals inherited from the Great Century. The strategy predated Pentecostalism, and aspects of it can be found in fundamentalist and evangelical missions, too. It envisaged “an apocalyptic scenario of divine intervention in signs and wonders to ensure that every tribe and nation would hear the gospel before the close of human history.”²⁹ The focus of the radical strategy was on evangelizing and planting churches in the power of the Spirit before the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The radical strategy drew inspiration from Bible verses such as the following:

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 (Matthew 24:14, NIV).

²⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁸ Gary B. McGee, “The Radical Strategy in Modern Missions: The Linkage of Paranormal Phenomena with Evangelism,” in *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics*, ed. C. Douglas McConnell (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997), 69–95. McGee expanded on this analysis in his magnum opus, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism*, American Society of Missiology Series, No. 45 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

²⁹ Gary B. McGee, “The Radical Strategy,” 74.

As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give (Matthew 10:7–8, NIV).

And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (Mark 16:17–18, NIV).

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

The radical strategy assumed a fundamental continuity between the New Testament era and the present regarding the place of miracles in missions. By contrast, as cessationists, most Protestant denominations assumed a fundamental discontinuity between the two. “In place of supernatural demonstrations of power,” McGee explains, “missionaries confidently shared the blessings of their ‘higher’ civilization to share the gospel.”³⁰ This led to a focus on building institutions, such as Christian schools, hospitals, and charitable organizations, all organized and maintained by missionaries.³¹

This model of “Christianization by civilization”³² often assumed a postmillennial eschatology, which taught that the spread of Christianity would make the world a better place, and the Second Coming would be the capstone on those efforts. By strong contrast, the radical strategy taught a premillennial eschatology that prioritized sharing a universal witness to the

³⁰ Gary B. McGee, “The Radical Strategy,” 70.

³¹ This does not necessarily mean that radicals were indifferent to human suffering, or that most Protestants were indifferent to evangelism and church planting. The question was which came first, and to which missionaries gave their best efforts.

³² Byron Klaus, “Foreword,” in McGee, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism*, xiii.

gospel before the imminent return of the Lord. Radicals evangelized and planted churches with a sense of urgency often lacking from other missions.

The indigenous church strategy and the radical strategy were conceptually distinct. They overlapped on the Three Selfs, but Venn and Anderson should not be considered radicals. All radicals were indigenizers, but not all indigenizers were radicals. Allen, with his focus on utilizing Paul's methods, pointed in radical directions, but his cessationism held him back. In the chapter on miracles, he concluded, "Every day, we see how it is not the possession of great powers but rather the spirit in which any power is used which attracts, which moves, which converts."³³ In this way, he substituted character for miracles. Pentecostals would ask themselves, *Why not have both?*

What characterized early Assemblies of God missiology was the combination of these two streams into a new gestalt: "New Testament methods coupled with New Testament power."³⁴

From Dependence to Responsibility

AGWM missions strategy developed over time. In this section, we will look at three milestones in its development: the 1921 *Pentecostal Evangel* articles by Alice E. Luce, titled "Paul's Missionary Methods"; the 1956 publication of *The Indigenous Church* by Melvin L. Hodges; and the 1991 publication of *Called and Empowered* by Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen.

"Paul's Missionary Methods"

The Assemblies of God (USA) was founded, in part, to promote the work of Pentecostal missions around the world. Indeed, delegates to the second General Council in Chicago, Illinois,

³³ Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 69.

³⁴ Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, 133.

famously committed themselves to perform “the greatest work of evangelism the world has ever seen.” The third General Council committed itself to evangelism according to “New Testament methods,” but it did not define those methods.³⁵

In a series of articles in the *Pentecostal Evangel*, Alice E. Luce, drew inspiration from Allen’s *Missionary Methods* to outline a suitable missiology for Pentecostals. Luce was a veteran missionary; she had served in India under the Anglican Church Missionary Society from 1896 to 1914, received AG ordination in 1915, and thereafter dedicated herself to evangelism among Hispanics. Luce founded the Berean Bible Institute (now LABI College) in 1926, serving there until her death in 1955.³⁶

The first article, published January 8, 2021, introduced the series.³⁷ Luce wrote, “I have been realizing more and more that there is such a thing as doing apostolic work along apostolic lines.” She contrasted that with “denominational methods which have no scriptural warrant.” The editorial introduction, which appeared above each of the three articles, similarly argued that “Paul’s methods are applicable, however, to every town and community and district in the homeland.”³⁸ The operative hermeneutic in these articles, whereby Paul’s methods were immediately applicable to Pentecostal missionaries, was consistent with the radical strategy, which saw no fundamental discontinuity between the New Testament church and today’s.

Luce described the topic of the first article, published January 8, 2021, as the relationship of missionaries to their home churches, including financial support; however, the article focused primarily on the work of the Holy Spirit in calling, ordaining, and guiding the day-to-day work of missionaries. Citing Paul’s example, Luce argued that a missionary’s labors come to an end when an indigenous church has been planted. “Paul’s example shows us the missionary [is]

³⁵ McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached*, Vol. 1, 95.

³⁶ Gary B. McGee, “Luce, Alice Eveline,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. ed., ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 844–845.

³⁷ Alice Luce, “Paul’s Missionary Methods,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, January 8, 2021, 6–7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

always a pioneer. He founds a church, establishes it with deacons and elders, leaves it to support them (which will usually be the utmost they can do), and passes on himself to take the message where It has never yet been preached.”³⁹ The indigenous church strategy themes of self-governance and self-support are evident in these words.

The second article, published January 22, 2021, examined Paul’s relationship with unbelieving people, whom she called “heathen.”⁴⁰ Luce focused on the message Paul proclaimed, arguing, “He preached CHRIST first, last and all the time.”⁴¹ Luce highlighted doctrines core to Pentecostalism’s radical strategy: mentioning “signs and wonders,” “the Full Gospel,” “Baptism of the Holy Ghost,” and “healing in the Atonement,” alongside traditional evangelical doctrines such justification by grace through faith.⁴²

Toward the end of the article, Luce reflected on the importance of missionaries adopting the right posture toward unbelievers: “they recognized the difference between those who went to them with a hidden sense of their own superiority and those who really had the spirit of a servant.”⁴³ Just as missionaries needed to shed personal feelings of superiority toward unbelievers, they also needed to shed national feelings of superiority toward indigenous cultures. Based on her experience in India, Luce knew the danger of the gospel being reduced to “a white man’s religion.”⁴⁴ She wrote:

How necessary then for us to show them clearly the universality of the Message we bring, and how all nations are alike before God. This fact also redoubles our desire to train native workers to evangelize their own countries, for they are the only ones who will ever accomplish it, and they have many advantages over the foreigner.⁴⁵

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰ Alice Luce, “Paul’s Missionary Methods,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, January 22, 2021, 6, 11.

⁴¹ Luce, “Paul’s Missionary Methods,” January 22, 2021, 6.

⁴² Ibid., 6.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

Notice how Luce connected the cultural humility of the missionary with the self-propagating work of the indigenous church. In her mind, the two were inextricably linked.

The third article, published February 5, 2021, examined the relationship of Paul to his converts.⁴⁶ Here, Luce argued explicitly that Paul's "aim was to found in every place a self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating church."⁴⁷ Two points from this article need to be highlighted.

First, Luce responded to critics who argued that the indigenous church strategy did not work. She attributed the failure of many indigenous churches to the absence of baptism in the Holy Spirit. "In most of those cases, the converts were not Pentecostal and had never received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, hence they were manifestly unable to attempt such a task."⁴⁸ For Luce, the Three Selves could not operate effectively without the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

Second, Luce returned to the necessity of missionaries displaying cultural humility. Some of her contemporaries argued that indigenous churches required long missionary supervision. She acknowledged that this might be true in some cases. However, she wrote, "that is not because we are foreigners but because we are older in the faith."⁴⁹ When those churches matured, she wrote, "what a joy it will be to us to be subject to them. and to let them take the lead as the Spirit Himself shall guide them."⁵⁰ It cannot be stressed enough how the indigenous and radical strategies, at their best, opposed the racism and paternalism of missionaries.

"Paul's Missionary Methods" both reflected ideas already being talked about by Pentecostals, not to mention evangelicals and fundamentalists, but they also contributed to the more precise definition of AGWM's emerging missionary strategy.

⁴⁶ Alice Luce, "Paul's Missionary Methods," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, February 5, 2021, 6–7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

In 1915, the AG committed itself to “New Testament methods” in its missions efforts, without defining what those methods were. The 1921 General Council in St. Louis, Missouri, took that step, and articulated its aim as “to seek to establish self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing native churches.”⁵¹ It would fall to Melvin L. Hodges to articulate that aim in its fullest form.

The Indigenous Church

Melvin L. Hodges (1909–1988) received ordination with the Assemblies of God (USA) in 1929. In 1935, he was appointed as a missionary to Central America, serving first in El Salvador and later in Nicaragua. He later served as field secretary for Latin America and the West Indies. Upon his retirement from the field in 1973, he served as a professor of missions at AG Theological Seminary in Springfield, Missouri, until his retirement from that position in 1986.⁵² He is, arguably, the most influential missiologist the AG has produced.

Hodge’s seminal book, *The Indigenous Church*, was published by Gospel Publishing House, in 1953, with successive editions in 1971, 1976, and 2009. It grew out of lectures he presented in 1951 at the Missionary Conference in Springfield, Missouri, and was influenced by the works of Venn, Anderson, and Allen. It articulated indigenous-church principles so clearly that it was published by Moody Press in 1954, although that publisher removed passages about miracles, healing, and baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁵³

For Hodges, however, as for Luce before him, the indigenous church strategy could not work without the Holy Spirit. “To be successful in the indigenous church ministry, the missionary must not only be able to teach and initiate the converts in right methods, but also be

⁵¹ Quoted in McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached*, Vol. 1, 96.

⁵² Gary B. McGee, “Hodges, Melvin L.,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. ed., ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 723–724. See also McGee’s “The Legacy of Melvin L. Hodges,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, January 1998, 20–25.

⁵³ For a brief history of the book, see McGee, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism*, 170–173.

able to introduce them into the realm of the Holy Spirit's workings," he wrote. "New Testament methods coupled with New Testament power is the answer to the present-day problems of our missions fields."⁵⁴

Several points about *The Indigenous Church* need to be highlighted. First is its emphasis on evangelism and church planting as the ultimate objective of missions. In Hodges' day, as today, not everyone agrees about what missions is. In the nineteenth century, many mainline Protestants missionaries believed they needed to build strong social institutions—schools, hospitals, charitable organizations such as orphanages—to better the social conditions of indigenous peoples. For Hodges, "the ultimate objective of evangelism is the calling out of a people for the Lord Jesus Christ," not "social betterment."⁵⁵ Social betterment was desirable, of course, but in Hodges' reading of the New Testament, attempts at improving social conditions were "by-products rather than the heart of the missionary program."⁵⁶

Second, the church produced by evangelism was an indigenous church, using the Venn-Anderson formula. Here is how Hodges defined those terms:

The New Testament church then was first, self-propagating; that is, it had within it sufficient vitality so that it could extend throughout the region and neighboring regions by its own efforts. It produced its own workers and the work was spread abroad by the effort of the Christians themselves. Second, it was self-governing; that is, it was governed by men who were raised up by the Holy Spirit from among the converts in the locality. Third, it was self-supporting; it did not depend on foreign money in order to meet the expenses of the work.⁵⁷

Third, Hodges argued that missionaries shouldered blame if an indigenous church failed to launch. "As missionaries," he wrote, "we have too often trained the converts in dependence upon us, rather than in *responsibility*."⁵⁸ The movement from dependence to responsibility is fundamental to the indigenous church strategy.

⁵⁴ Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, 133.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 10–11.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 17, emphasis in original.

A number of factors can impede this movement; Hodges identified six in particular.⁵⁹ Missionaries may fail to recognize the transitory character of their work. “The successful missionary is one who has done his work so well that he is no longer needed in that area,” Hodges wrote. They may center missions in what they do (“the mission station”) rather than in what indigenous Christians do (“the local church”). There may be too many missionaries working the same field. Missionaries may have failed to adapt themselves to “native psychology and methods.” Hodges cites the example of American missionaries who consider the “American way” superior to indigenous ways. The direct foreign funding of national workers may impede the development of indigenous churches. And finally, “the missionary may fail to exercise a vigorous faith in God for the development of the spiritual capability of his converts.”

In order to avoid these impediments and plant New Testament churches, Hodges gave detailed, concrete advice to missionaries about how to implement or convert to New Testament methods. This is the fourth point about the book that needs to be highlighted. Unlike Hodges’ later book, *A Theology of the Church and Its Mission*,⁶⁰ *The Indigenous Church* is a practical handbook, as befits its origins in the Missions Conference of 1951.

Fifth, it must again be emphasized that Hodges’ missiology was of a piece with his Pentecostal theology and experience. “The mechanics of a successful church on the mission field are the New Testament methods: the dynamics are the power and ministries of the Holy Spirit,” he wrote. “Either factor alone is incomplete and inadequate.”⁶¹ Hodges went on to argue that missionaries’ church planting efforts could fail because indigenous principles were “partially or imperfectly applied” or, alternatively, though applied, “they have not been accompanied by New Testament power.”⁶² This observation raises the possibility that the effectiveness of a Pentecostal

⁵⁹ Ibid., 18–21.

⁶⁰ Melvin L. Hodges, *A Theology of the Church and Its Mission: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1977).

⁶¹ Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, 131.

⁶² Ibid, 132.

indigenous church strategy, as opposed to a non-Pentecostal indigenous church strategy, may be empirically verifiable.

Finally, the Global Church is characterized by partnership. If missionaries plant indigenous churches successfully, then those churches have become the equals of the churches that sent the missionaries in the first place. Although not stated in so many words by Hodges, this is the clear implication of indigenous church principles.

Called and Empowered

The indigenous church strategy remains fundamental to AG missiology, though there have been two developments, one from the broader missiological community and another from within the AG itself.

First, in the broader missiological community, there has been a recognition that the Three Selves do not exhaust the meaning of indigeneity. David Bosch has pointed out, for example, that Western advocates of the indigenous church strategy often assumed their theological and economic assumptions were normative, rather than merely Western.⁶³ This had led to calls to add “self-theologizing” to the Three Selves, recognition that indigenous churches have to work through the theological implications of their own social settings.

Second, within the AG itself, the 1991 publication of *Called and Empowered* by Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen marked a turning point in AG missiology.⁶⁴ Jerry A. Ireland argues that it introduced “liberationist motifs, holistic paradigms, and greater appreciation for religious plurality” in the missiological conversation within the AG.⁶⁵ The book does not repudiate Hodges’ indigenous church strategy as much as it qualifies it. For example,

⁶³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 294–295, 448–450.

⁶⁴ Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991).

⁶⁵ Jerry A. Ireland, *The Missionary Spirit: Evangelism and Social Action in Pentecostal Missiology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), xxi.

the objective of missions is no longer merely evangelism and church planting, with social betterment as a by-product; missions includes social concern.

Missiology is not set in stone. It develops as Christians continue to ask questions of Scripture in light of the changing circumstances of their cultures and communities. Thus, we should expect continued conversation in AG and Pentecostal circles, such as those sparked by Bosch and *Called and Empowered*. Nonetheless, it is difficult to imagine the indigenous church strategy not remaining the critical component of any future AG missiology.

From Everywhere to Everyone

Allan Anderson has described Pentecostalism as “the most successful Christian missionary movement of the twentieth century.”⁶⁶ Numbers from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, which maintains the World Christian Database, bear this out. According to Gina A. Zurlo, the center’s co-director, Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity constitute “the fastest growing segment of World Christianity today.”⁶⁷ She defines the Pentecostal/charismatic segment broadly to include believers within classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God (AG), charismatics within historic denominations, and newer independent or nondenominational charismatics. What unites them is “a shared emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and the experiential nature of Christian faith.”⁶⁸

Between 1900 and 2020, this segment grew from 1% of the world’s Christian population to 25.6%. Its annual growth rate was 6.3%, four times faster than the population growth of Christianity specifically and the world generally. Though demographers project its growth rate to

⁶⁶ Anderson, *Spreading Fires*, 289.

⁶⁷ Gina A. Zurlo, *Global Christianity: A Guide to the World’s Largest Religion from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 30.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

slow between 2020 and 2050, it will still grow twice as fast as those other populations.⁶⁹ As of 2020, Pentecostal/charismatic believers comprised approximately 644 million persons. The vast majority lived outside the Global North: 35.7% in Africa, 30.3% in Latin America, 19.5% in Asia, and 0.7% in Oceania. The remainder lived in North America (10.5%) or Europe (3.3%).⁷⁰

The rapid growth and global distribution of the WAGF adherents largely mirrors the growth and distribution of churches in the broader Pentecostal/charismatic tradition. Comprised of 85,911,173 adherents and 174 denominational bodies in 147 countries, which are linked by history, doctrine, and experience, the WAGF is the largest Protestant denomination within the global Pentecostal/charismatic movement. These adherents include formal members of the WAGF itself, as well as national churches affiliated with the AG in Canada, Finland, or the United States. Table 1 shows the decadal growth of the AG worldwide.⁷¹

Table 1. Decadal AG Growth

Year	Adherents
1914	4,800
1916	10,021
1920	48,892
1930	130,849
1940	282,192
1950	525,682
1960	1,901,775
1970	4,093,507
1980	10,787,798

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 31.

⁷¹ Beginning in 1914, the AG (USA) began to report its number of adherents. In 1916, it added non-US adherents to the report, based on numbers provided by U.S. missionaries. It continued to report those totals even as non-US adherents organized themselves into national fellowships. Recognizing that other national fellowships both sent missionaries and counted adherents, AG (USA) statistics offer a useful baseline because of their age, consistency, and representativeness, the last factor due to the size of the US missionary force. The numbers for 2022 come from the WAGF, however. Thanks are due to Darrin Rodgers, director of the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center at the AG (USA) national office, and Brad Walz, chair of the WAGF Missions Commission, for their help in collating these numbers.

1990	23,772,027
2000	38,229,263
2010	64,100,667
2022	85,911,173

According to AG (USA) data, the global AG population first surpassed the AG (USA) population in 1953. Today, most AG adherents live in the Global South, as can be seen in Table 2.⁷²

Table 2. Regional Distribution of World AG Adherents

Region	Adherents	Percentage of World AG
Africa	43,676,030	50.1%
Latin America	26,758,574	31.1%
Asia	8,378,236	9.8%
North America / Caribbean	3,478,636	4%
Europe	2,572,872	3%
Eurasia	93,670	0.1%

Sixteen nations contain more than one million AG adherents, most of them in the Global South, as can be seen in Table 3.⁷³

Table 3. Nations with More than 1 Million Adherents

Nation	Adherents	Percentage of World AG
Brazil	21,265,616	24.8%
Ethiopia	14,225,000	16.6%
Korea	4,688,626	5.5%
Nigeria	3,692,962	4.3%
Congo DRC	3,171,465	3.7%
Kenya	3,100,000	3.6%

⁷² These regions are based on how Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) divides the world into regions. AGWM's Asia Pacific, Asia Southern, and Asia Oceania have been combined into one region for clarity.

⁷³ Some nations have more than one recognized AG denominational body within it.

United States	2,932,466	3.4%
Angola	2,656,685	3.1%
Tanzania	2,645,008	3.1%
Rwanda	2,019,000	2.4%
Uganda	1,852,300	2.2%
Ghana	1,831,047	2.1%
Mozambique	1,474,008	1.7%
Burundi	1,285,847	1.5%
Burkina Faso	1,131,495	1.3%
South Africa	1,053,000	1.2%

These numbers give reasons for Pentecostal believers, including within the WAGF, to rejoice. The seed of the gospel sown by missionaries and cultivated by indigenous churches has resulted in a wonderful harvest of souls. As Paul says, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but *God has been making it grow*” (1 Corinthians 11:16, emphasis added).

Alongside these reasons for joy, however, there are reasons for concern. Despite the growth of Spirit-empowered forms of Christianity in the Global South, the percentage of Christians around the world has declined slightly, from 34.95% in 1900 to 32.3% today.⁷⁴ This is largely because Christianity has declined in the Global North, especially in Europe and North America. In Europe, the percentage of people identifying as Christian—even if only nominally—declined from 94.5% to 76.1% between 1900 and 2020.⁷⁵ In the same period, a similar percentage in North America declined from 95.1% to 72.6%.⁷⁶ Zurlo predicts that these percentages will further decline by 2050 to 70% and 66%, respectively.⁷⁷

The task facing the World Assemblies of God Fellowship in the decade leading to MM33 is, thus, immense. The Fellowship must continue to cultivate the miraculous harvest God has given its churches in the Global South, even as it labors to reverse the declines Christianity has experienced in the Global North. Additionally, it must redouble its efforts to evangelize and plant

⁷⁴ Zurlo, *Global Christianity*, 5.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 11, 15.

churches in religious cultures—especially Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist—that continue to prove resistant to the gospel message.

If modern missions moved from the West to the Rest in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the movement of missions in the twenty-first century must be “from everywhere to everyone.”⁷⁸ Christ empowers every Spirit-filled believer to be witnesses to him (Acts 1:8), and every region of the world is the Macedonian who cried out to Paul in a dream, “Come and help us!” (Acts 16:9). May we answer this cry for help!

⁷⁸ This is the subtitle of Samuel Escobar’s book, *The New Global Mission: From Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL InterVarsity Press, 2003).

Section 3

Models of Modern WAGF Church Planting

Introduction

In this section, we will present a series of case study examples of models of church planting that have been undertaken in the past or are currently being used throughout the WAGF. In gathering the requisite case study data for this section, we desired to represent a diverse cross-section of the global Fellowship to demonstrate how God is working uniquely in every region of the world. We also felt the tension to harmonize our desire to include as many examples of church planting models as possible with the need to maintain brevity within this paper.

To that end, it is not possible within this section to exhaustively showcase all that God is doing throughout the WAGF. Instead, this section should be regarded as the beginning of an ongoing effort between national Fellowships and the WAGF Church Planting Commission to share best practices with one another, in the hope of learning from one another and ministering most effectively to the regions to which God has called each of us. When encountering a model in use within a region of the world different than our own, the task at hand is neither to attempt to copy that model entirely nor to dismiss it outrightly; instead, the patient, Spirit-led work of contextualization begins, as we discern how the best practices in church planting within another region might inform how we create unique church planting strategies in our own region. For this reason, we should analyze the church planting models of our sisters and brothers with a keen awareness of the contextual differences between their ministry context and our own.

To aid in facilitating the ongoing sharing of church planting best practices throughout the WAGF, the Church Planting Commission has not only produced this white paper but also desires for this white paper to be the beginning of an ongoing practice of sharing models and best practices in church planting with the rest of the Fellowship. To encourage this ongoing practice of sharing, we have created a web resource available by [clicking here](#), where national

Fellowships can share data relevant to their unique church planting practices. Any relevant data is welcomed.

Tanzania

In less than one hundred years since its founding in 1939, the Tanzania Assemblies of God (TAG) has grown to become one of the largest Christian denominations in the country. This, in no small part, was due to a ten-year national strategy (called “Ten Years of Harvest—Tanzania for Jesus”) first deployed in 2009, that placed church planting and multiplication as a primary means of evangelistic work for the TAG. Two features of this strategic model of a national church planting movement stand out.

First, TAG church planting efforts adopted a geographically oriented strategy by setting a goal of planting rural churches within a span of two kilometers of one another, and urban churches within a span of one kilometer. This allows for a systematic blanketing of the nation with churches that remain relatively close in proximity to one another, giving each local church a specific geographic area of targeted ministry.⁷⁹

Second, TAG church planting developed a seven-step model of church multiplication:

1. Identify an area (Need identification)
2. Recruit a church planter with a vision
3. Church planting school (Train, mentor, and coach)
4. Commission (Send with resources)
5. Cultivate (The actual work of planting a church)
6. Support

⁷⁹ This approach has historical precedent in the parish model in much of the West, which itself is historically rooted in the vision for synagogue ministry in second temple Judaism. For more information see: Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship, and Community* (Lisle, IL: IVP, 2014); “Godspeed: The Pace of Being Known” <https://www.livegodspeed.org/watchgodspeed>; and John D. Garr, *The Church Dynamic: Hebrew Foundations For Christian Community* (Atlanta, GA: Golden Key, 2019).

7. Replant (To enhance multiplication)

The resulting fruit from this effort has been exponential growth, both in the number of churches (2,619 in 2009 to 9,986 in 2018, with an additional 144 planted outside of Tanzania) and adherents (200,069 in 2009 to 1,326,195 in 2018). TAG leadership has now set goals for MM33 of growth to 40,000 churches and 9,000,000 adherents within Tanzania, and a total of 300 church plants outside of Tanzania.

Latin America

Church planting has been a long-standing catalyst of Pentecostal expansion throughout Latin America. In 2014, the World Hispanic Fellowship of the Assemblies of God (FRAHMAD) was formed in an effort to provide a unified vision and work for the ongoing evangelization of and gospel ministry within Latin America. Central to the evangelistic and church planting strategy of FRAHMAD was the formation of the Comisión Estratégica de Plantación de Iglesias (CEPI), to serve the Hispanic world through the planting and ongoing development of healthy churches. Dr. Jerry Brown explains CEPI's function:

CEPI provides the route by which members who sense a call can enter ministry with or without the prerequisite of theological training. It returns us to a New Testament pattern that places importance on the calling and equipping of the worker by the Holy Spirit. In many ways, it is similar to the methods of our earliest pioneers who won converts through personal evangelism and used small discipleship groups to establish churches.

In this way, it answers the deficit for church planters in view of the failure of Bible Institutes to prepare graduates to plant and pastor new congregations. The process for training church planters gives pastors confidence to discover and release potential church planters into ministry.

The focus of CEPI on training and equipping the priesthood of all believers for the work of church planting has yielded exponential fruit. CEPI has launched an average of 1,100 new church plants per year, with a goal to increase that number by twenty-five percent year over year.

CEPI has also seen an impressive rate of church plants who themselves become multiplying churches within their first two years of existence.

CEPI has identified twenty-two distinct models of church planting in Latin America, with eight being the most popular⁸⁰, and one (the “Mother-Daughter model”) being the most consistently successful. Within the CEPI training guide, *Sembremos Iglesias Saludables*, the Mother-Daughter Model is described as follows: “This is the most used method for planting churches. The church sends families and leaders to a new sector and provides them with financial resources and support. It is a very successful model.” In the mother-daughter model, CEPI trains the pastor of the existing church to be a mentor while also leading the prospective planter through a twelve-module program, designed to be completed in a year. Following completion, the church is launched. Following the launch of the new church plant, CEPI continues training the planter, with a focus on church health.

Togo

The Togolese Republic is a West African country that has a population of approximately 8,343,000, organized into 30 distinct ethnic groups. The Assemblies of God (AG) churches in

⁸⁰ Within the CEPI training guide, *Sembremos Iglesias Saludables*, the eight most popular models are described as follows: 1) The Independent Pioneer Model: In this model, the church is established in a place not previously evangelized. The church is planted by a worker who does not have any institutional support. Once the church is planted, the pioneer usually looks for a new place to plant another church; 2) The Mother-Daughter Model: This is the most used method for planting churches. The church sends families and leaders to a new sector and provides them with financial resources and support. It is a very successful model; 3) The Colonizer Model: It is identical to the mother-daughter model with the exception that the group that founds the church moves to a very distant location, with the group paying its expenses, obtaining new jobs, and settling in the locality; 4) The Multi-Congregational Model: An urban church uses the same location at different times for different ethnic groups, with their own pastors and autonomous leaders (Anglos, Hispanics, Asians, etc.) where each one contributes financially to the maintenance of the facilities; 5) The Satellite Model: This model has a single church in several semi-autonomous locations. The satellites have a close relationship with the mother church, although they have a lot of freedom; 6) The Missionary Model: It is the model best known by evangelicals in North America. The missionary pastor begins the work under the support of churches channeled through a missionary agency. As soon as the church is formed and established in doctrine, leadership, and economy, the pastor resigns and leaves a worker in charge; 7) The Denominational Model: This is an association-type model. It occurs when many churches join in a pact to build works, pooling resources and sharing their experience to carry out studies, select areas, and set goals to plant churches; 8) The Cellular Model: This is the way to organize a church using small groups and home meetings as the central axis of church work. The multiplication of cells and therefore of leaders is anticipated.

Togo began in 1936 through missionary work by the AG USA establishing churches in the Savannah region. After Togo gained independence in 1960, the Togolese Assemblies of God (TAG) adopted an aggressive church planting approach. Today, there are over 300,000 TAG adherents around the nation and approximately 3,000 churches.

For MM33, TAG has set a goal to triple in size, to approximately 10,000 churches and one million disciples. The national strategy to reach this goal is straightforward: each existing local church has been challenged and encouraged to plant at least two additional churches by 2033. Additionally, before completing formal biblical studies, all those who are preparing for vocational ministry are compelled to plant a church, thus, injecting the practice of church planting into the foundation of ministerial preparation.

United States

The cultural and religious makeup of the United States is diverse and rapidly changing, requiring church planting efforts to be innovative and to reassess models of church planting that have been effective in the past. While numerous church planting models are present within American church planting, they can reasonably be grouped into two broad groupings of models: “attractional” and “missional.” These two models are not entirely exclusive to one another and many diverse examples of church planting exist within each category; however, these two models represent a core difference in missiological strategy in engaging lost people with the gospel.

The emphasis of the attractional model has focused on creating ministry programs and services that are understandable and hospitable to lost people, with a primary focus on bringing people to the church (what Bengt Sundkler called “centripetal mission”⁸¹; cf. Isa. 49:6; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47). By contrast, the movement of the gospel in missional expressions of church planting is in deploying people for missional engagement within the community itself

⁸¹ Bengt Sundkler, *The World of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965).

(“centrifugal mission”⁸²; cf. John 20:21; Matt. 28:16-20; Eph. 4:11-13). While approaches to church planting vary greatly, we have included two case study examples of AG church planting, one employing each missiological strategy.

Focus Church is a multisite church in Raleigh, North Carolina, led by Pastors Mike and Ashton Santiago. The Santiagos planted Focus using a “suburban big box model,” a common model used in church planting efforts in the United States over the last 25 years. The suburban big box model (sometimes also called the “attractional model”) generally focuses on planting churches in proximity to large population centers in the United States and creating services that are accessible and attractive to newcomers. Since the planting of Focus, the church has planted two additional campus locations in other regions of the city which livestream the sermon from the main campus each week. Recently, Focus Church leadership identified language limitations as a barrier to the ongoing ministry of the church to reach new people with the gospel—namely, all their services were only in English—and they are currently experimenting with using artificial intelligence (AI) to overcome this barrier, running English sermon videos through an AI translation tool to quickly and professionally deliver sermons in Spanish.⁸³ Focus Church’s innovation in using AI demonstrates how churches can leverage emerging technologies for the sake of reaching people with the gospel who may not otherwise be reached and offers a successful and innovative example of the attractional model of church planting.

Whereas the attractional model employed by Focus Church begins with the launch of a Sunday morning service, from which other ministry programs flow, another model in use within the United States is exemplified by Alex and Destiny Kennedy in Louisville, Kentucky, who

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Mike Santiago explains: “At first, it was just eye-opening as to how powerful technology already is. After that, it was obvious to us that we could offer a Spanish version of our model anywhere in the world with this much horsepower. Now every one of our English campuses can host Spanish ones as well with very little start-up...or overhead [cost]. We keep the worship live and in-person and then transition to on-screen preaching with ease. It also cuts down on the time it takes to translate the sermon in real time, keeping every worship service within the desired time frame for our model. It’s like a weird Acts 2 language thing where people can hear me speaking in a language that they understand” (E-mail correspondence, 29 February 2024).

have spent over two years working among the unhoused and under-resourced communities of the western side of the city. Alex Kennedy describes their model of ministry as functioning as urban missionaries: “feeding the homeless, sharing the gospel, and introducing Christ-centered recovery solutions, [domestic violence] programs, and anti-trafficking organizations.”⁸⁴ Kennedy notes that after about six months of ministry work, several people within the community in which they minister expressed a desire to have a Bible study. Then, after about another six months of holding a Bible study with interested individuals, the Kennedy’s ministry was donated an abandoned church building, which they remodeled into an outreach center. The outreach center began a “dinner church” on Tuesday nights, with a full service followed by sharing a dinner together and over time discipleship groups, addiction recovery support groups, and youth ministries were launched as well. About twelve months after ministry began in the remodeled church building, the Kennedys launched Sunday morning worship services.⁸⁵ The Kennedy’s church planting journey is an example of the missional church planting model that is being employed across the United States, in a vast number of unique communities and forms.

Armenia

Similar to the Kennedy’s approach to planting in Louisville, Kentucky, Artavazd Tadevosyan of Armenia describes a similar pattern of door-to-door evangelistic work giving way to the planting of churches in his nation. Tadevosyan described how the process of preparing to

⁸⁴ Of their ministry, Kennedy describes: “Our building includes a full clothes & hygiene closet, a food pantry, two...kids rooms, a small commercial kitchen, and our sanctuary/dining hall. 90% of our congregation (or more) has come to Christ since we planted... a large amount of the disciples that have been there over a year now run most of the services and Bible studies. We have a weekly attendance of about 150 unique people each week, and about 300 per month” (E-mail correspondence, 28 February 2024).

⁸⁵ The model of missional development used by the Kennedys in Louisville is “Learn, Serve, Go.” They encourage every person who is a part of the community to be involved in learning through a discipleship-style group (i.e., a “small group”). Next, they encourage them to be involved in some sort of service or volunteer role. Finally, they are encouraged to be involved in an outward-focused evangelistic group, going door to door inviting people to church, sharing the gospel, feeding the unhoused, or other outreach teams (E-mail correspondence, 28 February 2024).

plant a new church for the Assemblies of God in Armenia generally begins through door-to-door conversations with existing believers traveling to a new community. As interest forms from these conversations, Bible studies and other groups begin to meet regularly, but a fully functioning expression of a local church meeting on Sundays comes later as interest grows and the financial and meeting-space resources become available.

This model can be reasonably called a “*koinonia* first” model. Whereas the scriptural image of the *ekklesia* (the gathering of believers) is often a dominant ecclesiological image in church planting, Armenia and other national fellowships have found stride in focus on building *koinonia* (i.e., the community of faith) first, through Bible Study, opportunities for gathering, and more, only to begin the weekly worship gathering at a later time after inroads have been achieved through community development.

Lumière Church Planting

Started in 2016, The Lumière Project is a children and youth focused church planting initiative led by OneHope International. Lumière serves French speaking Africa by equipping churches to plant churches with a strategic focus on the next generation of African Christians. As much of the forthcoming growth in global population is expected to be within the African continent, next generation focused church planting will ensure effective growth and sustainability of the African church.

Lumière has planted over 4,100 churches so far. In seeking to partner with African WAGF fellowships to fulfill their MM33 goals, Lumière has partnered with AG fellowships in Ghana to plant 5,000 churches and Togo to plant 3,000 churches out of their respective MM33 goals. Lumière intends to extend its partnerships to include countries like Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Benin, Sierra Leon, and more. The goal for the Lumière Project is to plant 25,000 children and youth focused churches in the coming decade.

Egypt

The Assemblies of God of Egypt (AGE) was formed in the early twentieth century and grew to approximately 145 churches by 2014. Since 2014, the AGE has adopted a model of church planting that centers around establishing and growing home-based small groups. The AGE uses a strategy that identifies areas within the nation that have no churches. The AGE trains prospective ministers in a Bible school and, upon graduation, deploys them to these unchurched areas to begin creating home-based small groups. After 20-25 small groups are formed (each consisting of five to 15 people), the church planter begins to develop a local church congregation from those small groups.

This patient, “house church first” approach has yielded incredible results in Egypt. While it took a century for the first 145 AGE congregations to form, an additional 52 local churches have been planted in the AGE in the last ten years alone, and the AGE estimates a combined total of approximately 3,400-3,600 small groups within its ministry in Egypt.

Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Assemblies of God (EAG) was formed in the late 1990s. In its first two decades, the EAG established 340 national churches. However, in the four years that followed, national leadership placed a focused emphasis on church planting and discipleship, nearly tripling the number of churches. For 2024, the EAG has set a goal to plant an additional 1,000 churches.

The national strategy of the EAG is for each established church (i.e., with property and a membership of about 50) to plant new churches (all churches are expected to plant at least one). This approach is similar to that already described in Togo. Like the Latin American “Mother-Daughter model,” a mother church begins by identifying a leader or group who will plant the church. The mother church funds the pastor and a property for the church plant to rent for the first year, with the expectation that self-sufficiency will be attained after that first year.

The EAG places high value on the formal training of clergy, with a main Bible school in Addis Ababa with undergraduate and graduate programs in ministry-related subjects, and twenty-two diploma centers across the nation. The EAG headquarters also launched a training school for church planters that has drawn over two hundred students to engage in a six-course training program over the course of six weeks before planting a church. After the church is planted, the planters return the following year for another six-course, six-week program.

Nigeria

The Assemblies of God Nigeria (AGN) found tremendous success in church planting and growth through the Decade of Harvest initiative of the 1990s. The Nigerian Decade of Harvest activities were informed by the work of a Research Committee established by the Executive Committee in September 1988 to assess the “degree of unreachedness” of Nigeria. The findings of the Research Committee made recommendations to target the 265 unreached people groups (UPGs) in Nigeria who, at the time, remained untouched by the gospel. It also recommended a shift away from long-form church planting efforts toward short-term church planter commitments to get churches established, and a focused effort in church planting that targeted 10,000 “autonomous communities” within the UPGs (“autonomous communities, are considered the highest homogenous people group that share common geopolitical, socio-cultural, and ethnolinguistic affinity, that would allow the gospel penetrate with least obstacles, if any.”⁸⁶). This resulted in several national strategies that included Taskforce Evangelism, “Adopt-a-People,” specifically targeting the northwest portion of the nation, and national allocation methods that leveraged top-down leadership to empower the Executive Committee to deploy resources and people to specific areas, similar to a “military concept.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ UcheChukwu O. Ama, “The Assemblies of God Nigeria: The Church Missionary Enterprise (1990-2025).”

⁸⁷ Ibid.

While the AGN is now nearly 25 years removed from the close of the Decade of Harvest, the initiative-based approach to church planting efforts of that time period inspires and informs the church planting efforts taking place in Nigeria today, in particular through the Decade of Rapid Multiplication initiative (2015-2025) which seeks to carry forward the unfinished work of the Decade of Harvest. Other strategic initiatives include “Mission Abak (2016-2018),” “Mission Ore and Akure (2017-2019),” and “Mission Kogi (2021-2022)” which leveraged the Taskforce Evangelism approach from the Decade of Harvest to deploy missionary volunteers for a period of six months and establish short-term (twenty-four months) church planting initiatives. Mission Kebbi (2018-2020) followed a similar approach but included the drilling of boreholes for the people in order to meet tangible needs as well.⁸⁸

Ghana

Church planting work in Ghana is one of six foundational components that are part of a broader national strategy, adopted in October 2022. These include:

- **Reach:** Evangelistic and discipleship work focused on every community in Ghana and beyond (including church planting).
- **Rebuild:** Focus on pastoral health and welfare.
- **Restore:** Focus on Pentecostal identity and revival.
- **Reform:** Focus on effective administration and structure.
- **Reposition:** Focus on becoming the leading Spirit-filled movement in the country.
- **Rebrand:** Enhance image and reputation.

With church planting being an essential component of the **Reach** portion of the national strategy, several church planting foci have been outlined. These include:

- Create minimally viable support systems (e.g. pavilions, signage, etc.) to rapidly deploy church plants in every town and every village in the nation.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

- Pursue growth via personal evangelistic efforts (e.g. door-to-door evangelism).
- Promote church vitality through annual Church Growth and Church Health Conferences.
- Introduce a course on church growth at the national Bible College.
- Establish strategies to plant churches that specifically target and meet the needs of particular groups (e.g. the French community, targeted tribes, the middle class, etc.).
- Plant more churches outside of Ghana.

This national model of church planting is supported by strategic efforts to better church health and vibrancy as well as to establish effective partnerships with outside organizations that can enhance the ministry work, such as OneHope, Compassion International, and Bible Society.⁸⁹

South Africa

Church planting is regarded as one of the most important activities for missional work for the International Assemblies of God of South Africa (IAG), which seeks to be “anchored in mission,” through its church planting activities. The IAG describes church planting as “one of the pillars upon which the IAG stands” (the others being theological education and its Pentecostal heritage).⁹⁰

While church planting has been a priority in South Africa, the IAG notes that growth rates and multiplication out of planted churches were concerns of leadership, leading to a period of analysis that uncovered several factors inhibiting their planting efforts. These barriers included a lack of tools to equip pastors to plant new churches, a lack of financial resources (both to support new ministry and sustain existing ministry), difficulties within the context to acquire land, and a felt absence of support by the ministers in church planting efforts.

⁸⁹ Office of the General Superintendent, “Assemblies of God, Ghana: The Transformation Agenda-Church Planting Mdoel.”

⁹⁰ E-mail correspondence, February 2024.

In order to address these barriers, the IAG established a national missions department that would, in part, address the weaknesses outlined above. The IAG also established a church health department (called “Healthy Pastor, Healthy Church”) to establish a baseline vision of pastoral health and seek to establish ministry efforts that would achieve that vision.

The IAG has identified four primary models of church planting at work within South African church planting efforts. These include:

- **National Missions Churches:** The National Missions Department identifies regions where there are no IAG churches and seeks to plant churches there. This approach is evident in the Northern Cape area where several churches have already been planted. In this approach the Missions Department identifies a suitable location, identifies a person who is willing to serve as the pastor of the church, provides the pastor with financial support, and provides the church with ministry support until they are able to support themselves.
- **District-planted Churches:** The strategy is the same as above except that it is the District that is responsible for the church plant instead of the National Missions Department.
- **Mother-Daughter Churches:** These churches begin as an extension of the local church and are fully overseen and supported by the mother church. Upon maturity, they can be released as an autonomous church or continue to exist as a part of the mother church.
- **Pastor/Evangelist-planted Churches:** These churches are planted by individuals on their own who then seek affiliation with IAG after being established.⁹¹

India

The Assemblies of God India has a vision to plant 10,000 churches in the next 5 years.⁹² The action plan being used to accomplish this goal is driven by a strategy of mapping unreached areas, identifying and researching in detail the people groups that need to be reached in those

⁹¹ E-mail Correspondence, February 2024.

⁹² Rev. Y Solomon Kings, “Assemblies of God India Missions & Church Planting”, (PowerPoint presentation, World Assemblies of God Fellowship Church Planting Commission Quarterly Call, 10 July 2024), slide 5.

areas, and choosing believers from established churches to train and send to those areas.

Importantly, this process is all backed by a constant foundation of intercessory prayer.

Notably, AG India has developed a list of 40 in-depth questions that are researched and reviewed when a new area of need is identified.⁹³ These questions help to determine prime locations for church planting within the nation based on need and aptitude. They include investigation of the basic details of the people groups present in an area such as predominant religions or churches, socio-economic status, and language, as well as more detailed research on specific customs and practices which may either pose a hindrance to or provide an open door to evangelism. Along with the practice of mapping the nation to identify areas of great need for evangelism, these questions help to identify where there is the most opportunity for the spread of the gospel and serve to prepare those who are going to new locations to church plant with the necessary information to plant new churches successfully.

Additionally, AG India is operating a replication initiative, with a vision “to empower local church members, nurturing them into transformative disciples modeled after Jesus. Through replication training, [they] aim to equip and mobilize individuals to plant vibrant, sustainable churches in unreached areas.”⁹⁴ This replication process involves five modules which build upon themselves to take an individual from church attendee to church planter. These steps are evangelism, discipleship, membership, leadership, and multiplication.⁹⁵ With only one class graduated, this replication initiative and the accompanying training has already identified, trained, and commissioned 1,367 church planters.⁹⁶

⁹³ Kings, “Assemblies of God India”, slides 10-16.

⁹⁴ Kings, “Assemblies of God India”, slide 17.

⁹⁵ Each of these steps are described as follows: 1) Evangelism: equipping every member of church to share the gospel. 2) Discipleship: making new disciples from the people who received good news during evangelism. 3) Membership: leading the disciples to church who are willing to partake in church sacraments. 4) Leadership: raising leaders to take care of different ministries in church. 5) Multiplication: every member transforms into church planters, fostering the spread of the Gospel until Jesus comes (Kings, “Assemblies of God India”, slides 18-20).

⁹⁶ Kings, “Assemblies of God India”, slides 21-26.

Russia

The Russian Assemblies of God (RAOG) church planting strategy involves reaching unreached people groups (UPGs). As Russia is populated by more than one hundred UPGs, church planting must involve a collaborative missional mindset for reaching the least reached ethnic groups. In this interest, rather than having one mother church, multiple churches work together to see a planted church grow and develop. Because many churches are understaffed and too small to provide substantial support, this collaborative approach encourages pastors and church members to participate actively in church plants within a 50-200 km radius of their location. Moreover, this strategy has a rejuvenating or revitalizing effect on the existing churches. Including people from existing churches in church planting strategies involves them sharing any valuable contacts with whom church planting teams can connect (relatives, close friends, coworkers, etc.) to establish "persons of peace" within the community.

Another important part of the strategy is to have accessible and goal-oriented training available to aspiring leaders and ministers. One form of training is hub training, which essentially makes each church plant into a classroom for prospective church planters, ensuring the practicality of their preparation. This hub training is coupled with ongoing work to make Pathway Training⁹⁷ accessible in Russian to provide leadership resources and basic discipleship content for new and prospective leaders. Additionally, the RAOG seeks to acknowledge the diversity of gifting in the church by deploying apostles and evangelists to do the work they're called to do. Having these individuals stay and become pastors of new churches may contradict God's will and design for their lives, so it is key to have teams that train pastors from within new congregations so that leaders with apostolic and evangelistic giftings are released to expand the work elsewhere.

The biggest challenge the RAOG is facing is overcoming the fear and anxiety potential ministers feel about moving to new locations. Considering economic and political factors,

⁹⁷ Pathway is a fully online training program with classes toward Assemblies of God ministerial credentials. See website for details: <https://pathway.training/>.

moving can pose a great challenge among Russian believers. The RAOG is working on creating a system that would serve as a buffer or support system for leaders who sense God's calling but are fearful about the consequences of moving to another location. Simply stated, before a church planter reaches a destination, evangelistic and ministry teams will make multiple trips to the location to ensure that there's strong potential for success in that area.

In addition, since 2010, OneHope has been operating the Hosanna Plan,⁹⁸ an initiative that has planted over 4,000 churches in Russia. In addition to church planting, the Hosanna Plan focuses on using modern resources like the Book of Hope, the GodMan film, and the Bible App for Kids to evangelize among Russian unreached peoples, with particular focus on children and youth. The Hosanna Plan's approach is three-fold: evangelism, church planting, and equipping. *The One Year For Jesus* project is aimed at developing dedicated believers willing to become missionaries in their homeland, committing a year of on the road evangelism, supported by local churches. This evangelistic work produces new faith communities with participating churches committing to plant one daughter church every three-to-four years, with unique strategic approaches to large metropolitan areas, mid-sized cities, and rural areas. Special training programs are established to train ministers to pastor new churches.

Conclusion

This section has presented a broad and varied set of case study examples of various church planting strategies in use throughout the World Assemblies of God Fellowship. These examples are hardly exhaustive of the diverse, Spirit-led work being lived out among WAGF national Fellowships around the world and no one particular model or methodology being employed is the “correct” way of doing church planting. Instead, this overview is intended to describe varied approaches to planting churches in the hopes of inspiring innovation across global Fellowships, while still taking into account the discerning work of contextualization—that

⁹⁸ See website for details: <https://onehope.net/global-outreach/what-we-do/hosanna-plan/>.

is, seeking to understand the unique needs of one's ministry context and adjusting strategies and methodologies accordingly.

That said, it is also clear from this brief overview, that there do exist several themes or common values that are present among WAGF church planting models at work today that are worth identifying for the sake of articulating a modern Pentecostal distinctive of church planting in the twenty-first century. These themes and values will be treated in the next and final section of this paper

Section 4

Analysis and Conclusion

Introduction

This White Paper sought to accomplish three primary goals. The first, and the subject of Section 1, was to articulate a Pentecostal theology of church planting that is rooted in Scripture and to identify key characteristics that give shape to WAGF church planting efforts, both in the past as well as in the future. The second, and the subject of Section 2, was to establish an Ebenezer of sorts (“Thus far the Lord has helped us,” 1 Sam. 7:12, NKJV) reflecting upon the development of WAGF church planting throughout its history. Third, and the subject of Section 3, was to begin a process of identification and analysis of church planting models at work among national Fellowships today, either at a local church or national level. As we noted in Section 3, the identification and analysis process presented in this paper is not exhaustive and should be regarded as the beginning of an ongoing work undertaken by the Fellowship, in particular the Church Planting Commission, in pursuit of our common MM33 goal to realize a one-million church movement in the WAGF by 2033.

In this final section, we will analyze several themes identified as common (or unique in one context but identified as significant by the Research Committee) to WAGF church planting efforts today. These themes are valuable and distinguishing characteristics of the shape of our common church planting efforts and the Church Planting Commission recommends that they, combined with the theological characteristics outlined in Section 1, be considered in the formation and implementation of church planting models throughout the Fellowship. In this way, we can avoid fragmented approaches to planting churches and, instead, retain our contextual

distinctiveness while growing a movement that is true to our Pentecostal heritage and missiology.

Common Themes to WAGF Church Planting

Geographical Strategic Focus

Several national strategies adopted foci that placed significant emphasis on specific geography. Tanzania's strategy to blanket the nation with churches every two kilometers (rural) or one kilometer (urban) is a notable example, but not the only one. Others created geographic strategies that targeted particular parts of a nation or identified geographic areas where no churches existed and sought to direct church planting efforts accordingly. This blanketed approach ensures saturation in the long-term, but also that individuals do not have to travel long distances between their home and their home church.

Emphasis on Training and Equipping Church Planters

A recurring theme throughout the previous section was the foundational need to not only plant churches but to train church planters to do the work of planting well. This approach ranges from the training of vocational clergy in formal education centers (i.e., Bible Colleges and seminaries) to church planting schools designed for the non-formal training of planters for the task at hand. It is notable that within the scope of training and equipping planters, practices also exist to train mother churches to mentor and support the planters they commission as well. We found this to be a significant practice that warrants ongoing expansion to ensure that church planters are supported as well as possible in both tangible (e.g. finances, equipment) and intangible (e.g. emotional support, prayer) needs.

Deployment of Multiplication Models

There is a strong focus throughout the WAGF on church multiplication (used here as distinct from “church planting”) as a means to achieve rapid growth. We distinguish church multiplication from church planting in that the former distinctively uses strategies that encourage existing churches to plant new ones. This is a common feature of national strategies that disperse large goals into bite-sized chunks, taken up by each local church (e.g. “each church should plant two churches in the next five years”). This serves not only to distill national goals into more achievable, local goals, but it also serves to spread a culture of church planting beyond the national office of a Fellowship into every local church. It must be noted that a central feature of Pentecostal church planting is that, inasmuch as it is collective, national, and even global in its work, it is also inherently a local and individual enterprise for each Christian to take up as the Holy Spirit leads. A focus on planting through multiplication ensures that this distinctive remains intact.

An Emphasis on Innovation

While technological innovation is not necessarily a universal trend, we found the unique examples, such as the use of emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence described in the United States, to be noteworthy missiological strategies to overcome barriers for the sake of gospel expediency. As the globe becomes increasingly interconnected and reliant upon digital technology, and as the people to whom God calls us to proclaim the gospel spend greater shares of their time in digital environments than ever before, it behooves us to consider how digital technology can foster innovation and afford us the ability to minister to people previously cut off by cultural or linguistic barriers, geographic distance, or governmental restriction.

Community Engagement and Service

A foundational missiological characteristic of Pentecostal church planting work has always been, and continues to be, the work of mercy, poverty relief development, and justice work—meeting the tangible needs of the communities to which God calls us as well as the intangible needs. Throughout our history, this has often taken the form of digging wells, establishing schools, ministry to the unhoused and the infirmed, and other systems that promote human flourishing to the glory of God. While context determines the shape of this community service, physical needs remain a central part of the human condition and must, therefore, remain a central part of our church planting work.

A From All to All Missiology

Inextricably woven into the spirit of Pentecostal missiology today is a “from all, to all” missiology that seeks to participate in the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, as described by Peter on the day of Pentecost, that the Spirit is poured out upon all flesh—young and old, women and men—for the purpose of gospel service. The fullness of that hermeneutic is a Spirit-empowered priesthood of all believers, commissioned by the Spirit to participate in our common missional task, irrespective of social class, education, race or ethnic group, gender, or hierarchal position.

This “from all, to all” missiology includes several features at work within WAGF national Fellowships today and warrants an ongoing prioritization and intentional focus, lest this precious distinctive be lost. The first is the missional mandate of every national Fellowship to be a church planting force within its own national borders *and* beyond, planting churches throughout the rest of the world in partnership with respective indigenous Fellowships. We need to continue shaping our missiology in the WAGF as one that understands that the training and sending of missionaries is a cornerstone task for every fellowship, regardless of its history or location. The whole Church yields tremendous benefit from the ongoing deployment of cross-

cultural missionaries from the global South and East, and for the planting of churches from everywhere to everyone to be one of the greatest contributions the WAGF can give to the broader Christian community.

Second is the training and rapid deployment of laity for the work of planting churches. If our MM33 goal is to be realized, the task of planting churches simply cannot be relegated to the work of professional clergy alone. We must seek avenues of training laypersons for the work of planting and support them with educational resources leading up to and following the establishment of new churches. Finally, we must continue to steward our Pentecostal heritage that seeks to empower and commission women, as well as prioritize the role of children and youth in our church planting efforts, in a manner that is proactive and intentional, in order to see each person the Lord calls walk out their missional mandate.

Finally, we must recognize the missional potential laden within globalization and the ongoing phenomenon of mass migration. Our increasingly interconnected and “transplanted” world (i.e., people not living in their culture of origin) has created a diaspora of peoples throughout the world. Increasingly, to engage in cross-cultural missions activity, one need not go to a distant land but need only look to one’s own community. The “nations,” more and more, have come to us. This provides enormous missional potential in not only reaching people who immigrate to our own cultural contexts with the gospel but also, by extension, touching the families and relational networks to whom they are connected.

National fellowships can no longer look only to plant churches that consider the cultural particularities of the majority peoples in their cultural context. They should also consider what it means to catalyze people movements among immigrant and refugee populations using church planting methods focused on reaching those populations. What’s more, national fellowships would do well to evaluate how growth within their fellowship is driven by global population migration and seek to adapt and innovate accordingly.

Goal-Oriented and Vision-Driven Efforts

Church planting efforts are often part of a larger national strategy, but church planting flourishes most when it exists as a central component of how ministry is accomplished, rather than a peripheral or secondary priority. It is apparent that church planting efforts are sustained best when there are strategies with clear and measurable goals as a part of a larger vision that is consistently reinforced over time. These goals provide direction and motivation for church planting activities.

Stewarding our Common Pentecostal Distinctives

Pentecostalism is among the fastest growing religious movements in the world today and is the primary avenue of Christian expansion globally. Thus, stewarding the essence of what has made the WAGF Fellowships distinctively Pentecostal within each respective cultural context is essential to our common missional mandate. This necessarily requires that we pay attention to the theological distinctives outlined in Section 1 that serve as the foundation for our ministry work. It also requires that we focus on the distinctives of the Pentecostal life that propel the mission forward. This distinct Pentecostal life includes a keen awareness of and participation in life in the Kingdom, including an understanding of the work of the Kingdom in the world today and a commitment to engaging in prayer and exercising spiritual gifts as a testimony to the truth of the gospel.

Similarly, this necessitates a commitment to the Spirit-filled life, not as a simple add-on to make our theology “Pentecostal” (i.e., “Pentecostalism = evangelicalism + praying in tongues”), but as a foundation upon which the life of the Christian is built. Thus, while our church planting work can and should glean best practices from other movements, the Spirit-filled life is not simply an add-on to those best practices, but the very means by which those best practices are reimagined and contextualized.

Next, life in outward-focused community is distinctively Pentecostal. By this, we mean that the Spirit-filled life is inherently community-oriented (i.e., we are first and foremost the *people* of God, not the *individuals* of God) and that that community is outward-focused, for the sake of ministry to the context in which it is planted and for the sake of gospel expansion.

Finally, the shape of the Spirit-filled life is one that does not simply declare the gospel but also lives it out through the demonstration of the Spirit's power in the working of signs and wonders, the anticipation of the coming of the Kingdom through works of service and mercy, and an incarnation of the transformational power of the gospel through holy lives.

A Focus on Unreached People Groups

The focus on Unreached People Groups (UPGs) has been an important focus of WAGF missionary efforts and church planting for decades. This focus continues in our current church planting practices, as described in the previous section. As the globe becomes increasingly more complex, it is worth considering how unreached groups remain ethnically oriented (in the way the term has been traditionally used) but also consider how affinity and other means by which communities are formed create communities for which unique gospel needs exist. These communities may be groups that are untouched by the gospel in digital environments, though they are located within communities that are ethnically heterogeneous but find common identity through shared interests and more.

The Priority of Young People to Catalyze the Movement

Young people have often played a crucial role in the early spread of Christianity. Their youthful zeal and fresh perspectives helped overcome barriers of status quo and innovate to keep the waters of Christianity fresh and never stagnate. Youth have also served as a key catalyst to the rapid expansion of Pentecostalism and subsequent Spirit-empowered movements in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Whereas other traditions have often placed emphasis

on education and appointment to official clerical positions as qualification for preaching the gospel, Pentecostals have long-recognized anointing as a necessary qualification, and have empowered that anointing for service, even when it is embodied in a young person whose experience and education may not match their passion for the gospel.

This feature, which was characteristic of our broader Christian roots, as well as our early Pentecostal roots, must remain a feature of our movement today. Movements like the Lumière Project provide helpful strategic insight into how children and youth-focused church planting can be done, not only in Africa but throughout the world. We must involve children and youth in the process of planting our churches, raising them to view planting churches as integral to what it means to be Pentecostal, with the earnest hope that they will take up the mantle of church planting after those who are laboring toward MM33 today have long-since fallen asleep in Christ.

A Focus on Establishing Community

An important feature that appeared almost universally within the models presented in the WAGF was a focus on church planting as a vision for establishing gospel *community*. In many of the models outlined, the gospel community was established—through Bible studies, small groups, etc.—before a Sunday worship service was even held. That is not to downplay the function of the gathered church, worshipping on Sundays—indeed, many of those who provided data about national models considered a new church as “launched” when it was holding regular worship services and offering other ministries (e.g. targeted ministry to youth)—, but it serves as a significant point of note that in many places throughout the world, the work of church planting begins with sending a person or group of people to build a gospel-focused community from which a church eventually grows, rather than an approach that begins with worship services and strategizes on the development of gospel community thereafter.

Conclusion

Our common MM33 vision, to see the realization of one million WAGF churches by 2033, is an enormous task. It is one we collectively believe has been given to us by the Holy Spirit and we're therefore dependent upon the favor and guidance of the Holy Spirit to see that vision come to fruition. We also believe that we have been invited to participate in God's mission in the world, as partners joining him in that mission work as he directs. Therefore, receiving guidance from the Holy Spirit is not a passive undertaking, but rather one that requires us to be proactive, diligent, and strategic—discerning the Spirit's leading as we work in partnership with him.

The WAGF Church Planting Commission has undertaken this white paper for several reasons. First, we believe that if the MM33 vision is to be brought to completion, it necessarily means that the global Fellowship will nearly triple in size in a relatively short period of time, presenting tremendous opportunity for the WAGF, but also presenting a need for us to remain rooted in a biblical vision for church planting as well as a clear understanding of our history and what makes us distinctively Pentecostal.

The Church Planting Commission believes that rapid growth is essential to reaching a rapidly growing, rapidly changing global population with the gospel. But we also are soberly aware that to do so requires a greater degree of collaboration and partnership than the WAGF has had in the past. That does not mean past collaborative work was unnecessary or ineffective, but only that we are convinced that God is calling the WAGF to a greater degree of cooperation and unity on mission together. This unity of mission necessarily requires that we strategize together, that we commit to sharing best practices, data, and resources together, and that we demonstrate our common bond—not only in our respect and love for one another, but also in tangible partnerships wherein we can produce real, measurable impact. We believe that, in our globally interconnected world, the WAGF must position itself as innovative and collaborative in a way that is unique among Christian traditions today—for no other reason than we believe that the

world desperately needs the gospel of Jesus Christ and that we are called to carry that gospel with every resource and strategy at our disposal. Through new, innovative approaches, like the sharing of data and establishing common measurements, we can identify and prioritize areas of the world either forgotten or written off as “unreachable” and muster our collective, Spirit-empowered might, to develop unique strategies to reach those contexts with the gospel in our lifetime.

This white paper is more than an academic endeavor; it is a clarion call to the heart of every believer within the WAGF to beckon us toward a future where our faith and actions intertwine to aggressively plant new churches throughout the world. Herein lies our Ebenezer: a marker not just of the Lord’s past faithfulness but also a sign of hope and promise that just as he has been faithful to us until now, he will be faithful as we work together in this present task.

As we press on towards the MM33 vision, let this document serve as a launching point of ongoing collaboration and strategy, as well as a reminder of our shared commitment to sow seeds of faith across the globe. Together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we embrace the challenge and opportunity to forge a legacy of faith that spans across the nations of the world and serves as an inheritance for our children. This is our mission, our mandate, and our ministry, to which we pledge our hearts and hands, in the pursuit of a world transformed by the love and truth of Jesus Christ.

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