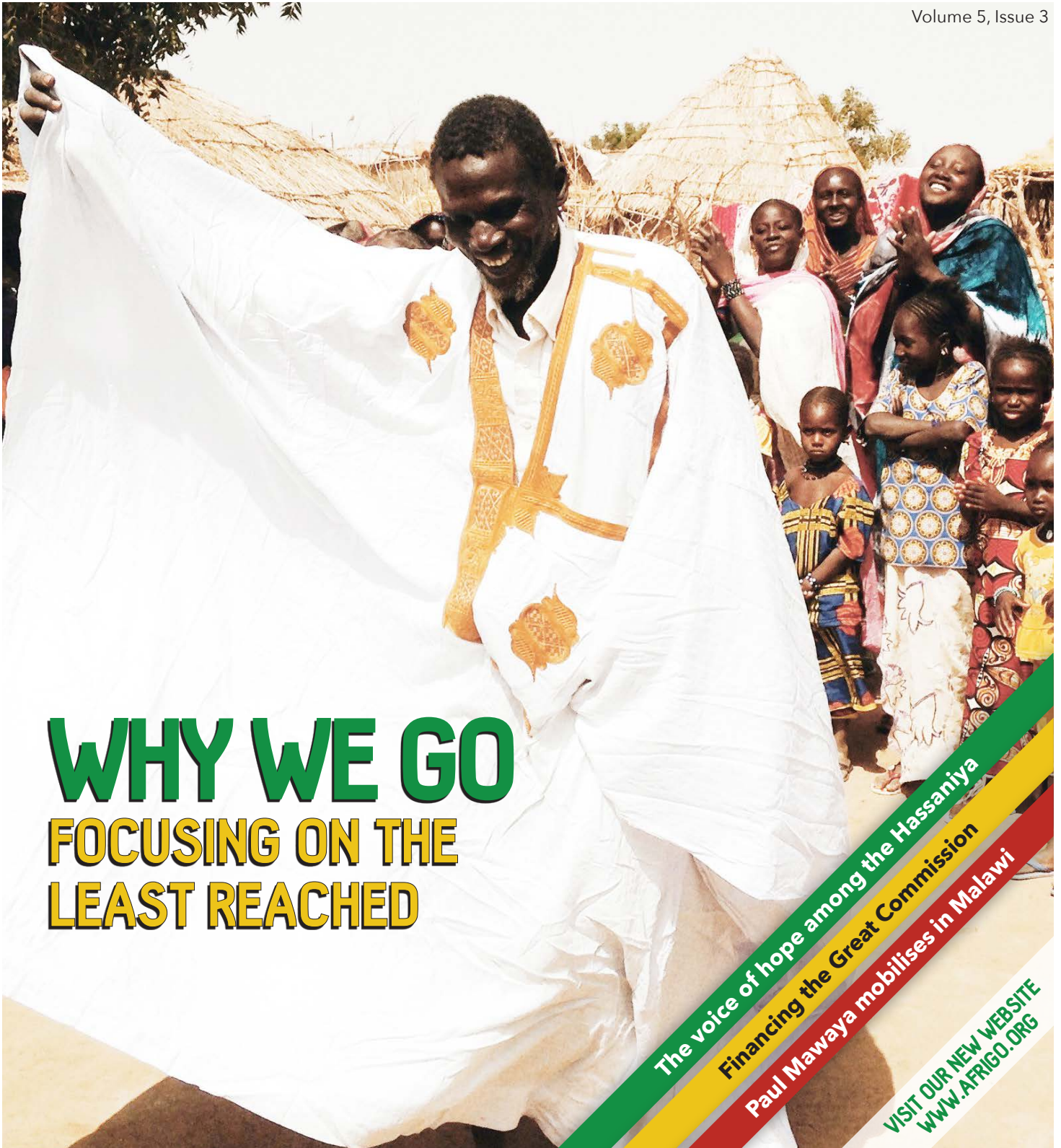


AFRIGO

Encouraging the Church in world mission

Volume 5, Issue 3



WHY WE GO FOCUSING ON THE LEAST REACHED

The voice of hope among the Hassaniya
Financing the Great Commission
Paul Mawaya mobilises in Malawi
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I remember sitting in a Christian Union meeting in my undergraduate years in Kenya as the speaker preached from the book of Acts. He spoke of Paul's desire to take the gospel where people had never heard about Christ. My heart was warmed that night. I recall God speaking to me and the real presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. At that time, I did not know how much of the world was not reached with the gospel.

Looking back, I am humbled that God continues to call people to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, but also to respond to his invitation to take the gospel where Christ is still not yet known. This call is real, compelling and personal.

As we think about the areas of the world where Christ is least known, a majority lie within the 10/40 Window. This term was first used in 1990 by Luis Bush, a mission strategist, to define the region of the world with the greatest suffering combined with the least exposure to the gospel. This area lies generally between latitudes 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator.

The concept of prioritising least reached peoples is not new; others have historically referred to such people and places as dark, heathen or unoccupied fields. Nonetheless, the 10/40 Window reminds us that these places remain, broadly speaking, the habitat of the majority of those who

follow the teachings of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. These people have no easy access to the gospel and do not even know a Christian because of severe restrictions to Christianity. Such large numbers of people of other faiths and no faith should compel Christ followers to take the gospel to them in obedience to Christ's command.

We can thank God that many people are coming to Christ all over the world and among communities where there were few believers in the past. God has certainly answered prayers for more workers to be sent into his harvest field (Matt. 9:38). Many faithful workers have sacrificed and suffered, obeying the Lord's call to take the gospel where Christ was least known.

As we look back over the last century in Africa, we can only be thankful for the way we have truly been recipients of God's saving grace. Research by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary showed that in 2018 Africa became the continent with the largest number of Christians. This is both an encouragement and a challenge.

The church in Africa must actively and intentionally play its part in global missions simply because of the abundant human resource available in its churches. In obedience to Christ's call, Christian leaders in Africa need to envision the church about global

missions, equip believers through biblical teaching to become true disciples of Christ, and fervently pray for God's Spirit to use this historically looked-down upon continent to make Christ known where He is least known. What a great privilege and joy it is to respond to God's call to join Him in the work He is doing in building His kingdom.

In this issue, we bring you the stirring story of the Mali Faithful Witness team, working among the Hassaniya-speaking people of the Kayes region. Meet and be inspired by Paul Mawaya of the Ngoni people who were once without Christ. Today he is mobilising the church in Malawi towards missions. Read the amazing conversion story of Tambaya Ibrahim, a Bo(ɓaa) Fulani and how he travels across Niger to preach to Fulani. Discover the new ways to finance the Great Commission from Peter Macharia of Kenya as you learn how to pray for the people of Ayutthaya, Thailand. There are amazing resources, training materials and missions news from across Africa for you. Happy reading!

Peter Oyugi is the Director of African Mobilisation for Africa Inland Mission (AIM) International. From Kenya, he previously served as a pastor and in student ministry. He is passionate about the Bible, cross-cultural missions, leadership and student ministry. He is engaged in various continental and global mission initiatives.

THE VOICE OF HOPE AMONG THE HASSANIYA

BY VICTOR BAJA

Every year, hundreds of Christians around the world move into unfamiliar environments, some with their families, in obedience to God's call to take the gospel to all nations and make disciples. The Mali Faithful Witness team is working among the Hassaniya-speaking people of the Kayes region.

Faithful Witness

Faithful Witness is an initiative of SIM that recruits and sends multi-cultural, multi-organisational and multi-skilled workers into communities across the world where there is no church and virtually no Christian witness.

This description fits the Hassaniya-speaking people of the Kayes region. The team is focused on relational transformation. They intentionally seek the lost and young disciples for God's kingdom in a place with few social amenities, and devoid of words such as comfort, peace or security.

In 2019, Faithful Witness leaders, along with partners and local church leaders, visited the region, sequel to visits in 2000, 2011, 2018. The city of Kayes, which shares its name with the region, has some indigenous churches and a Nigerian church. In the rural areas, however, the Fulani villages have few gatherings of believers. There is no church among the Moors and Soninke people.

The Hassaniya-speaking Moors are considered unreached. Most villages in that region are without churches or Christian organisations, with the majority of Christians concentrated in urban centres. These villagers would



have died without hearing the gospel of salvation.

"There are no known believers amongst the Hassaniya, and less than a handful amongst the Soninke and Fulani," says Joshua Ngunta, SIM's Mali Director.

In spite of the long and draining challenges of traveling, the team made a fact-finding visit. They discovered God was opening opportunities ahead of them for a harvest of souls. Nevertheless, there were no labourers on the field. This informed their desire to get feet on the ground for kingdom work.

The Hassaniya villages they visited opened their arms in welcome. The labours of previous workers had lit the path for the new team. They saw God's love and the missionaries' good-will through acts of compassion and other outreaches. They provided famine relief, built wells, schools and

children's clubs. The church teams showed the Jesus Film and distributed tracts. They held medical clinics, and learned their language and culture.

God had used these contacts to soften the hearts of the people; even their village heads were delighted to have the team and publicly honoured them. These villagers also expressed zeal to engage the team in conversations.

The Hassaniya of Kayes

The name 'Hassaniya' defines both the people and their language. They are typically rural and live mostly as pastoralists. Amongst the Hassaniya in Mali, there is only one known believer, but he is from a different region. They are mostly Tidjani Muslims, and the country is dominated by Islam.

There are mainly three groups in this region. The Moors (Hassaniya), the Soninke people, who are business minded, with entrepreneurs among them, and the Malinke (Maninka) with a very small number of believers.

No books of the Bible are translated into Hassaniyya. The Jesus Film is available in Hassaniyya as well as audio

**The Hassaniya
have expressed
openness for
workers to live
among them
and learn their
language.**



recordings of Gospel stories from the Global Recordings Network.

Kingdom Opportunities

God has opened doors of ministry. The Hassaniya have expressed openness for workers to live among them and learn their language. The team has received numerous requests for help, including adult literacy teachers, medical caregivers, and children's club workers, among others. This became a sign to the whole team that this is a field ripe for harvest and in need of harvesters.

While the Hassaniya welcome the team, the team also realised the challenges to gospel work in the region. Insecurity, a harsh climate, isolation and deeply held cultural beliefs are huge impediments.

But SIM Mali Director Joshua Ngunta is optimistic and believes God has stepped out with the team to build His Kingdom.

"We want to step into this land by faith. Through our survey focused on one particular group in that harvest field, we are conscious of the prayer

of Psalm 67, 'May all the peoples praise Him!'"

The Agabi's Faith Response

Undaunted by the enormity of the task, Ode and Jennifer Agabi, a young family from Jos, Nigeria, took a leap of faith to live amongst the Hassaniya.

"We must confess that it was not an easy decision to make. But knowing that there are people dying without the opportunity of hearing about the salvation in Christ Jesus is enough reason for us. For what good is having a room with a hundred lamps when another is in deep darkness?"

The Agabis journeyed to Mali amidst enormous challenges. In spite

of long waits, they considered it an adventure, and arrived in Bamako on December 11, 2019.

They were consoled by the words of Ezra: 'The hand of our God was on us, and He protected us from enemies and bandits along the way' Ezra 8:31-32.

Their faith in the Lord and warm fellowship with other missionaries on the ground is helping them to scale the hurdles of a new environment. It makes it easier to deal with harsh weather, the higher cost of living, ill-health of their son, and learning Hassaniya and French.

God has been graciously on their side all the time. They are driven by the truth, "For the gospel is no longer good news if it doesn't arrive on time."

PLEASE PRAY:

- For God's Spirit to prepare the hearts of Hassaniya herdsmen to receive the Gospel.
- For God's love and unity to grow among the missionaries in Kayes region.
- For God's intervention in the health and economic crisis due to the coronavirus.
- For financial provision for the team.
- For God to bring more workers to the team.
- For peace in Mali and other West African states threatened by Islamic extremists.
- For protection for all gospel workers.

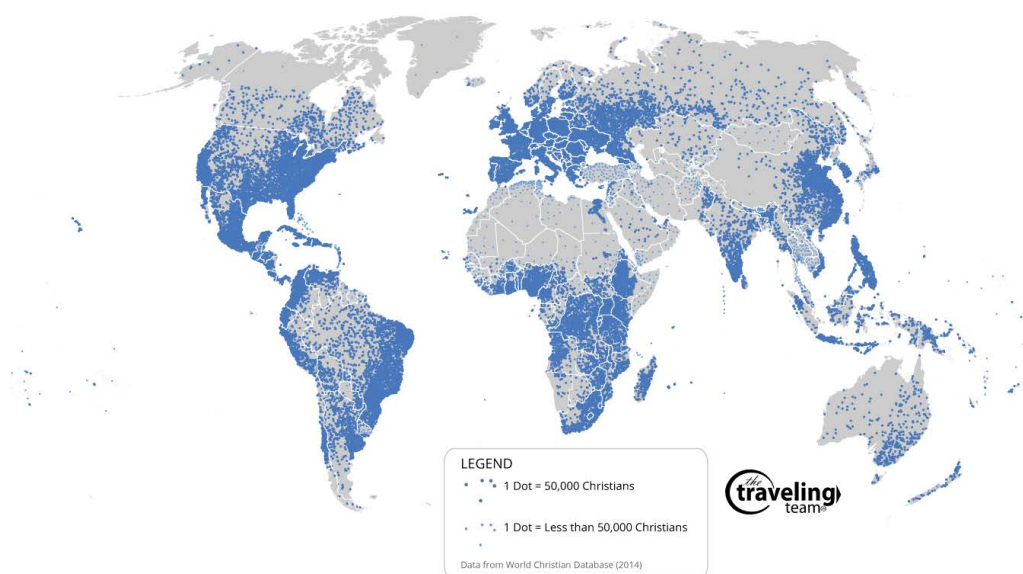
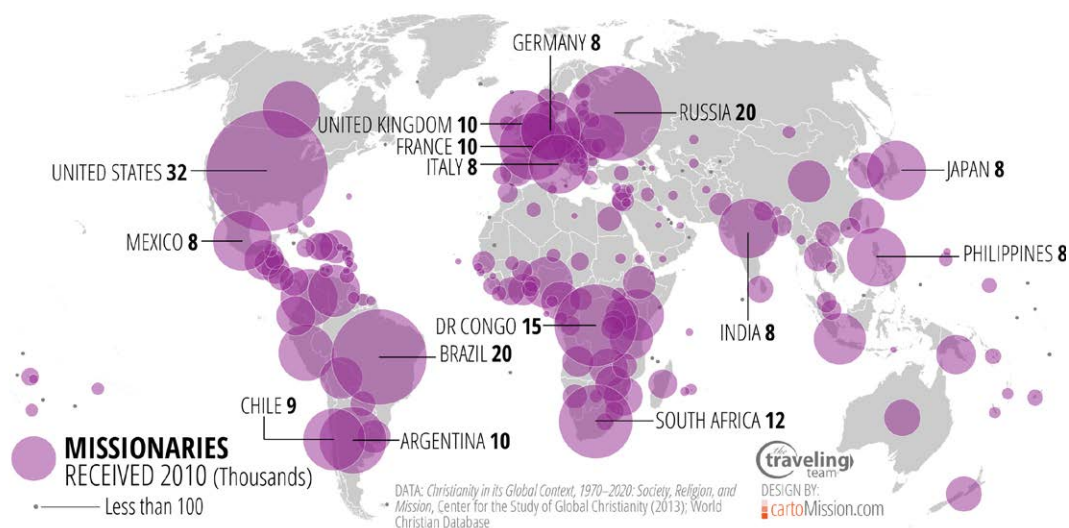
ARE MISSIONARIES REACHING THE REACHED?

Below, you will see two maps comparing the countries with the most missionaries (purple) and countries with the most Christians (blue). It is apparent that missionaries are being assigned to locations where Christians and churches are already

well established. Although we want to prioritise the unreached, in practice, most of our effort and resources are focused on the reached.

According to the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), there are about 400,000 missionaries in the world today, including both Protestant and

Catholic. Of these, 77.3% serve in the 'reached' world. Another 19.4% serve in the 'unevangelised' world. A mere 3.3% serve among the 'unreached.' What can we do to change these percentages, so that those still living and dying without Jesus Christ can hear the Gospel and become our brothers and sisters?



Infographics: thetravelingteam.org

HOW TO PRAY FOR THE LEAST REACHED

A wide variety of information is available today to pray for those who don't know Christ. In our last issue on prayer, we brought many of these to your attention. Please view that list of prayer websites, prayer apps, WhatsApp groups and prayer articles and videos: <https://bit.ly/31LvcdE>

UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS: IN SEARCH OF THE BEST WORD

Over the years, Christians have developed vocabulary to try to describe the lost. One of the most-used phrases is “unreached people groups” or UPGs. It has become so common we take it for granted when we pray, discuss and create our mission strategies. But this language is not in the Bible. Where did it come from?

Decades ago, mission agencies focused on countries in need of the gospel. However, even when missionaries founded new work in a country, many ethnic groups remained without the gospel. In 1974, Ralph Winter, founder of the US Center for World Mission, urged mission leaders to think differently. His term, ‘hidden peoples,’ changed the focus from national borders to people groups.

The term ‘hidden peoples’ begged for a definition. What is ‘a people’? Using the Homogenous Unit Principle, people groups became defined by ethnic and linguistic affinities, and put into lists. Next, what defined ‘hidden’? The term ‘unreached’ emerged with the technical designation of a people group with less than 2% evangelical Christians (and less than 5% of any type of Christian).

This alternative to the focus on countries influenced every area of missions and produced a wave of productive new work. Many groups such as the AD 2000 & Beyond Movement, Joshua Project, Adopt-a-People, PeopleGroups.org, 10/40 Window, Finishing the Task and more use UPGs to describe those who need the gospel.

In recent years some have raised concerns about whether this terminology has led to poor strategies in reaching the lost. If a people group is 3% Christian, it can be categorised as

‘reached’ and is no longer prioritised by some churches for mission work.

Additionally, a percentage reveals nothing about quality of faith. There may be many believers, but their faith is only lukewarm.

Ken Baker of SIM adds that while “a UPG orientation has been helpful for raising global mission awareness”, the PG category “simplifies identities for popular audiences. In current mission practice, UPG identities are externally assigned. A particular People Group identity is not necessarily how persons within that group would self-identify.”

There are also many differences within PGs. A PG may be reached in a city, but unreached in rural areas. The older generation may be reached, but not the youth. Also, trends in urbanisation, globalisation and diaspora movements mean that PG categories are blurring in settings where many groups live together.

Mission practice is changing too. Some missions now focus on causes rather than UPGs or places. Causes can include anti-trafficking, education for girls, or access to clean water, all combined with Gospel proclamation.

The mission organisation, SIM, now uses the term ‘communities where Christ is least known’ which identifies

people in their contexts. Thus, their strategies can accommodate the ‘deaf community in Mali’ or “the miners of Potosi, Bolivia.” A community is the dynamic, 3-D context of a person which shapes their identity and narrative.

Even as we wrestle with the best vocabulary, we can remember what Ramez Atallah, General Secretary of the Egyptian Bible Society has said: “Love is the supreme missionary technique.” Just as air can never be caught in a net, so God’s love cannot be caught in our categories; nevertheless, air can fill a net just as God’s love can fill our categories.

In 2024, the vocabulary of unreached, with its successes and limitations, will be 50 years old but the concept of prioritising peoples without the Gospel is as old as Philip explaining Scripture to the Ethiopian eunuch or the Apostle Paul’s vision for Spain. It is the message behind the parable of the shepherd who sought one lost sheep among 100. (If we extrapolated a definition of ‘unreached’ from this parable, then a people group with 99% believers would still be unreached.)

The wording of the Great Commission has the sense of carrying the Gospel further and further, ‘to the utter ends of the earth.’ Clearly, divine love is thorough, if not efficacious. We serve a God who commands us to invest costly resources and time on endeavors which have the merest chance, perhaps not for years to come, of resulting in one new relationship between Him and someone created in His image. May the Lord teach us to seek out this someone.

“Love is the
supreme missionary
technique.”
Ramez Atallah

UNENGAGED

Over time, the term ‘unengaged’ emerged. This refers to PGs with no evangelical church planting strategy underway (www.peoplegroups.org). The terms ‘unreached’ and ‘unengaged’ have acquired less technical cousins: least-reached and under-engaged.

Mike Latsko writes in Mission Frontiers magazine that “the term ‘unengaged’ is the most offensive in missionary terminology. It is a blatant acknowledgement of the missionary community’s refusal to fulfil the minimal apostolic prerequisite of being present among all peoples and beginning the work of gospel proclamation.”*

*Christianity Today, Why Mission Experts are Redefining ‘Unreached People Groups’
Submitted by the AfriGO editorial team

A FRESH EYE TO FINANCING THE GREAT COMMISSION

BY PETER MACHARIA, AS TOLD BY MERCY KAMBURA

In 2000, I conducted a training in Sudan for 12 evangelists. One day, someone raised an important question: How would they be supported to evangelise their people since I had been financed to evangelise them?

I struggled with this dilemma. It finally occurred to me that a funded missionary sounded like a good thing, but the model raised many questions.

Am I paid to tell people about Jesus? Would I keep doing what I'm doing if there were no funding? Why couldn't the people I was discipling be paid too? How do I teach dependency on God while I depend on support from outside?

How had I been doing it?

I have been in missions since 1994 after I graduated from Pwani Bible Institute in Mombasa, Kenya. Throughout my ministry, I have received support from friends, congregations and ministries. In all those times, I have also worked with my hands to support my family.

I realised that the support from individuals wasn't very reliable. And most churches have a hierarchy that does not support mission work in large scale. So, I set to work.

I have been a gardener and a night watchman at a Bible school's gate. My first six months in Sudan, I survived by bartering my clothes, shoes and salt for food items such as cassava, dry meat and sorghum.

When I worked among the Somali in Nairobi, I had a small juice business.

True missionaries are those with the gift of apostleship and the anointing to establish and advance God's kingdom. These missionaries have three important marks: self-denial, dependency upon God and ability to be self-supporting.

The following models could change the way missions is done and make a huge leap in solving the financing hurdle.

Indigenous People Reaching Their Own

In some areas, reached people already live in the communities we're trying to reach. Indigenous people are often well-suited to reach their own with minimal disruption of their livelihood.



Peter is an ordained minister with Africa Inland Church, Kenya. He has been serving under AICK Missions Department since 2006. He is married to Esther, and they are blessed with three boys.



PHOTO BY ADRIAN BUTCHER

If there are none, find someone in the communities to be your host. Join in their vocation or business, if they have any.

Near-culture people

These are people close in language and culture to the unreached people. They can remain in their jobs, which ensures financial stability.

When you enter new areas, do so with an exit strategy in place. Avoid becoming the host; be a guest. When you establish relationships, they become family, where mutual help and support are practised.

Bi-vocational

Use your skills and gifts to improve the lives of people. Businesses and employment opportunities should add value to communities. Use a holistic approach.

You have the right to receive gifts from international communities and local Christians. Nobody should leave the field for lack of financial support.

I have missionaries working to spread the gospel. One rears milk cows, which supports him in the field. Another sister has an Mpesa (mobile money transfer) shop. She gets very little money from the church, but the business has helped her network with many Muslim women. It is practical and fruitful.

Mission is not all about money. It is a relationship between the missionary and their social network. Churches may be financially unstable, but they are prayer giants. They are proud of you and see you as one of them. They can send gifts whenever they want. There should be no coercion; God loves a cheerful giver. They give accommodation when you are home; you feel loved, valued, and treasured in their midst. They listen to your stories, challenges and opportunities. This is more important than money.

Use your skills and
gifts to improve
the lives of people.

CALLED: PAUL MAWAYA

BY MERCY KAMBURA

In July 1876, after a revival in South Africa, four young men from the Xhosa tribe set out as pioneer missionaries to Malawi. The Ngoni, one of the people groups in Malawi, were a bloodthirsty, menacing people, whose conquests were known far and wide. Any stranger daring to go among them was signing his death certificate.

One Xhosa man fell sick en route and turned back. Another died months after arrival. The other two stayed on and preached Christ.

Paul Mawaya, an Ngoni, began his role as a mission mobiliser in Malawi in April 2020. He is a spiritual descendant of these Xhosa missionaries, and an example of what happens when we obey God's call to reach the unreached, even if we do not see the fruit in our lifetime.

Paul's story

I have a cross-cultural background; both my maternal grandparents are Ngoni. My mother is from Mzimba District in northern Malawi. My paternal grandmother was a Mang'anja while my paternal grandfather was Lhomwe.

My grandmothers taught us Ngoni and Tumbuka songs and created a family altar. They encouraged us to memorise scripture from an early age. But I was not born again.

Around 1985, I had a dream of the glorious Jesus who suddenly appeared on a powerfully dazzling throne in the sitting room of my parents' farmhouse.

In that dream, I was outside and it was very dark. Suddenly a bright light shone through the edges of the closed wooden door of the house.

I opened the door and fell facedown. The description of Isaiah 6:1 fits well with what I saw. Just like Isaiah, I said, "Forgive me because I am a sinner."

The next day, I shared this dream with my mother.

But being against a vocal Christianity, she advised me to keep it to myself.



Journey to ministry

I came to Christ through a personal crisis immediately after secondary school in 1995.

At that time, there was one state university whose selection process was very rigorous. Try as I did, I did not secure a slot. I was depressed and suicidal.

Mr. Mound Chombo, a family friend working with Trans World Radio, shared Christ with me. I resolved to 'test' God's genuine intentions for me by asking Him to enable me to read the entire Bible. God gave me the grace to accomplish this in three months. So I went back to Mr. Chombo, who led me to Jesus Christ.

This new life changed my direction. My quest to deepen my understanding of his Word led me to African Bible College in Lilongwe.

Ministry

I have so far ministered to 19 congregations, 33 prayer houses, and 11 mission schools. I also pioneered Blantyre Synod Radio, a national Christian broadcaster.

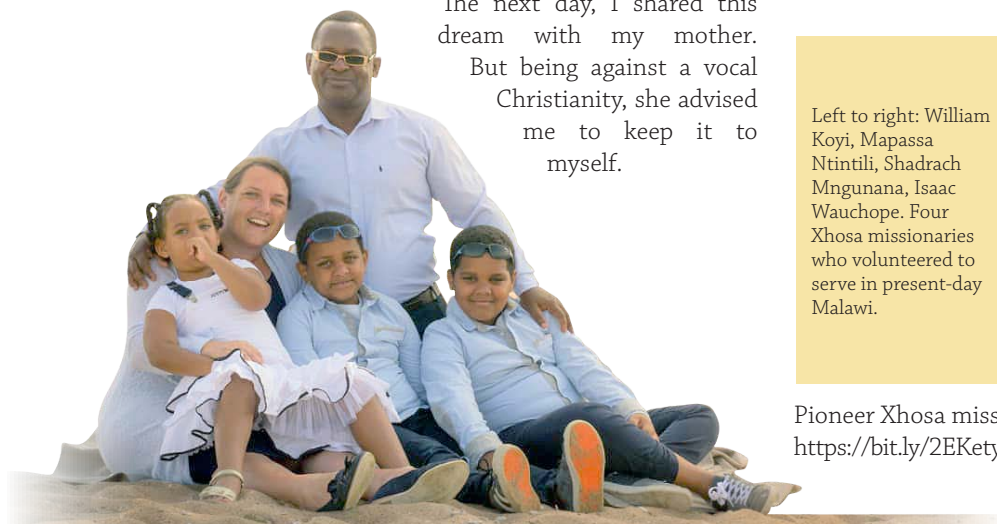
God used my attendance at a SIM Pastors Book Set Conference to catalyse a leap from my ministry as a Presbyterian minister to become a full-time missionary. I struggled with this at first because I had never met a missionary to show me how to become one. But God has guided me.

The language of my Ngoni people — who first received the Gospel 145 years ago — is dying out, but the Gospel never will! Working with SIM Malawi and Malawi Mission Initiative, I am at the centre not only of spreading the Gospel, but of mobilising others to cross borders and cultures to do the same.

Left to right: William Koyi, Mapassa Ntintili, Shadrach Mngunana, Isaac Wauchope. Four Xhosa missionaries who volunteered to serve in present-day Malawi.



Pioneer Xhosa missionary opens doors in Malawi:
<https://bit.ly/2EKetym>.



Rev. Paul Mawaya's family

GO! NEWS OF AFRICA'S MOBILISING CHURCH




Kairos Course Goes Online

The Kairos online training course is now available. This first online course, organised by Simply Mobilizing - East Africa in conjunction with Missions Campaign Network, started in July 2020.

The first course brought together 70 participants from across Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, United Arab Emirates, South Korea and India. The nine sessions ran through the end of August 2020.

The organisations are planning a line-up of other courses onwards as the COVID-19 pandemic opened possibilities of more online engagements.

 www.kairoscourse.org

New Seminary Opens in Liberia

The new Evangelical Seminary of West Africa (ESWA) in Monrovia, Liberia, held its inaugural course in September 2019. Students included pastors, teachers and school administrators, all enrolled in a three-year, 90-hour Master's of Divinity programme.

ESWA is the only interdenominational, evangelical graduate seminary in the country.


The vision of ESWA is clearly stated: "To glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by producing Godly servant-leaders for West

Africa; to serve the church, fulfil the Great Commission and transform the world (Matthew 28:18-20)."

Partners came together formally in 2014, including SIM Liberia, Dallas Theological Seminary, USA, and leaders from several denominations.

The Liberian government granted accreditation in June 2019 and the first president, Dr. Rick Calenberg, arrived the following month.

In addition to classes and weekly chapels, the seminary holds local outreaches. A recent event for the community surrounding the seminary's five-acre campus provided information and sanitation items in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

 Learn more at www.esw.africa

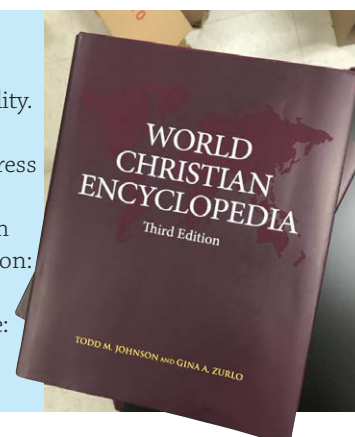


World Christian Encyclopedia

The third edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia is now available through Edinburgh University Press. Research staff at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) updated every figure in the book, located hundreds of new photos, and re-wrote all narrative texts about the history of Christianity in every country. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, the Encyclopedia includes quantitative information on world religions and Christianity down to the denominational level. Hundreds of Christians worldwide

helped make this book a reality.

- Available through Edinburgh University Press or Amazon: <https://amzn.to/30sgdVh>
- To purchase info by region: <https://bit.ly/30sgCaf>
- Portions available for free: <https://bit.ly/2Xs4ofY>



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TESTIMONY OF TAMBAYA IBRAHIM

I am a Boɗaaɗo Fulani. My father and forefathers are Woɗaaɓe; all of them were cattle herders. I grew up in the bush. I knew only shepherding cattle – nothing else. As a child, I never visited a town, large or small. Sometimes, men might go to a town market, but children and women never went to towns. We only stayed in the bush.

I was born during the famine of 1974. My father's name is Ibrahim. In that year, my people experienced much

suffering, including the death of all our animals. Many lost everything.

Within a week of my birth, my father was visited by Malaam T, a friend who was a Christian. He brought the customary greeting for my birth and asked if he could pray for me. Though my father was a Muslim, he accepted. Malaam blessed me and asked God to make me a worker for Him.

Ten years later, during the second terrible famine, our people went to a large city to find food. There, two of my uncles met a missionary, who explained to them the way of Jesus Christ. They trusted in Jesus that day.

From a young age, I suffered from terrible nightmares. My family thought these were caused by evil spirits; nothing could be done to alleviate these terrors. On one occasion, I was taken to a traditional healer, who explained what must be done. My parents were away at the time, but when my mother returned, she flatly refused such a treatment. Then she prayed a prayer I will never forget, "Jesus, I trust you. You have saved me and my son. He is yours. If you choose to, you can cure him." She then took me to another town to see my father, who was now a believer.

While there, a SIM missionary talked with me about Jesus, and asked if I wanted to follow him. I trusted Christ that day. God removed evil spirits from me, and the nightmares stopped. My heart was filled with joy and I began to follow Jesus.

I learned to read and write and loved studying. Some years later, a pastor observed my passion for learning and encouraged me to go to Bible school. This was God's leading and I studied four years at a Fulani Bible school in Bénin.

God has called me to reach Fulani who had never heard the *habaru belɗium* (sweet news). This dominates all my thoughts. I travel across Niger to preach to Fulani and encourage believers, finding great joy in working for the Lord, my life a testimony to how God is answering Malaam's prayer for me at my birth.



Tambaya IBRAHIM serves in many key capacities today. He is a member of the team translating the Old Testament into Niger's eastern dialect of Fulfulde, the language of the Fulani. The New Testament was dedicated and distributed in 2016.

He also serves as the director of the Fulani Ministry Training Center. This is the only Bible school in Niger dedicated to the Biblical training of Fulani – Fulani teaching Fulani in Fulfulde.

Tambaya is on the governing board of SIM Niger, which advises and directs the vision of SIM's activities in Niger.

God has further used him to promote missions to his own people, even traveling to Ethiopia to mobilise Ethiopians to reach Fulani.

(RIGHT) Jon Banke, SIM coordinator for Fulani ministries, Rev. Tambaya Ibrahim of Niger and Rev. Gashaw Nemomsa, Ethiopian missionary to Fulani in Mali, were the main presenters at the two-day conference in Addis Ababa, hosted by the East Africa Sending Office. A focus of some mission leaders in Ethiopia is the nomadic Fulani of West Africa: <https://bit.ly/3js5BfC>.





PEOPLE GROUPS:

PEOPLE OF AYUTTHAYA, THAILAND

The city of Ayutthaya is the former capital of Thailand and an important place for Thai Buddhists, especially on holy days and national holidays. It is known as a place of spiritual power. Just 40 miles north of the huge city of Bangkok, it is home to more than a million people with little opportunity to hear about Christ. Fewer than 700 Christians attend a handful of small churches.

For many, being Buddhist is a part of being Thai and there is tremendous pressure not to convert to Christianity. Additionally, Buddhists do not believe in the concepts of sin, or heaven and hell, and this can make it difficult to understand their need for Christ. Ten per cent of the population is Muslim,

and they worship in one of 56 mosques throughout the area. No local missionaries or churches are reaching this group.

The Faithful Witness initiative of SIM is forming a multi-cultural, multi-skilled team to reach the people of Ayutthaya, including team members from Ethiopia, Peru, the US and Australia. They plan to share Christ through outreach to university students and factory workers, sports ministries, community development, microbusiness, prison ministry and language teaching. COVID-19 travel restrictions mean that some team members, including two Ethiopians, are delayed in joining their colleagues already in Ayutthaya. More workers are still needed to join the team.

At a Glance

- The culture of Ayutthaya, and the province which shares its name, is unique; so language and culture learning will take quite a bit of team members' time in the early months.
- Muslims and Buddhists both seek salvation through works, a contrast to Christianity's offer of salvation through grace.
- Ayutthaya's population tends to be transient. People work for a few years, then return to their hometowns, making it a strategic place to share the Gospel.

Pray

- For the Lord to provide visas and travel for an Ethiopian couple joining the team.
- For God to open hearts and make Himself known, creating a hunger for the Gospel.
- For good relationships between local Christians and missionaries and a shared vision to work together to bring people to Christ.
- For more workers from around the world to join the Faithful Witness team.

Learn more about a new team forming to reach the people of Ayutthaya at www.facebook.com/global.faithfulwitness.



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