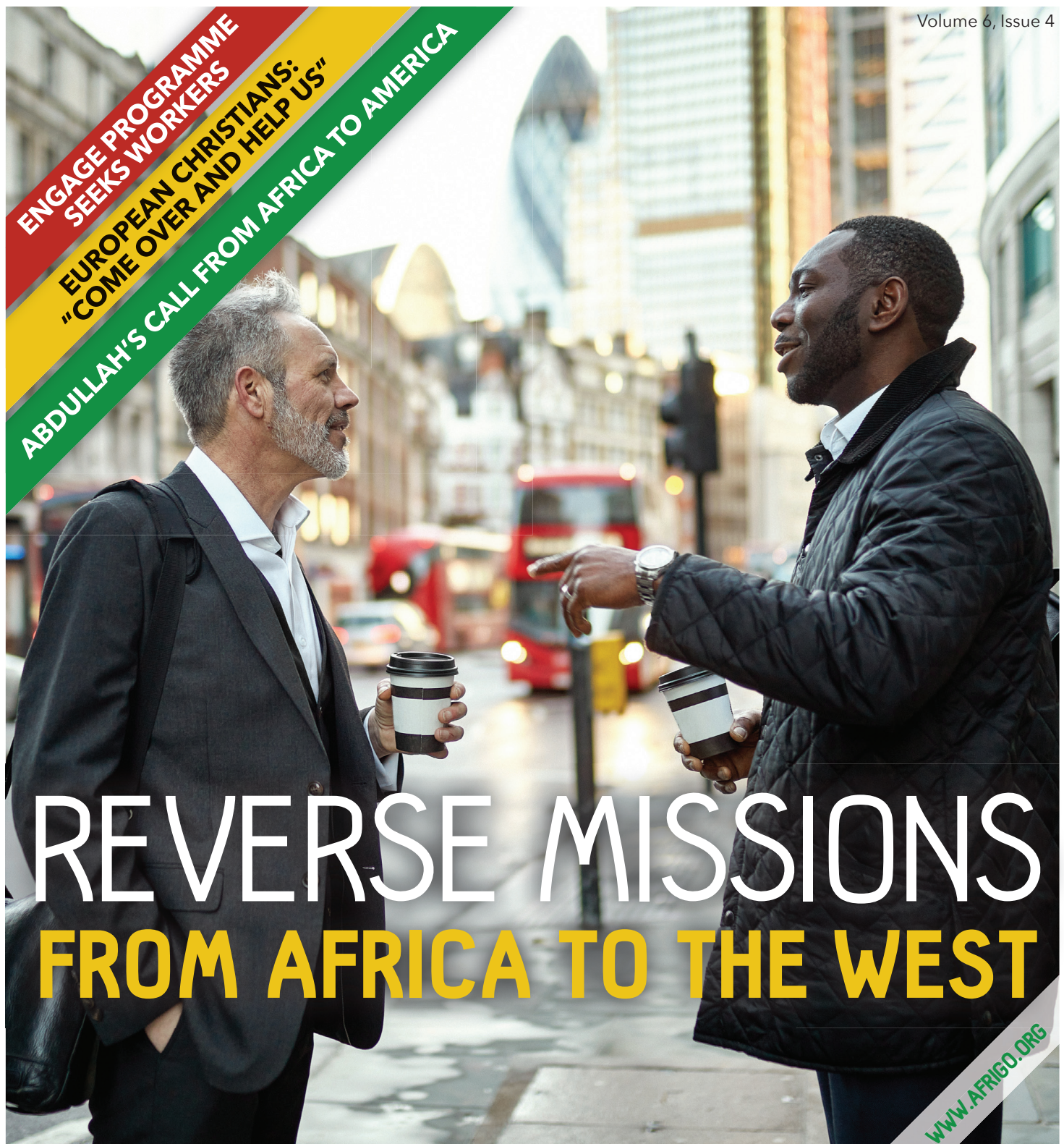


# AFRIGO

Encouraging the Church in world mission

Volume 6, Issue 4



ENGAGE PROGRAMME  
SEEKS WORKERS

EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS:  
"COME OVER AND HELP US"

ABDULLAH'S CALL FROM AFRICA TO AMERICA

REVERSE MISSIONS  
FROM AFRICA TO THE WEST

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# CONTENTS



## 04 CALLED: PAUL AKINOLA

When a young congregant in his London church was brutally murdered, Senior Pastor Paul Akin Akinola found opportunities not only to reach the youth, but for the youth to reach the unreached through missions.

## 05 EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS ARE CALLING, "COME OVER & HELP US"

Harvey Kwiyani describes missions as the coming together of revival and migration – two phenomena common to Africans. He describes how God is bringing forth light to shine in the spiritually dark continents of the world.

## 06 ABDULLAH'S CALL OUT OF AFRICA; INTO AMERICA

Persecution and economic necessity led Abdullah to flee his home country, but the call of God followed him. He shares the blessings and challenges of pastoring in a downtrodden community in the US.

## 09 SEASONED MISSIONARIES SHARE ADVICE

Though the African diaspora Christians are numerically strong, not all are aware of their great missionary opportunity. Read insights from Africans in the West who are living as missionaries.

## 11 ENGAGE PROGRAMME SEEKS WORKERS

Engage recruits and places gospel workers from around the world in local UK churches. Read how Mary from Ethiopia is impacting diverse people in the UK and beyond.





## REVERSE MISSIONS

BY TSHEPANG BASUPI

**T**hroughout history, migration and Christian missions have gone hand in hand. In the book of Acts, we notice that the persecuted believers in Jerusalem started sharing the gospel as they migrated (Acts 8:4). Andrew Walls notes:

“It is easy enough to point to historical situations where migration forwarded the spread of the faith. The earliest spread of the faith beyond Jewish Palestine owed much to prior Jewish migration across the Mediterranean world, as well as into Mesopotamia and beyond. The Jewish communities in the diaspora provided the networks by which the message about Jesus spread.”<sup>1</sup>

Africans have been migrating across the world, including to the West. As these believers migrate, they also carry their faith. This is similar to how European migrants brought the gospel to many parts of Africa.<sup>2</sup> Following the same trend, Africans are bringing the gospel to Europe and North America, a phenomenon known as “reverse missions”.

The first recorded missionary initiatives by Africans to the West were in the nineteenth century. For example, Sumner Chapel in Peckham, London, was established in 1906 by Ghanaian businessman Brem Wilson, who migrated to England in 1901.<sup>3</sup>

This African missionary movement differs from earlier missions to Africa by Europeans, who came in coordinated ways, often sent through churches and missions societies. African Christians and churches are going as individuals in response to migratory pressures. Others go because they feel called by God to reach the Western world. The implications of a lack of structures is that these efforts are not necessarily coordinated, so individuals and congregations are planting

churches without being aware of each other.<sup>4</sup>

This is very much like the biblical accounts of believers in the book of Acts who shared the gospel spontaneously as they moved. They were not sent in a coordinated way, but obeyed their Lord as they moved. One of the fruits of migrant believers fleeing persecution in Jerusalem was the planting of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-21).

Many African Christians are thriving in highly secularized places like Europe. The recession of religion in Europe is a call to re-evangelize Europe and re-establish Kingdom principles.<sup>5</sup> Many African believers who migrated to Europe believe that God is giving them an opportunity to spread the good news amongst those who do not have a relationship with Him.<sup>6</sup>

Though some may not define African migrants as missionaries, they play a critical role in missions. They initiate the process of evangelism and church planting.<sup>7</sup> We also need to recognize that every missionary is a migrant and every Christian migrant a potential missionary.<sup>8</sup> Some African churches have been able to utilize their migrant members as missionaries without necessarily heavily investing in them to do so.

Africans are already on the move. If churches and mission agencies could envision those who are moving to consider sharing the gospel and planting churches wherever they go, we will see a huge number of churches planted by ‘ordinary’, obedient African believers in the West.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Walls, 2002, *Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History*, *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5:2 (Dec 2002), 3-11.

<sup>2</sup> Hanciles, Jehu, 2008, *Beyond Christendom*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Babatunde Aderemi Adedibu, *Reverse Mission or Migrant Sanctuaries? Migration, Symbolic Mapping, and Missionary Challenges of Britain's Black Majority Churches*, 2013. 412 pp.

<sup>4</sup> Israel Oluwale Olofinjana 2020, Vol. 37(1) 52-65, <https://bit.ly/3DnNZLk>

<sup>5</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu Kwabena. 2006. “African Initiated Christianity in Eastern Europe: Church of the ‘Embassy of God’ in Ukraine”, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol.30. no.2, 73-75. <https://bit.ly/3DjWCXy>.

<sup>6</sup> Hanciles, Jehu. 2008. *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration and the Transformation of the West*. New York: Orbis Books.

<sup>7</sup> Anim, Emmanuel. 2019. ‘Mission in the Diaspora: The Role of Migrants (Refugees) as Principal Bearers of the Christian Faith’, in *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology*, vol.4, no.1, 131-140. <https://bit.ly/2ZUB71Q>.

<sup>8</sup> Hanciles, Jehu. 2008. *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration and the Transformation of the West*. New York: Orbis Books.



**O**n the wall of Willesden Green Baptist Church in London hangs the portrait of Charles Spurgeon, one of England's most famous preachers. It's not just antique décor; this church was founded by two of Spurgeon's students and dedicated by Spurgeon in 1882. Now, 140 years later, the church is pastored by an African, himself disciplined through student ministries. That son of Africa is me, Paul Akin O. Akinola.

During my first visit to the UK in 2000, I was grieved to see many churches had closed; some had even turned into factories. One evening I preached from the book of Esther. I challenged the diaspora community that they were not here by mistake. Who knew whether God brought them here "for such a time as this"?

I did not know that one day I would be among those serving in the UK for such a time as this. The Lord led me to the London School of Theology and, in 2006, I became the first black pastor at Rayners Lane Baptist Church in London, in charge of small groups, discipleship and baptism. I baptised two Iranians, a Pakistani woman and a Hindu man, including British citizens. A Sri Lankan Buddhist

lady also gave her life to Christ. Three years later, I moved to Willesden Green.

#### **Out of a tragedy, light**

Our first 'All Age' service at Willesden Green was on November 1, and a tall young man in a suit and tie was stewarding at the gate. On November 5, the young man was stabbed to death. Just two months after beginning as senior pastor. I sat on the ground near the crime scene and cried my heart out, "How do I begin ministry this way?"

I heard God ask me, "What will you do about it?"

Prayerfully, my wife and I and the church sought God's wisdom. Much work was needed in the community to prevent retaliation for the murder. Out of this terrible crisis emerged profound opportunities to reach the youth. The boy had been popular and had been using music to reach his peers with the gospel. We created a music studio named Hope and dedicated it to his memory.

We then decided to take the youth out of their local neighbourhoods for missions. In Liverpool they were gobsmacked at some of the poverty. The team did cleaning projects, as well as music, drama, dance, and barbecues. Upon returning home, the youth's transformation

continued as they took on leadership in church and even in school.

We began to plan regular youth missions trips, always partnering with local churches on location. We have ministered in several cities in England, Northern Ireland and Poland.

Our church is multi-cultural, but we serve mostly Caucasians. Yes, we have encountered hostility, bigotry, and discrimination, especially due to our skin colour. One young man was so discouraged by the verbal abuse, he lay on the ground in the park crying. I encouraged him, and the following day he went back to preach.

Another challenge is that Western culture is very rational, while African culture is more emotive and very aware of the supernatural.

#### **Advice for diaspora Africans**

Every opportunity is a gift from God. It's not about you; it's about God working through you. Speak and live out the gospel. When light shines, darkness can't stand.

Be sensitive but not apologetic. The gospel should be the offence; not you.

Get out of your 'ghettos'. Remember some of the missionaries in our countries who did not want to mix with us, but others did, not just because the gospel mattered, but because our families and stories mattered too. It is tempting to stay with other Africans in the West, but break out of those boundaries. You are here for 'such a time as this'.

Lastly, don't be in a hurry. Sow seeds, be patient, consistent and faithful. Someone else may harvest much later.

*Akin and wife Nike are blessed with four children – Tomi, Tobi, Timi and Tolu. He served previously with NIFES in Nigeria.*





# EUROPEAN CHRISTIANS ARE CALLING, “COME OVER AND HELP US”

HARVEY KWIYANI, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

A careful reading of the history of missions – one that pays attention to the development of the movement of the followers of Jesus not only from 1800, not even from 1500, but from the very beginning of the story in the book of Acts – shows us that God has used Africans in missions from the very beginning of the Church.

In Acts, we meet John Mark, Lucius, Simeon the Niger, Apollos, and others who came from Alexandria, Cyrene, and other parts of North Africa. This African presence at the beginning of Christianity sets the tone for the next six centuries when North Africans played a central role in evangelizing the Roman Empire and beyond. God has used Africa to evangelize not only in Africa, but in Europe and parts of Asia before. What we see today, when Africans are once again engaging in missions across the world, is not new. It has been before.

Missions is generally a coming together of two phenomena: spiritual revival and migration. Africa has been experiencing a great deal of both for a few

decades, and we often take the revival for granted. It is usually a shocking thing to find oneself in a post-Christian, secularized Europe. They have left the faith *en masse* and are now so far detached from Christianity that Bible-reading, Spirit-filled Christians are often hard to come by. When I taught at a university in England, less than five per cent of the students were Christians. One student told me, “There is no Christian in my entire family network, I am a fourth-generation pagan.” Many did not know any

Christians or anything about the Bible. Indeed, those who sent missionaries to us 150 years ago now need evangelists sent to them.

Like the Macedonian man who appeared to Paul in Acts 16, European Christians are calling, “Come over to Europe and help us.” Where Christianity is growing in Europe is mostly among migrant Christians, especially the Africans. Indeed, Africans (including Afro-Caribbeans) make up more than 60 per cent of church attendance in London. Similar reports are heard from other European cities. The largest congregation in Europe is African-led and located in Kiev (The Blessed Embassy of the Kingdom of God). The largest congregation in the UK is also African-led (Kingsway International Christian Centre). In many European cities, Africans are keeping the flame of Christianity alive. Their presence has also started to register in North America.

Whatever God is doing in Africa is beginning to overflow to other continents. The gifts God has given to the African church are not only for Africa, they are for the entire Body of Christ in all the six continents.

Gifts such as prayer, community, and an African understanding of the Spirit are desperately needed in Europe. It will take a great deal of prayers to pull down the strongholds of secularization that have almost dismissed Christianity in Europe.

Christian fellowship understood in the ways Africans live their communal



lives, often expressed through generosity and interdependency, will be a welcome gift in a context of individualism and consumerism where self-sufficiency is a coveted life-goal. The powerful work of the Spirit that gives us liberty and enables us to wrestle with powers and principalities is needed in Europe where Christianity has evolved in the aftermath of the Enlightenment to become a religion devoid of the Spirit. Many African Christians will know full well that a religion without the Spirit is simply human philosophy and dogma.

Africa has been exploited by Europe for centuries. God, in God's wisdom, is taking the ‘weak’ things of this world to confound the wise. Now is the time for Africa to share Jesus with the world in love and humility. Out of what Europeans pejoratively called the ‘Dark Continent,’ God is bringing forth light that is shining in the spiritually dark continent of Europe and in other continents worldwide.

I pray that God will send more labourers, for the work is huge. Those who cannot come may support us in prayer, for we need it. May God stir your hearts to pray for Africans serving in missions among the diaspora and, if God calls you to serve outside the continent, may you find the strength to obey.

**Gifts such as  
prayer, community,  
and an African  
understanding  
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desperately needed  
in Europe.**

*Harvey Kwiyani, from Malawi, is the Chief Executive Officer for Global Connections, the UK network for world missions, and Director for Missio Africanus. He teaches theology, mission and leadership. His current research focuses on contemporary missions in Europe and North America, intercultural theology, migrations, and African Christians in the Diaspora. [www.globalconnections.org.uk](http://www.globalconnections.org.uk)*

# ABDULLAH'S CALL

## OUT OF AFRICA; INTO AMERICA

**P**ersecution and economic necessity led Abdullah to flee his home country, but the call of God followed him.

When he arrived in New York airport, Abdullah insisted to the immigration official that he was a pastor. But his Muslim name and country of origin indicated the opposite. For two hours, he was interrogated, including questions about the Bible to determine if he really was a Christian. Finally, Abdullah begged to be let go, "I have just come off a long flight and I am exhausted!" And so, he arrived in the United States.

Abdullah grew up in East Africa in a Muslim family but gave his life to Christ four months after seeing a vision of Jesus. Wanting his neighbours to know Jesus, he took a course on how to reach Muslims. As he preached, however, he was thrown out of the area and even had to leave his own country.

In the new place, he kept preaching, so his extended family decided to make him stop. They persecuted those close to him, and one was even kidnapped. Eventually, Abdullah made the difficult decision to immigrate to the USA to protect his wife and children and to find a way to provide for them.

These hardships made him want to live just a "normal life," but he grew deeply unhappy working at a job just to make money. Back in Africa, his wife encouraged him to return to his ministry calling. However, he knew that every time he preached, his circumstances grew harder. "I knew something was coming," he says, as he considered returning to God's work. But he also knew he didn't have a chance at joy without preaching. Without ministry, "you lose the purpose of life," he said.

Eventually, a friend took him to an inner-city area where the African-American community was marginalized and poor. Crime and even murder rates



were high, and Africans warned him that his life would be at risk. He prayed, and God clearly told him to join the church, where he is a pastor today.

The church is not large, but it is deeply involved in the local community, where the youth are at risk from drugs and crime. Many drop out of school, feeling hopeless about their futures. African-American youth are often intrigued by the continent of Africa and they find Abdullah's life experiences interesting. This, and his care for them, draws some closer. Abdullah's vision is to raise up Christians from the congregation to carry the message and continue the church's ministry to those mired in addictions and in a poverty mentality.

### **Culture: The biggest hurdle**

Abdullah finds the differences between his culture and that of the African-American community a real paradigm shift, and the learning curve has been steep. Before he arrived, he had worked with whites for many years and felt he had some understanding about their culture. But this new community was different.

As he began to teach on marriage, he was disturbed to meet many unmarried couples who had several children together. However, being judgmental or "correct" was not

helpful; rather, listening and loving began to bring transformation towards a more biblical outlook.

Abdullah says, "Africans, we want everyone to accept us, but we don't want to accept others. That's the biggest problem. We go everywhere and we want to build our own kingdom. We love to do our own thing. The most difficult thing at first was wanting them to accept me, but I never saw how I could accept them, too. It was a culture barrier. Even if I have knowledge about culture, it was difficult to adapt."

### **Adaptation is the key**

"I saw the pain more than the culture," he says. He had never experienced slavery, and couldn't understand the deep pain of that, so he had to listen to understand that history. He adds, "The thing I saw in African-Americans was a brokenness and a desire for love."

Aspects of Abdullah's culture are similar to the African-Americans he knows, such as speaking what is on your mind. But this didn't turn out to be edifying to both parties. Instead, he purposed to change the way he communicated.

"God gave me a chance to listen, and His love became our common language." In listening, he could learn from them, too.

Abdullah advises, "It's hard if you come with the mindset of dealing with culture,



but if you come with the true gospel, it is easier to understand anyone. You can have good communication if Christ becomes the centre of your relationship.”

“The first six months were really hard. Some in the community didn’t like me and some wondered, who is this African guy and what does he want to do? But finally they understood, because Christ became the centre.”

### Advice for Africans in the West

Abdullah believes that Africans coming to the West struggle with having confidence in themselves, and this hinders adapting. He says, “They have to believe they have something to share and have confidence, because it is all about Jesus, not about being African or American.” In the beginning, he felt humiliated when people made fun of his accent, but eventually he came to not care much about that.

He has seen that many Africans in the USA have not tried to experience life as Americans do, and that’s why they end up starting African churches, though they may have intended to reach Westerners. They stay in communities that are familiar and which automatically accept their food, clothes, and way of doing things.

He cautions, “You can’t learn culture in a computer. You have to join them, take tea, preach the gospel.

Africans love to sit and learn, but they are not good at taking a risk.” Taking that risk is essential to learning Western culture and reaching those functioning in that culture.

It was hard for Abdullah to go to work in the inner-city African-American community at first because other Africans told him, “You’ll be killed. You’ll be dead.” It is ironic because in Africa, when short-term American missionaries came to his country, they were afraid of being killed. But once they got to know locals, they changed their minds. He believes that Africans will also change their minds when they get to know and are known by people.

### Experiencing racism

When asked about racism in the USA, Abdullah laughed, saying, “Wars are raging on my continent because of racism. Racism in the West sometimes

can be more subtle and that makes it hard to deal with.” When Abdullah visited white churches, he had a difficult time because of his Muslim name. “I could see their faces change,” he says. One lady even ran away from him. Even more painful is when people say

nothing, but the attitude behind the face shows racism.

“I have to make sure to show Jesus,

**It is ironic because in Africa, when short-term American missionaries came to his country, they were afraid of being killed.**



not my attitude,” Abdullah commented. He used to struggle with anger over this, but Jesus healed him. Instead, he is sad to see such things in the house of the Lord. Now he doesn’t respond the same way to such attitudes and advises that one cannot change racist attitudes in others; instead, you must change yourself. Say, “I love you brother, no matter what.” He has found that his patience works changes. Over time, people begin to love him and see him for himself, rather than their assumptions about his origin or race.

He encourages Africans to remember that millions of people face racism and prejudice; they are not the only individuals to experience it. Without the grace of God, anyone given the right circumstances may become prejudiced and racist.

Abdullah wants to remind Africans working in the West that if God has called them and they have chosen to obey, then they cannot complain. He says, “If you want it to be like home, go back.” It is the gospel that is important and that becomes the centre; it is the point of communication and satisfaction in the midst of cultural differences, hardship and racism.

“It’s a new environment, a new country, a new culture. What are you waiting for it to be like... Ghana? Adjust your mind before you come. Something new is awaiting you!”



# AFRICANS IN THE WEST:

## SEASONED MISSIONARIES SHARE THEIR INSIGHTS

**SUNDAY AND GRACE BWANHOT, SIM CULTURE CONNEXIONS, CHICAGO, USA**

The Church in the West for decades has been declining, making it a fast-growing mission field with many young people choosing to be atheists or non-religious. As African missionaries serving in the US since 1995 through SIM and ECWA, we have learned a lot and would love to share some critical issues that new African missionaries coming to the West need to be aware of.

- 1. Your calling:** Be very sure of the Lord's call to serve in the West because it is a spiritually hard ground. It is easier to preach the gospel to people who have not heard it than to people who have been exposed to it and have decided that it is not for them. You may be like prophet Jeremiah who preached, and the response was insult and persecution.
- 2. Pray:** Devote yourself to intensive prayer as ministering in the West can be discouraging. You will have confidence in your prayer if you are perfectly sure God called you to serve Him the West. You can then bring every difficult situation boldly to Him and ask Him to solve it, since He called you to this place.
- 3. Learn:** Be a good student; learn and adapt. You may speak English, but you have to learn American English. Get used to being told you have an accent or to repeat what you just said. Watch people's body

language to know when they do not understand you. Speak slowly and sometimes repeat yourself in different ways.

- 4. Culture:** This may be the missionary's most significant challenge as it has numerous appendages to it. An African missionary arrives in the West with invisible baggage that he is not aware of. His culture taught him behavioural norms, but coming to the West, he encounters new norms, which may conflict with what he cherishes. Challenging areas will include language, thought pattern, roles of husbands and wives, discipline, time orientation, my space, leadership style, and conflict resolution, to mention a few.

The West is changing fast, and you have to be aware and know how to live. If you have a family, the challenges will be more. Your African values will clash with Western values. Your children will be taught things in school that are unacceptable in your culture. The relationship between spouses will be tested. While African wives and children love their newfound freedom in the West, husbands feel threatened and hold tightly to African culture to exercise control. That is where most African marriages and homes in the West begin to break down – even Christian homes.



Since cultural differences affect the messenger and the gospel message, proper communication in any culture is needed to ensure that the gospel message is transmitted correctly.

- 5. Diversity:** Most Western cities are multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious. Even if you serve a particular people group, there are opportunities to minister to others. Jesus Christ, Peter, and Paul ministered to specific people groups, but also to people different from the main group they served. Be ready and open to minister to all those God brings your way.
  - 6. Stay focussed.** It is easy to get distracted in the West as it opens doors to opportunities you never dreamed of before. Stay away from charging credit cards for things you cannot pay for immediately. Live below, not above, your means.
  - 7. Racism:** You will experience the sad reality of it, and you cannot be too prepared for it. Your experience with tribalism will not hurt as much as racism. Sadly, it is not an exclusive situation in the secular arena; it is right there in the Church.
- Despite all these challenges, the Lord who called you promised to be with you and never leave you. He is faithful, and He will meet you at every point of need. Fix your eyes on the Lord.





## TIPS FROM HARRIET NGUGI: A CALL TO PRAYER, HUMILITY, TRAINING, AND HOPE

Reverse mission has sparked a great deal of interest, ranging from excitement and passion to skepticism and dismissal, both in Christian and secular spaces. A BBC television programme aired a few years ago featured some reverse missionaries, terming them 'idealistic'. For most in the Global South, once the initial shock about the decline of Christianity in the West wears off, the next question is: What should we do about it?

Much enthusiasm, momentum and vision is growing for the possibilities of a great harvest of peoples and revival of the Western church through the participation of missionaries from Africa, now home to the largest number of Christians globally. But though African diaspora Christians are numerically strong, not all recognize the great missionary privilege before them, so a main task is to mobilize and envision them to see and rise to the challenge.

Some are skeptical due to barriers, including cultural differences and a painful history of racial prejudice. While all missions comes with challenges, a closer look reveals unrealistic expectations and lack of preparedness. Jesus gave the illustration of a builder calculating the cost of his project. So, too, African missionaries must count the cost and prepare thoroughly if they hope to be faithful and fruitful. So, how does one prepare and equip oneself?

Firstly, **prayer**. As Samuel Zwemer wrote, "The history of missions is the history of answered prayer." Leadership



is needed in concerted, persistent, mission-focussed prayers. This calls for intentionally breaking out of our African church bubbles to pursue a greater purpose. Powerful missional prayer networks could result from this unity and collaboration.

**Humility** is vital to all missions. Taking on the attitude of a servant, as modelled by Jesus (Phil. 2:3-8), is especially difficult where racial prejudice and social marginalization are daily realities. Standing against injustice is indeed part of missions; however, African missionaries are not exempt from taking on Christ's attitude of self-emptying service with confidence in God.

**Cross-cultural training** is essential. The fact that we speak European languages and that Western culture dominates the world may give us the impression that we understand the West enough to be effective. This

cannot be further from the truth.

Interpreting Western culture through an African worldview only increases misunderstandings. Also, many least reached people groups live in Western cities, each with a distinct culture. Let us assume the attitude of learners and study culture with the same diligence of all effective missionaries.

Finally, God's people are people of **hope**, and hope is often characterized by waiting. The West has been seen as a hard place to evangelize. Afro-diaspora missionaries will need to take a long view of their mission marked by strategy, consistency, perseverance and diligence, with faith that even the hardest ground in world evangelization finally breaks.

*Harriet serves with Pioneers UK and with Mission Campaign Network (MCN). Harriet is married to Sam Ngugi, and together they have two children, Nuru and Heri.*

## WASHING DISHES IN SCOTLAND

Lawrence and Elizabeth Jah arrived in Glasgow, Scotland, in mid-2021, sent by Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Banjul, The Gambia. Their assignment is to evangelize among refugees and asylum seekers from Muslim backgrounds and to disciple Muslim background believers.

Lawrence has been learning about Scottish culture from Senior Pastor Alan. This picture has Lawrence washing

dishes – something he did not do in The Gambia, but he is willing to learn what it means to serve cross-culturally. He is learning that in Scottish culture, men – even pastors and reverends – wash dishes.

Lawrence and Elizabeth ask for prayer that they will bring the Living Hope to many displaced families; for grace and wisdom in communicating the message of hope.



# GO! NEWS OF AFRICA'S MOBILISING CHURCH

## PROGRESS IN PEOPLE GROUP MISSIONS

Adeoluwa Olanrewaju, missionary in northern Nigeria and head of the Research and Strategy Department for the Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association (NEMA) reports: "A review . . . in the first quarter of 2021 shows that 65% of the 72 identified unreached peoples in 1985 were no longer on the Nigerian UPG list. Moreover, 85% of the delisted UPGs have contributed to the sending force of the Nigerian missions movement."

More recently in 2017, a list of seven unengaged people groups were discovered among Nigeria's unreached groups. (The term "unengaged" refers to a group where no known active

church planting is underway.) This new information catalyzed another wave of missions.

Olanrewaju reports: "It would only take 11 months for Nigeria to be delisted from countries with unengaged groups, and four years later the number of unreached peoples was reduced to 45."

Olanrewaju goes on to describe the success of church mobilization through means of people group information, and cautions and advocates for cultural sensitivity in collecting data and describing people groups.

☀ Mission Frontiers, Sept/Oct 2021. <https://bit.ly/3lRVHYc>

## GEMAFest Draws 200

"Ghana to the nations: Don't be left out" was the theme of the Ghana Evangelical Missions Association's (GEMA) annual missions conference, called GEMAFest. From 20-22 October, 200 people participated in-person in Accra and online from around the world. Speakers from Ghana and Nigeria urged participants not to lose heart, but to press forward in sending, going and praying.

Gabriel Barao, Executive Director of GO International,

reminded participants that opposition is inevitable in successful work: "If you are not facing spiritual persecution, you are not touching the work of the devil," he said.

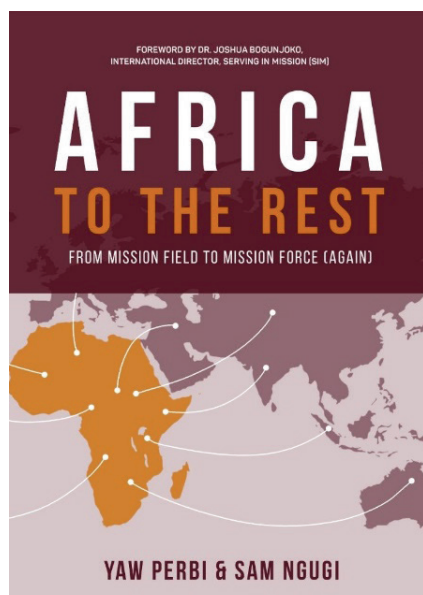
GEMAFest occurs annually and serves as a platform to encourage Ghanaians in world missions and to report on missions efforts in Ghana and around the world.

☀ <https://gemafest.gemagh.org/>



## NEW IN BOOKS: AFRICA TO THE REST

by Yaw Perbi and Sam Ngugi



Africa is the most Christian continent in the world today. The year 2018 was the first year in history when more Christians lived in Africa than on any other continent. This groundbreaking book celebrates this momentous occasion in world history. It traces some of God's goodness to Africa in the Bible and throughout history to make clear that Africa and Africans have been central to God's missional purposes.

Secondly, this book unveils the teeming potential, as well as persistent problems, regarding 'African missions', a phrase which would have been paradoxical only 100 years ago. Although this African lead is only going to increase into the foreseeable future – to the extent that by 2050 Africa

will have more Christians than the next two continents combined – these numbers are not adequately reflected in the number of Africans projected to be carriers of the gospel abroad! This book addresses why that may be so and how this can, and indeed, must change.

Dr. Joshua Bogunjoko, International Director of SIM, says, "The collaboration between these two authors models the kind of partnership across organizations and regions that will be key to seizing today's opportunities and forging solutions to today's challenges. Their combined knowledge, experience and passion have produced an annal for the history of Christianity that comes not a moment too soon."

Available on Amazon.



# ENGAGE MISSIONS IN THE UK

## ENGAGE PROGRAMME SEEKS WORKERS

The Engage programme of SIM UK is a form of reverse missions which addresses a need of the UK evangelical church to share the gospel cross-culturally with people from diverse nations embedded in their communities. While the UK church has been sending gospel workers for many decades, it recognizes the strategic gospel opportunity right on its doorstep among those who would otherwise

live and die without hearing the good news of Christ.

Working hand in hand with UK partner churches, Engage seeks to recruit and place called gospel workers, most of whom are from Majority World countries. These workers help resource the UK church to cross cultural and linguistic barriers, build trusting relationships, and share Christ in the surrounding ethnic community. SIM also

recognizes the inter-dependence between receiving and sending gospel workers and longs to kindle fresh mission vision in the churches who receive an Engage worker.

Engage placements are usually for one to two years and can take the form of an internship or a focus on a specific ethnic people group, according to the ministry goals of the church.

Contact [engage@sim.co.uk](mailto:engage@sim.co.uk).

## FROM ETHIOPIA TO LONDON

My name is Mary Haile. By the grace of God, I am a missionary from Ethiopia serving in London through SIM's Engage programme. I'm based at a central London church, where I lead ministries teaching English to migrants and running life-skills courses for low-income individuals.

In our English teaching ministry, we have been blessed with students from around the world. Our students are mostly immigrants who have come to London for work or to seek refugee status. We run classes in the church building and include the gospel content openly.

Over the lockdown, we were forced to make the classes online, and we expected lots of challenge. Instead, we met a new set of students from remote countries - students wanting to learn English and curious to hear Bible stories. A particular student from Korea regularly joined at 4 am her time; she didn't mind waking so early to learn to pray in English.

Seeing their interest, I led a six-week course on John's Gospel. To our astonishment, students from China, Myanmar, Russia, and so on joined consistently. They were delighted to get more than mere English classes - they heard the true gospel. And some students sobbed through the session where we discussed the crucifixion.

Inspiring things happened in our online class, including the radical transformation of a lady we shall call Lily, for the sake of this story. Lily attended regularly. For months I had



no idea Lily was transgender. She participated actively in English classes and joined our weekly Bible study. When we learned of her situation, in my heart, I thought it would be a very long time before we would see Lily lead a different lifestyle. But when we invited people for Christmas time, she was the only one to come to church in person.

It was then she shared with us that she felt God had been chasing after her for a long time, yet she couldn't make the decision to go after Him because she lacked community. She asked to see the church's counsellor. After a few counselling sessions, she wrote, "Tell Mary that I would like to be called 'K' as that is the name God knows me by" and asked that we

were to refer to him as 'he' from here on. Without us ever saying what he needed to do to repent, he started to detransition back to his birth gender. He also legally changed his name to what it was before.

We learned that K had been on the streets 25 years and had endured great pain in his life. By God's grace, K accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour and repented fully. He has now moved to a different part of London where he works in an organization that helps homeless people. K's story of restoration and reconciliation with God is a witness of the Lord's active work through His body. May Christ's church continue to be a light that shines in the deepest darkness! God bless.





# PEOPLE GROUPS: ROMANI

The Romani people can be found in any country in Europe. Widely known as Gypsies, this name came from the false belief that they had migrated from Egypt. The term is offensive and is used as a racial slur. Genetic and linguistic evidence indicates their origins are in northern India and their language is related to ancient Sanskrit.

The Romani reached Europe as early as 1007 AD, with more than 10 million now spread across the continent. Large populations reside in the Balkans, Spain, France, Russia, and the Ukraine. Many have migrated to North and South America.

Their reception in Europe has been mixed; at times they were deported or even executed when found within borders; other times they received traveling privileges. Generally, they have been subjected to brutal treatment, including slavery and later, genocide by the Nazis during World War II. Romani women were sterilized in some countries as late as the 1990s.

Traditional Romani follow strict gender and family roles. A patriarch presides over the extended family and a woman's status can be based on her child-bearing ability.

Purity customs dominate society. For example, clothing for the upper and lower body is washed separately. Dishes and utensils must be cleaned in a special way, and certain animals are considered unclean and cannot be eaten. Childbirth brings impurity and anything a new mother touches is burned. Death also brings impurity.

Rates of illiteracy and domestic abuse are high in Romani communities where poverty is prevalent. Eighty per cent live below the poverty line. A history of racism means Romani are reluctant to seek help from government officials and medical professionals. In some communities, children leave school after grade five to learn skills to help the family.

Many Romani are Roman Catholic, though there are Muslims, too. However, they mix in paganism, using charms and amulets. Curses, spirits and bad luck are all part of Romani culture. "Shaktism" — the need for a female partner for God — is still practiced, with the result that Christians pray to the Virgin Mary or her mother. In the past 20 years, a movement of the gospel has begun.

## At a Glance

- The Romani cherish the belief that they are one of the lost tribes of Israel.
- In the past, the Romani were known for their covered wagons, bright clothing and fortune telling.
- Due to the long history of prejudice, they can face severe obstacles in obtaining jobs and education.
- Romani have other names that vary by region.

## Pray

- For the Christian Pentecostal movement growing among European Romani, and for those looking to reach others with the gospel.
- For believers with a passion to reach their extended families. The gospel often spreads through family ties.
- For digital and print resources in their language to strengthen believers and reach the unreached.

Sources: <https://bit.ly/3GxFL5p> and <https://bit.ly/3lUKjem>



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