

Indigenous churches mean a growing Church



You may not realize it, but Assemblies of God missionaries have been practicing indigenous church planting principles for more than 100 years. Though our Fellowship has only officially been in existence since 1914, the earliest members of our World Missions fraternity were already ministering around the world under various organizational banners before their passion for Pentecost drew them together.

The rallying cry for world missions at the Assemblies of God's Second General Council at Stone Church in Chicago was not something new to that year's delegates. They had already dedicated their lives to answering the Great Commission of our Lord. And they responded to the Holy Spirit's wisdom with a key emphasis — indigenous churches. The Assemblies of God's earliest records make it clear we were not going around the world to build our own kingdom or to enlarge the U.S. church, but to establish national churches that could govern themselves and propagate themselves and finance themselves.

Through the 20th century, and now into the 21st, our commitment to building up the local church has been consistent, and we have model works to show to the world today the vitality of the indigenous principle. Through nurturing and training national pastors and national leaders, the seeds of evangelism are propagated worldwide and countless fellowships grow and govern themselves. This is God-directed exponential growth.

Today, more than 5,500 missionaries come from nations that were once U.S. mission fields. While our missionaries continue to serve in many of these nations, they do so in partnership with some 300,000 local pastors and church leaders. These local church bodies send their own missionaries not only to the unreached in their homelands, but around the world. As a veteran missionary to El Salvador, it gives me enormous satisfaction to watch our Latin American brothers and sisters zero in on unreached communities around the world, giving particular attention to the great spiritual need of the Muslim world.

God has brought us to this time, not only to recognize the local blessings created when missions work is founded on indigenous principles, but to enjoy the blessings of exponential growth that are a natural development of what

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Jesus taught us to do. The Great Commission first calls the faithful to go, but Acts and the balance of church history show us the results. The churches established as self-sustaining centers of ministry create a foothold for heaven. When political turmoil moves the original missionary away from a field of service, the believers who remain take up the mantle of ministry. The gospel continues to thrive. You can read of this phenomenon in

the life of Paul; you can see the same multiplication at work today.

When missionaries not only bring the gospel to a nation but also nurture local believers and train them to do the work of evangelism and discipleship, the bitterness of human dependency is bypassed. A spirit of gratitude for what has happened in their lives drives these fellow laborers to take on great tasks for the Kingdom in their corner of the world.

You can see this principle come to life as you read this *World Missions Edition's* coverage of Burkina Faso. Today, missionaries from Burkina Faso are serving the spiritual and community needs of 45 people groups in their own nation. How long would it take U.S. churches to marshal enough missionaries to go to all of these groups within this one nation? We recognize there are far more unreached people groups in our world than we will ever reach alone. But God is raising up men and women in the nations we have touched, and He is sovereignly multiplying His harvest.

The indigenous church takes on a unique ministry expression in every category of outreach. In the Philippines, for example, national believers have utilized media training and resources from our missionaries to communicate the gospel with a relevance our missionaries could never achieve. Television, radio, the Internet and print media are powerful tools for Assemblies of God fellowships across Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. We see that even technology is best utilized within the framework of indigenous missions ministry.

Should we be surprised? Certainly not. The multiplication and adaptation we observe today were foreseen by our Lord some 2,000 years ago when He commanded a primarily Jewish audience of believers to take the message of His life-giving truth to the Gentile world. We are the recipients many generations removed from the days of a Jerusalem church bringing to life countless culturally diverse churches around the Mediterranean world. May that miracle of multiplication and diversity continue until our Lord returns! **tpe**

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