

Reimagining Pastoral Training

The 90% Crisis Post Forum Report

Originally posted to the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission [website](#), April 07, 2026.

Alongside the expansion of the Church in the Majority World lies a crisis so urgent and spiritually consequential that it threatens to undermine the very foundations of its growth. This crisis is the overwhelming lack of accessible, affordable, and contextually grounded training for those called to shepherd these burgeoning congregations. This report represents a synopsis of the talks presented to the Online Forum for this topic combined with notes from break-out groups and content subsequently collected via a feedback site.

On March 24, 2026, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Mission Commission (MC) convened an online forum to address one of the most pressing challenges facing the global church: the reimagining of pastoral training. The forum was preceded by [an essay for pre-reading](#), designed to prime the participants for break-out room discussions in addition to the material presented in the forum.

Moderated by Dr Jamie Mätenga, co-leader of the Mission Commission, the forum sought to explore the missional implications of themes arising from the recent WEA General Assembly in Seoul, South Korea. The focus was not so much on classic missions themes in the sense of transnational missionary sending, but on matters of vital importance to the global Church, specifically the need for pastoral leadership development and theological education that is biblically faithful yet deeply relevant to local contexts.

1. Setting The Stage

[Watch Jamie's introduction on YouTube.](#)

Jamie set the tone by defining the overarching significance of the discussion: to participate in the purposes of God by expanding God's influence through both the declaration and demonstration of the gospel. He described it as incarnational, putting "bone and blood and muscle" into our theology, aiming to move beyond abstract orthodoxy toward a lived experience where pastors ultimately equip their congregations to be a blessing to their communities and beyond.

As the centre of gravity for Christianity continues its massive shift into the Majority World, the urgency of this task has reached a level of "global gospel crisis". This paper serves as a summary of that dialogue, but more importantly, as an invitation to ongoing collaboration.

2. Reaffirming the Challenge

[Watch Dr Michael Ortiz's presentation on YouTube.](#)

The forum's foundational data was provided by Dr Michael Ortiz, Executive Director of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). Dr Ortiz framed the issue as a "global gospel crisis", asserting that the Church will never accomplish its mission without enough trained pastoral leaders. The statistics are stark: the church in Asia, Africa, and Latin America grew from 30% of the world's churches in 1970

to 70% by 2022. By 2050, it is projected that 78% of all Christians will live in the Majority World.

Despite this rapid growth, the maturity of the Church is under threat. Dr Ortiz highlighted a statement from the 2010 Lausanne Movement gathering in Cape Town: the rapid growth of the Church in many places remains shallow and vulnerable because leaders themselves have not been well developed (discipled) and lack the ability to handle Scripture faithfully (see 2 Timothy 2:15).


The paucity of theological training available was exemplified by a friend of Michael's, a pastor in a poor area of Cuba who leads a congregation from his apartment where the sanctuary is the open space between his kitchen and his bedroom.

Although leading a congregation, this pastor hadn't had the opportunity to receive theological training but was eager for it. His plea, "Por favor, dime algo" (please, tell me something), represents the hunger of millions for theological education.

[The Global Pastoral Training Alliance](#), involving ministries like the WEA and ICETE, estimates there are currently 3.7 million churches worldwide without a trained pastoral leader. Forum participant feedback commented on this data, noting a "perception gap", suggesting that it is not yet clear if all 3.7 million pastors actually perceive a need for training. Therefore, a major task involves helping these leaders realise the value of training without it feeling like an academic threat.

This necessitates a shift in how theological educators and pastoral training providers approach these leaders—not as "problems to be solved" but as frontline practitioners in need of collegial support.

Additional resources:

- Michael hosts a Pod/Vidcast series on "*Reimagining Theological Education Together*" which can be found on YouTube here:  [@michael_ortiz](#)
- ICETE hosts "Impact Teams" that explore various topics related to theological education, these can be found here: <https://icete.info/resources/impact-teams/>.

3. Challenging the Status Quo

A recurring theme throughout the forum and participant feedback was the tension between traditional Western academic models and the practical needs of global pastors. In his introduction, Jamie argued for "biblical faithfulness" over the term "orthodoxy", which can be interpreted differently across faith traditions and cultures.

Participants noted a significant "theology stigma". For many untrained pastors, "theology" can be perceived as a dangerous, academic activity that threatens genuine faith. To bridge this, it was suggested that theology must be reframed as a "companion" to pastoral leadership rather than an abstract hurdle. Something that enhances the Holy Spirit's enabling of Jesus' followers rather than diminishing it.

Furthermore, there was a sharp warning against what was called, "colonial pedagogy." In other words, it is not enough to change what is taught (indigenising the curriculum and content); but how it is taught must also change. This requires moving away from Western lecturing and other teaching styles to embrace local ways of thinking and learning, particularly in oral-preference cultures.

In regions like India, participants highlighted the problem of "training calendars", where pastors attend constant sessions simply because they are available, yet the opportunity remains out of reach for the most appropriate people needing to be taught. The call is to move from "filling a calendar" to "meeting pastors where they are". This requires a shift from "content-driven" to "context-driven" education.

The overall discuss left us with an important question: will the training provided enable the pastor to shepherd their flock well in the face of local poverty, injustice, or persecution? Is theological and/or pastoral leadership training being fashioned around the felt-needs of the 3.7 million pastors needing to be trained? In other words,

how contextually relevant is current training content? To better understand some of these contexts, we heard from local trainers in three different Majority World regions.

4. Three Regional Examples

Africa: Beyond the Colonised Curriculum

[Watch Dr David Tarus' presentation on YouTube.](#)

Dr David Tarus, Executive Director of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), highlighted the critical issues of quality, future readiness, and sustainability. He argued that many African institutions still operate with a "colonised curriculum" that fails to speak to local realities. He proposed that theological education must shift from static models to dynamic, adaptable systems, acting as "laboratories for innovation".

Sustainability is a primary concern. With institutions closing in the US and UK, African seminaries must imagine afresh what it means to sustain their mission. Financial sustainability is a "big, big challenge", and the reality of persecution, kidnappings, and political violence adds a layer of extreme pressure.

Dr Tarus' colleague, Professor Sunday Agang, editor of [African Public Theology](#), was kidnapped for ransom just prior to the forum, which serves as a sobering reminder of the context in which many African leaders serve. Participant feedback echoed this, noting that in Africa, "theological education" often feels disconnected from the "public theology" needed to address societal ills.

Additional resources:

David has also secured permission to share his chapters from the following books:

- *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa* — [Download here.](#)
- *Future Ready, Mission Faithful: Theological Education in Africa* — [Download here.](#)
- *Faith and Public Life* — [Download here.](#)

Pakistan: Ministry in a Hostile Context

[Watch Rev. Ujala Hans' presentation on YouTube.](#)

Rev. Ujala Hans, Pakistan National Coordinator for the Asia Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission, presented a case study of a "suffering church" in a 96% Muslim-majority nation. In Pakistan, only 20% to 40% of pastors are trained. Most are bi-vocational and face severe social and religious pressure, including legal restrictions and blasphemy laws.

The rise of "Facebook and YouTube pastors" has led to a surge in heresies and charisma-driven ministries that lack theological grounding.

Ujala emphasised the need for a "theology of suffering" and trauma healing. Pastors in Pakistan are expected to be first responders, counsellors, and advocates. Training must, therefore, include knowledge of local laws to handle cases like forced conversions and marriages.

She called for a three-level formation process focusing on deeply spiritual transformation rather than just "head knowledge". Participants added that in such contexts, the "certificate" is often less important than the "community" provided by the training network.

Kyrgyzstan: The Holistic Needs of the Depleted

[Watch Kanat Kalmakiev's presentation on YouTube.](#)

Kanat Kalmakiev, Principal of the United Theological Seminary in Bishkek, used the Kyrgyz story "The First Teacher" as a cautionary tale against one-sided education that severs a person's connection to their original context. He noted that many pastors in Central Asia are "spiritually, emotionally, and physically depleted".

Kalmakiev categorised pastoral needs into "Head, Heart, and Hands":

- **Head (Knowledge):** The ability to understand God's Word deeply on their own, rather than just receiving more lectures.
- **Heart (Renewal):** Addressing loneliness and the need for mentors, coaches, and a "theology of rest".
- **Hands (Skills):** Practical skills in preaching, team leadership, and even business/vocational skills to generate income for sustainability.

He also noted that in his context, physical presence, having a building, is more important than an online existence because it signals to the government and society that the small Christian community actually exists. This highlights some additional "contextual infrastructure" needed for training to be effective.

5. The "Contextualisation" Debate

The forum grappled with the risk of "contextualisation" becoming a mere buzzword. A participant observed that despite all the talk of contextualisation by trainers and other Christian influencers, many trained pastors still cannot speak the daily language of their people or address the deep cultural issues that hinder spiritual rooting.

In Africa, Oceania, and elsewhere, indigenous people are returning to ancestral forms of worship, claiming that Christianity is a "Western religion". This is because the theology they are being taught does not speak to their deep assumptions and experiences of reality; what Jamie calls their "cosmovision". The Bible certainly does address these deep issues but the theology being taught,

predominantly influenced from Euro-American contexts, does not address the deep concerns of the Majority World.

On a similar point, another participant asked: "What does Jesus look like in another culture? How does the gospel express itself as a seed from the dirt of other contexts?" The conclusion was that true contextualisation cannot merely be a "transfer" or "transliteration" of Western ideas; it can only be done by locals well-trained in taking Scripture and "conversing with culture". This requires "intellectual humility" from Western partners, moving from "teaching" to "listening".

Participant feedback suggested that "contextualisation" must also include "economic context". Training that requires a pastor to leave their job or their village for years is not contextual; it is disruptive. We need models that allow training and ministry to happen "*in situ*", within the rhythm of local life.

6. A Practical Path Forward

To address the training gap, Dr Ray Neu of [Community Bible Study](#) proposed a "local wisdom" framework. This tool provides a structured pattern for leaders to analyse and assess local wisdom and cultural rituals, identifying what should be embraced, what should be redeemed, and what should be challenged by Scripture. This moves the pastor from being a "distributor of Western ideas" to a "theologian of their own culture".

The forum also highlighted the need to expand the scope of training:

- **Training for Women:** Participants emphasised training women for mission and ministry. Recognising the central role of women in community transformation, the suggested goal was to equip them to be effective in ministry within their own contexts and beyond should the Lord lead.
- **Network-Based Access:** Since traditional Bible colleges are often too expensive or time-consuming, informal "networks" are becoming the primary vehicle for reaching the 3.7 million untrained pastors. Training delivered on location every two weeks as part of a learning community is seen as a more viable model than traditional degrees learned in institutional fashion.
- **Collaboration:** Dr Ortiz stressed that this work cannot be done by one programme, seminary, or global ministry. It requires a "global collegial movement" focused on "Content, Coach, Continuity, and Collegiality" (see Michael's presentation on YouTube, link above).

Conclusion: An Invitation to Ongoing Dialogue

The March 2026 Reimagining Pastoral Training forum was not intended to provide catch-all solutions but to raise awareness of the issue as seen from a missions perspective and encourage an ongoing conversation. The findings suggest that the future of pastoral training lies in meeting leaders where they are, listening to their context, responding to their needs for healing and rest, and inviting their input into biblically faithful solutions most relevant to them.

The magnitude of the 3.7 million untrained pastors is not a "problem to be fixed" from the top down; it is an invitation for the global church to realign its resources and its heart. As one participant suggested, we must move from "instruction" to "accompaniment." The WEA Mission Commission encourages training providers, church and alliance leaders, and ministry and organisational leaders to continue these collaborations.

As the global Church navigates this shift, the goal remains clear: to ensure that pastoral leaders are equipped to remain "hand in glove with the Bible" while being deeply, authentically relevant to their cultures, ultimately demonstrating the "Shalom Kingdom of God" throughout the world as a witness to the blessed peace to be established in its fulness on Christ's return.

*"The need is not to train pastors to lead churches
but to equip pastors and leaders
to expand the Kingdom through the Church."*