

Leadership Multiplication in Africa

Response to the Gospel, especially in much of sub-Saharan Africa, has been quite significant in recent years. There are statistics that say the Church in Africa is growing by 6 million new converts a year. Church attendance is high but there is a lack of Biblical discipleship. There is a well-known saying that says “the African Church is a mile wide, but only an inch deep.” The rapid growth of the Church in Africa presents a strategic opportunity for equipping the people of God to impact the rest of society with Biblical values. The key to equipping churches to influence society with the good news of Christ starts with the empowering and multiplying of her leaders. There is a great need in the Church of Africa for the renewing and developing leaders that will strengthen and start churches in and beyond the continent. This does not come without significant challenges.

Challenges to Multiplying Leaders in an African context

- **The Village Chief Mentality**

In most, if not all, African cultures there is the belief that the Village Chief is not to be questioned. Village Chiefs were, and still are, a very strong authority widely respected in African cultures. Sadly, pastors and church leaders have taken on the mantle of ‘Village Chief’ and have allowed this mindset and attitude to permeate the church. As a result, we see churches with “super” bishops, pastors and apostles. These men and women have the attitude that it is “their” ministry and they cannot be questioned or challenged in anyway. Leaders with this mentality are often very controlling in their style of leadership. They make decisions as to who can, if any, be released for ministry. Where people are ‘released’, they are seldom given the opportunity to minister freely. The direct result of this is that the church is not being mobilised to minister to and influence society. Traditionally youth ministry in Africa is a neglected area within the church and there is not a strong tradition of healthy youth ministries. Controlling bishops, pastors and apostles make this even harder by over-controlling any emerging leaders within their church.

- **Knowledge is power**

The belief that ‘knowledge is power’ is another challenge to leadership multiplication within the church in Africa. The one who possesses knowledge is generally the one who is most respected, and is also the person most likely to receive some sort of remuneration. As a result, leaders are reticent to pass on any knowledge that they may have.

- **Influence of the Western World**

The Church in Africa has much to thank the Western world for. There is a rich legacy of men and women who sacrificed family, careers, health and even their very lives to bring the gospel to the people of Africa. However, the Church worldwide does not enjoy immunity from the influence of culture. The access that many pastors in Africa have to different types of Western media with specific reference to teaching surrounding the ‘prosperity gospel’ has resulted in many leaders ministering in pursuit of wealth. This has prevented potential leaders within a ministry from being released. There is the constant fear that an emerging leader may be even more ‘successful’ than the current leader.

Overcoming these challenges

It is vital to the long-term success of the Church in Africa to become far more intentional about building and releasing leaders. As we develop leaders in Africa, we need to incorporate the following:

- **Biblically-based leadership development**

It is imperative that the Church in Africa returns to Biblically-based leadership development – our leadership training and equipping needs to point people back to Christ’s model of leading. We need to develop in leaders a passion and humility to lead like Christ – who came to serve, rather than to be served.

- **Spiritual rather than positional leadership**

There are all too many examples from African churches where leaders demand respect as a result of their position. There are also leaders who end up assuming a prominent position within the church because of their charisma or force of personality. Leaders need to be continually challenged and reminded that their leadership is spiritual rather than positional. Sadly the adage “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” is true within the church as well. While the Spirit of God can change any heart or mind, our experience is that it is the younger, emerging leaders within the African church who are responding in obedience to this Biblical message.

- **God’s Kingdom rather than My Empire**

Leaders in the African church need to re-discover what it means to be a leader within the Kingdom of God. This will require a return to the teachings about the Kingdom in Scripture, as well as obedience to the Kingdom’s values and principles. Leaders need to be continually reminded that they are a small part of building God’s Kingdom. They should live in accountable relationships where they are challenged that all they do is to build the Kingdom of God, and not their own personal empire.

- **Empower others**

Leaders need to be in the business of growing people in their specific areas of gifting. Leaders also need to empower the people of God by creating environments that are free of restrictive controls which result in the people of God becoming disillusioned with ministry. This will require a dismantling of hierarchical systems and a renewed focus on how the church can best assist the people of God to minister to a broken world. Breaking down controls and hierarchy does not mean an absence of leadership. It also means that people should be required to live in mutually accountable relationships. It also means that people are free to minister in a Spirit-led way with the support of the church leadership. Leadership multiplication will be a natural outworking of an intentional focus on empowering others.