

THE GLOBAL HORIZON:
**A NEW ERA FOR THE U.S.
CHURCH IN MISSIONS**



The mission field is no longer somewhere you travel to — it is all around us. This new era of missions invites the American church to rethink its role in a world where

The Gospel moves from everywhere, to everywhere

and how to partner with strategic missions organizations.



1

The Map Has Changed



For most of the twentieth century, Christian missions followed a single, well-worn trajectory: the West sending the Gospel to the rest of the world. American churches funded missionaries, trained them in Western seminaries, and dispatched them to what were called the "unreached" corners of the earth.

The United States sat at the center of the missional map, and the map made sense. It no longer does.

Globalization — the collapse of social, technological, and economic barriers into something approaching a single connected world — has fundamentally redrawn that map. **The Gospel no longer flows in one direction. It moves from everywhere, to everywhere.** Brazil sends missionaries to Portugal. South Korea plants churches in the Middle East. Nigerian congregations evangelize in London. We are living through a polycentric revolution in missions, and the U.S. church has not fully reckoned with what that means for the world and for itself.

THREE FORCES ARE DRIVING THIS SHIFT.

The first is technological integration: a believer in Michigan can pray in real time with a church planter in rural Myanmar.

The second is rapid urbanization — cities are now the primary arenas of human life, and they are dense with cultural collision, opportunity, and spiritual hunger.

The third, and perhaps most significant, is the explosive rise of the church in the Global South. The fastest-growing Christian movements on earth are in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

The seeds planted by a previous generation of missionaries have matured into a global force. This is not a crisis for American missions. **It is the answer to prayer.**

This is not a cause for alarm. **It is cause for a profound change in posture.**

The question for the American church is no longer "how do we reach the world?"

It is ***"how do we join what God is already doing in the world?"***



2

The World at Our Doorstep



One of the most striking and underappreciated realities for American churches is that the mission field has arrived on their doorstep. Global migration — driven by economic pressure, conflict, and climate — has made the United States home to millions of people from every major unreached people group on earth. The Somali family three streets over, the Burmese refugees attending the public school, the Hindu engineers working at the technology campus downtown: they represent nations the church once had to cross oceans to reach. Seizing this opportunity, however, requires more than good intentions and an open-door policy. Engaging immigrant neighbors meaningfully demands a willingness to leave behind familiar assumptions about how life and faith work — and that begins with understanding how differently people understand the world.

3

Learning a New Cultural Language



Western Christianity has been deeply shaped by a particular cultural lens: the **law-and-justice framework**. In this worldview, sin is primarily understood as breaking a rule, and salvation is primarily understood as the payment of a legal debt. It is a coherent and biblical framework, but it is not the only one, and for millions of people now living in American cities, it is not the instinctive one.

Much of the world operates within what missiologists call an **honor-shame framework**. In these cultures, the deepest human wound is not guilt — it is shame, the experience of being exposed, disgraced, or cast out from the community that gives you identity. Sin, in this framework, is not primarily about breaking a law. It is about dishonoring the Father.

"For many of our immigrant neighbors, the Gospel question is not 'how do I get forgiven?' It is 'how do I come home'?"

This is not a lesser or alternative Gospel. The story of the prodigal son — a son who shames his father, is welcomed back with extravagant honor, and is restored to the family — communicates the heart of the Gospel in ways that land with profound force in honor-shame cultures. **The American church does not need to abandon its own theological heritage. It needs to expand it,** to learn that the Bible speaks in more than one cultural register, and that our neighbors may be waiting for a version of the story we have not yet thought to tell.



4

Adapting for Future Missions Impact



None of this means the American church has nothing to contribute. It means that what we contribute needs to adapt.

The era of the American church as the primary architect and administrator of global missions is giving way to something more appropriate:

the American church as a well-resourced, theologically humble servant of a truly global missions movement.



In practical terms, this means leaning into areas where American churches genuinely have comparative advantages: technical expertise in medicine, education, engineering, and digital communications; financial resources that can be deployed flexibly in support of indigenous-led initiatives; networks that can connect isolated movements to one another; and training spaces where emerging leaders from the Global South can develop without pressure to conform to Western models.

At the congregational level, the most promising development is the rise of mobilization centers around the Global South, where direct partnerships seek to equip, train, and send the global Church to contexts where the American missionary cannot go. When a church in Ohio commits directly to a missions sending movement in East Africa, something happens that organizational structures rarely produce: **genuine friendship across the global body of Christ.** These partnerships are harder to scale, but they form people in ways that writing a check simply does not.

5

A Call to Servanthood



The story of American missions has been, in many ways, a remarkable one. Churches gave sacrificially, families uprooted themselves, and individuals poured out their lives in places they were never fully at home. The fruit of that faithfulness is visible today in the global Church — in the tens of millions of believers in Korea, Nigeria, Brazil, and the Philippines who trace some part of their heritage to Western missionary witness.

We still need this!



But faithfulness in the next chapter will look different from faithfulness in the last.

It will require American churches and mission organizations to grow smaller in their own estimation, to relinquish control they have long assumed was theirs by right, and to **find their identity not in being the center of the global mission enterprise but in being faithful participants in something far larger than themselves.**

This is, of course, the shape of the Gospel itself. The one who was greatest became servant of all. The organization or congregation that discovers how to do that — genuinely, structurally, and without nostalgia for its former centrality — will find that it has not lost anything worth keeping. It will find that it has finally caught up with what God has been doing all along.



THE MISSION DOES NOT
BELONG TO THE AMERICAN
CHURCH. IT BELONGS TO GOD.

WE ARE INVITED TO
PARTICIPATE — AND THAT
INVITATION IS STILL, EVEN
NOW, EXTRAORDINARILY
GOOD NEWS.
