Polycentric Missions

by Cindy Wiles, Executive Director

When considering the term "polycentric" to describe God's global work, Christ followers should be eager disciples perched on the edge of obedience. To help our churches understand this new vocabulary, let's start at the very beginning. God granted shared "rulership" of His creation with the men and women he created in His image. In Genesis, God brought the wild animals and birds to the man to name them. "Whatever the man named them, that was their name." Yet God remained supreme as the Creator.

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As we discuss the reality of polycentrism in missions, we are not describing something that we have created. We are merely ascribing language to the work of God as He reveals His glory among the nations and peoples He desires to save. While "polycentric" may be a newer word in our mission vocabulary, the practices of polycentric witness are found throughout the Old and New Testament.

Polycentrism describes a context of "many" or "multiple" centers. As Westerners, we have viewed the world and the work of God through hierarchies, uni-directional flows, centralized control, and organizational structures. For many years we have viewed the Western church as central in missionary sending and in global witness. But if we allow ourselves to honestly examine the ways the gospel is penetrating the lost world in the current era of chaos, rapid change, globalization, urbanization, and mass migrations, we will see that God is not dependent upon our control or resources to make His glory known.

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Allen Yeh, in his book entitled, *Polycentric Missiology: 21st-Century Mission from Everyone to Everywhere*, captured the reality that missions is no longer to be viewed as "from the West to the rest" – but is to be practiced as multi-centric – "from everyone to everywhere". God has called all believers from every nation, tribe, and language to reach the lost in their spheres and beyond. They are not waiting on the Western church to give them permission or empowerment.

RESTORE HOPE

God is asking us to explore an expanded model of sending.

- **Send Out** – Sending gospel witnesses from North American churches to the world.
- **Send In** – North American churches import and support the work of gospel witnesses from other cultures to reach the lost in North America.
- **Send Within** - North American churches come alongside and empower indigenous believers to spread the gospel within their own people group and/or community.
- **Send Near** - North American churches help send indigenous believers as gospel witnesses of Christ within similar cultures.

What, then, does polycentric mission mean for the Western church?

Questions to Consider

- What if sending no longer exclusively means "flying North Americans over salt water?"
- How do we fuel the fires God has ignited among His church throughout the world?
- What does my church need to learn from other global voices?

Let's embrace the characteristics of God's polycentric mission: diversity, collaboration, communalism, empowerment, and friendship. Those are the ingredients of a healthy and unified global church that is seeking to reach the unreached in our time.