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Global
iNSIGHT

The Suffering Church

The Impact of Inadequate Pastoral Training

Around the world, the Church is growing rapidly—particularly in the Global South—but leadership development is not keeping pace. Many of us are accustomed to trained pastors in our churches with Masters’ degrees or even Doctorates. However, did you know that of the five million pastors worldwide, only fifteen percent have received formal theological training?¹ This leaves millions of congregations led by pastors who love God but have never had the opportunity to study Scripture deeply or learn how to lead a church well.²

In Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries, remote valleys in India, and the deep jungles of West Africa, pastors desire to learn about God but have no access to theological education due to barriers they face. The reasons for this situation are complex.

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1. Center for the Study of Global Christianity. *Quick Facts about Global Christianity*.

South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2023.

2. Ibid.



Barriers for Pastoral Training

Economic Barriers

Many pastors in the world simply cannot afford theological education.

- Tuition is too expensive. Bible schools and seminaries often cost more than pastors can pay.
 - Studying means leaving ministry. If pastors stop working to attend school, they may lose their income or their church may suffer.
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Geographic Barriers

Many pastors live far away from training institutions.

- Many churches are in villages or remote areas with poor transportation. Roads, buses, or travel options may be limited or expensive.
 - There may be no Bible schools in their region as Bible schools are mostly in big cities.
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Linguistic Barriers

Most theological education is not available in the languages pastors speak.

- About 80% of course materials are in English and few courses are translated.
 - Fewer than 5% of global pastors can study in English.
 - Some cultures are primarily oral and may not rely on written textbooks.
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Structural Barriers

The educational system itself often does not fit the reality of global pastors.

- There are too few trained teachers, professors, and mentors.
 - Many pastors lack reliable internet, electricity, or computers.
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Political/Religious Barriers

In some countries, governments restrict Christian training.

- Governments may limit religious education and Christians may face persecution or harassment.
 - Authorities may monitor or punish religious training activities and restrict theological materials.
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Sources:

International Council for Evangelical Theological Education. (2021). Standards and guidelines for global evangelical theological education (2nd ed.). ICETE. <https://icete.info/wpcontent/uploads/2021/08/Standards-and-Guidelines-for-Global-Evangelical-Theological-Education-2021.pdf>

Pew Research Center. (2023). Globally, Christians face widespread restrictions and persecution. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Naidoo, M. (2022). Nurturing intercultural theological education towards social justice ideals in South Africa. *Religions*, 13(9), 830. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090830>



Problems Caused by Lack of Training

Many pastors begin ministry with sincere hearts but limited preparation. Without training, pastors:

- Won't know how to disciple believers effectively
- Struggle to interpret and apply the Scriptures correctly
- Find it difficult to answer perplexing Biblical issues among the congregations
- May develop a narrow understanding of pastoral ministry, assuming that preaching alone defines their role
- May overlook the call to shepherd, equip, and nurture their congregations
- May create rigid religious systems built on rules rather than grace
- May lack understanding of the importance of accountability
- May pursue ministry for status, influence, or financial security rather than service

Churches led with rigidity and legalism often become spiritually shallow and vulnerable. For example, one student had previously used an authoritarian approach to church leadership and wondered why his church wasn't growing. He felt it was made up of "spiritual babies" instead of maturing disciples. As he learned through iTEE Global to be a humble servant leader, the culture of his church began to change. It matured spiritually as well as numerically.

Historical examples abound that show how poorly-disciplined leadership can result in manipulation, false teaching, or spiritual abuse. One iTEE Global student in West Africa has observed people buying large quantities of olive oil for their homes. Every day they apply it to their foreheads and their children's foreheads because they believe it guarantees their physical and

spiritual safety. Some people trust in salt for protection, sprinkling it on their cars, motorcycles, offices, and even their clothes.

In extreme cases, a lack of theological grounding can lead to tragic consequences. Recently, in Kenya's Shakahola Forest, over 429 people—including children—died after a self-proclaimed pastor encouraged his followers to fast to death.

These situations remind us why healthy pastoral formation is essential for the global Church.

Yet the more common consequences of inadequate training are quieter—but also damaging. Pastors often become overwhelmed, isolated, and unsure of how to lead. Many carry the entire weight of ministry alone because they have never learned how to equip others or delegate responsibilities.

One ministry leader studying with iTEE Global recently admitted this very struggle. As he worked through the **Ministry Leadership** course, he recognized that he had been trying to carry every responsibility in his church himself. He was exhausted, constantly reacting to urgent demands, and unsure how to prioritize what mattered most.

Through the course, he discovered the biblical model of servant leadership and the importance of developing others. As part of his practical "Hands Assignment," he evaluated his own leadership strengths and weaknesses. While he identified faithfulness, humility, and relational skills as strengths, he also acknowledged weaknesses in delegation, time management, and assertive communication.

Seeking growth, he interviewed a trusted mentor and began developing a plan to empower others in his church. By the end of the course, he had committed to delegating responsibilities, establishing an accountability relationship, and praying for wisdom to equip those around him. Reflecting on the experience, he said:

"I was truly blessed by several people in our Ministry Leadership class. Many brothers and sisters openly shared their real-life ministry experiences, challenges, and lessons learned. Their honesty helped me reflect more deeply on my own leadership journey. It reminded me that we are not alone in our struggles and that God is at work in diverse settings through faithful leaders."



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Stories like this highlight the transformation that occurs when pastors receive training. Another student from Pakistan, studying the **Christian Life** course in Urdu, shared how training changed his understanding of spiritual disciplines:

“What I’ve learned has been invaluable. I didn’t fully understand the purpose of devotionals before. But now when I read God’s Word and realize it is for me, it becomes God’s voice speaking to my life. I’ve already begun sharing this with my friends so they can also hear God through Scripture.”

For many pastors around the world, even foundational spiritual practices have never been taught clearly. When leaders gain access to training in their own language, they grow not only in knowledge but also in their personal walk with Christ—and this transformation spreads throughout their communities.

Research consistently shows that accessible theological training—delivered through flexible, contextualized programs like those offered by iTEE Global—is one of the most effective ways to strengthen the

global Church. Such training equips pastors to teach sound doctrine, shepherd their congregations faithfully, manage ministry responsibilities wisely, and build healthy leadership teams.

Just as importantly, it helps pastors develop the character and resilience necessary to sustain lifelong ministry. They learn to receive criticism, resolve conflict, build supportive relationships, and avoid the emotional exhaustion that often leads many leaders to leave ministry prematurely.

As the Church continues to grow worldwide, the need for trained pastoral leaders will only increase. The traditional Western model of theological education—four years inside a seminary classroom—cannot meet this global need alone. Training must become more accessible, contextual, and adaptable.



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For a detailed list of opportunities, please see iteeg.org/opportunities.

If you are interested, contact: HRinfo@iteeg.org



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