

SUMMER 23/24

PRAYER ALERT

HOPE IN TRANSIT

Theological education for
Arab diasporas

REACHING OUT

The Mongolian migration

DISCIPLESHIP AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The Sri Lankan
global vision

DIASPORA: NEED AND OPPORTUNITY



INTRODUCING DR PERRY SHAW

GUEST SPEAKER APRIL & MAY 2024



With three decades of experience in cross-cultural mission work, Dr. Perry Shaw is passionately dedicated to training local Christian leaders in the Majority World. His extensive background in theological education, cross-cultural teaching, intercultural leadership, curriculum development, and research methodology uniquely qualifies him to share his insights with us during our Speakers Program in April and May 2024.

Currently serving as Researcher in Residence at Morling College in Sydney, Perry and his family served in the Middle East from 1990 to 2019. During the final decade, he held the position of Professor of Education at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Beirut, Lebanon.

His instrumental role in developing ABTS's innovative curriculum led to a significant position as a faculty development consultant for theological schools worldwide. This consultancy work continues alongside his research role in Australia.

Perry will shed light on the current needs expressed by Bible colleges in the Middle East. We eagerly anticipate gaining insights into this context and, more broadly, exploring the current landscape of global theological education.

Keep an eye out for the dates when Perry will be meeting with small groups in your area in late April and early May 2024.

A keen advocate of Local Leaders' ministry, Perry joined our board in 2021.

“ I love Local Leaders International. I have repeatedly seen in person how much Local Leaders' approach of respectful engagement with Majority World colleges is appreciated on the ground. ”

PLEASE PRAY

Heavenly Father, we thank you for Perry and his family and the way they have served you over many years. Please prepare Perry for his time connecting with Local Leaders' supporters around Australia and help him to communicate the vital needs of colleges in the Middle East. Stir our hearts and minds to be aware of the needs of our brothers in sisters around the world. In your mighty name Lord Jesus. Amen.

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WE WELCOME YOUR LETTERS & COMMENTS!

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Local Leaders International is not required to hold an authority to fundraise in Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory or the Northern Territory.

COVER Refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia at the Slovenia/Austria border in 2015.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2023 ANNUAL DINNERS

I love how we get to bring the world of ministry training to our supporters. This round of Annual Dinners was a case in point. It was so obvious that people enjoyed learning about the work Local Leaders is doing, but more than that, to see what the Lord is doing amongst his people. Dr Joanna Feliciano-Soberano gave a glimpse of her work in South East Asia, which was a window on all the Majority World. She especially highlighted the work of Local Online: A Global Strategy (LOGS) in her region, sharing the significant advancements that have been made in online theological education. Online education is not a complete answer for the

world, but it is part of the picture which we are pleased to be able to help our partner Bible colleges to paint.

We produced a great 7-minute video report on the progress of LOGS which is now on our website. It tells of the developments in 250 Bible colleges around the world, including the 10,000 new student positions created through the strategy.

It would be a great way to introduce friends to the ministry of Local Leaders.

You can see it at:

<https://localleaders.org.au/media-resources/videos/>



Photos from our 2023 Annual Dinner series with Dr Joanna Feliciano-Soberano.

I'M GOING TO GRACELAND

Actually, I'm writing this in the Guest House (hotel) of Graceland in Memphis Tennessee. I'm not a great fan, but Elvis Presley is part of the cultural history of the western Anglosphere, so it's a bit interesting to be here. I'm in Memphis for work, meeting potential donors here and in Southern USA.

I've been trying to distil my learnings from 21 years in the role to explain why our new global strategy: **GRASSROOTS TO CANOPY: A CENTURY IMPACT**, makes sense and will make a massive difference.



This experience helps me appreciate so many of our supporters in Australia who have travelled with Local Leaders for many years and know instinctively the values we hold and the methods we employ. I haven't spent lots of time outlining the details to our Australian supporters yet - that will come - but what is obvious is that our supporters get the importance of this ministry and for that I am very grateful.

Thanks for your support to the local leaders of the Majority World.

Rev Dr Stuart Brooking
Executive Director

PLEASE PRAY

Lord of lords, we thank you for the success of Local Leaders' Annual Dinner series and that many people around Australia were able to hear about the ministry. Please help the Local Leaders team to build strong and lasting relationships with supporters. Please bless Stuart's work in the USA meeting potential donors. We ask you to connect Stuart with like-minded people who will understand the mission and financially support the Grassroots to Canopy Strategy. Amen.



Above: Stuart with some memorabilia in Graceland.

Below: See the video update on Local Online: A Global Strategy on our website.

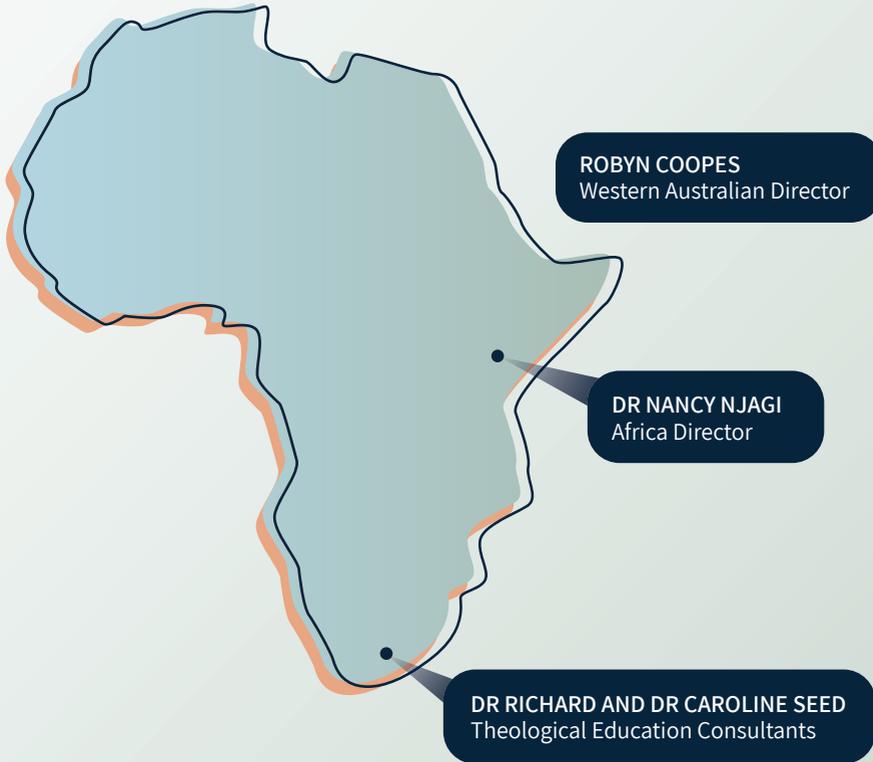
OUR INTERNATIONAL TEAM

The staff at Local Leaders International are not only used to connecting with Bible colleges throughout the Majority World, but also with team members spread out around Australia and across the globe!

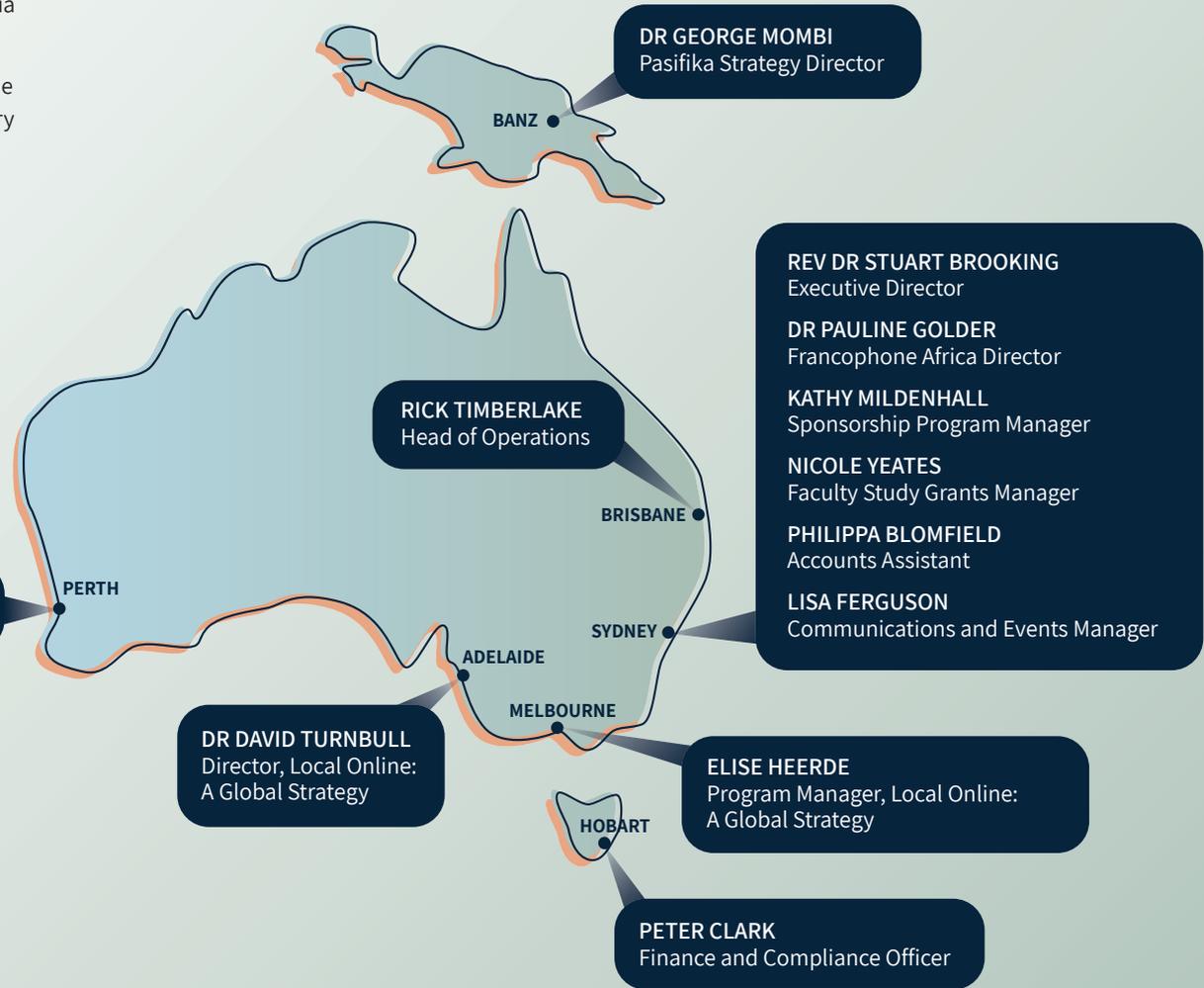
We meet regularly online for staff prayer sessions and team catch ups. For extended time together, we gather in person twice a year for our three-day staff conferences in February and September (usually near Sydney, Australia).

The diverse nature of our team is a blessing, giving us many perspectives that help to strengthen the organisation.

AFRICA



AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA



PLEASE PRAY

Lord God, thank you that the Local Leaders staff are able to operate as a team across great distances due to technology. Please continue to help them build and maintain close, collaborative relationships with one another and with the Bible college partners that they serve. Amen.

DIASPORA - IT REALLY IS(N'T) ABOUT THE WEST!

Rev Dr Stuart Brooking, Local Leaders International, Australia

I find it fascinating how easily in the West we co-opt all the world's stories to become really about us. I was at a conference earlier in the year discussing diaspora peoples in a certain region and despite the presentations about how people are moving 'from everywhere to everywhere' the videos we saw were the high-cost ones about how many peoples come to America, and so Americans have an opportunity to evangelise them. Obviously, that is an important concept, and it's true in Australia too. Many churches in Australia are growing because of their ministry to immigrants or overseas students taking an interest in the gospel. Praise the Lord!

But, at Local Leaders we notice a bigger reality. Although the media maximises the number of people trying to get to Europe, the USA or sometimes Australia, diaspora is a much greater issue elsewhere.

Our ministry partners with Bible colleges around the world who are working with diaspora peoples. Notice these examples:

- Alexandria School of Theology has a campus in Ethiopia near refugee camps of Sudanese people.
- Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Lebanon and Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary in Jordan work with people from Syria displaced by the war.

- Our partner in Colombia, Fundación Universitaria Seminario Bíblico de Colombia, works with Venezuelans fleeing the collapsed economy.
- Both colleges we support in Sri Lanka have students based in the Persian Gulf and many other countries through their new online programs.

In turn, the many people trained in the Scriptures by these colleges minister amongst their own people who, for whatever reason, are not in their homelands. The importance of this can be seen when you contemplate a core value of ours viz: to work with locals. In this case, the locals are not in their homeland. They are operating with a new culture – that of being raised in one place and now living in a very different place. That new context needs people to reflect on ministry for that specific location.

This is all very complex and very important. That's why it needs much prayer for our partner colleges and for the people they train, whoever, and wherever they are!

Our hope is that this edition of Prayer Alert will help you to pray with greater clarity and greater fervour.

PLEASE PRAY

Gracious God, please open our eyes to how you are working around the world, not just from a Western centric point of view. Give us your heart for people and help us to practically assist those who are experiencing the effects of diaspora. Please help Local Leaders partner colleges on the front line to train compassionate and skillful grassroots leaders who can minister effectively in these different places. Amen.



Migrant workers from Asia living in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

SERVING CHRIST IN THE AGE OF MIGRATION

Dr David Ng, Lecturer in Intercultural Studies and Program Leader for Master of Missional Leadership, Melbourne School of Theology, Australia

It was more than two decades ago when Philip Jenkins said we were living through “one of the most transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide”.¹

By this, he meant that the largest Christian communities were to be found not in Europe, the USA or Australia (as it was for centuries) but in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This general trend is now widely acknowledged and ongoing partnership with God’s people in these places is as important as ever.

Alongside this trend, however, it is important to also acknowledge that we are living in what has been called the “age of migration”. That is, while people throughout history have always been moving from place to place, the scale of migration in this generation is unprecedented.

People are on the move. According to a 2020 UN report, the number of international migrants worldwide (those residing in a country other than their country of birth) reached 281 million. Females made up 48% of international migrants, and 41 million migrants were under the age of 20.

People migrate for various reasons: some for economic or educational reasons and others because they have been forcibly displaced. In 2022, the UN reported that more than 100 million people worldwide were forced to flee their homes due to conflicts, violence, fear of persecution and/or human rights violations.

Those who never cross an international border (internally displaced migrants) account for 58% of forcibly displaced people.

All such movements are, of course, divinely ordained and such movements are opportunities for migrants to seek God (Acts 17:26-28). God has ordained such movement (both involuntary and voluntary) in Scripture to bring about His purposes and He continues to do so in the present. He calls His people to participate in this ongoing story of mission in the world.

I don’t know whether you have ever considered the fact that you are living in one of the most significant periods in the history of Christianity? But these changes raise some important questions for us as we respond to these realities in service. In this age of migration, how should we as individuals, churches, Christian denominations, mission agencies and Bible colleges, respond in how we resource local leaders? How do we partner together to respond effectively to the many and varied movements of people for the sake of the gospel and for God’s glory?

Praise God that He is on the move and building His church around the world. Praise God that we all have a part to play in this ever-changing and increasingly mobile world.

PLEASE PRAY

Father God, thanks for your sovereignty and that you know each migrant and each circumstance. Please use this age of migration for your purposes - to build your kingdom. Please continue to show Local Leaders and its partner Bible colleges how to work together to respond effectively to the many and varied movements of people for the sake of the gospel. Amen.



Displaced Sudanese families have breakfast in a refugee camp in Southern Sudan.

¹ Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Revised and Updated. Oxford University Press, USA, 2011, p.4.

HOPE IN TRANSIT: THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR ARAB DIASPORAS

Jad Tabet, Development Associate, Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Lebanon

Within the biblical narrative, migration has played a key role in the propagation of the gospel and the fulfilment of the Lord's will.

For instance, Abraham is only made into a great nation that blesses other nations by leaving his native country and going out into the Land the Lord called him to (Gen. 12:1). Likewise, Joseph could only save his people by being sold off to Egypt (Gen. 37).

Migration today takes on different forms, but whether it's voluntary or forced it continues to play a vital role in the growth of the Kingdom across the globe.

At Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS), we see this reflected in our students. Five years ago, most of our students were

residents of their native countries. They were sent to ABTS by their home churches to be equipped for ministry in their native contexts.

Today, with all the challenges the Arab world has seen and the migration movements they have caused, 38% of our Integrated Theology Program and 56% of our Certificate in Ministry students are somewhere along the refugee highway. Respectively, 75% and 82% of these students have become members of diasporas within the Arab world.

Most of these students come from low-income households and lack stability. For example, 56% of the diasporic church leaders studying at ABTS are Syrians

who exist in Lebanon in limbo – unsure of whether they will ever get a chance to go back home or if they will remain 'on the move'.

Despite this uncertainty (and sometimes because of it) they are serving the Lord wherever they go. Many serve through home groups, discipleship and counselling, to their fellow refugees. Others have joined local churches where they serve youth, women and children in their communities.

As difficulties increase, so does humanity's search for hope. Our students carry the hope of the gospel with them as they move.

But what does this mean for theological education for the Arab Church? Today, more than ever, we need biblically trained and theologically equipped Arab men and women who can bear the witness of Christ in the places God takes them. As they move along the refugee highway, well-equipped

Arab believers meet many fellow Arabs who have been afflicted by the suffering in this world. In these moments, they can use the skills and knowledge they gain at ABTS to be His Salt and Light, calling people to salvation through hope in Jesus Christ.

PLEASE PRAY

Our Lord, we give thanks that you have raised up seminaries such as ABTS to provide students with the wisdom and knowledge to address fellow travellers they may encounter on the refugee highway. We pray that people in the Arab world searching for hope will cross paths with one of Jesus' disciples from ABTS, and learn of your abounding love and acceptance. Amen.



Students praying for one another at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Lebanon.

REACHING OUT: THE MONGOLIAN MIGRATION

Luvsangombo (Luya) Gantumur, Principal of Union Bible Theological College, Mongolia

In 1990, Mongolia underwent a significant system change, granting Mongolians the opportunity to acquire foreign passports and the freedom to travel abroad. Since then, Mongolians have migrated to various countries for both living and working opportunities.

According to the Department of Statistics (2020), citizens living abroad numbered 122,301. A significant majority, 58.8%, resided in the Asia-Pacific region, including countries such as Korea, Japan, and Australia, while around 20% had settled in Europe.

As the message of Christ's gospel spread in Mongolia and believers with an interest in living and working abroad departed from the country, Mongolian churches began to take root in foreign lands. Among these, South Korea stands out with the largest Christian community. Korean churches initially incorporated worship services for foreign

congregants, and over time, Mongolian pastors assumed leadership in gatherings tailored to Mongolian communities. Some Mongolian congregations even gained independence and established separate Mongolian churches.

Pastor Shirnen Ulzii, who serves in South Korea, estimates that there are approximately 60 churches with about 1,800 believers in the country. In North America, our alumni G Tsolmonbaatar serves as the pastor of Bulag Church in Washington, and reports the presence of over 27 churches with more than 1,000 believers scattered across the United States.

In Europe, Pastor N Odbayar, who formerly worked at Union Bible Theological College (UBTC), believes there are around 16 or 17 churches comprising approximately 260-300 adult believers.

As the director of UBTC, in July 2023 I had the opportunity to visit the United States,

engage in discussions with pastors of Mongolian churches, and explore avenues for collaboration. All the while working on the development of suitable program ideas.

We are dedicated to praying, strategising, and actively working on ways to connect with Mongolian believers and congregations worldwide, and contribute to their theological education. Our primary

focus is on identifying opportunities for collaboration to enhance the quality of informal theological education in these regions.

To achieve this, we've initiated cooperation agreements, recognizing that TEE (Theological Education by Extension) in Mongolia provides an effective channel to reach Mongolian diaspora communities. The experience gained during the Covid-19 pandemic has also led us to develop hybrid-online teaching methods.

To further our mission, we're currently working on a project to improve the interior of our chapel environment and are in the final stages of preparation for online recordings.

Luya (right) with UBTC alumni, pastor G Tsolmonbaatar.

We are immensely grateful for the invaluable contribution and support from Local Leaders International in this endeavour. Reports indicate that our chapel sermons and online content are regularly viewed by believers from rural areas and overseas. We have even witnessed instances where individuals inspired by God's grace have journeyed to Mongolia to enrol as students at UBTC.

There is ongoing interest in online studies, reinforcing the importance of this initiative. As a result of this project, we anticipate enhanced UBTC chapel sermons and training recordings, alongside the introduction of more collaborative courses. Additionally, we're exploring ways to serve foreign communities in Mongolia.

One of our UBTC graduates is planning to establish a fellowship for Chinese individuals within his Mongolian church, recognising the need for such services. There is also a growing demand for assistance and support for Russian and Vietnamese communities within Mongolia.

PLEASE PRAY

Mighty God, we praise you that Mongolian citizens are venturing into the world to start lives in different places, and that your church is reflecting this migration. We particularly pray for the efforts of UBTC to connect with individuals and congregations worldwide. May these relationships grow. We pray for the ongoing work of UBTC and give thanks that it is attracting local leaders. Amen.



Mongolian pastors in North America during Luya's visit in July 2023.



MISSION AND DIASPORA IN GABON

Dr Pauline Golder, Francophone Africa Director, Local Leaders International, Australia

Gabon is a small oil-rich nation on the west coast of Central Africa with a better level of education and lifestyle than many of its neighbours. It has been an attractive destination for poorer West African neighbouring nations.

It is a rare exception in this part of the world: an African country with more people moving to it rather than locals moving away. According to the UN, more than 18% of Gabon's population are immigrants and (only) 0.06% of Gabonese emigrate elsewhere¹.

A local pastor explained that most immigrants were in basic jobs such as cleaning, security, mechanics, building trades, etc; as the Gabonese sought more professional positions.

During my short stay there in mid-2023 my accommodation's guard was from Mali, as was the lady at the stall across the road where I bought food. The carpenter and tyre repairer on the corner were from Benin, as was the mechanic down the road. I met others from Cameroon and visited shops owned by Mauritians.

Following a workshop with the Local Online: A Global Strategy (LOGS) project in the capital Libreville in July 2023, I was asked to lead a consultation about "21st Century Challenges to Mission" with leaders and missionaries of the Gabon Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) Church. One challenge for them was to not only minister

to the Gabonese diaspora in other countries, like France and Ghana, but for missionaries and church members to reach nationals in their host country.

Another challenge was the different migrant ethnic groups living on their doorstep, especially in the cities. Many find it difficult to cover the cost of living in the city because of lower-paying positions or the informal economy. These included things such as health care and children's education.

More research into the spiritual and economic needs of immigrants', and finding a holistic response, was recommended by different ministry groups. Suggestions included showing Christ's love through sport, health, educational support, and mentoring young parents.

Then a coup d'état took place the following month, and the military government brought changes to the constitution forbidding foreigners owning land or holding positions of political office². It remains to be seen if there will be a more widespread change in attitude towards welcoming immigrants and whether this provides an opportunity for the Gabonese church to reach numerous ethnic groups, notwithstanding the fact they might have been resistant to the gospel in their home countries.

It also highlights the precariousness of diaspora populations in many nations of the world with changing security and political situations.



Top: Pauline in Gabon with Complexe de Formation Théologique de Bethel (CFTB) Director, Dr Khonde, and his wife. Left: Pauline with the Nigerian seminary French program coordinator, attending meetings held by the Francophone theological accreditation agency. Right: Pauline with ex-students in Gabon who are now working in mission.

PLEASE PRAY

Our great God, thank you for the opportunities Pauline has had to work with high quality theological education organisations in Gabon and throughout Francophone Africa. We particularly lift up to you the lower-paid migrant groups in Gabon. Please give the local church greater understanding of their spiritual and economic needs. May recent political changes be an opportunity for the Gabonese Church to reach these people with the love of Christ. Amen.

¹ iom.int/countries/gabon

² Bernault, Florence. "Comprendre le coup d'État au Gabon", *The Conversation*, 18 September 2023. Available at <https://theconversation.com/comprendre-le-coup-detat-au-gabon-213592>.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKERS

Prof Noli Mendoza, Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies,
Asian Theological Seminary, Philippines

It's an undeniable reality that every year many Filipinos migrate to other countries to work. For many families, having an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) in their household is a very important step to escape poverty.

Countless households now live more comfortable lives because of family members who work in other countries as nurses, teachers, domestic helpers, engineers, construction workers, seafarers or any type of skilled workers.

These migrant workers are also considered by the country as 'bagong bayani', or modern-day heroes, because of their positive contribution to the economy. The remittances sent by almost two million OFWs, helps their families and the businesses that their families spend money on.

This increases their purchasing power significantly, contributing to the expansion of the country's so-called middle class. According to the data, almost 10% of the country's Gross Domestic Product and 10% of its Gross National Income comes from OFW remittances. Because of this, labour migration has become an essential part of the government's economic program. In fact, the Philippine government has just created The Department of Migrant Workers to focus on the welfare of OFWs.

OFWs have also contributed significantly to the development of the countries where they work. Economies which have benefitted include Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, Middle Eastern countries, Europe and the USA.

Despite these contributions, OFWs and their families continue to face many obstacles to real growth and change. Stories are rife of broken families, abuse from their employers, experiencing marginalisation and more.

Because of this, the Church has to play a more proactive role in ministering to (and with) the OFWs and their families. The challenge is how to better understand and respond to this phenomenon of the Filipino Labor Diaspora so that OFWs can experience real transformation for themselves, their household, their community, their home country and even the countries where they work.

It is important to mention that many OFWs become closer to God and are actively involved in church ministries when living in a foreign country. This shows the potential of the OFWs to be channels of the transformative gospel wherever they go.



Photo credit: KreangchaiRungfamai (iStock)

PLEASE PRAY

Our Heavenly Father, we give you praise that Filipino workers are spread all around the world and greatly contribute to multiple economies. Thank you for these workers and that the government is taking steps to ensure their welfare abroad. We pray the Church will work closely with OFWs and be able to minister more readily to them. We ask that those OFWs will be conduits of the gospel wherever they go. Amen.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

Dr David Turnbull, Director of Local Online: A Global Strategy, Local Leaders International, Australia

God's people are on the move, especially beyond their own countries. There are various reasons why this is so, which include elements such as employment, missionary service, marriage, and seeking safety from persecution and war.

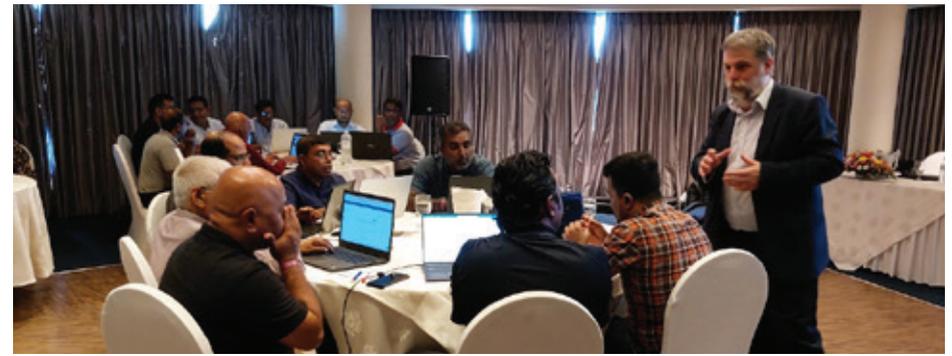
Consequently, Christian diaspora communities become established. Yet it is often without trained leadership, due to limited opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills required.

With the rise of theological institutions offering academic programs online, diaspora communities can access theological and ministry education in creative and innovative ways. I'm excited by this development and the way Local Leaders' largest project, Local Online: A

Global Strategy (LOGS), can contribute.

I've grown to appreciate the opportunities presented by online education for training leaders in diaspora communities - in creative access (closed) countries, in Western contexts and in languages familiar to each migrant community. Extension programs are not new, but digital options increase accessibility and availability.

At least ten institutions supported through LOGS have specific programs targeting diaspora groups beyond their home context. In my travels with Local Leaders, I visited some of these colleges and discussed how their engagement with online learning can make a difference. In Argentina, I learnt of the Spanish program from FIET in Buenos Aires, holding classes throughout Latin



David facilitating a training workshop at Colombo Theological Seminary in Sri Lanka.

America and in Sydney! (Full story overleaf). In Sri Lanka I heard about the plans for Colombo Theological Seminary's Global Initiative, to add to their domestic campuses and programs.

Through online education, members of diaspora communities, including those in Australia, can address common barriers to accessing theological training in their host countries. These factors include the lack of resources to cover the costs required by the local theological institutions, language barriers in the host country, and visa requirements to study in their current contexts.

LOGS has helped Bible colleges who are running diaspora programs by:

- providing technology to improve their services, thus increasing their capacity to deliver online education, and
- facilitating training for faculty, giving

them the vision and skills to provide quality education to their online communities.

We've also collaborated with the colleges to help tackle some of the perceived barriers in competence development such as knowledge of the technology used, the various computer packages and the features associated with learner-centred approaches to delivery.

One area to improve on in these programs relates to providing the skills and awareness of dealing with different geographical contexts and ministry demands. The host country will be different from the sending country and heritage culture, so this needs to be addressed when the colleges plan their diaspora programs.

Now there is hope that more leaders among diaspora communities can receive the training they require.

PLEASE PRAY

Lord Almighty, we are grateful that diaspora Christian communities are established throughout the world, and that LOGS can assist in providing creative and innovative quality theological and ministry education. We praise you for the ten institutions supported through LOGS who have specific programs targeting diaspora groups in other countries. Amen.



David with colleagues at FIET Instituto Teológico in Argentina, August 2022. From left: Lauren Espedido (Local Leaders Researcher), Dr David Turnbull and Dr Carlos López, Rector of FIET Instituto Teológico.

FROM ARGENTINA TO AUSTRALIA. SERVING THE SPANISH-SPEAKING CHURCH.

Dr Carlos López, Rector at Instituto Teológico FIET, Argentina

The arrival of immigrants from Europe to Argentina during the 19th Century generated the beginning of immigrant churches which held services in their own language, without pursuing evangelistic purposes.

The first immigrant churches, also called transplant churches because they maintained the identity of their own countries in a foreign land, were: Anglican, Lutheran, and Waldensian (1825-1848). Later the evangelical mission churches came, with a strong evangelistic emphasis: Plymouth Brethren, Methodists, Presbyterians, The Church of God, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, and The Church of the Nazarene (1844-1910).

Later the expansion of the evangelical movement in Latin America advanced under the influence of the faith missions (1900 onwards).

Two centuries later, the axis of missions has changed radically. Now, the migratory flow has turned from the south to the north. As a result of this contemporary migratory flow, inhabitants of Argentina and neighbouring countries settle in foreign lands in search of a better life for their families. They learn the language, adapt to the laws of their new country of residence, work hard, study and develop their lives in a culture very different from that of their birth. However, in matters of faith they try to be part of a community where the language of the heart is spoken and where experiences close to their own culture are shared.

These communities of faith in the diaspora fulfil multiple functions: they are evangelistic; they provide spiritual and material needs; they constitute a close family (partially replacing the one that is distant); and they spiritually and emotionally support the family, serving as teachers of how to live a life of faith in Jesus Christ. Incidentally, Jesus serves as a paradigm of what it is like to live a life of faith in God in a foreign land (John 1:14).



Carlos (right) with the International Coordinator of FIET (left) and the Pastor representing FIET AUSTRALIA (middle) visiting a Spanish-speaking partner church in Sydney, Australia.



Carlos (far end of table) at the graduation dinner for students in Sydney who have completed the FIET Diploma in Leadership and Ministry.

Seminaries also play a fundamental role in this process by accompanying the church in the diaspora. At the FIET Instituto Teológico (International Faculty of Theological Education – Theological Institute), we seek to be partners in the mission of Spanish-speaking churches in foreign lands.

An example of this is the task carried out in conjunction with the Hispanic churches of Sydney, Australia. Towards the end of 2021, we began a study project at the Higher Diploma level for pastors and leaders of

Spanish-speaking churches. The training of 24 leaders in the FIET Diploma in Leadership and Ministry in Australia was achieved thanks to the trust of the Local Council of Pastors, and the commitment of pastors who served as course instructors.

The church in the diaspora is the family of God in a foreign land. From there it serves the mission of God in the world with both commitment and enormous challenges. We do well to pray for it; for its bi-vocational pastors, its current members, and new generations born away from the homeland.

PLEASE PRAY

Our Lord, we pray for the church in the diaspora, your family in foreign lands. We give thanks for its bi-vocational pastors and the joys and challenges they face. Please be with them. We praise you that FIET Theological Institute seeks to partner in the mission of Spanish-speaking churches in many nations. Please bless their programs and help them to raise up leaders who love your word and are culturally sensitive. Amen.

THE SRI LANKAN DIASPORA: DISCIPLESHIP AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Dr Ivor Poobalan, Principal of Colombo Theological Seminary, Sri Lanka

Until the Syrian uprising in 2011, it was estimated that the Sri Lankan diaspora (16%) was only second to the Lebanese diaspora (60%).

Migration overseas by Sri Lankans has happened in waves. In the 1970s, it was the result of political realignment with strong leanings towards communist China. From the 80s onwards, Sri Lankans left for more dire reasons. During the three-decade civil war (1975-2009), well over two million fled to Europe, North America, and Australia.

In just the last year, there has been another wave of migration. This time economic collapse and runaway inflation has sent Sri Lankans, in their hundreds of thousands, in search of work anywhere in the world.

Yet, this sad reality is not without its silver linings. Sri Lankans are using their educational backgrounds and work-ethic to make useful contributions to the economies of their host nations.



From left: Ravin Caldera (CTS Academic Dean), David Turnbull, Diane Hockridge (on screen) and Ivor Poobalan (CTS Principal) during the two-day online education workshop.

Most exciting from a missional perspective has been the growth of Sri Lankan diaspora churches, now scattered in numerous countries around the world. Many of the believers are first-generation Christians and, as can be imagined, this has given rise to great needs in the area of teaching ministry.

In its nearly 30 years of ministry, Colombo Theological Seminary (CTS) has been acutely aware of this growing need. In keeping with the vision, “Resources to the Church for the Transformation of Nations”, we consider it the duty of the seminary to serve the Church at hand and the Church far away. But how?

Prayerful openness has its fortuitous breakthroughs. When the pandemic of 2020 forced the faculty to transition to teaching all courses online, an opportunity opened. We found expressions of interest from Sri Lankan believers in places as diverse as Canada, Australia, and Dubai.

So was born the vision for CTS Global: a model of theological education. It utilises technology and the latest best-practices in online learning to serve the needs of the scattered Sri Lankan Church, and indeed keen learners everywhere.

But how does one make this huge conceptual, cultural, and technological leap? Who would come alongside CTS in this endeavour?

It is in the place of real dependence that the Lord opened our eyes to see the resources He had already prepared. We were amazed to discover that Local Leaders International was already forging ahead with a program to assist theological schools develop online

education. The partnership which has been such a blessing to CTS over the years was joyfully channelled towards this new frontier.

The CTS Global project is now underway. As a first step, the faculty has been introduced to a process of coaching and equipping for the major shift. This was accelerated with an online learning two-day workshop for 30 lecturers. It was led by David Turnbull and Diane Hockridge from Local Leaders International. The next major steps to be taken are content creation, infrastructure development, and technical upgrades.

CTS Global’s vision is to make a unique Sri Lankan brand of evangelical theological learning available to a global Christian community.

PLEASE PRAY,

Dear God, we know that even where there is troubled displacement, you are at work and walking with the displaced. We thank you for the growth of the Sri Lankan diaspora Church and for the vision of CTS Global. We give you praise that it and LOGS emerged at similar times and are working together. In your perfect timing. Amen



David with the group of 30 CTS lecturers who completed the online education workshop.



STUDENT STORY

Rochharliana

Studying at Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology

Being a Bible college student, I sometimes have problems supporting my family as the political crisis grows and costs rise. But I have a God who is always with my family and caring for us. He is taking care of my family all the time so that we may stand firm for his glory

In the past six months, through the study of the Leadership subject, I have learned about myself and that I need to practice self-control. I also found out how forgiveness is important for ministry, and how it could be the way to approach the unreached people who are near to us. The subject of Diaspora Missions has challenged me and opened my eyes. It has given me knowledge about how migrant people should be reached.

I am trying to help those trying to cross the border due to the military coup in Myanmar, particularly those from Chin State and Sagaing Division to Yangon. Since most of them are youths, I encourage them not to

forsake God and to read the Bible as much as possible.

My relationships with teachers and fellow students at school gives me strength and makes me happy in my life. We help each other through the care group and mentoring group. We have some fun with the care group, and this builds strong and healthy relationships. As a student at Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (MEGST), I am challenged by needing and wanting to improve my understanding of theology. I have confidence that MEGST is the best theological seminary.

I have a big family (I am married with six children). By the grace of God my wife has a prayer life, and she prays to God and asks for my family's needs. I am also deeply grateful to you. Your precious gift has been a blessing, not only to me but also to my whole family in these times during the military coup.

Through your gift I can study the Word of God, and increase my knowledge of theology. I know and believe that your gift shall be an aroma pleasing to God. I pray that you would receive bigger and greater blessings. going deeper with Christ and further in mission, and that you might be able to work continuously for the kingdom of God.

**Rochharliana is a recipient of a Local Leaders Student Sponsorship.
His story is shared with permission from MEGST.**



MEGST students ministering at Believers Church in Myanmar.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT STUDENT SPONSORSHIP

Contact our Sponsorship Program Manager, Kathy Mildenhall
kmildenhall@localleaders.org.au

PLEASE PRAY

Gracious God, we pray for Rochharliana and his family. May you bless them as he seeks to learn how to make the greatest impact for your kingdom. We pray for the political situation in Myanmar. May your hand equip present and future MEGST students to attend to all people, particularly those who are displaced and broken. Amen.

INTRODUCING DR PERRY SHAW

GUEST SPEAKER APRIL & MAY 2024



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