

International Ministers Unite to Evangelize World's Unreached

✖ A cross-section of missions and church leaders are gathering in Tennessee this week to develop strategies for evangelizing the world's 6,000 unreached people groups.

J. Hudson Taylor IV, great-grandson of the pioneering missionary to China, and Philip Jenkins, author of *The Next Christendom* and a Penn State University professor of history and religious studies, head the list of speakers at the two-day Finish Line summit, which began Tuesday in Cleveland, Tenn.

Participants at the invitation-only event will identify unreached people groups they believe can be evangelized within the next year and develop a strategy to reach them. At a follow-up summit next fall, participants will assess their progress.

The event is hosted by the Billion Soul Network, which has partnered with more than 200 ministries worldwide to help fulfill the Great Commission in this century. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) and the Island Way Mission in Fiji, led by pastor Suliasi Kurulo, are co-sponsors of the summit.

"One hundred years ago, we didn't know where the unreached were, so we didn't know how to go to them," said James O. Davis, co-founder of the Billion Soul Network. "Today, we know where they are. So it's not a how-to issue, it's a want-to issue."

In addition to Taylor and Jenkins, the summit features international church leaders such as David Mohan, pastor of 30,000-member New Life Assembly of God church in Chennai,

India; Alex Mitala, chairman of New Birth Fellowship, a network of 20,000 churches in Uganda; and Kurulo, founder of 8,000-member World Harvest Centre in Suva, Fiji. Kurulo's ministry has planted more than 1,300 churches in 100 nations. Most have been among unreached people groups.

Representatives from Iran, where millions have reportedly come to Christ in recent decades, and from the Nigeria-based Redeemed Christian Church of God, which has reportedly planted more than 14,000 churches in 110 nations, also are participating.

"The philosophy behind the Finish Line summit is not the West going to the rest, it is the best around the world going to the rest," Davis said. "That is a major missional shift that is taking place in the world."

Jenkins has written extensively about the most vibrant sectors of the church moving from the West toward Asia, Africa and Latin America, where Christianity is spreading at an unprecedented rate. Many of the most vibrant congregations also take a conservative view of Scripture and embrace Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity.

"He's going to be showing us where Christianity is going, which further fits the conclusion that leading missiologists have come to-that not only is Christianity moving, but the church around the world is maturing," Davis said of Jenkins' presentation.

"The West sowed seeds all over the world for over 150 years, and those gospel seeds have come up," Davis added. "The largest missions thrusts now are emerging outside this country. God is doing that on purpose because now there's going to be a global, concerted effort about synergizing, networking to get to the finish line as fast as we possibly can."

Taylor, who leads the ministry his great-grandfather founded,

OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) International in Taiwan, is to discuss the top three emerging trends in missions.

"The first one is that the missional shift is moving very rapidly ... to the global church taking the lead in finishing the Great Commission," Davis said of Taylor's talk. "That's the curve."

Davis said Western ministries will continue to play a strong role in world evangelism but will partner with indigenous ministries by providing Bible translations, ministry training and other equipping resources.

He describes the partnership as an arrow, with indigenous churches being the arrowhead and global Christians, particularly those in the West, serving as the fletchings that help guide the arrow to its target.

"It's not just about money," Davis noted. "Because some places in the world, they don't need our money. ... They want our partnership."

Although 6,000 unreached people groups are all over the world, including in parts of Latin America, Africa and Europe, Davis said most are in the 10/40 Window, a region encompassing Africa and most of Asia. Nearly half of the 600 largest groups are in India, where Christians comprise roughly 50 million of the nation's 1 billion-strong population.

He said the Western church has much to learn from global Christians. Davis reports that missiologists expect 65 percent of the world's missionaries to be from outside the West by 2030.

"China has far more Christians than we really have Christians here in America, and they are growing extremely rapidly," Davis said. "We need to learn from their growth, not just us teaching them how to grow. That shift even in our thinking, the way we view the world, we've got to adjust."

This week's summit is the second in The Finish Line series. The first conference in January 2006 brought together nearly 100 leaders to hear presentations by former Foursquare President Jack Hayford and former Southern Baptist Convention President James Merritt, among others.

Billion Soul is planning to host a networking summit next year, which will be followed by another Finish Line summit to report on participants' progress in evangelizing the targeted people groups.