

Nigerian Pentecostals Hope to 'Plant Churches Like Starbucks' in US

European and American missionaries have traveled to Africa to spread the gospel, but a Nigerian pastor plans to do the opposite: build churches as numerous as Starbucks.

Pastor James Fadele is a pastor in Texas with the Redeemed Christian Church of God in North America, a Pentecostal movement that started in Nigeria in 1952. He runs the church in North America and pastors a congregation about an hour northeast of Dallas.

Pentecostalism has its roots in the U.S., but it's a global movement today, with most of its growth happening in Latin America and Africa. An estimated 280 million people follow Pentecostalism worldwide, reports .

According to *BBC News* magazine, Fadele said God told the church's leader, Enoch Adeboye, that its North American headquarters would be founded near Dallas, but he wasn't given a timeframe or specific location.

Then a few Redeemed Church members were dining at a local restaurant when a white man approached him and told them God had asked him to buy a patch of land but that the church was the owner.

"God told him, 'The land doesn't belong to you, it belongs to a group of church people,'" he explains. "'When you meet them, I will let you know who they are.'"

The 700-acre property in Floyd, Texas—an unincorporated community with a population of 220—will eventually house a university, sports complex and even a golf course.

Fadele's goal is to establish a church within every 10 miles in North America, taking as many people as possible with him to heaven.

"Because heaven is real, God is real," he says. "And that is why we want to plant churches like Starbucks."

There are currently 720 churches in North America, according to Redeemed leaders, nearly double from four years ago. They claim to have 15,000 members in the U.S.

Ruth Marshall, who studies Christian movements in Africa and has studied the Redeemed Church, says its aggressive plans come from Adeboye, its leader and guiding force.

"He really wants to be an important global player," Marshall explains. "One could say that he's almost obsessed with this logic of church planting because for him it's an index of success. And also, prosaically, because the more parishes there are, the wealthier the central organization."

Most of the church's members are Nigerian or African immigrants. They will need a lot more non-Africans for the church to grow, which is proving challenging.

Marshall says children of African immigrant churchgoers prefer congregations more relevant to their lives over Redeemed Church.

But Fadele remains encouraged, saying it will take time but he's convinced they will connect with the greater community.

The pastor says once people learn they are genuine, they'll join his church.

"I'm not saying all the churches in America are fake," he says. "But ... we have come all the way from Africa. We are engaging the people to show them the true gospel, making sure that people are being saved and people are making it to heaven."