

Why I'm Grateful for Pastoral Leaders

One day remains until families throughout the U.S. express their thanks on "Turkey Day," more properly known as Thanksgiving. What are you thankful for this year?

David Shibley with Global Advance recently gave Mission Network News a glimpse of his gratitude for pastoral leaders.

"There is an enormous amount of discouragement and incredible pressure on pastors today," he says. "At Global Advance, we often refer to them as 'hidden heroes,' and I am grateful for the privilege that the Lord gives to go on site into many nations of the majority world and 'lift up the hands' of these pastors."

Each year, Global Advance sponsors conferences, roundtables and training initiatives for indigenous pastors. The group works with national ministry partners to host Frontline Shepherds Conferences in the Middle East, North India, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, parts of Africa and Latin America.

"There is a marked spike in the numbers of pastors who are leaving ministry, both in the United States and around the world," Shibley says.

Internal pressure of church management and leadership as well as external pressure from communities and governments weigh heavily on the minds and hearts of indigenous pastors. And yet they bravely carry on the work God has given them to do.

One pastor in a war-torn African nation was vital to convening a recent Global Advance conference.

"He has been separated from his own family because of civil

strife within his nation, and yet he is caring for several orphans himself," Shibley says of the pastor.

Another pastor is braving the extreme danger in Beirut to help Syrian refugees who are flooding daily into Lebanon. In another region, pastors serving in two warring nations are combining forces.

"The pastors of both of these nations pledged to work together to reach their region of the world with the gospel," Shibley says.

"These are courageous men," he says. "And as Scripture says, we need to support them, lift them up and encourage them, and that's exactly what we have the privilege of doing at Global Advance."

Ministry challenges eventually take a toll on many pastors. Shibley says up to 20 percent of conference participants tell him, "If God doesn't do something here, I am going to leave the ministry."

"Many of these pastors serve without adequate resources, without adequate training, with very little, if any, affirmation, and that's why our conferences are so catalytic for so many of them," he says. "The all-important ministry of encouragement is sometimes overlooked, and yet it is every bit as valuable as the training and the resources that they receive."

More than 90 percent of pastors in developing nations will never have a chance to attend seminary or receive any formal Bible training. Global Advance conferences not only provide much-needed encouragement and affirmation, but they also equip pastors with tools and training.

"Every one of our training events requires thousands of dollars, and these training events are becoming more and more expensive every year," Shibley says. "We're very grateful that

we can contribute to the advance of the gospel and the fulfillment of the Great Commission in this way, but it takes those who pray for us and those who partner with us financially.”

Pastors attending a Global Advance conference pay a nominal fee of tuition, but the “lion’s share” is paid by the ministry, individual donations, churches and partner ministries.

“When people give to the ministry of Global Advance, they’re literally giving to provide the training and the tools that these pastoral leaders need,” Shibley says.

Shibley says the indigenous pastors helped by Global Advance are like the “mighty men of valor” described in Hebrews 11, which mentions men of faith “of whom the world was not worthy.”

“We see many men of that caliber ... who are spearheading the advance of the gospel in their nations,” he says. “We need to lift them up in prayer and honor men like these.”

Pray for encouragement for indigenous pastors in difficult areas of the world. Pray for their safety as they lead their congregations and proclaim the Good News.

“Pray first for pastoral leaders around the world who are facing enormous challenges,” Shibley says, “but also pray for our teams as they go ... that they will be protected.”

This article originally appeared on .