



By Jean-Baptiste Sawadogo  
Photography by Ken Horn

# Give us the privilege of sacrifice

When I started my first church in 1973, the church had 75 cents after the first month. My support was 25 cents. Another 25 cents was set aside, and the last 25 cents was spent to buy kerosene for the lamp we used as we taught new converts how to read and write the Word of God.

When I left that church one year later, I was earning about \$50 a month and the people had given me more than 220 pounds of corn. The growth was phenomenal. It strengthened the people's faith.

Our congregation had to sacrifice in order for that church to grow. Sacrifice was part of God's plan to build His Church in that community and ensure it would remain and thrive.

Yet, there are those from outside our culture who would have looked at those first numbers in our church and believed financial intervention was the only means to grow that church in that community. I hear arguments for such a plan of evangelism today, and I wonder, *What would have become of my church, or even my ministry, if I had been dependent on men rather than on God?*

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## Grateful for God's foundation

Don't misunderstand me. I will always be indebted to the missionaries who came to our nation years ago and laid the foundation of our church. I do not even want to think about what the Burkina Faso Assemblies of God would be like without the ministry we have received. The first missionaries committed themselves to laying a strong foundation based on our culture. They taught early converts to read and write the Scriptures in our language, helped them create and sing songs based on the music of our culture, and adapted a model of church leadership so African believers would recognize and respect it.

From the start, the U.S. missionaries God sent to Burkina Faso developed a respectful, active partnership with the early believers. They did not want us to become permanently dependent on them. In addition to teaching us how to read and write the Word of God in our mother tongue, they taught us to be self-supporting through projects such as raising livestock. Their aim was not only to help us earn money or to become educated, but also to teach us to support God's work. Because of their vision, some of our key Christian laypeople have done much to support the ministry.

Through their teaching and example from generation to generation, missionaries helped our churches to see the importance of doing their best to support their pastors and build churches. When the local leaders witnessed these efforts, they were encouraged to have faith and to participate.

## Two views of indigenous church growth

That history helps to illustrate the proper role of outside help within the context of the growing African church. When a church or national fellowship does not teach its members to give and support its ministries but to depend totally on outside help, that is not God's provision. Instead, dependency on outside support weakens the church. But when the outside help comes as a positive partnership, the result is healthy and biblically based because it adds to what is done locally.

A strong, biblically based partnership can help missionaries as well as national churches do what neither partner could do alone. This kind of help is God's provision, and it is a great encouragement to churches and leaders.

When the Assemblies of God uses the term "indigenous missions," it means self-propagating, self-governing and self-financing churches. This is what Jesus himself expected from His Church of all generations. This is what the churches of Jerusalem, of Antioch, of Thessalonica, and now of western and eastern Africa are doing and will continue to do.

Over the years the Africa regional office of U.S. Assemblies of God World Missions has helped us buy new printing equipment. There is no way our Burkina Faso Fellowship could buy this equipment. Because of AGWM contributions, a talented national team now works hard to print Christian literature for our own churches as well as for our neighboring national churches in West Africa. We have now built our own headquarters building and are also able to invest in new equipment.

Unfortunately, when some Americans use the term "indigenous missions," they are referring to pastors in Africa who receive full support from outside the country. The danger of this practice comes when something happens that causes outside help to cease. What will people do then? What will the national church do? What will missionaries do? In the vacuum created, the church would find itself in a catastrophic situation. I have seen this happen over and over again.

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## Ongoing partnership, ongoing local vision

We have a saying in Burkina Faso, “If you want someone to help you wash your back, first wash your face yourself.” I am grateful pioneer missionaries from the start trained our predecessors to develop ways to support their own ministries. It was hard initially, but now we have a firm foundation.

As a church we still have areas in which we need assistance. In most of our big cities, due to the high cost of living and rent, we cannot afford to plant churches. Our partnership with the U.S. church is helping us reach these goals.

Education is another area in which we need help. Educating pastors has helped our country reach new areas previously closed to the gospel. Many of our young people have participated on teams that have built schools inside and outside Burkina Faso.

Does Burkina Faso still need missionaries? Without hesitation, the answer is yes. Within the structure of a well-planned partnership, we can become more effective in transforming Burkina Faso with the gospel. We need missionaries, not only from the United States but also from other countries. Missionaries are God-sent ones, and we welcome any missionary God sends to our country.

I believe the God-sent ones from around the world are all part of God’s plan to raise up His sent ones from within Burkina Faso. And the promises of God’s provision on which those pioneer missionaries so faithfully depended are sure to hold true for us as well.

I would say to supporting churches around the world, “Thank you for all you have done in fulfilling the Great Commission in our nation. But please, give us the privilege of sacrifice. Give us the joy of trusting our God and watching as He brings a new day of spiritual victory and community transformation to our nation.” **tpe**

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