

Proclaiming the Gospel in a Shifting World

Where: Seoul, Korea

When: 28 October 2025

1. Executive Summary / Abstract

This report provides a comprehensive summary of the plenary session on Proclaiming the Gospel in a Shifting World. The session featured a series of distinct but interconnected presentations that collectively painted a picture of a global church facing profound external pressures and critical internal challenges. The core message is one of urgent, strategic action required to ensure the faithful and effective proclamation of the gospel in a complex and rapidly shifting global landscape. The speakers highlighted the critical need for data-informed mission strategies, revealing a vast, untapped global interest in the Bible alongside regions of deep spiritual ignorance. This opportunity is contrasted with severe challenges, including the rapid normalisation of abortion as a global moral and demographic crisis, and a severe internal leadership deficit where church growth, particularly in the Global South, is dangerously outpacing the capacity to train pastors, leaving churches vulnerable to theological error. The panel's overarching conclusion is a call to action for the global church: to leverage data for smarter mission, to engage culture with moral courage, to urgently address the leadership training crisis through collaborative and innovative models, and to ground all efforts in deep, responsive, and faithful theological reflection.

2. Detailed Summary of Plenary Session Content

The plenary session offered a powerful, multi-faceted, and impassioned analysis of the current state and future trajectory of global gospel proclamation. The narrative arc of the session moved from a wide-angle, data-driven global perspective to focused examinations of specific moral, structural, and theological crises, culminating in a specific and urgent call to address each challenge with coordinated and strategic action.

Data-Driven Mission: The Patmos Initiative and Global Bible Engagement

Paul Williams of the British and Foreign Bible Society and Chikondi Malomba of the United Bible Societies (UBS) initiated the session by outlining the "shape and contours" of global Bible engagement today. Williams introduced the **Patmos Initiative**, the largest-ever global survey of attitudes towards the Bible, which uses hundreds of data points (political, economic, demographic) to identify seven distinct "spiritual climates." His central thesis was that effective mission must be data-informed and context-specific. The research revealed a striking paradox: a vast global interest in the Bible among non-Christians (including 17% in South Korea) exists alongside massive ignorance, particularly in Asia, where 76% of the population know nothing about the Bible. The initiative also identified key mission fields, such as spiritually open Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East who are seeking to learn more.

Building on this global context, Chikondi Malomba presented a compelling case for Africa as a continent of both great spiritual hope and deep complexity. While Africa remains one of the world's most spiritually open regions, she identified significant barriers to Bible engagement: poverty, illiteracy, and the lingering post-colonial perception of Christianity as a "Western religion." For UBS, she stressed, making the Bible accessible in local languages, cultures, and formats (including oral, visual, and digital) is a matter of social and historical justice. Her message was that for the gospel to be truly transformative, its delivery must be contextual, inclusive, and empowering for local communities.

A Call for Moral Courage: The Global Abortion Crisis

Callum Miller provided a sobering and impassioned presentation on the global abortion crisis. He framed it not as a political issue but as a pre-eminent spiritual and moral challenge confronting the church. He began by listing the critical consequences of this trend: the direct opposition to the biblical value for life, and the demographic decline threatening the future of nations, particularly in low-fertility regions. He argued these challenges are a direct consequence of the church's failure to speak with both grace and truth on the issue.

Citing alarming statistics, Miller highlighted the frightening pace of this cultural shift. He shared data showing that Ireland moved from a pro-life majority to legalising abortion in just five years, and that 70% of young people in the Philippines now support it. This trend, he argued, is being actively promoted in the Global South through well-funded campaigns. His theological argument was stark: the New Testament word for hell, *Gehenna*, refers to an Old Testament site of child sacrifice, which he contrasted with Jesus's explicit welcome of children. The central message was clear: the church must rise with compassionate and courageous advocacy to "choose life" and build a culture where children are welcomed, mothers are supported, and fathers are cherished.

The Leadership Crisis: An Urgent Need for Training

Michael Ortiz of the Global Pastoral Training Alliance brought the preceding discussions into sharp focus by presenting preliminary data on the state of pastoral leadership. He began by identifying the critical issues confronting the global church, particularly in the Global South: a multitude of churches are drifting from the truth of the gospel. He argued these challenges are a direct consequence of a severe leadership training deficit.

Citing estimates that show a critical shortage of trained pastors globally (one for every 450,000 people ex-US), Ortiz shared research indicating that approximately 3.7 million churches worldwide lack a trained leader. The problem is that the church is multiplying faster than leaders can be equipped. The primary barrier preventing pastors from receiving training is the lack of accessible and affordable models.

In response to this crisis, Ortiz issued a powerful challenge for the evangelical community to form new collaborations. The **Global Pastoral Training Alliance**, he explained, aims to ensure that by 2035, every church has a pastoral leader trained in character and competency. This requires a shift away from exclusively formal, residential degree programmes towards non-formal, flexible, and contextual models that take theological education directly to local leaders. The central message was clear: the rapidly growing church cannot wait for leaders to come to institutions; the institutions must find innovative ways to go to the leaders.

Theological Faithfulness in a Fragile World

The final segment, led by Rei Lemuel Crizaldo of the WEA Theological Commission, introduced the Global Evangelical Theological Initiative (GETI). He characterised the modern context as a "BANI" world—Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, and Incomprehensible. In this fragile and uncertain environment, he argued, the church needs a renewed and robust theological vision. The mission of GETI is to discover and promote theological works that help the church reimagine a world as God intends, with a gospel "not just for everyone but also for everything and for all of God's creation." This was followed by a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the WEA's Theological Commission, which has historically worked to confirm and defend the gospel, create a space for faithful theology, serve the church, and network theologians. The central message was clear: all mission and advocacy must be rooted in deep, faithful, and contextually responsive theology to be sustainable.

4. Primary Arguments, Key Principles, and Theological Points

Bible Engagement and Mission Strategy

- **Data-Informed Mission:** Effective gospel proclamation in the 21st century must be strategic, leveraging data on cultural and spiritual climates to move beyond outdated assumptions.
- **Vast Missional Opportunity:** A significant, untapped spiritual curiosity about the Bible exists among millions of non-Christians globally, even in restricted nations and secular contexts.
- **The Justice Imperative:** Bible engagement is a matter of justice. Overcoming barriers of poverty, literacy, language, and post-colonial perceptions is essential to making the gospel truly accessible to all.
- **Contextual Delivery:** The Bible must be delivered in formats (oral, visual, digital) that are relevant to local cultures to unleash its transformative power.
- **God's Powerful Word:** Despite the challenges, God's Word is powerful and will accomplish its purpose (Isaiah 55:11), but the church is called to be a wise and strategic steward of its proclamation.

The Sanctity of Life and Cultural Advocacy

- **Biblical Foundation:** The call to protect life from conception is rooted in scripture, from the condemnation of child sacrifice (*Gehenna*) to Jesus's tender welcome of children.
- **A Global Crisis:** The rapid legalisation and cultural normalisation of abortion is a global trend that poses a profound moral, spiritual, and demographic threat to nations.
- **The Church's Responsibility:** The church has a non-negotiable responsibility to advocate boldly and publicly for the unborn and to create a culture that "chooses life."
- **A Compassionate Stance:** This advocacy must be filled with grace and truth, offering love and practical support to mothers, fathers, and families, not just condemnation.

The Leadership and Training Imperative

- **An Urgent Crisis:** An overwhelming majority of pastors globally, particularly in the fast-growing regions of the Global South, lack formal biblical and theological training, which directly contributes to widespread theological error and unhealthy church practices.
- **Growth Outpacing Equipping:** The central challenge is that the church is multiplying faster than it can equip shepherds to faithfully serve it, putting the health of the entire movement at risk.
- **A Call for Innovation:** The scale of the need requires "fresh theological education"—new models that are affordable, accessible, decentralised, and offered in local languages and contexts.
- **Valuing Proven Leaders:** The church must recognise and equip all effective ministers, including those who lack formal academic qualifications but are vital to the church's mission. Education must be taken *to* the leaders in their communities.

5. Conclusion and Call to Action

The plenary session presented a clear and undeniable conclusion: proclaiming the gospel in our shifting world demands a fundamental reorientation from the global church. The complex challenges of cultural hostility, spiritual ignorance, and explosive but under-resourced growth require more than passion; they demand wisdom, courage, and strategic, collaborative action. This reality requires moving away from outdated, one-size-fits-all models of mission towards a collaborative posture of mutual learning and support.

The primary call to action derived from the presentations is an urgent imperative to simultaneously address the external and internal crises facing the church. The very health and sustainability of this remarkable work of God are at risk if we do not act. The global church, therefore, must prioritise its resources, creativity, and personnel towards four key areas:

- 1) Leveraging data to conduct mission with greater intelligence and effectiveness.
- 2) Engaging culture with moral courage on defining issues like the sanctity of life.
- 3) Innovating and championing new, flexible, and accessible training pathways that can equip hundreds of thousands of pastors where they are.
- 4) Ensuring all our work is grounded in deep and faithful theology. The harvest is truly plentiful; the urgent task now is to labour together in wisely and effectively equipping the harvesters.

Invitation for Further Contribution

Your voice is still a vital part of this global conversation. We invite you to add your reflections, insights, and questions to this discussion by visiting the following link: <https://weafeedback.com/tuesday-28/>

1. Scroll down to the Panel session titles,
2. When ready, select 'Start Recording' and provide your input (responding to the questions below.
3. When done, select 'Stop'
4. No need to provide personal details
5. When ready, select 'Send'.

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