Second Generation Immigrant Ministry: Challenges, Opportunities, and Actions Required

Gemechu Olana

I want to introduce myself through my experience as an immigrant and immigrant pastor, which will also be reflected in this short article. Before receiving my present role as a double parish pastor in Austin, Minnesota, I served Oromo speaking Ethiopian immigrant communities in Greater Los Angeles and beyond for over twelve years. Besides congregational ministry, I have been involved in diaspora mission in various ways since 1999, the time I came to live in the immigrant community.

At the beginning of 1999, I had the opportunity to travel to Germany as an ecumenical and international practitioner with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus for a year, followed by years of theology studies in Berlin until 2005. It was here that, for the first time, I got an opportunity to minister to the Oromo speaking Ethiopian immigrant communities, alongside my volunteer work and studies. At the time, I was surprised to discover so many people from my home country who spoke my mother language, shared my experiences, and worshiped with the flair and fervor with which I used to worship in my home country. The discovery of my native people in a foreign land was a great comfort. It offered me a familiar social, emotional, and spiritual environment, not only where I overcame some of my homesickness, but also where I proceeded to practice my Christian faith in a way I better understood.

I was in Germany as a student, so you can only guess what finding a familiar community meant for most of those immigrants who were driven out of their home country under dehumanizing circumstances and who suffered harsh conditions until they reached this new but better world. In late 2005, when I immigrated to the United States, I became an immigrant myself and then a full-time immigrant minister. This opportunity has exposed me to many of the challenges that most immigrants face and worries about the future, especially for the second generation, which includes my three beautiful daughters. I will

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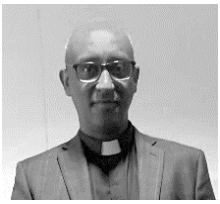

Rev. Dr. Gemechu Olana is a dual parish pastor at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Brownsdale, MN & Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Austin, MN. He has served as a mission planter, chairperson for the United Oromo Evangelical Churches Association, Board Secretary for the Oromo Evangelical Mission Society, a theological instructor at Mekane Yesus Seminary, Ecumenical Volunteer Service in Germany as a reverse-practitioner of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Berliner Mission Work. He did his postgraduate Theological Study at the Humboldt University of Berlin. He enjoys community engagements and painting in his free time. rev.g.olana@gmail.com

try to address those challenges and opportunities from those perspectives, particularly from my observations and experiences.

For most immigrants, including me, who flee harsh political repression and economic poverty, America is a beacon of hope. In contrast to the dehumanizing political and economic situations they may have endured in their native country, they conceive and hope that America will offer them another, better way to live. These immigrants bring this hope closer to reality by saving up all their money and giving up all their possessions to pay for the transatlantic trip to America, the land of their dreams. Regrettably, many suffer horrible hardships to get to America. For example, Ethiopians and Eritreans, the largest populations of African immigrants to the United States, have had to pass through war-torn regions such as Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, and Egypt. However, their despair turns to delight when they reach the United States—though that feeling may not last very long. As soon as they arrive, they become strangers in a strange land. Most of them face many challenges, uncertainty, and confusion until they find some form of normality and familiarity to offer them hope and consolation.

In the case of Ethiopians, but certainly also shared among other immigrant communities, places that offer such hope and familiarity are often the Ethiopian churches and fellowships in various cities in the United States. These immigrant churches and fellowships offer new immigrants a familiar social, emotional, and spiritual environment: people of their home country who speak the same language, with whom they can easily communicate and have an identity. It is here where they encounter hope through Christ and promises for tomorrow.

Since the early 1970s, thousands of Ethiopians have left their country and sought refuge in neighboring countries and the Western world because of the persistent deprivation of fundamental human rights, political instability, and economic crises that have continued to the present day. As a result, when Christian Ethiopians become refugees and settle in different countries and cities of the world, they start prayer groups, home fellowships, and churches, usually following the main national/language identities (Amharic, Oromo, and Tigrinya), like any other ethnic groups. Today, hundreds of Ethiopian congregations and Christian fellowships exist in Africa, the Middle East, Australia, Europe, and North America. The members of these congregations range from the twenties to the thousands, and often the number of children could double that.[1]

Before going further, I want to mention two important observations that should encourage us to be firm about our vision of immigrant ministry, particularly in our Lutheran church body. From my experience, two patterns stand out that often make me grateful and proud to be a Lutheran. Ninety-five percent or more of our Ethiopian Diaspora Lutheran churches and fellowships are hosted, supported, or in some sort of partnership with local Lutheran congregations, including some with non-Lutheran backgrounds, here in the United States and elsewhere.[2] Lutheran churches here in the States and in other parts of the world, like Canada, Australia, and all parts of Europe, have become a safe haven for most Ethiopian Lutheran/Evangelical Diaspora communities, particularly the Oromo speaking fellowships, by welcoming them and reaching out to them with the compassion of Christ. These welcoming ministries empower immigrants and have an enormous impact on their

emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. As a result, some Ethiopian fellowships have already become recognized LCMS congregations and are closely working with local churches. We also have more fellowships pursuing partnerships in different parts of our Synod.[2] In other words, the opportunity to serve the people in our neighborhoods is there and already taking place. But the big challenge is figuring out how to establish a sustainable outreach plan that goes beyond hosting to full partnership—that is, active discipleship that envisions second-generation multiethnic congregations.

Reaching the Second Generation of immigrants

Second-generation ministry requires specific and concrete mission goals and a culture that supports achieving those goals. Especially when we talk about immigrants and their young people, our effort should be based on the big picture of mission planning aligned with God's mission. This means that we need to be proactive in planning, which also includes understanding the challenges immigrant believers face, and those that their second-generation children face. As I pointed out briefly in my introduction, some challenges for immigrants are finding a home in their new world and overcoming economic, cultural, and communication barriers. When it comes to their children, it is even more complicated because they must find out how to navigate between two cultures to build their own identities. In addition to these factors, negative political discourse about immigration and the prejudices it creates against immigrants often further complicate the experience of immigrants and become a significant obstacle to the ministry of the Church. For example, fear and suspicion stemming from ongoing negative political debates over immigration, which often depict immigrants as criminals and threats to the nation and ignore the plight and humanity of immigrants, is a significant problem. In addition, this situation widens the division between established churches and immigrant communities and impedes mission possibilities.

Our approach and vision must align with God's mission

The governing principle of the ministry of second-generation immigrants should be purely God's mission. That means our theology matters more than anything when we talk about immigrant ministry as Christians. How we view immigrants and respond to their needs matters, whether in our churches or our neighborhoods, but is it not my intention to address the theology of immigration in this brief article. It has already been addressed in various studies. But I want to underscore the importance of what should inform our perspective and approach as we embark on this conversation.

Often, the political narrative of immigration in the United States obscures great opportunities for the mission on our doorstep and our primary responsibility as a church regarding immigrant ministry. In our current setting, the conversation about immigration is influenced by various complex political and ideological issues, which often impact our conversation in the Church as well.[3] In particular, the negative social, political, and ideological views that pervade our nation's conversations on immigration often interfere negatively with the Church's mission. Often, the political, economic, and cultural

conversations around immigration are very negative and based on the assumption that immigrants pose a burden to the economy and threaten the cultural identity of the host country. This kind of view is also common among believers, sadly.[4] A 2020 Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) poll found that 75 percent of white evangelical Protestant Republicans, the highest percentage of any Republican group, believe immigrants are invading American society.[6] Additionally, according to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey, the majority of white evangelical Protestants "say the US does not have a responsibility to accept refugees."[5] This indicates that believers cannot be immune from factors such as economics, politics, and other cultural desires, which influence our conversations on immigration. This does not mean, however, that we have no choice on how to respond to the needs of the immigrants among us in the light of the Gospel.

Given our calling and Christian identity and values, our interaction with immigrants should be different.[6] As believers, our vision and conversion to immigrant ministry should be guided by the Holy Scriptures and God's mission among us.[7] In other words, our primary authority, which should inform our views and conversations about immigrant ministry and the purpose of Christ's Church, should be God's Word and God's mission of drawing all people to Himself. God's Word is very clear about immigrants among us: They are not objects of our charity nor strangers we should fear and consider as a burden on us. They are our neighbors who God, in His divine wisdom, has placed among us, who we should embrace with compassion, and with whom we should share the love of Christ.[8] God's will for His Church is to treat immigrants as our neighbors and to love them by attending to their physical and spiritual needs. In particular, we must take outreach to immigrants very seriously if we genuinely care about God's mission and the second generation.

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The biblical concept that there is neither a native nor an immigrant also should inform our attitude toward immigrants. The more we absolutize our current reality as our final home, the more we exclude those we regard as foreigners. The Bible is clear that we are all immigrants and strangers in this world. With this assumption, the people of God were often cautioned about how they treated immigrants and aliens among them in the Old Testament. They were required to show aliens among them the same great care and compassion that they received from God, as they were in exile themselves in Egypt (Exod 22:21). They were themselves sojourners in a literal and spiritual sense, and so were Abram, Joseph, and Moses, their forefathers. And this experience of being strangers, whose destiny was beyond the primeval land, should motivate them to love the immigrants among them (Deut 10:18–19). Further, God's commandments about immigrants reveal His character, compassion, and concern for those in need, strangers, and those on the periphery of society.

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter uses the same analogy when he describes the Christian life in this world. He says that Christians are strangers and exiles (1 Pet 2:11 a), people of another Kingdom. Jesus demonstrated this as a stranger and exile in his earthly life, through his experience as a refugee in Egypt and being rejected among his own people. He also displayed compassion for strangers and the marginalized. These truths indicate to us that God's call for the Church is to reflect His own love for strangers in our midst, both in word and deed.

Based on these premises, ministry to the second generation of immigrants is a central responsibility of all our congregations. Through it, we practically express our commitment to God's mission and the commandment to love our neighbors like ourselves.

Second generation immigrant ministry is a God-given opportunity

Ministry to second-generation immigrants is an opportunity that God has provided to the Church in the Western world, where we have experienced the rise of immigrants in our communities. Tesfai Zeleke Tesema, in his recent book, *Hope for the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Can Rekindle Christianity in the West*, has eloquently demonstrated that second-generation immigrants can not only contribute to revitalizing the Church in the West but also help develop multicultural congregations that reflect the neighborhoods in which they are located.[9] Based on his own personal experiences, which the author of this article also shares, Tesfai demonstrates how God, in His divine wisdom and plan, has scattered Christian immigrants from the Global South to the Global North to help re-evangelize the West. From Tesfai's studies, we can conclude that God is not only creating new mission fields in American churches but is also sending missionaries for the revitalization of the Church in decline. The full realization of Tesfai's argument, however, is based on how Western churches deal with ministry to immigrants. If Western churches can see this as a mission opportunity given by God and invest in ministry to the second generation of immigrants, who can become agents of renewal through assimilation into established churches, then there is great hope.

The dispersion of southern people may allude to the dispersion of early believers to fulfill God's purpose.[10] If we look at immigrant congregations in our neighborhoods and churches, it is easy to see that they attract not only non-Christians but also faithful believers with the utmost missionary zeal. That means immigrant communities can be a vehicle for God's mission, through whom we can connect to the diverse communities in our neighborhoods, particularly the second generation. Regarding second-generation ministry, God has given opportunities if immigrant communities and host churches can learn to grasp the moment and transform it into an avenue for growth. We must also not undermine the idea that these immigrant churches can revitalize the mission of our established Church when they are allowed to share their vision of the Church.

Intentional engagement and strategic focus are essential

The materialization of this desire requires strategic missional focus: intentionally scanning our neighborhoods and seeking to partner with immigrant congregations and

ministers. Some may object to a culturally specific ministry and expect immigrants to just join and assimilate within established congregations. In reality, that does not happen, especially among first-generation believers.

The first immigrant congregations are mostly in a cultural preservation mode, like most of our declining established churches. And unless a healthy relationship is established early on with these culturally specific churches by realizing the state of their reality, it is almost impossible to influence their children and retain them as members of the Church. This also requires intentionally cultivating the culture and attitude of God's mission within our established churches, as well as among first-generation immigrant parents. It requires a Kingdom culture that focuses on a disciple-making God who sends and equips people to be active in their diverse communities in word and deed. Particularly among our established Anglo, non-immigrant congregations, it requires an outward-looking attitude that sees cultural diversity not as a problem but as a blessing and an opportunity to connect with diverse groups within a given community.

It demands compassion, love, and patience, sustained by a strong sense of community

Established host congregations must also be proactive in establishing a welcoming and edifying atmosphere for second-generation immigrant children, who are already living through many challenges. Particularly, without compassion, understanding, and a genuine relationship that transcends most of our cultural and racial barriers, it is impossible to have a second-generation immigrant ministry. Here, the role of immigrant congregations and immigrant parents should not be ignored. A mutual partnership and learning based on authentic love and patience, which focuses on the overall vision of God's mission, is key to successfully ministering to second-generation immigrant children.

The fact is that cultural differences and values often create tension and conflict. Not knowing how to handle cultural differences can be a significant obstacle to God's mission. Particularly, in such a setting, hosting congregation's impatience, lack of empathy, and different values and priorities can paralyze any outreach, especially immigrant outreach.

An excellent biblical example of how to deal with people from different cultures is the example of Paul in Acts 17. Paul gives us a model for interacting with people from different cultures with respect. After careful observation, Paul does not rush to disparage their practice but treats it respectfully enough to incorporate it into his preaching about Christ. This respectful approach not only gives Paul the privilege of being heard but also creates understanding through the gaping cultural divide. We may further read and deduce Paul's servanthood posture from many of Paul's writings. He modeled Christ by displaying a sincere concern for others, despite cultural differences (Acts 20–28) and subjected his apostolic privilege and Christian liberty to serve others, be it his people or those of different cultures and values (1 Cor 9:1–23). Paul's attitude helped him to exercise an effective ministry among people of diverse cultures and values. His humility and close identification with others, reflecting the character of Christ, enabled him to overcome complex cultural barriers. In other places, we also see a similar view of Paul (1 Cor 9:1–23). We need this kind of posture when we talk about immigrant communities: a posture of respect and

service that is motivated by the love of Christ. Another example is Philip in Acts 8. What we learn from him is the importance of being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the art of listening and proper communication. These qualities paved the way for Philip to communicate the Gospel of Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch.

Besides challenges of cultural differences and values, the second most important point we need to address is how we present ourselves and envision the future. Suppose we want to reach the immigrant children of the second generation. In that case, we need to focus on building a new community that comes together, not necessarily based on race, but on a common language and shared experiences that bring people to gather.[11] As they navigate between two cultures, second-generation immigrant children seek a genuine community. Unlike their parents, the question of identity and belonging is on their minds.[12] Therefore, the focus should be on creating an alternative community that takes the experience of immigrant children seriously and focuses on discipleship with the multicultural congregation in mind. In other words, it also means that our approach should always go beyond friendliness and toward establishing authentic relationships with purpose.

Sometimes certain circumstances, especially a lack of experience and differing external narratives, compel both immigrant and nonimmigrant congregations to focus on themselves and stay in a survival mode at the expense of later generations. The right approach is to challenge this kind of attitude by creating a welcoming, forward-looking alternative community of believers, nurtured by the Kingdom's values and visions, and strategically planning the next generation Church.

Here, host congregations can play an essential role in resourcing and sharing experiences by understanding the struggle of both immigrant parents and their children. But the approach should always go beyond providing resources and hospitality. It should involve a concrete ministry partnership, either in the form of leadership development, Christian parental education, meeting the needs of the neighborhoods, or hosting cross-cultural worship experiences from time to time. One example of this kind of work is that of LINC, an organization that tries to help congregations across the United States, especially those in cities, develop creative ways to immerse themselves in cross cultural ministries.[13]

From the outset, the partnership between host congregations and immigrant fellowships must be based on a shared mission vision, which should develop over time. For that to happen, the strategy must be intentional, active participation and a proactive partnership with a big vision of building the Church for future generations. That means it requires openness to a shared vision among hosting and immigrant churches and leaders. Shared vision requires cultivating an environment of respect and appreciation for individuality, cultural difference, and the heritage of others—an environment that aims for mutual growth in Christ and Christian love and service.

All these good aspirations, however, will not develop overnight but require deliberate cultivation of mutual rich and rewarding fellowship. It demands an authentic and lasting Christian communion that transcends our tendency toward tribal thought and strives to bridge differences through love and mutual learning. In other words, these partnerships require participants to see all of God's people as one family in Christ and to focus on

knowing one another, learning from one another, loving one another, forgiving one another, and supporting and caring for one another.

The practical approach is to organize joint services and events from time to time, in which the host and immigrant congregations both take part. It could be for a joint potluck, Vacation Bible School, or even joint neighborhood outreach events, which can bring people together and be mutually enriching. Intentionally encouraging immigrant church leaders and parents to be involved in hosting congregational business meetings, mission planning, or even worship would also be very enriching. Through these practical experiences, members and leaders of both congregations will have a chance to know each other better and mutually grow toward a more enriching communion, which is important for the Church's mission. Often, common misunderstandings and frustrations among host congregations and immigrant communities arise from a lack of mutual understanding, particularly in terms of culture and worship experiences.[14]

First-generation parents must be involved

It would be unwise to tackle the issue of second-generation immigrant ministry without the involvement of the first-generation parents. In most cases, immigrant parents overprotect their children and put a lot of pressure on them to retain their cultural identity. For the parent, the preservation of culture is often the greatest aspiration after education. Alongside English, they want their children to speak their language and worship in their own culturally specific churches. But this parental yearning, which is rooted in the desire for self-preservation, is often a source of conflict and misunderstanding because it fails to acknowledge the struggle second-generation immigrants face in navigating two cultures. Additionally, there are no well-resourced institutions that would help parents achieve this desire in a healthy educational environment. So, out of desperation, parents frequently turn to the Church for help. If this need of parents is not wisely managed by focusing on the well-being and faith of the children, it becomes a ministry obstacle. It diverts attention away from children's ministry, often distorting Sunday School and leading to poor and superficial discipleship.

This desire of parents, in the same manner, is a great hindrance to second-generation ministry among immigrant churches. A few years ago, while serving an Oromo speaking immigrant congregation, I realized that this problem required serious attention.[15] Parents' yearning for their children to embrace their cultural identity is good. But this desire must be balanced with their children's spiritual health and faith in a manner that is culturally relevant and appropriate to them. At that time, my approach was to provide the Sunday School teaching solely in English using the program already available through the help of the host congregation, who provided a Sunday School teacher. I asked the parents to take responsibility for teaching the language separate from the Sunday School class, which they did. But to arrive at this point and support the parents in their struggle to deal with their Americanized children, we set up a quarterly parenting seminar. During these seminars,

we shared experiences and addressed all the issues of the immigrant parents through sound biblical teachings.

Hence, from the outset, when we think about second-generation immigrant ministry, we need to be realistic and intentional in involving the parents. It will be a problem if parents emphasize cultural preservation alone and not the discipleship of their children in a culture and language they understand. Thus, from the start, it is imperative to equip parents and involve them in planning and casting a vision for second-generation ministry. Unless the immigrant parents are helped and equipped, encouraged to be real players in the second-generation ministry of the Church, and made aware that they are a vital force of God's mission through their children, an impactful second generation is hardly possible.

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We must recognize the challenges of immigrant congregations

The Christian immigrant faces some significant challenges that often frustrate the second generation's ministries. The main one is the lack of proper worship space and a sound support system that takes to account the reality of immigrants' experience and mission opportunities. Most of the time, immigrant churches use the facilities of established churches in the form of landlord-renter relationships without a shared long-term mission vision.[16] This attitude hurts the immigrant and host congregation's relationship, limiting it to a business or charitable agreement rather than a missional partnership. Therefore, when a problem occurs in the relationship, it is often handled with the same attitude as a tenant-owner relationship, not with a long-term mission objective that demands mutual missional goals based on love, forgiveness, and understanding. The financial constraints faced by immigrant congregations also are another challenge that not only exacerbates this problem but often creates misconceptions and the damaging dependency syndrome, especially in terms of support for pastoral ministry.

It is essential to recognize these challenges from the get-go and focus on building mutual shared mission outreach and ministry. I believe creating a supportive environment for second-generation immigrants starts here. The foundation we lay and the vision we have is what leads organically into multicultural congregations that embrace second-generation immigrant children as well as their parents. On the other hand, the tenant-owner relationships model, which is not missional, only fosters segregated congregations that are inward-focused and often a source great conflict.

Other significant issues include an adult-focused ministry without sound discipling among immigrant congregations and a lack of proper catechism instruction, which ultimately leads to the loss of the second generation. Immigrant churches and leaders are ill-equipped to do second-generation ministry unless they partner with established English-speaking congregations. Most immigrant pastors and leaders are not fluent in English and

are unfamiliar with the curriculum we have here in our Church body. In fact, first-generation pastors may not be able to fully address the needs of the second-generation children because of the cultural gap. Therefore, the possibility of immigrant children abandoning their Christian lives when they leave their parents' homes, particularly when they attend college, is very high.

There is strong evidence that if children, especially millennials, do not build a healthy relationship with the Church early in life, they are less likely to develop habits or associations that make it easier to stay or return to a church community after leaving home or after college.[17] Like their other American peers, young second-generation immigrant adults are likely to have a non-Christian spouse, which can lead to complete detachment from the church community and faith. Above all, like their other American peers, second-generation immigrants live in a dominant culture that is constantly evolving, particularly in terms of the relationship between morals and religion.

Unless properly equipped, second-generation immigrants will eventually join the majority who feel that church institutions are simply irrelevant or unnecessary. Therefore, supporting second-generation ministry is an excellent opportunity for hosting congregations. It is an opportunity to partner in God's mission and build up the next generation of the Church, and it is already within our reach. In this sense, the second generation can be a bridging generation. They live between two cultures, have unique skills, and are interested in engaging their communities. Through their shared experiences, they can also relate to other second-generation immigrant children, whom they can attract to the Christian faith, which could lead to a truly multicultural church that reflects our present community.

Purposeful plans and actions should contemplate the future church

A practical approach starts by intentionally seeking and partnering with ethnic immigrant ministers and congregations. Most of our established nonimmigrant churches are already located in a sea of diverse communities, so the opportunity to find mission partners is already there in their respective neighborhoods. Therefore, by aligning themselves with what God desires for His Church, our established nonimmigrant churches need to proactively scan their neighborhoods and make an effort to reach out to potential mission leaders and groups in the community. When they do, though, their outreach should not just revolve around compassion ministry but should focus on the practical building of a shared mission vision and partnership in neighborhood engagements. If this process is dealt with a clear mission drive and openness, the possibility of realizing multiethnic congregations favorable to the second-generation immigrant is possible.

Our nonimmigrant churches have a great missionary responsibility when it comes to immigrant ministry as well as the second-generation immigrant ministry. They are significantly better positioned in terms of resources, leadership, and status in the community. That means they must use their resources and standing for the advancement of the Gospel. This is not only a way in which they can promote the Gospel of Christ in their sphere of influence, but it is also an opportunity to practically lead by example and demonstrate the services of others with humility and love in the footsteps of Jesus.

Another practical step is to demonstrate openness and intentional practice of cross-cultural fellowship and worship from time to time with ethnic immigrant fellowships. Coming together to worship the Lord as people from many nations, tribes, and languages is a blessed experience and a foretaste of heaven (Rev 7:9–10). But the blessing can be unleashed if we commit ourselves to it with humility and openness, remembering the Gospel imperatives.[18]

Partnerships between our established churches and immigrant churches would have even more impact if they also included shared responsibility. We already have immigrant church leaders here in the United States who are mature, talented, and competent leaders. Seeking, cultivating, and including such leaders in the local ministry of the churches will undoubtedly bring positive synergy, new ideas, and new ways of carrying out the ministry of the Church. Most importantly, intentional inclusion will create a sense of belonging and opportunities for sustainable second-generation immigrant ministries. I also believe that these simple, practical measures could create a good foundation for ministry to second-generation immigrants, which may eventually lead to the organic development of the multiethnic church. To ignore this opportunity, on the other hand, is a mismanagement of what the Lord has provided, and this is also true for the immigrant church leaders. Neither should the leadership of the immigrant churches simply stand on the sidelines when our Church has trouble connecting with the local community and when the possibility of losing our second-generation immigrant children is high. They must also be open, go out of their comfort zone, engage, and commit to true missionary life for the good of the future Church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to stress that second-generation immigrant ministry requires recognition of challenges and opportunities, and an awareness of the responsibilities entrusted to it by the Lord. All resources, spiritual gifts, and ministry opportunities originate from the triune God (Jas 1:16–18; Eph 4:7–11; 1 Cor 12:1–11), and we are simply God's entrusted servants, given the privilege and responsibility to manage them for Him.

As receivers and custodians of the various measures of grace, we are all responsible for managing well the resources, abilities, and opportunities that God has entrusted us according to His desires and purposes. We all are called to be accountable partners with the triune God and the body of Christ to accomplish the *Missio Dei* (mission of God) under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This stewardship is carried out in two dimensions: in a vertical, trusting relationship with God and in a horizontal, loving relationship with others. Our stewardship flows out of God's act of love for us in Christ, which empowers us to love others with actions of Christ-like love in a practical, tangible missional spirit.

Often, the missing element of a strategic stewardship and partnership culture based on the above premises (especially the wise use of God-endowed resources, skills, and opportunities), as well as underestimating the unique opportunity for partnership across cultures, frustrates ministries, creates confusion and conflict, and blocks the expansion of the Gospel.

Both culture-specific and multiethnic ministries require cultivating strategic stewardship and strategic partnerships across cultures. These collaborations should be regarded as *mutual missional relationships* and opportunities to partner with God to accomplish the *Missio Dei*.

ENDNOTES

[1] For example, in the Twin Cities, where a lot of Ethiopians live, we have more than twenty-two organized Ethiopian churches.

[2] I know this firsthand from my involvement in the Association of Diaspora Oromo Speaking Ethiopian congregations worldwide, having chaired the association for six years (2010–2017). United Oromo Evangelical Churches (UOEC) is an umbrella organization of more than fifty Oromo Evangelical Churches throughout the world (in Africa, Australia, Canada, Germany, Norway, the UK, and the United States). Also worth noting is that Lutheran organizations, including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), have played an important role in resettling Ethiopian immigrants in many parts of the world, connecting them with local Lutheran congregations to welcome them, and advocating for them through the love of Christ.

[2] In our church, for example, organizations such as the Oromo Evangelical Mission Society (OELMS) and the North America Mekane Yessus Fellowship play a significant role in recruiting mission leaders, planting new immigrant churches, and establishing links between immigrant churches and hosting congregations and ministries of the LCMS in collaboration with our districts.

[3] In our current cultural setting, clearing our thinking is important. "Hauerwas and Willimon's contention is that the Christian church has lost its way and is captive to the culture. The church must regain the vision of being a distinct community, a distinct community made up of ordinary individuals (resident aliens) with a calling to be faithful to its Lord. The focus on living the life of the Savior in the world is clear from the other biblical quotation that begins their book: 'Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus' (Phil 2:5). Christians are to display the life of Jesus, and this requires acquiring a set of virtues, like peaceableness, kindness, hospitality, and patience. Christians and the church need to be a certain kind of people with a particular way of looking at and living within society. For the church to be the church requires training in these virtues, the nurturing of Christian tradition through Word and sacrament, and the continual practice of the virtues." M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press), 132–133.

[4] Close to half of evangelical believers in the United States tend to view immigrants from these perspectives. Evangelical Immigration Table and World Relief, *Evangelical Views on Immigration*, February 2015, https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Evangelical-Views-on-Immigration-Report.pdf

[6] Public Religion Research Institute, *Fractured Nation: Widening Partisan Polarization and Key Issues in 2022 Presidential Elections*, October 2019, https://www.prri.org/research/fractured-nation-widening-partisan-polarization-and-key-issues-in-2020-presidential-elections/.

[5] Hannah Hartig, "Republicans Turn More Negative Toward Refugees as Number Admitted to U.S. Plummets," Pew Research Center, May 24, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/24/republicans-turn-more-negative-toward-refugees-as-number-admitted-to-u-s-plummets/ .

[6] As Christians, our attitude and action should be shaped and guided by the biblical view of the immigrants among us, the grace of God that has shattered all barriers that divide humanity, the desire to build everything into one body, and the knowledge that our true and final home is in heaven with God (see Lev 19:33–34, Matt 25:35, Phil 3:20, Gal 3:28).

[7] Carroll R., *Christians at the Border*, 117.

[8] "Immigrants are, quite simply, neighbors. As neighbors, immigrants fall under the law of God, which calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves." *Immigrants Among Us: A Lutheran Framework for Addressing Immigration Issues*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (St. Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2012), 11.

[9] Tesfai Zeleke Tesema. *Hope for the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Can Rekindle Christianity in the West* (New York: Tenth Power Publishing, 2022).

[10] "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

[11] Church is built not on ethnic identity, but on language and shared experiences. Yes, a language can carry the identity of an ethnic group or a specific race, as often religion and ethnicity are deeply connected. But language is also a medium of communication, transcending sociocultural identities like race and ethnic identity. For example, not every English-speaking person is Anglo. And multiethnic congregations are possible due to this nature of language, being a means accessible to all who use it as a means of communication and understanding. At a time when we are starting to think about the Church in terms of a specific ethnic identity, rather than a common language and shared experiences, exclusion based on racial or ethnic identity is inevitable. It was based on this assumption that in the Ethiopian Mekane Yesus Evangelical Church congregations are named on the basis of their preferred language or land location, not ethnic identity. For instance, we say "Oromo speaking church," not "Oromo church." Unfortunately, here in the diaspora, some Oromo speaking churches call themselves "Oromo churches." Oromo is an ethnic identity, and "Afaan Oromoo" is a language. I understand that naming a church based on a specific ethnic identity is both theological and biblically wrong. The medium of communion should specify the church, not the exclusive ethnic identity.

[12] Tesfai provided details in the interview with twenty-five Ethiopian youths. Tesema, *Hope for the Second Generation,* 153.

[13] For more information and helpful resources, check LINC website at https://linc.org/.

[14] The author has a personal experience where the clash of cultures, and unspoken expectations have caused a lot of distress among host congregations and immigrant churches, to the extent of greatly frustrating immigrant mission outreach. For example, one of the battlegrounds is churches kitchen. Fellowship and eating after Church services are the most important cultural experience for most immigrant churches, hence use church kitchens and church fellowship halls excessively. But often they fail to see the unwritten or unspoken expectations of hosting Anglo congregations, especially in terms of time, cleanliness, and multiclause organization of kitchen tools. The worship experience is also likewise. This problem can only be resolved through mutual cultural awareness and understanding, as well as through sound conflict resolution that is not based on mere prejudice but on genuine empathy. We should also think that if a host congregation cannot learn to manage the difference with immigrant parents, how it may relate to their children.

[15] To give a complete picture, this happened when I was a pastor of an Oromo speaking Lutheran Church in Los Angeles, where some parents requested that Sunday school be taught in Oromo. The request of these parents was legitimate in terms of a desire to preserve cultural heritage, but the reality was that most of their children did not speak Afaan Oromo. They were Mission Matters 30,

children born and raised in the United States; they all spoke English. A few of them could speak some Afaan Oromo words, but not enough to understand Sunday School lessons taught in the language. This experience is shared among most Ethiopian and other immigrant churches, from my observation. At the time, my approach was not to change the medium of the Sunday lesson, as it was the relevant and just thing to do. As well, I did not discourage parents from worrying about their children speaking their heritage language. As an immigrant parent, I could relate to their struggle. Thus, I asked parents to help with needed resources and to identify who could teach Afaan Oromo after Sunday School. After intensive work, we were even able to develop our own Oromo League teaching materials with the help of parents who have a language curriculum development background, as well as a time for the language lessons. This program even helped the church get more children in church on Sundays because it was also aligned with parents' needs.

[16] From 2016 to 2018, when I was president of the Association of Oromo Speaking Evangelical Churches, this was my observation. The role of the association was to plant Oromo immigrant churches all over the world wherever there are Oromo immigrants and help the Oromo speaking fellowships connect with local hosting Lutheran congregations. During this time, I noticed that hosting congregations often provide space without long-term missional thought. Most often, this is with good intentions to help. But in the absence of a clear and deliberate mission plan, the result is usually small, parallel congregations with limited impact. Likewise, the immigrant churches often use the facilities of the hosting congregations like a guest, without long-term missional vision or commitment. This kind of approach limits both congregations' mission possibilities.

[17] See *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2018); According to another Barna Group study, "roughly seven out of ten Americans adults (71%) had a period of time during their childhood when they regularly attended a Christian church. Apparently, old habits die hard: a majority of those who attended church as a youngster still attend regularly today (61%), while a large majority of those who were not church goers as children are still absent from churches today (78%)." "Adults Who Attended Church as Children Show Lifelong Effects," Barna, accessed November 5, 2001, https://www.barna.com/research/adults-who-attended-church-as-children-show-lifelong-effects/

[18] One of the harmful practices I frequently observe with some of our established host congregations is to keep immigrant churches/fellowships away from using the sanctuary, limiting them to fellowship halls and church basements. Like other worldly institutions, this practice of keeping immigrants at the periphery does not assist the Church's mission of advancing the Gospel. This kind of practice fosters a guest and owner mentality, not a ministry partnership on which a shared vision of the future can be built and practiced. Eventually, when these immigrant fellowships grow or have come to some awareness and sense of independence, they will leave to look for alternative conducive worship environments. This means that the lack of Kingdom mentality and mission hospitality will eventually lead to missed mission opportunities.