

2020 Annual Report for Eric Belz

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As I'm sure you are aware, this has been a most peculiar year in many respects. As I write this annual report, I am struck by how different this year has been than the past nine years I've been engaged with Pathways in Africa. So, although there are some consistent themes, much of this year serves as an anomaly, singularly unique from previous years or years to come.

1. Your Ministry: *Explain your ministry in one-two sentences for a lay person.*

My ministry is to train African (and global) pastors and church leaders to study, obey and teach God's Word well, equipping them to pass this training on to others. At the same time, I equip US pastors to assist in this work. This year, much of my focus has been completing research for my doctorate (through BIOLA's School for Intercultural Studies) and writing my dissertation.

2. Strategic Value: *Tell why your ministry is important or strategic and how it fits into the "big picture."*

This ministry is important and strategic because most pastors in the majority world (Global South) have never been trained in how to study, understand, and teach God's Word to their people, or how to use it to grow healthy, Christ-honoring churches. Over 90% of pastors in Africa have received no formal training, so they slide into false teaching such as prosperity theology, syncretism, and working to earn salvation, all of which hurt the cause of Christ. Africa is rapidly becoming the "epicenter" of the Christian world (highest Christian population), yet without adequate training, the future is ominous for the church. The training we offer grounds pastors, ministry leaders, and community leaders not only in the truths of Scripture, God's revelation of Himself and His will for us in Christ, but it also gives them tools so they can study and teach God's Word well and grow their churches on a biblical foundation. This biblical foundation will lead to healthy ministries as God's kingdom grows and authentic disciples are made in all nations (Matt.28:18-20), all of which honors and glorifies Christ: the "big picture." The series of nine Pathways workshops we offer over three years to each network is effective for long-term change on a trajectory for exponential growth. The trainings are reproducible and sustainable because they are "owned" and driven by nationals. Multiplication of the trainings to other pastors is embedded in the DNA of the training, so hundreds and thousands of pastors can receive deeply needed training.

This year, after being recalled from training in Zambia in March and restricted from all travel, I immediately turned my attention to my dissertation. By God's grace, I had just completed collecting all the research data from global pastors, and for the rest of the year I have been analyzing, coding, synthesizing, researching other published literature, writing, reviewing, editing, and working to complete this monumental capstone project. Regarding the strategic value of this project, from which Pathways is already benefiting, the truth is that in-depth, scholarly research and evaluation of a Western training that has been taken to global audiences is rarely done. However, I am discovering a treasure trove of insights from global graduates of our program, and we are implementing this understanding by improving many aspects of our training. Not only will our team and larger division benefit, but I believe God will use the lessons learned to assist many other organizations, and I have already been approached by several seeking to glean from what I'm learning. By God's grace, I hope to have this project largely completed by early 2021, and I am positioned to graduate in May 2021.

6. **Successes and Challenges:** *What are some of the encouragements and discouragements you've seen this past year?*

Successes – As I look back on the past year, I can see God's hand at work in unmistakable ways. I'm encouraged that I'm making significant progress on my dissertation. In retrospect, if I had maintained the heavy travel/training schedule that I planned in 2020, there is no way I would have been able to get nearly so far on my project. My team is already completely rewriting one entire workshop due to findings that surfaced from my research, with more revisions on the way.

Another victory is that Holly has been healed, quite miraculously, after eight long years of struggling intensely with health issues! This is a testimony of God's grace. Because I'm home much more than I would otherwise have been, we have enjoyed a sweet time of mutual encouragement and support.

There are a number of other blessings that I could recount:

- By God's grace, our three kids are all walking with the Lord.
- We are staying connected with our global and domestic ministry partners as we strive to be faithful to the Lord's call on our lives. It has been a joy to meet virtually with many of our stateside partners, get caught up, and pray together.
- I am enjoying sweet and regular devotional times with the Lord.
- I have been able to preach in a number of churches throughout the fall in support of weary pastors.
- My body appreciates regular sleeping, eating, and exercising routines.

Challenges – This has been a challenging year in many respects, as it has been for most. God has wired me to be with people, to land in foreign locations, evaluate the situation, and offer assistance, to work well with frequently changing surroundings and schedule, to actively engage in equipping global leaders to handle the Word well. None of these have been able to happen for the past many months. As the cold, wet, dark winter in the Pacific Northwest sets in, and I have the prospect of several more weeks of work on my dissertation all alone in front of my computer, things seem a bit bleak. Yet I know that as I persevere, God will give me the strength I need, and together we will come out on the other side walking closer than ever.

This has also been a challenging time for pastors globally, particularly in Africa. Many have not been able to meet regularly with their congregations which means no offerings and problematic isolation. In collectivistic cultures where people grow spiritually as they are together in relationship, it has been a strain. I have tried to offer physical, emotional, and spiritual help where possible, but I miss my African brothers and sisters, and I know they miss me.

7. **Future:** *What ministry goals and plans do you have for the next year?*

Obviously, I need to hold any plans quite loosely in our rapidly changing world. However, setting targets can offer hope to many of us. So here are some of mine:

- Finish dissertation draft early 2021, defend the work before the committee, then make final revisions and graduate in May 2021.
- Our Pathways team is "hoping" that by early 2021 we will be allowed to return to travel and trainings, particularly in Africa and Latin America. Please join us in this prayer. Refresher courses will be required initially, so I need to develop these.
- Launch at least three new networks: one in Kenya, one in Uganda, and one in Ethiopia.
- Graduate one network in Kenya and possibly one network in Togo.

- Mobilize teams of US pastors to participate in these efforts.
- Continue to pray for a full-time partner to assist me in this enormous work.

8. **Finances:** *What are your financial needs to accomplish your ministry?*

We are very thankful for the many partners, both individuals and churches, who give sacrificially and generously so I can continue training pastors internationally. We cherish the relationships we share, and pray they continue long into the future.

As we look toward me returning to travel to Africa perhaps in early 2021, and Holly's part-time salary commensurate with her mission work (see her annual review), some attrition in giving due to COVID, and the needs global pastors are facing, we need to raise approximately \$1800 more in monthly support to cover our expenses and the assistance we offer global partners. We trust God will provide this, and we are happy to share details with churches or individuals who may be interested in partnering with us.

9. **Prayer Requests:** *What are your biggest ongoing prayer requests?*

Personally

- Please join us in praising God for healing Holly has experienced this year.
- Continue to pray for complete healing for Alyssa (16 yrs old), although she is showing some signs of improvement.
- Alyssa is in an online program where she gets high school credit for college classes she is taking, and seems to be progressing well.
- Both the boys (Adam, 21 and Andrew, nearly 20) are living up north and attending Western Washington University courses online.
- I'm thankful Holly was able to travel with me domestically this Fall, and please pray she continues to gain strength and one day will be able to travel with me globally.



In ministry

- Please pray for perseverance and joy in completing my doctorate.
- Obviously, please pray for the eradication of COVID, and that travel restrictions will be lifted soon so training of pastors can resume.
- Pray for God's grace upon existing ministry partners (global and domestic) and His leading in connecting with new potential partners.
- Praise God with us for the wonderful work He has been doing, and we eagerly anticipate and depend upon His continued activity.

Submitted with appreciation for our supporters and gratitude to our awesome God.

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