

“Sharing in Our Overflowing”

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A Stewardship Reflection

2nd Corinthians 8:1-15

November 18, 2018

Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

In that reading, Paul is talking about three far-flung communities. We have to know a bit about them.

- 1) We begin in Macedonia. Today it's a country. In Paul's time it was a region that included much of northern Greece. Paul had started small congregations there. Now he was back staying with them. They'd had it hard. They had suffered persecution for their allegiance to Jesus. Many were poor because the message of the Messiah is especially appealing among the under-classes. There had been a famine. They had very little. Yet they were overflowing because of Jesus' victory over sin and death.
- 2) The second community is down in the heart of Greece: Corinth. Corinth had a reputation for abundance: an abundance of ambition; an abundance of “new money”; an abundance of entertainment. It was a bit like Las Vegas, Silicon Valley, and Manhattan rolled together. Paul had started a congregation there too. They had a lot going for them. They were abundant in faith, eloquence, knowledge, commitment and love. They also had all sorts of problems getting what it means to belong to Jesus. (That's why Paul's letters to them are so helpful for us!)¹
- 3) The third community was across the sea: Jerusalem. For Jews like Paul, Jerusalem was everything. But very few of those Christians over in Corinth and Macedonia were Jews. They were Gentiles. They were some of the amazing fruit of the work Jesus had given Paul: bringing the Good News of God beyond Israel. They were Christianity's innovative, growing edge.

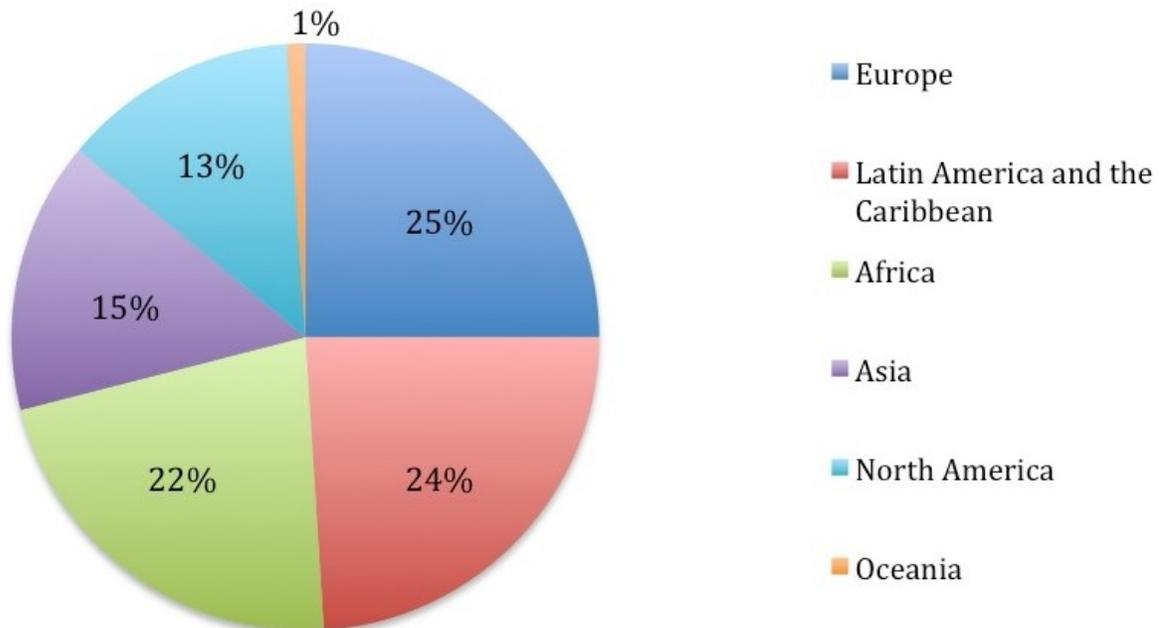
But Jerusalem was where it had all started. Yet the Jewish Christians there were having a hard time. Folks were suspicious of them, even hostile. They were struggling. They were poor.

And they weren't too sure of those Gentiles in places like Corinth and Macedonia. The idea that these outsiders were now part of God's People was a mind-blowing concept. They looked different, sounded different, and acted differently. They had ways of worshipping, praying, believing, and living the Christian life that were new and sometimes troubling.

¹ Michael J. Gorman calls the Corinthian congregation Paul's “problem child.” [Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters](#) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 227.

These next charts show where Christians are and how that is changing.³

Global Christianity: 2015

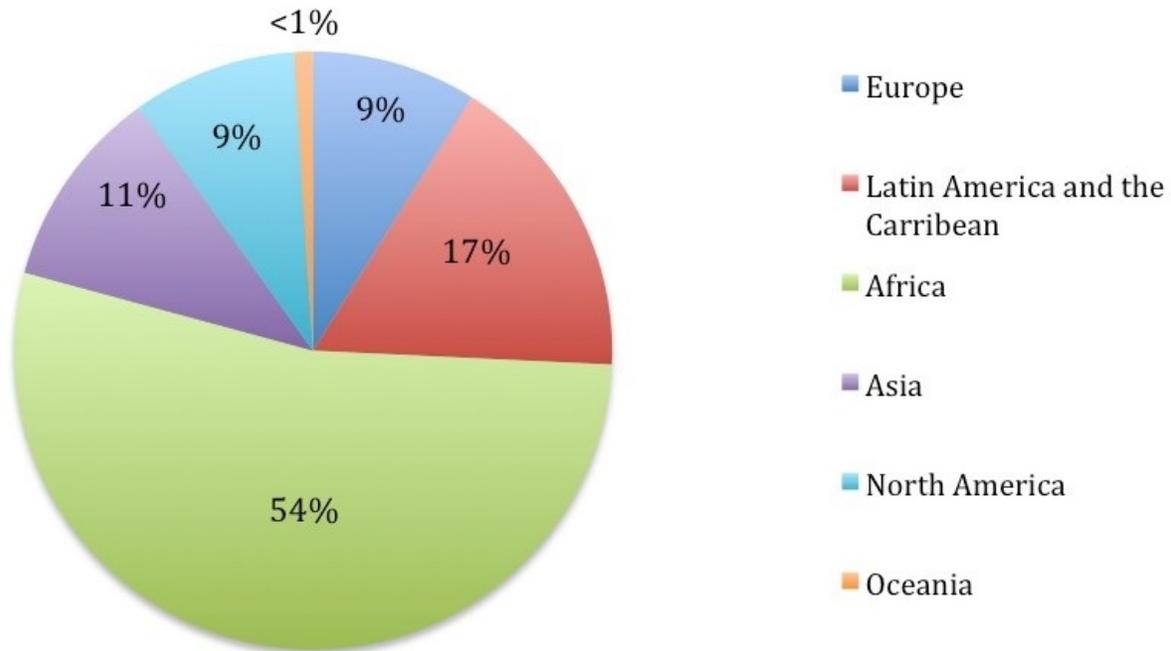


In 2015, the largest number were in Europe (blue), followed closely by Latin America (red) and Africa (green), each with about a quarter of the world's Christians. North America had 13%.

Look at what they're predicting by the start of the next century.

³ Corey Williams, "The Shifting Centre of Global Christianity" [Leiden Religie Blog](http://leidenreligieblog.nl/index.php/articles/the-shifting-centre-of-global-christianity) (Leiden, NL: University of Leiden, February 6, 2016)
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Global Christianity: 2100



More than half of Christians will live in Africa (green). Followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (red) and Asia (purple). North America and Europe combined, where Christianity was centred for more than a millennium, will be home to less than 20%.

This is the Holy Spirit at work. Just as the Spirit moved Paul to bring the Good News beyond the Jewish people, so now the Spirit is growing thriving Christian communities in places where they hardly existed a century ago.

Our sisters and brothers in Christ might look different from us, sound different, and act differently. They can have ways of worshipping, praying, believing, and living the Christian life that are new to us, and sometimes challenging. Do not be surprised. From the beginning, this is how God does things.

What holds us together?

It is this: God has given us an abundance to share.

III

Back to that beginning, and those three communities Paul was dealing with.

What had the Christians in Jerusalem shared? Jesus! Many of them had known him during his earthly ministry. They had kept, safeguarded and passed on the Good News of his life, death and resurrection. Though they were still trying to get their heads around the Gentile thing, they were supporting Paul and what he was doing in places like Macedonia and Corinth.

What did those congregations in Macedonia and Corinth have to share? The folks in Jerusalem needed financial help. Paul asked those in Corinth, Macedonia and elsewhere to donate money.⁴

Paul reminded them what Jesus has for us.

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He was rich

[he was the Son, the One God with the Father and the Spirit],

and he became poor for your sake,

[he became one of us, even like a slave, crucified]

so that through his poverty you could become rich.

We belong to Jesus because we know he has given us his abundant, overflowing gift — himself! The riches of Jesus's grace and mercy are now ours to overflowing.

Jesus has made us, in our own far-flung congregations, dependent on each other. None of us can make it on our own. That is how he has designed us. We are joined in an economy of sharing because we all belong to Jesus.

Tis collection for Jerusalem which Paul was working on was a powerful symbol of this deep truth: we are all in the family of Jesus. Despite our diversities and differences, we have a partnership of sharing in Jesus' life, his mission and his gifts.⁵

⁴ The Corinthians had already pledged their support. This had inspired the Macedonians who, though poor, gave as much and even more than they could afford. The awkward thing was that the Corinthians had not yet followed through on their promise. So Paul is 'encouraging' them. He is not trying to guilt. He wants to inspire them. Sharing needs to be free and willing. So he tells them what the Macedonians have been doing.

⁵ The Greek word for this partnership is *koinonia*.

IV

A very important way we do this is through the Mission and Service of our United Church of Canada. Through this, we share in partnerships with our siblings in Christ around the world who are serving their neighbourhoods, as we serve in ours.⁶

On this map, you can see the places where we have formal partnerships.⁷ They are partnerships. We share together.

What do we have to share with them? An abundance of wealth! Certainly more than most of our partners do. We also have experience in certain things, highly educated leaders which we offer to serve them where they see the need.

All the money that supports this Mission and Service comes from the offerings of people like you and me. There is not some magic source somewhere. It's all money that God has put into our pockets and purses to steward for God. We each can be part of sharing with our partners. So please be generous in your support of Mission and Service. Please support what we do here, and what we do with our partners elsewhere. You can do that simply by marking on your envelop, or your cheque, or your Pre-Authorized Giving instructions how you want your gift used.

What do our partners share with us?

Those in Africa, Asia and Latin America are Christianity's innovative, growing edge. Many of their congregations were started by people who came from places like Canada, but now they've take hold, are correcting some of our mistakes, and they are flourishing. Meanwhile, we are often having a harder time. We're struggling.

These are some of my friends who have come to serve in the United Church. They are from South Africa, Jamaica, Ghana, and Sri Lanka. They are blessing their congregations and our whole United Church with their faith in Jesus, their confidence in the Good News, their skills, their education, their experience. They, and many others, are revitalizing us, because the Holy Spirit is working in them.

Friends, we share in an overflowing abundance together, because together we are the family of Jesus. This is good news! Thanks be to God!

⁶ You can learn more about our approach to mission partnerships here:

www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/global-partners

⁷ I created a map using information from this document:

www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/mission_service_partners.pdf