An Introduction to WHMI's Bible Institute

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I. Preamble

Across the world there are millions of pastors and ministry leaders who have never received theological education. Furthermore, in more developed contexts where pastors have theological training, current approaches may lack the capacity needed to develop sufficient numbers of new pastors. As a result, millions of people who have responded to the gospel have limited access to biblical truth taught to them by their leaders. As a result, they are often led astray, either by false teachers or by those who are simply misguided. This is a global crisis, one that requires a course correction. This is not a call to a new method; it is a plea to include a model given to us in the New Testament (2 Timothy 2:2), an approach that is based on the concept of multiplication.

II. Philosophy and Strategy

World Hope Ministries International (WHMI) is a Christian ministry engaged in training pastors, growing churches, and transforming communities. The core of WHMI's approach is teaching current and prospective pastors and ministry leaders, then discipling and mentoring them to teach others. Our strategic approach has made WHMI a global leader in delivering basic theological education in diverse settings. As such, WHMI partners with other ministries around the world who are doing Great Commission work but lack the ability to provide theological education to those with whom they work.

When pastors are trained, churches are healthier, and new churches can be planted that have trained leaders. This is essential since healthy churches are God's primary means of bringing Gospel transformation to communities. Multiplication of theological education can occur as those who have received training actively engage in training others. All that WHMI does to engage in Kingdom work is built on the foundation of training leaders and working beside churches to help them become healthy. Trained pastors and healthy churches enhance all other Kingdom investments.

III. The Global Problem

There is significant disparity in the distribution of training among the world's pastors. For example, in the United States, there are approximately 600,000 pastors.[1] Two-thirds of them hold a master's or doctoral degree.[2] This equates to one theologically trained pastor for every 812 Christians in the U.S. Outside of the U.S., where the majority of the world's Christian population lives, more than 85% of pastors have never had theological training. Today, there are more than 2,000,000 pastors who have never had theological training.[3]

The lack of access to theological education is not just a problem for the majority world. In locations where pastors may have training, there is often an insufficient number of trained pastors to shepherd existing churches. In either case, there are not enough pastors and church leaders being developed to pastor existing churches and future churches yet to be planted.

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[1] http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#numclergy (last accessed October 2, 2022).

[2] *Protestant Pastors' Views on Seminary Education,* Lifeway Research, released March 22, 2010, https://lifewayresearch.com/2010/03/22/lifeway-research-finds-pastors-continue-to-value-use-seminary-education/ (last accessed October 2, 2022).

[3] In 2004, the number was estimated at around 2,000,000. See Stan Guthrie, Missions in the Third Millennium: 21 Key Trends for the 21st Century, Revised and Expanded (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004), 181.

Whether in developed nations where there are insufficient pastors or in less developed nations where pastors are already serving without training, this threatens the healthy spread of the Gospel. Pastors who lack training struggle to lead healthy churches. Without theological training, pastors often gravitate to false teaching, making them nearly indistinguishable from those who intentionally misuse biblical teaching to profit themselves. Furthermore, without a sufficient supply of pastors, Christians are also left vulnerable without trained shepherds.

This is a persistent problem, and it remains unfinished Great Commission work. WHMI has identified four common barriers that make it difficult for pastors to receive training: time, money, proximity, and academic qualification. While all four barriers are not present in every context, any one of these can hinder access to theological education. Current approaches to theological education alone cannot overcome these barriers.

IV. A Proven, Biblical Solution

2 Timothy 2:2 indicates that those who have received training should be engaged in training others, who then train others. This is the concept of multiplying discipleship applied to theological education. WHMI's Bible Institute has developed an approach that can be multiplied through essential core classes delivered in approximately 200-250 hours of instruction. As pastors receive training, nationals from within the context can become the teachers, creating an indigenous movement of theological competency. This approach originally proved successful after completing four years of field testing (2008-2011). Today, WHMI has become a global leader in providing theological training in multiple contexts.

WHMI Sources Instructors and Provides the Curriculum.

WHMI works with national leaders and missionaries to identify locations, schedule classes, and coach and mentor students through our course material. Our pedagogical method is face-to-face, lecture and discussion, usually in an intensive format. In locations where there are not qualified instructors, WHMI helps provide qualified instructors who can deliver course material to pastors within their context.

Graduates of WHMI's Bible Institute Become the Instructors.

Typically, students graduate with a Certificate in Ministry (or Diploma depending on the context) in approximately 3 years. Students receive this education while maintaining their jobs and continuing to serve in their field of ministry. Qualified graduates are coached and mentored to become instructors. WHMI works with these national instructors to assist them as they establish new locations of the Bible Institute. As graduates become instructors, theological competency is carried forward, creating indigenous, locally led theological education. Globally, the ratio of WHMI's graduates to instructors among nationals is around 10%. Since 2019, the majority of all instruction globally has been done by nationals.

Designed Multiplication

Multiplication occurs when first-generation students (the ones taught initially) become the second-generation instructors and work with their graduates to help them continue to open new locations. This is 2 Timothy 2:2 in action. It honors Paul's admonition to Timothy that those who have been trained should train others. This approach maximizes the investment of those who serve as instructors and multiplies theological training among nationals. The result is low-cost, sustainable theological education that is indigenously led.

A Tuition-Free Approach

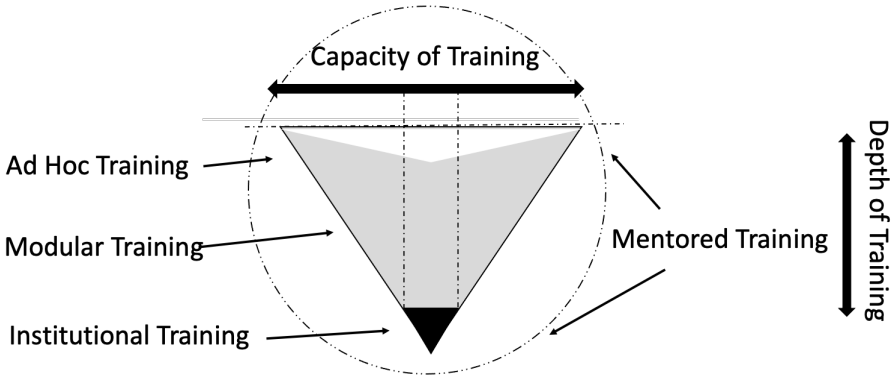
The Bible Institute collects no tuition fees, does not pay instructors, and does not charge for the use of the curriculum. Students do invest their time (many take time off from work), make their own arrangements to get to class, and provide for their own meals and/or lodging during class. Additionally, locations are responsible for making copies of the curriculum (about 30 pages for each module for each student). As we invest, the beneficiaries are also investing in their own training.

Monitoring and Enhancing Quality

In 2019, WHMI received a generous grant from the Dovetail Impact Foundation (formerly, the David Weekley Family Foundation) to implement a system of measurement and evaluation. In 2019, new data gathering devices were implemented. These systems allow us to measure and monitor the effectiveness of our instructors, the quality of our course content, and applicability and level of comprehension in the local context.

V. WHMI's Bible Institute and Other Types of Theological Education

Strategies for pastoral training vary, from distribution of literature to conferences to academic institutions. There are four basic types of theological training: 1) conferences or seminars, 2) institutional/degreed, 3) modular (the approach used by WHMI's Bible Institute), and 4) mentored training. In the graphic below, note the relationship between the depth of training and its capacity.



Institutional training is the best training for depth. In many places around the world, it rarely provides adequate capacity. Ad hoc training has significant capacity without the ability to provide essential depth. WHMI's Bible Institute fills the significant gap between short conferences/ad hoc training and institutional/academic training. Unlike institutional training, modular training can be multiplied, offering the possibility of high capacity while still maintaining a significant level of depth. Since 2011, WHMI has worked to test how much theological training can be replicated. The results have been extraordinary. We believe that the path Paul set forth for Timothy still represents an essential part of approaches needed to ensure there are 1) adequate numbers of pastors and ministry leaders receiving basic theological education and 2) that there are no pastors doing their job without access to theological education.

VI. Curriculum

WHMI teaches 16 courses, 14 required courses and 2 elective courses (chosen in consultation with local leaders). Core courses focus on foundational Christian doctrines and essential skills (biblical interpretation and exposition), all necessary for pastors leading God's people. Each course delivers in 12-15 hours and has been designed to work cross-culturally. Because WHMI works to foster indigenous movements of theological competency across multiple cultures, the curriculum avoids teaching methodologies that are purely Western or American based. Instead, once indigenized, nationals are able to contextualize and apply the content, as needed.

Core Courses (required for all graduates):

Doctrine of Salvation	Doctrine of God and Trinity
Biblical Interpretation	Doctrine of Christ and Man
Doctrine of the Holy Spirit	Principles of Discipleship
Doctrine of the Church	Biblical Worship
Introduction to the New Testament	Introduction to Christian Apologetics
Introduction to the Old Testament	Doctrine of Last Things
Expository Preaching	Missions and Evangelism

WHMI's courses are written and overseen by our Curriculum Editorial Board (CEB). This group of faithful scholars, pastors, and mission practitioners receive constant feedback from the field through WHMI's measurement and evaluation systems. This has enabled the CEB to provide ongoing improvements to the course notes and course content.

VII. Current Status of the Bible Institute

By the end of 2026 Q3, WHMI's Bible Institute had over 388 active locations in 58 nations, with over 10300 students enrolled in various stages of the Bible Institute Certificate program. The WHMI Bible Institute has celebrated the graduation of over 6900 students, and we are actively collaborating with these graduates to establish new locations of the Bible Institute in their regions.

About the WHMI President and CEO

Stuart Sheehan is a missions strategist and global theological educator. As President and CEO of World Hope Ministries International (WHMI), he leads a ministry that is working to help catalyze a global movement to make theological education accessible to every pastor and ministry leader in the world. Stuart has earned doctorates from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland (PhD-Divinity), and The University of Texas at Austin (DMA). He is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), the Evangelical Missiological Society (EMS), and has been a Praxis Scale Fellow. Before serving with WHMI, his ministry in the local church spanned more than 30 years. In 1987, he married Amy; they have three grown children, a daughter and two sons. He enjoys being Grandaddy and supports smoked meat and tacos.

For more information, contact us: https://www.whmi.org/contact