

# **The Cross-cultural Experience of Ghanaian Pastors Ministering to Second-Generation Ghanaian-Americans in the US**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates how Ghanaian immigrant pastors in the Church of Pentecost in the U.S. adjust while ministering to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. A cultural and generational gap exists between the pastors and the American-born youth. Through interviews with three pastors, the study identifies two key strategies for bridging this gap: education and contextualization. Education ensures both pastors and congregants understand each other's cultures, while contextualization allows pastors to adapt their ministry to the cultural context of the younger generation.

**Key Words:** adjusting, Church of Pentecost, contextualization, education, Ghanaian immigrant pastors, second-generation Ghanaian-Americans

## **Introduction**

The Church of Pentecost (COP) was established in Ghana in 1962 under the leadership of an Irish missionary couple, James and Sophia McKeon (Markin, 2015, p. 45). They believed in indigenous empowerment and leadership. From the onset, the McKeons “wanted COP to be indigenous with Ghanaian culture, ministry, and finance” (Onyinah, 2004, p. 221). They thought that “it would be difficult to grow an ‘English Oak’ in Ghana. A local species at home in its culture, should grow, reproduce and spread: a church with foreign roots was more likely to struggle” (Leonard, 1989, p. 65). The McKeons ensured that local Ghanaian members would take up the leadership of COP while they were still alive: “They brought in a Ghanaian Executive Council to lead the church and administer its affairs. They would sit down in meetings and make contributions to the discussions when they thought their decision went against Scripture” (Onyinah, 2004, p. 223).

Over the past six decades, COP has become a global Pentecostal church. Onyinah asserts that “the Church of Pentecost has moved from beyond the shores of Ghana to become a worldwide Christian denomination” (Onyinah, 2016, p. 15). Similarly, Ojo reports that “the Church of Pentecost, an indigenous church that had a background in the Apostolic Church, which is British, has made much progress in foreign missions” (Ojo, 1997, p. 552). As of 2023 December, COP has been established in 169 countries with a total membership of 4,534,644. This membership includes branches in Ghana and outside Ghana. According to the COP 2023 annual report, the membership in Ghana is 3,864,555, while the membership outside Ghana stands at 670,289 (The Church of Pentecost, 2023). COP in the US has 12 regions and 82 districts; five Spanish-speaking churches, four French-speaking churches, and one Swahili-speaking church; one South Asian church; and, five churches on military bases (The Church of Pentecost, USA, 2023).

The local churches of COP in the US are mainly led by Ghanaian pastors. They are Ghanaian immigrants who migrated to the US some years ago. Markin shares that the COP has established branch churches in various states and raised Ghanaian pastors from those congregations to oversee them (Markin, 2015). The COP in the US “has benefited from young people through the immigration inflow of young people already members of the mother church in Ghana” (Asirifi, 2021, p. 96). As of December 2023 the COP in the US had 115 pastors, and

110 of them were Ghanaian immigrants (The Church of Pentecost, USA, 2023). This means almost every Church of Pentecost in the US is pastored by a Ghanaian immigrant pastor.

How do Ghanaian immigrant pastors minister to the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans? In the COP in the US, pastors are from Ghana and the younger generation in the church were born and raised in the US. This younger generation is more accustomed to the US-American culture and context than their parents' Ghanaian culture. This study seeks to understand the cross-cultural experience of the Ghanaian pastors ministering to the second generation Ghanaian-Americans in the US.

## **Literature Review**

### *Ministering to Next-Generation Immigrants*

Ministry among the second-generation of the worldwide diaspora is important and essential for the future of global Christianity. Missions to diaspora children is Bible-based and therefore could not and should not be taken for granted. In addition, ministering to the children in the diaspora is a great opportunity for churches to seize and be deliberate about. Olana also shares that “ministry to second-generation immigrants is an opportunity that God has provided to the Church in the Western world” (Olana, 2022, p. 173). Similarly, Tesema points out that ministering to second-generation immigrants is important because it would not only bring about the revitalizing of Christianity in the West but would also help in developing multicultural congregations in that context (Tesema, 2022).

Ministering to second-generation African immigrants in western lands like the US can sometimes be challenging. One factor that has contributed this challenge is the inability of second generations to assimilate in African immigrant churches. Because most second-generation African immigrants choose to identify themselves as US-Americans over their African heritage, they do not feel a sense of belonging in African churches (Norton & Nyanni, 2023, pp. 216-217).

Second-generation immigrants struggle with cultural identity and adjustment. Arthur states that, “with the continued constitution of the African diaspora in global domains, questions arise as to the nature and forms of identities manifested by the second generation of immigrant youths” (Arthur, 2010, p. 161). Although there may be some differences among second-generation youth, “they often share the common experience of being bicultural by holding both heritage and mainstream cultural identities” (Gigue`re, Lalonde, & Lou 2010, p. 14). Kwak explains that “when a family immigrates to a new country for the purpose of long-term settlement, its members live in two cultures: their ethnic-heritage culture prior to migration, and the new culture of the society in which they currently reside.” Kwak further asserts that sometimes second-generation immigrants easily and quickly adjust into the host culture while their parents find it difficult to adjust to the host culture. This often leads to misunderstanding and disagreements between the second-generation youth and their immigrant parents (Kwak, 2003, p. 116).

### *The Ministry of COP and the Second-Generation Ghanaian Immigrants in the US*

Asamoah-Gyadu mentions that one strategy the COP in the US employs to reach the second-generation and youth is the Pentecost International Worship (PIWC) approach (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2011, p. 92). The PIWC strategy has been employed mainly to attract second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, other nationals, and the highly educated. The PIWC also gives the youth in the church the freedom to worship in their own style. Additionally, Asamoah-

Gyadu highlights that the PIWC services are held in English in order to bridge the language gap that may exist because of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans and other non-Ghanaians in the church who don't speak one of the Akan languages, particularly Twi, familiar to most first-generation Ghanaian COP members (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2011).

The fact that the COP has established the PIWC to attract second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, other nationals, and the youth of the church shows that the COP is culturally sensitive to the different cultures they encounter in the US. However, Asamoah-Gyadu does not discuss the different ways the PIWC strategy addresses the needs of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. As mentioned by Norton and Nyanni, the second-generation immigrants in the US are usually more accustomed to the US-American cultural context than to the cultures of their Ghanaian parents (Norton & Nyanni, 2023).

Asirifi discusses the ministry of the COP in the US in relation to why second-generation Ghanaian-Americans have not been willing to accept a call into full-time pastoral ministry in the COP. Asirifi points out that the majority of pastors in the COP in the US are Ghanaian immigrants, including younger immigrants in the US. Asirifi further notes that the COP in the US is currently “facing the urgent need to attract young American adults into its leadership succession strategic plan.” In addition, Asirifi argues that this has become a challenge for two reasons. First, the young Ghanaian immigrants who have become full-time pastors of the COP in the US grew up in Ghana and are well accustomed to Ghanaian culture rather than the US—thus limiting their effectiveness in ministry to the church's youth, the majority of whom are second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. Second, unlike the Ghanaian immigrants, the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans have student loan debt, which may hinder answering the call into full-time pastoral ministry. Asirifi concludes that, because some of the Ghanaian immigrants serving the COP in the US may not have a good understanding of US-American cultural realities, “it calls for a new breed of young pastors who understand and share generational and cultural views of the church's youth and children for better discipleship and shepherding” (Asirifi, 2021, pp. 96-97).

## **Research Method**

To investigate concretely the themes discussed above, we used a case study, qualitative research method. Case studies research examples within real-life, contemporary contexts or settings (Yin, 2014). We interviewed three Ghanaian immigrant pastors who have served the COP in the US. The main research question for this study is this: How do Ghanaian pastors experience their cross-cultural ministry to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in the US? The sub questions concern the challenges they encounter while they minister to the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans and how they respond to these challenges.

## **Case Studies**

### *Pastor Matthew*

Pastor Matthew migrated from Ghana to the US in 2002, which means he has been in the US for 22 years (as of the time of our research in 2024). Within those 22 years, Pastor Matthew has served the COP as a full-time pastor for 14 years. He has been the COP's Youth Ministry director for eight years and ministered a great deal among university students.

In an interview on how he is adjusting to the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, Pastor Matthew reported that because of his work among the youth and next generation, his eyes have been opened to the cultural war and tension that come between the second-generation

Ghanaian-Americans who have acculturated themselves more into the US-American context and their Ghanaian immigrant parents (Pastor Matthew, 2024). According to Pastor Matthew, while the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans are interested in US cultural matters and what happens in America, their Ghanaian immigrant parents have zero such interest, which often becomes a point of conflict and disagreement in the home. With these differences in interest, Pastor Matthew shared a story that happened between a second-generation Ghanaian-American and her Ghanaian immigrant mother:

There is a Ghanaian immigrant woman in my church who was very strict on raising her Ghanaian-American daughter from a Ghanaian cultural perspective. She was strict on how her daughter should dress, carry herself around, and perform house chores. Her daughter on the other hand was not willing or comfortable to comply because it was foreign to the American culture where she was born and had grown up. With this conflict, one day the woman found out in her daughter's wardrobe the inscription "If I die today, my mother will be very happy" (Pastor Matthew, 2024).

With this story, Pastor Matthew pointed out that he realized the Ghanaian immigrant woman did not know how to manage her daughter culturally (Pastor Matthew 2024). He further demonstrated that as a pastor he needed to be more knowledgeable and understand US cultural realities in order to resolve some of these issues as he ministers to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. For Pastor Matthew, acquiring enough knowledge should enable him to understand the US context well enough to educate both the Ghanaian immigrant parents and the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in his church to understand each other's culture and live peacefully at home.

#### *Pastor Kofi*

Pastor Kofi immigrated from Ghana to the US in 2012 through the American Diversity Immigrant Visa Program (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.). Before immigrating to the US, Pastor Kofi worshiped and served as an elder in the Church of Pentecost in Ghana where he learned about the doctrines and theology of the Church. When he arrived in US, he was called to be an elder in one of the COP branch churches and later accepted a call to full-time pastoral ministry in 2017. Pastor Kofi has served the COP in the US as a full-time pastor for eleven years. During these eleven years, Pastor Kofi served as a regional youth leader for five years.

In his interview, Pastor Kofi shared that because he had a background in intercultural studies and counselling, he already knew that ministering to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans would be challenging because they are bicultural. They live with their parents' culture at home while exposed to and living in US cultural realities outside the home (Pastor Kofi, 2024). According to Pastor Kofi, because of these differences in cultural contexts he noticed a communication gap between the Ghanaian immigrant parents and the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. Pastor Kofi further shared that because of this knowledge and information, he needed to be proactive to learn and understand the different cultural dynamics and be intentional about teaching the Ghanaian immigrant parents how to navigate through the different cultural elements (Pastor Kofi, 2024).

Pastor Kofi highlighted that since the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans understand and are more inclined to living in the US, he needs to educate the Ghanaian immigrant parents to have a good understand of US cultural realities in order to communicate with their children accordingly (Pastor Kofi, 2024). Furthermore, Pastor Kofi shared that he allows the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in his church to freely express themselves as US-Americans

while he ensures that they are doctrinally sound. He takes that approach because he believes they understand the US better (than Ghana), speak the language with a native US accent, and will be able to do share the gospel more effectively within US-American communities (Pastor Kofi, 2024).

### *Pastor Kwame*

Pastor Kwame has been in the US since 2013, also having immigrated through the American Diversity Immigrant Visa Program. Pastor Kwame became a full-time pastor in the COP in the US in 2020. He has served three COP branch churches in the Midwestern US. Pastor Kwame served as the overseer for the entire youth ministry in the Texas region before his transfer to another state (Pastor Kwame, 2024).

In response to how he adjusts to the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, Pastor Kwame revealed that he noticed a generational gap within his church and not only in families. He explained that the older generation in his church, who typically are Ghanaian immigrants, seem not to understand the younger generation while the younger generation also seem not to understand the older generation. This mutual misunderstanding is because both generations have different cultural orientations (Pastor Kwame, 2024). For instance, in the typical Church of Pentecost in Ghana, the elders and the pastors sit on a platform and face the congregation during worship service, which the older generation in his church in the US want to replicate. On the other hand, Pastor Kwame stated the younger generation prefers to have an LED screen in front for projection and presentation of sermon slides and song lyrics because it is more modern and civilized. According to Pastor Kwame, this generational gap and cultural differences have led to some of the younger generation leaving his church for other churches where they feel comfortable and that they belong, while others patronize virtual churches (Pastor Kwame, 2024).

In response to this challenge of generational misunderstanding, Pastor Kwame shared that he had to build a common ground for both the older generation and younger generation through education and teaching. He cited a typical example where one of his elders said to him that the way the younger generation are doing things in church will destroy the church. In response he explained to the elder that the younger generation will not destroy the church but have something unique they bring to the church and need to be supported. In addition, Pastor Kwame mentioned that he always comes to the level of the younger generation and learns their context in order to minister to them, and he encourages the Ghanaian immigrants and parents in his church to do same (Pastor Kwame, 2024).

## **Discussion**

Two themes that emerged from the three case studies are education and contextualization. In the following paragraphs, we discuss how these two themes relate to the ways COP Ghanaian pastors adjust to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans.

### *Education*

Education in this study points to two perspectives. First, there is a need for COP Ghanaian pastors to learn and understand cultural dynamics in the US. Second, COP Ghanaian pastors need to educate the older Ghanaian immigrants and parents to understand the cultural makeup of second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. On the reverse, there is a need for pastors to educate the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in their churches on the culture of the older Ghanaian immigrants and parents.

Education for the Ghanaian pastors to understand the culture of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans will make them competent to adjust and minister to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans effectively. One of the emphases of Edinburgh 1910 was the training of gospel communicators like pastors and missionaries to be well educated about the host culture in order to adjust and minister to the people effectively (World Missionary Conference, 1910, p. 170). This effectiveness will include “success in cultural adaptation and language acquisition, interpersonal relationships and communication skills, conflict resolution, and the transference of gifting and ministry skills into the new cultural context” (Brynjolfson, 2006, p. 32). In addition, education of the Ghanaian pastors is necessary for “knowing, being, and doing” (Whiteman, 2008, p. 10) in their ministry to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans.

Education for both the older Ghanaian immigrants and second-generation Ghanaian-Americans by COP Ghanaian pastors is necessary for bridging the generational and communication gaps that exist between the two parties. Educating both parties will help them to “find common grounds of coexistence by seeing things from each other’s perspective” (Portuphy & Adom-Portuphy, 2020, p. 164). In addition, educating the older Ghanaian immigrants and parents on the second-generation Ghanaian American’s cultural preferences will help them to know that they—not only the pastors—have a role to play in God’s mission to the younger generation (Olana, 2022, p. 174).

### *Contextualization*

Contextualization is also necessary for COP Ghanaian pastors to adjust to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, as well as help bridge the communication gap described earlier. Contextualization in this context refers to communicating the gospel in terms that makes sense to the worldview and culture of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans while remaining faithful to its core truth (Newbigin, 1986). Hiebert points out that “contextualization is an important and valuable process, necessary to the communication of the gospel” (Hiebert, 2009, p. 26). Contextualization will ensure that the Ghanaian immigrant pastors understand the US context and are communicating the gospel through US cultural elements.

Coming to the level of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans and allowing them to freely express themselves in US cultural ways (Whiteman, 1997, p. 6), as one of the pastors mentioned, will assure them of a sense of belonging and that the pastors are interested in them and are willing to identify with them in their culture and context. This approach will in turn encourage second-generation Ghanaian-Americans to fully open their hearts to the ministry of the Ghanaian immigrant pastors. In addition, it will help the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in the COP to become faithful Christians while staying true to their American cultural heritage (Whiteman, 1997).

Finally, contextualization will ensure that the Ghanaian immigrant pastors are not imposing their Ghanaian culture on the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. Since the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans are already dealing with cultural identity conflict at home, employing contextualization will to some extent ensure that they don’t deal with the same thing when they go to church. Additionally, through contextualization the Ghanaian immigrant pastors will be more sensitive to the culture of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans rather than their Ghanaian culture while they minister to them.

### **Conclusion**

This case study has looked at the cross-cultural experience of Ghanaian immigrant pastors ministering to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. We discovered that while COP

Ghanaian pastors are ministering to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans they encounter communication and generational gaps.

In responding to these challenges, COP Ghanaian pastors may need to consider education and contextualization to adjust to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. With regards to education, COP Ghanaian pastors believe they need to learn to understand the culture of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in order to minister to their needs and bridge the communication gap. Moreover, they also should consider educating the Ghanaian immigrant parents to understand the cultural makeup of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans to bridge the generational gap that exists in their churches. With regards to contextualization, COP Ghanaian pastors should adjust to the level of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans and identify with them in their culture in order to minister to them effectively.

This study is limited as it only examines the perspective of COP Ghanaian pastors in the US. Future studies may explore from the perspective of second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in the US on how they are receiving and adjusting to the ministry of the Ghanaian immigrant pastors in their churches. In addition, further studies may explore how Church of Pentecost Ghanaian pastors in Europe are ministering and adjusting to the second-generation Ghanaian-Europeans in their churches.

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