



...there are now close to 200 million international immigrants—people living in countries in which they were not born

Diaspora Missions Strategy

Reaching the millions of people on the move in a borderless world

BY PETER WHITE

The 21st Century has been marked by the greatest migration of people in world history. United Nations experts estimate there are now close to 200 million international immigrants—people living in countries in which they were not born. This is a lot of people, more than five times the entire population of Canada.

People are moving for a variety of reasons: rapid globalization of the labour force, geopolitical shifts, catastrophic natural disasters (e.g. hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis), national and ethnic conflicts, socio-economic advancement, and pandemics resulting in a crippling of the workforce (e.g. HIV/AIDS).

Rev. Sadiri Joy Tira (D.Min., D.Miss.) is Global Ministries Diasporas Specialist with The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada. He is also Senior Associate for Diasporas with the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and International Coordinator

for the Filipino International Network.

cmAlliance.ca recently interviewed Dr. Tira and asked him to share some of his thoughts on the challenges and opportunities this scattering of peoples poses to the Church.

Alliance.ca: *You have a new position within The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada. How did you arrive at this?*

Dr. Tira: I was Senior Pastor of the First Filipino Alliance Church in Edmonton for over 25 years. While there, I helped launch the Conference of Filipino Alliance Ministries and the Filipino International Network (FIN). For over two decades, I studied the growing trend of diasporas and the emerging Canadian mosaic, and later pursued advanced studies in international migration and missiology.



Lulu and Joy Tira >



Diaspora is a complex issue that is increasingly changing societies, cultures, economies, and world demography

In His Image Photography

Alliance.ca: *What is your role as Global Ministries Diasporas Specialist within the Alliance in Canada?*

Dr. Tira: Part of my responsibility is to pioneer, catalyze, network, develop and lead various diaspora groups and ministries within the framework of Global Ministries.

Alliance.ca: *What do you mean when you use the term diaspora?*

Dr. Tira: This technical term is fast becoming a buzz word. I'm using the term diaspora to refer to the phenomenon of 'dispersion' or movement of any ethnic group. I also use the terms 'migration' and 'people on the move.'

Alliance.ca: *Why has the concept of diaspora become of such interest to mission leaders today?*

Dr. Tira: Diaspora is a complex issue that is increasingly changing societies, cultures, economies, and world demography. It is one of the dominant forces in the world today that is being watched by government policy makers, economists, social scientists and missiologists.

Diasporas present great challenges and

opportunities for the Church. In fact, diaspora is one of the global issues to be discussed at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town, South Africa from October 16-25, 2010.

You see, most missions strategies are landlocked and geographically focused. The global Church needs to understand the world has become 'borderless'—caused by migration, globalization, and technological communication. We need a strategy that will effectively reach these millions who are traversing the globe.

Diasporas present great challenges and opportunities for the Church

Alliance.ca: *What are the unique components of diaspora missions as compared to more traditional missions?*

Dr. Tira: Let me give you a basic comparison between traditional missions and diaspora missions:

Traditional Missions

- Its focus is polarized so there is a separation between, for example, saving the soul and the social gospel; church planting and Christian charity; paternalism and indigenization; long-term missions and short-term missions; career missionaries and tentmakers.
- Conceptually, traditional missions is territorial, meaning there is a sharp distinction between *here* and *there*. It is lineal, meaning that movement goes one way: sending then receiving; assimilation then amalgamation.
- Its perspective is geographically divided into foreign mission vs. home mission, urban vs. rural, state/nation vs. country/state; and as a discipline, it compartmentalizes between theology of missions and strategy of missions.
- In paradigm, traditional missions priority is the *unreached people groups* in the most *unreached regions* of the world.

In contrast, diaspora missions can be summarized as follows:

Diaspora Missions/Missiology

- Its focus is holistic and contextualization, integrating evangelism and social concern. For example, we cannot just start a local church among refugees without also addressing their physical needs and becoming their advocate.
- Conceptually, it is 'de-territorialized' (i.e. the 'loss

of social and cultural boundaries' in missions strategy). A practical example of this is how we would conduct evangelism training, in say Tokyo, among Japanese believers – but also we have to make it relevant to some Brazilians who will participate, because those Brazilians are no longer in Sao Paolo. These Brazilians are living in Tokyo! Diaspora missions is also GLOCAL. That is a mission strategy that is simultaneously global and local. In contrast to the 'lineal' concept of traditional missions, it is 'multi-directional.'

- The perspective of diaspora missions is not geographically divided or confined to home/foreign, regional/global, urban/rural. Rather it is borderless, trans-national and global.
- Diaspora missiology is integrated and includes biblical studies, theology, evangelism, social sciences, arts, and technology. As a paradigm, diaspora missions goes where God is going and moves providentially where God places people. The priority is every person outside the Kingdom, everywhere.

Alliance.ca: What are the unique advantages or benefits of using a diaspora missions strategy as compared to a more traditional missions strategy?

Dr. Tira: I'll give you a short and simple answer. A diaspora missions strategy (1) is economically sustainable; (2) benefits from travel accessibility to the target audience; (3) has less political and legal restrictions; (4) is accepting of partnerships among like-minded people and organizations; and (5) is conducted by more than a few experts or International Workers.

However, diaspora missions should not be promoted over traditional missions. These two strategies are not in competition, but are complementary in light of the global situation in the 21st Century.

Alliance.ca: Briefly discuss the C&MA experience in diaspora missions in Canada.

Dr. Tira: Historically, diaspora missions has been integral to the C&MA. Dr. A.B. Simpson, the founder of the C&MA, started reaching out to Italian immigrants in New York at a time when it was unfashionable to interact with non-English newcomers.

Then in the 1980s, at the formation of the Alliance in Canada, we saw a rise of births of immigrant or ethnic congregations utilizing the vehicle called the Canadian Ministries. These church planting initiatives among the so-called 'New Canadians' accelerated in the 1990s when national committees were formed such as the Canadian Chinese Alliance Churches Association, Association of Vietnamese Alliance Churches, Conference of Filipino Alliance Ministries, Association of Spanish Alliance Ministries, and others.

Over the years, many local churches in Canadian urban centres became more aware of this new

phenomenon of 'diaspora,' so that these Alliance congregations were intentionally reaching out to new Canadians. Innovative ministries were launched. Alliance people were intentionally reaching out with great success to international university students. Many were also heavily supporting global diaspora networks.

It must be noted that many of our International Workers are non-Caucasian; they are products of the Chinese, Filipino, and Vietnamese congregations. However, while diaspora missions is long-standing in the Alliance in Canada, some of our denominational efforts are random and could be further synchronized to be more strategic across our denomination.

Alliance.ca: How can Alliance congregations embrace diaspora missions?

Dr. Tira: We need to:

1. **Rethink diaspora as part of God's sovereign design to accomplish his mission (i.e. Mission Dei).**
2. **Teach our congregations to be hospitable.**
3. **Build cultural awareness.** We need to educate our congregations to be effectively relational in our 'global neighbourhood.'
4. **Come up with more creative ministries.** For example, in recent years, FIN brokered a partnership with Operation Mobilization, Campus Crusade for Christ, the Seamen's Christian Friends Society, and the Alliance Graduate School in Manila. This partnership formed Alliance of Churches at Sea (ACAS). Since Filipinos compose over 25 percent of the global maritime workers, ACAS has been training Filipino seafarers to plant churches on board cruise ships, supertankers, and container ships. This is a case of a creative, multi-directional and trans-national approach to church planting.
5. **Accelerate formal and non-formal training for our future pastors, International Workers and lay leaders to prepare them for ministry in our borderless world.**
6. **Affirm and celebrate the GLOCAL ministries of Alliance people.** Some wonderful examples are the international ministries in Edmonton, AB and also those at the Toronto Alliance Church in Toronto, ON. They are intentionally reaching out to new Canadians in the heart of their cities.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to introduce the diasporas to Christ and invite them to become part of his Church. Within the Alliance in Canada, we are proactively responding to this major global trend of diasporas and recruiting participants for this new missions initiative. ☪

To read the complete interview with Dr. Tira, visit <http://cmalliance.ca/diasporainterviewp2471.php>

Peter White is an independent communication, media and adult education consultant