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thirdmill

Two Types of Education

Does Education Really Matter?

PLUS: When an Experienced
Pastor Found Thirdmill

Two Types of Education

How Dr. Dia Trains Leaders to Serve

Does Education Really Matter?

When Dr. Dia Mubwangi Diafwila (known affectionately as “Dr. Dia”) visited our offices to share about his work with Thirdmill, we asked him this question. His answer surprised us.

Dr. Dia is an educator. He has three master’s degrees, a PhD, and additional degrees in philosophy and higher education. Almost his entire life has been spent in and around education. He has taught all over the world for more than 40 years, and today, he runs two Thirdmill partner ministries associated with Global Scholars Canada and *Institut Universitaire de Développement International* (IUDI), that have a combined total of more than 9,000 students.

At first, he answered our question as we expected. He said, “In the Scriptures they say that my people [are] dying because of the lack of knowledge. ... So, education is very, very important ... Education will bring the light in the life.”

But just as we were about to ask him another question, he went on.

“Education is very important ... but not education without God. Because every education without God is very dangerous.”

Dangerous?

Dr. Dia grew up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the second largest country in Africa. The DRC is rich in natural resources, but has suffered from civil wars and economic instability. In 1999, Dr. Dia was forced to flee from the country for safety reasons. But this wasn’t the danger he was talking about.

He told us that the people in both of his parents’ villages had received education from Swedish missionaries. In his father’s village, they also received Jesus Christ, but in his mother’s village, they did not. The difference, he said, was that in his mother’s village, “Many people were trained, but witchcraft is still there and many other things.” Just being educated did not make them better. In many cases, it made them worse. Those who were



Institut Universitaire de Développement International (IUDI) Graduates



Students at IUDI



Dr. Dia and friend Rev. Dalo from the Democratic Republic of the Congo



educated became proud and considered themselves superior to others. Here was the danger.

As Dr. Dia explained, “After their independence, these people could not change Africa because they have only the diploma.”

If you are well educated and a good servant, you will make more impact in your culture, in your village, in your nation, than having only a diploma.

—Dr. Dia Mubwangi Diafwila

Something was missing in the educational process. And what Dr. Dia came to realize was that, “We have two things in education. We have the theoretical education that is for proud people. ... But you have also education for serving.”

The need for “education for serving” led Dr. Dia to Thirdmill in 2019. At the time, he was the vice president and a professor at IUDI in Cameroon. After discovering Thirdmill’s materials, he brought them to the University’s president,

Dr. Moussa Bongoyok. Dr. Bongoyok couldn’t believe how good they were and decided to incorporate them into the seminary’s program.

They started with less than 52 students using the Thirdmill materials, but the program grew and has continued to grow. Today, close to 700 students at IUDI incorporate Thirdmill into their education, and more than ten other universities have applied to receive the same training.

Interestingly, graduates of the program aren’t just theologians. They are geologists, medical doctors, agronomists, political scientists, and MBA graduates — all earning their certificates of theology, all learning the importance of not just education, but of education for serving—education that changes communities.

The way Dr. Dia puts it, “Theology by itself is nothing, but theology in the service of God is for helping people of different backgrounds to become a servant of the King of Kings. ... If you are well educated and a good servant, you will make more impact in your culture, in your village, in your nation, than having only a diploma.”

So, does education really matter? Yes. As long as Christ is in it.

Our mission at Thirdmill is to train leaders to transform communities. With a love of Thirdmill, 9,000 students, and two organizations that serve multiple countries, Dr. Dia is helping us make that mission a reality.

Leaving a Legacy

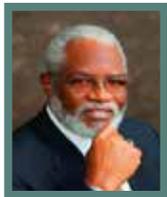


Planned Giving: Charitable Remainder Trusts

A charitable remainder trust allows you to support Thirdmill’s mission while also receiving income for life or a set period of time. Assets placed in the trust can provide steady payments to you or your loved ones, with the remaining value ultimately benefiting the mission of Thirdmill. These gifts may offer tax advantages and are especially helpful for donors with highly appreciated assets. A charitable remainder trust is a beautiful way to balance generosity, stewardship, and long-term planning. It helps meet today’s needs while investing in tomorrow’s leaders.

To learn more, visit thirdmillgivinglegacy.org, or email us at legacy@thirdmill.org.

When an Experienced Pastor Found Thirdmill



François Akoa-Mongo grew up in Cameroon. Almost 58 years ago, he became an ordained minister. Eight years later, he moved to the United States and earned master's degrees in theology and foreign language and a PhD in education. For 25 years, he taught French, English, Spanish, Latin, and social studies in universities and high schools, and he wrote and published more than a dozen books. For several years, he's been pastoring a small church in Maine.

Not long ago, he completed all three Thirdmill Institute certificates and received his Diploma in Christian Ministry.

Now, at Thirdmill, we're used to young pastors and church leaders getting excited about our materials. Many tell us they've learned things they never knew before. They often say our materials changed their lives. But why would such an accomplished, educated, experienced pastor, teacher, and writer want to study with Thirdmill? His answer was threefold.

- First, he wanted to renew both his theological knowledge and his faith.
- Second, he was working on a book and wanted to use the principles taught by Thirdmill to enhance his writing.
- And third, he wanted to experience the material for himself so he could let others know if it was worth studying.

This third reason led him to spread the word about Thirdmill and to create an online learning community. His learning community has students in Cameroon, France, and the United States. The group meets for about three hours every Friday. All of the students are growing in knowledge and faith.

As Pastor Akoa-Mongo said, "I like this program because it tells us ... that it is about my head, it is my attitude, and my actions. ... Every aspect of ... what we learn, is about doing, about changing, about becoming, about growing, about helping other people."

Even after 58 years as a pastor and teacher, Pastor Akoa-Mongo is still doing, changing, becoming, growing, and helping other people grow in Christ through Thirdmill. He told us, "We have an assignment to bring the Word of God to many people. And so, when I found this program, it was unique. ... It is an instrument you have put together for the world."

At Thirdmill, we are humbled and grateful to be part of this inspiring man's journey, and we look forward to seeing how God will use him next.

**When people talk about faith,
I think many people don't
see that it is about practice.
It is about obedience.
It is about life.**

— Pastor Akoa-Mongo



A Letter from our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

In August 2025, Dr. Richard L. Pratt Jr. and I traveled together to Southeast Asia for two weeks to reconnect with long-time friends and partners who are faithfully serving local learning communities. Richard spent much of the trip teaching—leading seminars and a church conference—while I had the privilege of listening, learning, and deepening relationships with those carrying out this work day by day.

What stood out most was not a single event or program, but the strength of the partnerships themselves. Again and again, we were encouraged by the shared commitment to biblical faithfulness and by the quiet perseverance of leaders serving in challenging contexts. Conversations were marked by honesty, gratitude, and a deep sense of mutual trust built over many years.

As we visited churches and spent time with partners, we were reminded that Thirdmill’s work is never about us alone. It is about walking alongside brothers and sisters whom God has called to teach, equip, and serve their communities. Seeing how the Lord continues to use these relationships was both humbling and deeply encouraging—and it reaffirmed the steady, faithful path God has set before us.

Eric Linares, Executive Director of Thirdmill

GO Network Spotlight

Rev. Jean Ronald Charles serves as a Thirdmill learning community trainer for two groups at *Iglesia Cristiana CENTI* in the Dominican Republic and one at *Centre Haïtien Semeur d’Espoir* in Haiti. Since starting his first learning community in 2022, he has become a dedicated champion of Thirdmill by faithfully expanding the reach of our curriculum to more pastors and church leaders across the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Under his leadership, many of his students have completed all three Thirdmill Institute certificates and earned their Diplomas in Christian Ministry. Their testimonies reflect the extraordinary impact of Thirdmill Institute training and Rev. Charles’ dedication.

Please join us in praying for Rev. Charles as he continues preparing leaders to serve their churches and communities. May God bless the learning communities he leads across the Dominican Republic and Haiti.



Before Thirdmill, I preached with passion but lacked depth. Now, I preach with both passion and precision. This training has transformed my ministry and renewed my calling. ... I need to share it with others. That’s the example Thirdmill has given us.

Gary Valerus, Thirdmill student

INTRODUCING OUR NEWEST VP: KELLY HINKLE

We are pleased to announce that Kelly Hinkle has been named Vice President of Advancement and Generosity (A&G). Kelly has served as Senior Director of Marketing since 2023. In 2025, she stepped into an expanded role overseeing both Marketing and A&G and has led both teams with clarity and care. She has been instrumental in strengthening our messaging, deepening relationships with our generous partners, and advancing Thirdmill's mission around the world.

We are grateful for her continued commitment. Her faithful service, thoughtful leadership, and deep

passion for the mission of Thirdmill have already made a meaningful impact across the organization. We look forward to seeing how God will use her in this new role.

Kelly was educated at Florida State University and currently lives in Central Florida with her husband and two daughters.



JOINING OUR BOARD: ADAM BLOOM

Thirdmill is delighted to welcome Mr. Adam Bloom to our Board of Directors. Adam is a financial advisor and co-founder of Bloom Private Wealth, an economic advisory group.

and shared it with many others, creating meaningful opportunities for friends and colleagues to connect more deeply with our work.

Reflecting on their support, Adam shared, "When you consider what it costs to effectively equip missionaries overseas and those who are leading the church, pastoring and discipling, all for truly pennies, it is remarkable. We consider it a privilege to support Thirdmill."

Originally from Pennsylvania, Adam graduated from Duke University with a degree in Economics. He and Nickie now live in Davidson, North Carolina, with their five children.

Adam and his wife, Nickie, have been faithful partners of Thirdmill for the past 18 years. During that time, they have graciously supported Thirdmill's mission



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316 Live Oaks Blvd.
Casselberry, FL 32707-3867
407-830-0222
dev@thirdmill.org