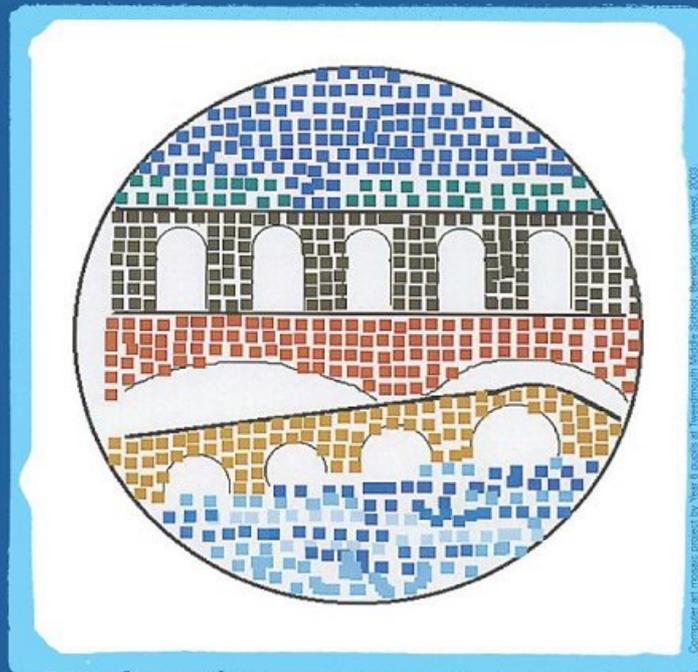


NEW

**INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
FOR LOCAL CHURCHES**

MISSION IS ...



building partnerships with other churches and groups who share some of our mission aims

...MISSION MATTERS

Guidelines to support congregational, circuit and district partnerships with churches in other parts of the world.

The **Methodist Church** 

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Introduction

In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority:

To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world; and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church

(from Priorities for the Methodist Church, Conference 2004)

At the heart of Methodism is an inclusive theology with a world-wide vision. This commitment to live on a large map makes an important contribution to the search for peace, the struggle for justice, and the integrity of creation. Partnership development is part of mission development. It has been said that the Church exists for mission as a fire exists for burning. The commitment to sharing in God's mission needs to take us beyond national boundaries to work together with Christians in all parts of the world.

Paul's metaphor of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) challenges us; each part of the body needs the others, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'". Different parts of the world-wide church are called to share in the essential task of sharing God's love in a needy world. To do this effectively, we need to get to know each other and to work together. This is a task that crosses boundaries of culture and language. No part of the church can do it alone. We are called to work in partnership with others.

In its statement of priorities the Methodist Conference in Britain has challenged every part of the church to work “in partnership with others wherever possible” and to deepen its “conviction of God’s love in Christ, for us and for all the world ...”

This gives clear encouragement to churches, circuits and districts to develop partnerships with particular churches in other parts of the world. Often such partnerships can be developed ecumenically, working with other denominations of the church in Britain, especially if the international link is with a united church.



Church of South India Headquarters, Chennai.

The purpose of such partnerships is to inspire churches and circuits to become better equipped to respond to the mission challenges in their own community and to share in the mutual development and enrichment of God’s mission in the partner churches. Partnerships help to develop our vision of the Church and of the world. They strengthen our sense of the Church as being “one holy catholic and apostolic”; there is a wide variety of forms and traditions but we discover the things we have in common are powerful in binding us together. The achievement of this purpose will help to transform the Church, Church life and the lives of individual Christians. Partnership is one way of practising Christian discipleship and encouraging ecumenical life.

Focus

Local church partnerships need a clear focus, one that needs to be agreed between the partners. A way of developing this focus is to reflect on the following headings:

- Celebration
- Prayer
- Learning opportunities
- Evangelism and service

Celebration

Partners have much to celebrate together, both what is held in common and what is diverse. The celebration of each other's gifts, insights, ideas about faith, church and community life are important ways of developing partnerships and confidence in one another. In celebration all ages can join together through sharing in common welcome and hospitality.



Celebrating in Bolivia

Prayer

Prayer provides the energy and the connection for the relationship. Praying for and with churches in other situations can encourage and strengthen faith and bring hope to those we pray with. It can open a new vision of possibilities. The sharing of E- mails, photographs, stories, letters, provides not only the raw material for prayer but is a way of praying.

Learning Opportunities

Our personalities and traditions are formed by and through the cultures in which we are brought up. The form of Christianity that is experienced and generally taken for granted is determined, at least in part, through cultural heritage and historical development. It is important to learn how Christianity is known in different parts of the world.

Through dialogue and relationships, as many testimonies show, learning from Christianity in other cultures helps us to gain a broader picture of the Church and helps to develop discipleship. Through this the Holy Spirit will guide us into more truth and enable us to work together for the good of all humanity.

Through the development of cross-cultural local church partnerships many opportunities to learn will be created. By designing a stimulating programme there will be possibilities for conversation and encounter for both individuals and groups.



British Methodist Conference 2004

Bible study, worship, discussion, fun events, social activity and the many informal moments spent over meals and other hospitality will create a good learning environment.

Much learning will be informal so opportunities to reflect on the various experiences with our partners need to be included as an essential part of any shared programme. Initially learning may come through the sharing of letters, including church prayer letters as well as personal pen-friend letters. But the opportunity to meet should be a goal even if it is difficult to realise at the outset of a partnership arrangement due to distance, costs and many other factors.

Evangelism and Service

Opportunities for sharing in mission programmes could form the heart of some inter-church partnerships. Serving one another and hearing about modern ways of talking about Jesus and helping people to faith could have a profound effect on the home own situation. Practical experience of sharing in mission activity is to be encouraged. The Methodist Church recognises nine aspects of mission that could provide ideas and suggestions.

In the relationship churches need to discover ways of serving each other. It could be by responding to social needs in each community, developing a shared project, using each other's worship resources, working together in a third country or campaigning together on issues of justice and peace. It could be raising money in response to an identified need. However, the fact that the British Church has money and therefore power is an accident of history. If money dominates a relationship or plays a bigger role than that of "learning" and "praying" then so does our power.



Campaigning together on issues of justice and peace in Israel

An important note about money:

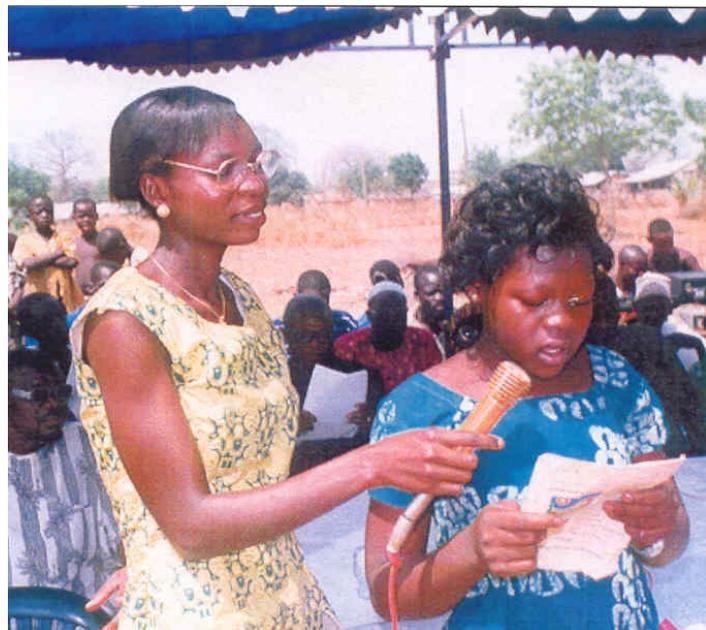
If a partnership is proposed with a church in a materially poorer part of the world it is all too easy to assume you are in charge

and what they need is money! Money has a place in partnership development but it needs to be agreed between each partner what the money is for. There are usually ways in which support can be genuinely mutual. This might include providing money for a visit to take place and in particular to pay for flights and visa costs to the UK, to pay for accommodation and any programme costs.

Individual or even corporate sponsorship is to be avoided. Abuse of power can occur in this way. Avoid also the partner becoming dependent on you and the relationship being all on your terms and conditions.

Starting a partnership

Whatever the starting point, an inter-church partnership is not just for the enthusiastic few! It needs to be owned by the whole church. The idea for a partnership could occur in a variety of ways. For example:



Learning together in Ghana, with support from the Fund for World Mission

- Personal contacts through holidays or migration.
- Request to the World Church Office to find a partner.
- Interest in a particular part of the world through a mission partner or experience exchange volunteer.
- Email or WEB discovery.
- Contact or personal links with Mission Partners overseas.
- Contact with personnel serving in this country through the World Church in Britain partnership programme.
- Through the Scholarship programme
- Friendships with nationals visiting or working in Britain.

Some important things to bear in mind about getting started

- This may be the only opportunity for congregations to encounter Christians from other parts of the world
- Be aware that it may take some time to establish contact with a partner due to cultural expectations in response times and practical communication problems.
- A good way to get the partnership off on a firm footing is for a small representative delegation from each church to visit the other and share hopes and expectations of the partnership.
- Formally to recognise the start of the partnership. This needs to be thought through carefully and should be a key goal wherever possible.
- Ensure there is a small group who will take responsibility for maintaining the partnership and organising various aspects of its life.
- The partners need to agree what is at the heart of their relationship but they should be encouraged to include all four aspects – celebration, prayer, learning opportunities. and evangelism and service – at least to some degree.
- Partnerships need to take seriously the interests of the other and not be dominated by one church's agenda.
- Engaging in inter-church partnerships across barriers of culture, race and language is at the same time both risky and exciting. Common themes need to be agreed and explored in both communities.
- Change, or transformation, is at the heart of Gospel priorities. So beware! You may be transformed as a result and if you are not willing to be changed you should not enter into a partnership! If both the church community and individuals are not changed to a greater or lesser degree then the partnership is not working.

Some Initial Questions

- What kind of link are you looking for?
 - Youth exchange?
 - Interest in certain themes?
 - Anti-racism, drugs, poverty, environment
 - Music, sport, drama, worship, Bible study,
 - Sharing in community activities
 - Worship; evangelistic outreach
 - Friendship links?
- Who is interested? children and young people, women's groups, leadership teams, music groups.
- Which part of the world are you interested in and why?
- Who do you know has contacts already?
- What are your hopes and expectations?
- For how long do you want the partnership?
- Do you have a lead person or group?
- Find out who already has a partnership and contact them to learn through their experience. ¹



**Mr Mirce Tancev, National in Mission Appointment
Macedonia**

¹ Contact Mission Education for details of those in your area.

Developing the Partnership

As the partnership develops it needs to give opportunities to:

- Make friendships across cultures and language, and break down barriers based on stereotypes and prejudice
- Help us to see ourselves as others see us
- Accept and learn from that which is different as well as what is similar, or what is foreign or alien to us. This is at the heart of a meeting and should not be overlooked, particularly in the early stages of development. Some of this may be disconcerting or unsettling but it should not be seen as a threat to the partnership.
- Develop new insights and self awareness into what it means to be Christian and to be the Church
- Experience new forms of worship and new methods in mission
- Get an understanding of being both givers and receivers. What we give and receive probably will be different depending on our needs. It will be an important step towards realising that through the partnership we can become a learning community.
- Acknowledge conflict and be prepared to work through conflict in a spirit of mutual openness, respect, sensitivity and commitment to one another. Great learning and growth can be the result.
- Invite the partner to share their observations of your situation and the challenges you face
- Develop a sense of solidarity.
- Strengthen the concern for other parts of the world

The list is not exhaustive or exclusive!

There are a number of specific things that can be done to develop the relationship with the partner:

- Share letters, photographs and e-mails
- Exchange videos and CD Roms
- Send church newsletters
- Provide up to date information on a special notice board or church letter
- Try to learn the others' language

Developing Good Practice

- Ensure the aims and themes to be followed are agreed by all partners
- Exchange information on as regular a basis as possible and try to avoid the information flowing only one-way.
- When making a visit or receiving visitors
 - Ensure you have an adequate budget
 - Agree the time and length of a visit through conversation with your partner – don't just decide yourselves!
 - If you are applying for grants do so in good time Contact the grant-aiding body before applying to ensure they know who you are, and that you know what you can apply for and what the criteria are.
 - During visits ensure there is space for regular reflection and sharing time
- When receiving visitors ensure that the hospitality is appropriate
 - To be prepared to receive visitors means to prepare the whole congregation or community
 - Mark the occasion with some special events as well as involving your guests in the regular life of the church or community
 - When things go wrong don't be too harsh either with yourselves or give the impression of being annoyed with your guests. Use the experience to reflect and learn.
- When making a visit
 - Do all you can in preparation to be aware of the culture and church life into which you are being received
- Hold an annual reflection on the nature of the partnership – its purpose, quality. Reflect on what is being learnt – theologically, socially, practically. Reflect on how your church community is being changed as a consequence of practising your church life in this way.
- Receive the reflection from the other partner and listen to what they have to say
- Make and exchange plans for the future but look to make a commitment to each other for at least 5 years, and then have an opportunity to review



Dalit Madonna © Jyoti Sahi

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