

Guidelines to support local churches,  
circuits and districts to build partnerships  
with churches in other parts of the world

# Developing twinning links between churches in Britain and overseas

A world transformed by God's love; a confident Church motivated to share God's love; a people celebrating being part of a worldwide family.

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## Introduction

At the heart of Methodism is an inclusive theology with a worldwide vision. Developing partnerships is part of mission and this commitment takes us beyond national boundaries to work together with Christians in all parts of the world. This commitment makes an important contribution to the search for peace, the struggle for justice, and the integrity of creation.

Paul's metaphor of the Body of Christ challenges us; each part of the body needs the others. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Corinthians 12:21, New Revised Standard Version, NRSV). Different parts of the worldwide Church are called to join together in the essential task of sharing God's love in a world full of different needs. Doing so crosses boundaries of culture and language. No part of the Church can do it alone. We need each other.

"The Methodist Conference in Britain has declared its commitment to the engagement of our Church in all its parts, with Churches across the world "in a spirit of partnership, collaboration and mutuality"." This gives clear encouragement to churches, circuits and districts to develop partnerships with particular churches in other parts of the world.

The purpose of twinning is to equip churches, circuits and districts to respond to the missional challenges in their own community and to share in the mutual development and enrichment of God's mission in 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 that is "holy, catholic and apostolic". There is a wide variety of forms and traditions but the things we have in common bind us together. 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. The goal of these partnerships is to help transform the Church and the lives of individual Christians.

Partnership is one way of practising Christian discipleship. This guide is designed to support churches, circuits and districts who wish to build links with a church overseas, explore the possibility of a twinning relationship with an overseas circuit or district, or who wish to formalise or re-define already existing links.

It is hoped the suggestions and ideas included are adaptable to different local churches and their hopes for a twinning partnership.

**For those wanting to establish district twinning links please get in touch with the Global Relationships team by emailing [gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk)**

## Areas of focus for church twinning

Church links need a clear focus and a plan developed by both partners. To create a focus you could choose to reflect on one or more of the following areas:

### Celebration

Partners have much to celebrate together, both what is held in common and what is diverse. The celebrations 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.

### Prayer

Praying for and with churches in other situations, and being prayed for, can encourage and strengthen faith and bring hope to those we pray with. It can open a new vision of possibilities. The sharing of emails, photographs, stories and letters provides not only the raw material for prayer but is a way of praying in itself.

### Learning

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 understood and experienced across different parts of the world.

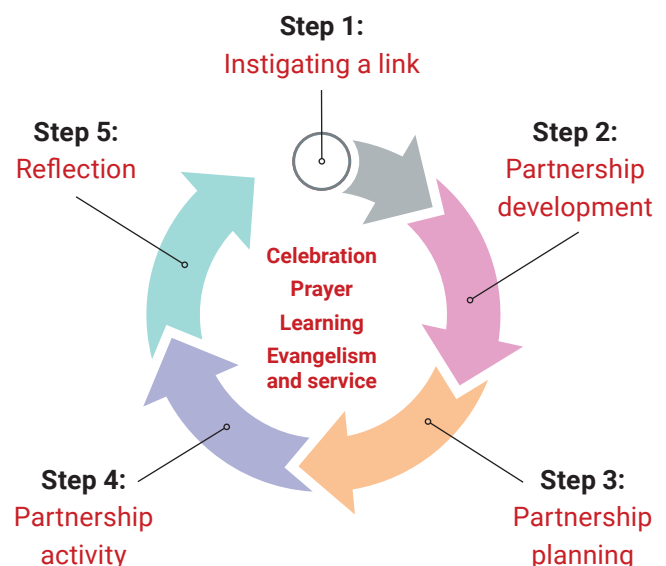
Through this, the Holy Spirit will guide us into a deeper understanding of truth and enable us to work together for the good of all humanity.

Developing cross-cultural church partnerships will lead to many opportunities to learn, though Bible study, worship, discussion, fun events, social activities and the many informal moments spent over meals and other events. It should be a goal to meet up, even if it is difficult to realise at the outset of a partnership due to distance, costs or other factors. Creatively using new technologies such as video meetings, social media or watching broadcasts of each other's worship can bring a real sense of connection.

### Evangelism and service

Opportunities for sharing in mission programmes can form the heart of some inter-church partnerships. Serving one another and hearing about current ways of talking about Jesus and helping people to faith can have a profound effect locally. Practical experience of sharing in mission activity in both contexts is to be encouraged. Partner Churches can 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, a partnership should not be solely based on money, or raising money. This misses the opportunity for mutual learning and praying.

## Five steps to Church Twinning



## Step 1: Instigating a link

This first phase of church twinning is aimed at sharing that initial idea and enthusing others!

### Main Activities

#### Build buy-in

Whatever the starting point, an inter-church link is not just for the enthusiastic few. It needs to be owned by the whole church. Building momentum, commitment, interest and understanding of what a link might mean for congregation and community is essential to its success.

#### Find a Twin

Inspiration for finding a suitable partnership could occur in a variety of ways:

- Personal contacts through holidays or diaspora
- Request to the Global Relationships office to find a partner
- Interest in a particular part of the world through a mission partner, mission volunteer or already established District link
- Friendships with overseas nationals visiting, studying or working in Britain.

#### Consideration

- What are you hoping for?
  - Youth exchange
  - Thematic e.g. anti-racism, migration, 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 team, music groups, home groups? What other world church initiatives are currently being undertaken through Junior Mission for All (JMA), for example?
- Which parts 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?

### First steps

1. Appoint someone to take the lead in developing relationships. This doesn't need to be the Presbyter or Deacon. Having an identified leader is essential to the further successful development of a partnership.
2. Once the leader has had a chance to talk to people in your church about the possibilities of establishing a partnership link and you are ready to move things forward, please do get in touch with the Global Relationships team. Connecting with all areas of the church through initiatives such as JMA could direct the type of partnership and with whom, allowing all members of the church to be part of the process.
3. Let us know if you would like to explore a link with a specific country or mission partner. Don't worry if you are unsure where there may be an appropriate link. We can help to guide the discernment and highlight where current opportunities are greatest. We will also be able to let you know of other circuits and districts that already have official links with a Partner Church.
4. Once you have a link up and running please do keep in touch with us to let us know how the partnership is doing. You can get in touch with us by email at: [gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk)

## Step 2: Partnership development

This phase of building partnerships is important to ensure that relationships are strong, expectations are clear and principles of working together are established.

### Main Activities

#### Establish a team

Develop a small group who will support the leader in maintaining the partnership and organising various aspects of its life at both ends of the twinning arrangement. Ensure there is an identified leader at both ends.

#### Principles of working in partnership

Establishing principles of working together is important. Here are just some that you should consider.

- Mutual understanding – Ensure the aims and themes to be followed are agreed upon by all partners.
- Active communication – Exchange information regularly and often as possible and try to avoid the information flowing only one way.
- Knowledge exchange – Gain an understanding of being both givers and receivers. It will be an important step towards realising that, through the partnership, we can become a learning community.
- Acknowledge differences – 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. The Positive Working Together materials could provide some guidance here and can be accessed from [www.methodist.org.uk/positiveworkingtogether/](http://www.methodist.org.uk/positiveworkingtogether/)
- Consider safeguarding – Build safeguarding in to your partnership. Create safe spaces for people to interact. If you connect via video conferencing or social media think about safe spaces online. Consider the different cultural expressions that people may have and how this may impact on safeguarding. Anyone travelling from the Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) to visit a Partner Church should have a current DBS certificate and leaders should have completed advanced module safeguarding training with MCB. Consult with your District Safeguarding Officer to consider what procedures you should put in place for any twinning, including for visits to and from Partner Churches. More guidance is available from [www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/](http://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/)

#### Find opportunities and strengthen

As the partnership develops, aim to give opportunities to:

- make friendships across cultures and language, and break down barriers based on stereotypes and prejudice
- see ourselves as others see us
- accept and learn from that which is different or foreign to us, as well as what is similar. 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
- develop a sense of solidarity
- invite the partner to share their observations of your situation and the challenges you face
- strengthen the concern for other parts of the world and for your own context.

## Step 3: Partnership planning

Clear expectations, from both twinned church partners, and an agreed plan of activities and principles for how the twinning will work, is essential to success. You might find it useful to plan activities around the four areas of focus outlined at the start of this guide: • **Celebration** • **Prayer** • **Learning** • **Evangelism and service**

### Main Activities

#### Co-development and planning

Engaging in inter-church partnerships across different cultures is both risky and exciting. Both communities should agree common themes to be explored, as well as a plan of activities. Both partners should be happy with how they can contribute to the aims of the twinning relationship. This could be built around the four focus areas. Expectations must be shared and managed.

#### Church-wide participation

Take the opportunity to build on initiatives that may already be underway within your church community. This could be through your young people and JMA or perhaps you have individuals who have participated on one of the overseas mission programmes such as Encounter Worldwide. Including a variety of groups from across the church to be part of the decision and process of partnership will provide strength and success.

#### Twinning partnership duration

Look to make a commitment to each other for at least five years, and then have an opportunity to review. You may just wish to focus on an initial two-year period.

#### Twinning church communications

Agree how best to communicate with each other. How often, and by what means? It can be useful to use things such as WhatsApp, Facebook or Zoom or more general video calls to bring congregations together or to be 'together' virtually for events. Find out what works best for both partners.

### Congratulations on establishing your partnership!

#### Launch your twinning partnership

Formally recognise the start of the twinning partnership. This continues to build buy-in and enthusiasm for the twinning process. It could be a special event or within a Sunday service. Your twinning church could join you online or they could be singing the same hymns or having the same prayer on the same day. The commitment and outline of planned activities could be blessed and shared with the wider congregation. Consider how this can be made an all-age and accessible event across the church community.

#### Money

It could, in some circumstances, be too easily assumed that the partnership is about money. Firstly, it will not always be the case that a partnership is with a church in an impoverished region or country. Moreover, giving money fundamentally changes a relationship, bringing in a power dynamic that can undermine equality.

The exchange of money can enable the development of the partnership through appropriate help with flight and visa costs in cases of hardship. However, individual or even corporate sponsorship is to be avoided at all costs. Should there be a request to support a project or institution in the Partner Church, or should a twinning partner offer financial support to you, please contact the Global Relationships team. We will be able to advise if the proposal fits with the strategic priorities of the Partner Church, or indeed of MCB. We will be able to consult the Head of the Partner Church and any other relevant body as appropriate.

Your twinning partnership may inspire you to make additional contributions to the World Mission Fund. This fund enables MCB to encourage, build and maintain long-term mission and service across the world. Twinning should express our equality within the body of Christ so it is important to avoid any sense of the dependence of either partner on the other or of the relationship being based on one partner's terms and conditions. To explore issues of money and power in our global partnerships further, see our training videos online at:

[www.methodist.org.uk/twinning-training](http://www.methodist.org.uk/twinning-training)

## Step 4: Partnership activity

Agreed activities are undertaken and mission, culture and worship exchanged.

### Main Activities

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

- Share photographs, e-mails and church newsletters.
- Provide up-to-date information about the link with your church in services or within different church groups such as home groups or junior church.
- Try to learn the language of your Partner Church.
- Share prayer and hymn requests.
- Each engage in Bible study following the same course or readings at the same time.
- Sharing food – eating together is a great source of fellowship and is a fun way of learning about another culture. You could share ideas and simple recipes for people to try out at home, or even host a tasting evening in your church.
- Get specific groups together – if you've got a youth group, women's fellowship, music group, or any other groups or clubs, then ask your twinned church if they have something similar and put the respective leaders in contact.
- Sharing music – the Methodist Church was 'born in song' and it's certainly a great way of worshipping and building community. You could share favourite hymns/worship songs, by sending YouTube links and/or sheet music, or by hosting a video call to teach one another songs.
- Learn about the history between the UK and the home country of your twinned church.

### Face-to-face exchanges

Wherever possible face-to-face visits, in both directions, can really strengthen and enrich twinning relationships. The opportunity to witness first-hand the other Partner's Church, worship and community should not be underestimated.

To receive visitors from overseas can have a real impact on the life of the church and its members. Guidance and support for organising a trip is available from the Global Relationships team. Contact the team at

[gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk)

## Step 5: Reflection

It is important to take the time for each church community, as well as the leaders, to reflect on the twinning partnership and how it is going.

### Main Activities

#### Anniversary reflection for both partners

Hold an anniversary reflection on the nature of the partnership – its purpose and quality. Reflect on what is being learnt – theologically, socially and 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 your partner and listen to what they have to say so you can develop and plan for the next set of activities.

### What's next in the twinning partnership?

#### Move into the next cycle

Repeat the cycle of partnership with your twinned church. You don't have to re-instate step one but you may wish to re-commit to one another for a set period of time or hold an anniversary event. Make and exchange new plans for the coming period by following the steps again. There is no set amount of time for each cycle, but as a guide, we recommend an initial cycle of at least two years.

#### Celebrating a partnership

In some instances, a further cycle of partnership may not be appropriate. If a partnership is ending, a nice way of acknowledging the work done could be to hold a celebration event with a summary of messages about what was learnt and what things have changed as a result. This could also be an opportunity to acknowledge how relations may continue in a less formal way.



### Further Information on Current Partner Churches

To get an idea of the kind of partners that the Methodist Church in Britain has please visit the Global Relationships website at: [www.methodist.org.uk/global-relationships/](http://www.methodist.org.uk/global-relationships/)

For any additional information please contact us:  
Global Relationships Team [gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:gr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk)

  
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