Developing Twinning links between Churches in Britain and Overseas

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

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 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. 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, including Britain.

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 join together in the essential task of sharing God’s love in a world full of different needs. This is a task that crosses boundaries of culture and language. No part of the Church can do it alone. We need each other. We are called to work in partnership with others.

In its statement of priorities the Methodist Conference in Britain has challenged every part of our 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 and circuits 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. The purpose 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 and the lives of individual Christians. Partnership is one way of practising Christian discipleship and encouraging ecumenical life.

This guide is designed to support:

1. Local churches who wish to build links with a church overseas
2. Circuits who wish to explore the possibility of a circuit wide twinning relationship with an overseas church
3. Local churches and circuits wishing 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 broaden twinning relationships at the District level please get in touch with the World Church Relationships team at:**
wcr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk for further support.

**Twinning church focus areas**

The following outlines areas of possible focus, on which church twinning can be built. Church links need a clear focus and plan developed *together*, between two 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:** 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 emails, photographs, stories, letters, provides not only the raw material for prayer but is a way of praying.

**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 in Britain and across
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.

By developing cross-cultural church partnerships, many opportunities to learn will be created. By designing a stimulating programme there will be possibilities for conversation and encountering each other, both as individuals and groups. Bible study, worship, discussion, fun events, social activity and the many informal moments spent over meals and other hospitality can 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 news and stories but the opportunity to meet should be a goal 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 Skype, social media, video links 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.

In a relationship, 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.
**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. For example:

- Personal contacts through holidays or diaspora.
- Request to the World Church 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 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 lead is essential to the further successful development of a partnership.

2. Once you (the lead) have had a chance to talk to people in your church about the possibilities of establishing a partnership link and wish to move things forward then please do get in touch with us in the World Church Relationship Office. 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 and steer the discernment and highlight where current need is 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: wcr.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 lead in maintaining the partnership and organising various aspects of its life at both ends of the twinning arrangement. Ensure there is an identified lead at both ends.

Principles of working in partnership
Establishing principles of working together is important. Here are just some that you might consider.

- **Mutual understanding**: Ensure the aims and themes to be followed are agreed by all partners and that what is possible and appropriate is agreed.
- **Active communication**: Exchange information on as regular a basis as possible and try to avoid the information flowing only one-way.
- **Knowledge exchange**: Gain 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 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 at: [www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/guidance-for-churches/positive-working-together](http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/guidance-for-churches/positive-working-together)

**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
- help us to see ourselves as others see us
- accept and learn from that which is different, foreign or alien 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 Focus Areas outlined at the start of this guide:

- Celebration
- Prayer
- Learning
- Evangelism/Service

Main Activities

Co-development and planning

Engaging in inter-church partnerships across barriers of culture, race and language is both risky and exciting. Common themes should be agreed and explored in both communities. A plan of activities and aims of the twinning relationship should be co-developed and both partners happy with how they can contribute. It 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 Skype to bring congregations together or to ‘be together’ 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 through Skype 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. It may have a place if the partnership is with a church in a less economically developed country, however, this will not always be the case. Some partnerships may be with churches which are economically better off than their partner church in Britain. Money has a place in partnership development but it needs to be agreed between each partner what any money is for.

Individual or even corporate sponsorship is to be avoided. Also avoid either partner becoming dependent on the other and the relationship being based on one partner’s terms and conditions.
Step 4: Twinning 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

- 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 etc.
- 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.

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 organizing a trip is available from the World Church Relationships team at Methodist Church House. Contact the team at wcr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk
Step 5: Reflection

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

Main Activities

Annual reflection for both partners
Hold an annual 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.

Next cycle of your twinning partnership

Move into the next cycle
Repeat the cycle of partnership with your twinned church. You don’t have to re-instigate step one but you may wish to re-commit to one another for another 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 period of time for each cycle or period but an initial cycle of at least two years could act as a guide.
Celebrating a partnership
In some instances, a further cycle of partnership may not be appropriate. If a partnership is ending, holding a celebration event where a summary of messages about what was learnt and what things have changed as a result, could be a nice way to acknowledge the work done. It is also an opportunity to acknowledge how relations may continue in a less formal way.

Further Information

Current Partner Churches
The current Partner Churches of the Methodist Church in Britain can be viewed by visiting the World Church website at: www.methodist.org.uk/worldchurch

District-wide Links
For those wishing to further develop their circuit or local Church partnership to the broader district level please get in touch at:
wcr.admin@methodistchurch.org.uk

For any additional information please contact us:

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