

Building a Responsible Mission Partnership:

Overview

The Free Methodist Church in Canada

We encourage the active participation of local churches in global ministries. Your involvement in mission should be rooted in your own local church's vision for ministry – in your own community, and then following the direction of the Holy Spirit to your Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

What is a Global Ministry Partnership?

“A relationship that exists between a local church in Canada and an international church or ministry which reflects the strengths and needs of both groups, as well as an exchange of resources and experience which mutually benefits both groups and moves both groups towards the realization of their respective God-ordained missions.”

For Canadian churches interested in partnerships with other churches both at home and abroad, there are some basic steps to take:

Congregational Dialogue

- be sure you want to do this
- pray about this

Identify Possible Partners

- With Free Methodist connections in more than 80 countries around the world, this is a natural place to begin
- You may have connections in your own congregation with other international ministries
- pray about this

Exploratory Visit

- you have to explore and understand the ministry situation
- you have to listen and understand the vision and objectives of your international partner
- you have to build relationships

Congregational education

- everybody needs to know the “why, what, how, who, when; and how much”

Develop mutual involvement possibilities and agreement

- identify measurable objectives for the partnership; what mutual, realistic goals can you both hope to achieve?

Maintain the partnership

- you have to maintain healthy relationships
- you have to see the objectives through to completion

Building a Responsible Mission Partnership: Principles and Practices

Free Methodist Church in Canada

The following principles and practice have been drawn together from our own learnings in developing partnerships, as well as from a number of organizations with long involvement in developing working, intercultural, ministry partnerships (Interdev, Partners International, World Vision etc.).

Principles

Paul's caution to Timothy was "lay hands quickly on no person" – meaning: *exercise prudence and build relationships*. At the same time Paul was not afraid to encourage Timothy into ministries where he felt inadequate and was perhaps lacking some skills – meaning: *be willing to take some risks while developing skill or capacity*. This is some good advice as we look at the practical issues involved in setting up a partnership.

A partnership is the association of two or more autonomous bodies who have formed a trusting relationship and are fulfilling agreed-upon goals by sharing complementary gifts and abilities. It is a relationship of shared commitment and interdependency.

A transformative partnership in Christian ministry is a cooperative relationship between two autonomous bodies whereby each enables the other to grow in its capacity to initiate and carry out change for the sake of the gospel.

Transformative partnerships have three characteristics: relationship, vision, and results.

Relationship is the means by which trust, communication, and collaboration are made possible – "do we know each other well enough to respect and trust each partner's contribution to the whole?" **Vision** is a compelling picture of what the partnership can achieve and how it is going to get there – "what can be done together for the Kingdom and how are we going to do it?" **Results** describes the partnership's capacity to deliver tangible outcomes – "what are we getting done?"

Steps to Forming Partnerships

Partnerships between local congregations and international ministries are the ultimate opportunity for church involvement in mission. These partnerships take all the available mission education, intercultural sensitivity, and mobilization resources of a local church and Global Ministries support, and integrates them into a comprehensive and cohesive expression of the life of a local church in mission.

Partnerships may not replace other forms of church mission involvement. Of course churches may continue to fund missionaries and mission projects that are not integrated into an international partnership. However, every church desires to capture its members' vision for mission through an integrated expression of its life and faith that unites all its members. Thus, a long-term international partnership can be the "tent pole" that supports all other forms of mission involvement.

Such partnerships take time to develop. The following process is probably necessary for most congregations as they pursue committing themselves to an international partnership.

Phase One: Laying the Foundations

1. Discussion of Concept

Workshop process with congregational leaders and global ministries facilitator to discuss the concept and potential of an international partnership.

2. Identification of Possible International Partners

Identification by the congregation of the region in the world where they believe God is calling them to build a long-term relationship with indigenous church ministry. This can be based on existing church interests, church location and/or current church mission involvement. In addition, a congregation may want to identify other churches who might want to join in with them in this partnership.

Phase Two: Building the Partnership

1. Exploratory Trip to the International Ministry

Unquestionably, "to know you is to love you." In order for a church to deepen its vision for partnership, and to understand the possibilities of relating to another community, visiting the partnering ministry is essential.

2. Congregational Educational Programs

Utilize appropriate educational resources and programs to enhance the congregation's understanding of holistic mission, cross-cultural communication and the background of the partner ministry. Some of these educational resources can be adapted for Sunday school programs, adult education and small groups, youth groups and worship bulletins.

3. Development of Involvement Strategies and a Covenant Agreement

It is next important to develop the specific components of their involvement with the partner ministry. Involvement timelines will be developed with an initial three-to five-year commitment, along with criteria for evaluation. Outcome measures will be created against which both partners can evaluate the impact of this relationship.

4. Phase Two and Beyond Financial Commitment

Because of the complexity of these partnerships, churches or clusters of congregations will make a significant financial commitment. Funding commitments will need to be developed along the way.

Phase Three: Ongoing Development of the Partnership

During years three and beyond of the partnership, the congregation will move into comprehensive forms of involvement. The goal is that everyone in the church will be aware of, concerned about, and in some way involved in the partnership.

1. assisting in the church sending short-term visitors
2. facilitating longer-term service by professional specialists
4. enabling visits to the congregation by leaders in the international ministry
5. facilitating interaction between the congregation and the international ministry
6. providing regular reports to the congregation of progress in the ministry and regular interaction with the leaders in the international ministry of the impact the partnership is having on the life of the Canadian congregation
7. assisting in the evaluation by both communities of the partnership
8. providing ongoing educational and interpretive resources

Through this process, the Church will express around the world the truth that we are “co-heirs in Christ” (Romans 8.17). That which has been a reality before God since the Cross of Christ is now becoming a reality in the Church—and a reality before the eyes of the world. We will finally give the world the opportunity to come to faith in Christ, “by the love we have for one another” (John 13.35).

Appendix: Practices

Connecting

At the Connecting level, two or more potential partners are getting to know one another. *Relationships* are being built where each partner is assessing the values, commitments and contributions that the other is making. *Information sharing* is the major activity at this point. ("What are you doing? What are we doing?") Relationships between key leaders are informal and personal. Neither side is making a commitment to working together.

Example:

An exploratory trip from a Canadian pastor or church team visits a particular country and spends time investigating the various ministries of the Free Methodist Church which may be present.

Cooperation

At the Cooperation level the partners *begin to get a vision* of the possibilities for collaborative involvement – "what possible things do we have to offer one another?" The connection is still mainly based on *information sharing*, but in greater detail with a freer, warmer, flow. *Relationships* between key leaders are still informal and personal. There is a *low commitment* to one another – "let's keep in touch and keep talking; is there something we could do together?" Ministry partners are seeking to *build a consensus* amongst their respective teams about possible partnering.

Example:

Following an exploratory visit, a Canadian team may be invited to come back to the country to help with a particular project, such as a leadership retreat, church construction, or children's program, etc. Potential partners are assessing the possibilities of a more consistent relationship. Perhaps a leader from the host country is invited to a leadership program in Canada or to share the vision of the ministry in their country.

Coordination

At the Coordination level the partners have *articulated specific purposes* for a longer-term partnership. One or two *joint projects* may be identified and a plan is made to achieve these. *More formal relationships* are being built with agreed upon job descriptions and responsibilities. There is a *medium level commitment* to one another. In planning projects there is some *joint decision-making*. There is a *limited sharing of resources* between the partners.

Example:

A formal agreement is put in place that defines how the two partners can help each other to achieve certain objectives. Initially one or two clearly identified projects are mutually agreed upon. The relationships between the two groups are clarified. Both sides are understood to be making a significant commitment to the agreement. Both parties are engaged as respected equals in the decision-making process. Resources are shared in a responsible manner with limited initial commitment until reporting procedures are fully operational.

Collaboration

At the Collaboration level the partners have worked out a *clearly defined Vision and Purpose Statement* and are engaged in *comprehensive planning of joint ministries*. *Relationships have deepened* between the partner organizations with numerous points of contact and relationship between the partner teams. There is a *high commitment* to the partnership from both sides; both could suffer if the partnership breaks down. There is a *defined structure* to the working relationship and *defined process* for joint decision-making. Often there is *pooling of common resources* or joint involvement in the securing of resources.

Example:

The partners have together developed clear objectives based upon a particular vision of joint ministry. The partners work together extensively in planning projects and objectives. The joint ministry plan includes relationships of responsibility as well as processes for modifying, reporting, etc. Multiple leaders in both organizations are relating comfortably across cultures and contributing to one another's development. It is understood that both partners are highly committed to one another. Often funds are raised jointly and there may be joint access to such funding.

Tracking of Existing Partnerships

If a working agreement is negotiated and signed and a partnership begins to function, the agreement will define the responsibilities and expectations of each partner in order to achieve the common goal. The agreement is in force for a set period of time. Renewal of the agreement for another term is not assured and must be re-negotiated. Tracking the progress of the partnership in light of the expectations stated in the working agreement is accomplished through the following measures:

1. *Regular visits* (at least annually, often more) are made between the ministry partners. Written reports are submitted after each visit.
2. The ministry partners provide regular *written reports* (at least three times per year) that describe their activities and progress.
3. *Financial reports* are required within four months after the close of the fiscal year.
4. *Routine, general communications* occur between the partners throughout the year. These communications provide a great deal of insight into the overall health of the partnership.
5. Often other individuals or groups, supporting churches, donors, Area Directors, etc. will visit the ministry partners and bring *additional viewpoints* that help increase understanding within the partnership.

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