



MISSION POSSIBLE! **SHARING IN GOD'S MISSION BY** **ESTABLISHING CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS**

Methodism has a global character and its ministry aims to overcome many kinds of boundaries: political, historical, social, economical, cultural and linguistic ones. This can either be considered a rather theoretical concept and an idealistic idea – or an invitation to make this vision come true. As leaders of Methodist Churches in more than 25 European countries, we are convinced that mission is more than focusing on



the activities of our own local churches or thinking about supporting the work of unknown local churches elsewhere. Today, mission development also means partnership development, and sharing in God's mission consequently takes us beyond our own boundaries to work together with Christians in other parts of the world. That's what we would like you to experience by establishing church partnerships.

THE PURPOSE OF PARTNERSHIP

The purpose of church partnerships is to inspire local churches to become better equipped to respond to the mission challenges in their own communities and to share in the development and enrichment of God's mission in the partner churches.

THE HEART OF PARTNERSHIP

While there should be a mutual agreement what should be at the heart of any inter-church relationship, we recommend that all church partnerships include the following aspects:

Celebration

People of any age and language can join together in celebration of:

- what God has done and is still doing in each other's church and community life;
- each other's gifts, insights and faith stories;
- each other's cultural and spiritual heritage;
- hospitality, mutual trust and friendship.

Prayer

Prayer provides the energy and the connection for the relationship. Praying for and with churches in other situations encourages and strengthens faith and brings hope to those we pray with. This can open new possibilities for mission and service.

Learning Opportunities

Sometimes we are tempted to expect that our own expression of Christian faith will be the same in other parts of the world. Church partnerships teach us how much of what we take for granted is determined, at least in part, through cultural heritages and historical development. It is therefore most helpful to learn what it means for others to be Christians, and to think about how this relates to our own lives. Joint Bible studies, worship services, discussions, fun events, social activities and informal conversations help us to gain a much broader picture of the Church. Further, they enable us to overcome generalizations and to see the world, our local church and even our own life and faith through different eyes.

Evangelism and Service

Exchanging each other's ways of talking about Jesus and helping people to faith can have a profound effect on our own situation. Discovering ways of serving each other or of jointly developing projects to respond to social needs in each community, will have an encouraging impact on the individual discipleship of those involved. Particularly for young people, any kind of practical experience related to a joint Mission activity or a joint serving ministry can determine the course for their whole life.



SOME PRACTICAL ISSUES

How to Start a Partnership

- The idea for a church partnership can arise from personal contacts, through holidays or migration, from the interest in a particular part of the world, from an existing town twinning, from a Volunteers-in-Mission visit or from a variety of other experiences.
- The Fund for Mission in Europe is willing to help you identify your potential partner church and help you take the first steps in order to avoid duplication and in the interest of transparency that the head of church (local or national) is informed of your plans.
- A church partnership should not be just for the enthusiastic few. It needs to be owned by the whole church from the very beginning. A good way forward is to establish a contact with representatives of all generations. This helps to build and enhance the partnerships on behalf of the whole church.

Communication

- A first communication step will most probably be the exchange of letters/e-mails with some general and particular information, prayer concerns and photos.
- The opportunity to meet soon after a partnership has started should be a goal, taking into account many factors, including distances, costs and language.
- Visits should be well prepared. This means, amongst other things, that time and length are agreed on a mutual base. Preparations should include awareness of the culture and church life.
- Try to learn the other's language – this will be an important contribution towards sharing in the «burden of translation».

Goals and Timeline

- Both partners should try to be carefully listen to one another in order to learn about the respective mission priorities. It will be an important foundation of the future partnership.
- The partners need to agree on the main goals of their relationship. This is an important factor in avoiding disappointments because of different expectations.
- These goals should be regularly and mutually reviewed and – if necessary – adapted.
- It has proved helpful for a commitment to a church partnership to be for between 3 and 5 years. At the end of the agreement, the commitment can be either brought to an end or be renegotiated.

Finances

- Taking in account all the above, a partnership between churches in extremely different economic situations will probably include the desire to share financial resources. Money certainly has a place in partnership development, however, it is not all what a church to church relationship is about.
- It is important to mutually agree in advance on what donations, which are sent to the partner church, will be used for. One-sided terms and conditions should be avoided since abuse of power can occur in this way. Additionally it should be avoided that one church is becoming dependent on its partner church.
- We strongly advice that any financial donations are sent through official channels, and are not transferred directly from church to church nor brought personally to the partner church. This is a matter of transparency and accountability in order to avoid envy and the suspicion of corruption. This is intended to support trusting relationships and the development of God's mission. All donations should appear in the church accounts and information be given to what it is used for.

Transforming Partnership

Different parts of the global 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. No part of the church can do it alone. We are called to work in partnership with others. This may result in a transformation of your life and faith, and if you are not willing to be changed, you should not enter into a partnership. But if you do so, you will also become part of God's mission in another country and contribute to the transformation of the world.



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