

**Guidelines for churches interested in forming cross-cultural partnerships**

# **Church to Church Partnerships**



**Global  
Connections**

## Contents

Introduction	3
The importance of partnership	3
Core values	4
Key issues	5
Checklist	7
Common mistakes	8
Case studies	10

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## Introduction

The Global Connections *Code of Best Practice for Church to Church Partnerships* (C2CP) is designed to provide guidelines for churches interested in forming partnerships with churches, denominations and organisations in cross-cultural settings abroad or in the UK. These brief guidelines have been developed by a group of Church leaders from a variety of backgrounds, all of whom have significant experience in cross-cultural partnerships.

## The importance of partnerships

The New Testament uses the image of the body to describe the church (1 Cor. 12). Each member is needed and each one has a role to play. We are used to applying these principles in our local churches, but they are equally applicable on a broader scale. The relative simplicity of international communications and travel and, most importantly, the dramatic growth of the church outside of the West give us an opportunity to demonstrate the multicultural reality of the body of Christ. We come together from across the world to form friendships and partnerships of equals; united under the headship of Christ.

Our unity in diversity brings honour to Christ and is a powerful demonstration of the truth of his message.



## Core values

- **God and his mission:** God is drawing people from every tribe tongue and nation to himself in Jesus Christ. The aim of partnership is to discern where God is at work and to join with him in his mission.
- **The local church:** the local church is central to God's mission in the world.
- **Local decision making:** the local church is responsible for making decisions about its activities and projects.
- **The world:** God is at work in the whole world and partnerships should reflect this. It is not enough simply to meet our own needs; we have to reach out to others.
- **Prayer:** consistent, faithful prayer for God's work and for his people.
- **Receiving:** each partner has something to contribute and each partner has something to receive from the other. We have to learn to give but also to receive.
- **Mutual respect:** Scripture calls us to consider others better than ourselves and our partnerships should respect this. We respect our partners as brothers and sisters in Christ and also as people from whom we can learn and who can bless us.
- **Integrity:** we act honestly towards one another, without hidden agendas.



## Key issues

### Culture

- Making friendships across cultures is a great blessing; we have a great deal to learn from each other. However, there are significant challenges, especially in the early days. Be prepared to ask for help from someone who knows both situations well. There are a number of mission agencies and church groups who are able to help British churches develop new contacts and partnerships.
- People in different cultures see things differently to us and do things in different ways. We should be slow to make judgements about actions that we do not understand. All cultures, including our own, need to be seen in the light of Scripture.
- The more we make friends with people from other cultures, the more we get to see our own background in a new light. It is a real privilege to learn to see ourselves through the eyes of others.

### Relationships

- Good, loving, Christ-like relationships are more important than simply getting a task done. We need to invest time in getting to know one another and building the friendships that our common task is based upon.
- People deal with conflict in relationships in different ways. It is important for partners to think through, together, how they will approach possible conflict or relationship breakdown. It is almost impossible to do this once a crisis has developed.
- Very often, church to church partnerships are based upon a friendship between two leaders. This is a good basis for a start, but if the partnership is to last for a long time we need to ensure that a wider network of friendships develops.
- Joint projects eventually come to an end and it is important to know how to bring activities to a close successfully. Friendships, however, should last beyond the shared project activity.
- Often, the best way to protect a relationship is for the partners to sit down together and to develop a written document that sets out the way in which they see the partnership developing and any agreed outcomes. This should be revisited from time to time.

## Finance

- It is important to recognise that finance has the capacity to distort relationships. Partners need to have a clear understanding of one another's expectations in this area.
- It is important to have systems of financial accountability in place. However, accountability needs to be flexible enough to allow for local decision making and to reflect conditions where project management may be more difficult than in the West.
- In some partnerships, the UK partner makes a financial contribution, while in other situations, it is the church in the UK that receives finance from their overseas partner and in many cases, there is no financial aspect to the partnership at all.
- It is perfectly feasible to share things other than money. Church partners can share one another's teaching ministry, worship leading and can learn to bless one another in many different ways. These can be much more important and have a reach far beyond any financial support.



## Check list

This list highlights issues that need to be considered in cross-cultural Church partnerships. It is important that these questions are discussed in a culturally appropriate fashion and that a joint understanding is reached.

- A time of significant prayer and discernment should be a part of process involved in developing the partnership.
- Those involved in leading the partnership should develop an understanding of the culture and history of the people involved.
- All partners should have a clear understanding of any financial component to the partnership.
- All partners should have a realistic understanding of the time available and the capacity of the different partners to be involved in joint ventures.
- Everyone involved should be aware of other local or international partners who are working in the same area.
- There needs to be a mechanism for identifying and addressing disagreement and conflict in the partnership.
- Is there a process for acknowledging the completion of partnership activities?

### **British churches should also consider the following:**

- British churches and Christians often have unconscious feelings of superiority towards their brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. These should be addressed in the light of Scripture and the world Christian situation, if the British church is to play a full role in a partnership.
- British churches need to be aware of the legal and accounting issues raised by transferring money to and from the UK if these form a part of the partnership.



## Common mistakes

- Promising things you cannot or do not deliver.
- Failure to be upfront and honest about any reticence to partner either in general or in specific projects.
- Speaking ill of the other party without having talked things through with them proactively (directly or indirectly).
- Speaking ill of other partners / donors known to your partner.
- Failure to be clear about any costs or charges involved with things being offered.
- Sending insufficiently experienced, prepared or godly short term teams who dishonour either or both parties and/or the gospel.
- Not being sufficiently cautious about the security needs of partners in closed countries.
- Jumping to offer solutions to problems without fully understanding the issues involved or the long-term implications of your intervention.
- Assuming that finance is the most important need in any situation.

*This document has its origins in table group discussions at the Global Connections Conference in November 2014. The output from the discussions was compiled and reviewed by a group of church leaders who developed the current format of the document. This draft was reviewed, before being submitted to a number of experienced overseas partners for their input. The result is a document which has received a wide range of input from church leaders in the UK and worldwide and which represents a distillation of years of experience.*

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## Case Studies

### All Souls Church London

John Stott met Mercy Abrahams during a visit to India in 1994. "At that time I was running a home for destitute women. In my 2-roomed house I was supporting street prostitutes who had been rescued from brothels. I had 13 women with me - a 9 year old, some teenagers and others in their early 20s. 'Uncle John' was impressed, and promised to help us by the first plot of land,' Mercy explained. John also suggested training the women in vocational skills, which led to the launch of screen-printing and sewing programmes. He then helped Mercy source other funding in the UK and subsequently to buy more than 15 acres of land. In 2001, John invited Mercy and her family to visit the UK and it was at that point that the relationship with the whole church began.

Mercy has since visited All Souls several times to update the congregation on how the ministry is developing and to thank them for their support. As well as inspiring and challenging the church through her testimony of God's work through her ministry, Mercy has also taught on Christian responses to poverty.

All Souls have sent three short-term teams to India. The first group of 13 people went in 2002, soon after Mercy's first visit to the church. They helped build two hostels, - one for women and one for children - and taught sewing and practical skills to the women. Following on from this trip, two women returned to the Mahalir Aran Trust (MAT) as short-term mission partners, working specifically on developing the sewing training and handicraft production. One has since become a long-term mission partner with her own ministry, linking with other organisations in India as well as the MAT. In 2010, a second short term team visited. This group helped at the ICT centre, taught English, ran children's activities, worked on the land, and produced the promotional video for the Trust website. The third short term team included medics to help at MAT's medical centre, as well as a builder, photographer and others who worked with the children.

The team trips have inspired others to visit over the years; some whilst on holiday, some to train pastors, and others have made contributions to the community by training the women and helping with language study. Most recently, one of the church counsellors visited India for three weeks to help develop the counselling services and advise on employing an Indian chaplain or counsellor.

As well as teams or individuals going out to India, Mercy's UK visits have provided opportunities for members of All Souls with particular skills to engage with the work from UK: an HR expert was able to give advice regarding administration and job descriptions, an architect helped with the design of the proposed new church building, and the All Souls church manager helped Mercy think through the organisational structure of the Trust.

Anna Bishop, Minister (World Mission) at All Souls, shared the impact of these short-term trips on those who went: "All those who have visited as part of a short-term team would say that it was a life-changing experience – it changed how they look at life, at the global church family, and at the gifts God has given them. It stretched them in a way they hadn't expected and they have become more involved on their return. Sometimes people discover new gifts or passions. For some, going to India opened up children's work to them and they are now involved in regular children's ministry in London. Going from a city centre soaked in materialism to the simplicity of rural India is a massive contrast – you can't experience that and it not have an impact on you. It raises lots of questions and challenges to think through as Christians. Mercy has helped us with that, too."

"Mercy Abrahams and MAT are beloved at All Souls" Anna explained, "and I think we are loved by them too. Everything we do flows out of that."

## **Hook Evangelical Church**

Hook Evangelical Church's involvement with the Dawla people of Chad is an example of how a church in the UK has built an ongoing relationship with a church in Africa through the intermediary of a UK mission agency. Patrick Tucker, who was an elder at Hook EC, explains.

### **What made the church decide to get involved with InFocus?**

The church has always had a strong mission interest. In 2000 someone suggested that we should consider adopting a people group. It became clear that many people in the church had an appetite to support something quite pioneering – linking to a group without the scriptures and among whom little or no evangelism was being done.

### **How did you find the right project?**

Wycliffe's projects team helped link us with the Dawla people group in Chad. This group seemed to match the 'criteria': no existing evangelism, no church and no scripture translation. But there was a young Chadian man, Jean, whose father was a Dawla, who wanted to reach out to that group. So, in God's timing, some of the big decisions were made for us. Jean was ready to begin work and our church agreed to provide financial backing for him as a full-time evangelist to the Dawla.

Since the start in 2002, much of Hook's prayer and financial support has been for Jean doing village evangelism among the Dawla. (He left the work in 2008 but another worker has taken his place.) We also learned of another Chadian evangelist working among the Dawla in a different village and we have been able to support him by prayer and finance. Support from other sources has also enabled a couple from Wycliffe US to make huge inroads into the analysis of the Dawla language: producing an alphabet, dictionary, learn-to-read books, health leaflets and guides for

teachers, as well as portions of scripture text. Literacy classes have been set up, involving up to 500 Dawla speakers.

### **And you also visited Chad?**

From the beginning we always hoped it would be possible to visit. The first visit in 2003 was carefully planned because the Dawla had no idea who we were and may have cared even less if they knew why we were there! As time went by we made further visits to do practical work with Chadian churches in the Gajara region, not far from the Dawla. Little by little this has allowed us to make contact with the Dawla people themselves and to win their confidence.

Our members have also been able to benefit from 'the Chad experience' by providing teams to run holiday Bible clubs in the capital, N'Djamena. A young couple spent a year doing administration and support work. Altogether, nearly 30 people have been able to visit. The impact has been inspirational and has 'lifted' church life.

### **How has being connected to this project challenged your church?**

From the beginning we wanted this to be a whole church project, but getting this vision across is always a challenge! It can be difficult for Hookites to picture what is going on in Chad. Since we started we have had a number of new members and regular attendees, and the danger is we just assume they know what we are talking about when we mention the Dawla project. So we have to work hard at our communications: with prayer and regular updates in services, newsletters etc. One other great benefit has been when workers from Chad have visited the church to share what is going on.

### **What about encouragements?**

There's a real thrill to be part of a local church that is prayerfully and practically active in seeking to extend God's kingdom in a place where it is not yet recognised, being involved in pioneer stuff among an unreached people group. We firmly believe the interest in a people group without the Bible or a church has kept the need of the unevangelised high on our agenda. It's also great to see so much progress being made in so little time. The Dawla now have their language written down and literature produced. This is a blessing in itself – let alone one day having the scriptures in their own language.

### **And the future?**

We knew our commitment to the project would be long-term. This is a project that will run for many, many years yet and we need to remind people of this. We expect future visits will be vital for information and encouragement. Finally, we need to trust God's word that one day we will meet Dawla people before the throne of the Lamb!

Adapted from InFocus: Hook Evangelical Church in Chad from Wycliffe Bible Translators' Words for Life magazine. Although this article was written a number of years ago the links between the church and Chad remain strong and active. If your church is interested in supporting a Wycliffe project visit [wycliffe.org.uk/projects](http://wycliffe.org.uk/projects).