

Ten Principles of Partnership

from “Towards Dynamic Mission: Renewing the Church for Mission”

adopted: Anglican Consultative Council, 1993

Introduction:

Partners in Mission is a continuing process by which the Churches of the Communion contribute to each other's local mission. It assists Churches in sharpening their mission priorities and setting goals. They can share with others from their resources such as experience of poverty and weakness, acting for justice, spirituality and prayer, friendship, enthusiasm, patterns of development, liturgy, dance and song, people and money. They can receive from the resources of others. In so doing all participate in God's mission in the world.

These principles of partnership can also be seen as characteristics of a healthy partnership in mission process.

The idea of mutual responsibility and interdependence in the body of Christ for the purpose of fulfilling the great commission is at the heart of New Testament missiology and practice. It has been a constant theme at ACC gatherings over the years (ACC-2 pp53-54; ACC-4 pp25-27; ACC-5 pp30-34; ACC-7 pp30-33). In short, the PIM process is designed to create and sustain relationships and continuous interdependence and not just to promote a single or isolated consultation (ACC-7 p30). Various ACC consultations have identified the following principles as essential to any meaningful or healthy partnership in mission process:

1. LOCAL INITIATIVE

“The responsibility for mission in any place belongs primarily to the church in that place” (ACC-2 p53). Thus the initiative for establishing a new missionary venture in any given place belongs to the local church. Partnership therefore implies respect for the authority of the local church.

2. MUTUALITY

Mutuality is underscored by a deep sense of open and joint accountability. “To be open to one another as friends on the basis of common commitment, mutual trust, confession and forgiveness, keeping one another informed of all plans and programmes and submitting ourselves to mutual accountability and correction.” (Sharing Life - El Escorial - Guidelines for sharing: 1987 World Council of Churches, p29)

Mutuality in partnership affirms the oneness of the people of God, their unity and interrelatedness as the children of one Father. In this relationship each person and community is recognized, valued, affirmed and respected.

In decision making, mutuality means sharing power. For example, major decisions affecting partners (in the South), should not be taken without their participation in the decision whether by their presence when it is made or by prior consultation.

3. RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP

Responsible stewardship in partnership means that partners see their resources as jointly owned and held in trust by each member for the common good (I Cor 12:7). The giving, receiving and use of resources must be controlled by judiciousness, selflessness, maturity and responsibility (II Cor 8:9).

God's gifts to any one part of the universal Church are given in trust for the mission of the whole church. No mission agency, diocese, province or national Church 'owns' its resources.

4. INTERDEPENDENCE

“Interdependence means to represent to one another our needs and problems in relationships where there are no absolute donors, or absolute recipients, but all have needs to be met and gifts to give” (WCC Ibid p29)

We need each other. We are incomplete and cannot be called the Church of God if the diversity implicit in our catholicity is over taken by a parochial, cultural or racial, homogeneity. In practice, three consequences follow:

- i. every cultural group has something to give or something others can learn from them;
- ii. all cultures need redeeming and therefore no culture can be said to be fundamentally Christian and thus superior to others;

- iii. every one has needs that can only be met by others. There is an African saying addressed to arrogant and selfish rich people: “no one buries himself - if he does one of his hands will be outside the grave.”

5. CROSS FERTILIZATION

Cross-fertilization requires a willingness to learn from one another. It produces an enrichment that results from being open to one another's ideas, experiences and respecting one another's cultural and contextual peculiarities in a process of give and take. “If we once acted as though there were only givers who had nothing to receive and receivers who had nothing to give, the oneness of the missionary task must now make us both givers and receivers” (ACC-2 p53).

6. INTEGRITY

A healthy partnership calls for integrity at all levels. It involves a recognition that all partners are essentially equal. This implies a commitment to be real and honest. We do not always have to say ‘yes’ to everything the other partner says for fear of offending or out of a false sense of guilt. A healthy partnership requires that we take each other seriously, raise creative and loving challenges that could lead to positive re-evaluation of long held traditions and assumptions. The result is a healthier and more enriching relationship. This includes both listening to each other and being willing to repent and change where we have been in error.

7. TRANSPARENCY

Transparency involves openness and honesty with one another. It also involves risks. The risk of being hurt. The risk of being misunderstood and the risk of being taken advantage of.

Information needs to be fully shared with one another; not only information connected with our specific relationship with one another but information about all of our relationships. Full disclosure of financial information to one another is one of the marks of a transparent relationship.

8. SOLIDARITY

We are part of each other. We are committed to one another in Christ's body. What touches one member touches the others. Thus no one member must be left to suffer alone. In many non-western cultures, group cohesion and solidarity are thought to be central to existence and crucial to the progress and survival of society. In spite of their strong belief in the rights and individuality of the individual, the Igbo of Nigeria, for example, argue that ‘igwe bu ike’ (‘our strength has its source and sustenance in group solidarity’). In parts of East Africa, the Harambee motif has been successfully harnessed in political, social and religious spheres to achieve astounding results. Missiologically speaking the church needs to act in solidarity ‘so that the world may see and believe’ (John 17:21).

9. MEETING TOGETHER

The concept of mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ implies that the Church in every place should find a forum for periodic evaluation, self assessment and cross-cultural fertilization. Thus while a PIM Consultation is not the fulfilment of a PIM vision, it is essential to it (ACC-2 p53). We need to meet together.

10. ACTING ECUMENICALLY

Our mission relationships as Anglicans must be seen as part of the wider mission relationships of all Christians. In this Decade MISAG-II underlines the importance of the Lambeth call for Anglicans to explore ways of being involved in mission co-operatively with other Christians. We need the stimulation, the critique and the encouragement of sisters and brothers in Christ of other traditions. A constant question before us must be, to what extent are those of other traditions invited to participate in advising and working with us in our outreach?