

Partner Congregation Quick Reference Guide

For congregations in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA partnered with congregations in the companion synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Colombia (IELCO) and the Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT)

An Important step for growth	page 2
Ideas for nurturing a partner congregation relationship	pages 3-5
Planning a visit	page 6
When and how to provide financial support	pages 7-9
When questions or challenges arise	page 10
Synod contact information	page 11

Salaam katika jina la Yesu Kristo!
Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ!
Saludos en nombre de Jesús Cristo!

Thank you for your congregation's commitment to enter into a partner congregation relationship! The partner congregation ministry exists for the purpose of strengthening one another for life and mission within the body of Christ. The relationship you share with your partner congregation is a mutual one – where both congregations share and receive, reflecting a new understanding of mission in Christ's Church.

"Companion synod [and partner congregation] relationships embody the accompaniment model for mission. Accompaniment –literally, walking together side by side-is a mutual relationship between companion churches who walk together in service in God's mission. Each church has primary responsibility for mission in its own area...The biblical roots of accompaniment are found in the incarnation of Jesus when God walks with us. One of the stories that unfolds this presence is in Luke 24:13-35, the Easter story of the friends walking on the road to Emmaus... ***We walk with one another in a journey where the presence of God is revealed to us...***The accompaniment model rose out of the changing paradigm of mission. Today, churches throughout the world are now made up of people who have been Christians for generations. Instead of taking the lead on mission in their countries, we interact with one another as colleagues, fellow workers in the vineyard of Christ..." (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Global Mission Companion Synods Handbook, Summer 2006, Orientation Handout C)

So, now that you have a partner congregation what's next? As with all relationships, it takes hard work, attention, and patience to nurture growth. This becomes that much more challenging when the relationship is between two unique and ever-changing congregations, located in different cultures and settings, thousands of miles away from one another, and who speak different languages. That's part of the challenge of this relationship but it is also part of the joy. This guide provides some practical suggestions for nurturing your partner congregation relationship.

An Important Step for Growth

Establishing a **mission support team** or similar kind of group that will oversee the partner congregation relationship will help to provide the consistent and intentional care that any growing relationship requires. Such a group is essential for communication with your partner congregation, the synod, and members of your own congregation. This group can also establish long-term goals and provide leadership through times of staff transition.

Ideas for nurturing a partner congregation relationship

Communicate regularly:

- Send an initial letter of thanksgiving describing your congregation's vision and mission; your location and setting (rural, town, lakes, woods, hilly and other features), tell about your Sunday School, woman's and men's groups, Bible studies, choirs, youth groups, and other kinds of activities and events; enclose photographs of your church, staff, members.
- Write letters on computer so print is legible. If someone in your congregation or community knows Spanish consider asking them to help with translation. Note: Overseas mail service can take a long time and delivery can be unreliable.
- If technology and local conditions permit, communicate via email, fax, audio recordings, video recordings, or through web logs.

In Worship:

- Consider planning a special litany together – to be used on the same Sunday in both your churches as a way to mark your relationship.
- Pray regularly for your partner congregation; exchange prayer requests, and remember special anniversaries and other significant events.
- Exchange worship banners as a visible sign of your connection.
- Learn a few phrases in the language of your companion for a liturgical response during

worship such as "Christ is Risen!" or "Thanks be to God!"

- Learn a song or hymn in your companion's language.

With children and youth:

- Plan a study of your partner congregation's country, culture, and church history.
- Have students draw pictures and write notes of greeting to the children of your partner congregation.
- Teach students songs or hymns from your partner congregation's country.
- Take photos of children and send to your partner congregation with a letter of greeting.

With adults:

- Plan an education series on the partner congregation's country, culture, and church history.
- Invite a speaker who is either from your partner congregation's country or someone who has visited that country to talk about their experiences.
- List your partner congregation in your bulletin each week and have a regular update column in your bulletin.
- Invite groups in the congregation to think up unique ways to share with your partner congregation how they are part of your ministry.
- Consider holding a simultaneous Bible study and share your insights and thoughts.
- Explore the current political and economic needs of your partner congregation's country

and consider how your congregation can become an advocate on behalf of those needs in this country.

To promote and encourage ongoing interest:

- Post photographs of your partner congregation and its members on a special display.
- Run a series of articles in the newsletter written by someone from your partner congregation.
- Exchange basic recipes with members of your partner congregation and include them in a congregation potluck or cookbook.

Planning a Visit

Visiting your partner congregation or hosting an individual or group from your partner congregation can strengthen your relationship and build understanding better than any letter, video, or slide show ever will. Visits are personal and visible expressions of the relationship we share in Christ. A few things to consider when planning a visit:

- Always plan visits in conjunction with – and by invitation of – the partner congregation. Visits to your partner congregation are often welcome but consider that visits can also be a burden to a congregation with limited resources.
- Identify specific purposes and expectations for visits between partners, e.g. special events such as an anniversary or special service project.
- Notify the synod office of your plan to visit. This helps synod staff coordinate the Companion Synod program. Also, synod staff and other synod members can provide your group with valuable information as you plan your trip.
- Be aware of political conditions that might affect travel to or from your partner congregation's country.
- Invite members of your partner congregation to visit your congregation. When you host guests try to focus on listening as much as "showing". Create occasions where guests can share their faith. Listening is receiving.

(Excerpts from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Global Mission Companion Synods Handbook, Summer 2006, p. 17)

When and How to Provide Financial Support

One of the most frequently asked questions in a partner congregation relationship centers around financial support. While this kind of support is appreciated it is not a requirement of the partner congregation program, and important steps are strongly recommended before making this commitment of resources.

Before your congregation considers providing financial resources to your partner congregation spend time establishing and nurturing your relationship through communication and prayer. After a period of time, if you wish to provide financial support for your partner congregation the Global Missions/Companion Synod Committee, in cooperation with the ELCT and IELCO, requests that you follow these guidelines:

- 1) Congregations may contribute up to \$500 to their partner congregation per year. A maximum contribution per year encourages a partner relationship that is not defined solely by money. It also lessens the disparity that can result between congregations in Tanzania and Colombia when one receives more financial support than another. Please note: at the request of the Central Diocese, financial gifts given to partner congregations in Tanzania will be divided evenly, one half going to provide educational scholarships for youth in your partner congregation and the other half used for any ministry project as your partner congregation sees fit.
- 2) Money sent to partner congregations should be sent by check (payable to Southeastern Minnesota Synod) to the synod office along with a letter that lists the partner congregation's name and any specific project

or fund that the money is to be used for by that congregation.

- 3) Once a check is received the synod will then wire the money to your partner congregation and include a letter announcing your financial gift. A copy of that letter will be sent to your congregation and to the Diocese or national Church. Please note: the synod wires mission support funds quarterly as agreed upon with the companion synods.
- 4) **Financial gifts above \$ 500 are welcome for the work of the larger church in either Tanzania or Colombia.** Your congregation's check, *given in honor of your partner congregation*, should be sent to the synod either designated (*e.g. the Tanzania Scholarship Fund or Leadership & Development LIZWAN in Colombia*) or undesignated for use by the Central Diocese in Tanzania or by the national Church in Colombia. Undesignated gifts help to meet special needs requests.
- 5) Please read the following statement about financial resources from the ELCA Global Mission "Companion Synods Handbook":

"Global Stewardship Principles"

(from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Global Mission Companion Synods Handbook, Summer 2006, pp. 11-12)

Accompaniment emphasizes relationships before resources. Money can represent power and when it becomes part of the relationship, it may disrupt the mutuality and equality of the partnership.

Development of programs and allocations of resources flow from how companions relate, rather than vice versa. Accompaniment means mutuality in the sharing of gifts for ministry. Use the following principles to guide financial decisions.

- Establish the relationship first, and then consider sharing financial gifts.
...Prematurely sharing financial assistance will put the ELCA [congregation] in the dominant and controlling role in the relationship and destroy mutuality in mission.
- Follow your partner congregation's agenda, not yours. Projects and plans for spending monetary gifts should originate with the partner congregation...
- Benefit the community rather than individuals. Financial gifts should work for the greater good of the community or whole church and not benefit one family or individual.
- Support development rather than dependency. Financial gifts should help empower and develop self-sufficiency.
- Make use of synod oversight and coordination. At the request of the companion synods in Colombia and Tanzania all financial gifts should be sent through the synod office. This provides transparency and accountability.

When Questions or Challenges Arise

As in most relationships, challenges can arise. The Global Missions/Companion Synod Committee, the Companion Synod Congregational Partnership Team and synod staff are all available to provide your congregation encouragement and support. Please contact they synod or one of the Partnership Team members listed on the back of this guide.

Each year your congregation will be asked to reflect on your partner congregation by completing an annual report. This form is important because it provides an up-to-date record of the synod's partner congregations. The ideas and positive feedback you provide on the report can be used to promote interest in this program and the report is one of the ways your congregation can share concerns and questions with the Partnership Team.

Through the years ahead you will have the privilege and joy of sharing in the life and ministry of your partner congregation through prayer, communication via letters or email, study and reflection, exchange of resources and maybe even exchange of people. We pray that this relationship will provide your congregation with an expanded view of the body of Christ, broaden your vision of the Church's mission, and help your congregation to grow in discipleship. The blessings of our Risen Lord and Savior be with you and your partner congregation always.

**2007-2008 Southeastern Minnesota Synod
Congregational Partnership Team**

Rev. Wendy Anderson 507 265-3355 wjanderson@wctatel.net

Rev. Steve Delzer 507 331-2276 steve@oursaviorsfbo.org;

Rev. Mark Johnson 507 645 4429 mjohnson@stjohns-elca.org;

Rev. Richard Jorgensen 507 334-4389 rljpastor@qwest.net;

Rev. Tom Kolden 507-324-5283 ttkolden@frontiernet.net;

Gordy Kosfeld 507-334-0061 kosfeld@msn.com;

Jim Nielsen 507-334-4782 jlniels@deskmedia.com;

Rev. Meg Sander 507-553-3513 pmstb@yahoo.com;

Dr. Richard Wintersteen 507-625-7807
richard.wintersteen@mnsu.edu

Synod Contact: Kathy Bolin 800 426-6376
bolin@semnsynod.org