

## Partnership Document - Mission Committee

“This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things I command you.”  
[John 15: 11b-14]

### Introduction

1. Partnership begins with God’s vision of a global community: one humanity with all its multiplicity (**Creation**). Partnership is a tangible expression of a God who breaks into the world through the lives and struggles of peoples (**Incarnation**). It lives out God’s desire for all to be free from every form of human bondage and injustice (**Mission**). God calls the whole church into a journey towards partnership, walking the way of shared grace and generosity. Through partnerships, we may experience interdependence, exercise mutuality, and gift each other through a generous sharing and redistributing of time, love, talents and resources. Partnership offers us the opportunity to live out our calling to be the **body of Christ** so that with others we can experience joy, peace, love, hope and transformation in our broken world. This journey will haul us to unlikely places - from fear and comfort to courage and generosity. Such a journey is grounded on a sustaining spirituality (**Holy Spirit**) for the long haul.

ORIENTING WORDS  
‘fullness of life for all’  
In partnership with God in Christ  
Ephesians 4:1-16  
1 Corinthians 12  
John 1 and Genesis 1

### The URC’s Journey

2. From its inception, the URC has worked to affirm and uphold God’s mission of wholeness of life for all people and all of creation. Our basis of union states: “The Church is catholic or universal because Christ calls into it all peoples and because it proclaims the fullness of Christ’s Gospel to the whole world.” [A3] The habit of working in partnership has been and continues to be a dynamic and vital part of our witness to God’s mission in the world. While our antecedent denominations may have had varying understanding of mission, it is reasonable to say that for the URC (from 1972) “partnership” became the expression that best described the concept of “mission with” in contrast to the earlier assumptions.
3. In the 1980s, especially through the influence of CWM (partnership in mission, 1995; Mission in the Context of Empire (2010)), we affirmed doing justice at the heart of our participation in God’s mission. Given our size and consistent with our dissenting, non-conformist and uniting heritages, the URC came to see its special contribution within the larger *missio Dei* as directed toward working with partners advocating for systemic justice and social transformation. Consistent with this commitment we also maintained a focus on partnership that held ecumenical, development, peoples’ movements, and justice organizations together. Over the years, the URC increasingly our understanding and practice of partnership revolved around principles such as mutuality, reciprocity, trust, accountability, and transparency. The church also emphasized the importance of mutuality in listening and learning from the experiences of partners in the global South. Through CWM the URC began to place a stronger emphasis on the receiving component of people-to-people exchanges and on the welcoming of global partners into the URC.
4. Our Vision 2020 focus attempted to underscore all of the above: from mission to foreign lands to mission with partners directed toward the injustices in their place to mission with global partners directed toward recognizing ourselves as complicit in the creation of poverty, oppression, and environmental destruction in the world. The 2012 (May 10-11) partnership discussion paper at Mission Committee reiterated this.
5. Another transition relates to the growing interest across the church for direct engagement and participation in mission with global partners. While discouraged for a time, and recently only modestly supported through Assembly programs, there are growing expressions of direct congregational connections with global churches, agencies, and programs. We wish to affirm these and hope the reiteration of our working principles will be what such partnerships will be based on.

6. At a time of significant decline in membership of the church, through Vision 2020 and now *Walking the Way*, congregations have been recovering the biblical/theological awareness that mission is at the heart of the gospel and therefore at the centre of renewal. Most of our synods continue to see the global partnership program supported through a central fund as their primary avenue of participation in God's mission in the world. Some (including congregations) also seek out partners and projects outside the General Assembly program.

#### *What our partners say? Synod and Global*

7. To evaluate the current state of our Global partnerships we considered re visiting the question: what then are the principles/values that should shape our understanding partnership? To help us, we ask our Synods and Global partners for their responses
8. From both our networks and our global partners the core values named are consistent with our working understanding of partnership, though we may not always follow through on our good intentions. These can be grouped into: *solidarity, dignity, respect, mutuality, reciprocity, accountability, equity, justice.*

#### Related Working Principles

- Varying levels (local – national – international)
- Owning it
- Finding a key purpose
- Listening as a crucial habit
- Open to be transformed
- Ending well
- Learning together and from each other
- Recognising the distinctive nature of each partnership

#### *Making partnership happen*

9. Our practice of partnership with our global partners and across the constituencies of global and ecumenical bodies tend to revolve around several areas. These include:
  - a. people exchange – co-participation in forums and round tables and the sharing of people – partner in mission etc.
  - b. resource sharing – reciprocal and broadly deployed
  - c. advocacy-campaigns-shared topics for reflection, action, empowerment and transformation
  - d. Information-sharing especially given the speed and ease of electronic communication allow partners across the world to maintain effective and timely communication on issues of concern and to share stories that nurture hope.
  - e. Local connections – such congregation to congregation are affirmed by partners as beneficial on both ends of the relationship.
  - f. Offering space – especially accompanying migrant partner communities in our UK context
10. The above areas happen in a multiplicity of ways and is both a mixture of traditional and newer forms of partnerships. We need to see the many varied expressions of partnership that are emerging at local and global levels as signs of responsiveness to God's mission. We must seek to provide resources and advice to ensure that these are reflective of the best principles and practices of global partnership.
11. There are, though, challenging issues and tough questions that we mindful of and ask of each other and often wrestle with. These include: recognising power differentials and imbalance in our relating; asking partners what they think of us; balancing/enabling local autonomy with enabling enriching and direct personal relationships developing; wrestling with the place of realism in partnership (for instance: when a

#### Partnership that is faithful will manifest

- shared grace in Christ and thanksgiving to God
- mutuality and interdependence
- generosity in our engagement on justice issues
- recognition and respect of our identities
- open dialogue and transparency of action
- a two-way sharing of resources and gifts

partnership is working or not: how to end a partnership with integrity etc); who would we not partner with and why? How do we facilitate and shape partnerships in the context of climate disruption?

12. Environmental questions: Partnerships work best when relationships are formed and deepened face-to-face. Up to now, this has been achieved largely through air travel. However, air travel contributes significantly to carbon pollution. We have an obligation to find creative alternatives to air travel to achieve our aim of deepening relationships, such as online meetings, video and photo storytelling etc. To this end, Global and Intercultural ministries has designed a pilot project – The Macedonian Project’ – to develop these alternatives to air travel.

### *Restating our motivation*

"You yourselves are our **letter**, written on our **hearts**, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, **written not with ink** but with the Spirit of the living God, **not on tablets of stone** but on tablets of human hearts." [2 Corinthians 3:2-3].

13. Partnership begins with God’s vision of a global community of one humanity/creation with its multiplicity. Partnership is a recognition of a God who breaks into the world through the lives and struggles of peoples desiring all to free themselves from all forms of human bondage and injustice. This is a journey to which God calls the whole church, walking the way of shared grace/generosity, in mutuality and interdependence and in the sharing/redistributing of resources. Partnership offers us the opportunity to live out our calling to be the body of Christ so that with others we can together bring, joy, transformation and hope to our broken world. Partnership is about opening hearts of extravagance. Partnership is about becoming goodness through the practice of loving God in all of life, with life and for life. It is an invitation to be born again and again to a burning heart for justice (fullness of life). Partners are not projects. Partnership is meant to transform all, including ourselves. It is daily dying and rising with Christ. This journey will haul us to unlikely places - from our fear and comfort zones to generosity spaces. Such partnership will be grounded on a sustaining spirituality (Holy Spirit) for the long haul.

Global and Intercultural Ministries  
September 30, 2019

For Additional Documentation, kindly note the following: