

**General Guidelines for International Partnerships
Between PC(USA) Congregations, Presbyteries and Synods and
International Church Governing Bodies and Institutions**

- 1. Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. congregations, presbyteries and synod international partnerships and the World Mission program unit are given guidance through the policy “Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership,” adopted by the 215th General Assembly (2003).**

This policy emphasizes that our mission relationships within this country and around the world are most faithful when they proclaim and incarnate:

- Our shared grace in Christ and thanksgiving to God
- Our mutuality and interdependence
- Recognition and respect of our identities
- Open dialogue and transparency of action and
- Two-way sharing of resources, human and financial.

- 2. The 2003 PC(USA) policy statement, “[Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership](#),” is congruent with and respects many ecumenical statements and principles concerning relationships or partnerships between church bodies and institutions, such as the 1987 Guidelines for Sharing, from the World Council of Churches Consultation on *Koinonia*.**

These and similar documents call us all to seek:

- To answer God’s call in mission, *not serve our own needs by ‘doing good;’*
- Opportunities for initiatives in mission by any partner, *not one-sided efforts;*
- Mutual respect, *not paternalism;*
- To be independent (self-propagating, self-supporting, self-governing) church partners with a mission vision, *not dependent churches focused on survival;*
- Interdependent partnerships that are of benefit to all partners, *not one-sided dependent relationships;*
- Mutuality, *not one-way mission;*
- Opportunities and recognition for “the least of these,” *not exploitation to the benefit of the more powerful;*
- A growing web of partnerships, *not exclusive or private relationships;*
- To meet the holistic needs of churches and people(s), *not serve narrow agendas;*
- Open dialogue, prophetic challenge and mediation of differences, *not coercive or manipulative imposition of solutions;*
- To honor the integrity of the church context, structures and social dynamics, *not to subsidize another’s central church life nor exert undue pressure to change or conform;*
and

All international partnerships are called to seek the day when Christ’s church in all its diversity may show its unity for the sake of the gospel, not promoting or being content with division in Christ’s Body.

Application of these general guidelines to developing and reviewing partnerships

In living out these principles or guidelines for international partnerships, PC(USA) congregations, presbyteries and synods are asked to pay particular attention to the power dynamics that occur in attempting to relate as equal bodies in mutual relationship with our brothers and sisters in other places.

Experience through the 24 years of the International Presbytery and Synod Partnership Program of the PC(USA) strongly indicates the need for PC(USA) governing bodies and related groups to:

1. Consult with the national governing body of the partner church in another country prior to making agreements with a lower governing body or institution of that church. It is often appropriate and helpful to invite the national church body in that place to send someone to travel with the PC(USA) group while in that country. The Area Coordinator in the World Mission ministry area of the PC(USA) can advise PC(USA) groups on the appropriate contacts.

Rationale: Consultation with the national church body demonstrates respect for the independence of that body and their priorities for ministry and mission in that place. Further, such consultation helps to promote unity and to minimize competition and divisions within that church or institution.

2. Enter a time of study, prayer and discernment before initiating a partnership.

Rationale: The practice of partnership is a discipline that requires study and conversation, prayer and action. Mission history has many good examples, but also is full of bad examples of what not to do. “Partnership” as we understand the term missiologically, theologically is counter-cultural. Biblical and theological reflection and study of mission history are means of learning how to “be” the church as we attempt to relate to other parts of the Body of Christ around the world. We can trust that time belongs to God and, trusting in God’s sovereign plans, we need not rush before we have a healthy, established relationship. The Equipping for Mission Involvement office area of the PC(USA) can advise PC(USA) groups on [resources](#) for study and reflection.

3. Develop a written covenant agreement with the international church body or institution, after a sufficient number of exchange visits have occurred, to include ways in which both parties give and both receive.

Rationale: A covenant places the relationship within a Biblical and theological understanding and is an opportunity to clearly define joint intentions and expectations. A written document provides a healthy tool for regularly reviewing the relationship and activities of the partnership. The Equipping for Mission Involvement office area of the PC(USA) can advise PC(USA) groups on developing and reviewing covenant agreements.

4. In making financial commitments within the partnership:
 - a. Refrain from making financial commitments for at least the first two years of the partnership;

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- b. Limit the amount of the financial commitment, set any commitment to the scale of the local economy, and develop clear, agreed-upon guidelines for the funds' use, administration, and reporting.
- c. Be aware of, and try to minimize, the divisive impact that gifts to only one part of a partner church or institution can have on the whole. Consult with the national governing body of the partner church before making financial commitments.
- d. If congregational partnerships are developed within a presbytery partnership, there should be agreements on the limits of funds shared between congregations.
- e. Plan towards longer-term sustainability of joint projects, which includes refraining from paying the salaries of personnel, whether pastors or other staff.
- f. Send funds through the appropriate channels to optimize transparency in the relationship.

Rationale: While Presbyterians are encouraged to give generously to mission endeavors, funds cause more problems for partnerships than any other single issue. Respect for the priorities and mission vision of the partner should guide the financial commitments, rather than ministry being “donor-driven.” Competition and jealousies are frequently engendered within the partner church because of large financial gifts. Power dynamics within the partner church or institution are greatly affected by the infusion of outside funds, even to the point of dividing the church! It takes time and attentive listening and observing even to begin to understand the dynamics of another place and culture. “Transparency” and “accountability” require much dialogue to determine how they are understood on each side and what specific practices will be considered by both to be practical and necessary. Sustainability is a practice to be planned for, whether in outreach ministries or evangelism/church planting.

5. Join with other PC(USA) governing bodies and groups in [mission “networks”](#) that are related to World Mission program unit.

Rationale: We are able to be more faithful in our witness and mission when we reflect together, share information and learnings, and coordinate our actions within the connectional church that is the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.