

Guidelines for Pacific Northwest Conference Global Partnership Exchanges

As partnership exchanges proliferate as a model for global mission, it is important for partners to have mutually agreed upon understandings of goals, objectives, content and design of exchanges, or they could become just another tour without the faith dimension.

Partnership visits:

- People of faith interested in meeting people of faith in another setting.
- Duration: one to three weeks—longer may tire visitors or strain hosts.
- The objective is to befriend and understand Christians living and struggling faithfully in another cultural, political, economic, or social context.
- What is exchanged? hope, solidarity caring, respect, awareness, prayer.
- These are exchanges of hospitality, opportunities to learn.
- Exchanges break down hostility, enemy images, stereotypes.
- Whether all expectations are met in program, format or convenience is insignificant compared to the power of relationships established.

Through global partnerships,

We seek to develop global partnerships by bringing people together in dialogue on church life and on issues of peace, justice, spirituality and values and to develop a sense of our connection and our common

Twe experience full communion because we celebrate the same baptism, meet at the same table, share the same Word and cooperate in the same mission for God's Justice, Peace and Compassion. In partnership, we discover we are inseparable members of same faith. Delegations enhance the faith, hope and love of their hosts and return home with fresh perspectives for their own congregations.

Experiences of the UCC/EKU exchanges offer insights into partnership vis-

By Paul Kittlaus

Church members have experience traveling in tour groups and on cruises, but the experience of traveling as a Christian being hosted by Christians is new. There are important differences. Time with host families is important to learn about their participation in and style of church. Hosts and visitors are encouraged to ask questions freely, about war and peace, about economics and justice, about racism and violence, about youth and aging people, about current issues.

We have to learn something hard for Americans and Europeans: Trust. We want to control our schedule, to negotiate it, to substitute Plan A for Plan B, to choose our accommodations, to order from a menu. That's fine for the travel agent tours and cruises, but for our exchange program, we must learn to put ourselves in people's hands, into the care of strangers. We must trust that they will do all that can be done to make our days fulfilling and joyous. We have to be prepared to go along with their plans.

It's good for us to trust the spirit of Christ in our hosts. They will not let us down. We will find that we are under the wing of friends. It's like having friends

over. They don't ask which room they are going to be in each hour of the evening or what's for dinner. You go because you know they'll take good care that you'll enjoy yourself. That's the way to think of this experience. Trips become montages, full of white handkerchief farewells with lots of Holy Spirit squeezed in between. Being a Christian means trusting that God is already out there in front of us preparing the way for us. God will not fail. Then God will use us for a ministry of hospitality to our global partners.

When you host, think of what you would like to know, see and experience. Introduce them to your friends, church, city, Conference, ecumenical ministries, discussions, potlucks, elements of the economy. Plan a rhythm of activities with some discussions, some tours, some hands on experiences, some shopping, some free time. Plan an agenda ahead and send it to the global partner. That helps relieve anxieties and builds anticipation. Include names of hosts. Invite them to send names of delegates and some information them that might help in selecting and interesting hosts. Some guests may be invited to preach, lead a class, give words of greeting, share in a discussion. Give

some advanced notice.

Gift giving and receiving are important aspects of the visits. It's not a matter of spending a lot of money, but the thought and meaning of the gifts. Gifts should help them understand the Conference and your congregation. Handmade gifts are treasured. Gifts need to fit in luggage.

Delegates need to remember that their purpose in going is to represent the Conference and United Church of Christ, not just themselves, to understand their church and help them understand ours and to deepen relationships among members. Delegates should try to learn some language in advance to be able to greet people and know some polite phrases and to show interest. Delegates should take time to study about their own church, community and issues in order to share fully. Delegates need to be ready to share their own faith stories, priorities, struggles, and questions. Learn about the host country and church. Delegates should plan to keep a daily diary and take photos to help them share their experiences with people in their home church and other Conference churches.

From the *Manual for the UCC/EKU Exchange*

Some practical considerations based on experiences:

At the heart of a partnership experience is trusting hosts and graciously receiving the gift of being hosted.

1) For the Pacific NW - visiting groups should be eight—a maximum of 10. That makes finding host families and transportation manageable. Respecting timing and plans is important so that planners can find host families for future visitors.

2) Groups from one parish should visit one parish generally.

3) Partnership exchanges are not “group building” experiences. The focus needs to be on meeting people and learning about church life and work for peace and justice.

4) In orientation we need to help visitors be aware that the distances between and isolation of communities in eastern Washington are part of the culture and setting in which the churches here work.

5) Delegates should be church members, interested in learning about and participating in the church life of hosts.

6) The partnership goals would be lost if visits are seen as low-cost tours. There is time for sightseeing and shopping, but they are not the heart of the experience. Visitors should not expect that hosts meet all their desires, as they might with tourist travel.

7) Hosts and visitors need to be flexible. Not all schedules will work out, but hosts will wear down if schedules are overrun, because they plan an intentional experiences.

8) Organizers need to include free time. It's strenuous for many visitors whose English or German is limited.

9) Who to choose as delegates: Some screening helps. Married couples may be difficult to house together. They need to be committed to a mission experience, not a "trip together." Two traveling from one parish can be mutually supportive in sharing the experience at home.

Guidelines for Overseas Partnerships

From “Partnership in Mission” - Friendship Press

by Randall Mullins for the United Church Board for World Ministries

Purposes

1. Enable Christians in different lands to share and live out their understanding of Christian faithfulness.
2. Facilitate the growth and transformation of participants to deepen their understanding of their calling in the global family.
3. Identify ways to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.
4. Identify specific needs to be met through the partnership.

Attitudes and Cultural Sensitivity

1. Seek a reciprocal relationship. Respect the autonomy of the other.
2. Be sensitive to culture, life-style differences, unique concerns of partners.
3. Recognize how histories of domination have prevented dignity and mutuality.
4. Raise issues, priorities and questions of deep concern with sensitivity to the other's situation.
5. Realize the Christian community may be sharply divided over political and social issues—some may criticize their government and others may support it.

Note: Partner visits may be intense. There needs to be sensitivity that the emotional and spiritual intimacy of relationships combined with cultural differences not lead to sexual misconduct that would jeopardize the intent of the partnership contacts.

Organization

1. Consult the UCBWM and keep it informed.
2. Conferences and Associations are effective for facilitating.
3. Communicate with people in your local area from other denominations which may connect with that partner church, too.
4. Put the nature of implementing the partnership in writing.
5. Agree on limits
6. There should be a core group committed, taking responsibility for the long-term management of the partnership.
7. Structural backing of Conference staff and budget are important.

Exchanges

1. Exchanges of delegations are fruitful. Face to face contacts nurture the connections.
2. Partnerships should begin with an empty-hands spirit, not for financial exchanges, although that may come.
3. Financial exchanges require careful attention so mutuality is preserved.
4. Financial exchanges should be made with sensitivity as to their affect on the larger stewardship issues of congregations, Conferences, national and ecumenical church bodies. They should be in consultation with the Conference and UCBWM.
5. Patience and flexibility are important—respecting staffing, time involved.

Summary of issues to consider related to global partnership visits

Local and Conference partnership exchanges are part of denominational covenants of partnership. Partner churches need to seek relationships that are reciprocal and mutual, respecting the autonomy and hospitality of the other with sensitivity to differences in culture and life style. Partners need to do careful preparation and reflection to understand the vision and goals of global partnership as a part of world mission.

- **Partnership** is first a commitment to be aware of and pray for one another—exchanging letters, Bible studies, worship elements.

- **Partnership** is sharing joys and burdens.

- **Partnership** affirms the whole human community and opposes nationalism that divides people of faith from recognizing and realizing their covenant of friendship.

- **Partnership** affirms diversity among peoples and nations and growth that can emerge from contacts with those living in different value system and under different ideologies, religions, political and economic systems.

- **Partnership** comes from a desire for deeper, more mutual, more personal connections with Christians of other nations, coming with empty hands to receive and learn, as much as to give and teach.

- **Partnership** is mutual companionship, being open to one another as friends and family based on common commitment, mutual trust, confession and forgiveness.

Visits are based on hospitality.

- Partner visits are short-term accompaniment, not tours in five-star hotels. Groups often arrive, are greeted by hosts, and scatter. There are organized activities, meals with families, meetings with

church groups, and tears, hugs and energy. Visitors need to be ready to receive what hosts give, rather than overrunning the schedule with their needs.

- Visitors come to enhance the faith, hope and love of hosts and to return home with fresh perspectives to offer our congregations.

- Hosts offer hospitality, with sensitivity to the interests and needs of guests, bearing in mind the overall goals. Share yourself and your ministry, your community and your friends, your ecumenical and inter-cultural contacts. Share the issues of your life.

- Visits include study tours, exchange delegations, long-term mission work.

Some of the purposes:

- to enable Christians in different lands to share and to live out their understanding of faithfulness within their particular contexts.
- to facilitate growth and transformation;
- to deepen our understanding of our calling in our own setting of life in the global family;
- to discover we are inseparable despite different languages, cultures, histories, and societies;
- to strengthen faith connections and commitment;
- to break down barriers and overcome discrimination;
- to identify ways to work for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation;
- to share ideas on stewardship of the environment, on arts, on social services, on your life;
- to witness together for peace and join in vigils.
- to raise issues, priorities, questions of deep concern—with sensitivity to the other's situation, recognizing that the church com-

munity may be divided over political and social issues.

- Orientations of delegations should:

Be clear on the purpose.

Be sensitive to logistical difficulties for the partners.

Be patient and flexible.

Express hopes for partners.

Help participants be ready to grow as Christians.

Be sensitive to limits of organizers.

Be aware that host family and personal relationships are central to the experience.

Address issues of sexual harassment/misconduct, racism, nationalism.

- Study programs invite and facilitate thematic dialogue on critical assessment of issues to enhance mutuality, power sharing, and to deal with the power structures in our own lives and to see our own cultures in ways that bring hope.

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