



# **A RESOURCE ON DEVELOPING MISSION PARTNERSHIPS**

**- Multiplying Our Strength in Ministry -**

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-Metro/Urban/Rural/Small Town-  
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## Developing Mission Partnerships

The purpose of this resource brief is to provide your congregation with some helpful guidance if you are considering developing a mission partnership with another congregation, with your community or a community agency. This resource brief will address what it means to build a mission partnership that is equitable and sustainable, with a long-term focus.

This model of partnership is one among a variety of models. It contrasts with partnerships that have a short-term focus, are project- and client-oriented, such as working with Habitat for Humanity to build a home for a family. Short-term, project-oriented partnerships are important, but they do not build lasting and significant change for/with the communities being served. Short-term projects tend to focus on individuals/families rather than the larger community. Building a home for a family in need is valued ministry. However, the family continues to be in a situation of risk because the larger community continues to experience economic distress and challenges.

Mission partnerships with a long-term focus require the partners to develop a healthy relationship that will provide a solid foundation for a partnership that is equitable and sustainable. It is important for the partners to spend time and energy to get to know each other, to discuss each others' self-interests, to listen carefully to what each partner wants and does not want in the partnership. This relationship-building process needs to happen—first, on an interpersonal level, and second, at an inter-agencies/congregation level.

In Charlotte, North Carolina, a large Anglo Presbyterian Church, a smaller membership African American Presbyterian Church, an African American Baptist Church and residents from the Grier Heights community have spent the last year sharing with each other who they are, learning about each others' values and interests as they work together to develop a community-wide partnership, lifting up what they want and do not want in this proposed partnership. This group could have jumped immediately to identifying the projects they might develop to serve the residents of the Grier Heights neighborhood. However, the group knew from past experiences that they needed first to broaden everyone's ownership for this mutual effort. Deepening their relationship with each other would lead to effective and sustainable, long-term ventures with people from the Grier Heights neighborhood.

Every partnership is unique, formed by the intentions and commitments of two or more groups and their respective leaders. Partnerships take on various forms and styles; for example:

- Forming a neighborhood health ministry with other churches and community groups where each partner formally affiliates through representation on the governing board for this ministry;
- Developing a program partnership such as covenanting with Habitat for Humanity to build 2 homes each year for the next five years;
- Becoming a member of a community-based, housing development corporation by agreeing to have a representative serve on the board and providing funding annually to support the mission and work of the organization.

Mission partnerships take a lot of work and energy to build. Sometimes it entails taking risks such as:

- Diminished sense of ownership. In participating in a mission partnership, the church no longer has sole control of the ministry, because it must share leadership, ownership and decision-making with its other partners.
- Divided loyalty. Church members may have to choose between competing interests in their efforts to serve the larger mission partnership and other ministries of their congregation.

However, developing mission partnerships between churches and other community groups can bring significant benefits that far outweigh the risks such as:

- Expansion of resources available for the ministry
- Ecumenical awareness and relationships in working with other congregations
- Community visibility and credibility in extending the congregations' relationships with their neighbors by going deeper into and with their community.
- Enhanced community building by broadening the participation level of church and community participants

I have attached for your use two appendices to this brief resource paper on developing mission partnership. The first appendix – How Are Partnerships Nurtured? - is a summary of a study done by Rainbow Research about churches working in partnership with housing and community development organizations. The second appendix – Ingredients for Building An Effective Mission Partnership - is a reflection on my experiences and learning in working to develop urban-suburban church partnerships.

There is no perfect plan to develop the perfect Mission Partnership. Both of these “lists” provide helpful questions and insights that your congregations should consider, explore deeply, and discuss before it enters into a Mission Partnership.

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## How are Partnerships Nurtured?

1. A basic element of partnerships is the relationship and it is important that partners are committed to nurture the relationship ... and they practice this preaching.
2. The partnership structure is simple and clear: not too many partners
3. The project is simple and clear: not too complex
4. Partners share values
5. Partners communicate well and regularly
6. Partners build trust by doing their homework, keeping commitments, and meeting deadlines.
7. Differences of timing, desired outcomes and other expectations are acknowledged and resolved or accepted.
8. There are multiple forms and levels by which partners may be involved, e.g.
  - a. participating in governance
  - b. providing funds, property or other resources
  - c. providing staff, volunteers, or other labor
  - d. providing contacts with people in the community
  - e. providing technical expertise
9. The gifts of each partner are matched with the opportunities and demands of the project.
10. All partners have opportunities to develop their capabilities according to their choice.
11. Partners are open to “Quickening of the Spirit” and are not exclusively task oriented. They encourage fellowship activities such as joint prayer and worship.
12. Goals are matched well with partners' capacities.
  - a. Goals that stretch the partners don't exceed their breaking points.
  - b. Staffs, funding and other capacities are in scale with project goals.

## Ingredients for Building an Effective Mission Partnership

1. The partners must share a common vision and mission. A mission partnership must be guided and shared by a common vision and mission rather than from partners' self-interests.
2. The partnership ministry should be designed cooperatively by all of the partners.
3. The mission partnership must have the support of the senior staff person, i.e., senior pastor, executive director. An effective partnership cannot be initiated and sustained by middle-level staff persons without the authority and support of senior leadership.
4. The mission partnership must have the formal approval and support of each partner's governing body/constituency, i.e., congregation, session, board of directors. An effective partnership must have support from its leaders and constituencies if it is going to have continuity and be sustained in the long run.
5. The gifts of each partner, e.g., relationships with the community, resources, funding, must be recognized and contributed to the mission partnership. An effective, healthy partnership is built upon relationships of gifts and strengths and not upon a co-dependent relationship.
6. Each partner must have a "hands-on" role in the partnership. Hands-on involvement helps build a spirit of mutual participation and mutual accountability. Hands-on involvement moves the relationship beyond a "one-way, check-writing partnership."
7. A board/advisory board, with equitable representation from the partners, will oversee the partnership ministry, creating an on-going, hands-on ownership and accountability for this partnership ministry.
8. The persons/community "being served" by this partnership program/ministry should have representation on the board/advisory board. Such participation enables two-way dialogue with those who benefit from the ministry and enables the empowerment of those whom we "are serving" by developing their capacity to serve.
9. The partners should allow at least 5-8 years for the mission partnership to develop and mature. A mission partnership requires long-term commitment. Like any relationship, it takes time to learn about each other, to develop trust, and to deepen the relationship. To critically judge the effectiveness of a partnership at the end of its first year is premature and sometimes self-defeating. It is important to evaluate the partnership annually during the first 3-5 years to make any necessary changes in the program/ministry design that will allow the partnership can grow and mature.
10. The foundation of mission partnerships should be solid relationships among partners. It is important to develop, nurture and sustain these relationships. Persons engaged with the mission partnership play critical roles in leading and growing the partnership. They will be the mission partnership's primary advocates within their respective congregation/constituencies.
11. Every partner should provide funding to support the mission partnership. The funding will be proportional to the size and financial capacity of each partner. The funding should be designated specifically for the mission partnership to insure that each partner will receive a clear accounting of the employment of funds by the mission partnership.