Reviewing Partnership

in the Context of Empire

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

Reviewing Partnership in the Context of Empire

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300
Toronto, ON
Canada M8X 2Y4
1-800-268-3781
www.united-church.ca

Supported by the
Mission and
Service Fund

Design: Ian Ball, Graphics and Print

Printed in Canada 090127

Contents

Executive Summary

The United Church of Canada has been engaged in global partnership for over 150 years. Significant shifts have happened throughout that history, redirecting both the practice and theology of partnership to allow it to more fully engage the context of its day. Recent articulation of the nature of empire and the call to live faithfully in resistance to its forces, which are so destructive to the world and its peoples, has resulted in this most recent review. Partnership, the review proposes, is grounded in the relational nature of God, who calls us into right relationships with one another, with all of creation, and with God. Partnership leads us to form communities of right relationships, committed to resisting the forces of empire. To speak of partnership in this way requires that the whole church at all levels be invited into lived experiences of global partnership.

Worship with Koinonia, near Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The United Church of Canada has a long history of working in partnership with organizations around the world united in their commitment to fulfilling God's global mission. Because our global environment changes with time—socially, economically, geopolitically—the church periodically reviews its principles and practices of partnership, taking into account the current context for engaging in mission. Close consultation with global partners is always at the centre of such a review. Following is the report of the United Church's latest review of partnership, undertaken in 2007–08. The report was approved by the church's General Council Executive in November 2008, and initiatives to follow up on its various recommendations are underway.

A. Introduction

Bicycle ambulance provided by the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM)

Why a Review of Partnership?

For nearly 150 years, The United Church of Canada and its founding denominations have worked to affirm and uphold God's mission of wholeness of life for all people and all of creation. In striving to fulfill that mission, the church has closely related to many faith-based and secular organizations around the world. As Section B of this report ("The United Church of Canada and Global Partnership—A Short History") documents, for many decades "partnership" has been the formal term chosen to represent these relationships, both in form and content, method and goal. The act of working in partnership has been and continues to be a dynamic and vital part of the United Church's witness to God's mission in the world.

Periodically the church takes the time to review the key values, principles and practices that undergird its partnership model, and it does so in the context of contemporary global social, political, economic, environmental, and other realities. Our world and the way we engage in it is, after all, continually changing. Partnership reviews are seen as important opportunities to discover those expressions of partnership that will best facilitate the participation of the whole church in God's global mission in the years ahead. The last review took place in 1987–88, more than 20 years ago. A great deal has changed in the world during that period, making a review now both necessary and timely.

Mandate for the Review

The review was mandated by the General Council Executive at the request of the Permanent Committee, Programs for Mission and Ministry (PC-PMM). It was to be set in the context of contemporary empire as described and analyzed in *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*,[1] a report adopted by the 39th General Council. Other realities facing the church were also to be considered as part of the context for the review, namely

- the possibility of reduced capacity for support for global partnerships within the General Council Office
- the effects of the unified budget on limiting direct support for global partners
- the interest of the church for direct engagement in global mission and the expanding number of congregations undertaking global mission initiatives

The Partnership Review Task Group, consisting of General Council Office staff and elected members from across Canada,[2] was formed to guide the work.

The task group identified four questions to frame the review:

1. What *theology of partnership* can most faithfully inform the work of The United Church of Canada in its practice of partnership today?

2. What *principles of partnership* can be identified as arising from the current context and theological affirmations?

3. What *practice(s) of partnership* would best facilitate the participation of the whole church in God's mission?

4. What special implications might the results of the above three questions have to the practice of partnership in the Canadian context?

Context for the Review

As mentioned above, the world has changed dramatically over the course of the past 20 years. Shifts in geopolitical realities, the acceleration of economic globalization, the expanding gap between rich and impoverished people the world over, the growing militarization of societies, and the onset of climate change and increasing ecological ruin have become urgent global concerns affecting people everywhere. In 2006 the 39th General Council approved the report *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*, which described these trends and realities as interconnected systems of oppression that are global in scope. "Empire" was the term identified by the United Church, as well as by many of its global partners, to represent this new reality. It is in this context of contemporary empire that we seek to understand the meaning of partnership for this time.

What the United Church understands as empire is addressed comprehensively in *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire* and does not require repeating at length here. Suffice it to say, the report generally supported a definition offered by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). Empire, WARC said,

> *"…is the convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic and military imperial interests, systems and networks that seek to dominate political power and economic wealth. It typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities and countries to the more powerful. Empire today crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation states and either marginalizes or co-opts religious communities."*[3]

A shorthand version of this definition could be: empire is comprised of "interconnected systems of political and economic domination, often kept in place by violence or the threat of violence, that are global in scope and benefit the few at the expense of the many."[4] The report also stated that empire can be thought of both as a metaphor and as the empirical manifestation of neo-liberal economic globalization[5] and its many attendant destructive tendencies and consequences.

But definitions like these remain abstract and intangible. Putting a human face on those who experience empire most viscerally is critical. A principal characteristic and practice of the United Church's style and practice of partnership is to open itself fully to the lived experience of impoverished, marginalized, and vulnerable people everywhere. We have listened to heart-rending narratives of misery and despair: stories of economic privation and ever-deepening poverty in countries like Zambia, in Africa; stories of the rapacious extraction of precious minerals, with little or no benefits accruing to local populations, in countries like the Philippines, in South Asia; stories of massive environmental and ecological ruin in nations like Haiti, in the Caribbean; and stories of increasing homelessness and cultural disintegration among Aboriginal communities in countries like Canada, in North America. We have heard these stories and been deeply moved and motivated by them.

Protest against killings of church and social activists—Philippines

Process for the Review

In an effort to make the review comprehensive and inclusive, two major points of consultation were engaged: United Church global partners and United Church congregations. Organizations in Canada with which the United Church collaborates on issues of common concern were also consulted to explore what implications partnership values, principles, and practices might have for the practice of partnership in the Canadian context.

Partners in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific; the Caribbean and Latin America; and the Middle East; as well as global ecumenical partners (such as the World Council of Churches and World Alliance of Reformed Churches) were consulted in two ways: through a questionnaire which posed questions related to the theology, values, principles, and practices of partnership, and through a face-to-face consultation in Toronto in June 2008. Responses to these consultations are analyzed in detail in Section C ("Consultations with Global Partners") of this report.

United Church congregations were surveyed using an online survey tool and focus group process. Responses to these consultations are analyzed in detail in Section D ("Consultations with Congregations") of this report.

Canadian organizations were also consulted using a questionnaire. However, because a very limited number of responses were received, there was insufficient data with which to draw any reliable conclusions. Also, it became clear in discussions about "Canadian partnership" that the issue is a very complex one if only because there are so many different kinds of organizations with which the United Church works, from United Church Conferences to ecumenical groups of which the United Church is a member to community ministries to secular non-governmental organizations and networks. (The Partnership Review Task Group has acknowledged that additional work is needed to fully explore the values, principles, and practices of partnership in the Canadian context to inform the partnership review.) This could constitute a separate and second phase of the partnership review to be undertaken at a later date.

The task group also convened several face-to-face gatherings to discuss key partnership-related issues and to consider the collective responses of the various consultations. As well, it convened a special session on the "theology of partnership," to which United Church members with special theological expertise were invited. The purpose of the session was to deepen the theological understanding of partnership values, principles, and practices to inform the review.

B. The United Church of Canada and Global Partnership—A Short History

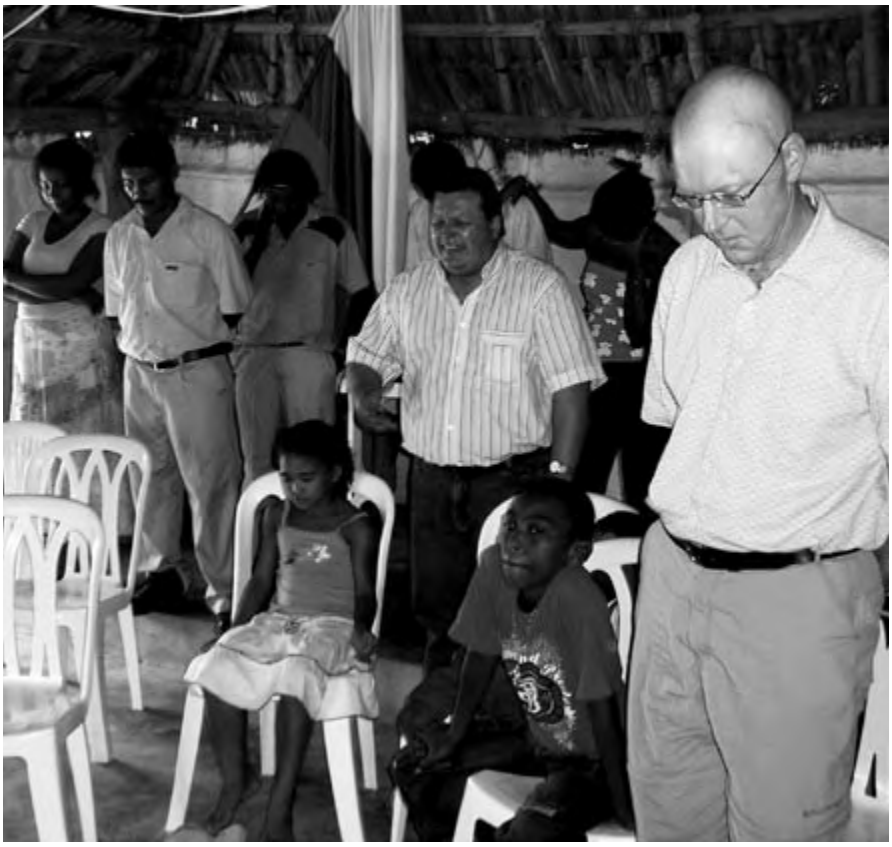
The United Church of Canada has been involved in global mission through its founding churches since late in the 19th century. While the church inherited traditional understandings of the missionary gospel imperative, the turn of the century brought to the foreground of the new Canadian church the message of the social gospel and the desire to serve the physical and social well-being of people throughout the world. The early expressions of mission therefore involved Canadian missionaries serving the social, medical, and educational as well as religious needs of people in foreign lands. As the growing Christian communities became larger national churches, and as medical and educational institutions developed local indigenous leadership, missionaries stepped aside from direct leadership roles in overseas communities. The growth in indigenous leadership was further nurtured through the growing political independence of many former colonies and the desire and need for indigenous churches to become self-directed.

By the mid-20th century many national churches and institutions more strongly pursued goals of self-support and self-direction and requested overseas funding to be directed to core budgets enabling these institutions to set their own mission agendas. In some situations, overseas funding was also directed toward more specialized programs, such as theological education and development and relief. In part coincidental with this trend, many churches, including the United Church of Canada, began a significant reduction in the number of overseas personnel.

In The United Church of Canada the trend of a declining number of overseas personnel was dramatic, shifting from approximately 600 people overseas in the 1950s to fewer than 30 today. While financial limitations played a part in this reduction, there were also significant missiological reasons, including recognition that Canadian personnel could only rarely offer skills not already present in a partner country. As global partners increasingly desired accompaniment and challenged the Canadian church to engage its own complicity in global injustice, the roles and need for overseas staff changed. This transition has had a significant impact on congregational connection to overseas work, with many older members of the church remembering the frequent and direct contact to the "mission field" afforded by missionaries on home assignment.

Many of the major shifts in understanding of partnership that would be undertaken in the next decades were initiated in the report of the Commission on World Mission to the 21st General Council (1966). In particular, the report lifted up the language and practice of mission, redirecting understanding of "mission to" toward the affirmation that *missio Dei*, God's mission, was at the heart of the shared work between Northern and Southern churches. Furthermore, in affirming God's creative and redemptive work in the religious life of all humanity, the commission also challenged any assumptions that the church was responsible for "bringing God to a Godless world."

Through the next few decades "partnership" became the expression that best described the concept of "mission with" in contrast to the earlier assumptions. In the Statement on Partnership to the 31st General Council (1988), an understanding of partnership was deepened, and a commitment was made by the church to the El Escorial global resource-sharing agreement. This document lifted up the importance of balancing the power of donors and recipients with a theological challenge that the world's resources were unequally distributed because of unjust economic systems,



Moderator David Giuliano joins the prayers of the people of Brisas del Mar, Colombia, in 2008

and that the resources of the Northern "wealthy" donor churches truly were God's resources, meant for the well-being of all.

Several other shifts marked the United Church's more recent history of global partnership. In the 1980s the church solidified doing justice at the heart of its distinctive participation in God's mission. Given the limited resources of the United Church, certainly in comparison to the much larger European churches, and consistent with its social gospel heritage, the church came to see its special contribution within the larger *missio Dei* as directed toward working with partners struggling for systemic justice and social transformation.

Consistent with this commitment the church maintained a focus on partnership that held ecumenical, development, peoples' movements, and justice organizations together. While many other church bodies created development agencies with separate funding mandates, the United Church consistently affirmed the interrelationship of all expressions of partnership within a unified fund.

Second, the church increasingly emphasized the practice of partnership, deepening its understanding of such values as mutuality, reciprocity, trust, and transparency. Consistent with this practice the church emphasized core funding to partners, and personal contact and long-term accompaniment of partners' work was given priority over extensive auditing requirements. The church also emphasized the importance of mutuality in listening and learning from the experiences of partners in the global South. The United Church began to place a stronger emphasis on the receiving component of people-to-people exchanges and on the welcoming of global partners into Canada.

Third, the articulation of "whole-world ecumenism" further strengthened the church's commitment to working together with people of all faiths who share a common commitment to healing the world. It also critically informed the importance of working together with others as a more effective methodology in both financial and human resource utilization and impact on systems of injustice.

Finally, the emphasis of the denomination as a whole on gender justice and inclusiveness led to the development of gender justice guidelines relating to partnership. While lifting up the importance of dialogue with partners over these concerns, the guidelines nevertheless were a result of growing tensions between the commitments of the United Church toward gender inclusiveness specifically concerning sexual orientation, and the social realities of partner organizations. In many situations, however, partners began to intentionally seek out United Church presence and support in addressing these issues in their own contexts.

In the early 21st century several new shifts are becoming evident.

The deepening practice of partnership has led the church to listen carefully to the experience and analysis of global partners concerning the nature of unjust economic systems. The United Church's confessional faith stance against unjust global systems and the exploration of the nature of empire as the mechanism underlying them is a direct response to working with global partners in God's mission for justice and peace. Furthermore, it has signalled a complete circle: 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 comprehensive and prophetic nature of the programs at CENACORA are not just a local initiative based on our painful reality. This prophetic nature has a lot to do with a partnership and prophetic posture by The United Church of Canada."

—National Commission to Combat Racism (CENACORA), Brazil

A second major transition has been marked in relation to a Canadian mission that parallelled foreign missions in time and practice. From the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, the United Church participated in the development and operation of Indian Residential Schools. These schools were designed to assimilate First Nations children, erasing Native identities, language, and culture, and imposing a White Canadian (European) identity in its place. Children were removed from their homes and in some cases subjected to violence and worse, contributing significantly to the social breakdown of First Nations communities in Canada.

The United Church intentionally addressed its complicity in the wrongs committed in these schools, issuing two major apologies, participating in financial compensation, and supporting a truth and reconciliation process. Of critical importance is the realization that at the heart of the church's complicity was the arrogance of believing it knew clearly what God's mission required. The church, in other words, has been confronted with the need for humility in its practice of mission. Integral to the response of the church to the history of residential schools has been the articulation of a central principle of working toward right relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, including respect for the integrity and faithfulness of Aboriginal spirituality.

A third transition relates to the growing interest across the church in direct engagement and participation in mission with global partners. While discouraged for a time, and recently only modestly supported through national programs, there are now increasing expressions of direct congregational connections with overseas churches, agencies, and programs. At a time of significant decline in membership of the church, congregations are recovering the biblical awareness that mission is at the heart of the gospel and therefore at the centre of congregational renewal. Many congregations continue to see the national global partnership program supported through a unified fund as their primary avenue of participation in God's mission in the world. Many also seek out partners and projects outside the national program.

Global partners also indicate a desire for more locally rooted connections with the United Church. Programs of connection-building that encourage the participation of all partners in mission that support the exchange of people, shared advocacy programs, greater information- sharing, and congregational twinning are all affirmed.

C. Consultations with Global Partners

United Church global partners in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific; the Caribbean and Latin America; and the Middle East; as well as global ecumenical partners were invited to respond to a survey document on partnership that raised questions related to the theology, values, principles, and practices of partnership. The partners provided thoughtful, constructive, and appreciative responses. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) Mission Project called the United Church review "timely and urgent," and affirmed the need for a "re-authentication and if still possible, re-invention" of the partnership vocabulary and vision in order to be able to inform authentic partnership practice.

Affirmation for United Church Partnership

Generally, partners significantly affirmed the United Church's current style and practice of partnership. For example:

> *"The comprehensive and prophetic nature of the programs at CENACORA is not just a local initiative based on our painful reality. This prophetic nature has a lot to do with a partnership and prophetic posture by The United Church of Canada."*

—National Commission to Combat Racism (CENACORA), Brazil

> *"The decision to form a joint study group to address the issues arising from empire…challenged PROK to do more about the marginalized sectors of Korean society and eventually the PROK created [a standing committee of the General Assembly] to deal with economic justice issues in the context of empire…We hope that The United Church of Canada will continue to challenge its partner churches around the world and encourage them to make their faith relevant to the cries of the people."*

—The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), Korea

> *"In our relations with The United Church of Canada we highlight: the attitude of real commitment with all the questions that makes the construction of another world possible; the attitude of an honest and frank search for forms and methods to develop better mutual relations; the courage to develop a theological reflection on empire."*

—Centro Memorial Martin Luther King (CMMLK), Cuba

> *"We must sincerely say that the experience of having The United Church of Canada as a partner, or better said, as a sister, has framed our lives. It is the only entity united with the AMA…the United Church of Canada has accepted us as we are—they do not demand that we write more or well, they recognize us as a culture that is more oral than written…and that for us is a lot."*

—Andean Women's Association (AMA), Peru

"Some partners have really moved away from El Escorial and the principle of consultation with partners. The United Church of Canada still seems to uphold these better than most other organizations."

—Ecumenical Centre for Service and Popular Education (CESEP), Brazil

"The whole theme of sexual diversity is one where The United Church of Canada has an important contribution to share with others."

—Koinonia, Brazil

"The United Church of Canada has been one of our most enduring and supportive partners."

—Pacific Peoples Partnership

In an introductory statement to its response, the Latin American Council of Churches observed, "Much has been written on partnership. It is theoretically difficult to express something new that has not been said." None of the partners responded by saying "We've said all this before" but the responses do reflect more of a reiteration or confirmation of current positions/statements on partnership than something genuinely new. It is significant to note a number of specific references to "empire" as part of the context in which partnership today needs to be assessed, and also to consider the number of partners who named the integrity and care of creation as an essential value undergirding partnership.

There were no obvious themes or issues that emerged from only one particular region, and given the size of the sample (relative to the overall number of United Church global partners), it would be impossible to make comparisons between regions.

The strongest consensus emerged in the areas of practices that encourage the participation of all partners in mission, with support for the exchange of people, shared programs, greater information-sharing, and congregational twinning.

In summary, the survey demonstrated significant support for the United Church's practice of partnership. The concept of partnership itself seems well worn and comfortable. There is strong affirmation concerning the United Church engagement with empire as a thematic response to partners' concerns. The emphasis of partners on encouraging greater regional and local contacts with the United Church is an important affirmation.

Learnings

The United Church's ethos and practice of partnership should be affirmed and continued. In essence this concerns the care that is given to the partner relationship and attention to the shared commitments to justice. The focus on empire is affirmed as a helpful response by the United Church to the global context of partners and should be continued. The need to expand programs of regional and local (congregational) contacts with partners is indicated.

> ***"Partnership should always evolve through shared aspirations and priorities."***
>
> —CONTAK, Philippines

Values and Principles

Survey respondents blurred, to some degree, the distinction between values and principles. And indeed, respect or equality can signify both a value (the essential worth of the human person) and a principle of engagement. With that qualification, the following can be said: more than one-third of respondents named five essential values that inform their understanding of partnership:

- dignity
- respect
- equality (the primacy of who we are rather than what we do)
- justice (love of neighbour; advocacy on behalf of the poor; the empowerment of the disadvantaged; putting the last first; the liberation of the oppressors; social gospel values)
- integrity and care of creation (sacredness of life; creation as gift; impact of actions in one place on the rest of the globe; those who lead in destruction should lead in reparation; can't continue to exploit our common home)

Other values that global partners believed ought to characterize partnership relations included

- openness
- freedom (the right to life; the security of the whole person)
- community (people-centred; people more important than possessions; social economy; the common good)
- spirituality (the essential cultural and spiritual values of human communities)
- honesty
- solidarity

A number of values were named by only one or two respondents: faith, compassion, trust, generosity, patience, humility, sacrifice, forgiveness, courage, conviction, flexibility and responsiveness, valuation of non-material resources, and a sense of history.

"It is imperative that we listen carefully and allow partners to chart their own course. If we are clear about our mission and values, it is seldom that their ideas would run counter to this. Most often we find ourselves in solidarity and common cause."

—Pacific Peoples Partnership

Principles of Partnership

A significant number of partners listed the following as key principles that should undergird partnership:

- mutuality and accountability
- shared decision-making (shared responsibility for identifying needs and priorities; involvement of partners in crucial decision-making; participation of the receiver in decision-making; respecting those closest to the situation; consideration of the other in the exercise of power; mutual responsibility; mutual decision-making, especially involving common issues like downsizing)
- dialogue (intelligent exchange of ideas as well as actions; tools and space for multilateral dialogue to deepen relations of cooperation; engage in dialogue to identify challenges and concerns; dialogue, especially interfaith dialogue, to achieve reconciliation; inclusion of more partners [than the historical ones] from both North and South, in order to change the power dynamic between North and South)
- joint advocacy (choosing life in the midst of death; joint advocacy informed by partners on the ground; participation in concrete actions that transform the world; common emphasis on social and prophetic witness; new model of economic development; confrontation of poverty; specific agendas that bring partners together [women, youth, etc.] not just general themes; commitment to justice, peace, and integrity of creation; commitment to basic needs [poverty eradication, etc.])
- respect for diversity (exchanges that respect social, cultural, political differences; respect for culture; recognition of the importance of culture; regard for context; recognition of "expertise" in all regions; respect for diverse gifts and strengths; variety of gifts and perspectives)
- information-sharing (commitment to listen, learn, and share information; effective sharing of results with other regions [South-South twinning useful here]; information-sharing and ownership by the oppressed [awareness-raising among the oppressors]; sharing related themes)
- shared vision (unity of common task; common understanding/analysis of the world in which we live; recognition of God's common purpose for us; common vision and goal; sustainability based on common vision and hope)
- capacity-building and empowerment (promotion of local leadership; capacity transfer rather than just resource sharing; long-term commitment to local capacity-building)

- trust
- autonomy (devolved decision-making as far as possible; helping partners further their own mission goals; respect for institutional autonomy)
- consultation

In summary, the core values of partnership named by partners are consistent with the United Church's long understanding: dignity, respect, equality, justice. The addition of care for the integrity of creation reflects established commitments of the church but is new as a central value of partner relations. Principles of partnership also reflect long-standing commitments of the global partnership program of the United Church.

Learnings
The values and principles of partnership are well understood and affirmed by global partners and the United Church.

Practices That Facilitate the Participation of the Whole Church in God's Global Mission

Partners tended to name desired practices of partnership that would facilitate the participation of the whole church in mission. The responses can be summarized under the following categories:

- People Exchanges. These should involve regular exchanges to enhance understanding and knowledge of one another; exchanges on the experiences of reconciliation and peace; exchanges that are reciprocal, that is two-way; co-participation in forums and round tables and the sharing of people.

  "Being physically present with people struggling for justice and freedom is one of the most effective ways of ministering to people and expressing compassion..."

  —CONTAK, Philippines

- The sharing of resources. Some partners noted the need for new guidelines for ecumenical resource-sharing in light of the new context of globalization; practices that assist both partners in recognizing each other's resources and using them to the fullest potential. Resource-sharing in order to promote the capacity of the poor was particularly noted. The El Escorial agreement was affirmed as the most complete reference for good partnership relations.
- Campaigns and shared topics for reflection and action are affirmed as important ways of focusing energy and insight across global boundaries.

  "In addition to (the integration into campaigns developed by partners), the discussion of the same topics by all partners at the same period of time can have a great meaning and motivation for a more effective commitment."

  —Coordenadoria Ecumênica de Serviço (CESE), Brazil

- Information-sharing. Advances in electronic communication allow partners across the world to maintain effective and timely communication on issues of concern and to share stories that nurture hope.

  "There has not been an in-depth analysis in the area of electronic communication in sharing relations. It is necessary to create a new dynamic for information, communication and relations with the mentality of the 21st century.

  —Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI)

- Local connections such as congregational twinning are affirmed by partners as beneficial on both ends of the relationship.

  "A network of friends [from a congregation in Canada] are writing to us as a family and their prayers have been a source of comfort and inspiration to us. I now know a little bit of Canada through the correspondence and encouraging messages that I constantly get. These people are also getting first-hand information about our situation in Zimbabwe…it creates real friendship even with people you have not seen and may never see in your life. That is what the gospel is all about."

  —Institute for Theological Reflection Today, Zimbabwe

In summary, practices of partnership named by partners focus on shared activities. Shared engagement on common issues, campaigns, information-sharing, and resource- sharing are all traditional forms of partnership. The inclusion of personal contacts, exchanges, congregational twinning, and increased local connections is a noted new affirmation by partners.

Learnings
Traditional practices of partnership are affirmed and should continue. Attention needs to be paid to increasing capacity for establishing connections among partners and local and regional parts of the church, in particular congregations.

Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit Consultation with Partners, June 2008: Focus Group on Partnership

In June 2008 the Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit convened a consultation attended by global partners from Africa, Asia, and the Pacific; the Caribbean and Latin America; and global ecumenical partners; as well as representatives from Canadian faith-based and secular groups with which the United Church works closely on a range of social justice issues. Participants were divided into focus groups, one of which was on partnership. The session was used as a means of testing with partners present what the United Church had been hearing so far in its broader consultative process with global partners. Any new insights into partnership were encouraged.

Affirmations

In general, partners who participated in the focus group (and the full spectrum of partners who attended the consultation) affirmed the United Church's decision to review partnership at this time for the reasons articulated by the church in its original proposal. There were strong affirmations of the United Church's "distinctive" style

of partnership, characterized by its capacity to listen and learn from the experiences of others and its practice of viewing partnership less as a program and more as a "way of being" in the world. The kind of partnership espoused and practiced by the United Church was viewed as an evolution, moving through the stages of relationships with partners to a family to a movement to the "kindom" of God. In this sense, partnership was likened to "a glimpse of the reign of God in the midst of empire." However, a number of challenges and concerns were raised.

Challenges and Concerns

Key points raised included the following:

- Some partners felt that changes are required in the *language and vocabulary of partnership*, beginning with the word "partnership" itself, a view that was expressed in a limited way in responses to the more extensive survey of global partners. However, there does not seem to be a strong consensus on this point. Because many partners seem to be comfortable with the term "partnership," is it appropriate to introduce a new term now, or might a better option be to work harder to fulfill the promise that partnership has always entailed? In other words—is it best to use any implicit imbalances in partnership as incentives to create more egalitarian relationships?
- The United Church and its partners need to better articulate what shared accountability, as a principal feature of partnership, can look like.
- We speak together of power-sharing but, given the differences between us, what do we really mean by this?
- The United Church could better articulate what it wants to receive from partners. In particular, how can partners contribute their own experience to help the United Church grapple with some of the problems it is facing in its own context, as an expression of working together for God's mission?
- The United Church needs to be careful to develop partnerships with an appropriate cross section of organizations and movements in the developing world and not to become elitist in those it chooses to work with.
- What is the role of the Canadian faith-based and secular groups ("partners") with which the United Church makes common cause, in the relationship between the United Church and global partners? This could be better articulated.
- The United Church should adopt and commit itself only to those principles and practices of partnership it honestly believes in and can live up to.

> ***"The majority of bilateral international mission relationships today do not qualify for the label 'partnership,' regardless of what vocabulary is used. The main learnings in the WARC Mission Project and its preceding project on 'Mission in Unity' are that unequal north south mission relations still hinder local ecumene and reinforce distorted mission identities at both ends."***
>
> —World Alliance of Reformed Churches *(WARC)*

- Partnership ought to include consulting with partners over matters of budgeting that might affect them. This would be an example of the power-sharing that we talk about in our partner relationships.
- The United Church should integrate justice imperatives and analyses between domestic and international work on excluded and marginalized communities and peoples—and include them in partnership structures and considerations and decision-making.
- Direct involvement of congregations in global partnerships must be handled with great care to ensure that United Church values, principles, and practices of partnership are upheld. It is acknowledged that this will require further discussion and consultation.
- Partnerships between the United Church and its global partners would benefit from ongoing evaluation.

In summary, the consultation raised issues of mutual accountability and the need for greater attention to consultation practices, in particular during times of budget reductions affecting partners. United Church practices of partnership were in general strongly supported, with the caution that the church should affirm only those principles and practices it can concretely live out.

Learnings

Attention needs to be paid to processes of consultation that are mutually understood and achievable.

D. Consultations with Congregations

As a key component of the Partnership Review process, a survey was undertaken of congregations across the church. Approximately 1,800 pastoral charges were invited to respond to the Internet-based survey, of which 18% (339) responded. This is understood to be a good response for this kind of survey and we believe it provides a reasonably good indication of congregational perceptions of global partnership issues. Five congregations also participated in an in-depth study providing additional content for analysis of the survey results.

Funding for Global Partnership

The survey responses indicated a high level of support for and understanding of how the Mission and Service Fund supports mission work around the world and in Canada (99% and 94%, respectively). A still significant percentage indicates support for the fund because it provides for the education and training of ministers (76%). However, responses also indicate that less than 50% of congregations are aware that the fund sustains the operations of the General Council Office. Many congregational members do not understand how the work of the GCO is supported, and believe that the M&S Fund is solely directed toward mission work in Canada and overseas.

Just over half of congregations (51%) responding to the survey support World Development and Relief through a special offering. 62% of respondents believe that this provides additional resources specifically for global programs and only 38% of respondents responded accurately that WDR donations support all of the work of the Mission and Service Fund. While current identification of the special offering (World Development and Relief within the Mission and Service Fund) has attempted to clarify its status, there are still many within the church who believe that it is a designated fund allocating additional resources to global partnership work.

To test an overall understanding of the allocation of M&S resources to global work, respondents were asked to identify the percentage of M&S funds allocated to global partnership. Only 31% identified the approximate ratio (the unified budget allocation of JGER is approximately 18%) while the remaining two-thirds estimated higher. One-fifth of respondents believed that the Mission and Service Fund allocates 45% of its resources to global mission work. Almost two-thirds (64%) of congregations responding reported participation in United Church emergency appeals. However, 48% of respondents also supported other relief and development agencies (outside of the M&S Fund), and one-half of congregations responding provided financial support (beyond the M&S Fund) to a project in another country.

In summary, a significant proportion of church members support the Mission and Service Fund because they believe it is primarily directed toward mission work in Canada and globally. WDR continues to be misunderstood and seen by many as a special designated offering providing additional funds to global work. There is a significant trend toward congregations providing direct funding of global projects outside of the Mission and Service Fund.

Learnings

The M&S Fund is vulnerable because of perceptions that it provides a higher level of support to global mission than it currently does. The trend of congregations providing direct support to projects external to the M&S Fund will likely continue and increase, primarily because of congregational desires for direct connection with projects and partners. A secondary factor is issues of trust.

Participation in Global Relationships

A majority of congregations responding to the survey indicated a strong connection (61%) with the M&S Fund as their primary mechanism of maintaining connection with global mission work. However one-third of responding congregations indicated that they are involved in an overseas project identified through their own contacts. A slightly smaller number (29%) indicated participation in projects identified and supported through United Church networks.

One-third (approximately 30%) of congregations indicated participating in a visit to a global partner or project within the past three years. Of that 30%, 20% initiated a visit facilitated by an organization other than the United Church, and 10% participated in a visit facilitated by a United Church body.

Slightly fewer than half of congregations responding indicated that they had received a global visitor or speaker within the past three years. Approximately half of these were connected with a United Church partner, and the other half with organizations outside the United Church global program.

When asked if members of the congregation feel connected to global partners through the United Church global partnership program, an equal number expressed agreement (42%) and disagreement (42%). Of those who indicated disagreement, 10% indicated strong disagreement. Almost two-thirds of responding congregations indicated, however, a desire to be directly connected to a global partnership.

Summary: While the Mission and Service Fund remains the main avenue of connection for global partnership for a majority of congregations, a significant number are establishing their own relationships involving direct, hands-on engagement. The current global partnership program, while providing welcome connections for a significant number of United Church congregations, has been unable to meet the needs and interests of many others.

Learnings

A large number of United Church congregations seek to be connected with the work of a global partner and will find this through the United Church global partnership program or will seek it elsewhere through other contacts. If congregations do not feel supported by the General Council in establishing these connections, then support for the M&S Fund will likely be further eroded.

Understandings of Partnership

Respondents to the survey indicated overwhelming support for the use of "partnership" as the term that best describes how the United Church and global partners should describe their relationship. In ranking a number of characteristics of partnership, the highest rankings were given to "working together with others around the world on common issues of justice, peace, and the environment," and "working together with others around the world on projects that increase the physical and spiritual well-being of people who have few resources."

An overwhelming number of respondents affirmed that understanding the global context is a vital component of the practice of global partnership. 56% of respondents affirmed the current "Challenging Empire" theme as an important analysis of the global context. 9% disagreed, and 34% didn't know, indicating that they were not familiar with the study.

Learnings

United Church people have a strong sense of the importance of working for systemic change at the core of the global partnership program. Equally, the importance of caring for the physical and spiritual needs of the poor throughout the world is affirmed. Justice and charity are both affirmed in the church.

Bill Thomas and Bern Jagunos visiting detained UCCP Pastor Berlin Guerrero—Philippines

What Is Needed to Become More Engaged

In an open-ended question inviting comments on what congregations need to become more engaged in mission, hundreds of responses were received. The largest number related to issues of communication and education. One hundred and ninety-two comments related to requests for more and better communication including more mission stories, direct personal connection, visits and/or news from overseas personnel and partners, and guest speakers. A number of additional comments mentioned opportunities for mission trips, non-monetary connections, and direct involvement in specific projects.

A smaller but significant number related the need for assurance that M&S resources go to provide tangible benefits to people in need.

Several comments expressed a desire that M&S funds be dedicated to mission work only, or that a designated system replace the unified fund. A number of responses pointed to the connection between global partnership and transformation of the hearts and minds of members.

Learnings

Additional mechanisms must be found to facilitate closer and more personal connection of United Church members with global partners. The benefits of this not only relate to a strong and vibrant M&S Fund, but also to a transformed church.

"Partnership begins with a common vision of a global community and a recognition of a God who breaks into the world through the lives and struggles of peoples wanting to free themselves from all forms of human bondage and injustice. The partnership should provide opportunities for people to tell their stories of suffering and hope in the context of struggle. It should create a network of committed Christians, linked together by a shared commitment for the evolution of new ministries within the cultural ethos of the poor."

—United Church of Christ in the Philippines

E. Challenges for the Future and New Directions

The Partnership Review Task Group has reviewed in depth the survey documents outlined in this report and has, over a number of meetings, reflected on the learnings of this process. In this section key affirmations are noted along with a number of central challenges.

A particular issue throughout the process has been the tension between the focus of the review on global partnerships and the concern for integrating this review with partnership relationships in Canada. The United Church maintains extensive contacts in Canada with justice-based organizations. Some, like housing and poverty coalitions, are agencies that the church has supported through staff and volunteer time and, in some cases, with grants. Some, like KAIROS, are distinctive partnership bodies structured by a formal agreement. In addition, the United Church supports, through Mission Support funds, numerous community-based outreach programs, some of which are community organizations as noted above, but many of which are outreach ministries of the United Church and therefore part of the church. Understandings of the meaning of partnership differ in each of these.

Adding to this complexity are other bodies, such as theological schools and educational centres, that employ a language of partnership as well.

The task group recognized the complexity of trying to address the many expressions of partnership in Canada and determined that it could not do so within the limited scope of this review. Such an undertaking would of necessity involve other connections within the General Council Office, different survey methodologies, and broader fields of consultation. The task group does, however, believe that the learnings of this review, while focused on global partnership, can offer insight into the nature of partnerships in Canada. The task group recommends, therefore, that further work be undertaken on the theology, principles, and practice of partnership in the Canadian context.[6]

Affirmations

Global Partnership Program Is Strongly Affirmed. The task group believes that the existing global partnership program is strongly affirmed by global partners in its practices and, in particular, in its relational aspects. Global partners strongly endorsed the commitment of the United Church in building respectful, collaborative relationships focused on transformative justice, and see this as a distinctive contribution of the church to global expressions of partnership.

Congregational Desire for Participation in Global Partnership to Be Celebrated. While congregations have mixed experiences of the formal global partnership program of the church, there is a strong desire of many congregations throughout the church for meaningful involvement in global partnership. This should be celebrated as an indication of the willingness of the whole church to participate in God's mission.

Mission and Service Fund Main Avenue of Support for God's Mission. The Mission and Service Fund remains the primary avenue of support of most United Church members for global partnerships and therefore of participation in God's mission in the world. The denominational global partnership program must remain a key component of the work supported by the Mission and Service Fund.

Challenges

Need for Deepening Language of Partnership in the Context of Empire. While questions continue to be raised about the need for a new language of global partnership, it is clear that the term "partnership" still provides the best summary of what is hoped for. Survey results have indicated strong affirmation for expressing the values and principles of partnership as aspects of a relationship. The task group felt the language of "right relationship" provided one way to build connections among the learnings of global partnership, the church's experience with First Nations peoples, and the contribution of feminist analysis in the history of the church. The task group further recognized that proposals concerning resistance to the forces of empire have uniformly been based in the formation of alternative communities. The task group proposes, therefore, to frame global partnership as an expression of right relationships that create alternative communities of resistance to the forces of empire at work within the world.

> ***"Today, in Brazil, the great news is the growth of the inter-religious movement with a strong content of citizenship. We do not get together just to share our faith. We get together in order to, in the context of our beliefs, gather strength to fight evil that affects us as human beings, no matter what our religious condition and origin. The fight against the empire enables us to advance towards the unity of the human being in their fight for humanity's survival. The fight cannot be solely a mission of Christians. It is*** **everybody's.***"*
>
> —CENACORA, Brazil

New Models and Resources to Support Congregational Engagement Needed. The task group further noted that framing partnership as expressions of right relationship implied that partnership must be the practice of the whole church. While the history of global partnership within the United Church has emphasized a national program in which members' support was expressed through contributions to the unified fund, it is clear that interpreting partnership as right relationships and as communities of resistance to empire implies that the direct engagement and meaningful contact of all levels of the church is necessary. While the Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations (JGER) Unit has expanded its programming and avenues of congregational participation in global partnership, particularly in the past few years, additional new models and resources for partnership are necessary.

1. Global partnerships will find expression through numerous avenues in the church including those initiated by congregations. These congregation-based connections need to be celebrated in the church as a reflection of the church's engagement in God's mission. Resources and programs need to be developed nationally to assist these initiatives and to call them toward the best practices of partnership developed and learned through the church's history.

2. Existing programs of partnership engagement within the JGER partnership program, such as Extra Measures[7], people-to-people exchanges, and mission trip leadership programs need to be expanded. For many congregations, global connections will best be developed through partnerships established within the church's formal global partnership program.

3. For both places of engagement, JGER will continue to be called upon for advice, consultation, resources, and connections, and, from past experience, will continue to be an expected source of help in the event of problems.

Expanding congregational-based programs will require addition staff and financial resources in order to adequately address the expressed needs of the church.

4. Expanding congregational participation in global partnership carries with it the need for some caution. Ongoing monitoring and analysis of the impacts of the program within the church and, in particular, on global partners will be important.

New Models of Effective Consultation Needed. Partner relationships in their essence require dialogue and consultation throughout their lives. This is true regardless of the size of the partnership or the form in which it is expressed. The Partnership Consultation of June 2008 lifted up the importance of meaningful forms of consultation, especially in the context of budget reductions and potential funding impacts on partners. The challenge the task group noted was to establish an effective model of consultation with partners to assist the General Council Executive in its priority- and budget-setting responsibilities. The task group noted the significant difficulties of proposing meaningful consultation with over 140 partner organizations in a budgeting process that requires confidentiality (if staffing considerations are involved) and extensive knowledge of the global budget of the church (if the balancing of reductions across many program areas is necessary). The task group therefore is proposing that a representative model of consultation should be considered. One option is to consider the development of a "Partners' Council" composed of perhaps five or six partner representatives. The council could be scheduled to meet once yearly to allow it to offer advice to the GCE through the General Secretary and Moderator. It would also be available at other times through electronic communication. Such a body could be a reference point for consultation on decisions that potentially could affect global partners. But, more important, the task group believes that the council could assist the church to see the world through different eyes and, therefore, to measure its decisions with different scales. The council, the task group understands, would function as an addition, rather than a replacement to the global partner representative on the GCE and global partner presence at General Council meetings.

> ***"The biggest challenge to partnering is the fear of clash of culture or identity...the difficulty for partners is to understand that we do not need to agree with everything someone does, to partner with them. I don't need to weaken my Christian identity to work with non-Christian organizations. Instead, I need to be sure of my identity and certain about when I can partner and when I cannot."***
>
> —Christian Council of Tanzania

Concern for Clarity Around the M&S Fund, Designated Giving, and WDR. The task group notes significant concern over the misunderstandings in the church concerning the level of support of global mission work within the Mission and Service Fund, the nature of World Development and Relief donations, and the possibilities for designated givings toward global partnership programs. While not a major focus of this study, the task group briefly reviewed the various mechanisms of support allocated to global partnership programs. Two avenues exist for designated givings to global needs that result in *additional* resources being available for the work: the new Emergency Response Fund (ERF), and supra-gifts, both related to emergency relief and reconstruction.

Other forms of donation, specifically donations to WDR and bequests, are treated differently. WDR funds are used for the purposes directed, on the understanding that the unified budget allocates

Rev. Rocio Barcenas (*centre*) of the Colombia Methodist Church in Colborne St. United Church, London, Ontario, as a Face-to-Face visitor

more than the amount of the funds donated to world development and relief programs. The stipulation is that if WDR donations exceed that amount, then the unified budget would be adjusted to ensure that all the WDR funds still were applied to their designated purpose. Bequests to global partnership work are treated similarly. They are placed in a designated trust account and are drawn, generally over a three-year period, into the unified budget again on the understanding that the unified budget allocates more than the amount received through the bequest.

The task group notes that in both cases the end result does not impact the overall proportion of the allocation of the unified budget to global partnership work and that, therefore, it is more accurate to say that such donations benefit the whole program of the church. The task group is concerned primarily about misunderstandings of these two areas of donations, and believes that either further work is necessary to clarify this to the church or the question of designated giving needs to be revisited.

The task group notes that the United Church unified-funding model for global partnership work is in contrast to the agency model employed by most other denominations in Canada. In other Canadian denominations avenues exist for designated gifts to be made to the core work of the development and relief programs of the denominations. In some cases these agencies exist as a separately incorporated body; in others they exist as a separately funded body within the national structure of the church. The task group believes that the absence of such opportunities within the United Church invites members to support other para-church or non-church development programs and loses the potential entry point for givers who choose not to support the general work of the church. Because of this, the task group believes that a review should be undertaken of World Development and Relief.[8]

The task group notes with concern the misperceptions of funding levels of global partnership work within the Mission and Service Fund. It believes that such misunderstandings may have a serious negative impact on the future of the fund. The task group has no wisdom to offer on this, but is concerned that it be a matter of further consideration.

F. Theological Reflection on Partnership

Although the language of empire is new, past and present shifts in partnership can be understood as attempts to move beyond empire. Our development of the partnership model was an attempt to move beyond the paternalism and colonialism of 19th-century missions. The current work to develop right relations with Aboriginal peoples is an attempt to move beyond a history of colonization and racism. This ongoing struggle to move beyond empire involves the recognition that our theology and biblical interpretation have often supported sexism, racism, colonialism, and the exploitation of creation. This theological reflection suggests a reinterpretation of the biblical story for the reformation of our theology as we seek to live faithfully in the midst of empire.

Theologies of empire have understood God and men as separate from and superior to women, indigenous peoples, and nature. The Bible, however, paints a picture of the mutual interdependence and interrelationship of God and all creatures. Mutual relationship characterizes God in the creation stories of Genesis 1—3. God creates in and through relationship by empowering other parts of creation as co-creators. Earth "brings forth" vegetation (Gen. 1:12) and animals (1:24). The sun and moon are made "to rule" over the day and over the night (1:16–18). The waters "bring forth" fish (1:20). Another indication that God is collaborative and chooses to work with others is when God says "Let *us* make" (Gen 1:26) and, in the book of Proverbs, God creates with Woman Wisdom or Sophia (8:22–31). This relational nature of God is expressed for us as Christians in the ministry of Christ and in the doctrine of the Trinity.

The creation stories have too often been used to legitimize unjust relations between men and women and between humans and other creatures, but they can be interpreted in ways that support right relations. The creation of humans "in the image of God…male and female" (Gen 1:27) indicates the equality of women and men. The creation of a "*helper* as a partner" (Gen. 2:20) does not mean women are inferior, because the Bible calls God our "helper" (Ps. 10:14; 30:10). The creation of humans in the image of God "to serve the land" (Gen. 2:5; 3:23) and "protect it" (Gen. 2:15)[9] gives them a special role and speaks of the dignity and value of every person, but does not make humans superior to or separate from other creatures. The creation of animals as "helpers" for humans indicates the dependence of our ancestors on animals for work and our continuing dependence on animals for companionship and food. Interpreted in this way, the creation stories are a poetic picture of the interdependence and interrelationship of God, humanity, and creation, which is necessary for right relations, blessing, and abundant life.

God's choice to empower others as co-creators involves sacrificing control and creates the possibility for evil, one expression of which is imperial expansion and exploitation. Our ancestors in the faith had to negotiate living faithfully in the midst of empire, whether the empire was Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, or Rome. For the Israelites, the exodus from Egypt became a metaphor both for empire's commitment to death, and for the Creator's support for life, especially for the marginalized. Global partners have made us aware of the problems of the exodus as a model for liberation. Innocent Egyptian civilians are killed so that the Israelites can be liberated, and the Israelites take the Promised Land from indigenous peoples. The stories of the exodus are problematic if read literally or uncritically, but the Bible reinterprets the exodus metaphorically. The exodus was remembered yearly at Passover. When Israel lived under other empires, Egypt symbolized

Women's weaving project near Tirua, Chile

the oppression of empire and God's will for abundant life for all. The Sabbath was kept both because of God's example as Creator (Exod. 20:11) and because the people were to remember what it was like to be slaves in Egypt and give workers and animals rest (Deut. 5:15). The Sabbath and Jubilee years gave slaves, labourers, and the land the right to rest and redemption from exploitation (Lev. 25). The prophet Isaiah used the exodus as a metaphor for the return of the people from captivity in Babylon and restoration to life in the land. So, Exodus symbolizes God's will for liberation and right relations.

Jesus' life and teaching were so threatening to the empire of his day and its collaborators that they conspired to have him killed. Global ecumenical partners have reminded us that Jesus came so that people might "have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). His ministry is full of stories of healing the sick and providing food to the hungry. In the Canadian context, "abundant life" can be distorted by a gospel of individual prosperity and greed. Our challenge is to learn when we have crossed the greed line and have had enough. As Néstor Miguez, professor of New Testament Studies in Argentina, said, we need to "demonstrate…that other ways of living bring dignity and plenitude…through the extension of alternate symbols and lifeways, of which we are heirs" so that we "pronounce and take part in a vision of 'life beyond empire.'"[10]

The early church understood Jesus' death and resurrection as overcoming empire and restoring right relations. They understood Jesus' death on the cross not only as payment for our sins, but also as liberating people from the kingdom of Satan, or spiritual and political principalities and powers of this world. His death on the cross exposed the death-dealing hatred of empire, and his resurrection revealed the power of God's love and justice to overcome empire and to restore right relations and abundant life.

At Pentecost the early church witnessed the spirit of God active in creation working to overcome barriers of language, race, and culture. In response the

Nora Carmi (*right*) of Sabeel (Jerusalem) with JGER staff Wendy Gichuru and Rivkah Unland

followers of Jesus set up communities of resistance by the power of the Spirit that modelled a different world. They shared all things in common (Acts 2:44) and were radically inclusive. In these communities, there was no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female (Gal 3:28). Empire is often internalized in the minds of its subjects and the early church's teachings challenged conformity to the internalized world of empire by the renewal of their minds for transformation (Rom. 12:2). Ofelia Ortega, a professor of systematic theology in Cuba, writes that this means "we are called to be nonconformist and transformative communities, because life is not possible unless we do transformation that addresses the roots of injustice."[11] Early Christians understood their prayers as expressing the groaning of all creation for liberation (Rom. 8:22–26). Their central ritual was a meal together, in many cultures a fundamental expression of life together. The central elements, bread and wine, were co-creations of the Creator and of the women, men, and animals who grew and harvested wheat and grapes and turned them into bread and wine. This meal recalled Christ's last meal as well as the meals Jesus had shared with those marginalized by society.

Creation, Christ, and the early church provide models of interrelationship, interdependence, and the development of radically inclusive communities that challenge empire by working toward right relations and the mending of creation, and that, by the power of the Spirit, take part in a different future. As a predominantly middle-class Canadian church, our vision is clouded and our practice of Christianity is compromised by the extent to which we participate in and benefit from empire. So we will continually need to reform our understanding and practice of partnership and right relations. We will need to work on learning how local congregations can become communities of resistance and transformation. On this journey, partners in Canada and overseas who live closer to the margins of empire and whose ministry for the common good, often carried out at great personal risk or sacrifice, will continue to inspire and challenge us. Maintaining and strengthening relationships with such partners will be essential for the United Church to live faithfully in the midst of empire.

G. Statement and Affirmations on Global Partnership (2008)

The Executive of the General Council

1. approved the "Statement on Global Partnership" (2008) as affirmations to guide the global partnership work of The United Church of Canada for this time, and directed the General Secretary, General Council, to develop and implement a comprehensive educational plan

2. directed the General Secretary, General Council, to explore options for more effective consultation with global partners concerning programming and budgeting decisions that have an impact on global partnership

3. affirmed the goal of increased participation of the whole church and, specifically, of congregations in global partnership through the continued development of programs that strengthen this engagement

4. celebrated and affirmed the many expressions of global partnership emerging in the church as expressions of the church's commitment to engage in God's mission and called the church to live out the values and principles identified in the "Statement on Global Partnership"

Statement on Global Partnership (2008)

> God is Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description. Yet, in love, the one eternal God seeks relationship.
>
> So God creates the universe and with it the possibility of being and relating. God tends the universe, mending the broken and reconciling the estranged.
>
> God enlivens the universe, guiding all things toward harmony with their Source.
>
> In and with God, we can direct our lives toward right relationship with each other and with God. We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life. We can grow in wisdom and compassion. We can recognize all people as kin.
>
> —from "A Song of Faith"

Therefore The United Church of Canada affirms the following principles to guide its practice of global partnership:

1. **Right Relations at the Heart of God's Mission.** The United Church of Canada continues to learn from a history of engagement with the experiences of partners in the global South, marginalized peoples, and partners in justice throughout Canada. In particular, from the experience of First Nations peoples and from the contribution of feminist thought, the church is learning to speak of striving for right relations at the heart of God's mission. *The church believes that right relationships flow from an understanding that relationship is central to the nature of God and that the Spirit calls us to live relationships that reflect Christ's character of justice and love.*

2. **Resistance to Principalities and Powers.** Jesus, whom we seek to follow, announced the coming of God's reign, not of domination but of peace, justice, and reconciliation, and therefore calls us to struggle against the principalities and powers that seek to undermine a world of justice and love. The world is at risk because there are those who seek domination and who use the instruments of military, economic, political,

and cultural power to that end. The church's participation in God's mission of necessity involves resistance to these powers of empire. The church believes the primary mechanisms of resistance involve the creation of alternative communities, based on right relationships that seek a transformed world. The injustice of our world finds primary expression in concentrations of wealth in nations and individuals through continuing net transfers of wealth that impoverish the global South and benefit the global North. *The United Church of Canada and its members, who are complicit in and benefit from this global transfer, are called to work with partners in Canada and throughout the world for systemic change in support of just economic systems and a world transformed by love.*

3. **Global Partnerships Are Lived Expressions of Right Relationships.** "Global partnerships," the expression that we use to speak of our shared work in God's mission with churches and organizations around the world, are first and foremost to be lived expressions of the right relationships toward which God calls us. This means that partnerships will give attention to the values that guide them, seeking to deepen understanding and practice to more fully model for the world relationships based on respect, mutuality, trust, reciprocity, and transparency. Deep listening and mutual learning are fundamental characteristics of partnership. Partnership finds expression through differing identities of language, culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, and many other factors that frame our perceptions and interaction with one another. *The church is called to pay attention to how different identities impact the ways in which decisions are made and to whose voices are heard in the functioning of global partnerships.*

4. **Humility and Critical Self-reflection.** In a postcolonial context of mission, the church continues to live into the meaning of past histories of mission, including the historic mission among First Nations people in Canada and the global mission of the past two centuries. The non-Native church's inability to understand the depth of spirituality of First Nations peoples in Canada, and, globally, the complicity of the church with imperial and colonial powers and the confusion of gospel and culture all reveal an arrogance that denied the essence of respect at the heart of right relationships. *Humility and critical self-reflection are essential characteristics for participation of the church in God's mission for this time. The church, however, is called not to paralysis but to boldness in its search for renewed patterns and models of engagement in partnership.*

5. **God's Mission Is Meant to Be Undertaken in Partnership.** Because right relationships are at the heart of God's mission we believe that mission is meant to be undertaken in partnership. In part, we believe that this is so because no one community has the full resources needed for God's mission. Money alone is never sufficient; wisdom, vision, activity, creativity, and friendship are all needed for the fullness of God's purposes. Learning to receive from partners is a particularly challenging skill for the church to adopt as it seeks to work in partnership. Most important, our experience has taught us the importance of partnership in God's mission as a faithful check on our tendency to view the world and God's mission through perceptions moulded by complicity in empire. In other words, partners need each other to see the world and themselves more clearly. *The church is called, therefore, to seek partnerships in all aspects of its participation in God's mission.*

6. **Resource-Sharing Is Fundamental.** Because we live in a world of profound financial inequality, resource-sharing remains a fundamental component of global partnership. The unjust distribution of resources in the world means that particular care must be given to theological questions of ownership of resources and

shared power and decision-making over their distribution. *The church believes that its resources are entrusted to it by God for effective partnership in God's mission and, therefore, that careful attention must be paid to how financial decisions reflect a commitment to shared power.*

7. **Ecological Justice.** The church believes that living in right relationship means acknowledging the interconnection of all of creation. Our engagements in global partnership cannot be separated from our commitments to the sustainability of creation. God's mission, the United Church has affirmed, is concerned with healing the whole world and bringing all of creation into relationships of mutual respect. All activities addressed toward partnership, whether concerned with human rights, ecological justice, peacemaking, or relief and development are interrelated and mutually dependent. *In global partnership, the church is committed to caring for the integrity of creation and in its practices of partnership limiting the ecological impact of its activities.*

8. **Justice and Charity**. God calls us in right relationship to address the brokenness of our human life and community. The church seeks not only to address the immediate suffering present in the world but also to address the habitual and systemic forms of injustice, violence, and hatred that sustain the present suffering. Acts of love and immediate responses to human suffering (sometimes called charity) must never be disparaged because relieving suffering is always the first claim of right relationship. Yet charity alone denies the fullness of love found in justice and undermines the fullest demands of the right relationships that God requires of us. *The church is called to celebrate acts of love that address direct human suffering while upholding transformative justice as the expected outcome of all forms of partnership.*

9. **Partnership with People of Other Faiths and Beliefs.** We believe that God's call to right relationship is to the whole world, and anyone who seeks the healing of creation is involved in God's mission. Partnership in God's mission is necessary between people of different faiths and beliefs. Indeed, we believe that God's call to right relationship invites us to break through barriers of belief, language, and culture for the sake of the world which God loves. *The church will continue to seek out partnerships that both encompass and extend beyond traditional boundaries of faith and belief.*

10. **Partnership Involves the Whole Church**. Global partnership is meant to transform the world, including ourselves. We affirm that it is a process into which God calls the whole church. The United Church will maintain a strong national global partnership presence, and will seek ways of expanding avenues for participation of congregations, community ministries, educational centres, and others participation in these relationships. This will of necessity involve innovative approaches, especially in the context of reduced funding capacity. The church also affirms the many varied expressions of partnership that are emerging at local and regional levels as signs of responsiveness to God's mission. *The church will seek to provide resources and advice to ensure that these initiatives are reflective of the best principles and practices of global partnership.*

Notes

1 *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire: Report to the 39th General Council* (The United Church of Canada, 2006).

2 Members of the task group were elected members Georgina Fitzgerald, Mary Gunson, John Oh, Elizabeth Stevenson, Arthur Walker-Jones, Faye Wakeling, and Christine Williams; and staff members Bruce Gregersen, Omega Bula, and Gary Kenny.

3 Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth, 24th General Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Accra, Ghana, October 2004.

4 *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*.

5 As an ideology, neo-liberalism is generally defined as a doctrine that upholds and promotes the market as the judge of the common good. Within this market-oriented world view, competition is enshrined as a supreme value and nearly everything is viewed as a commodity to be bought and sold. Neo-liberalism represents a set of values that run counter to God's mission of wholeness for the world and creation as revealed through the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus. [paraphrased from *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*]

6 This recommendation was made to the parent body of the task group, the Permanent Committee, Programs for Mission and Ministry.

7 The Extra Measures program provides an opportunity for congregations to connect with and provide financial support for special projects identified by global partners provided that the support is over and above commitment to the Mission and Service Fund.

8 This recommendation will be made to the parent body of the task group, the Permanent Committee, Programs for Mission and Ministry.

9 The Hebrew words typically translated as "till" and "keep" can also be translated as "serve" and "protect."

10 "Jesus and Empire: Then and Now," Appendix C, *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*, p. 54.

11 "Where the Empire Lies, People Suffer, They Are Exploited, and Life Becomes Death," Appendix B, *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*, p. 48.