

# Accompanying Global Partners: A Guide for the Journey



*Guidelines for congregations, Regions, and  
Conferences seeking relationships of mutuality  
with international partners through Global Ministries*

## A Vision for All God's People and Creation



**Our Vision:** That all of God's people and creation share in God's abundant life.

Through Global Ministries, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ are committed to receive and share the Good News of Jesus Christ by joining with global and local partners to work for justice, reconciliation, and peace.

This mission is embodied through reciprocal relationships with 250 Partner churches and organizations in over 90 countries. You are already in a partnership relationship with these global partners by your affiliation with the UCC or Disciples.



## The Foundation of Partnership in Global Ministries



Partnership is a key concept of the Church's role in God's mission, as best as we can know it. We understand our central calling is to follow Christ, as each day we face a world of challenges, both large and small; we do so loving the world that is so loved by God. It is this yearning quest that prompts us to join with global and local partners.

### **Why are Global Partnerships good for Our Churches?**

Nurturing partnerships is our starting point for following Christ and becoming the one Body of Christ. God created the world to be in relationship with the Divine Creator and with the rest of creation.

God's saving grace redeems and transforms the world. We witness God's transforming work—and perhaps even partake in it—through our relationships with sister churches and other partners around the world. Jesus of Nazareth has shown us how best to love and walk with God by being in loving relationships with each other.

Mission happens best in relationships with international partner churches and organizations, where we walk together as companions in faith. These relationships offer mutual support, shared growth in knowledge and faith, and an opportunity to experience the richness of God's global family. As Ephesians 2:19 reminds us, "You are no longer strangers or foreigners, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of the household of God."

Global partnerships are a crucial and significant pathway to us as North American churches to foster an awareness of wider global contexts and thus enable us to follow Christ with appropriate understanding and adequate resolve. Engaging with Christians and people of other faiths around the world deepens our faith, life, and witness as the Church.

## How Do We Engage in Mission through Partnerships?

Many mission efforts have been shaped historically – and contemporarily – by an effort to “convert” and “civilize” non-Christians, goals tied up with colonialism and cultural imperialism. The model of mission embraced by Global Ministries, however, soundly rejects such harmful practices. Instead, as followers of Christ, whose very nature is relational, we believe we are called to embody a spirit of connection and care. By basing mission today on global partnerships rooted in mutuality, shared faith, and an honoring of reciprocal wisdom, our mission engagement seeks to expand these healthy and healing relationships in our world.

We believe healthy partnerships demonstrate *accompaniment*—walking with others, sharing life and faith together. The story of the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35) offers a model in which Christ is revealed in being present, through conversation, and in the breaking of bread. Through such partnerships, the face of Christ is revealed again and again. Because of this, we celebrate that we *receive* and share the Good News of Jesus Christ through our partnerships.

Therefore, global partnerships are not just a way of “doing good”—they are vital to our faith and discipleship. While humanitarian work and social justice are important, our partnerships are not just an outcome of faith—they *are* our faith. Nor do we measure partnership merely by the time or money invested, but by the depth and authenticity of our relationships. While humanitarian mission efforts and financial support can be meaningful expressions of partnership, they are not the defining elements. Partnership activities like financial support or work trips might resemble traditional mission work; however, our posture has shifted from “doing for” to “being with.”



### Key Principles of Partnership

The quality of partnerships makes a difference in the values that serve as their foundation and in the values our shared efforts uphold. At the heart of every healthy global partnership are certain values that guide the way we engage with partners:

- **Trust and understanding.** Trust develops and understanding emerges when we take time to listen deeply to the voices of our partners and when we demonstrate a consistency of care and presence.
- **Respect and humility.** Build relationships with those already doing the work. Their knowledge ensures that efforts are culturally appropriate and sustainable. We do not impose our solutions, but honor the wisdom and experience of our partners.

- **Mutual faith and shared purpose.** See people not as “projects” but as partners. Genuine relationships come from mutual respect and shared testimonies of faith. The nature of our specific ministries with partners should be developed in consultation with one another.
- **Listening and honesty.** Don’t assume we have all the answers. Let the voices and needs of local communities guide our efforts. Partnerships rooted in trust make space for speaking the truth as each understands it, always spoken with love.
- **Solidarity.** Stand with and for each other in situations of violence and injustice. Commit to addressing their root causes through advocacy and action. Seek to understand how policies and practices of the United States have direct impact on partners.

Upholding these values requires paying attention to the ways partners interact. Especially for our North American churches, we need to be conscious of how our geo-political status continues to assert power and privilege in the world. While we are accountable for our own behavior in these relationships, partnerships based on trust also allow us to hold each other to the same commitments of care, mutual respect, and solidarity. Our intentional efforts to remove or counteract persistent patterns of domination and privilege, and to rethink theologies that validate them, are why Global Ministries has identified *de-colonization* as an ongoing and fundamental priority for our work.

### **Who Are Our Partners?**

Disciples and UCC partners, nurtured by Global Ministries, include denominations and church bodies, ecumenical councils, human rights organizations, development and disaster-response agencies, and diaconal organizations like schools and hospitals. Some partnerships are long-standing; others are more recent, formed through shared advocacy or theological vision. They are mostly – but not exclusively – Christian, as we also engage with partners of other faith communities. Though Global Ministries generally relates to national-level organizations and leadership, meaningful partnerships are also manifested at regional and local levels; many Disciples Regions and UCC Conferences have built strong relationships worldwide. Whether partnerships are lived out at the national church level or through local or middle judicatory levels, global partnerships are less about providing aid and more about building relationships rooted in justice, equity, and shared faith.



## Defining a Global Church Partnership



A global church partnership is a covenantal relationship between a Disciples Region, a UCC Conference/Association, and/or a Disciples or UCC congregation, and an international partner. Global Ministries may be a third party if desired, ready to participate in the stages of nurturing the relationship as needed and if appropriate.

This multifaceted relationship may be affirmed in a document written and signed by all parties called a Covenant Agreement. In this document, the understandings, expectations, parameters, and protocols of the relationship should be clearly stated based on each partner's input. Emphasis is placed upon a reciprocal relationship where each party has gifts to share and receive.

Some examples of partnership goals:

- Seeking to experience the unity of Christ across cultural, racial, and national boundaries.
- Learning from each other about the spiritual, mental, and physical needs of individuals and communities.
- Supporting each other in deepening and expanding our faith and public witness.
- Seeking to grow in understanding of people in other lands.
- Purging ourselves of the notion that our global relationships are all about a financial relationship, which can quickly devolve into unhealthy dynamics of power and privilege.

Through these relationships, ecumenical and missional horizons of different settings of our churches can be expanded, resulting in reciprocal learning from each other's faith.

## Steps in Developing a Global Church Partnership



Developing a global church partnership should be viewed as a sacred journey rooted in mutual respect, shared mission, and a commitment to walk together in faith. As you move through the discernment process, forming a Partnership Committee and clarifying initial hopes and goals, it is essential to remember that the development and expectations of the partnership must ultimately be determined in dialogue with your prospective global partner. You may need to revisit and adjust from your original expectations, considering the gifts, priorities, and perspectives of our global counterparts. A faithful partnership is not something one side designs for the other, but something to co-create, grounded in humility and shared purpose.

### **1. Establish a Partnership Committee:**

A group representing your congregation, UCC Conference/Association, or Disciples Region/Area should form to begin to discern what is hoped for in a global partnership. This group may become a partnership committee to prepare documents and nurture the relationship. The relationship should not become the exclusive project of the committee. It is important to make intentional efforts from the start to involve the Conference, Region, or congregation as a whole.

### **2. Contact Global Ministries:**

After your discernment and discussion of hopes and goals, a next step in the process is to contact Global Ministries to indicate your interest in entering into a global church partnership. Global Ministries will be eager and ready to work with you throughout the process. Contact us for an initial conversation: [serve@dom.disciples.org](mailto:serve@dom.disciples.org)

### **3. Prepare a Partnership Proposal:**

The following documents are suggested:

#### **a. Theological Statement (1 page):**

Discuss your theological rationale for seeking a partnership. How does your faith and the scripture shape your understanding of walking with a community different from yours in another country and culture?

b. **Statement** of Gifts and Needs (1 page):

Identify your special strengths and how these might benefit your global partner. Equally important, identify your needs, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities.

c. **Profile** (1 page):

Describe your congregation, Disciples Region/Area, or UCC Conference/ Association. Offer information regarding your size, location, mission, special ministries, context, and special meetings.

**4. Seek an appropriate global partner and share your proposal:**

At this stage, contact Global Ministries for assistance connecting with international partners. A Global Relations Minister may recommend one or more possible partners for your consideration and can then contact a partner church or organization on your behalf.

***Tip:** Request financial assistance to implement the relationship in a budgeted line item from your church board.*

**5. Meet with a Global Partner**

Meet and become acquainted with a potential partner and discuss what each of you seeks and hopes for in a partnership. A Global Relations Minister with Global Ministries can assist with arranging and facilitating this conversation. Discuss what strengths, particular wisdom, and vulnerabilities each partner would bring to a potential partnership.

**6. Jointly Develop an Agreement or Covenant**

Once your partnership proposal is considered, you have met with a prospective partner, and both of you have decided to move forward based on mutually agreed upon goals, a Global Relations Minister can help you draft the Partnership Agreement. It should be a one-page statement with these parameters:

a. **Parties in the Relationship:**

Name the partners in the relationship.

b. **Length of the Relationship:**

Set the length of the term of the partnership, which will allow each partner to evaluate the relationship, make any modifications, or allow for a natural end if the relationship is not meeting the expectations of those involved and issues cannot be resolved.





**c. Theological Purpose:**

Emphasize that the role of partnership is, first and foremost, a commitment of faith. All partners should be involved in this process.

**d. Partnership Goals and Strategies:**

Establish goals and expectations.

**e. Financial obligations:**

The financial aspect of the relationship should **not** be the main motivation for the relationship, and this should be a clear understanding. All projects and programs will be decided upon by mutual agreement among all parties involved in the partnership. Financial contributions may be sent through the Global Ministries Office of Resource Development or the Global Ministries Finance Office with the designation specified.

## **7. Living into the Agreement**

In the early stage of the partnership, delegations can be exchanged, preferably in person but at least via video meeting. The Global Ministries People-to-People Pilgrimage Office can help you prepare for a trip to visit your prospective or new partner, or to receive representatives from the partner to your location in the United States. Focus on building relationships, and be creative!

## **8. Keep Global Ministries Informed**

If helpful, include the Global Relations Minister in correspondence. Provide periodic updates/reports and stories of lives touched through the relationship.

## **9. Schedule Periodic Partnership Reviews and Evaluations**

Periodically review your agreement. Plan an intermediate evaluation and an evaluation at the end of the designated time in the partnership agreement.

**Questions?**



Global Ministries is happy to accompany you in your partnership journey. For general questions, please contact: [serve@dom.disciples.org](mailto:serve@dom.disciples.org)