

***Partnering Relationships for Mission***

***(An Inquiry & Overview of Diocesan and Parish Twinning)***

***Spring 2003***

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## I. Introduction of Project

In 2001, USCMA held a pre-conference workshop in response to the current trend of parish and diocesan twinning in conjunction with their annual conference.<sup>1</sup> This daylong program addressed the need for dialogue around issues of the role twinning plays within the Church's overall concept of mission and the ways that twinning relationships were fulfilling this role, especially at the parish level. The result of the workshop was a call for further study of the twinning phenomenon including a search for more information and for more resources including best practices. This present inquiry is a follow-up to those requests.

This study is the culmination of inquiry that was conducted in the spring of 2003. The U.S. Catholic Mission Association is aware of the active involvement of U.S. parishes and dioceses in relationships with parishes and dioceses throughout the world. **This study seeks to assess the current programs and to provide recommendations and resources that would enable healthy partnering to be conducted within the mission concepts of solidarity and mutuality.**

To enhance the reliability of this study and to ensure that this study reflected current partnering practices, surveys were sent to both a sample of diocesan mission offices responsible for partnering programs and to intermediary organizations that help to facilitate partnerships. Out of 34 diocesan offices contacted, 11 responded. Out of 10 intermediary groups contacted, 5 responded. **Though the statistical reliability of the response rate is not high, the responses did yield beneficial information regarding partnering practices and concerns that need to be addressed.**

## II. Definitions: Mission & Partnering

*Our own time, with humanity on the move in a continual search, demands a resurgence of the Church's missionary activity. The horizons and possibilities for mission are growing ever wider, and we Christians are called to an apostolic courage based upon trust in the Spirit. The Spirit is the principle agent of mission!*

-Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 30.1

According to the recent [Mission Congress 2000](#), contemporary mission is a global endeavor that reaches not only areas where a small percentage of the population is Christian, but also traditionally Christian areas such as Europe and the United States where secularization is challenging and displacing religion in urbanized communities.<sup>2</sup> Parish and diocesan partnering are forms of mission that have the potential to address both the historical view of mission to non-Christian areas as well as that of mission to traditionally Christian regions including the United States. When conducted with a sense of mutuality, the U.S. partner is enriched through the relationship in tangible ways, just as the non-U.S. partner may be enriched in concrete manners.

In addition to expanding who is affected by mission, Mission Congress 2000 also enlarged what is encompassed in mission. The view of mission put forth by the Mission

Congress emphasizes the “promotion of the values of the Reign of God (love, community, service, simplicity, inclusion, etc.)” as well as the “promotion of justice and peace in society as part of the Reign of God.” Proclaiming the Word of God and working towards easing or eliminating structurally embedded injustice and conflict are elements of mission that the Mission Congress frequently highlighted as essential. Partnering programs as mission activities have the capacity and potential to address these essential elements of mission in a very meaningful way.

Mission is no longer just an isolated action of the Church, but it is the Church. Most Rev. Marcello Zago, OMI quotes [Redemptoris Missio](#) in his keynote address at the Mission Congress when he states, “mission concerns everyone. It does not pertain to only a few people. All Christians are invested with this duty: ‘every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission’ (RM 90).”<sup>3</sup> Through diocesan and parish partnerships more people at various levels of the Church are able to participate in their baptismal call to mission.

At present, studies show that U.S. dioceses and parishes are actively engaged in partnering relationships. A recent study commissioned by the [Secretariat for the Church in Latin America](#) noted that roughly 30% of the U.S. parishes surveyed and reported through the National Parish Inventory (2000) of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) are engaged in ‘relationships of support’ with another parish. Latin America was the geographical location designated by 15 % of the surveyed parishes.<sup>4</sup> The diocese of Minneapolis/St. Paul recently revealed in their study of parish twinning that 18 % of the parishes in their diocese are involved in various types of international relationships.<sup>5</sup> However, not all of these relationships would meet the definition of twinning used in this report. The percentages of parishes partnering within the various dioceses surveyed for this inquiry ranged from 3 to 15 %.

This study recognizes that various language and terms are used to describe the phenomenon of parish and diocesan mission partnerships. Examples of these terms include sistering, twinning and partnering. Though initially the survey questions used the terms twinning and twinning relationship, this study chooses to use the terms partner, partnering, partnerships, and partner relationships. Partnerships currently take on many different forms and make use of various definitions of mission from which they develop and sustain these relationships. **This study prefers the terms relating to partnering because these types of relationships are based on mutuality and solidarity, not on charity or obligation.** Each partner in the relationship brings its knowledge, skills and gifts and enters into the relationship willingly as a partner in mission.

### **III. Diocesan Mission Office Inquiry Results**

The survey results speak to six key areas that address program motivation, advantages & disadvantages, relationship duration, diocesan support of parish twinning, priorities within the relationships and intermediaries.

## *Program Motivations*

### *Theological*

Each diocesan mission program was asked what theological framework guides diocesan and parish partnering programs. Many responses reflected that the impetus for partnering is the framework of mission following “the baptismal call of each member of this universal church to be missionary and to seek the common good” (Mission Office, Archdiocese of Milwaukee). The main document that each diocesan mission office cited as the theological motivation for current partnering is the 1997 U.S. Bishops’ statement, [\*Called to Global Solidarity: International challenges for U.S. parishes.\*](#)

The response from the archdiocesan mission office of St. Paul-Minneapolis eloquently summarizes the theological background that *Called to Global Solidarity* provides partnering programs:

The theological framework that guides this movement to establishing partnerships between the parishes in our diocese here and the barrios in the Venezuela mission is that articulated in the Bishops’ *Called to Global Solidarity* ... responding to Jesus’ command to love one’s neighbor, called by baptism to action for “the least (most vulnerable) among us”, promoting the unity of the human family, the universal church, the call to live up to our name to really be “catholic,” and the call to solidarity to overcome divisions in our world.

Other documents were also specifically referenced in response to this question. These included the Vatican II document, [\*Ad Gentes\*](#), Pope John Paul II’s pastoral statement, *Redemptoris Missio*, the U.S. Bishops’ Statement [\*To the Ends of the Earth\*](#) and David Bosch’s [\*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission\*](#) (Orbis Books, 1991). The Archdiocese of Milwaukee responded that motivation is continually drawn from Pope John XXIII, when he “called us, in this hemisphere, to look out for our sisters and brothers in Latin America and the Caribbean. Solidarity is a virtue for our times. It is healthy for a diocese to have this type of sister/partner extension in another

“Specifically with *Sagrada Familia* parish in *Sabana Yegua* (in the poorest, desert area of the country) [our relationship] is an opportunity for all people in SE WI to share faith and friendship with people beyond our borders.”

-Archdiocese of Milwaukee

country. It is a place where priests and laity can live for varying periods of time and “be” the message to the people ... that we care about them, and for people [in our diocese] to experience the transformation that such an opportunity provides.” The Diocese of Youngstown listed stewardship, shared blessings, thanksgiving, charity and outreach as their motivations for parish-parish

twinning.

### *Non-Theological*

Non-theological motivations also play a role in developing and maintaining relationships. The globalization phenomenon which is bringing people of different countries and cultures together has increased the need to evaluate if parishes and diocese are answering the call to look beyond their own borders to become truly “catholic”. Other responses regarding non-theological motivations included a desire to reach out to our brothers and

sisters while facilitating the dialogical sense of mission, an opportunity for people to instill the Gospel message in a tangible and personal way, and an attempt to transform the parish by international interactions. One response even mentioned the people-to-people/sister city program established by President Eisenhower in 1956 as a template for the current partnering program structure.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles mentioned that political and economic motivations accompanied promotion of a greater sense of humanity and the increasing intercultural dynamics of the diocese as non-theological motivations for their twinning endeavors. The Diocese of St. Cloud explained that the ability of partnering relationships to enliven people's faith and inform people was a reason for partnering in the diocese.

### *Advantages & Disadvantages*

Beyond initial motivations, dioceses were asked what the advantages and disadvantages were with developing and maintaining partnering relationships at the diocesan level. All of the dioceses responded in the same manner noting the common theme of being part of a universal Church and looking beyond the boundaries of the local focus. The basis for this advantage is that the local parish or diocese in the United States is transformed and changed through contact and interaction with their non-U.S. counterparts. **The advantage lies not only in more fully participating in its role in the universal Church, but also in gaining information, understanding and skills from their interactions for the local parish or diocese.** One parish mentioned that their diocesan relationship, which entails sending priests for set periods of time to serve in the diocesan mission parish, enabled them to gain the language skills that were necessary to address the changing population within the diocese. Another diocese pointed to the role that the non-U.S. counterpart has in providing a contrast to American values, such as individualism, providing exposure to other possible ways of approaching faith and culture within the diocese. St. Paul-Minneapolis indicates that partnering brings mission to life for the average parishioner in the pew.

When asked for disadvantages to diocesan twinning, only two dioceses responded. The first mentioned that if the goal is to gain global awareness, then **partnering can create a myth of global awareness since it is really only a bi-cultural experience not a multi-cultural one.** The second response dealt with the burden of the financial cost of supporting a diocesan mission church through salaries and expenses, in addition to the cost of sending priests to the mission when they are increasingly needed in the archdiocese.

### *Relationship Duration*

The average length of parish twinning relationships according to the responses from the diocesan mission offices was 3-4 years. This is close to the average timeframe noted in the CARA study for the Secretariat for the Church in Latin America. In that study, 46% of the respondents stated that the relationship was initiated within the past 5 years.<sup>6</sup>

The diocesan relationships are not uniform. A few relationships have been in existence in one form or another since the call of Pope John XXIII. One response indicated that their

diocesan relationship has been in existence for roughly a decade while others reported the relationship duration as only a few years.

### ***Diocesan Support of Parish Partnering***

The CARA study completed for the Secretariat for the Church in Latin America regarding parish twinning with Latin America found that more than two-thirds of parishes with supportive relationships report that their diocese actively promotes the development of these supportive relationships.<sup>7</sup> The responses from our survey were not as conclusive. Three of the diocese reported that they do not actively promote parish partnering relationships, but are encouraging when contacted by parishes. Two dioceses responded that they do actively support twinning relationships. Two dioceses noted that they are either unaware of any parish partnering programs currently underway in their dioceses or are not looking to promote partnering programs at this time.

### ***Relationship Priorities***

Currently, partnering relationships have several priorities that eventually shape the relationship into various forms. The Diocese of Milwaukee noted that of primary importance is that “the relationship is mutual and based in solidarity.” Going beyond this prerequisite for partnering, our survey asked diocesan mission offices to select areas of priority when establishing and maintaining a healthy partnering relationship from a list of eight topics. As one might imagine, each diocesan mission office had a different perspective, but a general division did emerge among the eleven respondents.

***Establishing communication and personal contact/participation were cited as key priorities by all the respondents.*** Looking at a comparison with the CARA study commissioned by the Secretariat for the Church in Latin America, there is a similarity. The CARA study found letter writing, a form of establishing communication and personal contact, to be the third highest type of support.<sup>8</sup>

The second tier of priorities consisted of *motivation and theological basis, area/regional education, and long-term strategies and goals*. Having a *financial plan including accountability factors* was seen as a secondary priority by most of the diocesan offices, though one saw it as an important issue and one did not list it as a priority at all.

***Material support and work teams were areas of caution for the mission offices.*** These were seen as secondary priorities, though ones that are quite commonly found as integral parts of partnering. In the CARA study commissioned by the Secretariat for the Church in Latin America there was a section of questions pertaining to the types of support that the U.S. parishes provide to their partners.<sup>9</sup> Material Support was second on the list behind intercessory prayers. This result contrasts the partnering priorities that were stated in this current inquiry. This contrast could be explained by the fact that the inquiry was based on priorities and not what is actually occurring, whereas the CARA study questions were based on the types of support actually being carried out in the relationship.

### *Intermediaries*

Partnering can be difficult to establish and maintain without intermediary help from twinning organizations or religious congregations and established missionaries. Religious congregations were mentioned by all of the respondents as key intermediaries in partnering relationships.

Organizations that either specialize in partnering or that foster partnering as part of other established programs were also key actors in partnering relationships. These organizations included [Catholic Relief Services \(CRS\)](#), [Parish Twinning Program of the Americas \(PTPA\)](#), [Sister Parish](#), [SHARE Foundation](#) and COAR. CARA also found in their study for the Secretariat for the Church in Latin America that in addition to religious congregations and the more traditional relief organizations such as Catholic Relief Services and SHARE, there were other organizations that assisted with parish partnering.<sup>10</sup> The main alternative organization respondents identified in that study was PTPA. The share of responses for PTPA matched the number of responses for Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Overall, the CARA study noted that 49% of the respondents have worked with groups that promote the development of supportive relationships with the Church in Latin America. These respondents were more likely to be aware of other parishes with these types of relationships and other groups that promote these relationships.<sup>11</sup>

## **IV. Areas of Concern**

Certain areas of concern surfaced through talks with partnering directors and participants as well as in response to the questionnaire. **The main areas of concern pertained to participation, finances, mutuality/solidarity/justice, relationship closure and medical teams.** Partnering has been likened to walking a tightrope. It is easy to do the wrong thing, even with the best of intentions and planning.

### *Participation*

Comments regarding participation in partnering relationships centered on avoiding problems that stemmed from the responsibility of the relationship being too concentrated in one person or in a small group. Logistically, diocesan mission offices were concerned that this concentration of responsibility leads to lack of accountability or to the dissolution of the relationship when that one group's interest wanes or that one person transitions to another parish. Theologically, since parish partnering is a way to engage the parish as a whole in mission, another concern is that lack of broadly-based participation from the parish community prevents the parish from fulfilling its mission calling. This was apparent in the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis's response. Their concern is "that it becomes something interesting for just a few parishioners in the parishes here, rather than broadly-based in the parish community and part-and parcel of the parish's identity, that is well-known and even engaged in by virtually all members of the parish."

### *Finances*

There were two themes in the area of finances that were expressed in the results of this inquiry. The first dealt with growing from a charity-based model to a solidarity-based model that relies on mutuality between the partners and not just a one-way flow of money and material goods. With the shift in mission understanding that was previously discussed, the models of mission must also change. These comments reflect the need for partnering to adhere more closely to the solidarity model of relationships, where **money and material support can be a part of the relationship, but that it is not the sum total of the relationship.**

The second theme pertained to the concern about partnering programs taking money away from other mission efforts that are already established in the diocese or parish. Three of the respondents noted this concern and cited programs and organizations such as Mission Sunday; USCCB's Overseas Appeal; CRS' Operation Rice Bowl; Holy Childhood Association; and Mission Cooperation Plan. One respondent explained that there needs to be some correlation between programs and organizations that receive the financial and material donations, including partnering relationships. This correlation of funds would exist so that structural changes in global institutions can be exacted and funds can be prevented from just being funneled into one area or parish when they have the potential to make larger, more embedded changes.

An additional financial concern is that parish partnering programs not be overwhelmed by demands of other individual needs. This concern stems from the idea of opening the flood gates of support when the parish is asked to support each and every project of the partner without regard to the relationship as a whole or the goals and vision established at the beginning of the partnership centering on only one or two main projects.

### *Mutuality, Solidarity, & Justice Issues*

**Establishing a twinning relationship that is mutual and not paternalistic is a key concern of diocesan mission offices.** One of the responses aptly describes that they are concerned "that [the relationships] may not be mutual, but are too 'one-way' with some archdiocesan parishes assuming an air of superiority- 'we have the goods', 'we have the answers' mentality- that only enhances the feeling of inferiority among the peoples of the twinning parish. [Also, another concern is] that it becomes a way for the people to just 'feel good about themselves for contributing' without allowing the experience to be a source of conversion or transformation."

Working with other parishes and dioceses in solidarity means that the relationship must move past the initial charity stages and address the structural injustice that is creating the poverty and hardship. The mission office in Cincinnati is working on guide sheets that show the difference between twinning out of a charity model and that of a solidarity model. This concern about moving beyond the charity level can only be addressed through better education of missiology and through a more in-depth understanding of the structural injustices that exist both within the United States and within the region or area of focus.

### ***Bi-cultural or Global View?***

Partnering relationships are sometimes used to create a more global awareness of the universal Church in a parish or diocese. One mission office expressed the concern that parishes and dioceses do not become contented with the notion that reaching out in partnership with one region or area comprises a global understanding. Their concern is that partners stop at only one local partnership without broadening their view or having other partners. Seeing only one area is really a bi-cultural relationship, not a global one. This mission office is creating tri-partnered relationships to lessen the bi-cultural focus. These partnering entail choosing two parishes from two different cultural communities within the diocese and partnering them with a parish in an international region that is not culturally similar to either of the first two cultural communities.

### ***Relationship Closure***

As with human relationships, when a relationship has come to an end, dissolving the union or terminating that relationship can be a painful process. This holds true for partnering as well. Although parishes and dioceses might want to enter into a relationship without contracting a time-limit, there are concerns about being able to dissolve the relationship if necessary. One respondent indicated that the “challenge is to determine when to move on. We believe this will happen through mutual discernment though we know that will need some facilitating. Then another challenge will be to provide for a smooth transition especially regarding finances.” The Diocese of St. Cloud does not have a formal, contracted time limit; however, they do encourage an on-going evaluation mechanism that allows a period of time when evaluation and, if necessary, termination of the relationship can be more easily accomplished.

### ***Medical Teams***

One of the common direct support methods used in a partnering relationship is to send teams of medical professionals to address health care issues within the partner’s parish, diocese or community. There are three main concerns with this practice.

The first is that medical teams sent for a short period of time disrupt the established health care profession and structure in the local area. Though the established health care profession in the area might not be a Western model or of Western standards, it is however the profession that will continue to address the needs of the community once the medical team has left the area. Coming into an area and handing out eye-glasses or providing basic medicines might disrupt the medical economy and professional status of the local health care providers.

The second concern is that the health care providers are not knowledgeable about health care practices in the area and are unable to provide the Western version of health care that they are familiar with in the United States. An example to illustrate this point is the lack of medicines or hi-tech medical instruments which makes it difficult for Western trained doctors to be useful in a setting less technologically advanced than what they are accustomed to in the United States.

The third concern is that cultural issues are not addressed concerning medical care, body image, traditional healing, or patient-health care provider interaction. Other cultural communities do not necessarily approach health care and health care providers as Americans would and a better understanding of the cultural issues surrounding health care and treatment might afford better results for such teams.

### ***Lack of Education***

One diocese noted that “we as a diocese are not providing enough education/formation support for parishes involved in, or considering, partnerships.” This concern echoes a general theme throughout this inquiry regarding how much formation does a parish or diocese need before embarking on a partnering program? How engaged should the diocese be in informing and directing the parish programs? What types of education would be beneficial for diocesan and parish partnership programs: mission studies, cultural training, regional history, examples of other programs? Partnering programs, as they are currently structured, are not uniform throughout dioceses or throughout the United States. The one common document that the respondents cited as background for partnering programs was the U.S. Bishops’ *Called to Global Solidarity*. The concern is that partnering programs do not gain a good foundation of theology, missiology and cultural awareness before embarking on partnering relationships.

### ***Cultural Competency***

Throughout the aforementioned concerns runs the vein of cultural competency. It is practically impossible to avoid dealing with culture in a healthy partnering relationship. Whether it be experiencing new foods during a trip to the partner’s parish or learning the language of the partner’s region, culture can play an obvious role in the partnering relationship. Culture can also play an invisible role. Understanding local customs and practices can facilitate a smoother partnership especially when dealing with the needs and desires of the non-U.S. partner. Certain decisions about which project to focus on or who should lead a delegation could be based on cultural practices or traditions that are not adhered to or understood by the other partner. It is a concern that Americans are participating in partnering programs without regard to cultural differences and cultural competency. This leads to a lack of respect for the non-U.S. partner and the inability to engage in a mutual relationship of solidarity. In *Redemptoris Mission* (53), Pope John Paul II talks about how it is necessary for missionaries to “immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own limitations.” Since partnering is a form of mission, those involved in partnering relationships are also missionaries. Actual contact with and understanding of other cultures is part of the call to mission.

## **V. Healthy Partnering Situations**

**Healthy partnering relationships have a key role to play in enabling a variety of people to be involved in mission including clergy, religious and lay people.** Partnering is an opportunity for local parishes or whole dioceses to answer the call to be in mission as members of the Christian faithful and to address the need for what the U.S. Bishops call further ‘integration of the international dimensions of Catholic discipleship within a

truly universal Church'.<sup>12</sup> Healthy partnering relationships cannot be maintained through the interest of only one or two people. It is the responsibility of the entire parish or diocese as a whole to develop and support a twinning relationship as a way to make missionary activity the responsibility of the whole Church.

In addition, healthy partnering relationships adhere to the mission values of solidarity and mutuality. Rev. Bill Nordenbrock indicates that in addition to the inclusion of all the baptized as participants in mission there also exists a shift “away from believing that the missionary ‘has God and takes God to the pagans’; to recognizing that Christ is already present in the mission Church and recognizing and supporting the inculturation of Christianity in a particular local Church.”<sup>13</sup>

The lands to which missionaries went used to be called “the missions.” These countries were seen as mission receiving. Other countries were thought of as mission sending; they did not see themselves in need of receiving missionaries. A deeper understanding of the theology of mission leads us to recognize that these distinctions no longer apply. Every local church is both mission sending and mission receiving.

-U.S. Bishop’s Pastoral Statement,  
*To the Ends of the Earth*, #15

**The partnership grows out of respect for the dignity and the gifts that each partner embodies. This is not based on charity or paternalism, but on a rich relationship of interdependence and mutuality.** Each member of the Body of Christ has their own gifts given by the Holy Spirit. In the partnering encounter, these gifts are shared between the partners.

The partnering encounter should be a relationship that is able to change with the reality and needs of each partner. Though a partnership might be initially established for the purpose of providing catechesis or for providing emergency assistance after a natural disaster, the partnership does not need to be relegated to only these areas. As the relationship develops and deepens, additional needs should be addressed. This includes taking the step from providing relief of symptoms to addressing the embedded issues causing the symptoms. **Mission partnering is accomplished through the addressing of injustice and a deepening of faith. This occurs through looking at how each partner can be enriched and brought closer into communion with Christ.**

## VI. Recommendations

The following section outlines various recommendations that address issues or concerns raised previously pertaining to partnering relationships.

### Diocesan Mission Office Involvement

**Solidarity partnering is a form of mission whose validity has been approved by the Church<sup>14</sup>. As a form of mission, partnering should thus come under the auspices of the diocesan mission office.** Though by their nature, partnering programs tend to

incorporate issues of social justice, **the overall focus of partnering programs relates to a mutual sharing of faith.** Partnering is an active form of mission and thus, seems to fall naturally under the auspices of the Diocesan Mission Office. At both the diocesan level and the parish level, the diocesan mission office should then be involved with partnering programs as an extension of the mission activities it currently directs or coordinates.

**Involvement in partnering does not presuppose a lessening of involvement in other areas of mission.** There are a variety of ways that the mission office can be involved with partnering programs. If an active role is not desired, simply being receptive and encouraging when other diocesan offices or parishes engage in partnering relationships is adequate. Acting as a networking force between parishes and diocesan offices that are attempting or already involved in partnerships is another way for diocesan mission offices to be involved in partnering programs.

In addition, mission offices do have the opportunity to actively support and promote partnering as a form of mission by educating parishes and other diocesan offices of the role that partnering plays within the Church. Various resources could be made available such as best practice lists, theology resources for partnering, contact information for mission office personnel able to assist in partnering programs and contact information for other parishes or dioceses that are engaged in the partnering process. Information regarding specific regions and areas would also be helpful if the diocesan mission office has access to such information from other mission endeavors in those regions.

### **Partnering Participants**

Though some partnerships are established without the inclusion of the bishop or pastor, maintaining a long-lasting relationship requires an integral role for both the pastor and the bishop. Whenever possible, it is therefore in the interest of the partnership that ties be created with the involvement or, at the very least, the approval of the local pastor and bishop.

**Healthy Partnering Relationships begin with**

- support/approval from both the pastor and bishop or diocesan representative,
- involvement from the whole parish not just one committee, and
- rotate key partnering leaders so that individuals don't become institutionalized.

Moving beyond clergy participation, it is important to work towards the partnering effort being both parish and diocesan-wide for both partners. The effort should grow beyond simply the social concerns or mission committees. Especially in the diocesan

partnership the relationship should grow beyond a clergy to clergy basis. The Diocese of Milwaukee noted that is worthwhile that “the whole parish engages in this relationship and not just a small committee like the social concerns committee. We suggest that there be a committee representative of all aspects of parish life that coordinates and keeps this relationship alive in the parish. While the committee may be ongoing, we recommend that the membership rotate”. When speaking about parish partnering programs, the

Diocese of Seattle also indicates that an important factor is the “involvement of the whole parish (U.S.) intergenerationally, programmatically, & liturgically.”

Broadening the participation in a partnering relationship will add a stronger base of knowledge and fervor that will help to sustain and maintain the relationship through staff transitions and periodic ebbs in enthusiasm for the partnership.

### Getting Started

Though many relationships develop from informal roots, a lasting partnering relationship should have a more formal planning process. Some relationships take 2-3 years of planning, visits, and prayerful discernment from the initial inquiry into the possibility of a relationship and the formal establishment of the relationship. There are various stages that are needed to fully ascertain the compatibility of partners and the willingness of partners to maintain the relationship for any length of time. **Initially, each partner should do a self-evaluation of the capacity that the partner has for entering into such a relationship.** Ideally, this includes gaining support within the partner organization, such as the parish or diocese before a partner is sought. This is also a period of time when further education can occur. This education pertains to Church teachings regarding mission, the missionary role of partnering programs as acts of solidarity and to education about the region, area or culture of the partner

**Though some partnering programs feel that the relationship cannot be contracted and should develop in a more informal manner, it is recommended that some type of formal contract or covenant be used to solidify the partnership.** Each partner has goals and a vision for how the partnering relationship will develop and grow. It is important that these goals and visions be shared and understood by each partner before a partnership is begun.

### Intermediary Organizations

**Using intermediary organizations is beneficial for establishing, maintaining and terminating long term partnering relationships.** They provide assistance and expertise for parishes, dioceses or organizations that are not familiar with the logistical and cultural how's and why's of partnering. Intermediary organizations can also provide the added benefit of access to a network of various groups that are engaged in partnering programs. One of the main ways that intermediary organizations assist in partnering is to provide clearer communication through interpreters and correspondence assistance. This is valuable when language barriers prohibit partners from adequately communicating.

When choosing an intermediary organization, be sure to match the goals of the partner with the organization's goals. If the intermediary organization is primarily focused on hunger objectives or justice issues, the intermediary will be of more help if the partner's focus is also along these lines. If the parish or diocese is interested in short-term humanitarian relief after a disaster and the intermediary organization being considered promotes long-term programs that create and support sustainable farming methods, there

is an incompatibility. Conversely, if the goals of both the partners and the intermediary organization align the partnership has a strong base to build from throughout the relationship.

### **Maintenance & Continuation**

Throughout the responses in this survey and in the CARA study commissioned by the Secretariat for the Church in Latin America establishing good communication was the key to a healthy partnering relationship.

To avoid the common problem of relationships dissipating once key leaders responsible for the relationship have moved on to other duties within the parish, diocese or partner organization, communication needs to reach beyond the pastor or the parish council involved with creating the relationship. Partnering is a call for the diocese or parish or organization as a whole to engage in the relationships and therefore it is necessary to establish a relationship that reaches out to all participants and not just a few. Direct communication through visits does help to solidify the partnership and to create personal relationships that enhance the organizational partnership. Logistically, for partnering that occurs over great distances, visits might not be an option.

**To maintain the relationship overtime, it is important to realize that like human relationships, the partnering relationship will change over time.** This is why it is important to have renewal periods when the relationship can be reassessed. During the preparation for the relationship and the renewal periods, it is important to set the goals of the organization as well as to recognize the goals of the partner. Not all partnerships are good matches. It is necessary to find a partner whose goals reflect the same goals that the organization, parish or diocese wants to meet.

### **Accountability**

**U.S. Americans should be aware that accountability is a culturally embedded U.S. issue and it is not necessarily one that will be honored as ‘normal’ in other cultural contexts.** While other cultures might not need a full statement of how every penny sent to the partner is spent and used, U.S. Americans tend to need that type of verification. This verification is needed in order to feel as if the money is being used for ‘good’ causes instead of ‘wasted’ and also to validate spending money on the partnership instead of in other areas of the Church budget. U.S. Americans should follow through on a desire for accountability and make all attempts to gain that accountability but should not be surprised if attaining dollar for dollar accounting proves difficult or impossible.

**It is important to address accountability within the preliminary stages of the partnership.** Methods of accountability should be discussed between the partners and, if a relationship covenant or contract is being used, these methods should be included in that relationship covenant. If any failure to deliver funds or goods occurs, or a misappropriation of funds or goods occurs the situation should be addressed both in a

timely and culturally sensitive manner. This will provide both parties with the opportunity to reflect and evaluate their continued participation in this aspect of the relationship.

If the situation arises where the partners do not feel that the funds or materials are being used in an appropriate manner, it is possible that miscommunication is the root of the problem and not intentional misappropriation of funds and material. The situation should be evaluated in light of the mutual understanding of each partner's needs. Even though financial support or materials have been provided for a specific task seen as important to the American partner, the local partner might have intended the money for other projects deemed more important or for other goals that the American partner was unaware of or did not understand. Correcting this problem might draw the partners' attention to communication issues within the relationship, but it is not always a need for the relationship to be dissolved.

### **Visit Preparation**

Cultural training and awareness is needed in cross-cultural partnering relationships. One of the main reasons that parishes and diocese engage in partnering programs is to gain a broader knowledge of global issues and how Catholicism is expressed in other regions of the world. This approach comes with the recognition that reality is not experienced the same the world over; differences do exist. The partnering relationship is bound to address the culture differences between the partners at some point during the relationship.

Within the partnering program, cultural issues should be taken into consideration. Intermediary organizations are very helpful in this regard. Other groups that have partnered in the same region are also helpful in providing logistical and cultural information that is specific to the region or population. It is especially important to provide cultural awareness training to participants who visit the partner, and to those who receive visitors from the partner. This awareness training can consist of regional and historical information, language learning, food tasting, and U.S. American cultural knowledge learning. The goal of this type of awareness training is to lower the cultural barriers that might exist between the reality of American life and the reality of life as lived by the partner.

### **Material Support & Work Teams**

No other area in the survey gained greater response than the material and work group support question. Previous efforts at partnering under the understanding of mission as charity have established precedents for various partnering behaviors; not all of which have been healthy or even successful. **The current understanding of mission as solidarity calls partnering programs to move beyond the traditional charity model and embrace a more mutual relationship of prayer and support.**

The Diocese of Milwaukee's mission office encourages the principle that "nobody is so poor that they have nothing to give, and nobody is so rich they have nothing to receive."

This keenly summarizes an approach that is beneficial for partnering programs. The Diocese of St. Cloud's mission office noted that material and work projects should be done with great caution and should definitely be done in an appropriate way. This includes not putting people out of work and working together with the local population's needs and abilities. It is important to keep in mind that the non-U.S. partners in a relationship have established ways of doing things that might be more appropriate and beneficial than the methods for accomplishing tasks used by the U.S. partner. It is also possible that the non-U.S. partner is not able to continue the practices that the U.S. partner has established in the partnership. An example would be of a partnership that helped to building a new church or parish center that the parish or diocese was then unable to adequately maintain once the funding and support from the U.S. partner ceased.

The Diocese of Los Angeles suggests a scaled method of material support consisting of a two to three year minimum commitment. The first year is suggested to be used as a foundation year to build the relationship through the sharing and exchange of ideas, visions, and mutual church experience. During the second year, after that first year has taken place to put the relationship into focus and context, material support through funds can start.

The Diocese of Seattle's mission office suggests that if there is financial support included in the relationship, the parish needs to assure continuing support of other commitments (e.g. local and international charities, national collections). Involvement in a partnership program should not be at the expensive of other mission efforts that the parish or diocese is already undertaking. Rev. William Nordenbrock used the example of Isaiah 54:2 to describe the image of stretching out the tent to reach beyond current boundaries to include others<sup>15</sup>. It is not to pick up camp and pitch the tent elsewhere, but to extend the boundaries and to grow.

**Partnering does not always necessitate material support.** The Diocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis notes that "material and work support might well be appropriate if the disparity of wealth is great, which it is for our relationships with Latin America and Africa. However, there is one parish twinning relationship in our archdiocese with a parish in Japan, approximately the same socio-economic status. In that relationship there is not material support or work projects, but rather a prayer relationship and getting to know one another. The form of that relationship is very appropriate." It is through the honest evaluation of the partners' needs, goals and visions for the partnership that such a relationship can be established and can flourish.

### **Relationship Closure**

The first recommendation about relationship closure pertains to relationship formation. When a partnership is being formed, it is necessary to be realistic about the time period of commitment and the goals of the relationship. It is possible at this point to establish a time limit for the relationship. A relationship is a commitment, however, and it is important not to make a time-limit too short so that the relationship does not have time to establish itself and to flourish or grow.

Instead of a specific time limit, a renewal or review mechanism period would be a better choice. This is a set period of time such as every three years or every five years when the partners must review the relationship and decide whether or not to proceed. This enables not only a period of time when closure can be approached in a less intense manner, but also a period of time when the goals and priorities in the relationship can be evaluated and changed in accordance with how the relationship has developed.

#### **Planning Healthy Closure**

- Build in a renewal or review mechanism from the start.
- Closure should be approached with cultural sensitivity.
- Termination of relationship can extend over a period of time.
- Prayerful reflection upon the mutuality of the partnering experience invites the Holy Spirit to guide both parties.

It is important in relationship closure that the situation be approached with cultural sensitivity. It is easier for the partners if there are specific ways that closure can be presented so that partners can be more accepting of the termination of the relationship. While it is important to be honest and frank within a relationship, it is also beneficial to present the reasons in face-saving manners for withdrawing from a relationship. Other cultures are not always as direct or abrupt as American cultures and such directness could cause unnecessary disruption and pain within the relationship.

The termination of a relationship can extend over a long period of time. Just like the beginning of a relationship is planned and coordinated through various steps, the termination of a relationship must also be planned and coordinated. One thing to consider is the reality that communication through mail or even e-mail might take longer to reach its destination and return than is common in the United States. Also if the partnership contains material support, it is better to help the partner establish other ways of obtaining similar support so that the programs and projects that were accomplished through the partnership can be carried on after the partnership is dissolved. This might not be possible in every partnership, but withdrawing from a relationship of support without assisting in gaining other means of support should be avoided whenever possible.

The dissolution of the partnership can also involved a period of reflection on the part of both partners. This reflection can be a joint effort, or one that is taken on by each partner individually. This reflection should address the relationship as a whole. The following questions are examples of reflection questions that might be addressed mutually or individually: How were our goals attained? Could this relationship have been sustained? Should another relationship be started through another partner?

## **VII. Conclusion**

This inquiry has sought throughout this study to examine how partnering relationships are currently structured and to propose recommendations for improving partnering practices within the Church. These areas of concern and recommendations are provided so that parishes, dioceses and other institutions and organizations that are attempting partnering relationships might have more resources to draw from and more experiences to consider

when establishing the relationships. *However, every partnering relationship is an individual endeavor that must develop its own relationship structure.*

As the number of participants in partnering programs continues to grow, the role that partnering plays in mission within the Catholic Church continues to change and become more defined. This study is only an initial foray into the continual research and resource development that is needed to support and promote this form of mission.

## VIII. Suggested Resources

### Theological

- Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. (1999). *Cooperatio Missionalis: Instruction on missionary cooperation*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.
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- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1997). *Called to Global Solidarity: International challenges for U.S. parishes*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- Vatican II Documents- *Gaudium et Spes, Ad Gentes*

### Short Term Mission & International Mission Partnerships

- Campbell-Evans, S. (1996). *People, Places and Partnerships: a workbook for your mission trip abroad*. Louisville, KY: Worldwide Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on behalf of The Ecumenical Working Group for Mission to the USA and Canada.
- Petersen, N. Hicken, S. K., & Medina, H.D. (2001). *Reading The Signs of the Times: A seven week small-group process for social change*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications.
- Task Force for Global Mission, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. (2003). *The Code of Best Practice in Short-Term Mission*. Accessed at: [http://www.missionarytraining.com/CD2001/pdfs/Resources/code of best practice.PDF](http://www.missionarytraining.com/CD2001/pdfs/Resources/code_of_best_practice.PDF)
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### **Mission & Culture**

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- Hiebert, P.G. (1994). *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
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- Kraft, C. H. (1996). *Anthropology for Christian Witness*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

### **Culture & Cultural Training**

- Archer, C. (1986). Culture bump and beyond. In J. Valdes (Ed.) *Culture Bound: Bridging the cultural gap in language teaching*. (pp. 170-178). New York: Cambridge University Press.
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<sup>1</sup> The keynote addresses for both the pre-conference seminar and the conference can be found at <http://www.uscatholicmission.org/ac-c-a01p.htm>. The pre-conference was held October 25, 2001. Fr. William Nordenbrock, CPPS gave the keynote address for the twinning seminar.

<sup>2</sup> Mission Congress 2000. Pre-Congress Readings. Contemporary Mission. Can be accessed at: <http://www.usccb.org/wm/mccontemporary.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> The keynote address for MISSION CONGRESS 2000 was given September 28, 2000 by Most Rev. Marcello Zago, OMI, Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Vatican City. The published transcript of his comments can be accessed at <http://www.usccb.org/wm/mczago.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> This study was commissioned by the Secretariat for the Church in Latin America of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in November 2000. CARA, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, collected data in the National Parish Inventory concerning Catholic parishes in the United States that have 'relationships of support' with other parishes. Results were submitted in July 2001. A second, follow-up study was commissioned through CARA to gain more in-depth information regarding the relationships of support with Latin America. In the follow-up study only the 332 parishes who initially identified a 'relationship of support' with Latin America were included.

<sup>5</sup> *An Assessment of the Current Status of Parish Twinning Relationships within the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis: A Summary Report*. Submitted October 18, 2002 to the Center for Mission of the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis by Michael J. Haasl.

<sup>6</sup> Gautier, M.L. & Perl, p.M. (December 2001). *Parish Relationships of Support to the Church in Latin Americas and the Caribbean*, p. 5. Washington, D.C: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.8

<sup>11</sup> Ibid p.18-19

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Conference Catholic Bishops. Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes. p.1 Washington D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference.

<sup>13</sup> William Nordenbrock, CPPS (October 25, 2001). "The Whys of Twinning." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Mission Association. p. 6 Accessible at: <http://www.uscatholicmission.org/ac-c-a01p.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. (1999). *Cooperatio Missionalis: Instruction on Missionary Cooperation*, n. 18. Boston: Pauline Books and Media.

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