

Principles for Congregational Gift-Sharing Relationships

(excerpts from document developed by MMN and MWC staff)

Congregational gift sharing relationships help strengthen Christian fellowship through direct experiences across cultural and geographical boundaries within the body of Christ. Vision for gift sharing and mutual ministry deepens relationships.

Principles and Values: 1) trust, openness and mutual concern-spending time getting to know, understand and appreciate each other is a priority. 2) this is a process, not an event-building personal trust takes time. Invest the time and receive rich dividends. Each event is just one step in the process. 3) clear identity and purpose-successful gift sharing relationships develop best when both are clear about who they are and what their congregational mission and vision entail. Secondly, all must be clear about why they wish to relate. 4) Prayer is a powerful bonding element-there is an amazing refreshment and empowerment in frequently praying in small groups for each other's needs. 5) readiness for change-both sides of a relationship may become something different, not yet known to themselves, as a result of gift sharing.

Key Questions to Address: 1) What brings us together? 2) What do we anticipate as the outcome? 3) What will we work at

together? 4) Who will do what? 5) How will we stay connected and accountable? 6) How and when will we measure the results? 7) How long will our relationship continue? 8) What are the roles of WDC? 9) What are the key resources or connections available beyond our congregation that can help us in this relationship?

Healthy process suggestions: congregations find many creative ways to build sharing relationships with each other. The following are some ideas that have worked well for others.

Remember to use your own imaginations and creativity as a congregation. There is no blueprint for building relationships.

1) Seek to learn all you can from the conference leaders who are facilitating the potential partner. 2) Find a process in your congregation to work through the discernment questions. 3) Develop a leadership team in each congregation to communicate and continue follow-up in the relationship. 4) Send a letter of greeting and introduction. 5) Send a brief church profile, history and description of your local community context , and contact information. (pictures)

Communicating: Devise a system to maintain communication-

1) Coordinate a method of sharing prayer requests. 2) Be creative with emails, letters, photos, skype, telephone calls, etc. 3) Consider some church members learning the others' language and study the culture of the other church. 4) Have

designated representatives who can translate all communication. 5) Send digital media of special church events, worship music or greetings from your congregation. 6) Send pictures and cards created by the children. 7) Encourage one-on-one relationships of ongoing communication by different generations in the church.

Planning Activities: 1) Shared worship experiences-establish rituals that can be done in both churches (lighting a candle or singing a specific song) 2) Plan a Sunday service around the same theme. 3) Create a litany together that can be read in both congregations. 4) Plan a service event to help others and do it together. 5) Exchange visits-experience the life and ministry of the congregation and its members. 6) Create a visual display of your partnership in the church. 7) If your partner church faces struggles for justice, discover ways to stand with them and advocate for justice. This may include becoming educated about issues in your partner church's context and addressing government policies.

Discernment Questions: 1) In what ways has our congregation related intentionally to other congregations? 2) What have we learned from these? 3) How would we describe ourselves as a congregation? What are our strengths? 4) What are the areas in which our congregation would be open to or welcome growth? 5) How might we describe how we are theologically? Are we

open to theological diversity? Can we transcend theological differences for the benefit of relationship building? 6) What would it take for us to suspend the impulse to DO something and grow by getting to know one another?