

APPENDIX A

Seeking to Understand "Partnership" for God's Mission Today

Statement of The United Church of Canada
Approved by the 32nd General Council

Over the years The United Church of Canada's involvement in overseas mission has undergone many changes. The process continues. In the 19th century Canadians carried the gospel to people who had never heard it. Converts were made. Small Christian communities grew and became national churches in which national leadership was developed. The missionaries stepped aside taking roles in support of national leaders. In time, nationals assumed complete responsibility, and missionaries were invited fill assignments as determined by the national church.

Parallel changes have taken place in financial relationships. In the beginning financial support came entirely from the West. In many places, however, the goal of self-support was pursued almost from the beginning. Local congregations gradually achieved self-support and eventually most denominational structures also achieved this goal. Overseas funding became less and less critical to the on-going life of the churches. Today most overseas funding is for special programmes like theological education, pioneer evangelism, social service programmes or development programmes in poorer communities. Unfortunately, the negative effects of present economic structures ensure that this kind of special funding will continue to be necessary even while churches struggle to support their own internal life and work. This in brief is our history.

Given this situation, what are we in the United Church suggesting when we use the word "partner" to describe our relationship with the churches or agencies with whom we work? The term suggests some kind of equality of contribution to a common task. If that were the only definition the term would be inappropriate for the present. During the period in which nationals and missionaries shared leadership in newly emerging churches and overseas finance was still a critical component of the new churches' budget, it might have been appropriate, but is it today? To think of ourselves as full "partners" in the life and work of the churches with which we are associated overseas is presumptuous. It is our partners in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America who make the witness, suffer the persecution, absorb the defeats and celebrate the victories of being faithful to Christ in those places. Our level of participation makes us junior partners at best.

In fact our partnership is not primarily in the life and work of our partners. It is rather a partnership with them in God's mission. As Jose Chipenda reminded us at our Division's 1987 Annual Meeting, the mission is God's. We and our partners are called to work together in God's mission. We believe that God has given primary responsibility for mission in any particular place to the people of that place, but not all the gifts needed for the fulfilment of mission are necessarily to be found in that place. And so we believe God calls us to be in partnership one with another, so that we can contribute to one another the gifts we have to offer for mission. For some this understanding of mission makes the image of companion more helpful than partner as we journey together in God's mission in this ever more interdependent Global Village world.

If this is an accurate description, then we have a problem.. If we have some role in God's mission with our partners overseas, then is it not a natural corollary that they must have some role in partnership with us in God's mission in this country? We try to recognise this through our Mutuality in Mission programme, but how deeply this awareness permeated the thinking of United Church people? In particular, how conscious are people of our church's role as one partner among many in God's mission to the world? How many see the work of the Division of World Outreach as facilitating that kind of co-operation between partners? Many, unfortunately, still see the DWO as the Division with responsibility to carry out the United Church's mission to the rest of the world.

The United Church of Canada has been a supporter of the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources programme of the World Council of Churches. If this programme is to have any reality in the life of The United Church of Canada, the whole church must see itself as one partner among many needing to share its gifts and receive the gifts of others so that God's mission can be faithfully pursued. The DWO can facilitate the sharing of the gifts our church has to offer our partners, but until the whole United Church knows itself to be involved in a sharing process we will never be able to adequately facilitate the sharing of our partner's gifts within The United Church of Canada.

In keeping with the above understanding of partnership the Division has attempted to define the nature of the relationships it maintains with partners overseas.

Partnership means becoming involved with others in God's mission for wholeness of life especially on behalf of the poor and powerless. Partnership brings people together in community for mutual empowerment through the sharing of gifts, recognised as gifts freely given by God for the benefit of all, not possessions which some may control. We need the gifts our partners can share with us. They have gifts of spiritual and theological insight, of faithfulness in witness, the experience of costly discipleship. We acknowledge that these gifts carry a higher value in kingdom terms than some we offer. We give and receive all gifts in trust accepting whatever risk may be involved, believing they are of God and confident that our shared commitment to God's mission calls each of us to a common faithfulness in their use. We recognise the need for mutual accountability, for respect, trust, forgiveness and persistent love, and the need to be ever-conscious of the covenant we share with all those who share with us in God's covenant.

August 1988