



# Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council

*Connecting Unitarian & Universalist congregations around the globe*

## **NEW PARTNERS—GROWING A RELATIONSHIP**

Now you have a partner. Congratulations! But what happens next? Building an emotional connection cannot be left to chance. You can't wait for opportunities to bump into each other on Sunday morning or sitting down for a cup of coffee. Even chatting on the phone can be very difficult and costly. But with some thought and planning, and helpful suggestions from other successful partners, you can build a mutually satisfying relationship together.

### **COMMUNICATION IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP**

Deliberate, frequent communication makes the connection real. As soon as you have been assigned a partner, write to them. E-mail is such a blessing to long distance relationship building. Try to get an e-mail connection as soon as possible. It may not be with the minister of your partner. Maybe there is a student in your partner church who has e-mail connections through their school. Or maybe there is an Internet café nearby. You could offer to cover the cost of connections. Some North American partners have purchased communication aids for overseas partner such as computers, paying for the e-mail provider and even paying for cell phones and wireless internet connections. International mail is often slow, but it can be done if it's the only way. Develop some kind of routine—once a week or every other week—and stick to it. Skype calls with small groups – the partner church committee, the ministers, choirs or RE classes – help make the connection live.

Develop many, many links—as many as possible. Here are some suggestions that have worked elsewhere:

- Have the minister write to the minister of your partner. At holidays, have them exchange greetings and messages to be read from the pulpits of both churches. Post them on a bulletin board or print excerpts in your newsletter.
- Have different people on the committee be responsible for letter writing during different months. Describe all important church events—baby namings, flower communions, church fundraisers, annual dinners, even the canvass! Sharing information about how your church operates will help them share information about how their church operates.
- Foster an exchange between RE groups to connect the youth of both churches. One church established a pen pal program between several youth in both churches. They sent all the letters at the same time. When they got responses (which all came back at the same time), they held a pen pal party with a translator and shared the letters. Everyone wrote a response and had a great time.
- The coming of age class in another church connected with the confirmation class. They shared what they were learning and at the end exchanged traditional gifts. Another church connected graduating seniors in a similar program.
- Exchange music between the churches. Your choir director will probably be familiar with music from your partner's tradition. Ask them to perform some music and record it so you can send it to your partner. A cd that can be played on a computer is probably the easiest way.

- Make a short video and post it and send your partners the link. It could be on your webpage, YouTube or Vimeo.
- Send them your newsletter if language is not a barrier. Also send copies of your photo directory, annual report and other documents about your church that you produce.

## **CREATING A PRESENCE IN YOUR CHURCH**

Visible reminders of our partners keep the relationship exciting. The congregation is in partnership. Even though not everyone is an active participant, they are part of the relationship. Try these suggestions to make the relationship visible.

- Create a display of gifts from the overseas partner.
- One church commissioned a communion service set from a local potter and gave it as a gift to their partner.
- Use a bulletin board in a high traffic area to show a map with your partner clearly marked. Display letters, photos, maps, art and craftwork, and post regular updates to keep it lively.
- Take the opportunity of chalice lightings and joys and concerns candles to remember your partner. Find out about holidays they celebrate that are different from ours and remember them at that time.
- Assign a member of the committee to write a short news article for each issue of your newsletter. Include plans, letters, recipes, photos and general news from your partner's country.
- As the partnership becomes part of the culture of the church, build it in to long range plans, mission and vision statements to enable it to grow as part of your core values. The Partner Church Committee in Bellevue, WA has been involved in a long range planning process. Every committee has written their own goals that have been incorporated into the church goals. This has firmly established the partner program at this church into the organizational life of the church.
- Hold a Sunday service and special RE program once a year to celebrate the partnership (often led by visitors to or from your partner church). On the same Sunday at the same moment, your partner might also hold a special afternoon partner church service and ring the bell (or both can ring bells) half a continent away.
- In one church, the collection plate every third Sunday goes to support the Partner Church needs and projects.
- Hold a social/educational evening each year to celebrate your partnership (including slide shows, folk dancing and singing, music, ethnic meals/desserts, handcraft exhibits). You might want to invite nearby churches that are also partnered when having special functions such as a dinner or fundraiser.

## **TRAVEL**

In a piece entitled "Why We Travel: A Love Affair with the World," Pico Iyer, writes, *"We travel, initially to lose ourselves, and we travel, next to find ourselves. We travel to open our hearts and eyes and learn more about the world than our newspapers will accommodate. We travel to bring what little we can, in our ignorance and our knowledge, to those parts of the globe whose riches are differently dispersed. And we travel, in essence, to become young fools again—to slow time down and get taken in, and fall in love once more."*

“For if every true love affair can feel like a journey to a foreign country, where you can’t quite speak the language, and you don’t know where you are going, and you’re pulled ever deeper into an inviting darkness, every trip to a foreign country can be a love affair, where you’re left puzzling over who you are and whom you’ve fallen in love with. ... All good trips are, like love, about being carried out of yourself and deposited in the midst of terror and wonder.”

We recently asked long term partners what one thing had helped the partnership develop. All of them agreed that the most important activity of any partnership is travel. “Visit, visit, visit!” they said. The partnership may never be real to some members of your church until they actually meet someone from the other church.

Your partnership needs the emotional connection that comes from getting to know each other. The personal friendships that develop can last a lifetime. Visiting another country and each other’s homes can be life-changing experiences. Travel there, bring them here.

Reality says that it is difficult at best for your partner to afford a trip here without your financial assistance. One church found someone in their congregation who travels frequently around the world and therefore had a lot of frequent flyer miles. They contributed the miles to the church. The contributions are tax deductible. Use these free trips to send a congregant, minister, staff or youth to visit there. They can also be used to bring someone to this country from there.

Exchanges of all kinds can be arranged. The first is often the minister and her/his family. Churches have also brought teenagers, the church president (leader) as well as other representatives of the partner church. Exchanges of medical personnel or teachers are possible. If you are arranging a trip for the first time, the UUPCC is a great source of help. The website has information about obtaining visas for guests. If you are arranging a trip from the U.S. to your Transylvanian partner, the UUPCC Pilgrimage services can help with all your arrangements. Check the Pilgrimages section on the website.

“... All good trips are, like love, about being carried out of yourself and deposited in the midst of terror and wonder.” Plan a visit and talk about it with your partner. The expectation and planning will keep the relationship tightly linked. Knowing that a trip is planned in either direction keeps the anticipation level high.

## **COVENANT TOGETHER**

As the relationship matures you become committed to the other. As you learn about their lives and their needs, and as they learn about yours, you discover ways that you can make a difference in each other’s lives. Cement this relationship with a covenant that both congregations sign.

## **CREATING A BETTER WORLD—PARTNER PROJECTS**

*“If you've come here to help me, then you're wasting your time. But if you've come because you've seen that your liberation is bound up with mine... then come, let's walk together.”* -Australian Aboriginal Elder Lilla Watson

We change the world when we think globally and act locally. We can make the world a better place through our partnerships. It is natural for us as partners to be concerned and to care for the well being of Unitarian churches and well as for the future of Unitarians everywhere. So let us walk together with other Unitarians.

Many partnerships have agreed on a variety of projects that have been completed together. Any decision about projects should be made in conjunction with thoughtful, deliberate discussions between

the two partners. One should never assume that we know what the other needs or would choose. In many parts of the world, churches are sustained through the ownership of income producing property rather than depending on the sole support of their members. In many places the members have little money to give. In some cases, support for the church comes from the government.

In the Khasi Hills, the Philippines and in Transylvania, the UUPCC has introduced and trained facilitators in a process called Community Capacity Building. Your church might want to consider sponsoring a CCB workshop in your partner community. The cost is about \$500 - \$800 and it helps the local community prioritize their own needs and strengths. You can read more about this and read actual case studies.

These are just some suggestions. Every relationship is different. You and your partner will work together to define your relationship. The UU Partner Church Council is here to help. The district networkers are your link to information and answers to questions. Please contact them with your questions. PCC Chat is your link to all the other churches that might have ideas to share.

May your partnership blossom and grow!