

Principles of Global Partnership:

What's It All About?

The United Church of Canada and its predecessors have been engaged in global partnerships for more than 150 years. Over that time a lot has changed, including the church's understanding of itself and its mission in the world. In 2008, the Executive of the United Church's General Council approved a "Statement and Affirmations on Global Partnership," including 10 guiding principles. As more and more United Church members look for ways to meaningfully connect with the church's partners throughout the world, perhaps now is a good time to reflect on the values and principles that the United Church brings to bear on the practice of global partnership.

The question "What is global partnership all about?" has different answers. Here are some starting points. These are based on 10 partnership principles approved by the General Council Executive in 2008:

It's all about

Right Relations

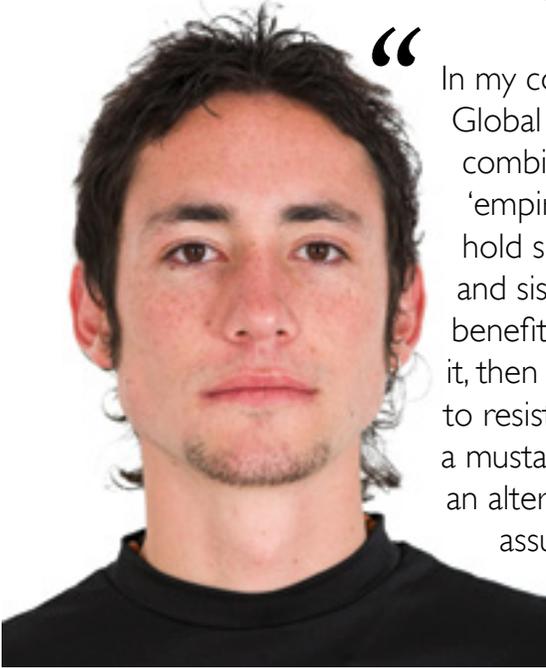
“ The Elders taught me that God wants the world to be a circle where everyone has a place. I think some feminist theologians talk about this, too, that the nature of God is relationship. I could see that was true when the minister from the Philippines came to our church, and we sat down together and ate and shared our experiences with each other. She said she missed her little girl while she was in Canada, but she felt it was important to come. She came all that way to see me, to get to know me, she said, because it was part of God's mission.

I'm sometimes uncomfortable with that word, 'mission,' but sitting with that lady I thought, this must be the heart of mission. ”



It's all about

Resistance



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In my country, you can see poverty and oppression clearly. Global systems of political, economic, and military power combine to oppress us. Some people call these systems 'empire.' I call them powers and principalities because they hold such dominion over us. I am sad to say, my dear brothers and sisters in the North, that many of you are implicated—you benefit from these systems. But if you know that and acknowledge it, then you can stand in solidarity with us. We can work together to resist, just like Jesus did when he said, 'The reign of God is like a mustard seed!' He resisted the powers-that-be by establishing an alternative community, a way of relating based not on the assumptions of empire but on God's vision.

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It's all about

Living Out the Complexities

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A congregation near where I live was raising money to support overseas partners through the United Church's World Development and Relief fund. They asked my advice because I used to serve as overseas personnel for the United Church. But it became clear from talking to them that some people in the congregation (not all) wanted to know what they were 'buying' with their money. If they were going to invest their cash they wanted to see outcomes—a school or a well or a crate of medicine. I tried to explain that when the United Church engages in global partnership, the bottom line is always relationship. Some people see mission too simplistically: See a problem, fix a problem (usually with money). In fact, it's much more complicated because it's about the quality of relationship. It's about recognizing and negotiating differences in culture and values, creating balance in terms of power and decision-making, listening, learning, and working at building trust, fairness, and mutuality. That's the bottom line.

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It's all about

Humility

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If you wish to come and meet me, please do not be arrogant. Do not assume that you have all the answers and I have none. Do not be so certain of what God is calling you to do that you cannot hear the wisdom I have to offer, or the possibility that God might be calling me as well. I know you have good intentions, but please try to listen if I tell you that you are part of the problem. This is a journey we take together. Sometimes we will stray from the path, but with humility we can find our way back. I do not say this to inspire paralysis or self-doubt, only to urge you to look honestly at yourselves.

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It's all about *Partnership*

We can't do it alone. The job of building God's vision of peace, justice, and compassion in the world is too big. We need each other. Money alone is not enough. I learned this big time when I went on an exposure trip with my youth group to Zambia. People there were so generous and knowledgeable. I realized it's as much about receiving as it is about giving. And meeting each other as equals. Sharing power and sharing work. Listening carefully, honouring difference, always trying to understand each other better. The biggest thing those global partners (I call them 'friends') gave me was the ability to see myself and the world more clearly, with new eyes.

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It's all about *Resource Sharing*

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Ours is a small women's rights advocacy organization in India, reliant upon bodies like The United Church of Canada for our funding. It is admirable that The United Church of Canada does not presume to dictate to us how we should operate simply because it provides us money. In a world of profound financial inequality, where those who 'own' much claim the right to control decision-making, it would be easy for The United Church of Canada to follow suit. Instead it distributes its resources with an eye to shared power—the money is sent to meet the priorities of our community. And we, in turn, share our resources, albeit non-financial, with them, in the form of knowledge and analysis about our unique context and organizing strategies that may benefit others.

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Whole Church

What does it mean to represent the United Church?
How can I give more people the chance to support or be involved?

Right Relations

Have I prayed about this project?
Am I open to God creating a relationship of justice and love?

Eco-Justice

What's the carbon footprint of this trip? Is it worth it?
How do my ecological choices affect partners' context, and vice versa?

Resistance

What powers are lined up against us in this?
Am I benefitting from the way things are?
Does this partnership model an alternative way of relating?

Getting Involved in Global Partnership

Have I thought about my values?

Resource Sharing

Between us, do we have what we need?
How do we make sure power and decision-making are shared fairly?

Humility

Am I willing to be taught?
What do I do with my feelings of guilt?

Interfaith

Is there an opportunity to build bridges?
Is this about improving interfaith relations or about people of different faiths working together for a common goal?

Living the Complexities

What will I do if we disagree about things that really matter to me? (e.g., gender, human rights)
What does "success" mean in this partnership?

Charity/Justice

Is there immediate suffering that needs to be relieved here?
How can the root causes of suffering be addressed?

Partnership

What's the difference between "mission to" and "mission with"?
How do I feel about receiving gifts?





It's all about

*Our Home,
the Earth*

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Our values don't compartmentalize well for easy access. How does one, for example, separate social justice from peacemaking? Which is more important, development or human rights? These are all interconnected values, just like all of creation is interconnected. One cannot truly engage in justice-making if one's vision of justice sees only the human in the equation. My sense is that the United Church is still discerning how to engage in global partnership in ways that limit its negative impact on the globe. Each day it becomes clearer and clearer that we must be mindful of the earth, for the sake of the integrity of creation and for our own survival.

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It's all about

Charity

“When our people are suffering, when we are in real need, the Christian response is to provide relief.”

“But why are we suffering? Why are we in need? The Christian response is to expose the roots of oppression and injustice that cause our people's suffering.”

“When the fish all suddenly died and the people were starving, United Church congregations sent us money to help feed the hungry. That was an act of love.”

“But they also supported us when we took the company that polluted the river to court—and the government that allowed them to kill our lake, and the international corporation that owns the company. That was an act of love too.”

“Both charity and justice are acts of love and go together.”

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It's all about

Love

No, it's all about

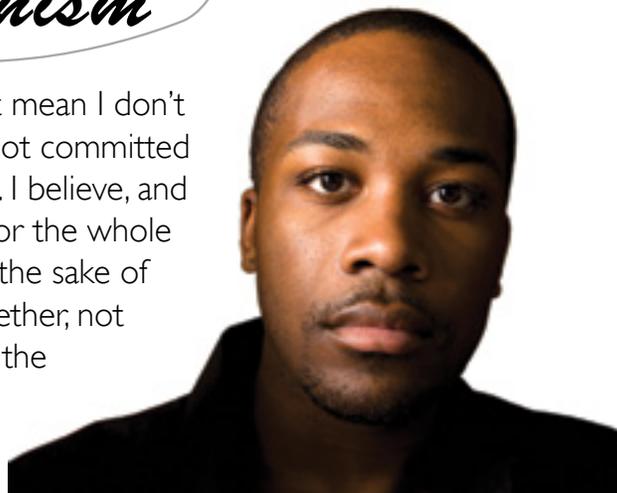
Justice



It's all about

Whole World Ecumenism

“ Just because I'm not a Christian, does that mean I don't care about making a better world, that I'm not committed to justice, that I'm not hungry for peace? No. I believe, and I think maybe you do too, that God cares for the whole world, not just people of one faith. So for the sake of God's world, we need to be working together, not dividing ourselves apart. I am pleased to see the United Church reach across ancient barriers to take my hand. ”



Photos: Cover - Design Pics, Interior - Dreamstime.

It's all about

All of Us

“ The whole church needs to step up and get involved in global partnership. My congregation hosted a minister from Nicaragua for a year. My cousin went with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme to Palestine/Israel. My friend's congregation took part in a Face-to-Face program and hosted a global partner from Zambia. I heard about a congregation that was advocating for stricter laws for Canadian mining companies overseas and a study group that was planning an exposure trip to Cuba. Some congregations write letters back and forth with partners in other parts of the world and hold each other in their prayers. I'm in the process of figuring out if God is calling me to be overseas personnel for the church. It's God's mission, but it needs all of us in one way or another. ”



The United Church of Canada

For opportunities to get involved, search “People in Partnership” or visit the Social Action section on www.united-church.ca.

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