Collaborative Missional Leadership

The Art of Working Together in God's Mission

Kirk J Franklin

REGNUM STUDIES IN MISSION

Collaborative Missional Leadership

Series Preface

Regnum Studies in Mission are born from the lived experience of Christians and Christian communities in mission, especially but not solely in the fast growing churches among the poor of the world. These churches have more to tell than stories of growth. They are making significant impacts on their cultures in the cause of Christ. They are producing 'cultural products' which express the reality of Christian faith, hope and love in their societies.

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Introduction

In today's globally connected and culturally diverse world, collaboration in God's mission is no longer optional – it is essential. Churches, mission agencies, and Christian organizations increasingly recognize that working together enhances their collective witness, makes better use of resources, and reflects the very nature of the triune God. Yet genuine collaboration remains challenging. Too often, efforts to partner have stalled due to mistrust, misunderstandings, or imbalanced power dynamics. In response, this book argues that collaboration can become a Spirit-led endeavour that reflects God's Kingdom values when the endeavour is guided by Scripture, theology, and missiology, and is informed by history and practical case studies.

Concrete examples illustrate the need for collaboration, showing how no single organization can address the complexities of global mission alone. Understanding these terms – and why they matter – lays the groundwork for healthier, more fruitful alliances.

This resource equips missional practitioners to build partnerships that transcend mere transactions. Instead, it shows how collaboration can be an intentional, relational practice grounded in trust, cultural intelligence, and mutual respect. As we will see, different terms like 'collaboration' and 'partnership' carry distinct nuances, and clarifying them from the outset helps avoid confusion and establishes a shared language.

Why Collaboration Matters

Collaborative missional leadership is vital because God's mission is expansive, aiming to bring wholeness and redemption to all creation. Mission theologian Dean Flemming reminds us of God's 'massive purpose [or grand design] to bring wholeness and redemption to the entire creation, especially people from every nation.'[1] God's future vision informs our present calling, inviting Christians everywhere to work together across

organizations and traditions. The triune God is the author and owner of this mission, calling us into the divine project and guiding us through the Holy Spirit.

Jonas Thinane, adopting a project management perspective, writes: 'In *Missio Dei*, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are equally the superior principals and owners of the *Missio Dei* project. The triune God as the project manager alone knows the ultimate goal of Missio Dei and He alone knows best how to achieve it.'[2] In this divine endeavour, human involvement (*missio hominum*) occurs as individuals are called to join the community of believers (*missio ecclesiae*), contributing to God's unfolding mission. This collective witness points others toward God's Kingdom like a lighthouse guiding ships at sea.

Historically, mission agencies and churches have not always worked collaboratively. Sometimes, the so-called 'para-church' organizations have held the church accountable for its missional calling. Johannes Knoetze adds that 'para-church mission societies may also be viewed as the conscience of the church, where the church was not always obedient to its calling.'[3] Michael Stroope explains: 'Mission is divine activity, but missions include human and ecclesial activity.'[4] Embracing the adjective 'missional' means living in alignment with God's purposes and seeking to extend the good news.

Collaboration is not merely a strategic choice; it is a theological conviction. Just as the triune God models relational unity, Christians are called to reflect that unity in mission. The Spirit leads us to partnerships where trust, reciprocity, and mutual benefit replace one-sided or paternalistic arrangements. Today, effective mission no longer belongs to isolated groups but emerges from Spirit-led communities that learn from one another.

Complex global issues require partnerships that transcend traditional boundaries. Cross-cultural differences, historical baggage, and power imbalances can complicate collaborative efforts. Yet, these relationships can flourish with maturity, discernment, and the Spirit's guidance.

Building processes for honest dialogue and joint decision-making fosters equity and inclusion. Respectful engagement, rather than dependency or paternalism, encourages local leadership and ownership of mission initiatives. This approach ensures that the church's witness becomes more credible, unified, and responsive to the world's needs.

Building Spirit-Led Partnerships

This book equips collaborators to form sustainable, God-honouring partnerships, offering tools and frameworks for navigating cultural differences, managing power imbalances, and fostering trust. Its comprehensive approach integrates biblical and theological insights, historical precedents, and contemporary strategies. By highlighting genuine relationships over transactional exchanges, this resource provides a guide for organizations seeking to move from isolated efforts to collaborative endeavours honouring God's mission.

Collaboration means working intentionally and relationally. As Bambi,[5] a mission mobilizer from the Philippines, notes, 'collaboration' sometimes better conveys the idea of relationship-based cooperation than 'partnership,' a term that can carry transactional overtones. While we use these words somewhat interchangeably, this book leans toward 'collaboration' to emphasize relational depth rather than business-like arrangements.

According to the dictionary, to collaborate means 'to work, one with another; cooperate.'[6] In the past, the word also had a negative connotation, especially associated with cooperating with an enemy, but today, it primarily signifies joining forces for a greater good. After significant reflection and practice in missional collaboration, the Wycliffe Global Alliance describes collaboration as occurring 'when the leaders and/or staff of two or more organizations decide to deliberately think and work together to achieve something in God's mission.'[7] This intentional approach fosters friendships within God's mission, leading to deeper partnerships and generosity, as the value of each partner is recognized and affirmed. True collaboration and partnership, grounded in a genuine community, allow us to experience what God intends for us.

Social scientists Paul Mattessich and Kirsten Johnson define collaboration as 'a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals.'[8] Official agreements may sometimes formalize these arrangements, but the heart of collaboration lies in trust and the capacity to complement one another.

Clarifying Key Concepts

While 'partnership' often implies legal, formal, economic, or organizational ties, in Christian mission it also describes a shared calling under the Holy Spirit's guidance. Micah Global, a network that fosters healthy partnerships in God's mission, defines partnership as mutually beneficial relationships between two or more autonomous entities (which may or may not involve formal agreements). These entities view one another as co-workers entrusted with God's mission and as co-heirs committed to complementing each other in pursuit of the shared goal of advancing his Kingdom.[9] Karsten van Riesen describes partnership as 'two or more agencies intentionally working together to accomplish shared goals.'[10]

In ministry contexts, Enoch Wan and Kevin Penman emphasize that collaboration is 'the unique opportunities in working with the triune God and the Body of Christ to accomplish the *missio Dei* under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit.'[11] MissioNexus, a US-based mission network, describes partnership as 'cooperative scaling', enabling organizations to do more together than they could alone.[12] Missiologist Cathy Ross stresses trust, responsibility, and a willingness to 'pay the price' as essential elements of strong partnerships.[13]

Theologically, collaboration in mission aligns with the triune God's nature and purpose. John Flett underscores the church's Kingdom focus and missionary identity.[14] From a practical standpoint, building Spirit-led partnerships requires understanding differences, managing conflict, and nurturing a space where decisions are shared and resources flow freely.

A Needed Resource for Today's Practitioners and Leaders

This book arose from course materials developed for the Melbourne School of Theology (MST) in Australia's Master of Missional Leadership program. While preparing for that unit, it became clear that resources specifically addressing collaboration in mission from theological, historical, and practical perspectives were scarce or outdated. Student feedback confirmed that understanding and practising collaboration transform mission efforts. Embracing the diversity God created, believers learn to rely on one another and, in doing so, reflect the unity that Jesus prayed for among his followers. MST is a publishing partner for this book.

Around the same time, Stephen Coertze, Executive Director of Wycliffe Global Alliance, asked for a book about missional collaboration to be written. The Alliance had become a community where collaboration among its 100+ organizations was critical. However, it, too, needed an authoritative text to guide its principles and practices.

Friends from International Partnering Associates (IPA), such as Dave Brooks, Bambi, Ruslan Maliuta, Russ Simons, and Todd Poulter, shared insights through interviews and case studies in this book. Wisdom from other IPA people is featured throughout the book. Therefore, and gratefully, IPA is also a publishing partner. IPA is 'an association of partnering facilitators and advocates.'[15]

Practical Tools and Discernment

This resource offers practical strategies to strengthen collaborations, such as careful planning, realistic expectations, and adaptive responses to challenges. It acknowledges that no single framework fits all contexts. Instead, readers are invited to exercise discernment, drawing on the range of insights and models presented to design approaches that fit their unique environments. The book's goal is not to prescribe a rigid formula but to stimulate creative, Spirit-led solutions. At the end of most chapters are Thought Questions and Practical Applications to help you.

While we occasionally use terms like 'ownership,' we do so with the understanding that God is the true owner of his mission. Human leaders, however, can take joint ownership of processes and initiatives, recognizing their role as stewards under God's overarching authority.

At times, we reference missiological consultations. These have been hosted by Wycliffe Global Alliance since 2006 and have explored various issues related to collaboration, and their insights inform our discussion.

This project itself is a collaboration of authors and editors. Deborah Crough oversaw copyediting, collecting, and shaping stories to illustrate some of the content. Susan Van Wynen gave her insightful input and also authored chapter 14. David Cardenas brought his extensive collaborative experience in Latin America into authoring chapters 16, 17 and the last case study.

As you begin this journey, approach the frameworks, stories, and strategies presented here as catalysts for deeper thought and reflection.

Each context is unique, and collaboration, as an art rather than a formula, requires skill, humility, and the Holy Spirit's leading. May this book inspire you to enter into the rich, complex, and ultimately rewarding work of collaboration in God's mission.

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[1] Dean Flemming, *Foretaste of the Future: Reading Revelation in Light of God's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 7.

[2] Jonas S. Thinane, "Missio Dei as the Main Project: Project Management Model for Mission of God," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 102, no. Special Ed 2 (2021): 4, https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.102.221.

[3] Johannes J. Knoetze, "A Long Walk to Obedience: Missiology and Mission under Scrutiny (1910–2010)," *In die Skriflig / In Luce Verbi* 51, no. 2 (2017): 2, https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v51i2.2192.

[4] Michael Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* (London: Apollos, 2017), 14.

[5] A pseudonym.

[6] Dictionary.com, "collaborate," https://www.dictionary.com/browse/collaborate, accessed 6 March 2024.

[7] Susan Van Wynen, Dave Crough, and Kirk Franklin, "Foundational Statements of the Wycliffe Global Alliance," 2019, accessed 7 September, 2020, https://www.wycliffe.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Alliance_Foundational_Statements_2019_09_EN.pdf.

[8] Paul Mattessich, and Kirsten Johnson, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Fieldstone Alliance, 2018), 5.

[9] Micah Global, *Partnership Guidelines* (Micah Global, 2020), 2.

[10] Karsten van Riezen, "Partnering Towards Sustainable Movements for Scripture Engagement and Language Development" (Biola University, 2015), 8.

[11] Enoch Wan, and Kevin Penman, "The 'Why,' 'How' and 'Who' of Partnership in Christian Missions," *Global Missiology* April (2010): 2.

[12] MissioNexus, "Degrees of Partnership," 2015.

[13] Cathy Ross, "The Theology of Partnership," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 3 (2010): 145.

[14] John Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmands Publishing Co., 2010), 76.

[15] For more details about IPA see https://www.ipassociates.org.

Chapter 1: Old Testament Foundations

It is good for a family of God's people to live together in peace. Yes! It brings great pleasure! – Psalm 133:1 (Easy English Bible)

More can be accomplished working together than could be achieved alone – Kenneth Shreve[1]

The Old Testament lays essential theological foundations for collaboration in God's mission. It emphasizes the importance of shared purpose, trust, and dedication to the authority of Scripture as core principles for building missional partnerships. By exploring God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David, we see divine commitments that invite people into collaborative relationships. Each covenant reveals distinct aspects of God's nature and his expectations for cooperative work, whether sustaining creation, building a great nation, or leading with integrity. These agreements provide a model for unity, preparation, and steadfastness in mission, offering timeless insights into working together toward God's purposes.

General Old Testament passages also provide insights into creating, managing, and evaluating collaborative efforts in God's mission. These biblical principles guide and inspire missional work, unity, and shared purpose. These scriptural imperatives call God's people to work together to fulfil his mission.

The Old Testament Covenants

The covenants offer insights into how God relates to and collaborates with his people. The term 'covenant' comes from the Latin *con venire*, meaning 'a coming together'. It signifies an agreement where 'two or more parties come together' to establish promises, 'stipulations, privileges, and responsibilities.'[2] Ancient societies were familiar with covenants. For example, 'they were made between individuals, tribes, or royal houses.

Each covenant was unique,' detailing specific terms and promises, and served to 'expand relationships.'[3]

In Hebrew, the word *berith*, translated as 'a covenant,' appears 284 times in the Old Testament.[4] It covers interpersonal treaties or alliances – solemn commitments 'guaranteeing promises or obligations undertaken by one or both covenanting parties.'[5] For example, Abram formed alliances with the Amorites (Gen 14:13). Conversely, God warned the Israelites not to make any covenants with the Canaanites 'or their gods' (Ex 23:32, CSB). Biblical scholars refer to Exodus 20:22 to 23:33 as the 'book of the covenant' or 'covenant code'[6] because it contains laws and regulations given by God to Moses after the Ten Commandments. The code has guidelines for worship, justice, social conduct, and the treatment of others, shaping the covenant relationship between God and his people.

A covenant describes 'two or more parties bound together,'[7] and many examples exist of divine-human covenants, illustrating how God created covenants with people. These were a 'divine constitution or ordinance with signs or pledges.'[8] We now explore God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David to see what we can learn about this collaborative aspect of God's engagement with people.

God-Noah

The term 'covenant' first appears in the Bible in Genesis 6:18 when God tells Noah, 'I will establish my covenant with you' (ESV). This mention 'anticipates the solemn oath' God makes to Noah – 'as the representative of creation' – immediately after the flood.'[9] God said, 'I establish my covenant with you' (Gen 9:9, ESV). God's promise extended to Noah's sons and every living creature that emerged from the ark. With these words, God assured them that there would never again be a flood to destroy all life on earth, reaffirming his commitment to creation and reassuring Noah with a divine oath. In doing so, God promised to uphold and sustain this covenant.

The central part of a covenant is the terms or conditions that outline requirements for one or both parties involved. In this agreement, God places obligations on himself 'rather than imposing them on Noah and his family.'[10] God also provides a sign of his covenant, the rainbow, as described in Genesis 9:12–17. Whenever it appears, it reassures humanity and reminds them that God will keep his covenantal promise. This

covenant was a 'firm assurance,' emphasized by God's repetition of the phrase 'I establish my covenant'.[11]

When we consider developing collaborative efforts in ministry, an important insight from God's covenant with Noah is the necessity of including assurances and commitments in the purpose and terms of any agreement. Such assurances build trust and underscore the mutual obligations that bind the parties together.

God-Abraham

God's covenant unfolded throughout the course of Abram's life, as seen in the progression of events in Genesis (e.g., chapters 13–14; 15:1, 5, 7, 12–21; 17:3, 8, 11, 15–21; 22:1–6, 17–18a).[12] It began with God's initial call to Abram in Genesis 12:1–3 '… go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others' (NLT). By obeying God's command, Abram relinquished his position within his father's household, sacrificing his sense of security. This act meant placing his future entirely in the hands of the Lord. Abram acknowledged his submission to God, and in turn, God became the God of Abram and his countless descendants. This is revealed in 'the promise of a "great nation" and the promise of international blessing.'[13] Arthur Glasser observes, 'This universal purpose totally dominates the covenant.'[14]

The covenant with Abraham is fully realized when he is willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. In response to his obedience, God promises to abundantly bless Abraham, making his descendants as numerous as the stars and the sand (Gen 22:16–18). He assures Abraham that his offspring will inherit the land of their enemies and bring blessings to all nations on earth, affirming that this will happen because of Abraham's unwavering obedience to God's command.

God's underlying commitment to Abraham and his offspring is based on God's love. The *Africa Bible Commentary* notes, 'In love, the Lord reaffirms his commitment to those who obey him, and in love the same God withholds his commitment from those who disobey him, until they learn to live in obedience to him.'[15]

In considering how this helps us develop collaboration in ministry, the covenant between God and Abraham provides insight into how all parties demonstrate their commitment to observe the guidelines and requirements

in an agreement. When this happens, anticipated blessings and benefits follow.

God-Israelites

In the book of Exodus, the nation of Israel emerges as God takes steps to announce 'the purpose of this nation for the world.'[16] Christopher Wright explains, 'Just as it was the role of the priests to bless the Israelites, so it would be the role of Israel as a whole ultimately to be a blessing to the nations.'[17] God decided to partner with an entire nation at this moment in history. He specifically chose and set apart this nation, dedicating it to serve as priests for a spiritually lost world.[18]

For Israel to fulfil this role, the people were required to purify and consecrate themselves. The covenant was explained in Exodus 19:10–14, describing the consecration of the people of Israel. This was confirmed through the giving of the law (Exodus 20–23) and the ratification of the Sinai (Sinaitic) covenant. Moses spent forty days and nights on Mount Sinai in the presence of the Lord, where he received the stone tablets inscribed with the law and commandments that God had given for their instruction (Exodus 24:12). The law was delivered through Moses, who served as the privileged intermediary between God and the people.

The law imposed strict guidelines on preparing to meet with God, emphasising 'the importance of holiness and the sacredness of the occasion', leaving no room for superficiality.[19] The Sinaitic Covenant demonstrated 'the unique divine-human relationship between Yahweh and Israel,' emphasizing the necessity of a means to maintain communion between a holy God and a sinful people.[20]

The seriousness of this covenant between God and the people of Israel provides valuable insights into developing collaboration today. It is a process that requires preparation and adherence to agreed-upon guidelines by all parties. The intermediary or facilitator plays a crucial role in negotiating the terms of the agreement, ensuring that the collaboration is grounded in commitment and mutual understanding.

God-David

In God's covenant with David, he promises to make David's name great, 'like the names of the greatest men on earth' (2 Sam 7:9, NIV). God

promises that David's people – the entire nation of Israel – will have 'a homeland… in a secure place where they will never be disturbed' (2 Sam 7:10, NLT). Even in disobedience, God promises to maintain his blessing (2 Sam 7:14–15). Through David's descendants, his 'kingdom will endure forever' because David's 'throne will be established forever' (2 Sam 7:16, NIV). All these promises find their fulfilment in the arrival of Jesus as the Son of David.

From this point on, the destiny of God's people became intertwined with his chosen family. When the northern tribes later split from Judah, they were considered apostate because their separation and rejection of David's dynasty were seen as 'a refusal to submit to the will of God.'[21]

What can we learn about developing partnerships in ministry from God's covenant with David? Even when an agreement endures over a long period, it may not always be fully upheld. Yet, in those moments, all parties can choose to extend grace. This response underscores the importance of lasting commitments, forgiveness, and cultivating a collaborative environment built on mutual trust. Although we gain insights into cooperation from the Old Testament covenants, it is crucial to remember that their central theme is grace. While mutual commitment remained the ideal, God recognized human fallibility and used these covenants to direct our attention toward himself and his generous grace. Only God consistently upholds his promises. When we show grace in our relationships, we reflect his character and learn to partner well in ministry.

Summary

The concepts from the Old Testament covenants shape our understanding of collaborating as viewed in this table:

Type	References	Summary	Insights for collaborating in mission
Generally	*berith* (Hebrew)	God's covenants with people demonstrate mutual commitments, forming the basis for relationships and collaboration	Mutual commitments, clear terms, and responsibilities strengthen collaborative relationships in ministry, reflecting God's covenantal approach
God-Noah	Gen 9:8–11	God established a covenant with Noah, promising never to flood the earth again, with rainbows as a sign	Include assurances and commitments in agreements to ensure clarity and trust in collaborative ministry efforts.
God-Abraham	Gen13–15; 17; 22	Developing through Genesis, highlights mutual commitment, obedience, and blessings	Demonstrating commitment to guidelines and requirements fosters trust and brings blessings in collaborative ministry efforts
God-Israelites	Ex 19–24	Emphasizes holiness, preparation, and the nation's role as a blessing to the world	Effective collaboration requires preparation, adherence to guidelines, and a facilitator to negotiate and uphold agreements
God-David	2 Sam 7:9–16	Ensures David's enduring dynasty and blessings, fulfilled through Jesus as the Son of David	Long-term agreements require grace and flexibility, acknowledging that adherence may vary over time

Table: Overview of Old Testament covenants

Old Testament References

The Old Testament has other examples that give biblical insights into collaboration. From the outset, God expected people to be productive together. The Hebrew terms *rabah*, meaning 'to become much, many, or great'[22] – conveying the idea of multiplying, increasing, and abundance – and *parah*, meaning 'to bear fruit, be fruitful,'[23] reflect this expectation.

This commission is not limited to biological growth. Throughout the Bible, God seeks genuine community where people rely on each other as they 'spread community throughout the world.'[24] This mandate reveals God's nature through relationships that mirror the Creator's likeness and image. God's people can only succeed in this endeavour by working together to achieve it.

Collaboration is further emphasized in Ecclesiastes 4:9 and 4:12b (NLT): 'Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed... Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily

broken.' Here, the Hebrew words towb, meaning 'pleasant, agreeable, good,'[25] shalash, 'to do a third time,'[26] and nathaq, 'to pull, draw, or tear away, apart'[27] highlight the strength found in unity. According to Kenneth Shreve, the idea is that 'more could be accomplished working together' than could be achieved alone.[28] Different translations of Ecclesiastes 4:9 emphasize the benefits of collaboration: helping 'each other succeed' (NLT); gaining 'a more satisfying return' (AMP); receiving 'a good reward' (NKJV); and together 'they can reap more benefit from their labour' (NET). In many cultures, community life is foundational to one's identity, bringing security and success. This is encapsulated in the African proverb: 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.'[29]

The concept of unity is also captured in Amos 3:3 (MSG): 'Do two people walk hand in hand if they aren't going to the same place?' This suggests that when we see two people walking together, 'we can deduce they must have met and agreed' to do so.[30] The Hebrew word *yachad*, meaning 'unitedness,'[31] conveys the idea of being in a union, companionship, and mutual support on the journey.

Similarly, Psalm 133:1 (NIV) states: 'How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity.' Here, *yachad* refers to 'the blessing of fellowship and unity,' which applies to 'the human family, extended family, a community of God's people, or the unity of Christians.'[32] This unitedness is 'pleasing [and] delightful,' as indicated by the Hebrew word *na'iym*.[33] When Christians experience being together, God's favour is expressed as a miraculous act of His grace, a divine gift of unity that human efforts cannot create, only preserve.[34] Such preservation requires care and nurturing. Participants at a Wycliffe consultation noted: 'There is no unity without love. There is no love without trust. There is no trust without communication. Communication starts with listening to the other partners, which requires time.'

The book of Nehemiah provides a practical example of collaboration. The people of Israel successfully rebuilt parts of the wall around Jerusalem because they worked well together. This work was 'completed… for the people had worked with enthusiasm' (Neh 4:6, NLT). The Hebrew word *qashar*, meaning 'to bind together,'[35] underscores the collective effort. The Israelites didn't attempt this monumental task alone; they had 'a heart to work' (AMP) and 'put their hearts in the work.' Demonstrating their unity of heart compelled them to collaborate.[36]

Bambi,* a mission mobilizer in the Philippines, has observed numerous approaches and remarkable demonstrations of unity in ministry and missions worth acknowledging and celebrating. Reflecting on the process of moving toward collaboration in mission, she considers the story of Nehemiah. It begins when an individual becomes aware of a deep passion, yet this awakening also involves a season of preparation. Many may carry a compelling vision, but they need to learn how to convert it into a genuine partnering initiative – an effort often benefiting from a key facilitator or champion to help guide the process.[37]

The transformative power of interpersonal interaction is highlighted in Proverbs 27:17 (CSB): 'Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another.' The Hebrew *chadad,* meaning 'to be sharp, keen,'[38] suggests 'that constructive criticism among friends develops character.'[39] Duane Elmer explains that the verse illustrates the idea of 'learning with,' meaning that when two people interact respectfully, both benefit. They rely on each other and simultaneously act as both teacher and learner, often without realizing or focusing on these roles. Their relationship is strengthened by strong, 'resilient trust,' which fosters deep sharing, genuine authenticity, and the joy of discovering God's path together.[40]

Finally, Proverbs 11:14 (ESV) emphasizes, 'Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.' The Hebrew *rob,* meaning 'multitude, abundance, greatness',[41] indicates that wisdom in making decisions often functions at the highest levels of leadership. A lack of guidance results in failure, whereas consulting with several good advisers results in 'success' (NET), 'safety' (NLT), or 'victory' (AMP).

Summary

The concepts from the Old Testament references shape our understanding of collaborating as viewed in this table:

Bible reference	Hebrew	Translated	Insights for collaborating in mission
Gen 1:28	*parah*	Be fruitful (NET)	Bear fruit, be fruitful, grow in number, be productive, and steward creation
Gen 1:28	*rabah*	Multiply (NET)	Become much, many or great, multiply, increase, abundance
Ecc 4:9	*towb*	Better off… to succeed (NLT)	Pleasant, agreeable, good, more is accomplished together
Ecc 4:12b	*shalash*	Triple-braided cord (NLT)	Do a third time, combined strength to succeed
Ecc 4:12b	*nathaq*	Not easily broken (NLT)	To pull, draw, or tear away, apart, brings security and success
Amos 3:3	*yachad*	Hand in hand (MSG)	Unitedness, union together, companionship, mutual support
Ps 133:1	*yachad*	Live together in unity (NIV)	Unitedness, the blessing of fellowship and unity
Ps 133:1	*na'iym*	Good and pleasant (NLT)	Pleasant, delightful, God's favour over being together
Neh 4:6	*qashar*	Worked [together] with enthusiasm (NLT)	To bind, group together, unity of heart compels collaboration
Pr 27:17	*chadad*	One person sharpens another (CSB)	To be sharp, keen, constructive criticism among friends develops character
Pr 11:14	*rob*	An abundance of [good] counsellors [brings] safety (ESV)	Multitude, abundance, greatness, consulting with several good advisers results in success

Table: Synopsis of Old Testament passages and concepts

Thought Questions

1. How do the Old Testament covenants help you view God's commitments and expectations in your collaborative ministry relationships?
2. What role does grace play in partnerships when one side falls short of the agreed-upon commitments?

Practical Applications

The Old Testament gives a theological foundation for collaboration through God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, the Israelites, and David. These covenants emphasize mutual commitments and responsibilities, emphasizing the importance of assurances, obedience, preparation, and long-term dedication for successful collaborative efforts. Each covenant

offers distinct lessons on partnering with God and others to fulfil his purposes.

Additionally, Old Testament passages highlight the value of working together, being fruitful, and achieving more through unity and mutual support. These insights teach us the importance of thriving together and encourage us to provide mutual support and engage in constructive, collective wisdom.

Effective collaboration in God's mission requires intentional preparation, clear communication, and a commitment to mutual trust and respect. The goal is establishing enduring partnerships that promote continuity and blessings while extending grace when commitments falter.

The Old Testament gives principles that we can use in missional collaboration. These principles will help build stronger and more fruitful collaborative efforts in ministry:

- *Set clear commitments and responsibilities:* The covenants reveal that effective collaboration begins with clear commitments. Like God's covenant with Noah, define roles and responsibilities to foster trust and ensure smooth cooperation.
- *Nurture unity through preparation:* Unity is a recurring theme in the Old Testament, such as in the covenant with Israel (Ex 19–24). Just as Israel consecrated itself before fulfilling its purpose, all participants should be aligned around shared values and goals to establish unity.
- *Practice grace and flexibility:* The covenant with David (2 Sam 7) teaches the value of long-term commitments and shows the importance of grace when commitments falter. Be prepared to extend grace while maintaining accountability.
- *Encourage mutual support and accountability:* Mutual support is evident throughout the Old Testament, especially in passages like Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. Foster open communication and regular check-ins to build a collaborative and supportive team.
- *Allow space for constructive criticism.* Proverbs 27:17 emphasizes the role of constructive criticism in missional collaboration. Encourage feedback for growth and improvement, which benefits the whole team.

[1] Kenneth Shreve, *Partnership Theology in Creative Access Regions* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2017), 27.

[2] Gerard Van Groningen, "Covenant," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 124.

[3] Shreve, 84.

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Chapter 2: New Testament Principles

Make every effort to preserve the unity the Spirit has already created, with peace binding you together – Ephesians 4:3 (VOICE)

Scripture is clear… when we humbly work together with other believers, we will find the good and perfect will of God – Russ Simons[1]

The New Testament provides theological principles for collaboration, demonstrated in the life and practices of the early church. This chapter examines how these principles guide and inspire unity, shared purpose, and effective missional work. By reflecting on these essentials, we gain insights for working together, participating in the spread of the gospel, fulfilling God's mission, and strengthening the Kingdom of God

Partnering expert Ruslan Maliuta describes how the New Testament image of the body of Christ connected by various ligaments is a way of viewing collaboration in ministry. He states, 'When we take a person who has been successful in ministry and put them in a role… that should facilitate collaboration', we think 'if somebody was a good pastor' or an excellent not-for-profit leader 'they probably will do well in collaboration.' The problem is that this lacks an 'understanding of this as a distinct function in the body of Christ.'[2]

We now explore nine concepts about collaboration primarily through Paul's writing: unity and oneness, one body, co-workers, body life, cooperative relationships, fellowship, inter-relationships, like-mindedness, and cooperative friendships.

Unity and Oneness

The apostle Paul writes about 'oneness, unity, unanimity' in Ephesians 4:3, 13 using the Greek *henotes.*[3] He states, 'Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace'. This responsibility to equip God's people will last until we reach 'such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in

the Lord,' fully reflecting Christ's character and standards (NLT). This unity is established and modelled in the Trinity because the Holy Spirit has called Jews and Gentiles into one body with a common hope in Christ.[4] Unity is not the same as conformity because unity doesn't allow for division or discord. Still, it does allow for 'diversity of action and function'.[5] Conformity involves aligning with Christ's mind and following the Spirit's guidance.

Oneness is a theme in these two Greek concepts: *autos* means 'the same,'[6] and *diaireseis* is 'division, distribution, difference, distinction.'[7] In 1 Corinthians 12:4–5, Paul states, 'There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord' (NLT). The one Spirit distributes a wide variety of spiritual gifts. The different gifts enable service for the many by the one God. The gifts are for the collective benefit of all rather than for individual gain.

Just as with the unique parts of Christ's body, every member has an essential role to play, and collectively, they can accomplish more than anyone could alone. This indicates that God seeks unity within diversity, not uniformity. Each part is valued yet designed to collaborate for greater effectiveness. Through this diversity of function, God equips his body with the creative ability to adapt, coordinate, and innovate. Through this diversity, 'God releases the resources needed to overcome challenges and advance the gospel.'[8]

Unfortunately, instead of collaborating, we often allow sin and Satan to divide us, undermining our collective witness through 'anxiety, competition, mistrust, and a fear of scarcity. In our passionate focus on our own calling and ministry, we can forget that we are also part of something larger than our individual callings.' It is in 'working together that the world witnesses the power and presence of God (John 17:18–21).'[9]

The Greek *heis,* meaning unity or oneness,[10] is a central theme in Jesus' prayer in John 17:21. He prayed, 'that they will all be one, just as you and I are one as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me' (NLT). Here, 'the unity of the family of God… is to be one as Christ and the Father are one.'[11] For example, at a Wycliffe consultation, participants noted, 'Jesus prays for the body, the church, because the church always moves out and the cross equalizes power relationships.'

Jesus understood that unity among his followers lends credibility to the church's message and is essential to its mission. The gospel is the Good News of restored relationships between God and humanity and among people, accomplished through the cross. Jesus further prayed, 'May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me' (John 17:23 NLT). Through this unity, God shows that the restored relationships among his people signify his completed work.

Just as the Father and the Son are united, 'believers are to be united in working towards their goal of bringing the world to believe in the Father and the Son.'[12] With this background of John 17, Dave Brooks, speaking from his many years of ministry partnership experience adds, 'We can do things we wouldn't normally think of when we come together.'[13] Participants at a Wycliffe consultation noted, 'Love is also the only credible explanation for why people are driven to be involved in God's mission.'

One Body

The Greek word *melos* is defined as 'a member or limb (of the body).'[14] We see this in Romans 12:4–5, 'For just as in one body we have many members, … so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another' (NET). Some English translations use 'parts' (e.g., MSG, NLT). The *Africa Bible Commentary* notes, 'Each part of the body has a different function, and all parts need to work together if the body is to function well.'[15] For example, the 'physical body moves and works as a unit, unless it has a cancer which works to destroy the body.'[16] A cancer can be 'divisions, disunity, and competition.' Ruslan Maliuta states that 'competition is an inherent characteristic of the evangelical movement. And it's not going away, anywhere, anytime soon. This is just the reality.' Instead, 'we need to learn to be collaborative' in a competitive ministry environment.[17] Russ Simons notes how 'Scripture is clear here and elsewhere, that when we humbly work together with other believers, we will find the good and perfect will of God.'[18]

The metaphor of the body of Christ is critical for Paul, as demonstrated by these references (emphasis added): Romans 12:4–5 'Just as our bodies

have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other' (NLT). 1 Corinthians 12:20–25 'Yes, there are many parts, but only one body…. In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary…. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other' (NLT). Ephesians 4:4, 7 'For there is *one body* and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future…. However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ' (NLT).

The unique dynamic of believers in Christ is how they become part of *sóma*, the Greek word which means 'body, flesh; the body of the Church.'[19] Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:27, 'Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it' (ESV). Paul was addressing a degree of disharmony that existed between groups within the house churches of Corinth. Paul observed the use of 'Corinthian slogans'.[20] He wrote, 'Each of you is saying, "I am with Paul," or "I am with Apollos," or "I am with Cephas," or "I am with Christ"' (1 Cor 1:12, NET). These slogans indicate factions or factionalism. This could have come from their diverse composition throughout Corinth as they gathered in different households under the leadership of various patrons.[21] Rivalry concerned Paul because it risked unity. He was troubled about how the churches could become divided in favour of an alternative gospel.[22]

Despite the diverse backgrounds, languages, countries, and denominations represented in the body of Christ, by recognizing our unity we can then learn to work together and collaborate. At a Wycliffe missiological consultation, participants stated how we use our gifts to serve one another as good stewards. When each part learns to accept, give space, and use their gifts to serve each other, 'the body of Christ gets stronger' and 'becomes spiritually mature and enjoys unity.'

Ernie Addicott addresses unity and disunity: 'We need the other parts of Christ's body and must work together in partnership [to] be an effective, functioning organism.'[23] Each part of the body of Christ is unique, just like the human body; each part needs to work together, and each part needs each other. This is what Addicott calls '*inter*dependence' (emphasis his).[24] In the body of Christ, there are 'very different roles, working together in

harmony'.[25] Each part of the body doesn't 'envy each other' and 'there should be no looking down on one another just as the different parts of the body do not look down on one another.'[26] Christians are to work together and respect and even celebrate our differences so that the body of Christ is built up as a witness to the watching world.

Co-workers

In Philippians 4:2–3, Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their disagreement. He asks (emphasis added) his 'true *companion*… to help these women [to keep on *cooperating*], for they have shared my struggle in the [cause of the] gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my *fellow workers*, whose names are in the Book of Life' (AMP). In this passage, Paul uses Greek synonyms for how people helped him: *suzugos* meaning 'yokefellow' and used as 'colleague' or companion;[27] *sunergos* defined as 'a fellow worker' and used as 'associate, helper';[28] and *sunathleó* described as 'to strive with' or labour together.[29]

When Paul refers to his ministry relationship with Apollos, he states: 'For we are both God's workers' (1 Cor 3:9 NLT) or, 'For we are God's 'servants working together' (AMP). Synergy comes from *synergoi,* and according to Daniel Dow, 'collaboration means to coordinate, organize, and co-labor in such a way that the sum of our combined efforts produces more than our individual contributions.'[30]

It has been estimated that Paul had approximately 75 people as co-workers. Paul H. Byun helpfully categorizes them for us: 'Local church leaders who continued the gospel missions that Paul had initiated in the community (e.g., Stephanas, Epaphras, and Philemon); Travel colleagues who accompanied Paul's missionary campaigns (e.g., Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, [and] Tychicus); Personal envoys to the local churches (e.g., Timothy and Titus); Missionary assistants to Paul sent out from the local churches (e.g., Epaphroditus and Epaphras); Messengers of the local churches sent to Paul (e.g., Stephanas); and Co-workers involved in the composition of Paul's letters.'[31]

Paul practiced what he preached, as seen by his inclusion of lists in his letters of individuals who collaborated with him in ministry (e.g., Col 4:7–17 and Rom 16:1–15, 21–23). Paul referred to his co-workers, explicitly or implicitly, as his companions, aides, or allies engaged in various aspects

of apostolic work. He acknowledged churches and individuals as partners and co-workers in advancing his ministry in God's kingdom.[32] Because of these relationships, Paul had a truly collaborative ministry.

Paul also sent envoys to maintain and strengthen relationships between churches that were to be in partnership. For example, he noted that Titus 'encouraged us' upon his arrival (2 Cor 7:6), and Timothy brought 'good news about your faith and love' (1 Thess 3:6). Titus and Timothy acted to renew and foster these relationships. Paul became restless as he heard about how the churches were doing and then sent Titus and Timothy to find out. They returned with messages of encouragement. In Titus's case, he acted as a third-party go-between for Paul and the church in Thessalonica.

Paul's co-workers nurtured relationships with different churches. For example, Epaphras connected Paul and the Roman believers with Christians in the region of Colossae. Another example is how Barnabas 'was influential in building the bridge between the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church.'[33]

Body Life

According to Paul, body life has many different functions. To illustrate, he used the Greek *praxis*, which means 'a deed [or] function'[34] in Romans 12:4, 'For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function' (NIV). Each part serves a distinct role, and the effective functioning of the body relies on the collaborative efforts of all its parts.[35] The idea behind multiple parts or members is the Greek *polys* defined as 'much, many'[36] as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12:12, 'Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ' (NIV). The human body is a metaphor for how the many parts of the body of Christ have diverse gifts, collectively forming one unified whole.

Another example is *sugkerannumi*, the Greek word defined as 'to mix together, to agree with,' to 'commingle' when multiple parts combine into an integrated unit, holding the body together.[37] An example is given in 1 Corinthians 12:22b–26. Paul mentions that parts of the body that seem weak are indispensable. We consider the parts less honourable, treat them with greater respect, and cover the less presentable parts with dignity. The

parts that are already presentable don't need special treatment. God has 'blended together' (NET) or 'combined' (AMP) the body in such a way that greater honour is given to the parts that lack it, so there will be 'no division in the body' (NET). Instead, all the members 'have mutual concern for one another' (NET). If one part suffers, every part shares the pain. When one part is honoured, all the parts rejoice together.

Paul modified the Greek philosopher Aristotle's image of the body, which didn't uphold the idea of weaker parts being given special honour. Paul reversed this by insisting that 'the least valued should be the most cherished.'[38] Paul promoted mutual care within the body of Christ because all parts need each other. Individuals depend on one another.

Cooperative Relationships

We return to Philippians 4:2–3, where Paul addresses Euodia and Syntyche, leaders in the Philippian church whose relationship was strained by conflict. He urges them to 'keep on cooperating' (AMP) and appeals to an unnamed 'loyal friend' (CEB) to help them reconcile. As a result of this intervention, Euodia and Syntyche likely continued their service of the gospel in and around Philippi. Paul H. Byun notes, 'One of Paul's concerns underlying the letter is the discord among believers.... What Paul seeks from the Philippian church is unity and collaboration between church leaders.'[39] This plea for unity is also evident when Paul appeals to the 'spiritually mature' to work together despite disagreements (Phil 3:15).

Paul's letter to the Philippians clearly describes the practices essential to collaboration when he thanks the church in Philippi for their partnership in the Gospel, evident 'in giving, receiving, working, praying, rejoicing, struggling, and suffering.' [40] Dean Flemming outlines the partnership: 'Practical support of Paul's mission, both through financial gifts (4:15–16) and by sending co-workers like Epaphroditus to aid him (2:25–30); Intercessory prayer on Paul's behalf (1:19); Suffering along with Paul for the gospel's sake (1:30; 4:14); Living in a way that is worthy of the gospel (1:27); and Evangelistic witness to the gospel in Philippi (1:27, 28).'[41]

The Philippian church 'shared in a common project with Paul and were partners with him.'[42] They also partnered with the Roman churches through the ministry of Paul and his co-workers.[43] It was mutually

beneficial for the Philippian church to preserve their partnership to advance the gospel.

The Philippian church collaborated with Paul on a common purpose, becoming his partners in spreading the gospel. Through the ministry of Paul and his co-workers, they also formed partnerships with the Roman churches. Maintaining this partnership was mutually beneficial, helping the Philippian church to advance the gospel. There is a 'reciprocal quality to the partnership between Paul and the Philippians.'[44]

Fellowship

Another key term in the New Testament is the Greek *koinonia*, defined as 'fellowship', 'partnership, contributory help, participation, sharing in, communion, spiritual fellowship, a fellowship in the spirit.'[45] There are three ways the term is used. First is sharing in 'participation' seen in Philippians 2:1, 'Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit?' (NLT). Second, is 'contact, fellowship, intimacy' seen in Acts 2:42 (where *koinonia* is first used), 'All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer' (NLT); or 'life together' (MSG). Third is 'the fellowship of service' seen in 2 Corinthians 8:4, '… that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints' (NKJV). Here, based on the context, we see how *koinōnia* is more than just 'fellowship' but includes mutuality, linking to one another, sharing, and coming together regularly. Being united with Christ through the Spirit means 'the body of Christ with all its diverse personalities can be united under the same purpose and values.'[46]

koinōnia can be defined as a partnership where individuals unite to pursue a common interest or goal. The people of God 'as a Spirit-formed community functions as a sign of the kingdom of God' is a theme of the New Testament.[47] According to Paul, 'the partnership is in Christ' requires that 'believers live with one another according to the standards of the Gospel and preach the Gospel to those outside the faith.'[48] *koinōnia* describes the idea that believers participate in the life of Christ and, through him, share all things with one another. Paul's words in Philippians 2:1–12 frame this with his opening words in verse 1, 'Is there any

encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?' (NLT). The body of Christ is inseparably linked to Christ and each other through sacrificial service.[49]

There is no equivalent of *koinōnia* in English to capture the variety of its original meaning. That's why we see a range of expressions based on each context. *koinōnia*, in a single word, describes joint partaking in something we share or do together with others based on a mutual commitment to a common purpose to each other.

Inter-relationships

A cluster of terms describes the dynamic of body life and inter-relationships. One is the Greek word *allélón*, meaning 'one another' or 'each other'.[50] An example is Mark 9:50, 'Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other' (NET). Jesus challenges his disciples to 'live up to their calling' and to live peacefully with one another.[51]

Another term is *anechó*, defined as 'to hold up, bear with'.[52] Paul writes in Colossians 3:13, 'Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you' (NIV). Here, Paul emphasizes the importance of God's people actively demonstrating love and forgiveness for each other.

A healthy body life also involves the desire to grow together. This idea is conveyed by the term *auxanó*, meaning 'to make to grow' or 'cause to increase,' often used in promoting growth.[53] An example is Ephesians 2:22, members of God's household are described as a 'whole structure' (AMP) that is 'joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord' (NIV). This new household of God 'is built upon a solid foundation' of the prophets, the apostles, and Christ.[54]

Like-mindedness

Like-mindedness is seen in the Greek term *phroneó*, defined as having 'understanding, to think'; in some New Testament usages, it conveys the idea of being of the same mind.[55] We see this in Romans 12:16, 'Be of the same mind toward one another' (NASB). Living harmoniously 'involves

exercising both spiritual and social prudence in the way we think of and deal with others.'[56] Bearing with one another is conveyed in *peripheró*, which means 'to carry about.'[57] Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:10, 'We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body' (NIV). In other words, 'Paul is experiencing death so that the believers may enjoy life.'[58]

In Philippians 2:1–2, Paul writes 'if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose' (NET). Paul calls for unity among the Philippian church because they face opposition. Consequently, 'the right attitude for believers is one of unity.'[59]

Collaborative Friendship

As seen in Paul's writings, friendship plays a significant role in strengthening collaborative efforts. The Greek term *koinóneó*, meaning 'to have a share of'[60] implies entering into fellowship and becoming partners. Paul tells the believers in Philippi that when he first preached the gospel after leaving Macedonia, they were the only church to partner with him in 'the matter of giving and receiving' (Phil 4:15, AMP). This enduring friendship was because of their common faith in Christ. Paul refers to it as a 'partnership in the gospel from the first day' (Phil 1:5, NIV).

Another example is *philadelphia*, defined as 'brotherly love.'[61] Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:9–10 about loving one another because God taught about this kind of love. Paul commends them for showing love to all the believers throughout Macedonia and urges them 'to love them even more' (NLT). Similarly, in Romans 12:10, he writes, 'Be devoted to one another with mutual love, showing eagerness in honoring one another' (NIV). *Philadelphia* 'is used to signify the loving relationship of the believers, reflecting an intimate and genuine kinship among believers, reflecting the heartfelt love parents have for their children. It represents the good works done in love for others and is based on Jesus' command in John 13:34–35: 'Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples' (NLT). Such genuine affection unites Christians and demonstrates to the world that they are followers of Christ.

In Philippians 4:1, Paul expresses deep affection: 'Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! (NIV). The word *agapétos,* meaning 'beloved by God, Christ, and one another,'[62] reflects Paul's overflowing love and concern for the Philippian believers. He genuinely desires their welfare, rejoicing in their conversion and faithfulness to Christ. Paul also writes in Ephesians 6:21 about Tychicus: 'He is a beloved brother and faithful helper in the Lord's work' (NLT). Paul calls Tychicus 'beloved' because they share the same grace, belong to the same family of God, and serve in the same ministry. Where there is such companionship in ministry, love should naturally be present.

These examples of Paul's relationships with his co-workers and churches show deep bonds of fellowship, partnership, and mutual support in spreading the gospel – all are part of collaborative friendships.

Summary

As we can see, the New Testament gives many examples to guide our understanding of collaborating in mission, reviewed in this table:

Theme	Bible reference	Greek	Defined	Insights for collaborating
Unity and oneness	John 17:20–21, 1 Cor 12:4–5, Eph 4:3, 13	*heis, henotes, autos; diaireseis*	Diverse harmony and united purpose, reflecting the triune God's model of collaboration and mutual support	Unity in faith and diversity in spiritual gifts foster collaboration, reflecting the Trinity's model. Jesus' prayer for unity underscores its importance for the church's credibility and mission
One body	Rom 12:4–5, 1 Cor 1:12, 12:20–25, 27, Eph 4:4, 7	*melos*	Many members with unique roles, united in Christ	Requires unity, interdependence, and celebrating differences within the body of Christ, enhancing collective witness and function
Co-workers	Phil 4:2–3, Col 4:7–17, Rom 16, 1 Cor 3:9, 2 Cor 7:6, 1 Thess 3:6	*suzugos, sunergo, sunathleó*	Collaborative partners striving together in ministry, united in purpose	Working together with diverse partners, maximizing collective efforts and fostering unity
Body life	Rom 12:4, 1 Cor 12:12–26	*praxis, polus*	Unified yet diverse functions within the church, mutually supporting each other	Involves diverse roles working together harmoniously, valuing all contributions, and ensuring mutual care and support within the body of Christ
Cooperative relationships	Phil 3:5, 4:2–3	*phroneó*	Fostering unity and mutual support in ministry	Cooperative relationships in God's mission involve resolving conflicts, supporting each other, and partnering in evangelism, prayer, and suffering to advance the gospel
Fellowship	Acts 2:42, 2 Cor 8:4, Phil 2:1–12	*koinōnia*	Spiritual partnership, sharing, and unity in Christ's mission	Unites diverse personalities under common purpose and values, partnership in pursuit of a common goal, joint partaking based on mutual commitment, shared purpose and commitment to one another
Inter-relationships	Mark 9:50, Eph 2:22, Col 3:13	*allélón, anechó, auxanó*	One another, each other, to hold up, bear with, to make to grow	Deep mutual participation, sharing life and service, and being united under Christ's purpose, embodying the kingdom of God through community

Theme	Bible reference	Greek	Defined	Insights for collaborating
Like-mindedness	Rom 12:16; 2 Cor 4:10; Phil 2:1–2	*phroneó*	Harmonious unity and shared purpose in Christ	Requires unity, mutual understanding, and shared purpose, fostering collaboration and support among believers, even in adversity
Collaborative Friendship	John 13:34–35; Rom 12:10; Eph 6:21, Phil 1:5; 4:1, 15; 1 Thess 4:9–10	*koinóneó, philadelphia, agapétos*	Partnership in faith, mutual love, and shared ministry	Combines deep affection, shared purpose, and mutual support, exemplifying the love and unity among believers that strengthens ministry efforts

Table: Synopsis of New Testament passages and concepts

Thought Questions

1. How can churches, mission agencies and Christian charities learn from Paul's approach to collaboration, and how can these lessons be applied in missional contexts?

2. How can you ensure that your diverse gifts and backgrounds enhance rather than hinder our collaborative efforts in fulfilling God's mission?

Practical Applications

The New Testament provides a theological foundation for collaboration, encouraging believers to unite and work together in fulfilling God's mission. Scripture highlights that effective missional service relies on the harmonious functioning of diverse gifts, with each member playing an essential role. Paul's writings, along with those of other New Testament authors, emphasize the importance of unity and teamwork, reflecting the integrity and oneness of the triune God. Unity strengthens the church and lends credibility to its mission, as the body of Christ works together in diversity.

The teachings of the early church demonstrate that effective collaboration arises from shared purpose and mutual love. Paul underscores the significance of mutual support, where each believer contributes to the collective work of spreading the gospel. The goal is not competition but cooperation. Division and conflicts are addressed and resolved to maintain unity. Embracing a collaborative spirit, believers honour each other's contributions and work together for the common good. Relationships built on love, mutual respect, and shared purpose foster strong, cooperative partnerships that advance God's kingdom. The following practical advice draws from these Old Testament principles.

The New Testament gives principles to influence missional collaboration. These principles will help build stronger and fruitful collaborative efforts in ministry:

- *Commit to unity in diversity:* Just as the body of Christ is composed of many members with different roles and gifts, value each member's unique contributions, embracing diversity in gifts and backgrounds to strengthen the mission.
- *Foster mutual support through prayer and fellowship:* The early church exemplified the power of shared fellowship (Acts 2:42). Regular communal prayer, Bible study, and worship build strong bonds, centring the team on God's mission.

- *Address conflicts promptly:* Paul urged two leaders to resolve their conflict for the gospel's progress (Phil 4:2–3). Create an open and trusting environment to resolve conflicts quickly, fostering reconciliation and unity.
- *Emphasize co-worker relationships:* Paul used *sunergos* (fellow worker) to describe his partnership with others in ministry (1 Cor 3:9). Encourage mutual responsibility and acknowledge each member's role in the collaborative effort, strengthening team impact.
- *Maintain focus on the shared mission:* The Philippian church partnered with Paul to advance the gospel. Keep the team aligned on a common goal, guiding decisions, and reinforcing commitment.

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[1] IPA, 11.

[2] Ruslan Maliuta, "Interview," interview by Kirk Franklin, 8 May 2024, Zoom recording.

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Chapter 3: Collaborating in the Great Commission

So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – Matthew 28:19 (GW)

God calls all His people to join Him in reconciling and restoring a broken world – Daniel Dow[1]

Dave Brooks has over 35 years of experience in Bible translation partnerships. He emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships, stating, 'You're constantly building a foundation of relationships, and that's what you lead with.' He has encountered organisations that claim to partner with hundreds of others, but upon closer examination, he realizes they are often just asking for favours rather than truly partnering. 'True partnering,' Dave explains, 'is about understanding that we're walking this walk together. It means listening to what their needs are, which can vary greatly across different parts of the world.'[2]

Developing and serving in friendship-based relationships is fundamental. Vinoth Ramachandra explains, 'We are formed as persons through relationships, so we do not find our fulfilment as persons apart from God and one another.'[3] Using this as a theological basis for collaboration in God's mission ensures that our efforts rest on a solid foundation.

The theological exploration of missional collaboration is interdisciplinary and comprehensive because it integrates biblical studies, theological and missiological reflection on Trinitarian mission, and social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, and history. However, Timothy Tennent notes, 'Christianity, as a whole, is built on an entirely different foundation and worldview', which means 'the controlling categories' of mission should be 'theological, not sociological.'[4] Collaboration also calls

upon a missional hermeneutic approach to interpret Scripture as the revelation of God's mission.

Integrative Missiological Matrix

We can ground our theological theory and practice of collaborating in God's mission in a matrix that, when used in an engaging, reflecting manner, shows how the disciplines of mission theology serve as a process to explore and scrutinize the foundations, methods, and aims of our participation in the *missio Dei.* The main components are illustrated in this diagram:

Diagram: Integrative Missiological Matrix[5]

An overview of each of the components:

- Missio Dei: God, as the source of mission, extends salvation to all people and establishes Christ's Lordship over creation. The *missio Dei* forms the foundation for collaboration for God's purposes.
- *The Bible:* When interpreted through a missional hermeneutic, it is the exclusive source for theologising about God's mission, providing the biblical basis for collaboration.
- *The Church:* This is the primary agent of God's mission, with its historical reflections serving as examples and case studies for collaboration in mission.

- *Personal Pilgrimage:* Each of our journeys as human agents of God's mission, including our gifts, abilities, and experiences, influences how we collaborate in mission.
- *Contexts:* Mission occurs within unique cultural, socio-economic, and political contexts. Social sciences provide tools to understand and engage these contexts appropriately.
- *Mission Theology:* This helps us understand and participate in the *missio Dei*, focusing on the motivations, methods, and goals of Christian mission and providing a basis for collaboration.
- *Praxis:* This ensures continuous engagement between action and reflection in mission, helping evaluate and improve collaborative efforts.

The Great Commission

Hudson Taylor (1832–1905), founder of the China Inland Mission (now OMF International), popularized the term 'The Great Commission' for Matthew 28:18–20. The origin of the term is somewhat mysterious. Some evidence suggests it was coined by Justinian von Welz (1621–1688), a Dutch missionary who wrote passionate appeals in 1664 for Protestant Christianity to engage in world missions.[6]

The modern mission movement is credited to British missionary William Carey (1761–1834) and his mission agency, the Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathens. These missionaries helped make the text of The Great Commission well-known as the mandate for missions. However, according to Robbie Castleman, for the first 1600 years of the church's missionary activity, the text 'was read and understood as the trinitarian foundation of ecclesiology [the theology of the church], not as a fanfare for missiology [the theology of mission].'[7]

More recently, reading the Bible with a missional hermeneutic or interpreting the Bible through a lens of mission has become more common. This means the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, according to theologian Christopher Wright, 'renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of God's purpose for the whole of God's creation.'[8]

Through Jesus' Last Words

What happens when we read Jesus' final words through a missional lens, considering how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together? How does this inspire us to collaborate in God's mission?

Matthew 28:18–20

Let's explore this, starting with the passage known as the Great Commission: 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age' (Matt 28:18–20 NLT).

The triune God calls us to a personal relationship with Jesus, who has ushered in his kingdom. This call demands 'radical loyalty and commitment,' a comprehensive and costly lifestyle of obedience, and 'entry into a community chosen to participate in God's mission to the world.'[9] Jesus gives a divine commission, delegating his authority to his followers. This shared mission to make disciples of all nations requires a collective effort and unified purpose.

The instruction to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit highlights the collaborative nature of the Trinity, serving as a model for teamwork. Teaching new disciples implies a continuous and collaborative education and spiritual growth process. Jesus' promise to be with his disciples always provides ongoing support and partnership, ensuring they are never alone in their mission. The call to reach all nations emphasizes cultural and ethnic inclusivity, necessitating diverse collaboration across different cultures and peoples. By focusing on Christ's authority and presence, we recognize that our success is secondary to his overarching mission.

When we apply the Integrated Missiological Matrix (IMM) to our reading of Matthew 28:18–20, we see these characteristics:

IMM	Matthew 28:18–20
Missio Dei	God's mission extends to all nations. Jesus' authority underpins the mission, emphasizing God's sovereignty and the universal scope of salvation
The Bible	This passage serves as a direct biblical mandate for discipleship and baptism, rooted in the authority of Scripture
The Church	The primary agent to carry out this commission, making disciples and baptizing in the name of the triune God
Personal Pilgrimage	Each believer's journey involves obeying this commission, contributing their gifts and experiences to make disciples
Contexts	Missions must adapt to diverse cultural and social contexts, as the command is to reach all nations
Mission Theology	The passage emphasizes discipleship and baptism, reflecting core theological principles of teaching and community building
Praxis	Implementation involves continuous teaching and nurturing new disciples, reflecting on and adapting methods to fulfil this mandate

John 20:19-23

All three members of the triune God are present in this portion of John's text. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, who were hiding behind locked doors out of fear of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus stands among them and says, 'Peace be with you.' He shows them the wounds in his hands and side, and the disciples are filled with joy. Again, he says, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.' Then he breathes on them and says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'

This passage illustrates collaboration in mission through divine sending and empowerment. The Father sends Jesus, who then sends the church, with the Holy Spirit providing guidance and power. Jesus' greeting of peace establishes unity and calm, essential for effective collaboration. He connects with the disciples by showing his scars, reinforcing their bond. His statement, 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you,' extends the divine collaboration within the Trinity to the disciples. Breathing the Holy Spirit on them signifies their empowerment for the mission.

When we apply the Integrated Missiological Matrix (IMM) to our reading of John 20:19-23, we see these characteristics:

IMM	John 20:19-23
Missio Dei	Jesus' sending of the disciples mirrors the Father sending him, indicating participation in the divine mission
The Bible	Emphasis on peace, forgiveness, and receiving the Holy Spirit underscores the spiritual foundation of mission
The Church	Sent as Jesus was sent, empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue His work
Personal Pilgrimage	Believers are called to embody peace and forgiveness, aligning personal mission with Jesus' example
Contexts	The need for peace and reconciliation is contextual, addressing the disciples' immediate fear and broader mission challenges
Mission Theology	The passage highlights themes of divine sending, peace, and the Holy Spirit's empowerment, central to mission theology
Praxis	Reflecting on practice involves extending peace, offering forgiveness, and relying on the Holy Spirit's guidance

Luke 24:46–48

In this passage Jesus confirms an Old Testament prophecy about how 'the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day' and that 'this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: "There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent." You are witnesses of all these things. And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised' (Luke 24:46–48 NLT).

Luke emphasizes collaboration in God's mission by highlighting a shared goal: proclaiming Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, and the forgiveness of sins. This unified message binds collaborators together. Jesus instructs his followers to spread his message with authority, providing a divine mandate requiring teamwork. The disciples are called to be witnesses, a collaborative act that needs mutual support. Jesus promises the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, showing that their work relies on divine guidance, fostering unity. He instructs them to wait for the Holy Spirit, emphasising the importance of preparation and patience. The global mission to reach all nations requires broad collaboration across cultures.

When we apply the Integrated Missiological Matrix (IMM) to our reading of Luke 24:46–48, we see these characteristics:

IMM	Luke 24:46–48
Missio Dei	Framed within God's redemptive plan, with Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection as the core message
The Bible	Old Testament prophecies and their fulfilment underscore the biblical foundation for proclaiming repentance and forgiveness
The Church	Tasked with witnessing these events and spreading the message to all nations
Personal Pilgrimage	Witnessing involves personal testimony and transformation, reflecting the disciples' experiences
Contexts	The message starts in Jerusalem but is meant for all nations, requiring contextual adaptation and cultural sensitivity
Mission Theology	Central themes include forgiveness, repentance, and the authority of Jesus' name, foundational to mission theology
Praxis	Practically, this involves proclaiming the gospel, starting locally and expanding globally, with an emphasis on forgiveness

Mark 16:14–20

Jesus appears to his disciples and tells them, 'Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned.' He then describes the miraculous signs that his disciples will perform, such as casting out demons and healing the sick. After this, Jesus is taken into heaven and sits at God's right hand. The disciples then go everywhere, preaching, and the Lord works through them, confirming their message with miraculous signs (Mark 16:14–20 NLT).

Mark highlights collaboration in mission. Jesus gives the disciples a shared mission to preach the Good News worldwide, uniting them in purpose. He promises miraculous signs to empower them, fostering reliance on God's power. The disciples work together, showing the importance of teamwork. The Lord validates their efforts with miraculous signs, demonstrating divine partnership. Their willingness to go and preach reflects obedience and trust, which are crucial for collaboration. Even after his ascension, Jesus continues to support them from heaven, underscoring a sustained divine partnership.

When we apply the Integrated Missiological Matrix (IMM) to our reading of Mark 16:14–20, we see these characteristics:

IMM	Mark 16:14–20
Missio Dei	Jesus' commissioning to preach and perform signs is an extension of God's mission to reveal his power and salvation
The Bible	The mandate to preach and the accompanying signs are rooted in Scripture, affirming the gospel's truth
The Church	Involves preaching the gospel and demonstrating God's power through signs
Personal Pilgrimage	Believers are called to faith and action, participating in miraculous signs as evidence of God's presence
Contexts	The command to go into all the world requires understanding and engaging diverse cultural contexts
Mission Theology	Emphasizes the proclamation of the gospel and the manifestation of God's power through signs, integral to mission theology
Praxis	Involves preaching, healing, and performing signs, reflecting ongoing divine support and validation

Acts 1:6–8

Finally, we look at the passage where Jesus tells the apostles, 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:6–8 NLT).

The book of Acts, often called the 'Acts of the Holy Spirit,' highlights collaboration in mission. The Father sets the times and dates, emphasising trust in God's timing. The disciples are empowered by the Holy Spirit, relying on divine strength. They are called to be witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, indicating shared responsibility and a unified effort. This mission's expansive reach requires coordinated teamwork across diverse regions. Willie James Jennings notes how 'Geography matters. Place matters to God. From a specific place, the disciples will move forward into the world. To go from place to place is to go from people to people and to go from an old identity to a new one.'[10] God is always ahead, calling us to embrace the new and unknown.

When we apply the Integrated Missiological Matrix (IMM) to our reading of Acts 1:6–8, we see these characteristics:

IMM	Acts 1:6–8
Missio Dei	God's mission is empowered by the Holy Spirit, with a mandate to witness globally, reflecting God's redemptive plan
The Bible	Scriptural promise of the Holy Spirit and the mandate to witness provide a biblical foundation for mission
The Church	The church's mission involves bearing witness to Jesus' resurrection, starting locally and extending regionally and globally
Personal Pilgrimage	Empowerment by the Holy Spirit is essential for personal mission, enabling believers to witness effectively
Contexts	Mission spans from locally to the ends of the earth, requiring contextual awareness and adaptation
Mission Theology	Highlights the role of the Holy Spirit and the responsibility to witness, central to mission theology
Praxis	Involves ongoing action and reflection about being witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and engaging in cross-cultural mission

By applying the Integrative Missiological Matrix to these Great Commission texts, we can see how each component interrelates to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mission mandate and how it should be lived out in various contexts and practices.

Summary

These five passages collectively form The Great Commission, emphasising the Lord's call to make himself known and disciple the nations. They provide a biblical foundation for God's mission and a mandate to share the gospel. Daniel Dow remarks, 'God calls all His people to join Him in reconciling and restoring a broken world.'[11] This mission is too vast to accomplish alone, requiring loving partnership with each other and with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The leaders of the Wycliffe Global Alliance recognize that building relationships is a universal mandate, though the understanding of these relationships varies across cultures. At a consultation in Accra, Ghana, a participant exploring the missiological foundation of community observed, 'Relationships undergird everything. We focus on relationships first, and then we do ministry.' This approach has a solid theological basis, reflecting the nature of God as a community – the triune God – who models relationships within the divine community.

We summarize our learning by observing how the inter-relation of the triune God influences collaboration in mission in this table:

Text	Triune God[12]	Collaboration
Matthew 28:18–20	Baptising the new discipleship community is done in the name of all three members	The divine commissioning emphasizes collaboration through a shared mission
John 20:19–23	The Father is the sender, Jesus is the sent one, the Holy Spirit is revealed for his presence, guidance, and empowerment	Collaboration is demonstrated by the triune God's unity and mutual support
Luke 24:26–48	Jesus mentions the sending of the Holy Spirit just as the Father promised	Collaboration in mission occurs around a shared goal, teamwork and mutual support
Mark 16:14–18	Jesus takes his place beside the Father; signs confirm the Word and demonstrate the presence of the Lord; Word and sign demonstrate the Spirit's power	Collaboration in mission results through a shared purpose, empowerment by the Spirit, teamwork, and sustained support
Acts 1:6–8	The apostles were with Jesus; he references God the Father; he promises the Holy Spirit as they go about from place to place	Collaboration through trust in God's timing, empowerment by the Spirit, shared responsibility, and coordinated teamwork across diverse regions and contexts

Table: Summary of Trinitarian mission and collaboration in Jesus' last words

Thought Questions

1. How can your church or ministry better equip its members to interpret the Great Commission through a missional hermeneutic emphasising collaboration and cultural sensitivity?

2. How can missional teams incorporate the concept of personal pilgrimage to enhance individual contributions to the collective mission effort?

Practical Applications

The Integrated Missiological Matrix (IMM) provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting and applying the Great Commission texts by integrating biblical, theological, and contextual perspectives. This framework underscores God's mission as the foundational purpose for collaboration in God's work. It encourages using a missional hermeneutic to interpret Scripture, highlighting the church as the primary agent of God's mission, the importance of personal pilgrimage in each believer's journey, and the need for contextual sensitivity in missions. Engaging in continuous action and reflection aids in evaluating and improving collaborative efforts to fulfil the Great Commission and contribute effectively to God's overarching mission.

These are some practical steps for engaging in collaborative mission efforts that draw directly from principles from this chapter:

- *Integrate missional work:* Combine biblical studies, theological reflection, and social science insights to understand the mission context fully. Engage with Scripture and cultural realities to ensure the Great Commission influences different collaborative ministry environments meaningfully.
- *Cultivate genuine relationships:* True collaboration begins with deep, friendship-based relationships. Partnerships should focus on mutual respect, shared purpose, and actively listening to the needs of local communities. Relationship-building should be the foundation, ensuring every collaboration is based upon mutual respect, shared purpose, and love.
- *Integrate action and reflection:* Collaboration in mission requires a continual process of praxis – where action and reflection inform each other. Regularly evaluate and adjust methods to align with mission objectives and adapt to changing contexts, improving strategies and outcomes. Team members should engage in practical action and thoughtful reflection to refine their collaborative strategies and improve outcomes.

- *Follow a trinitarian collaboration model:* The Great Commission reveals the collaborative nature of the triune God, and this divine teamwork should serve as a model for human collaboration. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together in perfect unity to accomplish God's mission, and believers are called to collaborate similarly. Each member should contribute their unique gifts and work together towards making disciples across nations.
- *Equip for cultural sensitivity:* Develop a missional hermeneutic and cultural awareness to engage effectively with diverse communities. By understanding the Bible through a missional lens, teams can engage more effectively with diverse cultures and communities. Equip team members with the skills to approach God's mission with cultural understanding, which will enhance their ability to collaborate and communicate the gospel in ways that are relevant to each context.

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Case Study: Navigating Partnerships in Mission

Bambi[1] is affiliated with International Partnering Associates (IPA). She shares her insights about partnering.

Early Partnerships

The resources of most of the Filipino churches we had mobilized [for gospel outreach] were limited, so it was natural for them to see the need to partner with others. Without much training or knowledge about partnering, we were able to see partnership structures organically develop out of a common desire to [reach the] Unreached People Groups (UPGs). Christians called to be missionaries, churches, business people, students, community development groups, and mission organizations would come together to pray, discuss, and create a plan for reaching a UPG. I participated in the prayer mobilization, exploration, and facilitation of some UPG partnerships that eventually formed. I discovered this was happening in other cities and around other UPGs in the Philippines. It was a move of God.

We partnered with two UPGs in a region and two UPGs in our city. Interestingly, the P[2] group partnership began when young people from various churches decided to work together and mobilize prayer for the people group, with around 10,000 intercessors mobilized. Two young people volunteered as missionaries, while others explored creative ways to raise funds and help their local church send them to the P. Many churches got involved. Some community development groups offered expertise. A water project was completed on the remote island where the P lived. Mission organizations provided training and materials for evangelism and discipleship. Experienced missionaries offered advice and visited the area to help the workers. Eventually, a church was planted among this people group as members of Christ's body contributed their part. It was a beautiful expression of unity that bore abundant kingdom fruit.

The ministry among the two UPGs in our city is a different story, with distinct types of partnerships developed to support it. Initially, we tried to reach families and created a loosely structured network around that ministry, later shifting our focus to students when we discovered that they were more open to the gospel. The workers learned that after students become followers of Jesus and graduate from school, they are usually sent back to their original location or encouraged to work in the Middle East to earn money for their families. The workers had to start all over again with a new batch of UPG contacts, so the composition and structure of the partnership around this ministry had to change many times.

From the late 1990s until the late 2000s, many Christian churches and organizations formed partnerships focused on different UPGs in the Philippines. But working together is not easy, and sometimes it can be heartbreaking. Mistakes were made. Some partnerships did not survive and died prematurely. Others had to be closed intentionally, having served their purpose for a season.

Today, there are communities of believers in every UPG in the country. Although much work is still needed to see the UPGs reached, what's great is that some of the believers now want to be equal partners and key players in the collaborative efforts around UPG work. The perspective that they bring is a huge blessing.

As far as I know, every unreached people group here in the Philippines has had some form of partnership around it. Some got dissolved, and there was a lot of hurt, which caused partnership to become a dirty word in some circles. Collaboration is a more acceptable term these days. But I still use those two terms interchangeably because I define what we mean by partnering when I talk to people, and sometimes replace it with collaboration if that's what they prefer.

Organic Collaboration

When I spoke at a meeting where most of the missionary organizations among UPGs in the Philippines were present, we surveyed the types of partnerships developing in this region. We were surprized to discover that some partnerships have lasted for decades while others were birthed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the Philippines you will find organically grown partnerships that sometimes would not seem to be considered partnering from a Western perspective. I've often struggled with comments about Filipino Christians not being united and not working together in missions because my experience is different. I have seen various models and incredible expressions of unity in the context of ministry and missions, which need to be affirmed and celebrated.

One of the key factors here – and I've thought about this a lot – is friendship. A lot of partnerships are built on friendship. We're such relational people, and trust is developed more easily through friendship. In my experience, this often starts with deep trust with people I know already and who have a similar passion for UPGs.

Another thing I have observed is that some expressions of partnering are only in place for a specific purpose and are short-lived. That's why I've introduced the concept of closing the partnering effort well because it's not just about exploring, forming, and operating something. We must acknowledge that some of these [partnerships] have a lifespan. We must honour that and close properly. I think you can close the structures around these partnerships, but if the relationships are strong and there is goodwill, you can continue to nurture them. Another structure can be built on that foundation later.

There's a God factor in what's happened with many UPGs here, as seen in the timing and the generations involved. In the past, because there were no believers [among these people groups], we were focused on partnering with agencies and churches. That's not the case anymore. We have strong communities of believers and leaders within these people groups, which has changed the dynamics. We didn't even think about what's happening now back in the 90s or the early 2000s.

Painful Partnerships

We also have many battle scars. The hardware for a system for partnership training and the technology for partnering introduced in 2000 included the heart and attitude required for partnering, but the software was missing.

The biggest scar came from the P partnership. When we entered the ministry, we were working with only one believer, who was a believer for over 21 years. After 21 years of ministry, this elderly missionary had only

discipled one believer. He ushered us into this ministry, then two young ladies in their early 20s went there, and eventually, through the work of so many churches and organizations and this team, about 70 [new] believers came to the Lord. They had already started Bible study, and it was thriving.

Then, an American missionary came, took over the ministry, and built his building, though they were already meeting in houses. This missionary morally fell within that community. So, we had to 'kill' the partnership and perform an autopsy on it because it was dangerous for the partners. It was such a horrific experience. It wounded us all. This same missionary was in my meeting this January. Wow, the wonderful work of healing that the Lord can do. That was painful.

Some of the partnering pain has come from disagreement over strategy. In one partnership, the strategy for church planting was not discussed properly when the partnership was formed. We were so eager to develop the partnership that we rushed the process. The vision statement sounded inspiring and biblical, so nobody disputed it, and people quickly signed up. But, as the work among the UPG progressed, there were strong disagreements about the approach used in sharing the gospel and discipling believers. The process of resolving the issue without killing the partnership was extremely difficult. The partnership survived, but we lost some partners. So now, in any partnership formation meetings I'm part of, I give people time to discuss the meaning of each word or sentence in their agreed vision, and I encourage the partners to consider the implications of achieving it. Prayer is also very important. Each one needs to pray seriously about their decision to join the partnership.

Another area would be financial issues. People have misused finances, and partnerships cost so much money when people meet in hotels, then accuse the others who don't attend of not being partnering-focused because they would prefer to spend the money instead on supporting their missionaries. It leaves a bad taste in the mouth when that happens. There are so many stories like this. When I would speak with some of the pastors and mission leaders involved in the past, I would sometimes spend hours sitting with them to listen to them tell me why they don't want to partner.

The Partnering Champion

In the partnering journey and training we present, we acknowledge that it's not rocket science. It's a matter of arranging things in a logical form that people already know. There's a system to it. As an example of the partnering champion, we start with Nehemiah's story, when he awakens to a passion. But there's also a degree of preparation. We add preparation before beginning to explore. The role of a catalyst could facilitate a partnership, exploring the possibility of translating that vision into a partnering initiative. That's the role of the champion.

Many people may have a vision but not know how to translate it into a partnering initiative. At the outset, that's key for a facilitator or a champion, who may not continue to be the facilitator as the partnership progresses. There's a phase in developing a partnership where that's important.

Funding Local Partnerships

From the beginning of my work, I've endeavoured not to involve foreign funding. I've always preferred to find funding here. I was given a legacy from the UK by somebody I didn't know, but it was always from the Philippines. We did have a case in the P situation where a wealthy church in Manila wanted to fund a very costly water project. Because I didn't want to be involved, they had to define the accountability for those finances and clarify any expectations. This is where some of the problems sometimes happen. They appointed an administrator somewhere in a city close to the island where the ministry was taking place. But they had to work it all out. The burden was not on the workers as much as the funder because they wanted to participate. I've been in missions long enough to know that's not always the case.

Sometimes, you need to raise funds for something. We have different layers of training in IPA, including one on Operating Partnerships. Our colleague has developed a session on resourcing partnerships based on his experience. They have an extensive UPG-focused network in their country that has a separate structure mainly focused on resourcing the partnerships in their country. Because the UPG partnerships in the Philippines tend to be smaller, I think they're easier to manage without a large structure like that. The people groups are small enough, and the projects are small enough. It is like a mom-and-pop store.

With Nehemiah, [eventually] the building of the wall was finished. So, we celebrate and nurture relationships beyond that. We're not here only for the work.

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[1] A pseudonym.

[2] Name changed.

Chapter 4: Theology of Collaboration

> There is *one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling* – Ephesians 4:4 (NKJV)
>
> There is *The triune God exists in a relationship of love and unity, where each person is united in purpose, working together in loving cooperation yet with distinct responsibilities* – Kenneth Shreve

In the heartbeat of God's mission lies a profound call to collaborate. It's an opportunity to model a divine relationship. Our triune God is a missionary God. Timothy Tennent states, 'God the Father is the source and initiator of missions.'[1] The triune God's salvation activity is called the mission of God or the *missio Dei* and is a fundamental part of God's divine character and attributes. Each member of the Trinity plays a unique role in this mission. This collaborative action within the Trinity is a model for our mission efforts, emphasising unity, diversity, and mutual trust. We now explore how this Trinitarian foundation reshapes our understanding of partnering.

The Nature of the Triune God

The triune God, though one in essence, consists of three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Cathy Ross explains that 'God is not a monad,' a singular entity, 'but a community of three divine persons' united as one God (John 1:1–2).[2] Each member of the Trinity plays a unique and collaborative role in the mission of God. For example, 'the Father sends the Son, the Spirit fills and guides the Son, and the Son embraces the cross,' enabling reconciliation between God and all people through his death and resurrection.[3]

The relationship within the triune God models the importance of relationship, unity, and diversity within God's mission. Enoch Wan and Kevin Penman emphasize that this 'relationship, love, and unity-diversity' becomes 'the starting point for understanding partnership.'[4] Diversity in a

missional relationship is not something to disparage but to embrace as it reflects God's creative brilliance where 'each part has its own function.'[5]

Divine Love and Community

The triune God's community of love extends beyond itself to the entire created order. John Franke states, 'There is no God other than the Father, Son, and Spirit bound together in the active relations of love throughout eternity.' [6] The triune God embodies divine love 'found in the reciprocal interdependence and dedication towards each other.'[7] This divine community exemplifies why expressions of love should mark collaboration in God's mission. A participant at a Wycliffe missiological consultation observed that 'God's love for humanity and his love for community [is] reflected in the Trinity.' Another participant noted that the triune God's character and nature are transformational, encompassing 'love, respect, unity, diversity, taking in and giving out, spiritual sacrifice, humility, stewardship, and faithfulness in serving.' These qualities inspire collaborative efforts in mission within a multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual world.

The Missio Dei *and Human Participation*

The *missio Dei* (mission of God) is a divine call from the triune God to invite human participation and collaboration. Through a Trinitarian focus on mission, the love of the Father sends the Son. With the Father, the Son sends the Spirit to gather, equip, and enable the church to participate in God's mission (John 20:21). Because of the collaborative nature of the triune God, the body of Christ is also called to respond in a cooperative spirit with each other and with God in his mission. Missional collaboration reflects the Trinitarian nature of the *missio Dei* as it 'embodies mutuality' and 'brings people closer to God and to each other.'[8]

Missional collaboration is focused wherever and with whomever the Holy Spirit determines. The body of Christ sets the foundations for partnership in mission. All who participate serve on the same team, so to speak, which calls for unity and the right relationships as 'the expected standard of operation' to fulfil God's mission (Eph 4:4).[9]

Building Trust and Accountability

It is not that God needs human instruments for his purposes. Allen Yeh states, 'It is God who initiates, and we are merely partners in the endeavour.'[10] God is involved with us as a supreme act of trust. Trust is crucial for any collaborative effort. Therefore, the triune God 'chooses the risky course of partnership,' starting with appointing the first disciples as his co-workers who held very different social and theological positions (Zealots, Roman-sympathizers, Galileans, and Essenes). Such actions may seem risky to us, but they are not to God. Jesus' disciples are entrusted as his co-workers in local and global collaborative ministry (Matt 28:18–20). The apostle Paul continues this collaborative focus through shared ministry among co-workers such as Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor 16:19), itinerant preachers such as Barnabas (Acts 13:2) and Silas (Acts 15:40), young recruits like Timothy (Acts 16:3), and with many others (Rom 16:21–24).[11]

The *missio Dei* initiated by the triune God invites human participation in a collaborative mission driven by the Holy Spirit. Jonas Thinane elaborates, 'The union or relationship… between members of the Trinity is mostly characterized by reciprocity, mutual participation, equality, cooperation, collaboration, mutual understanding, mutual dependence, and active connectedness.'[12] This divine partnership reflects the unity and mutuality of the Trinity and calls the body of Christ to work with God and each other in unity, right relationships, and trust to fulfil His mission. To illustrate this, participants at a Wycliffe missiological consultation said, 'We need to build trust through transparency and accountability when developing partnership.' Similarly, at another consultation, a group of participants asked: 'What will it take to develop accountability processes that are contextually sensitive and respectful of all partners and help build relationships and trust rather than undermine them?'

The Kingdom of God

God's missional desire is to see broken relationships restored and all things brought together under the headship of his Son. Through the incarnation of Jesus comes the 'fulness of God' (Col 1:19).[13] The Good News is that Jesus Christ is proclaimed through the blood of his cross as the universal saviour for all (Col 1:20). The triune God is seen in John 14:26 when Jesus tells his followers about the coming arrival of 'the Holy Spirit… whom the Father will send in my name.' Kenneth Shreve states,

‘The Persons of the Godhead are intricately involved together in achieving the end result’ of ‘redemption and salvation.’[14]

Jesus gives this invitation: ‘As the Father sent me so I am sending you’ (John 20:21). The sending of Jesus’ followers is part of the very nature of the triune God. As Timothy Tennent states, ‘God the Father is the Sender and therefore the ultimate source of all missionary sending.’[15] The implications for a collaborative effort in mission is this: God is ‘involved with us in a supreme act of trust,’ he’s ‘responsible for our redemption,’ and his ‘self-emptying supremely upon the cross was the liability accepted by God for our creation and was God’s freely chosen means for our redemption.’[16]

God’s Redemptive Plan

The triune God partners with the worldwide body of Christ, the church sent by Jesus to continue his mission. God’s plan includes a partnership with humankind created in his image. Kenneth Shreve notes, ‘Partnership must be focused on wherever and with whomever the Holy Spirit determines.’[17] This collaborative effort includes teaching, baptising, and nurturing new believers, responding to human needs by loving service, transforming unjust structures of society, safeguarding the integrity of creation, and sustaining and renewing the life of the earth. Collaborating in God’s mission means taking an active interest in the world that belongs to God and is alive with potential. Expressing a similar sentiment, participants at a Wycliffe missiological consultation observed, ‘The restoration of relationships is at the heart of total transformation. This includes the relationship with the triune God, relationships within people’s community, and the relationship with the environment.’

God invites all people into the presence of his kingdom through new life in Christ. God’s will for his community – following the Holy Spirit wherever and whenever he leads – gives a preview of God’s kingdom. Jesus’ prominent teachings announced the arrival of the kingdom of God or the reign of God through his miracles and bold teachings. The kingdom of God ‘represents the dynamic activity of God and the sphere in which his rule is experienced.’[18] Arthur Glasser helps us understand the role of the Spirit in God’s reign: ‘The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost gave birth to the church, mobilizing and empowering the church to be God’s primary instrument for announcing the Kingdom of God among the

nations of the earth.'[19] Therefore, 'God is now partnering with the worldwide body of Christ'[20] because this body, his church, consists of his human instruments commissioned by Jesus and sent by the Spirit to continue Jesus' mission.

Another way to consider how the triune God partners with his people is to look at the scope and focus of God's plan. For example, throughout the Old Testament, God reveals his missional plan, including how he 'chose to work with Abraham who was called his friend. The plan grew to a partnership with a nation who he called to be his chosen people' (Gen 12:1–3).[21] The pattern continues to the coming of the Messiah in the New Testament. As Cathy Ross observes, 'In the incarnation God communicates himself to us and establishes a relationship with us.'[22] Through the incarnation of the Son of God, the triune God informs the basis of our collaboration with the triune God. Kenneth Shreve continues: 'After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the partnership rose to a whole new level as the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and to lead the church.'[23] The apostle Paul's letters discuss a range of foundations, relationships, and implications for the body of Christ acting in partnership with God in his mission. The Godhead's partnering with humans is part of the scope and focus of God's plan of redemption and reconciliation to him of all that was lost in the Fall.

God's redemptive plan continues 'through the presence and active working of the Holy Spirit who is the presence of the reign of God in foretaste.'[24] The triune God sets this foundation for collaboration. Kenneth Shreve explains it this way: 'God in his sovereignty and wisdom created the world and mankind to rule it…. God's desire is to see the broken relationship [with humankind because of the fall] restored and all things brought together under the headship of his Son.'[25]

Divine Collaboration

The triune God embodies collaboration through distinct yet unified roles in the *missio Dei*. This divine cooperation is foundational for understanding how to work together in mission. The Father initiates and owns mission, the Son carries it out through his sacrificial incarnation, and the Spirit empowers and supports the effort, demonstrating that mission is inherently relational and communal.

The love and unity within the Trinity extend to humanity, inviting us to participate in God's mission with the same spirit of collaboration. This partnership built on trust and mutuality reflects the character of the triune God and guides our missional efforts. Vinoth Ramachandra explains that exposure to other cultural traditions helps us understand and appreciate our own: 'My imagination is stretched as I am forced to rethink my own in the light of another way of life, and I come to cherish that which is good and challenge that which is bad or ugly.'[26] The example of the triune God's collaboration calls us to embrace unity in diversity, working together to fulfil God's redemptive plan for the world (John 17:21).

God's plan involves partnering with people created in His image, modelled on the relationships within the triune God. At a Wycliffe missiological consultation, participants reflected on this divine inspiration. They emphasized that the recipients of their ministry are not merely 'objects' of their work; instead, they are part of the community. The participants highlighted honouring all community and family members in their work. One participant spoke of the 'values of openness, faithfulness, and trust in the community to live interdependently. It's not community versus individualism but needing to see how God intended individuals to be part of the community.'

Summary

The Trinity inspires the importance of relationships and serves as a model for our collaborative efforts. By understanding the Trinitarian nature of God's mission, we can better appreciate the importance of unity, diversity, and mutual trust in our partnerships. We summarize this and relevant applications in this table:

Heading	Overview	Application
The Nature of the Triune God and Its Implications	The triune God exemplifies unity and diversity, each person playing a unique role in God's mission	Embrace and celebrate diversity in your collaborative efforts, reflecting the unity and cooperation within the Trinity
Divine Love and Community	God's community of love extends to all creation, inspiring collaborative efforts in mission	Let your collaboration be marked by love, respect, and humility, mirroring the divine love within the Trinity
The *Missio Dei* and Human Participation	The mission of God invites human collaboration, reflecting the cooperative nature of the triune God	Engage in mission work with a spirit of mutuality and unity, recognizing it as a reflection of God's collaborative nature
Building Trust and Accountability in Mission	Trust is essential for collaboration, exemplified by God's trust in human partners for his mission	Foster transparency and accountability in your partnerships to build trust and strengthen collaborative efforts
The Kingdom of God and Missional Collaboration	God's mission seeks the restoration of all relationships under the lordship of Christ	Actively participate in God's mission, working towards reconciliation and unity in all your relationships
The Scope and Focus of God's Redemptive Plan	God's redemptive plan involves partnering with humanity to restore creation and establish his kingdom	Be attentive to the Holy Spirit's guidance in your mission efforts, focusing on holistic transformation and reconciliation
Implications of Divine Collaboration	The collaborative nature of the triune God serves as a model for relational and communal mission work	Embrace unity in diversity and work interdependently with others to fulfill God's redemptive mission

Table: Summary and application of the collaboration of the Triune God

Thought Questions

1. How can you better embody the collaborative nature of the triune God in local mission efforts?
2. What challenges do you face in building trust within your collaborative relationships, and how can you address them?

Practical Applications

Collaboration in God's mission reflects the relational nature of the triune God, whose very essence exemplifies unity in diversity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit model divine love, mutuality, and cooperation, inviting us to participate in God's redemptive plan with the same spirit. By embracing trust, mutual respect, and diversity, we can collaborate effectively in God's mission.

The collaborative model provided by the Trinity emphasizes a commitment to love, serve, and work together. As we engage in mission, we are called to embody this relational approach, building trust and fostering unity across diverse cultures and contexts.

Through missional collaboration, we become active participants in God's local and global mission, bound together by a love that reflects the communal nature of the Trinity. Practical ways we can do this in missional collaborative efforts are:

- *Embrace unity in diversity:* Inspired by the triune God's example of unity and diversity, mission collaborations should reflect these values. Encourage openness to different cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds, recognizing that this diversity contributes to a richer, more dynamic mission effort. Promote an environment where each member's unique gifts and perspectives are valued, enabling the team to accomplish more together.
- *Build trust and accountability:* Trust is foundational to collaboration, as seen in the divine trust within the Trinity. Implement accountability processes that are contextually sensitive and respect all partners involved. Ensure that decisions are made collaboratively, with shared responsibilities and mutual respect, to foster a culture of trust and reliability within the collaborative effort.
- *Cultivate relational approaches:* Reflecting the relational nature of the triune God, prioritize building deep, meaningful relationships within collaborative teams. Invest time in understanding each partner's needs, goals, and resources. Approach each collaboration as an opportunity to serve and learn from others, ensuring that partnerships are built on love, respect, and a shared sense of purpose.
- *Align with God's mission*: Embrace the idea that collaboration is not just for ministry success but is a response to God's call to participate in his redemptive work. Encourage partners to continually reflect on how their work contributes to the larger mission of restoring relationships with God, each other, and creation.
- *Be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance:* Encourage collaborative teams to pray together, seeking God's guidance. The Holy Spirit's

role in the collaboration should not be underestimated, as He empowers, connects, and equips for the task. Trust in his ability to unite diverse people and resources to fulfil God's mission.

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[1] Tennent, 75.

[2] Ross 145-6.

[3] Shreve, 72.

[4] Wan, and Penman 2.

[5] Shreve, 98.

[6] John R. Franke, "Intercultural Hermeneutics and the Shape of Missional Theology," in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, ed. Michael Goheen (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 92.

[7] Franke, in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, 92.

[8] Dana L. Robert et al., "Missional Collaborations 2021: A Report from North America," in *A Hundred Years of Mission Cooperation: The Impact of the International Missionary Council 1921-2021*, ed. Risto Jukko (Geneva, CH: World Council of Churches, 2022), 406.

[9] Shreve, 117.

[10] Allen Yeh, *Polycentric Missiology: Twenty-First Century Mission from Everyone to Everywhere* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 20.

[11] Balia, and Kim, 128-9.

[12] Jonas S. Thinane, "Conceptualisation of Missio Hominum as an Expression of Imago Dei: From Missio Dei to Missio Hominum," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (2022), https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7061.

[13] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 118.

[14] Shreve, 72.

[15] Tennent, 76.

[16] Ross 147.

[17] Shreve, 32.

[18] Glasser, 226.

[19] Shreve, 325.

[20] Shreve, 92.

[21] Shreve, 92.

[22] Ross 147.

[23] Shreve, 92.

[24] Newbigin, 118.

[25] Shreve, 91.
[26] Ramachandra, 145.

Case Study: Creating and Sustaining Collaborative Ecosystems

Ruslan Maliuta, from Kyiv, Ukraine, now based in Switzerland, has served as a pastor, teacher, and NGO member working with vulnerable children. His experience spans collaboration with ministries, churches, and government. Ruslan offers these valuable insights.

Collaboration for Transformation

A while ago, a group of leaders in Ukraine started informally getting together. We all shared a passion for orphans and were committed Christians from different walks of life. Our group included a businessperson, a government leader, NGO leaders, and some pastors, and out of those informal meetings and prayers came a vision for a Ukraine without orphans. What if churches and the Christian community in Ukraine came together around a shared idea or a shared vision? What kind of impact would that have? That was the first time I had been intentionally thinking about where this could go and how we could see a real change because of intentional collaboration.

I did not have a lot of this language around collaboration, so some of the things I'm saying wouldn't be explained in that way back then. But there were some inspiring stories and examples of what happened because of that gathering, including collaboration. It encompassed a broad denominational spectrum. Not just in the evangelical community, it was Catholics and Orthodox, and most importantly, it impacted many children's lives. Of course, at that time, we had no idea what would happen in the future (i.e., the war between Russia and Ukraine). Despite all the difficulties that Ukraine has been through, I think there have been significant advances in child welfare because of collaboration. I'm not saying it was only because Christians were involved, but that was an essential factor. It laid the foundation for future collaboration in the church's response to the war.

The vision from Ukraine began to spread worldwide, the World Without Orphans movement was born, and I had the privilege to facilitate and lead for the first five years. And it was all about collaboration. The vision was straightforward: how can the church be mobilized to care for vulnerable children, and how can we do it intelligently, not through institutional care but through family-based care? This was the simple vision behind World Without Orphans, and the critical operational idea was how to identify, inspire, and support nationally led initiatives that are taking responsibility for what's happening in their countries. We, as regional and global actors, join in and support that.

As I travelled around the world meeting these people and working on this, it became apparent that this whole thing – not just the vision for children, but the vision for collaboration – resonates significantly in my heart. These days, I describe my calling through this lens, which is to help people work together around a shared vision. That vision was about children at risk for many years, and I think this has more recently broadened. I transitioned from leading World Without Orphans to working with OneHope, serving several collaborative initiatives and more in a supportive role, consulting, advising, and facilitating. I could see a growing interest in and commitment to collaboration, yet an apparent lack of understanding of what it is and how it works. I'm not saying that nobody understands it; what I mean is that we use the language a lot; we all agree that collaboration is essential and needed. But whenever we look at what's happening behind the stage, I think the examples of real 'kingdom collaboration' are still few and far between. I hope this will change; we'll see an increase in language and general commitment and the practice of the body of Christ working together to achieve transformational impact.

Language of Partnering and Collaborating

The concept and language of collaboration have trended more than that of partnering. In the world of networks and movements, I think it's less about a specific word and more about how we define it. Depending on how collaboration and partnering are defined, they can be used interchangeably but may mean very different things.

Historically, partnering has often been used more from the following perspective: this is my ministry, and I want to partner with others to achieve my vision better. I don't mean this negatively. I've been doing this too. I ran organizations with exactly this mindset, especially if you have quite a large vision, and this comes very naturally. We have this big vision and structure, and we want to help others; we want others to work with us. I think partnering has a lot of this; it's just a habit of old.

I love the word partnering, and collaboration and partnering can mean the same thing if we define them as people working together toward a shared goal. We must go beyond the language and look at definitions and what we mean. Even in the narrower sense, partnering has been used primarily in Western contexts regarding financial support. People say these are our partners, and this is my partner. It frequently means people who give money to the ministry but are not involved in any other way. There's nothing wrong with this; it's a great way to engage. However, that has been a dominant definition and understanding, creating obvious barriers to collaboration.

Kingdom Collaboration

This is a defining element. I don't have much experience in the marketplace or the business community, but I investigate it from time to time to see what happens there and what we can learn. And whenever I do it these days, I see collaboration everywhere. The same things happen to governments. Some exciting models came out of the secular world that we are using actively, like Collective Impact – we can get back to them – but I think it is now the most trending model in Christian collaboration and partnering work.

As with many other things, collaboration and working together are biblical concepts. The key is understanding God's kingdom as something with a different way of life, a different way of doing things, etc. When I say kingdom collaboration, I'm not saying something separate from our context; I'm saying something very much in our context, but it is played by different rules, probably by other motivations and cultures. I would compare it to cultures. Again, this is very simple – all cultures have negative ways about them. Ukrainian culture, American culture, Australian culture. Even Swiss culture, where I live now. It's not about,

oh, let's find the best culture, let's promote it. Let's instead figure out what kingdom culture is from God's Word and see how we can align our cultures, including all the good and bad things.

This idea of kingdom culture is helpful because it's not about competition between our cultures, whatever culture we're coming from. It's about aligning our culture and letting the Holy Spirit transform it into kingdom culture. I'm learning how God does it. It's not that we stop being who we are – like me, stop being a Ukrainian. It's redeeming the negative elements of a culture and reinforcing the positive elements, reshaping it in a way that works for the kingdom. I would say the same for collaboration. It goes deep to the heart of what drives culture, what motivates it, and what some of the best practices in a culture are. Are there positive things in the secular world? Are there positive things in business? Certainly, but we must be careful not to adopt something just because it's working somewhere else, whatever defines success. However, we need to have an increasing understanding of biblical or kingdom collaboration to align our collaboration culture and practice accordingly.

A way that was most helpful for me is to understand that both invisible and visible realities are in play simultaneously. On the visible side, we've got everything we can see, measure, and do something with. It's our local churches, denominations, organizations, projects, budgets, etc. On the invisible side, God's Word is in people's hearts, and there is genuine transformation, salvation, change, and impact. So, honestly, there is real stuff there if you think about it. That is not to say that the visible is unimportant, but, as in the Bible, we see the invisible is the key.

From this perspective, collaboration is not an option; it's a natural state of being and doing in the church. This changed my way of thinking. It's not just about us trying to figure out how we can do it – it's hard, and there are reasons for that. But from a biblical perspective, it's natural. Part of our work in collaboration is removing barriers that have been created, sometimes by us, that prevent the body of Christ from operating as it should. And I know it will never get perfect, but it changes for the better. It's not just about us saying, here is my organization or even my network or movement, how we can work with your network or movement. It's more like the body of Christ is working together, seeking to align ourselves. Suppose I have a responsibility for an organization, a movement, a budget, or a project. In what practical ways can I fill my

responsibility and align with this invisible reality that is more real than what we can see?

You've probably heard this idea: let's leave our logos and egos at the door when we partner or work together. It sounds cool, but I stopped believing this a while ago. I think it's unbiblical, and I think it's harmful. One reason is that it's unrealistic. From the perspective I've just shared, we need to bring these things in. I know that people have an easier time bringing in logos than egos. We bring our logos to determine what to do with them in collaboration. We cannot simply leave them; for example, if someone is the CEO of an organization, that person can pretend that they are not that, but only for a very short time.

The healthier question is how effective a partner an organization can be in this collaboration, how to submit our vision to a shared vision, and so on. And then there are egos; we need to be aware that we are all people with egos, requiring God's help and help from other people to work through that. We need to figure out how to share credit. How do we learn authentic humility? How do we deal with the fact that collaboration is always unfair, that there will always be someone getting credit for things they haven't done, people not getting credit for things they have done, and so on? A big part of this is just maturity emerging in the community, going from theological to what I would consider practical things, and collaboration creates an excellent space for this.

Facilitative Leadership

When it comes to collaboration, there is good and bad news. The good news is that it is about people. There are people out there who are doing this. There is nothing magical in collaboration or facilitating it. It's a function, and just like other functions, it requires a combination of skills, giftings, and experience. If you look around the landscape, the evangelical landscape, some people have been doing this for many years and have giftings in those areas and have developed some amazing skills. So that's the good news.

But here is the bad news. I think it's unrecognized, almost a lost functional role in the body of Christ. Whenever we talk about the church, we talk about pastors, and there are ways or forms for how pastors operate. There is a big difference between pastoring a small church in a rural area

and a megachurch in a vast city. But essentially, we understand many nuances of the role of a pastor and how people become pastors. Biblically, it is an essential function in the church. When it comes to pastors, teachers, and evangelists, one way to think about this is the purpose of a ligament. Ephesians 4:16 says the body of Christ is connected, fitted, and held together by the various ligaments.

The dominant view is that when we take a person who has been successful in ministry and put them in a role that should facilitate collaboration, that's how it's done. If somebody is a good pastor or a good NGO leader, they will probably succeed in collaboration. Most people don't think *why* they think that. However, there is no understanding of collaborative ability as a distinct function in the body of Christ. For example, in a simple context, very few children or young people think: I want to be a facilitative leader who helps others to work together. That's the bottom line: calling is understood in a context. We don't have context for children, young people, or even older people to realize, oh, this is something that God is calling me to. There needs to be a kind of ecosystem where people can learn about this and get some practice so that some can rise through the ranks. The bottom line is we need a lot of people serving in this way, in a myriad of ways across the body of Christ, so that from them, some will rise who will know how to do it and be committed and maturated in how to deal at the level that is needed, national, regional, and global. As you can imagine, this is not what's happening right now.

There is a growing and acute need for collaboration, with many different people and groups wanting to play the 'collaboration game'. And the playing is less than remarkable. Not because people are generally inadequate or poor leaders. However, collaboration is a different game from pastoring and leading an organization. For me, one of the greatest needs in this area is to provide ways to reach discernment regarding God's call to facilitative leadership. There must be a space to learn, get experience, and connect with others. None of this is unique in how people learn to do something, but it's unique in understanding this role and its support systems. The good news is that more jobs are coming in this area, so that part is very pragmatic. As in other fields, we need many volunteers and a few professionals, which calls for well-defined jobs. I'm advocating for jobs explicitly framed around collaboration among organizations and churches.

Generational Approaches

Fewer older adults will have developed motivational thinking and practice relating to collaboration. Having said this, I know some fantastic collaborators in their 80s. It's not about technology, age, or a particular context, but understanding it's about God's kingdom and the body of Christ. What's the shared vision here? Some people came to this because of the natural gifting; some people came through difficult experiences. Whatever the journey, they arrive there and operate like this. I hope that there are more people like that. But there is a generation difference. The world has changed, seeming more open and connected. The world has changed, with an environment much more open and connected. For younger people, collaboration is more a way of life.

There is no substitute for intentional work of forming this kind of culture, mindset, and practice of kingdom collaboration. Some things are much easier now, while others pose unique challenges, depending on the context. There are more unique ways to accomplish things than before. It is a new field from this perspective. Some people could say it's because they've been doing this for a while and seem like experts. But it's still undefined and undeveloped, especially from more difficult contexts and perspectives.

Managing Competition

Paul's partnership with the churches in Asia Minor sets an example for collaboration for kingdom purposes. But when it comes to following similar practices in ministry, our organizational boundaries and silos get in the way. It's shocking to the point of almost schizophrenic. It's hard work, but I'm talking about reality. I think there is a context that is more specific to evangelicals. There is a global context that we just touched on; it's a new reality, and younger people are getting it faster and many more new opportunities. There's an overall Christian context, and I think there is a more specific evangelical context. It was my 'aha moment'. Competition is an inherent characteristic of the evangelical movement. It dawned on me as we relocated to Switzerland and started looking for a local church to join. In the town close to where I live were three different evangelical churches. This statement tells you everything you need to know about why the evangelical movement is, was, and will be

competitive. I have a choice of three evangelical churches in a small town, and either would be fine. That's when it dawned on me – this is not going away.

We need to do a reality check. The question is different from how we can replace competition with collaboration. I don't think that we can. The question is how we can have kingdom collaboration in a very competitive context that will remain such. There always will be competition for people and resources – it's just the way evangelicals are wired. And that's okay; it's not a pessimistic approach. It's just that we need to learn how the kingdom works in that environment. We need to learn how to be collaborative. When we all know that a person can send money to this organization or that organization, it's ultimately up to that person. There's nothing we can do to influence that directly.

The good side is that it will help us strive for effective collaboration because ineffective collaborations won't survive in this competitive environment. But effective collaboration is not that we are just better collaborators than you are, so give us all the money. No. It's those that are adding value to the kingdom and have a real impact. That's a positive side that many Christians intuitively learn to make choices and gravitate to something, so I hope we can harness that in a way that will reinforce collaboration.

Collective Impact and Collaborative Ecosystems

In terms of ministry contexts, Collective Impact and collaborative ecosystem are different. We've talked about calling, the people factor, and context. I think we've come to something that is also key: the practice of collaboration. And we need models, frameworks, and collaboration paradigms – again, multiple, because there is no one way of doing this. I'll use those two as examples. Collective Impact is a model that came out of Stanford University and has gained much traction. I like the framework; we used it extensively in the World Without Orphans movement. The Word Without Orphans RoadMap is a framework and a tool built for the movement using collective impact thinking. I cannot take credit for this, but I've been part of the initial laying of the foundation.

At OneHope, we are intentional about using this model. The model is simple. It asks what is needed for effective collaboration or collective

impact, differentiating it from isolated impact. It identifies five factors: common agenda, shared measurements, mutually enforcing activities, continuous communication, and organizational backbone support. There has been a lot of evolution regarding how it works, but this model has gained traction. For example, the concept of a common agenda is significant. For any collaboration to be successful, understanding the problem and its solution must be shared. In general, one thing we need to improve in the evangelical community is the shared vision – not just a single vision statement but something genuinely mutual. No organization controls it. There is an organization for collective impact that shares best practices, but it's a framework anybody can use.

There isn't much written about the collaborative ecosystem. I mentioned this in a few circles, but I don't think there is a single author; instead, it evolved from several essential understandings. In my journey, I went from a local church and NGO organization to a national network and a global movement, working in all of them. There is a way of thinking beyond – a global movement is probably as big as it gets, not in terms of scope but of thinking. You are thinking about the world, this level of change, and so on, even if it's a small operation. But there is a better way: thinking about the collaborative ecosystem. Meaning that it's all connected, and if you want to see change, we need to be intentional about how we are working on that change and how it's affecting others, even if not everyone is directly involved.

I'm training myself to shift from thinking in the context of a specific organization or movement to the context of a collaborative ecosystem, defined by what we're discussing. There can be a global collaborative ecosystem around Bible translation or a very local one around children's ministry. Just like nature, it has multiple ecosystems. It's a way of thinking that recognizes, even when starting something new, it's connected already. Something or someone impacts us, and we impact them. We cannot make things work or produce results, but we can align ourselves with others. It's like the work of a gardener. In an ecosystem, some barriers are removed, some are created, and some things are defined, leading to lasting fruit. That's the conceptual thinking behind the ecosystem.

My practical work has focused on the global space for children and families, with intentional conversations and initiatives to figure out what a

global collaborative ecosystem for children, families, and youth can look like. Among other elements, the three components or areas of focus we can work on include a shared vision, a shared way of measuring progress, and collaborative initiatives. First, a shared vision can be adopted widely across the ecosystem, indicating that we are on the same page in wanting this to happen. But even a mutually accepted vision can be too broad and too vague. Then, second, we can bring it down to how we measure and know that we're going somewhere. In some areas, such as Bible translation, there has been more progress because of shared measurements. We can all more or less agree on how many translations exist and how many still need to be done. It makes sense for us to align ourselves.

Then, we recognize that it's all about people and relationships. Practically speaking, we acknowledge organizations, but it comes down to you and me connecting and building relationships. And then the third focus is specific collaborative initiatives, meaning that people from organizations or movements have decided to work together on a defined outcome or set defined outcomes within this larger context. In this case, they become very focused, and it's much more exclusive. An ecosystem is very inclusive, but a particular initiative is very exclusive. Ecosystems can have many things they think about and care about, and collaborative initiatives mainly focus on one thing. So that's what I mean and what's in practice in a collaborative ecosystem.

Regarding people and relationships, one significant challenge is that the design and structure for training people to carry out ministry functions is preventing collaboration. Not intentionally. Nobody sets out saying, I'm just not going to collaborate. However, anybody who joins this kind of reality has a lot of unlearning before they can engage meaningfully in the collaborative space and be fruitful.

I spend most of my time in global collaboration. It's my calling. However, the true test of collaboration is at a local level, where the rubber hits the road. How can we grow this collaborative ecosystem around something in a specific geographically defined area? When it comes to overlapping and interconnected spaces, one of the challenges here is rather than thinking linearly, step by step, we must train ourselves to think non-linearly. While that can be very confusing, it can also be very liberating. We don't have to choose whether to work in an organization or be in a vague, strange, collaborative space. That's not the question.

The question is how we can harness or leverage what we have in a way that leads to a transformational impact in the context of a collaborative ecosystem. We need to leverage existing things and develop new ways. Some new ways of interaction and new ways of doing networks and movements need to be formed. And there will be friction, too. There will be pushback and friction because this is a change at a large scale, and it will have implications across the board. It won't be easy.

Chapter 5: Collaborating in the Modern Missionary Era

For in fact the body is not a single member, but many – 1 Corinthians 12:14 (NET)

Mission always has its context, and so does partnership – Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim[1]

When viewing almost any era through the lens of an abundant timespan, the perspective is one of a rapidly changing world. Indeed, the Modern Missionary Era, from the late 1700s to the early 1900s, was also a time of significant expansion and change in global missions. This period saw the birth of major missionary movements, with figures like William Carey and organizations such as the Baptist Missionary Society pioneering new efforts to spread the gospel. Yet, as these efforts unfolded, the concept of partnering and collaborating in mission began to take shape – though not without challenges.

As missionaries journeyed across continents, they often navigated complex relationships among colonial powers, indigenous peoples, and the sending churches back home. The result was a mission landscape both rich with innovation and marred by paternalism. Despite the obstacles, this era laid the groundwork for a more collaborative approach to mission, culminating in events like the 1910 Edinburgh Conference, which explored new models of partnership and unity across denominations and cultures.

In this chapter, we explore how early mission strategies evolved, the lessons learned, and how significant figures challenged the status quo to develop a vision for partnership that still shapes mission efforts today. By understanding these foundations, we can better navigate the complexities of global mission in the present.

The Birth of the Era

The birth of the modern mission movement is widely attributed to William Carey (1761–1834) of England and his founding of the Baptist

Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathens. In 1792, Carey published *Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Heathens*, which became known as the 'charter for the modern missionary movement.'[2] In this influential work, Carey examined whether the Lord's commission of making disciples of the nations was still binding on Christians, explored the feasibility of expanding mission efforts, and discussed the responsibility of believers to engage in this task. The booklet sparked a movement in both the United States and the United Kingdom, inspiring Christians to take up the 'Great Commission' of Matthew 28:18–20.

Carey's vision led to the formation of mission societies specifically designed to achieve specific objectives: sending and equipping individuals for Christian proclamation and service overseas while rallying support from those at home.

Missionary work was a 'five-pronged advance,' with each component carrying equal importance: (1) 'The widespread preaching of the gospel' through every available method; (2) supporting this preaching by distributing Bibles in the local languages; (3) establishing churches as early as possible; (4) deeply studying the culture and beliefs of non-Christian peoples; and (5) training indigenous leaders at the earliest opportunity. This holistic approach became a blueprint for future missionary endeavours.[3]

The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, founded in the US in 1886, quickly gained momentum, joining forces with rapidly growing Bible institutes and nondenominational or interdenominational faith mission agencies. These organizations emphasized the core tenets of the Christian faith, focusing on proclaiming the gospel. Matthew 28:18–20 was their central scriptural mandate, along with Matthew 24:14 and Mark 16:15.

Among the leading figures in Western mission history were Adoniram Judson (1788–1850), who served in Burma; Robert Morrison (1782–1834) in China; Robert Moffat (1795–1883) in South Africa; David Livingstone (1813–1873), a missionary-explorer in Africa; John Geddie (1815–1872) in New Hebrides (now Vanuatu); Henry Martyn (1781–1812) in the Middle East; Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) in China; and Charlotte Diggs (Lottie) Moon (1840–1912), also in China. These missionaries, often considered the 'greats' of Western missions, were ordinary individuals

who made extraordinary sacrifices, leaving their home countries for the cause of spreading the gospel.

However, their work was often entangled in the complexities of European colonial expansion. As Anthony Brendell and Thorsten Brill point out, 'not all missionaries saw themselves as full-blooded partners of the colonial governments and supporters of their policies.'[4] While colonial powers occasionally aided missionaries in eliminating harmful local practices, their behaviour was not always exemplary. Many missionaries led wide-ranging education, health, agriculture, and poverty alleviation initiatives, bringing compassion and service alongside Western civilization.

Yet, as historians J. Herbert Kane and Andrew Porter remind us, English-speaking Westerners did not solely drive the modern missionary movement: 'Other lesser-known, non-English speaking individuals… should [also] be placed at the head of the modern missionary movement.'[5] People like Bartholomaus Ziegenbalg (1683–1719) and Heinrich Plütschau (1677–1752), both German missionaries to South India, and the German Moravians from the 1730s, also played pivotal roles. Additionally, Majority World missionaries, such as Samuel Adjayi Crowther (1807–1891) from Nigeria, who served in his home country, made significant contributions.

The Influence of Mission Theorists

During this era, several mission theorists were particularly influential in scrutinizing and refining mission practices. Among them were Henry Venn (1796–1873) of the Church Missionary Society in the UK and Rufus Anderson (1796–1880) of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the US. Though initially working independently, the two eventually 'harmonized their thinking' through correspondence.[6] Their theoretical contributions, embedded in their missionary experiences, aimed to clarify both the primary goal of missions and the most effective strategies for achieving it. Central to their thinking was the concept of the indigenous church, which became the cornerstone of their mission theory.[7]

Venn was concerned about the 'stagnation' he observed in mission churches supported by his society, warning that 'spoon-feeding' by missionaries could create what he called 'rice Christians' – people who

converted for material benefits.[8] Similarly, Anderson believed that the ultimate goal of missions should be establishing churches that were self-supporting, self-governing (or led), and self-propagating – a model later referred to as the 'three-self' church.[9] This model resonated with mission leaders focused on fostering indigenous churches that would not depend on Western mission societies and denominations.[10]

Building on the work of Venn and Anderson, John Livingston Nevius (1829–1893), an American Presbyterian missionary in China, developed what became known as the Nevius Plan. His book *Methods of Mission Work* outlined his belief in the three-self church model and added specific principles for church establishment. Nevius emphasized systematic Bible study and 'economic independence' for the national church.[11] His 'Nevius Plan' included five key points: (1) Christians should continue to live in their communities, being self-supporting and witnessing to those around them; (2) missionaries should only create programs and institutions that the national church desired and could sustain; (3) national churches should call and support their pastors; (4) church buildings should reflect native styles, funded by local church members; and (5) church leaders should receive intensive biblical and doctrinal instruction annually.[12]

Roland Allen (1868–1947), an Anglican missionary from the UK, served in China with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and was an early advocate of the Nevius Plan. Allen, who wrote *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours*, stood out for consistently emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in missions.[13] He urged missionaries to focus on itinerant church planting, trusting the Holy Spirit to develop local churches. Allen believed the Apostle Paul was 'very much wiser than modern missionaries' because Paul trusted the Holy Spirit to equip and lead local believers.[14] Allen's principles included: (1) teaching that was clear, easily understood, and able to be passed on by those who received it; (2) church organizations structured so national Christians could sustain them; (3) church finances provided and managed by local members; (4) Christians support each other in pastoral care; and (5) giving national believers the authority to exercise their spiritual gifts immediately and freely.[15]

These theorists shaped mission strategies for decades, emphasizing the importance of indigenous leadership, self-sustaining churches, and reliance on the Holy Spirit for growth and guidance in mission fields.

In reviewing this survey, it is evident that none of these missionaries – particularly the mission theorists and scholars – directly or deliberately mentioned partnering or collaborating in their mission endeavours. One challenge with their principles was the 'sharp separation between Church and mission,' which some argue lacks a solid theological foundation in the New Testament.[16] Despite their deep analysis and practical experience, these mission theorists were often overlooked in their time, even though they provided the most thoughtful critiques of the mission methods of the modern missionary movement.

A significant issue of the era was the overtly paternalistic structure within sending churches, where missionaries 'were anxious to preserve their status and control' over the churches planted in the newer receiving contexts.[17] This control hindered the possibility of genuine collaboration and partnership.

As the era progressed, many countries were pushing for independence from colonial powers. As Galeen Van Rheenen suggests, the three-self church model (self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating) reflected some of this 'nationalistic thinking'.[18] However, the focus on the three-self formula has its theological limitations. From a theological perspective, no church is truly self-sustaining: a church is not self-propagating but empowered by God to reach the lost; 'it is not self-governing but ruled by the sovereign God and Lord Jesus Christ'; it is not 'self-supporting but provided for by God'. In this sense, Christianity is more about denying self than affirming it. In this context, the concept of 'self' holds meaning primarily in a social, rather than theological, sense.[19]

Church historian Stephen Neill highlights Anglican Bishop Alfred Robert Tucker, the first bishop of Uganda (1890–1908), who 'envisaged a Church in which African and foreigner would work together in true brotherhood, and on the base of genuine equality.'[20] Unfortunately, as Neill observes, most missionaries of the time 'were blind to this possibility.'[21] Only in the following era, beginning in 1910, did such ideas gain traction. In more recent times, Allen Yeh points out that Majority World churches have added a fourth self to the original model: 'self-theologizing'. This concept emphasizes the ability of local churches to contextualize the gospel and 'solve ministry challenges within their various ministry contexts,' moving beyond dependence on external mission structures.[22]

We can summarize the main points of the mission theorists from this era as shown:

Mission theorist	Date	Principles
William Carey	1761–1834	1) Widespread preaching of the gospel by every possible method; 2) by distribution of the Bible in the languages of the country; 3) establishment of a church as early as possible; 4) study of the background and thought of the non-Christian peoples; and 5) training at the earliest possible moment of an indigenous ministry
Henry Venn	1796–1873	Self-supporting, self-governing [or led], and self-propagating churches – three self-churches
Rufus Anderson	1796–1880	Self-supporting, self-governing [or led], and self-propagating churches – three self-churches
John Livingston Nevius	1829–1893	1) Christians live in their neighbourhoods, pursue their occupations, are self-supporting, and witness to their families, co-workers, and neighbours; 2) missionaries only develop programs and institutions that the national church desires and can support; 3) national churches call out and support their own pastors; 4) national churches built in local style with money and materials given by church members; and 5) intensive biblical and doctrinal instruction provided for church leaders every year
Roland Allen	1868–1947	1) Teaching is intelligible and easily understood so that those who receive it can retain it, use it, and pass it on to others; 2) organizations are set up in a way that allows national Christians to maintain them; 3) church finances are provided and controlled by local church members; 4) Christians are taught to provide pastoral care for one another; and 5) missionaries give national believers the authority to exercise spiritual gifts freely and at once

Table: Summary of mission theorists of the modern missionary era

The Turn of the 20th Century

As we transition into the early twentieth century, particularly 1910, we continue searching for when and how the language of partnership in mission began to emerge and whether ministry and mission practices adapted accordingly. Along the way, we aim to uncover lessons that apply to our contexts today. For instance, Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim point out the significant shift in the meaning of partnership from the 19th century to the present:

> Mission always has its context, and so does partnership. The context of the 1820s, when the Church Mission Society (CMS) in London gave birth to an autonomous CMS in Australia, provided very little opportunity for these two agencies to collaborate in mission. Partnership in those days was limited to very local forms of collaboration. Today, our global context is vastly different.[23]

By studying mission history through the lens of collaboration, we gain a clearer picture of how God has worked through his people in the past and gain deeper insights into his character. This, in turn, equips us to follow him more faithfully and discern how best to engage in mission going forward. Mission history isn't merely a record of human actions, notable figures, successes, and failures; it is also a testament to God's work and a revelation of who he is, offering valuable guidance to the current and future generations.

Setting the Context

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, partnering in mission was challenging due to geographical distances and limited communication methods. International travel was confined to long ocean voyages by ship or transcontinental journeys by train or road, while communication was often slow and unreliable. These obstacles made it difficult to build and sustain ministry relationships. Eleanor Jackson observes, 'In keeping with the free enterprise of the age, missionary societies sprang up wherever there was sufficient enthusiasm, launching their efforts with little thought of collaboration with others.'[24] These societies often approached their mission in a competitive spirit, especially in rivalry with Catholic missions, and sometimes even with one another. During this period, most mission efforts were driven by nations in North America and Europe, where 82% of the world's Christians resided at the turn of the twentieth century.[25]

Large Christian mission conferences, such as in Liverpool (1860), London (1878 and 1888), and New York (1900), promoted cooperation among Protestant missionary societies.[26] However, despite these efforts, the track record for collaboration among mission agencies needed improvement. Instead, territorialism and denominational rivalry often characterized relationships, leading to fragmentation rather than unity.

New mission agencies frequently emerged with little or no connection to existing ones, contributing to the fractured landscape of global mission.

Foreign mission-sending agencies rose dramatically, from 200 in 1800 to 600 by 1900, and a staggering 4,000 by 2000. This increase was not primarily due to new collaborative efforts but rather the result of fragmented ministry relationships. It seemed more manageable and practical to create new agencies than to work together with existing ones.[27]

Mission during this era took various forms. Church historian Andrew Walls identifies two parallel approaches to Christian expansion between the 1800s and early 1900s. The first was the 'crusading mode,' where some missionaries aligned with colonial governments, likening God's mission to military conquest and territorial expansion. Christianity was considered superior, and the goal was to 'Christianize' entire people groups, with missionaries sometimes conquering, coercing, and destroying 'in the name of Christianity.'[28] This 'colonial mission' raised many complex questions and doubts, as it resembled earlier Spanish and Dutch mission efforts that shaped the identities and actions of those on the receiving end.[29] Western education, often introduced in English or the local vernacular, became essential for this expansion.

The second approach, the 'missionary mode,' was characterized by missionaries who genuinely sought to proclaim the gospel and disciple new followers in their faith with sincerity and truth.[30]

Andrew Kirk offers another perspective, comparing the missionary initiative to a business enterprise. In this view, Christianity was 'sold' persuasively, packaged in the form of European civilization, reflecting how missions intertwined with the spread of Western culture.[31]

Edinburgh World Missionary Conference

The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910, a ten-day event beginning on June 14, marked a turning point in the concept of partnership in mission. Before the conference, delegates received eight comprehensive Commission Reports to study, each around 250 pages, which outlined current and future trends in the missionary movement.[32] The gathering brought together 1,200 missionaries and mission leaders who 'came not merely as individual enthusiasts for the mission, intent on propagating and recruiting for its cause'. [33] They were representatives of more than 170

missionary societies and church mission boards. However, despite the broad representation of mission organizations, Western churches, the newer churches established in the Majority World, were underrepresented. While the delegation lacked significant geographical diversity, the conference still stood as a landmark in global missionary cooperation, marking the most inclusive event of its kind up to that point.

Two important themes emerged from the conference that shaped the language of partnership in mission. First, the relationship between churches, particularly between the 'younger churches' – a term for the Protestant churches planted by missions in Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific – and the Western churches that had founded them. Second, the development of ecumenism as a framework for fostering unity and collaboration between different denominations. These threads laid the groundwork for a new understanding of mission partnerships that would influence future efforts in global mission. Let's look at these two themes more closely.

Relationship between Churches

At the 1910 World Missionary Conference, an air of optimism permeated the discussions as participants eagerly envisioned a future of worldwide evangelization. The Great Commission was viewed as an integral principle of church life and faith, with flexibility in how different churches and missions interpreted and implemented it. Western missions, now a powerful force, dominated the conference, reflecting what has been described as the 'all-time high-water mark in Western missionary enthusiasm' – the peak of an optimistic, pragmatic approach to mission.[34]

This zeal was fuelled by the political and theological ideals of 'expansion and extension,' rooted in the 19th-century concept of progress, particularly prominent in the American context.[35] Timothy Yates notes that, leading up to the conference, the idea of mission as expansion was dominant, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world.[36] This sentiment was understandable, given that 'Christianity appeared to be ascending, moving from triumph to triumph.'[37]

The slogan 'the evangelization of the world in our generation' captured this confident moment after a century of significant Christian growth, with roughly 34% of the world's population identifying as Christian. Conference leaders, such as John R. Mott, believed that all available

Christian resources would soon be mobilized to support this global advance, and those gathered in Edinburgh were tasked with initiating a comprehensive plan to 'reach' the world in the foreseeable future.[38]

The language of world dominion echoed through the conference halls, with military metaphors like 'crusade,' 'conquest,' and 'advance' frequently used. Robert E. Speer, for example, promoted the idea of mission as 'conquest.'[39] At the close of the conference, Mott confidently declared that a focused effort towards global mission had begun. However, his intention was not necessarily triumphalist, as he was known for his ecumenical spirit and cross-cultural relationships.

Underlying the optimism was a significant factor influencing mission partnerships: the fear of Islam's advance, especially in East and Central Africa, where Christianity and Islam were seen as competing 'for the souls of animists'.[40]

Another critical dimension of partnership emerged with the dawn of post-colonial mission, which reshaped relationships between mission societies and the younger, non-Western churches. Yet, the 'theology of partnership' remained fragile at the conference due to Western missions' reluctance to fully accept these younger churches as equals. This unequal dynamic persisted, even as the younger churches sought unity within their contexts, while the lack of noticeable unity among Western churches was a source of concern.[41]

One of the few representatives from the Majority World at the conference was Samuel Azariah (1874–1945), a young Anglican minister from Dornakal, South India. Invited through his close friendships with conference leaders Sherwood Eddy and John R. Mott, Azariah was one of only 17 non-Western participants. He was asked to address 'The Problem of Co-operation between Foreign and Native Workers.' Drawing from Ephesians 3:18–19 and 1 Corinthians 13, Azariah courageously confronted 'the condescending attitude of Western missionaries toward non-Western Christians.'[42] In his now-famous remark, he said, 'Too often you promise us thrones in heaven, but will not offer us chairs in your drawing rooms,' unmistakably calling for an equal partnership that went beyond paternalism. [43]

Azariah concluded with a powerful vision of true collaboration: He envisioned the full glory of Christ being fully realized not by any one group alone but by all people – whether English, American, Japanese,

Chinese, or Indian – working, worshipping, and learning together. He emphasized that only through shared spiritual friendships could believers from different cultures understand the love of Christ and be filled with the fullness of God. This collaborative effort, he argued, could only be possible from spiritual friendships between the two races. Azariah's plea culminated in a heartfelt request:

> Through the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. Give us FRIENDS![44]

Brian Stanley, quoting Temple Gairdner, a conference biographer, described the moment as one of 'electric silence,' broken by a 'subterraneous rumbling of dissent' and some applause when Azariah acknowledged that the condescension he referenced was not universal.[45] Azariah's speech marked a pivotal moment, challenging the Western-centric approach to mission and highlighting the need for genuine, equal partnership in the global mission movement.

Samuel Azariah's words continue to resonate, offering a powerful biblical and practical vision for partnering in mission. Dana Robert highlights how the traditional reading of Azariah's famous plea has emphasized its judgmental and prophetic tone, particularly in confronting the racism and paternalism that were major themes in 20th-century Protestant missions.[46] Azariah's critique was unmistakable when he said, 'Missionaries, except for a few of the very best, seem... to fail very largely in getting rid of an air of patronage and condescension, and in establishing a genuinely brotherly and happy relation as between equals with their Indian flocks.'[47]

Robert offers another interpretation of Azariah's speech, focusing on its optimism and hope for change. Azariah believed in the power of cross-cultural friendship, as he had experienced its transformative potential firsthand. While the 20th-century mission movement is often judged harshly for failing to live up to its ideals, Robert argues that unless Azariah's perspective is looked on as 'half full' rather than 'half empty,' we cannot fully understand how Christianity successfully spread across cultures during that era.[48]

Azariah's call for friendship in mission became one of the conference's 'most memorable statements'.[49] Azariah was committed to cross-cultural

friendship because he had personally observed its power. His plea was not for leadership, more workers, or increased funding, but friendship – a desire beyond the transactional nature of partnership at the time. It was a plea for friendship that would eventually manifest in true collaboration.

In his second address at the conference, Azariah further emphasized the need for the church to model a visible demonstration of God's kingdom in his divided Indian society, fractured by caste and systemic injustice. He urged the church to show how it could be united 'across the dividing lines of caste, ethnicity, culture, and empire' through a unique kind of friendship, rooted in the 'exceeding riches of the glory of Christ.'[50]

Robert notes that the powerful philosophy of 'world friendship' emerged from the 1910 conference.[51] However, evidence of cross-cultural friendships between indigenous Christians and Westerners was needed for this philosophy to be credible. Unfortunately, many such examples, if documented, have remained buried in mission archives. If recovered, these stories could provide valuable inspiration for today's mission movements.

Racism and missionary paternalism remain significant barriers to genuine Christian fellowship. To overcome these challenges requires 'all races working together' to reflect the full glory of Christ, as 'only cross-racial friendships... reveal the image of the Lord.'[52] With economic disparities and social inequalities still present in the global church, Azariah's plea remains as relevant today as it was over a century ago. His identification of failures in human relationships as the most fundamental of all missionary shortcomings struck a 'raw nerve' in Western Christianity.[53]

Robert concludes that today's church continues to struggle with 'friendships strained by postcolonialism, dependency, paternalism, and poverty.'[54] Yet, Allen Yeh offers a hopeful outlook, reflecting on the changes in mission since 1910: 'Gone are the days of Western paternalism; now the new way of mission is partnership.'[55] Azariah's vision of friendship – built on mutual respect and collaboration – remains essential to the future of global mission work.

Ecumenism as a Structure for Partnering and Unity

The second central theme of partnership from the Edinburgh Conference was ecumenism – the deliberate effort by Christians from different denominations to work together, foster closer relationships among their

churches, and promote Christian unity. The conference played a pivotal role in strengthening the ecumenical impulse, laying a foundation of 'cooperation and unity' that fuelled the ecumenical mission movement in the years that followed.[56] While the Edinburgh Conference was not truly ecumenical due to the absence of Roman Catholic and Orthodox representatives, Eleanor Jackson notes, 'from the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church became an influential collaborator in ecumenical missiological [efforts].'[57]

The word 'ecumenical' originates from the New Testament Greek *oikoumené*, which referred to either 'the whole world' or 'the Roman Empire'.[58] By the fourth century, the term was used to describe the entire church and its councils, which were 'recognized as authoritative by the undivided church.'[59] Often grounding the ecumenical movement in modern times is Jesus' prayer from John 17, 'where he prayed that all who believed in him would be one so that the world might believe.'[60]

One significant outcome of the Edinburgh Conference was the forming of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921, aimed at promoting international missionary cooperation. The IMC significantly influenced the founding of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948. It is worth noting how Evangelical-ecumenical dialogue has been marked by tension as evangelicals grapple with a mix of hope and hesitation. While many value the potential for unity, theological differences have created concerns, leaving some uneasy about fully embracing ecumenism.[61]

Throughout the Edinburgh Conference, military language and metaphors, such as 'conquest,' 'world occupation,' 'spiritual guerrilla warfare,' and 'the army of God,' were commonly used by its organizers. In his closing address, John R. Mott even referred to the idea of world conquest by mission agencies, which led to the congress' perspective on partnering as 'going together to conquer the world for God's kingdom.'[62] Samuel Cueva raises whether this was an expansive, imperialistic missiology aimed at 'the conquest of new territories for colonial empires.'[63] Despite such concerns, the vision of ecumenism was evident, as the congress sought to strengthen the church's unity with the ultimate goal of 'extending and expanding God's kingdom.'[64]

Thought Questions

1. How can you integrate lessons from mission history to build genuine, equitable partnerships in a modern, post-colonial mission context?
2. What steps can churches and mission agencies take to avoid the paternalistic attitudes of the past and instead foster relationships based on mutual respect and shared leadership?

Practical Applications

The Modern Missionary Era laid the foundation for understanding and practising collaboration in mission today. From the pioneering efforts of William Carey to the 1910 World Missionary Conference, mission strategies evolved through trial, theological reflection, and practical experience. Mission theorists like Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson, John Livingston Nevius, and Roland Allen introduced key concepts, such as the three-self-church model, which emphasized indigenous leadership and self-sustaining churches. Despite these advances, challenges like paternalism, colonial entanglements, and the reluctance of Western churches to treat non-Western churches as equals persisted.

The 1910 Edinburgh Conference marked a significant shift in mission collaboration, moving from transactional partnerships to deeper, more mutual relationships. Samuel Azariah's powerful call for true friendship rather than mere cooperation emphasized the need for respect, shared leadership, and genuine cross-cultural collaboration. His words resonate today, especially in a post-colonial mission context, where relationships should be rooted in mutual understanding rather than dominance.

Ecumenism also emerged as a central theme, highlighting the importance of unity across denominational lines. While the early ecumenical efforts lacked broad inclusivity, they set the stage for a more interconnected global church. This led to the creation of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches, signalling a recognition that mission cannot succeed in isolation but requires cooperative efforts from diverse Christian communities working together.

This historical backdrop provides valuable lessons for modern collaboration in God's mission. The past offers principles that we can learn from and apply to collaborative missional efforts in these ways:

- *Nurture mutual respect and friendship:* Samuel Azariah's plea for true partnership, emphasizing friendship over transactional relationships, is foundational in modern missional collaboration. Genuine relationships, built on trust and respect, create the foundation for effective and lasting partnerships. This involves listening to and learning from each other and embracing collaboration as a shared learning journey.
- *Empower local leaders:* Drawing from the insights of mission theorists such as William Carey, Henry Venn, and Rufus Anderson, prioritize the empowerment of local leaders in collaborative efforts. Focus on their training, support their development, and allow them to lead within their cultural contexts.
- *Practice inclusive collaboration:* The 1910 Edinburgh Conference showed the strength of cooperation between different denominations and mission agencies. Embrace collaboration by acknowledging that working together across boundaries reflects God's kingdom on earth.
- *Avoid colonial mindsets:* Colonial influences marred collaboration in the modern missionary era, creating a sense of superiority and control. Ensure that all partners, regardless of geographical location and culture, are treated equally with unique contributions. True collaboration reflects humility, where each partner's role is equally valued.
- *Focus on long-term relationships:* As mission history has shown, partnerships should not be seen as temporary solutions for short-term objectives. Instead, focus on building long-term relationships that foster ongoing growth, mutual support, and accountability.

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Chapter 6: A History of Collaboration in Bible Translation[1]

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish – John 1:14 (MSG)

… the best partnerships [arise from] rich relationships based on shared passion, mutual goals, and much time spent together – Stephen Downey[2]

In the New Testament, Matthew records Jesus's words: 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come' (24:14, NET). This chapter focuses on how these words influence participation in recent history and current events in God's mission, particularly Bible translation for the world's people groups.

William Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators (1942) and SIL (1934), was driven by his 'burden of getting the Word of God to every tribe in its own tongue and a real concern of hastening the return of our Lord and the coming of that Great Day when we can look out on the throne of the redeemed from every tribe and nation and language, singing praises to God.'[3] Townsend's era was marked by an evangelical fervour that saw Christians as responsible for completing the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20), believing they played a crucial role in fulfilling God's will.

Townsend's work followed in the footsteps of the modern missionary movement, which began with William Carey (1761–1834). Over the last 200 years, significant progress in Bible translation has been made, with portions of Scripture available in over 3,650 languages. Missiologist Terry Muck emphasizes that to fulfil the mission of reaching 'all tribes and peoples and languages' (Rev 7:9), 'finding ways to cooperate with all forms of the global church is crucial.'[4] This underscores the importance of collaboration in Bible translation efforts.

Translating God's Word into people's mother tongues has historically fuelled church growth. For example, the Protestant Reformation emphasized Scripture in local languages, coinciding with significant church expansion. The Reformers, shaped by the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, understood the authority of Scripture as essential to the Christian faith. As church historian Andrew Walls notes, 'Christian faith rests on a divine act of translation: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).'[5]

By the late twentieth century, the Bible translation landscape began to shift. Previously, Western missionaries were sent abroad to learn indigenous languages and translate the Bible. But starting in the mid-1970s, national citizens were increasingly trained to become Bible translators, or at least to draft initial translations. By 1985, this shift had led to the formation of eleven national Bible translation organizations affiliated with Wycliffe International and SIL International.[6]

The Bible translation movement is known to be comprised of people with 'a passion for God's Word and a desire to see vernacular Scripture used for evangelism, church planting, spiritual growth, and transformation'.[7] Collaboration is now a defining feature of Bible translation in the 21st century, characterized by complex, relational ecosystems. Partnerships between local and national churches, Bible translation organizations, media producers, mission agencies, seminaries, and funding organizations all work together to serve minority linguistic communities. These collaborations are built on each partner contributing their strengths while honouring God through humility and mutual respect.

Bible Agencies Collaborating

The Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) emerged from the 1989 Lausanne Congress in Manila, which focused on the theme 'Proclaim Christ until He Comes: Calling the Whole Church to Take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World.' The congress addressed key mission issues of the late twentieth century, and over 300 global mission partnerships were formed.[8]

FOBAI was one of these partnerships, creating a space for Bible agencies to collaborate on Bible ministry. Through FOBAI, individual agencies built stronger relationships, leading to new Bible translation

collaborations. The global church has increasingly taken a leadership role, assuming direct responsibility and ownership of translation programs involving multiple partnerships.

Interestingly, the Manila Congress agenda did not initially include Bible translation and distribution. However, Fergus MacDonald, then General Secretary of the Scottish Bible Society, questioned this omission and led a workshop on the topic, joined by John Bendor-Samuel, Executive Vice President of SIL International and WBTI. Emphasizing partnership, MacDonald and Bendor-Samuel invited leaders from a wide range of Bible agencies 'to gather in the same room, share their perspectives, and listen to each other.'[9] This marked a turning point, as Bible translation had often been characterized by competition among agencies. The Manila gathering sparked a desire for ongoing discussions.

In 1990, representatives from over a dozen Bible agencies met at Wycliffe and SIL's UK centre in Horsleys Green, England, to establish an annual forum for greater cooperation and to reduce competitiveness. FOBAI was born with MacDonald and Bendor-Samuel as its first co-chairs. In 2009, Doug Birdsall, then head of the Lausanne Movement, referred to the formation of FOBAI as an example of the 'spirit of cooperation and communication – the Spirit of Lausanne', and this meant the Movement needed to 'engage with the challenges of Scripture translation.'[10] A reallocation of resources, realignment of organizations, and translation by local speakers rather than outsiders was needed.

Since 1990, FOBAI has met annually (except in 2020 due to COVID-19) and grown from a dozen agencies to 42 members across three categories: full members, associate members, and collaborating agencies. FOBAI's vision is 'to work together to maximize the worldwide access and impact of God's Word.'[11] This collaborative spirit is built on respect, open communication, and a focus on four key areas: (1) increasing Scripture availability through translation; (2) encouraging Scripture engagement; (3) advocating for the relevance and credibility of Scripture; and (4) innovating communication methods to make Scripture more meaningful.

FOBAI's work is organized into Development Groups focused on Translation, Scripture Engagement, Media, and the Deaf. These groups contribute expertise, avoid duplication, monitor trends, and promote innovative practices. Collaboration within FOBAI requires a significant

investment of time and resources, but the willingness to work together rather than compete has yielded powerful results.

A Bold Vision

The Lausanne Movement's Manila Congress and the creation of FOBAI sparked a wave of missional collaboration, a development embraced by the Wycliffe Global Alliance (WGA) and its predecessor, Wycliffe Bible Translators International (WBTI). Within WBTI, a vision began to take shape for 'embracing and facilitating a worldwide Bible translation movement' and imagining what the Majority World church would look like when fully engaged in this mission.[12] In 1999, a bold decision was made to address this growing vision.

At a joint meeting of leaders from WBTI and SIL International, there was a growing concern about the slow progress of Bible translation. At the current pace, it could take another 100–150 years to provide some Scripture in the heart language of the remaining 3,000 language groups. Dissatisfied with this timeline, the leaders adopted Vision 2025. John Watters, then Executive Director of WBTI and SIL International, described Vision 2025 as an 'audacious intermediate goal' that asked, 'What would we need to do so that by 2025, a Bible, New Testament, or portions would be available in every viable language, or at least have a program in progress?'[13]

Vision 2025 emphasized 'the pressing need for all peoples to have access to the Word of God in a language that speaks to their hearts.' It acknowledged WBTI and SIL's historic values and their trust in God to accomplish what seemed impossible. The goal was clear: by 2025, a Bible translation project would be underway for every people group in need. However, the leaders recognized this couldn't be achieved by simply 'working harder' or maintaining the status quo. A change in both attitude and approach was essential, requiring capacity building for sustainable translation programs, prioritizing partnerships, developing creative strategies for each context, and seeking God's guidance in new directions.[14]

WBTI understood that achieving Vision 2025 and meeting current and future needs would require joining cooperatively with others, so the WBTI Board instructed leadership to foster partnerships with churches in the

Majority World. Partnership became one of the five core themes of Vision 2025, alongside (1) Urgency, reflecting God's deep love for humanity and desire for all peoples to know Him; (2) Capacity building, ensuring trained personnel, sufficient funding, and networks to support translation efforts; (3) Creative strategies, adopting new attitudes and innovative methods to increase effectiveness; (4) Sustainability, ensuring that what has been started can be sustained; and (5) Partnership, recognizing that collaborating with others, rather than working alone, is key to success.

WBTI embraced Vision 2025 as a call to 'freedom and creativity [with] joy, wonder, and anticipation,' encouraging risk-taking and experimenting with what God might accomplish through expanding partnerships with Bible agencies, missions, and the global church.[15] Sixteen years after adopting Vision 2025, Wycliffe Global Alliance, as WBTI became known in 2011, sought to discern the times during its 2016 Global Gathering. Most delegates were newer leaders who had not been involved in the original adoption of Vision 2025. However, discussions during the gathering clarified that a 'new era for the Bible translation movement' had emerged, characterized by 'working differently, new partnerships, greater flexibility, and adaptability in response to what God was doing around the world.'[16]

At the Global Gathering, Vision 2025 was revisited and updated. One topic, 'kingdom-based partnerships… in the context of global realities,' highlighted the need for balanced collaboration regarding time, authority, ownership, and competencies, emphasizing both giving and receiving. There was a recognition that Bible translation organizations needed to 'acknowledge past wrongs, seek forgiveness, and restore relationships through authentic reconciliation.' Participants were encouraged to be humble, listen more to God and each other, speak less, and learn together. They were also challenged to give up personal rights, embrace 'chaos', and improve coordination and communication at both the global and local levels. Building trusting, interdependent relationships at all levels was seen as essential.[17]

To strengthen the Wycliffe Global Alliance and its role in Vision 2025, the governing board introduced a Covenant/Statement of Commitment in 2016. This agreement, aimed at organizations, including church denominations, wishing to join the Alliance, set clear expectations. Organizations were to work continually and conscientiously at 'being

trusted and healthy partners.'[18] The agreement called for attitudes and practices that promote unity and peace (shalom), characterized by mutual respect, integrity, humility, and generosity. It emphasized the importance of honouring the needs of all involved parties, fostering a 'collaborative mindset,' and seeking outcomes beneficial to everyone.[19]

Collaboration expert Gilbert Steil highlights that 'a clear vision of the future is the best way to sort out what's important from what doesn't matter.' [20] The boldness of Vision 2025 exemplifies this principle, while the *Covenant/Statement of Commitment* fosters interdependent collaboration.

The Francophone Initiative

Collaborative efforts in Bible translation organizations can be complex. For example, in Francophone Africa, Bible translation agencies encountered uncertainty regarding the local churches' acceptance of their work. The cultural dynamics in this region are like an iceberg: only about ten percent is visible, while the larger, more significant part lies beneath the surface. As Richard and Evelyn Hibbert point out, 'Each culture has a more superficial, easily visible level and a deeper level that is harder to see.'[21]

On the surface, the preference for using French in worship and church services in Francophone Africa is evident – much like the visible part of an iceberg. This includes language, literature, and readily observed customs. However, beneath the surface lie deeper cultural and linguistic dynamics, such as the influence of French in social, theological, and ecclesial settings. The challenge is compounded by the underappreciation of local languages and their role in meeting the spiritual needs of their speakers.

Addressing these underlying issues requires time, complexity, and collaboration. This need for exploration began in 2003 when leaders from SIL and Wycliffe Bible Translators International (WBTI, now Wycliffe Global Alliance) met in Africa. Their discussions highlighted the necessity of involving churches in the Global South in Bible translation. A pivotal moment came at the 2004 Brackenhurst conference in Kenya, where delegates prayed for Francophone Africa's challenges. By 2006, SIL appointed a part-time coordinator to focus on this growing concern, and

representatives from WBTI, SIL, and Groupes Bibliques Universitaires d'Afrique Francophone (GBUAF) gathered in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to discuss these issues. They identified three major challenges: (1) the lack of mission initiatives in local churches, (2) the decline of foreign missionaries, and (3) the churches' disconnection from Bible translation efforts.

This meeting gave rise to the 'Francophone Initiative,' a collaborative platform, uniting organizations such as the United Bible Society (UBS), GBUAF, Council of Theological Institutions of Francophone Africa (CITAF), WBTI, and SIL Francophone Area. In 2007, Michel Kenmogne (WBTI) became the part-time coordinator of this inter-agency committee. The Initiative aimed to (1) promote a Bible translation movement in Francophone Africa, (2) make Bible translation a priority for the church, and (3) mobilize prayer for the region.

The Initiative's monitoring committee met twice annually to oversee its activities, such as consulting member organizations, identifying Bible translation challenges, and developing strategies. Every four years, they sponsored consultations on local ownership of the biblical message, the need for curriculum and training materials, and the benefits of local church involvement in Bible translation. These consultations invited representatives from Bible translation organizations, theologians, and church leaders.

The first consultation took place in 2007 in Abomey-Calavi, Benin, on the theme 'The Churches and the Use of Local Languages in Francophone Africa.' One result was the development of a Bible translation curriculum, which CITAF adopted for theological training programs. Subsequent consultations were held in 2011, 2015, and 2019.

In 2009 (and updated in 2015), Michel Kenmogne and Lynell Zogbo published *La Traduction de la Bible et Église: Enjeux et défis pour l'Afrique francophone* (Bible Translation and the Church: Issues and Challenges for Francophone Africa), which became the key textbook for the Initiative. Other important texts followed, including *Église et utilisation des langues nationales en Afrique francophone* (The Church and the Use of National Languages in Francophone Africa) and *Le Christianisme et les réalités culturelles Africaines* (Christianity and African Cultural Realities). The Initiative has organized training seminars for theological faculty across Francophone Africa, from Mutengene in

2009 to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire in 2024. By 2010, the Bible translation course was offered in 24 theological institutions, a number which has now grown to nearly 70.

Although Wycliffe Canada, UK, and Netherlands provided some financial support, funding limitations meant that parts of Francophone Africa were still underserved. Nevertheless, the Initiative made a significant impact, demonstrating the power of collaboration. Theological trainers have noted how translating the Bible into local languages deepens people's understanding of the Scriptures, as they can read and hear the message in their mother tongue. Theologians found the Initiative's platform valuable for exploring the contextualization of the gospel in Africa.

In 2021, an independent consultant reviewed the Initiative and found it successful in achieving its objectives. One recommendation from the review was to 'strengthen advocacy for prioritizing Bible translation in church agendas, especially by encouraging each church to create a Bible translation department.'[22] This underscores the Francophone Initiative's original purpose: to bring together Bible translation and theological training institutions in Francophone Africa to envision effective Bible translation and meaningful evangelism, discipleship, and theological formation. Reflecting on his decade of involvement, Michel Kenmogne emphasized that for the African church to engage fully, it must recognize its responsibility and build vision and capacity through seminaries and theological institutions.[23]

The Bible Translation Philosophy

Collaboration in Bible translation thrives through the engagement of many partners, as demonstrated by the development of Wycliffe Global Alliance's Bible Translation Philosophy, first released in 2013 and updated in 2019. This Philosophy guides translation programs by focusing on (1) the role of Bible translation in the mission of God, (2) its contribution to holistic transformation within and beyond language communities, and (3) principles that help organizations strategically respond to varied contexts.

The need for such a statement arose when organizations within the Alliance faced challenges defining their identity and collaborating with

others. They noted a lack of unified theological and missiological foundations for Bible translation and a missing description of its transformational impact. Meanwhile, the global growth of the church increased opportunities for participation in Bible translation efforts.

Led by Michel Kenmogne, a core team of nine members from various Bible translation organizations drafted the Philosophy. Grounded in the *missio Dei*, they described Bible translation as 'a reflection of incarnation,' allowing God's Word to dwell within specific language communities.[24] They also emphasized the centrality of the church, positioning Bible agencies as a functional part of the church and highlighting the church's role in developing translation consultants. The draft was refined in a 2013 consultation in Ruiru, Kenya, attended by 29 representatives from various translation agencies.

The resulting Bible Translation Philosophy is rooted in the *missio Dei*, reflecting the sacrificial vulnerability of the triune God. It emphasizes God's desire for holistic transformation in language communities, aligning Bible translation with God's will through prayer and increasing church leadership in planning and implementation. The Philosophy encourages interdependent relationships that reflect God's character and foster transformation. As churches mature, their obedience and vulnerability facilitate the Spirit's work, affirming languages, cultures, and identities.

Since its release, the Philosophy has prompted a shift in mindset among Bible translation agencies. Consultants now encourage agencies to focus on transformational outcomes rather than transactional project management. This approach exemplifies the power of sacrifice, where individuals and smaller groups put aside narrow interests for the greater good. The ultimate beneficiaries are the language communities central to Vision 2025.

The Shift from Western-Centric Partnering

The shift from Western-centric missions to global church partnerships has been gradual, influenced by key historical moments. At the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference, Western missions struggled to view emerging Majority World churches 'as brothers and sisters in Christ', reflecting a 'lack of equality' in their relationships and policies.[25] By the

1974 Lausanne Congress, a shift became more evident as the dominant role of Western missions was 'fast disappearing,' and God was raising up new resources for world evangelization from the younger churches.[26] However, David Bosch observed that Western churches had fostered a 'benevolent paternalism' that left these churches dependent on Western funding.[27] This imbalance persisted for decades, with the 2010 Lausanne Cape Town Congress challenging the idea that financial power should equate to decision-making authority in mission. Instead, mutuality and 'interdependence in giving and receiving' were emphasized as the foundation of true partnerships marked by respect and dignity.[28]

In the Bible translation movement, this shift toward global partnerships began with the formation of National Bible Translation Organizations in the late 1970s. By 2000, Wycliffe Bible Translators International (WBTI) had formally partnered with Cooperación Misionera Iberoamericana (COMIBAM) to encourage Bible translation in Latin America. In 2001, WBTI invited loosely affiliated organizations to become formal partners, and 12 organizations accepted. By 2011, WBTI had grown to include 45 member organizations and over 50 partner organizations, prompting a rebranding as the Wycliffe Global Alliance. By 2015, the Alliance's *Covenant/Statement of Commitment* officially equalized the status of all member and partner organizations. A significant milestone had been reached: 75% of the Alliance's organizations were now from the Majority World, compared to the entirely Western makeup of 1975.

Despite this progress, financial disparity remains a challenge. Bible translation is expensive, requiring a lengthy timeline, advanced technology, and multiple partnerships between local churches, translation agencies, and funders. The challenge is that wealthier Western partners often hold more financial resources, making it difficult to achieve true equality. Majority World partners have expressed the need for systems that honour 'the dignity and community of all participants,' along with accountability processes that are sensitive to cultural contexts and foster trust among mission partners.[29]

Global bodies like the Lausanne Movement, World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission, and World Council of Churches have highlighted the importance of collaboration in the *missio Dei*, in which they have included the Bible translation movement through the Forum of Bible Agencies International.

At the heart of this collaborative ethos is the growing role of the church. Adriana Tunliu and Larry Jones note that local churches are increasingly taking leadership in overseeing the publication of faithful Scripture translations. This includes building capacity for Bible translation through initiatives such as internships, workshops, and training of local staff to carry out the necessary tasks. A key development has been the ability of Majority World churches to support and execute translation projects directly.[30] As this shift occurs, Bible translation organizations move from owning the work to partnering with the church and the local community for whom the Bible is being translated.

Thought Questions

1. How can Bible translation organizations ensure their collaborations reflect true equality and interdependence, especially when financial or resource imbalances exist between Western and Majority World partners?
2. What role does the theological concept of missio Dei (God's mission) play in shaping attitudes toward partnership and collaboration in global Bible translation efforts? How might this understanding influence practical approaches to partnership?

Practical Applications

The Bible translation collaboration history provides examples of what Stephen Downey describes as 'the best partnerships,' built on 'rich relationships based on shared passion, mutual goals, and much time spent together.'[31] These partnerships enable all peoples to encounter Christ through translating his Word into their heart languages. This collaborative spirit aligns with the insight of missiologist Kenneth Ross, who notes that the call to mission in the 21st century 'breaks down barriers and creates unity.'[32]

The future of mission, including Bible translation, hinges on the ability to respond to this call, fostering partnerships that transcend cultural and linguistic divides. With this foundation, here are practical steps to guide collaborative efforts in Bible translation:

- *Embrace shared vision:* As seen in the work of William Cameron Townsend and the formation of Wycliffe Bible Translators,

effective collaboration in Bible translation stems from a shared passion for God's Word and a clear, compelling vision. Establish a common vision among all partners, whether local churches, Bible agencies, or mission organizations, focusing on reaching every language group with the Scriptures. This vision should inspire all stakeholders and encourage active, long-term participation.

- *Focus on mutual respect and trust:* The collaborative efforts seen in the creation of FOBAI emphasize the importance of building relationships based on mutual respect and trust. Effective Bible translation requires not only technical expertise but also relational investment. Take time to build trust through open communication, humility, and a willingness to learn from one another. Foster a partnership dynamic where all parties feel valued and equipped to contribute their strengths.
- *Prioritize local involvement and ownership:* The shift in Bible translation efforts from Western missionaries to training and encouraging local translators in the 1970s has been key to sustainable collaboration. Ensure that local leaders and communities are involved in the translation process from the outset. Equipping them with the skills and resources to lead translation efforts increases the likelihood of culturally relevant and long-lasting translations. Equip local churches to take ownership of the process, ensuring that translations reflect their linguistic and spiritual needs.
- *Build capacity through training and development:* As highlighted in the Francophone Initiative, collaboration must include ongoing training programs, theological education, and the development of local experts in translation. Invest in training initiatives that equip translators, church leaders, and community members with the skills to sustain Bible translation and engage with Scripture meaningfully.
- *Adapt and innovate for contextual relevance:* Vision 2025 highlighted the need for creative strategies to expedite translation efforts. Be willing to adapt methods and approaches to fit the specific cultural, linguistic, and social contexts. This may involve integrating new technologies, creating new partnerships and finding innovative ways to engage with local communities.

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Chapter 7: Ecumenical Collaboration

Try your best to let God's Spirit keep your hearts united. Do this by living at peace – Ephesians 4:3 (CEV)

God's mission calls all people to work together for healing and justice in partnerships of mutuality and respect – Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim[1]

The historic Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910 birthed a new chapter of collaboration. The conference became known as 'a movement for missionary cooperation,' creating an environment where people from different theological positions were 'given the opportunity of working together and coming to know and trust one another.' A key factor was the willingness of participants to be 'ready to accept one another in good faith.' This openness allowed them to 'concentrate on cooperation' because 'suspicion and hostility could be neutralized and cooperation could pursue a wholly positive aim.'[2]

The International Missionary Council (IMC) was formed in 1921. IMC aimed to disseminate 'ecumenical efforts and activities toward Christian mission through a series of collaborative meetings.'[3] The IMC embodied the 1910 Edinburgh conviction that Christ's mission to the world 'could not afford the luxury of fragmentation along national and denominational lines.'[4] The IMC wanted closer cooperation between mission agencies and the national churches they birthed. In this respect, IMC saw itself as a 'midwife' to influence through the 'gift from God of the spirit of fellowship, mutual understanding, and desire to cooperate.'[5] For example, the Council's original membership included national cooperative bodies representing Protestant foreign missions from Western countries, the National Missionary Council of India, Burma, and Ceylon, and two national branches of the Edinburgh Continuation Committee in China and Japan. Like the Edinburgh conference, Council membership was not based on ecclesial representation.[6]

This chapter explores how ecumenical collaboration has transformed over the last century, with particular attention to the theological

underpinnings that guided these partnerships.

Jerusalem 1928

The IMC held a conference in 1928 in Jerusalem as its first follow-up to Edinburgh 1910. The years following Edinburgh were called the 'new era of equality in mission' because mission societies and younger churches started seeing each other as equals.[7]

At Jerusalem, 261 national Christian councils and mission societies representatives were present. India, China, Japan, and Korea were well represented, while the rest of Asia had fewer participants. Unlike in 1910, Latin America was represented, with delegates from Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. Indigenous representation from Africa included delegates from Egypt, Uganda, South Africa, and Madagascar, but none were given a public role. Additionally, no Indigenous Christian was invited to prepare a preliminary paper, and only three were asked to deliver a main address.[8]

Four geo-political and religious influences formed the backdrop of the conference: (1) The outbreak of World War I disrupted the Western perception of superiority in mission; (2) independence movements were emerging in colonial territories; (3) major world religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, were becoming more missionary, presenting challenges for young local churches; and (4) secularism was rising, particularly following the Russian Revolution, challenging religious worldviews.[9]

The conference focussed on 'a comprehensive approach to mission that would challenge unjust economic and social structures in building the kingdom of God.'[10] To achieve this, the emphasis was on 'real partnership' rather than mere 'cooperation' because the relationship between mission agencies and church partners needed 'mutual understanding and trust of one another.'[11] The younger local churches – the fruit of mission agency efforts – sought independence from financial paternalism, which often involved 'control of power' without true 'sharing of decision making'.[12] They insisted upon 'independence and liberation from Western missions… to collaborate as co-workers.'[13] The focus of partnering was to address what was lacking in current relationships rather than build upon the strengths of partnering that may have already been in

place. Samuel Cueva concludes, 'Jerusalem 1928 was an emergent discussion of partnership with more weaknesses than strengths.'[14]

For many Western leaders in the aftermath of World War I, the emerging ecumenical movement affirmed the unity beyond the national boundaries of all Christians. In a world recently torn by conflict, they believed the unique lordship of Christ should surpass all other loyalties.[15]

Tambaram 1938

The next IMC conference convened in Tambaram, near Madras, India, as the world teetered on the brink of World War II. This gathering assembled 471 delegates from 69 nations, with at least half representing younger churches from the Majority World – a first for any ecumenical conference.[16] The diverse, multiethnic participation made Tambaram more representative than the earlier Edinburgh conference, showcasing the unmistakable global spread of Christianity.

With mission work increasingly led by indigenous churches, leaders like John R. Mott advocated for 'mission in unity'. They called for an end to the distinction between 'sending' and 'receiving' churches.[17] Hendrik Kraemer further emphasized that these 'younger' churches were the fruits of missionary labour, not possessions of mission societies.[18] His viewpoint was integral to Kraemer's 'framework for mission partnership theology',[19] which stressed the unity of Christian churches and the importance of ecumenical relationships.[20]

Amid efforts to renew ties between older Western mission agencies and younger Majority World churches, David Bosch observed the use of slogans like 'three-selfs,' 'partnership in obedience,' 'living as comrades,' 'equality,' 'cooperation,' 'a fifty-fifty basis,' and 'solidarity.'[21] Despite these initiatives, younger churches remained sceptical. Genuine autonomy was unattainable as long as 'existing structural patterns' – specifically the policies and practices of mission agencies – remained unchanged.[22]

At the same time, global geopolitical tensions were escalating. Conflicts like the war between Japan and China and the rise of the Soviet Union and Axis-aligned countries intensified the urgency for evangelism. The conference defined evangelism as the responsibility of 'the whole church for the whole world,' viewing it as essential for achieving world peace.[23] This mission called for the church to operate as the unified body of Christ.

Whitby 1947

Following the end of World War II in 1945, the IMC held its next conference in Whitby, Canada. The world was still healing from deep divisions when the 112 delegates gathered to assess how the war had affected mission efforts. With this focus, the conference adopted the theme 'Christian Witness in a Revolutionary World.'[24] Despite recent geopolitical tensions that made it challenging for participants to come together, the conference was 'characterized by a deeply experienced unity.'[25]

Discussions centred on how the church's witness should involve an obedient partnership among all Christian churches and initiatives.[26] Using the Greek terms *kerygma* (proclamation) and *koinonia* (fellowship),[27] delegates emphasized the importance of partnership between the older and younger churches, recognizing their 'developing equal standing.'[28] They agreed that new and old churches should be considered equal partners working together to fulfil the church's mission in the world.[29] David Bosch noted the theological absurdity of distinguishing between 'autonomous' and 'dependent' churches, suggesting such distinctions were inappropriate.[30]

A significant issue was the joint service in mission between former enemies meeting each other for the first time after the war.[31] This included representatives from older and younger churches and mission societies from nations on opposing sides during the conflict. Another concern was the collaboration between mission societies from the North and young independent churches from the South.[32] Structural differences between mission societies and church bodies were considered less important than their shared mission.[33]

Samuel Cueva, paraphrasing Lothar Bauerochse, identified four areas of tension at the conference and how partnership commitments addressed them: (1) Staff cooperation: Prioritizing training for church leaders to enhance cooperation; (2) Financial aid: Addressing financial independence from a biblical perspective; (3) Responsibility for decision-making: Shifting mission focus away from traditional geographic emphasis; and (4) Administration: Calling for close collaboration in planning tasks.[34]

Participants tackled these concerns through a robust theology of partnership. The Whitby conference captured the nature of the relationship between older societies and younger churches. The previous language of

‘older’ and ‘younger’ implied an imbalance of power that needed correction.[35] However, Cueva critiques the Whitby 1947 Conference for promoting what he calls ‘romantic missiology’, an idealistic vision of mission partnership that failed to address the practical realities of collaboration.[36]

While participants agreed theologically on the importance of unity and mutuality in missions, this vision often overlooked deeper issues, such as unequal power dynamics and cultural misunderstandings. The disconnect between the rhetoric of mutual partnership and the reality of unequal relationships, particularly between Western mission agencies and non-Western churches, limited the effectiveness of their collaboration.

The conference’s ‘partnership in obedience’ motto encapsulated this approach.[37] This was significant for the development of ecumenism, implying that ministry relationships are ‘established on equal footing’, both partners are actively engaged, and mutual agreements define the relationship.[38]

Despite the small size of the gathering, there was a compelling sense that the conference represented the worldwide unity of the Christian faith, reassembled after the fragmentation of the war years. The emphasis shifted to the church as the embodiment of *koinonia* rather than mission as merely a church activity. However, as one Indonesian delegate reportedly remarked, ‘Yes, partnership for you, but obedience for us,’ highlighting ongoing challenges in achieving true equality.[39]

Willingen 1952

When the IMC met in Willingen, Germany, in 1952, the global landscape changed rapidly. The aftermath of the two world wars had severely undermined the moral authority of the ‘Christian’ West. The emergence of the United Nations emphasized mutual understanding and cooperation among nations, implicitly questioning the role of the Christian missionary enterprise. Colonial rule had ended in South Asia and was increasingly challenged in Africa. The Communist revolution in China led to the expulsion of missionaries from what had been considered a premier mission field. Meanwhile, the rise of secularism in the West eroded the strength of what was once the ‘home base’ of missions. Mission leaders

were soul-searching; familiar landmarks disappeared, and the future seemed unclear and threatening. Mission appeared to be in crisis.[40]

Notably, only 37 out of 187 attendees at Willingen – about 20% – were non-Western nationals. Within the IMC secretariat, only one of the six members was not a Westerner: the Indian Lutheran Rajah Manikam, who had become the East Asia secretary for the IMC and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in April 1951.[41]

This crisis prompted a quest for a deeper theological understanding and justification of mission, resulting in a new focus: the mission of God or *missio Dei*. The growing influence of *missio Dei* theology provided significant impetus for convergence between older and newer mission bodies. The Willingen statement grounded Christian mission in the unity of the triune God, affirming that 'there is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world,' and insisting that 'division in the church distorts its witness, frustrates its mission, and contradicts its own nature.'[42]

World Council of Churches

The IMC was pivotal in forming the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948. During the WCC's third Assembly in New Delhi in 1961, the IMC officially joined the WCC under the guidance of Lesslie Newbigin. At the conference, Newbigin addressed the vision for partnership in this unified context, emphasizing the importance of a mission grounded in collaboration and stripped of 'colonial attitudes.'[43]

Eleanor Jackson notes that there could be no 'us' and 'them' or so-called younger churches when there were self-supporting Tamil Church of South India congregations in New York or autonomous Chinese Baptist churches in London, Liverpool, and Cardiff. Although the integration of congregations and mission structures needed to make progress, Newbigin emphasized that partners should focus on Jesus, aligning with the New Delhi theme of 'Christ, the light of the world.'[44] Since integrating into the WCC, the IMC has kept mission at the forefront of the WCC's agenda while also cultivating deeper relationships with branches of World Christianity that are not formal members of the WCC.[45]

Over a decade after the United Nations was established, the WCC raised hopes for a new era of international harmony and cooperation. Paul H.

Byun refers to the ecumenical movement as 'one of the most notable developments of twentieth-century Christendom' due to its concern for church unity and its pursuit of 'inter-church conversation and cooperation' for 'theological and missiological progress.'[46]

The purpose of WCC has been to unite churches that acknowledge Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, viewing their unity as a divine gift through him. Committed to expressing this unity practically, the WCC brings churches together to work in collaboration. It facilitates joint witness to their shared faith and cooperation in matters requiring united action. The WCC does not seek to control or legislate for its member churches or aim to become a single unified church or centralized authority.

In its *Together Towards Life*, the WCC outlines a partnership perspective. It emphasizes the call on diverse Christian communities to find and practice ways of witnessing together in 'a spirit of partnership and cooperation.' This call involves engaging in mutually respectful and responsible forms of evangelism. Even when churches are separated, they share a common mission by manifesting the divine gifts of truth and life they already experience collectively.[47]

The WCC also acknowledges that contemporary mission movements are emerging from the Majority World, which is multi-directional and diverse. Churches explore mission expressions rooted in these contexts, cultures, and spiritualities. There is a need to develop further mutuality and partnership, affirming interdependence within the ecumenical movement. Mission practices should demonstrate solidarity with suffering people and harmony with nature. Evangelism should be conducted with humility, respect toward others, and dialogue with people of different cultures and faiths. It should also involve confronting oppressive structures and cultures that contradict the values of God's kingdom.[48]

100 Years After

A centenary after the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh inspired Edinburgh 2010, a collaborative, intercontinental process that involved representatives from global Christian bodies to reflect on Christian mission in the 21st century. The process focused on nine key themes and embraced diverse perspectives across regions, genders, and denominations.

Part of that reflection explored partnering in mission 100 years after 1910. Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, in their Edinburgh 1910 volume *Witnessing to Christ Today*, note how 'God's mission calls all people to work together for healing and justice in partnerships of mutuality and respect.'[49] The 'better together' theme regarding mission collaboration and partnership is addressed. Balia and Kim note, for example, how 'Christian missions do not have a good track record in cooperation.'[50] In the 19th century, agreements were made between missionary organizations to avoid competition by dividing mission territories (which helped reduce conflict but reinforced territorialism and hindered broader unity).

The 1910 Edinburgh Conference marked a turning point, highlighting the importance of cooperation. The Commission on Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity emphasized that even with ample resources and workers, without collaboration, missionary efforts would be ineffective. They optimistically concluded that divine guidance, which had already led them toward unity, would continue to do so. While progress has occurred over the past century, it is still challenging today for denominations and missionary organizations to work closely toward the shared goal of spreading the Gospel, emphasizing unity and cooperation rather than acting independently or competitively.

Historically, there is little evidence of Christians from different traditions collaborating in mission, despite claims like Stephen Neill's assertion that cooperation marked Protestant missions from the start. Fragmentation has been more common, according to data on the rise in foreign mission agencies – from 200 in 1800 to 4,000 by 2000 – often due to lack of collaboration. However, examples such as the United Mission to Nepal (1954), the International Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (1966), the Albanian Encouragement Project (1991), and the Central Asian Consultation show collaborative efforts across multiple agencies.[51]

Churches are called to unity in witness by fostering partnership, cooperation, and responsible relationships in evangelism. To cultivate this shared missionary ethos, they must first repent for past failures and critically reflect on how they relate to one another and approach evangelism. Denominational competition and rivalry, and the temptation to proselytize members of other Christian traditions, must be renounced. Rather than establishing parallel church structures, churches should focus on supporting and cooperating with existing local congregations in their

evangelistic efforts. Additionally, they must reject any manipulation of humanitarian aid to induce denominational shifts or advance the goals of one church at the expense of another. Churches should also help individuals change their denominational allegiance to discern their motives, ensuring they are worthy. Lastly, when concerns about proselytism or dishonest evangelistic practices arise, churches should address them by 'speaking the truth in love' to one another.[52]

The journey of ecumenical collaboration in mission, from the Edinburgh Conference 1910 to the present, highlights both the progress and the persistent challenges in achieving true partnership among Christian churches. While the IMC conferences sought to address issues of autonomy, mutual respect, and cooperation, the road to equitable collaboration has been fraught with theological and practical tensions. Nonetheless, the ongoing dialogue between Western mission agencies and younger Majority World churches has contributed to a richer understanding of partnership. The 'partnership in obedience' principle introduced at the Whitby 1947 conference encapsulates this evolving relationship.

Relationships between younger churches in the Majority World and older Western mission agencies were particularly affected. Bosch observed that the Western church's 'benevolent paternalism' resulted in younger churches not reaching maturity according to Western standards, inadvertently teaching converts 'to feel helpless' without financial support.[53] As the global church moves forward, the lessons from these historic collaborations provide a framework for fostering deeper cooperation in today's complex and multi-directional mission landscape. David Bosch described this era as a call for 'mutual responsibility, accountability, and interdependence', necessitating 'new relationships… for the sake of unity and of mission.'[54]

Thought Questions

1. How can the church today balance the need for unity in mission with the diverse expressions of faith across different cultural contexts?
2. How can mission organizations and local churches work together to overcome historical patterns of paternalism and foster genuine collaboration?

Practical Applications

The work of ecumenical bodies like the World Council of Churches (WCC) emphasizes that unity in mission is crucial for a powerful and effective Christian witness in the world. In *Together Towards Life*, the WCC envisions a growing collaboration with Evangelicals, particularly with the Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance. This collaboration is driven by a shared commitment to ensuring that 'the whole church should witness to the whole gospel in the whole world.'[55] This vision of unity calls for a deeper, more intentional approach to mission grounded in mutual respect and partnership.

Building on this vision, here are practical steps for fostering true ecumenical collaboration in mission today:

- *Prioritize mutual respect and shared decision-making:* Following the example of early ecumenical conferences, such as Jerusalem 1928 and Whitby 1947, ensure that mission partnerships are built on mutual respect and shared decision-making. This requires an intentional effort to listen to and learn from one another.
- *Foster equal partnerships in leadership:* Echoing the concerns raised in the 1928 Jerusalem Conference, address financial and leadership dependencies that hinder true equality. Work towards economic independence for younger churches, ensuring they have the resources to sustain their ministry without overly relying on external funding. Likewise, prioritize the development of indigenous leadership, training local leaders to embrace leadership of mission work within their cultural context.
- *Build cross-cultural friendships:* Samuel Azariah's call for cross-cultural friendship remains a crucial principle in ecumenical collaboration. Cultivate genuine relationships built on mutual understanding and respect rather than transactional partnerships. These friendships are about sharing resources or goals, learning from one another, and creating a more holistic collaboration.
- *Address historical challenges:* The fragmentation and territorialism that plagued earlier mission efforts must be actively addressed. In line with the lessons from the Edinburgh Conference and later IMC gatherings, collaborate across denominational lines and avoid reinforcing divisions. This requires a willingness to confront past mistakes and make changes that foster true partnership.

- *Focus on the whole church for the whole world:* As emphasized in the Willingen 1952 conference, the mission of God is a collective responsibility. Encourage a shift from isolated efforts to a unified vision for global mission, where all churches, regardless of their geographical location or denominational affiliation, come together to witness to the gospel.

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Chapter 8: Evangelical Collaboration

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ – 1 Corinthians 12:12 (ESV)

… a primary obligation of those committed to world evangelization is to find ways to initiate and strengthen partnerships, networks and other forms of cooperation[1] –Lausanne Issue Group on Partnership and Collaboration

In the ever-evolving landscape of global mission, the language of partnership has emerged as both a necessary and complex component. Over the last century, partnership has been more than a buzzword – it has become the backbone of collaborative efforts in world evangelization. The Lausanne Movement, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and other major mission organizations, movements, and agencies have championed partnership as essential to fulfilling the Great Commission. However, as the history of these efforts unfolds, it becomes clear that the outcomes behind partnerships have often struggled to match the intentions, with significant gaps in practice and understanding. This chapter will explore how partnership language has integrated into mission dialogues and how, despite numerous efforts, the global church wrestles with true collaboration's complexities. We will trace this journey through significant events of the Lausanne congresses and the Iguassu Consultation, all while examining how mission organizations have navigated the challenges of fostering genuine, equitable partnerships.

The relationship between evangelicals and ecumenical movements has at times been uneasy. Evangelicals often find themselves caught between a desire to engage in unity and collaboration and lingering theological reservations that create hesitancy toward deeper ecumenical involvement.[2]

Partnering in the Lausanne Movement

The World Council of Churches' *Together Towards Life* shares a common value with the Lausanne Movement: a commitment to the whole church

bringing the whole gospel to the whole world. This expression echoes the 1989 Lausanne Congress in Manila, where the *Manifesto* declared, 'God is calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.'[3] As global church demographics have shifted, the need for partnerships has become even more critical – a reality the Lausanne Movement also recognizes. Established as the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization (LCWE), the Movement evolved into a global network fostering greater cooperation in evangelism. Now known as the Lausanne Movement (LM), its reach has been international, its focus missiological, and its foundation, from the start, centred on collaboration in God's mission. We now explore LM's significant contributions to the ongoing discussions around collaborative mission efforts.

Lausanne Congress 1

The first Lausanne Congress took place in 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland, giving birth to what is now known as the Lausanne Movement. This gathering marked a significant shift in global Christianity by recognizing the emergence of 'growing and vigorous churches in the Two-Thirds World.'[4] With the theme 'Let the Earth Hear His Voice,' the congress attracted 2,473 delegates from 150 nations, over half of whom came from Majority World contexts.[5] Notably, Latin American leaders René Padilla and Samuel Escobar advocated for a more holistic approach to mission, while Ralph Winter highlighted the urgency of prioritizing unreached people groups.[6]

Roger Hedlund observes that 'historically, Lausanne should be seen in line with the Berlin World Congress of 1966 and regional congresses in Singapore, Minneapolis, Bogotá, and Amsterdam.'[7] Billy Graham influenced both Berlin and Lausanne. However, their purposes differed: while Berlin aimed to draw the church's attention to evangelism broadly, the Lausanne Congress 1 focused more on unevangelized peoples.

A significant outcome of the congress was the creation of the *Lausanne Covenant*, a foundational statement that became 'the common faith basis for church-planting and conversion-oriented missions.'[8] Over time, the Covenant was regarded as one of the most significant mission documents in the modern Protestant era, second only to William Carey's 1792 booklet *Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion*

of the Heathen that sparked the modern missions movement.[9] Under the wise leadership of John Stott, the *Covenant* gained widespread acceptance as an evangelical statement of faith that transcended denominational lines, uniting believers globally.[10] It provided a 'framework for unity among Christians globally and formed the basis for many collaborative projects' in the context of 'an evangelical definition to world evangelization.'[11] It focussed 'on mainstream biblical issues while avoiding controversial secondary issues.'[12] The *Covenant* 'set a course for evangelical theology of mission for decades to come.'[13]

The *Covenant* begins with an introduction that sets the congress's context. It is followed by 15 sections addressing theological and mission concerns of the day. Of particular interest are the sections on unity and partnership.

Unity

Unity in the Church is described by Stott (emphasis added):

> We affirm that the Church's visible *unity* in truth is God's purpose. Evangelism also summons us to *unity*, because *our oneness* strengthens our witness, just as our *disunity* undermines our gospel of reconciliation. We recognize, however, that *organizational unity* may take many forms and does not necessarily advance evangelism. Yet we who share the same biblical faith should be closely united in fellowship, work and witness. We confess that our testimony has sometimes been marred by a sinful individualism and needless duplication. We pledge ourselves to seek a *deeper unity* in truth, worship, holiness and mission. We urge the development of regional and functional *co-operation* for the furtherance of the Church's mission, for strategic planning, for *mutual* encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experience.[14]

As we can see, the central points are oneness strengthens witness, disunity undermines the gospel, organizational unity varies by context, shared biblical faith calls for close fellowship, a pledge for deeper unity, and the encouragement of cooperation. The language underscores unity in doctrine, Christian practice, and mission. Visible unity is strongly affirmed as a goal.[15] The partnering statement listed these references: John 17:21, 23; Ephesians 4:3,4; John 13:35; Philippians 1:27; and John 17:11–23.[16]

Editorial notes accompanying the Covenant highlight practical considerations (emphasis added):

> On a pragmatic level, 'evangelism summons us to *unity*'. Our message of love and peace will always ring hollow when we are not living it out ourselves (John 13:35; 17:21). *Unity* should be marked by truth, but has room for diversity and flexibility. *Joining together* local churches, or even denominations, has not in the past brought an impetus to evangelize; we need to guard against naivety that mergers in and of themselves will take us forward in this way. Mergers can be good, and combine strengths as well as saving on costs. But we must not be starry-eyed about new spiritual energy because structures have changed. This is not how the Holy Spirit works.
>
> Evangelicals, perhaps because we are people of passion and of conviction, can be rugged individualists, and at times we appear to prefer to build our own empire than to allow our work to be absorbed in a larger endeavour for the common good. The only *unity* pleasing to God is *unity in truth*. We may disagree with one another on some secondary issues, but we must stand firm and stand together on the great fundamentals of the biblical revelation.[17]

Noticeable themes include the responsibility for evangelism as a call for unity, the fact that unity allows for diversity, that structural changes alone don't guarantee unity because it is a work of the Holy Spirit, a warning against individualism, and the importance of finding shared unity in biblical truth even if secondary issues differ. Fundamentals of a biblically informed faith are essential to practicing unity. To avoid misdirecting evangelicals' activistic nature towards empire-building, efforts were called for in unity, with adherence to biblical truth as the 'qualifier' for unity.

Partnership

Partnership in the *Covenant* was described as 'Churches in Evangelistic Partnership' and mentioned these Bible references: Romans 1:8; Philippians 1:5, 4:15; Acts 13:1–3; and 1 Thessalonians 1:6–8. The Covenant highlighted the emergence of a 'new missionary era' characterized by:

- The traditional leading role of Western missions is rapidly changing.
- God empowers churches from the Majority World to take a significant role in global evangelization.
- All churches and mission agencies are urged to assess their missionary responsibilities regularly to reach their regions effectively and beyond.
- Organizations involved in Bible translation, theological education, media, literature, and evangelism should collaborate and support the

global mission.

- A growing partnership among churches will display the universal character of Christ's Church.[18]

In essence, the *Covenant* emphasizes that unity and partnership are vital for effective mission work. Unity enhances the church's witness by presenting a cohesive message of reconciliation rooted in shared biblical faith and practice. Partnership calls for collaboration among all churches and mission agencies, recognizing the shifting dynamics of the global church and the importance of working together to fulfil the Great Commission. By focusing on these principles, the Covenant provides a blueprint for evangelical cooperation that transcends cultural and denominational barriers, fostering a collective effort to spread the gospel worldwide.

Lausanne Congress 2

The second congress was held in 1989 in Manila, Philippines, with the theme 'Proclaim Christ until He Comes: Calling the Whole Church to Take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World.'[19] Over 300 'strategic partnerships in world evangelization' were born during the congress and many 'involved co-operation between nations in all parts of the globe.'[20] The congress addressed 'the issues of mission at the end of the twentieth century,'[21] which included 'postmodernism and the challenge of AD 2000 for world evangelization.'[22] 'Luis Bush wanted efforts towards the unreached people groups who primarily lived in the "10/40 Window" – the region between 10 degrees and 40 degrees latitude between North Africa and Asia.'[23]

An informal gathering of leaders from Bible translation and distribution organizations was an example of the strategic partnering discussions at the congress. A lack of collaboration and disunity often characterized Bible agencies. At that time, the leaders wanted to continue the conversation and agreed to meet again the following year.[24] This initiative led to the formation of the Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI).

The main statement of this congress was the *Manila Manifesto*, which expanded the *Lausanne Covenant* to 21 affirmations. The *Manifesto* recognized opportunities for partnership in mission, emphasizing the urgent need for churches, mission agencies, and Christian organizations to

cooperate in evangelism and social action, 'repudiating competition and avoiding duplication.'[25] Reflecting on this, Lausanne's Issue Group on Partnership and Collaboration highlighted 'a primary obligation of those committed to world evangelization to find ways to initiate and strengthen partnerships, networks and other forms of cooperation.'[26]

The *Manifesto* emphasized the critical role of working together in world evangelization because any form of disunity discredits the gospel of reconciliation. While the church is diverse, unity 'in heart and mind' is necessary to provide a powerful witness to God's grace. The fragmentation of the body of Christ is a significant obstacle to world evangelization, and the solution lies rooted in 'unity in truth' and 'closer cooperation' among all churches.[27]

The *Manifesto*'s statement 21 became the best known from the congress: '… God is calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.'[28] Three affirmations used partnering language (emphasis added):

> 13. We affirm that we who claim to be *members of the body* of Christ must transcend within our fellowship the barriers of race, gender, and class.
> 14. We affirm that the gifts of the Spirit are distributed to all God's people, women and men, and that their *partnership* in evangelization must be welcomed for the common good.
> 17. We affirm the urgent need for churches, mission agencies, and other Christian organizations to *cooperate* in evangelism and social action, repudiating competition and avoiding duplication.[29]

In the section titled 'Cooperating in Evangelism', the *Manifesto* expanded on the aim of working together by emphasizing the essential connection between evangelism and unity. It highlighted that Jesus prayed for his people's oneness to reflect his unity with the Father, serving as a witness to others. Similarly, Paul urged the Philippian Christians to 'contend as one person for the faith of the gospel' (1:27). Consequently, world evangelization was to be pursued together through unity in diversity, visibly manifested among people, churches, and mission agencies with different temperaments, gifts, callings, and cultures, and among men, women, and multiple generations working together.[30]

The *Manifesto* also acknowledged emerging missiological opportunities due to demographic shifts. With most evangelicals now hailing from the Majority World, their number of missionaries was expected to surpass those from the West. This changing dynamic made collaborative

evangelism critical, as any form of disunity would discredit the gospel of reconciliation. While diversity existed in composition, unity in heart and mind was essential to provide a 'dramatic witness to the grace of God.' However, cooperation faced challenges because of serious theological differences between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Recognizing that the 'brokenness of the body of Christ' was 'a major stumbling block to world evangelization,' the *Manifesto* sought 'unity in truth' and called for closer cooperation to overcome these barriers.[31]

Lausanne Congress 3

Held in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2010, the third Lausanne Congress brought together 4,500 participants from 198 nations. Emphasizing an evangelical mission perspective, the event was structured to encourage delegate participation in all presentations. The congress was themed around reconciliation, inspired by 2 Corinthians 5:19: 'God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.' The main document produced was the *Cape Town Commitment*, titled 'A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action.' It was presented in two parts: the first, 'For the Lord We Love,' encompassed ten topics ranging from 'We love God because he first loved us' to 'We love the mission of God.' The second part addressed six themes covered during the congress, including 'Bearing witness to the truth of Christ in a pluralistic, globalized world.'[32]

The section titled 'Partnering in the Body of Christ for Unity in Mission' is fascinating to our exploration of partnering language. This section presents a theological basis for the significance of partnership in ministry: 'When we live in unity and work in partnership, we demonstrate the supernatural, counter-cultural power of the cross.... Paul teaches us that Christian unity is the creation of God, based on our reconciliation with God and with one another.' Conversely, it warns that 'disunity through failure to partner together... demeans our mission and message' and denies 'the power of the cross.'[33]

Under the heading 'Partnership in Global Mission,' the *Commitment* identifies two tensions Christians face when attempting to work together:

1. 'Partnership in mission is not only about efficiency.' The document notes that 'too often we have engaged in mission in ways that prioritize and preserve our own identities (ethnic, denominational,

theological, etc.) and have failed to submit our passions and preferences to our one Lord and Master.' Therefore, missional response and activity 'must be more than a confession of faith'; it should influence governance, strategy, practice, and unity.[34]

2. 'Partnership is about more than money.' The Commitment addresses the issue of the 'unwise injection of money,' which has frequently led to corruption and division within churches. The challenge is to prove finally that mission does not presume that 'those who have the most money have all the decision-making power.' This implies that Western partners should refrain from imposing their 'preferred names, slogans, programmes, systems and methods' on their Majority World partners. Instead, there is a call for 'true mutuality' and 'interdependence in giving and receiving' across the entire church, fostering 'the respect and dignity that characterizes genuine friends and true partners in mission.'[35]

Another significant section, titled 'Men and Women in Partnership,' declares: 'We affirm that the gifts of the Spirit are distributed to all God's people, women and men, and that their partnership in evangelization must be welcomed for the common good.' The statement particularly recognizes 'the enormous and sacrificial contribution that women have made to world mission, ministering to both men and women, from biblical times to the present.'[36]

In the Commitment's 'Call to Action,' several statements address aspects of mission that require partnership. For instance, it emphasizes that 'Theological education... should place the Bible at the centre of their partnership' in 'all forms of missional engagement,' whether 'formal and non-formal, at local, national, regional and international levels.' Furthermore, those dedicated 'to the cause of Christ... in a needy and broken world,' especially 'a new generation of evangelical leaders, men and women, and people of different ethnicities,' are urged 'to facilitate many fruitful friendships and partnerships.' This call encourages them to avoid being 'driven by a spirit of competition' or overly concerned about who is 'leading the charge.'[37]

Lausanne Congress 4

The fourth congress took place in October 2024 in Seoul, South Korea. Approximately 5,000 people from nearly 200 countries attended in person, and several thousand others participated in a curated online experience. The conference theme was 'Let the church declare and display Christ together,' pushing for togetherness framed as a call for 'Collaboration'.

In preparation, the Lausanne Movement released *The State of the Great Commission* report.[38] The report mentions the role of partnership and collaboration in God's mission worldwide. Effective ministry depends on interdependence between local and foreign partners; fostering dependency undermines sustainability and dignity. Thus, a healthy collaboration that values every contribution is essential.

The global church's shifting cultural and demographic composition presents new opportunities and alliances that will accelerate missions in the 21st century. Forming alliances within cities invites the whole church to collaborate meaningfully, especially for the sake of the next generation. There's a pressing need for collaboration that minimizes duplication, reduces competition, welcomes partners, and promotes resource-sharing. Churches can significantly benefit by partnering with global mission organizations and accessing abundant resources and expertise. Cooperation between Western and Eastern churches is crucial for reaching people of other religions. Partnerships grounded in equality, understanding, and mutual trust can combine unique resources to fulfil the Great Commission. Unified efforts characterized by prayer, the Holy Spirit's guidance, and resource sharing significantly enhance mission impact.

Facing challenges in discipling all nations, the church is called to unity and partnership to reduce redundancies and conflicts. Leveraging technology enables better decision-making, strategic assessment, and partner identification.

A collaborative leadership approach empowers diverse leaders to address contemporary global issues effectively. Embracing partnerships between men and women, recognizing that both are equally gifted and called by God, allows full engagement of every member, leading to remarkable results within the church.

Globally, the church is encouraged to engage in holistic ministry through community collaboration and innovative mission entrepreneurship, advancing the gospel during natural disasters and times

of hardship. A new era of partnership between movements and agencies is essential to reach unreached ethnic groups. Collaborating between Western and non-Western missionaries ensures local voices are heard and respected, leading to more effective and holistic mission strategies that address complex social, economic, and spiritual needs.

By promoting unity, leveraging technology, sharing resources, and valuing every contribution, the global church can more effectively address challenges and advance God's mission with more significant impact.

On the first day of the congress, the Lausanne Movement released *The Seoul Statement*, which focused on collaboration and partnering in mission as essential to fulfilling the Great Commission. It underscores that the whole church must work together to bring the whole gospel to the world. Collaboration between local and global partners is critical for sustainability, emphasizing interdependence to avoid fostering unhealthy dependencies.

The *Statement* advocates for partnerships based on equality, mutual respect, and trust between Western and non-Western missionaries to achieve more effective, holistic mission strategies. It also highlights the importance of partnerships that embrace cultural diversity and localization, recognizing the unique contributions of each cultural context.

Collaboration is encouraged in evangelism, social justice efforts, technological innovation, and addressing global challenges like poverty and conflict. The statement calls for a partnership that includes the full participation of men and women, valuing the gifts of all believers, and ensuring that mission efforts are competitive and coherent but unified.

Ultimately, the statement calls for unity in the body of Christ through partnerships that demonstrate the power of the gospel and foster mutual respect, resource-sharing, and the collective mission of evangelism and discipleship worldwide.

Summary

The *Covenant*, *Manifesto*, and *Commitment* all emphasize the importance of solid biblical foundations for partnering in ministry. Similarly, *The Great Commission Report* and *The Seoul Statement* outline theological, missiological, and practical values that express a clear intention to cooperate in God's mission. These statements are prayerfully and rigorously crafted by dozens of theologians, missiologists, and mission

practitioners to be taken seriously by all participants in God's mission. They call for a heartfelt commitment to collaboration and deserve the attention of everyone involved in advancing the gospel.

Kärin Butler Primuth, the Lausanne Movement's Catalyst for Ministry Collaboration, emphasizes the importance of collaboration in mission, stating, 'Collaboration is perhaps the easiest concept to understand, yet the hardest to implement. It simply means to co-labour, as we are called by God to work together as the body of Christ.' Despite the 'astounding' progress of the gospel over the past 2,000 years – evidenced by nearly 2.5 billion Christians and five million churches – Primuth points out that the global percentage of Christians has remained at about 33% for over 100 years. The solution, she argues, is greater collaboration: 'It is the only way we can fulfil the Great Commission in our generation and accomplish together what none of us could do alone.' Primuth stresses that ministries can no longer operate in isolation. As the world becomes more complex and interconnected, no single ministry or approach can address these challenges alone. She notes, 'In every place where there is collaboration – whether in a city, across a country, or globally – there are breakthroughs for the gospel.' [39]

In conclusion, collaboration has been central to the Lausanne Movement's inception. It continues to champion cooperation and partnership in the evangelistic task and God's mission.

The World Evangelical Alliance

In October 1999, a decade after the second Lausanne Congress in Manila, the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship (now the World Evangelical Alliance, WEA) held a missiological consultation in Foz do Iguassu, Brazil. The gathering brought together 160 participants who recognized the urgent need for a serious analysis of the challenges facing a rapidly changing world in sociological, cultural, philosophical, economic, and spiritual areas. The organizers issued the *Iguassu Affirmation*, a statement of context, declaration, and commitment, looking to the Spirit's empowerment in mission, 'regardless of geography, culture, or ministry.'[40] The Affirmation was intended as a working document to stimulate global discussion.

Through the consultation's dialogue, a promising spirit of partnership and unity emerged among international organizations, including the WEA, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (now the Lausanne Movement), and the AD2000 and Beyond Movement.

Iguassu Affirmation

The *Affirmation* stressed the need for renewed cooperation, recognizing unity in the body of Christ as essential for effective witness. It also acknowledged past challenges in working together, mainly due to theological differences and resource imbalances. For example, this is evident in this text (emphasis added):

> As citizens of the Kingdom of God and members of Christ's body, we commit ourselves to *renewed efforts at cooperation* because it is our Lord's desire that we *be one* and that we *work in harmony* in His service so that the world will believe. We acknowledge that our attempts have *not always been as equals*. Inadequate theology, especially in respect to the doctrine of the church, and the *imbalance* of resources has made *working together difficult*. We pledge to find ways to address this imbalance and to demonstrate to the world that believers in Christ *are truly one* in their service of Christ.[41]

The WEA's consultation focused on the maturation of mission partnerships. Collaboration expert Gilbert Siehl observes how a shared identity and sense of community make finding common ground easier,[42] a sentiment reflected in the guiding statements of the WEA, Lausanne Movement, and WCC. These statements affirm the importance of partnership between churches and mission agencies.

Themes covered in the *Affirmation* included the 'Trinitarian foundation of mission', 'Church and mission', 'Pluralism', 'Strategy in mission', 'Globalized missiology', 'Christian responsibility and the ecological crisis', 'Member care', and 'Partnership'. Of particular interest, Affirmation 13, Partnership that reads (emphasis added):

> As citizens of the Kingdom of God and members of Christ's body, we commit ourselves to *renewed efforts at cooperation* because it is our Lord's desire that we *be one* and that we *work in harmony* in His service so that the world will believe. We acknowledge that our attempts have *not always been as equals*. Inadequate theology, especially in respect to the doctrine of the church, and the *imbalance* of resources has made *working together difficult*. We pledge to find ways to address this imbalance and to demonstrate to the world that believers in Christ *are truly one* in their service of Christ.[43]

The language used in the Affirmation came from deliberations during the conference. In this next section, we explore two areas: (1) discussions about resources for mission; and (2) missiological perspectives about the Affirmation and partnering contexts in mission.

Mission Resources

Several sessions at the conference focused on the strategic deployment of mission resources, with a central theme of 'Partnership and Cooperation.' A think tank identified two competing models hindering mission work: the business model of sponsorship and the family partnership approach.

In the business model, people are regarded as stockholders, with a focus on activities and control maintained through money. In contrast, the family model views people as members, emphasizes relationships, and values fellowship. Contributions in the business model are competitive, while in the family model, they are complementary, with no contribution devalued. Accountability exists in both models, but the business model of accountability is one-sided, whereas the family model seeks mutual accountability.[44]

The think tank highlighted that while the business model efficiently accomplishes tasks, it fails to nurture kingdom-based relationships centred on the care and shared ministry vision. They pointed to obstacles in collaboration, such as diverging agendas, a lack of focus on relationships, and outdated sponsorship methods. Sponsorship was characterized by control, hierarchy, imposed vision, and one-sided, short-term contributions, while partnership prioritized equality, participation, shared vision, enduring commitment, and mutuality.[45]

Effective partnerships, the group concluded, thrive on solid and sincere relationships that prioritize mutual growth in Christ. To further support the development of such partnerships, they proposed the formation of a task force with several key objectives. These included developing a biblical theology of partnership, creating a handbook outlining outcomes, contemporary models, and best practices, designing a curriculum for biblical partnership training, and organizing an international consultation on biblical partnership with representation from across the globe.[46]

Missiological Perspectives

At the Iguassu Consultation, speakers from diverse ministry contexts shared missiological insights, emphasizing the critical role of partnership in mission.

One speaker from the US highlighted how the term 'partnership' in mission strategy often reflects business language, creating power imbalances that favour wealthier partners. They advocated for adopting biblical metaphors, such as the body of Christ, to emphasize interdependence and mutual sharing of resources. Another contributor from the United States urged Western partners to adopt a posture of humility, proposing a 'season of silence' in which they set aside their plans and strategies, allowing true partnerships to develop under the leadership of Majority World churches.

From Sri Lanka, a participant addressed the disparity in lifestyles between foreign missionaries and local communities, noting that missionaries often live in relative luxury, distancing themselves from those they serve. They called on the global missionary movement to critically reflect on how lifestyle choices impact the authenticity of partnerships. Meanwhile, a speaker from the Philippines critiqued partnerships that privilege Western 'big players' imposing strategies on Majority World 'small players.' They urged a move toward genuinely interdependent collaborations that respect the contributions of all churches equally.

In Africa, a participant from Ghana observed that intra-church cooperation works effectively on the continent but encounters significant challenges when extended to partnerships with Western churches. They highlighted the role of economic and technological inequalities in creating dependency and stressed the need for partnerships that promote interdependence and prioritize collaboration within Africa.

A European perspective came from a speaker in the Netherlands, who emphasized the continent's increasing reliance on missionaries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These regions now play a vital role in global missions, particularly in areas such as church planting and spiritual warfare, where Europe has less experience.

Overall, the consultation underscored the importance of fostering equitable and interdependent partnerships that respect cultural differences, value mutual contributions, and reflect the shared mission of the global church.[47]

Summary

The WEF (WEA) Iguassu Consultation had robust presentations and discussions about partnering in God's mission. This is specifically evident in the wording of Affirmation 13 about partnerships. We see this in the contrast between the competing sponsorship and partnership models. We see it in the regional missiological reflections about improving partnering between Western and Majority World missions. The Iguassu Consultation was a small gathering compared to the events highlighted by the Lausanne Movement or most International Missionary Conference gatherings in the 1900s. Nonetheless, the Iguassu Consultation demonstrates the maturation of what partnering in mission should consider, and much is still relevant today.

Though many spoke about unity, few offered concrete strategies for achieving it or what it would look like in practice. The language was there, but the substance often needed more depth. As we reflect on the history of evangelical collaboration, it is evident that while there has been progress, significant barriers remain. The desire for unity and partnership must be matched with intentional actions and a deeper understanding of how to realize collaboration.

Historically, Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals focused more on their differences than their common mission. However, this began to change in 1966 with gatherings such as the Wheaton Congress, the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism, and the Lausanne Congress of 1974, which fostered greater unity. Historian Timothy Yates notes that the Lausanne Movement's success lies in its ability to hold together the two dynamics of evangelism ('mission as proclamation') and 'social justice' (i.e., 'concern for the poor and socio-political involvement').[48] Allen Yeh summarizes this as the explicit 'bond between evangelism and social justice as equal partners in mission.'[49] Rather than being in tension with each other, they could mutually work together.

Thought Questions

1. What practical steps can be taken to ensure that the language of partnership translates into genuine collaboration in mission efforts?
2. How can mission organizations address the lingering power imbalances hindering true partnerships across geo-political and

socio-economic contexts?

Practical Applications

The history of partnerships in global mission reveals a significant tension. Despite much talk and well-meaning efforts toward collaboration, the language of partnership has often needed to improve in practice. Calls for deeper cooperation, initiated by bodies like the International Missionary Council in the early 20th century, frequently went unheeded. While the language of partnership was introduced, it was only sometimes carried forward or implemented in ways that could reshape the global mission landscape. One notable gap was the dominance of English in these discussions, which limited the involvement of non-Western voices and created imbalances in power dynamics.

Even with these challenges, the Lausanne Movement and the WEF Iguassu Consultation have consistently worked to integrate partnerships into mission efforts. During what Allen Yeh terms 'the Great Century of World Christianity,' these pivotal events marked a period when Christianity regained its status as a truly global religion. During this time, the Majority World churches grew in number and maturity, bringing new perspectives to global mission efforts.[50]

Considering these historical insights, here are practical steps for fostering genuine collaboration in God's mission today:

- *Embrace unity in mission as a biblical imperative:* As the Lausanne Covenant notes, 'Evangelism summons us to unity,'[51] means that collaborative efforts should be found in shared biblical faith. Prioritize unity in the essentials of the faith, focusing on mutual respect and a common purpose. This missional collaboration, since unity in truth, provides a powerful testimony to the world.
- *Move beyond competition and embrace true partnership:* One of the critical aspects of successful collaboration is moving beyond competition, which has historically been a barrier to evangelical mission. The *Lausanne Manifesto* and the *Iguassu Affirmation* both emphasize the need to avoid duplication and competition, urging churches and mission agencies to work together rather than independently. This means actively seeking opportunities for shared resources, joint efforts, and common goals. Collaboration should be

viewed to complement one another's work, not to compete for resources or recognition.

- *Foster equitable partnerships across cultures and economies:* Evangelical mission has often been marked by power imbalances, especially between the West and the Majority World. To cultivate effective and respectful partnerships, acknowledge and address these imbalances. Practice humility and allow for true interdependence, where all partners contribute their strengths equally. Ensure that financial support does not create dependency but fosters sustainable, local leadership in mission efforts. True partnerships should respect and elevate the contributions of all.
- *Prioritize mutual learning and shared vision:* Mission partnerships should be based on mutual understanding, where all participants are open to new perspectives and willing to teach and learn from each other. The *Iguassu Affirmation* and the *Cape Town Commitment* highlight the importance of a shared vision for the mission. This collaborative spirit ensures that the mission reflects the global body of Christ, enriched by the diversity of gifts and callings.
- *Engage in strategic, long-term collaboration:* Collaboration is not just a one-time effort but should be part of a long-term, sustained partnership. Like the ongoing collaboration fostered by the Lausanne Movement, establish networks that allow continuous cooperation and follow-up. These partnerships should be grounded in mutual accountability and regular evaluation. Whether through formal networks or informal partnerships, ensure that collaborative efforts are sustained, evaluated for effectiveness, and aligned with long-term mission goals.

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Chapter 9: Types of Collaboration

You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is already among you – Luke 17:21 (NLT)

The heart is continuously working hard to pump the blood; while a kidney takes it much easier, and a finger only moves when it has to. Yet all body parts are interrelated and cannot function independently – Karsten van Riesen[1]

Collaboration in God's mission is both a profound calling and a complex challenge. The body of Christ is designed to function as a unified yet diverse organism, where each part contributes uniquely to the mission. Discussions about missional collaboration have grown in importance over the past few decades. Key people and agencies have focussed on dealing with specific aspects of missional partnering. They include Alexandre Araujo and others from Partners International, Phil Butler and Ernie Addicott from Interdev, Luis Bush from the AD2000 and Beyond movement's classic work, *Partnering in Ministry*, The Lausanne Movement, and the World Evangelical Alliance.[2]

We will now explore five models of partnership that Christian missions can take: Independent, Unequal, Task-based, Interdependent, and Kingdom-focused Partnerships. Each model reveals a different dimension of collaboration in mission, from those that may create imbalances and dependency to those that aim for reciprocal engagement and mutual empowerment.

Independent Partnerships (No Partnering)

The effort required to establish, maintain, and evaluate partnerships can sometimes make working independently in mission seem more efficient. Being independent means not being influenced or controlled by others in opinion, behaviour, or decision-making. It involves thinking and acting for oneself, free from external authority or influence, and not being swayed by the thoughts or actions of others. However, it's crucial to consider whether

this approach aligns with how the body of Christ is called to function in ministry and God's mission. Exploring the theology and missiology of partnering shows that working independently contradicts the biblical model, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of the body of Christ.

Acting independently, even within partnerships, can sometimes seem appealing. 'Partnerships, like all relationships, are fraught with difficulties, and the temptation is still to "go it alone".'[3] The desire for independence often stems from a need to maintain control, especially given the tension between wealth and power on one side and poverty and disempowerment on the other.

For instance, in a missiological consultation on funding in African mission partnerships, participants noted that the colonial mission paradigm persisted. Despite starting with the intention of meeting local needs, foreign missionaries often ended up working independently of the local community. When they left, it became evident that they had developed only minimal local capacity. This illustration shows how those in positions of power are more prone to working independently, reducing the need to collaborate with or rely on others in mission partnerships. With power tied to wealth, or when wealth grants someone power, the likelihood of working independently increases.

As Karsten van Riesen illustrates, different parts of the human body have varying levels of activity and commitment. 'The heart is continuously working hard to pump the blood; while a kidney takes it much easier, and a finger only moves when it has to. Yet all body parts are interrelated and cannot function independently.' This provides a valuable 'metaphor for dynamic, broad-based partnership.'[4]

However, it's essential to consider whether this approach aligns with how the body of Christ is meant to function in ministry and God's mission. A study of the theology and missiology of partnering reveals that working independently contradicts the biblical model, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of the body of Christ.

As previously discussed, working independently is not a true partnership, though it sometimes happens. Potential partners may choose to go it alone in certain situations because they view it more efficient or straightforward. However, this approach can be seen as self-serving. We must focus on developing more effective partnerships to address the

significant and pressing issues today that impact God's mission's vital responsibilities and priorities.

Unequal Partnerships

For a partnership to be equal, it must be 'alike in quantity, degree, value...; evenly proportioned or balanced.'[5] In practice, however, it is challenging for two autonomous entities to partner equally, and as a result, partnerships often involve a certain level of risk. If left unchecked, partnerships can become unbalanced and thus unequal. This can happen, for example, when one partner feels it is 'doing a favor' by agreeing to collaborate with the other. But unless both partners recognize their mutual need for one another, the partnership risks becoming 'one-sided and is open to tensions and misunderstandings.'[6]

Another major factor in partnerships is the use or misuse of power. Those who hold power often have a high degree of control and can be self-reliant and adept at using management methods and technology. However, a subtle shift can occur in these relationships, where reliance on material and technological resources overshadows the focus on the gospel and new life in Christ. This power dynamic can allow mission movements and their supporters to hold influence (financial, educational, cultural, etc.) over the emerging churches of the Majority World. Often, partners may only accept this imbalance after critically examining how it affects their collaborative efforts. Additionally, a power dynamic is at play in determining who decides what is of value and how things are valued within the partnership.

Unequal partnerships often struggle with unhealthy financial dependency. This issue was addressed by the Lausanne Movement's *Cape Town Commitment*. When financial wealth is considered a sign of God's blessing and approval, spiritual well-being can become wrongly equated with wealth and possessions. Wealth, however, can be acquired through unethical means, such as 'oppression, deceit, or corruption,'[7] which must be carefully avoided in mission partnerships. The concern is not about money but how funds are handled. Even well-meaning financial contributions can lead to corruption and division within the church if used unwisely. Managing finances in mission partnerships is one of the most significant complications in collaborative efforts for God's mission. In most cases, one partner will inevitably have more financial resources than

the other, and problems can arise when money is distributed carelessly or given when not needed. Missions often involve the wealthy and the poor. Still, when the wealthy release the 'burden of wealth', there must be open and honest conversations to prevent dependency or paternalism from taking root.[8]

Gary Corwin observes that when different 'cultural forces occupy the same geographical space', there is often competition for 'prominence, position, and influence.' When the power dynamic between these forces is imbalanced, it is almost inevitable that one side will dominate while the other becomes subservient.[9]

This dynamic is evident in many well-meaning mission initiatives between the Western world and the Majority World. Such struggles can intensify feelings of inadequacy, hindering the national partner or church from fully embracing what it means to be self-sustaining. Daniel Rickett points out, 'partners who collaborate primarily out of benevolence run the risk of overvaluing their contribution and undervaluing the partner's contribution.' When this occurs, the dominant partner 'can easily fall into the trap of paternalism.'[10] Paternalism emerges when one party takes on a client-patron relationship – where a wealthy donor, through generous contributions, wields power and influence over the partnership. In these situations, patrons may expect loyalty, support, and even praise that elevate their status and honour.

Many factors and contexts contribute to unequal partnerships. We have touched on principal factors, such as power dynamics, financial influence, and the disparity between affluent and less affluent partners. However, the idea of an 'unequal' partnership feels uncomfortable because of these questions: What does equality in a partnership look like? By whose standards or expectations is equality measured? For some, an equal partnership might mean having the same resources and opportunities; for others, it could mean being equally disadvantaged or having equal needs. It is worth considering why we place such a high value on equality. Unequal partnerships can undermine unity within the body of Christ, but perhaps there is a better, more holistic way to approach collaboration. How might we redefine partnership to focus on mutual respect, shared vision, and complementary strengths rather than striving for a strict sense of equality? We're now ready to look at the next category.

Task Partnerships

Mission endeavours may manifest as tasks to be achieved by action-oriented practitioners who don't necessarily understand how to participate in the triune God's mission or may lack appreciation of the theological and missiological implications of collaborating in ministry. Some collaborative processes follow a linear progression, moving step-by-step over time, from defining the problem to setting a course of action and implementing it.[11] The result focuses on the actions, tasks, strategies, plans, and initiatives to fulfil a particular project or program in God's mission.

Evangelical fervour in the era of modern missions has led to Christians' belief in their responsibility for bringing the Great Commission to completion, or at least doing their part to accelerate it, thus playing a critical role in God's plan of redemption and reconciliation of all peoples. Western mission agencies still primarily influence cross-cultural mission strategy and methodology. However, partners from the Majority World have been known to experience unpleasant encounters with the powerful notions of Western mission endeavours. For example, the Protestant work ethic connects a primary calling of service to God with hours worked, which, if left unchecked, can lead to workaholism. On the positive side, this can contribute to a deliberate and proactive engagement with problems, resulting in a means or change in collaborative relationships.

The powerful international system that controls the transfer of Western resources (such as personnel, funds, prayer support, and strategies) is associated with 'getting the task done' and recently includes the contribution of Asian wealth and influence. These resources and contributions are distributed to and used by the Majority World, enabling a system that keeps Westerners in charge. Their financial resources and academic expertise initially brought these services to the rest of the world. Efforts to raise funds and relate to large-fund donors create expectations that speed, efficiency, and meeting goals and targets are of primary importance.

Statistical reports are a standard method for assessing progress, often based on the saying, 'You are what you measure' or 'What gets measured counts.'[12] However, relying solely on more data to address difficulties in ministry partnerships may not provide the complete (or any) solution. As Seth Godin insightfully points out, what's needed isn't necessarily more

data, but 'more insight, more innovation, and better eyes.'[13] In other words, discernment is essential to transforming raw data into meaningful information from which 'useful truth' can be extracted.[14] It can be challenging to ensure that a process of discernment is included in task-oriented partnerships, especially when the emphasis is on completed tasks and expected outcomes. All of this opens the door for further exploration of other types of partnerships.

Interdependent Partnerships

Shifting away from unequal and task-based partnerships allows us to focus on what each partner uniquely contributes to the collaborative effort, with the goal being interdependence. Achieving this type of partnership can be demanding because true partnership requires change – it cannot simply leave things as they are.[15] A healthier form of partnership builds on mutual trust and 'confidence in one another.'[16] An essential element of successful partnerships is a 'reciprocal character' where mutual encouragement flows both ways. In such relationships, both partners share resources, rather than one partner being the sole giver and the other the receiver.[17]

Changing direction from unequal partnerships toward interdependence requires what Alex Araujo calls 'responsible trust,' where each partner has confidence in the other's ability to fulfil their role.[18] Each partner deliberately learns to depend on the other, setting aside the desire to remain self-sufficient. While some argue that equality is an essential ethos for any partnership,[19] interdependence becomes the actual value, recognizing that perfect equality is impossible beyond shared value, voice, and representation.

Healthy partnering and collaborative efforts can lead to increased missional impact. These relationships are built on a foundation of 'trust, equality, unity, and respect,' all while 'affirming the *missio Dei* as both the means and the end of mission.'[20] In cross-cultural contexts, when partners focus on establishing trust across cultural boundaries, they are more willing and joyful in serving together. The goal of cross-cultural relationships is to foster positive change, with participants becoming 'agents of change' as they recognize the dynamic nature of partnership.[21]

Creating space for grace is crucial in strengthening genuine friendships built on trust and mutuality. Such relationships lead to deeper collaboration, shared control, and generosity, recognizing and affirming the value of each partner. In this context, 'creative, non-paternalistic partnerships are needed' to foster mutual understanding and transformation.[22] Trust is the primary ingredient for effective cross-cultural collaboration, though it can be challenging to establish when miscommunication threatens to derail even the best intentions.

All partners have strengths and weaknesses, but spiritual maturity is necessary for open and transparent relationships within the community. This perspective shifts the partnership focus from merely completing tasks or meeting goals and instead emphasizes fostering a healthy and productive relationship.

In an interdependent collaboration, partners understand each other's expectations through dialogue and build a common understanding. Alex Araujo refers to this as 'an informed assessment' of the partnership, which contributes to building confidence.[23] While the abilities and strengths of each partner may differ, at the partnership table, all partners should be afforded equal status, with benefits flowing in at least two directions.[24]

Global mission is undergoing a transformation driven by the church's growth in the Majority World, globalization, people movements, and the widespread use of technology. This growth has led many new organizations and individuals to participate in God's mission. As Allen Yeh notes, Majority World churches have 'come of age' and are now equal contributors, no longer just learners.[25] However, it's essential to recognize that everyone in global mission should be learners and contributors. The Western church must avoid paternalistic thinking that assumes it alone is mature in this respect.

Advances in technology have introduced innovative ways of doing mission work, and these innovations are most effective when managed within interdependent partnerships. None of us possesses all the gifts, and our limitations remind us to embrace interdependence and celebrate the strengths of our partners.[26] Collaborative efforts based on trust are ultimately the most effective.

Kingdom-focused Partnerships

We now turn to an ultimate form of partnership. Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God, demonstrated through his miracles and bold teaching, emphasized God's reign on earth. His teachings often addressed the injustices caused by poverty and corruption. The church proclaims this kingdom as being 'over all things,' for God is ruler over all.[27] Importantly, the kingdom of God is not a physical place on earth – it is embodied in the person of Jesus (Luke 17:21). He represents God's reign on earth, the tangible 'reality of the kingdom in human form.'[28] The kingdom of God reflects 'the dynamic activity of God and the sphere in which his rule is experienced.'[29]

Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom was intended to break down barriers of class, religion, gender, and reputation – the very boundaries that keep people apart and hinder the growth of God's kingdom. We see this in many biblical accounts. One example is in Luke 5, where Jesus calls the first disciples. This story reveals many layers of boundaries and power struggles: who needs healing, whose sins need forgiveness, and who has the authority to forgive. Jesus' arrival disrupted the established identities and roles, particularly those of religious leaders, as he gathered fishermen and others to follow him.[30]

As Dana Robert and others note, '"Kingdom partnerships" based on listening and mutuality are key to evangelical collaborations abroad.'[31] Partnering in God's kingdom 'is done in a spirit of collaboration,' as men and women form the body of Christ together. Just as 'the triune God exists in community,' we too are communal by nature, made in his image.[32] The church's mission begins with the triune God. When the church acts out the love that took Jesus to the cross, it invites people into union with Christ, representing the kingdom's presence in this world. As a 'preview' of God's kingdom, the Holy Spirit directs the church into the world in often mysterious ways.[33] Building the kingdom of God involves the whole person – body, mind, soul, and spirit. Partnering for this kingdom leads to a more holistic missional practice, where all partners seek the best for one another, reflecting Christ's body and the triune God's inter-community nature in mission.

Collaboration in God's kingdom reveals itself through clear signs and actions that reflect biblical values such as oneness, unity, and partnership as members of the body of Christ. We become yokefellows, colleagues, companions, fellow workers, and associates, labouring together. This

involves fellowship, community, communion, and joint participation, where we bear with and forgive one another as members of God's household. We grow together, living in harmony and carrying the self-giving of Jesus in our bodies so that his life is revealed in a unified body with many diverse parts and functions – revealing the profound vision of kingdom partnership!

Summary

The typology we've covered gives us perspectives from no partnering to partnering for God's kingdom. The typology is summarized in this table:

Independent	Unequal	Task	Interdependent	Kingdom-focused
Go it alone	Difficult and risky to partner equally	Focus on actions and tasks (business model)	Each partner contributes	Focus on God's reign
Maintain control	Can be one-sided	Protestant work ethic	Confidence in each other	Breaking through barriers
No need for others	Open to tensions and misunderstandings	International system	Reciprocal	Dealing with boundaries and divisions
Not biblical	Misuse of power	Western control	Mutual encouragement	Spirit of collaboration
Selfish	Dependency	Efficiency focus	Responsible trust	Triune God sets example
	Feelings of inadequacy	Statistics and measurements (results focussed)	Equality, trust, unity	Triune God in mission sets agenda
	Paternalism	Competitive and isolating	Creative, non-paternalistic	Signs and actions of God's kingdom

Table: Comparison of partnering typologies

Thought Questions

1. How can we redefine success in mission partnerships beyond task completion and measurable outcomes to emphasize spiritual growth and mutual encouragement?
2. How can we ensure that affluent and less affluent partners contribute meaningfully and are valued equally in mission collaborations?

Practical Applications

Partnering in mission is more complex than simply choosing between working independently or in collaboration. Each context calls for authentic, respectful, and generous cooperation. There is a clear distinction between short-term, project-based partnerships and a deeper, ongoing collaborative mindset. Regardless of the type of partnership, it's essential to seek opportunities to embody the values of kingdom partnering throughout the entire process.

Kingdom partnering is not just a single model; it is a mindset, a theology, and a way of behaving. It's crucial to recognize that there is no ideal type of collaboration – kingdom partnering is not the only valid approach. Every form of partnership has its value and its unique challenges. The key is understanding how to collaborate in a way that reflects the broader kingdom's vision of God's mission.

Ruslan Maliuta, a key figure in supporting collaborative initiatives, emphasizes the need for a shared vision when people work together. His passion for collaboration grew as he engaged with individuals concerned about the world's orphans, and he has observed a growing commitment to collaboration in Christian missions. However, he also points out that genuine 'kingdom collaboration' remains rare despite widespread agreement on the importance of collaboration. Ruslan's observations underscore the need for a deeper theological understanding of collaboration, particularly one rooted in the kingdom of God.[34]

This chapter explores various types of collaboration in God's mission, highlighting the opportunities and challenges inherent in each model. Consider these applications:

- *Move beyond independent work to interdependence:* In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul describes how the body of Christ cannot function independently – each part is vital. True collaboration requires mutual trust, shared resources, and the willingness to support and learn from one another.
- *Recognize and address power imbalances:* For healthy partnerships, it is crucial to identify and address power imbalances. Engage in honest conversations about the power dynamics in your collaboration. Ensure that all partners are valued equally regardless of financial or cultural standing. This can involve intentionally sharing leadership responsibilities and decision-making power,

preventing one-sided control or the emergence of an imbalanced partnership.

- *Task-oriented partnerships need clear goals:* Task-based partnerships can be effective when focused on completing specific goals. However, it's important not to lose sight of the bigger picture – God's mission. Set clear, measurable objectives for task-oriented collaborations, but ensure they are part of a larger vision that includes relationship-building, mutual respect, and shared growth.
- *Shift towards interdependent and reciprocal relationships:* Interdependent partnerships, where all parties contribute and benefit, are the foundation for lasting collaboration in mission. This requires moving away from the 'giver-receiver' mentality and embracing mutual contribution. Each partner should have confidence in the others' abilities and willingness to learn and share. Establishing interdependence requires patience, humility, commitment to ongoing dialogue, mutual encouragement, and trust.
- *Focus on kingdom-focused collaboration:* The goal is to advance God's Kingdom, not merely organizational success. Kingdom-focused partnerships are driven by a shared vision of God's rule on earth, as exemplified in Jesus' life and mission. Encourage collaborations that reflect oneness, unity, and the holistic nature of God's mission. A true partnership in mission is about building relationships, fostering transformation, and working together toward glorifying God.

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[1] van Riezen, 19.

[2] Wan, and Penman 1.

[3] Balia, and Kim, 132.

[4] van Riezen, 19.

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[18] Araujo, in *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions*, 123.

[19] Celesi, and Bowers du Toit 2.

[20] Celesi, and Bowers du Toit 2.

[21] Wrogemann, 97.

[22] Balia, and Kim, 132.

[23] Araujo, in *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions*, 124.

[24] Celesi, and Bowers du Toit 2.

[25] Yeh, 180.

[26] *Co-Workers and Co-Leaders*, ed. Amanda Jackson and Peirong Lin (Bonn: VKW, 2021), 93.

[27] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission, Revised* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 29.

[28] *Co-Workers and Co-Leaders*, 30.

[29] Glasser, 226.

[30] *Co-Workers and Co-Leaders*, 14.

[31] Robert et al., in *A Hundred Years of Mission Cooperation: The Impact of the International Missionary Council 1921-2021*, 383.

[32] *Co-Workers and Co-Leaders*, 31.

[33] Newbigin, 65.

[34] Maliuta, interview.

Chapter 10: Frameworks for Collaborative Efforts

I tell you the truth: whoever believes in Me will be able to do what I have done, but they will do even greater things, because I will return to be with the Father – John 14:12 (VOICE)

Collaboration requires both patience and persistence. Results may take time, but consistent effort is essential for success – adapted from Rick Warren[1]

This chapter presents various frameworks to guide mission and ministry partnering efforts. These frameworks come from a range of sources. While they offer valuable insights and tools, it is essential to note that we are not advocating for any one framework or endorsing the entirety of the perspectives behind them. Instead, these frameworks are offered as potential resources that aid in different aspects of partnerships, depending on context and need. Readers are encouraged to approach them critically, considering what may be helpful while understanding that no single framework will fully address the complexities of every situation. The goal is to foster discernment and thoughtful consideration, ensuring the frameworks are used as starting points for deeper reflection and adaptation rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

Principles for Effective Partnering

In *Body Matters*, Ernie Addicott outlines Interdev's principles, which are vital for developing effective partnerships and fully aligning with Scripture.[2] Although Interdev is no longer active, it was a Christian ministry dedicated to helping missions, churches, and other agencies collaborate in God's mission. These principles are organized into four categories and summarized in this table:

A. Leadership	B. Direction	C. Effective Working	D. Effective Partners
1. Seek the direction of God (praying together, sharing communion, ministry of the Holy Spirit)	3. Clear purpose (fulfilling a specific purpose)	7. Built on relationships of trust, openness, and mutual concern (restored relationships)	13. Engage constituencies/ stakeholders (acknowledge and value their contribution)

A. Leadership	B. Direction	C. Effective Working	D. Effective Partners
2. Have a facilitator/facilitation team (a person/people committed to partnering)	4. Identify needs before structure (barriers to progress, priorities for action)	8. Focus on what is in common (unity through things of the heart; acknowledge and celebrate differences, too)	14. An internal advocate for partnering (shares the vision with colleagues)
	5. Clear well-defined objectives (provides motivation)	9. High level of participation and ownership (all partners involved in decision-making)	15. Clear identity and vision (effectiveness comes from clarity about joint efforts)
	6. Focus on vision (long-term rather than day-to-day demands)	10. Continuously impart partnership development (partnership development; processes for managing change)	
		11. Costs time and money (commitment and investment)	
		12. Ongoing process (aim for the long-haul rather than short-term gains)	

Table: Interdev's 12 Principles for Partnering

The principles, divided into leadership, direction, practical working, and effective partners, emphasize seeking God's guidance, having clear objectives and vision, fostering trust-based relationships, and ensuring high participation and ownership. Partnerships should focus on long-term goals, involve continual development, and engage stakeholders while addressing mutual needs and differences.

Effective Partnering Features

Drawing from his doctoral research on partnering in mission contexts, Karsten Van Riesen identifies five key features for effective partnerships. These features exist along a continuum of engagement, moving from high to low levels of involvement, which he categorizes as collaboration, coordination, and communication.[3] His experiences establishing and managing ministry and mission partnerships inform his work. The five features are outlined as follows:

A clear and compelling vision: According to Van Riesen, a clear and appealing vision is essential to a successful partnership. He notes that Jesus was foremost a visionary leader, able to mobilize people around an inspiring vision. This vision must be articulated clearly and be compelling enough to motivate leaders to invest their time and energy in meetings and discussions. However, the vision also needs flexibility to adjust, enabling partners to make it their own. As partners engage in discussions and collaborative efforts, the vision may either expand through contributions that the initiators hadn't considered or become more focused as partners rally around particular aspects of the original vision.[4]

Joint decision-making: Effective joint decision-making is complex and crucial, requiring deliberate effort and a simple, participative process involving all stakeholders. Obstacles to truly collaborative decision-making include structural challenges embedded in the systems participants belong to, administrative hurdles due to the organization of the partnership, and social barriers resulting from ingrained patterns of thought and behaviour. Overcoming these barriers is essential for fostering genuine collaboration.[5]

Tangible progress: This is key to sustaining the effectiveness of any partnership. Periodically, all stakeholders – governors, CEOs, implementers, and funders – must step back, reflect, and celebrate what God has accomplished through their partnership. A lack of communication between these groups can hinder this process, so Van Riesen emphasizes the importance of developing mechanisms to monitor, celebrate, and learn from the partnership's progress. For leaders of mission organizations, numbers and data alone are insufficient; they also want to see evidence of God's work and celebrate it through worship. Furthermore, effective partnerships should focus on successes and reflect on areas where things

did not go as planned, as learning is often more critical than simply managing programs.[6]

Fostering deep relationships: Building deep, trusting relationships is particularly important in cross-cultural contexts. Van Riesen notes that in collectivist cultures, individuals generally prefer to operate as part of a group, and much of their communication is non-verbal. To interpret these non-verbal cues effectively, partners must know each other well. Trust is foundational to these relationships, and Van Riesen draws on Stephen M.R. Covey's *The Speed of Trust* to outline key behaviours that foster trust: (a) speaking straightforwardly, (b) showing respect, (c) being transparent, (d) demonstrating loyalty, and (e) listening first.[7]

Supporting different levels of engagement: Effective partnerships require flexibility to accommodate varying levels of engagement, depending on the type and stage of the collaboration. Partnerships evolve through seven stages of collaboration: (1) Coexistence, (2) Communication, (3) Cooperation, (4) Coordination, (5) Coalition, (6) Collaboration, and (7) Coadunation (meaning 'united by growth'). Understanding and supporting these different levels of engagement is crucial for long-term partnership success.[8]

The above offers a practical framework for building sustainable and collaborative mission partnerships.

Kingdom Partnerships

Alex Araujo outlines six factors within a framework that help determine whether a partner's organization can be trusted to meet mutually agreed-upon expectations.[9] These factors are:

- *Internal accountability structure:* A trustworthy organization typically has an internal accountability structure, such as a board, council, or oversight committee. This body is updated regularly on the ministry's goals, significant program activities, financial status, and accounting practices. Board members must attend meetings consistently and thoroughly understand their ministry responsibilities.[10]
- *Clear goals and objectives:* The organization's goals and objectives should be clearly defined, measurable, and achievable. These are

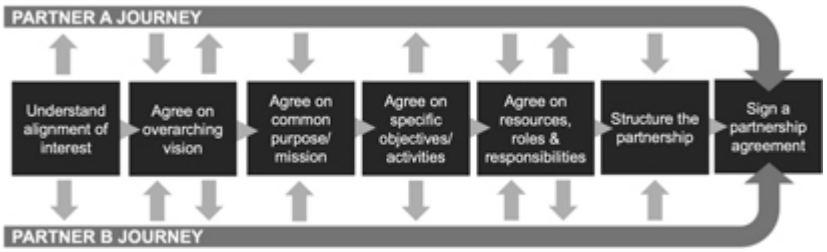
often called SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.

- *Well-defined policies and procedures:* A partner organization should have established policies and procedures that guide its governance, decision-making processes, and program implementation. Effective governance may require a formal, consensus-driven, deliberative decision-making process, particularly when managing public programs or assets. Financial policies are also necessary to ensure proper oversight of the ministry's funds.
- *Sufficient personnel:* The organization must have adequate human resources to meet the expectations and responsibilities outlined in the partnership.
- *Credibility:* Partners should ensure their organizations are credible within the broader ministry community. A solid reputation increases trust and reliability in collaborative efforts.
- *Past performance:* Evaluating the partner's past performance in implementing programs and projects with other organizations can be a strong indicator of their ability to fulfil future partnership commitments.[11]

These six evaluation factors of a partnership ensure the organization can meet mutually agreed-upon expectations and contribute effectively to collaborative efforts.

Partnering Journey

The Partnering Initiative (TPI) outlines a comprehensive roadmap for building effective collaborations, referred to as the 'partnership formation journey.'[12] This process progressively clarifies the partnership's vision, mission, objectives, activities, and roles. Over time, these elements become more specific as the partnership evolves. TPI's diagram illustrates this journey, showing the phases from aligning interests to signing a formal partnership agreement, emphasizing both internal and external negotiations throughout:



TPI's roadmap for building effective partnerships illustrates a journey where vision, mission, objectives, and roles gradually become more evident. This process involves aligning interests, agreeing on an overarching vision, defining a common purpose, setting specific goals, assigning roles and responsibilities, structuring the partnership, and signing an agreement. Partners engage in internal and external negotiations to maximize the partnership's value and secure commitment.

Partnering Continuum

VisionSynergy, an organization dedicated to facilitating mission partnerships, offers Daniel Dow's 'Partnering Continuum,' which illustrates how partnerships progress through increasing levels of engagement, moving from Connecting to Cooperating, to Coordinating, and ultimately to Collaborating.[13]

Connecting: This stage involves sharing a vision and basic information, but there needs to be a formal commitment, structure, or decision-making involved. *Cooperating:* Participants engage informally in projects with minimal risk and structure, building consensus without joint decisions. *Coordinating:* Partners commit to formal relationships, collectively plan projects, share moderate risks, and make joint decisions. Collaborating: In this high-trust phase, partners invest significant time and resources, share comprehensive planning, and make structured, joint decisions.

This framework provides insights into the stages of development of successful partnerships moving from low-intensity to high-intensity. This

framework helps organizations understand and navigate the evolving dynamics of mission partnerships.

Collective Impact

Stanford University identifies five conditions essential for the success of collective impact initiatives, which lead to proper alignment and powerful results:[14]

- *Common agenda:* All participants must share a unified vision for change, resolve differences in problem definitions, and work collaboratively towards agreed-upon goals.
- *Shared measurement systems:* Participants collect and analyze consistent data using common indicators, ensuring accountability and alignment while learning from the initiative's successes and failures.
- *Mutually reinforcing activities:* Stakeholders undertake differentiated activities that align with and support each other's efforts, creating a coordinated plan to address complex, interconnected social issues.
- *Continuous communication:* Frequent, structured communication over time builds trust, ensures fairness, and fosters collaborative problem-solving, helping participants develop a shared understanding and common language.
- *Backbone support organization:* A separate, dedicated organization provides essential coordination, facilitation, data management, and logistical support to sustain the initiative and guide decision-making processes.

The Collective Impact's five conditions for successful collaborative initiatives, when used together, the elements ensure alignment and drive powerful, collective results.

Collaborative Factors Inventory

This inventory, provided by Wilder Research, is designed to help groups systematically assess the health of their collaboration. It is based on 22 key 'success factors,' which offer a comprehensive framework for evaluating and strengthening collaborative efforts:[15]

1. History of collaboration in the community (feelings and experiences)	7. Ability to compromise (clarity, collective ownership, new perspectives)	13. Appropriate pace of development (the right people involved; phases for collaborating)	19. Unique purpose (accomplishing more together than alone)
2. Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community (signs of trust)	8. Members share a stake in both process and outcome (collaboratively led, revisit agreements, clear and measurable outcomes)	14. Evaluation and continuous learning (agreed measures for impact, learning and evaluation)	20. Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time (realistic budgets and timelines)
3. Favourable political and social climate (adversaries and champions)	9. Multiple layers of participation (each level informed and engaged)	15. Open and frequent communication (transparency, communication eco-system, key information)	21. Skilled leadership (experienced facilitation; shared leadership)
4. Mutual respect, understanding, and trust (agreements and realistic goals)	10. Flexibility (course corrections, structured for impact, cultural norms included)	16. Established informal relationships and communication links (partners easily connect with each other)	22. Engaged shareholders (buy-in, two-way communication)
5. Appropriate cross-section of members (who is affected, who is missing)	11. Development of clear roles and policy guides (responsibilities and expectations)	17. Concrete, attainable goals and objectives (clear, simple documentation)	
6. Members see collaboration as being in their self-interest (articulating benefits)	12. Adaptability to changing conditions (open and honest, managing changes)	18. Shared vision (definition of success, easily communicated)	

Wilder inventory helps groups assess the health of their collaboration through 22 success factors. These include a history of collaboration, legitimacy and trust, political and social climate, mutual respect, diverse membership, flexibility, shared ownership, effective communication, clear goals, and skilled leadership. The inventory also emphasizes adaptability, continuous learning, and sufficient resources to ensure collaborative efforts are impactful and sustainable over time.

Finish the Task's Collaborative Framework

Rick Warren offers this nine-step approach to plan a collaborative effort for the Great Commission based on Genesis 24:[16]

- *Step 1: Describe the present condition.* Assess our current position. Understanding our starting point is essential for moving forward effectively.

- *Step 2: Define the purpose.* Clarity of purpose is essential to successful collaboration. Teams do not unite around vague goals; they need a clear, concise, and compelling vision. Ask your team: 'What do we want to be? What do we want to do? What do we want to achieve?' Knowing the 'why' behind your goals is crucial – it provides motivation. Jesus often emphasized rewards, which inspire commitment.
- *Step 3: Discover a promise.* This is where Christian collaboration stands apart from secular efforts. We have the privilege of holding onto God's promises. The Bible offers over 7,000 promises, like blank checks waiting to be claimed. In every collaborative project, find a promise to anchor your confidence. Focus on God's promise, not just the problem, to cultivate trust in Him.
- *Step 4: Desire in prayer.* Once the purpose and promise are clear, the next step is to express your desires in prayer. Jesus encourages us to pray for our goals. In Mark 11:24, He says, 'Whatever you desire in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.' Prayer aligns your desires with God's will.
- *Step 5: Diagnose the problems.* Now, identify the obstacles. Ask, 'Why haven't we achieved this yet?' List the barriers, challenges, and roadblocks preventing progress in church planting, scripture translation, or evangelism. Determine the biggest hindrance to your goals.
- *Step 6: Design a plan.* With clarity of vision, goals, and challenges, work with your team to design a strategic plan. Genesis 24:10-14 outlines Eliezer's plan, providing a biblical model of thoughtful, step-by-step preparation.
- *Step 7: Be Patient and Persistent.* Collaboration requires both patience and persistence. Results may take time, but consistent effort is essential for success.
- *Step 8: Depend on People.* Trust is the foundation of all collaboration. Like Eliezer, who enlisted the support of family members, we must build relationships of trust and cooperation within our teams.
- *Step 9: Make the Investment.* Every goal requires sacrifice. There is always a price to pay for dreams and projects. In Genesis 24:53, Eliezer invests in relationships by giving gifts to Rebekah's family,

a smart move that builds goodwill. Likewise, be prepared to invest in your collaborative efforts.

Collaborating with Wicked Problems

The challenges of global mission are too complex for any single group to solve alone. Nicola Ulibarri highlights how public organizations often adopt collaborative approaches when faced with 'wicked problems'.[17] These uncertain issues, labelled 'wicked' simply because they are complex, resist straightforward solutions. Collaboration, while helpful in sharing risk, can increase uncertainty as diverse stakeholders may reframe or complicate the issue. Wicked problems were first coined by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber (1973). They argued that science developed methods to deal with 'tame' or solvable problems, not to deal with 'wicked' problems. These are complex, multifaceted issues that defy straightforward solutions. Unlike 'tame' problems, which can be easily defined and solved with technical expertise, several vital attributes characterize wicked problems:

- *Complexity:* Wicked problems involve numerous interconnected factors, making them challenging to understand comprehensively. These problems often have multiple causes and consequences, and addressing one aspect may have unintended effects on others.
- *Uncertainty:* Solutions to wicked problems must be clarified and may involve trade-offs between conflicting interests or values. There is often uncertainty about proposed solutions' effectiveness and long-term impacts.
- *Ambiguity:* Wicked problems often need to be defined or open to interpretation. Different stakeholders may have diverse perspectives on the nature of the problem and potential solutions, leading to disagreement and conflict.
- *Resistance to Resolution:* Wicked problems persist over time and resist traditional problem-solving approaches. Even if temporary solutions are implemented, the problem may reappear or manifest in new forms.

Wicked problems are defined by their interconnectedness with other issues, the involvement of diverse stakeholders with varying perspectives, and the likelihood of unintended consequences from any intervention.

Tackling these challenges requires collaborative, adaptive approaches that consider multiple viewpoints. Leaders must manage power dynamics, foster collaboration, and navigate the unpredictability of complex systems. To do so, they must be reflective practitioners and lifelong learners, continuously identifying opportunities and challenges in regional-global contexts. Although the complexity of wicked problems can tempt leaders to abandon this discipline, it also offers potential solutions.

Thought Questions

1. How can joint decision-making and shared ownership principles be effectively applied in your current or future mission partnerships?
2. In what ways might the unique cultural dynamics of your partnership affect the development of trust and communication among stakeholders?

Practical Applications

The various frameworks presented in this chapter offer valuable insights and strategies for fostering effective mission partnerships. These frameworks cover maintaining cultural awareness, evaluating progress, facilitating stakeholder communication, and ensuring a well-rounded and sustainable collaboration. Addicott's principles emphasize the importance of leadership and trust-based relationships for long-term partnerships. At the same time, Van Riesen highlights the need for a compelling vision, joint decision-making, and deep relationship-building. Araujo underscores the significance of accountability and credibility, and TPI provides a detailed roadmap for evolving partnership roles. Additionally, Dow's continuum presents the stages of collaboration, and Stanford's Collective Impact identifies the essential conditions for success. Wilder's inventory helps assess the health of cooperation, while Warren's nine practical steps offer guidance on collaborating for the Great Commission and addressing complex challenges.

While these frameworks share common elements, each offers a unique perspective, focusing on clear guidelines, measurable impact, and adaptable strategies. These resources are not one-size-fits-all solutions; they help us assess, adapt, and implement effective collaboration strategies that fit the specific context of each partnership. No single

framework can address every complexity, but they offer a comprehensive understanding of engaging in and sustaining collaborative efforts in mission. These tools allow us to move toward more profound, meaningful collaboration that aligns with God's kingdom and mission.

Now, here are practical steps to guide your collaborative efforts grounded in these frameworks:

- *Seek God's direction and share the vision:* As Ernie Addicott's principles highlighted, the first step in any successful partnership is seeking God's direction. Start by committing your plans to prayer and ensuring all partners align with a shared, compelling vision. This vision should be clear yet flexible enough to evolve as partners contribute new insights. Focusing on long-term objectives creates a unified purpose, transcending immediate tasks and fostering deeper collaboration among partners.
- *Establish trust-based relationships:* Trust is the cornerstone of effective collaboration, especially in cross-cultural contexts. Karsten Van Riesen emphasizes the importance of deep, trusting relationships, which are vital for sustaining partnerships over time. Foster trust by being transparent, showing respect, and listening first. Regular communication and shared experiences are crucial to building this trust. Ensure all stakeholders are genuinely invested in the partnership, making it a shared endeavour where every voice is heard.
- *Practice joint decision-making and ownership:* One principle for successful collaboration is joint decision-making, where all stakeholders actively participate in shaping the direction of the partnership. This is essential for ensuring that all partners feel ownership of the mission. Overcome structural barriers and social norms that might hinder participation by creating a simple, inclusive decision-making process. Empower local leaders and stakeholders to be actively involved in decisions, ensuring that the partnership reflects the needs and aspirations of all involved.
- *Celebrate tangible progress:* Regularly assess and celebrate the tangible progress made in the partnership, whether through achieved milestones or personal stories of transformation. Van Riesen emphasizes the importance of acknowledging both successes and challenges. This not only boosts morale but also provides learning

opportunities for all partners. Use data and feedback to adapt and refine strategies, ensuring that the collaboration remains focused on its goals and is responsive to the evolving mission context.

- *Adopt a kingdom-focused mindset:* Keep the overarching goal of advancing God's kingdom central throughout the collaboration. As Alex Araujo suggests, ensure that the partnership's goals align with clear, kingdom-focused objectives, such as addressing justice, reconciliation, and the spread of the gospel. Build a strong accountability structure and ensure all actions contribute to a larger vision of God's reign. Avoid focusing solely on efficiency or tasks; prioritize your efforts' spiritual and missional impact.

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[1] Rick Warren, *How We Will Collaborate for the Great Commission* (Finishing The Task, 2022), 3.

[2] Addicott, 169-73.

[3] van Riezen, 100.

[4] van Riezen, 101.

[5] van Riezen, 83.

[6] van Riezen, 106.

[7] van Riezen, 107.

[8] Dictionary.com, "coadunate," https://www.dictionary.com/browse/coadunate.

[9] Araujo, in *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions*, 125.

[10] Araujo, in *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions*, 126.

[11] Araujo, in *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions*, 128.

[12] The Partnering Initiative, "The Partnering Journey," https://thepartneringinitiative.org/the-partnering-journey/, accessed 13 November 2024.

[13] Synergy Commons, "The Partnering Continuum," https://synergycommons.net/resources/the-partnering-continuum/, accessed 13 November 2024.

[14] John Kania, and Mark Kramer, *Essentials of Social Innovation Collective Impact* (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2011).

[15] Mattessich, and Johnson, 57, 94-98.

[16] Warren, 3.

[17] Nicola Ulibarri, "Collaborative Governance: A Tool to Manage Scientific, Administrative, and Strategic Uncertainties in Environmental Management?," *Ecology and Society* 24, no. 2 (2019): 3, https://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-10962-240215.

Case Study: The Partnering Pyramid

Overview

Imagine being captivated by a beautifully crafted dollhouse in a toy store, only to find 'assembly required' when you get home. The instructions are unclear. Halfway through, you realize that crucial parts are missing. The project stalls. Disappointment sets in.

If assembling a toy is frustrating, building a partnership is far more complex, dealing with frameworks, contexts, people and resources, and organizations, each with different histories and perspectives. Miscommunications happen, commitments fade, and progress can stall without explanation.

But there is hope. While partnerships don't come with a step-by-step manual, they follow a predictable process. The 'Partnering Pyramid' developed by Todd Poulter of International Partnering Associates provides a visual guide to help you understand and assess what's needed for effective collaboration. It won't do the work for you, but it will help identify the building blocks for a successful partnership.

A seasoned mission practitioner, Bambi has applied the Pyramid in her work. She gives insights into how these principles function in partnerships, where relationships and trust are essential to building long-lasting collaborations. Her insights speak to some of the Pyramid's usefulness.

Diagram: Essentials of the Partnering Pyramid

The Partnering Pyramid is divided into three levels: Foundation, Forward Progress, and Fruit(fulness), with God's Purposes, Heart, and our Unity are at the centre of it all (see illustration). Like the enduring pyramids of Egypt, the strength of a partnership lies in its design, foundation, and maintenance.

Foundation

At the base of the Pyramid lies the Foundation, consisting of a *Clear, Compelling Purpose, a Passionate Champion, Committed Partners,* and *Deep Trust.* There is the often-hidden work of God to inspire the idea of partnering and to prepare individuals and organizations to take up the challenges of partnering. Trust and friendship are the pillars of any successful partnership.

Bambi underscores this foundational element: 'In my experience, partnership sometimes starts with a clear purpose, but often, it starts with deep trust with people I know who share a similar passion for unreached people groups (UPGs).'[1] This insight affirms the Pyramid framework's point that relationships and trust are critical in laying a partnership's foundation.

Bambi also reflects on the critical role of champions in partnership: 'I think that's what Todd illustrated by placing the heart in the middle of the Pyramid. We emphasize that now in the training because it's of utmost importance, and the younger generation of missionaries need to know that…. They are already motivated to partner but don't know how to do it

well. They need some spiritual foundations to undergird what they are already willing to do with others in the Body of Christ.'[2]

Forward Progress

The second level, Forward Progress, emphasizes the importance of good processes in partnership development. This involves partners agreeing to engage in a *Shared Journey*, requiring skilled and *Effective Facilitation* to start and sustain partnering efforts.

Fruit

At the top of the Pyramid is Fruit, the visible outcomes of partnership: partners working together, praying together, and accomplishing tasks beyond individual capabilities. The best partnerships yield fruit that honours God, brings tangible changes to communities, and transforms the partners themselves. This key element underscores the learning required to enter and engage in effective partnering.

Bambi identifies one of her best partnering experiences: 'When I look at the Pyramid, all these things were expressed. To me, that remains the best partnering experience.'[3] This understanding and use of the Pyramid is a testament to its usefulness in fostering impactful collaborations that bear lasting fruit.

The Pyramid in Training

Bambi's experiences with the Pyramid extend to her work in training others for mission partnerships: 'I realized even when putting together the workshop called Partnering Essentials, it's all built on coaching questions. The training is run more like a long conversation or shared meditation on the subject of unity…. I think a partnership facilitator or champion just needs to be asked the right questions by somebody who would journey with them at the right time.'[4] Her integration of the Pyramid's elements into training underscores its adaptability and relevance in various collaborative contexts.

The Value of the Pyramid

Bambi captures the value of the Pyramid: 'Whether you're experienced or new to partnering, you can always look at the basic ingredients and assess whether these elements are strong or still need development in your context. But it's all there.' Her endorsement highlights the Pyramid as a comprehensive tool for self-assessment and continuous partnership improvement.

Additionally, she recalls the coaching approach embedded in the Pyramid: 'When Todd first shared this with me, he had a series of questions under each part of the Pyramid, like coaching questions. It felt like a long conversation.'[5] This reinforces the Pyramid's function as a reflective, dialogical tool, encouraging more profound engagement with its principles.

Conclusion

The Partnership Pyramid offers a framework for building solid and sustainable partnerships in God's mission. Its focus on spiritual unity, trust, shared purpose, and reliable processes equips individuals and organizations to collaborate effectively for the Kingdom. Notably, at the centre of the model is the emphasis on aligning with God's purposes, his heart, and our unity. Bambi's real-world application of the Pyramid demonstrates its value in training, assessment, and practical collaboration, confirming that it's not merely a theoretical tool but a guiding structure for success in missional partnerships.

At the heart of the Pyramid lies the conviction that collaboration in God's mission starts with aligning our hearts with his purposes. This approach fosters trust, deepens relationships, and brings diverse partners together to achieve more than they could alone. Insights from a missional partnership practitioner, Bambi, highlight some of the Pyramid's usefulness. The Pyramid is a reflective tool, guiding partners to assess, adapt, and grow in their collaboration efforts.

Ultimately, the Partnering Pyramid helps reshape how we approach missional partnerships, not as static agreements but as dynamic, living relationships grounded in a common kingdom of God vision. By embracing the principles of the Pyramid, mission teams can create partnerships that not only endure but flourish, honouring God and transforming lives across communities.

[1] Bambi, interview.

[2] Bambi, interview.

[3] Bambi, interview.

[4] Bambi, interview.

[5] Bambi, interview.

Chapter 11: Creating Collaborative Relationships

Jesus must become greater, but I must become less important – John 3:30 (Easy English)

… partnership is a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with [humans]. It is carried out within the context of the missio Dei[1] – Kenneth Shreve

Building solid relationships is foundational to effective collaboration in Christian mission. As Daniel Rickett emphasizes, 'Communication is only as rich as trust is deep.'[2] This statement underscores the importance of nurturing close contact and high levels of interaction to build the understanding and trust essential in collaborative partnerships. Trust is not a given – it must be cultivated through purposeful, meaningful relationships. This focus on relationships is even more important in the context of participation in God's mission, where diverse cultures and backgrounds intersect and setting an example of unity is a primary goal.

The rapidly changing circumstances of the 21st century present unique challenges to these partnering relationships. Maintaining and transforming existing relationships while building new ones is crucial for adapting to new areas of missional work. Relationships in missional collaboration require ongoing effort and flexibility, particularly as personnel and priorities shift.[3] Because many organisations have personnel challenges and often do not have clearly defined succession plans, many collaborative efforts depend on the 'right people being in the right places at the right time.'[4] This reliance on current personnel highlights the need for intentionally cultivating and nurturing relationships, which is critical to both personal and organizational well-being in the present and future.

Ultimately, relationships are at the heart of missional collaborations. This chapter is about relationships because they are both the vehicle through which ministry is done and the foundation upon which trust, understanding, and mutuality are built. In a world where contextual landscapes are constantly shifting, maintaining and adapting relationships is critical to the sustainability and effectiveness of collaborative efforts.

Basis for Relationship

Kenneth Shreve asserts that 'partnership is a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with [humans]. It is carried out within the context of the *missio Dei*.'[5] In this view, partnership in ministry is deeply influenced by the Trinitarian nature of God. As Shreve observes, working in partnership 'starts with the Trinity.'[6] How Chuang Chua further emphasizes this by stating that 'one of the greatest gifts a missionary can give to, and in turn receive from, national co-workers and believers is that of friendship. Indeed, the love of friendship springs directly from the heart of the triune God.'[7]

Incarnation highlights the relational nature of mission. Jesus, as the archetypal missionary, entered human history, culture, and consciousness to reveal a relational Father who gave his Son as a 'relational gift.'[8] Following Jesus, the church imitates his incarnation, living a relational and missional lifestyle grounded in its relationship with the Trinity.

The Trinitarian influence on missional collaboration reminds us of Paul's writing in Ephesians 4:3, 13: 'Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace... This [i.e., the responsibility to equip God's people] will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ' (NLT). The *Africa Bible Commentary* underscores this, noting that 'this unity is based on the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the one who has called both Jews and Gentiles into the one body of Christ, the church, and has given them all a shared hope in Christ.'[9]

Cathy Ross states that while partnerships can 'lead us to the heights or take us to the depths,' they are a 'high ideal and a wonderful idea when practised well.' Yet, she acknowledges that partnership is not an 'easy idea,' as 'intense jealousy' can 'annihilate a partner,' even among 'joint heirs with Christ.'[10] Authentic partnership requires counter-intuitive attitudes such as 'vulnerability and suffering, self-emptying and humbling ourselves, submission, listening and learning.' Partnership can flourish through these 'attitudes of listening, giving, and forgiving', especially in the fragile and broken human condition.[11]

Michael Abel offers a similar perspective, advising that in our churches and fellowships, we should focus not on what we gain from relationships but on what we can bring to others. He encourages us to follow the

example of John the Baptist, who said, 'He must become greater; I must become less' (John 3:30).[12] This posture of humility is crucial to fostering relationships that reflect the unity and love of the Trinity.

In summary, mission partnerships reflect our relationship with God and others, embedded in the *missio Dei* and God's Trinitarian nature. Friendship and unity, grounded in God's love, are essential in fostering collaboration. Authentic partnerships require humility, vulnerability, and self-emptying attitudes, which allow relationships to thrive. By focusing on what we can bring to others rather than what we gain, we reflect the unity and love found within the Trinity.

Missional Relationships

How does an organization focus on relationships in its partnering efforts? An example is how the Wycliffe Global Alliance emphasizes the relational dimension of its missional intent through collaboration, focusing on nurturing existing relationships and cultivating new ones. The goal is to unite around common objectives that advance the Bible translation movement, with particular attention given to amplifying little-heard voices and including geographic areas and language communities historically excluded from global discussions.

Wycliffe achieves this through collaborations that enable all participants to contribute meaningfully toward the shared vision of Bible translation. Diverse voices are encouraged to participate because they, too, are co-labourers with Christ. By prioritizing relationships and collaborative efforts, the Wycliffe Global Alliance aims to guide a truly global movement in Bible translation rooted in mutual respect and shared purpose.

Kingdom of God-oriented collaborative efforts are embedded in community and fellowship, where partners share dreams, limitations, joys, and concerns. These relationships are motivated by a shared desire to enter kingdom partnerships rather than promoting individual agendas. The partnership vocabulary often includes terms like 'ownership' and 'stewardship'. Missional partners should adopt a servant leadership posture, ensuring that the host partner takes responsibility for nurturing the relationship, a delicate balance that requires cultural sensitivity.

Kingdom partnerships are rooted in Christ. Partners become friends (or conversely, friends become partners), sharing their faith and spirituality. Sharing about Christ strengthens the relationship, making the partnership more than a task. However, financial concerns can be a stumbling block early on. While money is needed, it should never be the primary reason for a partnership. While economic considerations are important, they should not drive collaboration.

Allow potential partners time to process the commitment involved. Rushing into agreements can ruin promising partnerships. Patience is critical, as kingdom partnerships may take several years to develop fully. If a partner shows little initiative, pausing and waiting for the right time may be required.

After establishing mutual trust and a shared vision, partners can begin discussing practical arrangements like host-guest relationships where the partnership is with an outsider. In other situations that aren't host-guest, factors can be logistics, resources and contextual issues. Eventually, an agreement is drafted. Sensitivity to God's timing and the needs of each partner is crucial to fostering a sustainable and meaningful partnership.

The Oral Bible Translation (OBT) strategy exemplifies the relational dimension of mission partnerships. It focuses on learning from and collaborating with partner organizations that bring unique cultural perspectives. OBT involves a community-centred, oral process to achieve translation and quality assurance, ensuring the resulting Scripture is accurate, intelligible, and culturally appropriate.

OBT fosters relational collaboration by engaging local communities to take ownership of the translation process. Translators emerge from open storytelling events, forming teams that operate in a non-hierarchical, mutually respectful system. The team dynamic emphasizes service, respect, and prioritizing the needs of others, making relational bonding and trust-building central to the mission's success. This partnership-based strategy exemplifies how mission efforts can be deeply relational, responsive, and culturally sensitive.

YWAM's Marcia and Edson Suzuki's OBT work with the Suruwaha people of Brazil is an example of how this collaborative effort works. It shows an understanding of the intersection of spirituality, orality, and literacy and growing in relationship and friendship while encountering the text at a heart, mind, and body level. Despite their literacy and written

translation efforts, the Suruwaha valued oral communication for spiritual truth. This led to a strategy shift where the tribe internalized and orally recounted Bible passages, demonstrating the power of an oral, culturally resonant approach.[13]

Relational Considerations

Steve Steinhilber emphasizes that relationships are the foundation of successful partnerships, describing them as the 'glue' that holds an alliance together, especially in times of conflict. Strong relationships are essential for any partnership; without them, the collaboration risks collapsing 'at the first sign of discord.'[14] Steinhilber points out that most partnerships fail due to a leader's inability to maintain trust and navigate interpersonal dynamics. Thus, it is necessary to establish dynamic relationships between people from the outset.[15]

Steinhilber notes the importance of 'translation mechanisms' to bridge cultural divides in cross-cultural partnerships. Different organizations may use similar language but mean different things.[16] To address this requires creating standard definitions and providing training that helps partners understand cultural differences, especially in partnerships spanning diverse countries and cultures, where misinterpretations can quickly arise.[17]

Stephen Dent and Sandra Naiman highlight the importance of trust in partnerships, noting that 'the more trust you feel in a relationship, the higher your Partnering Intelligence will be.'[18] They outline six key attributes that form the foundation of successful partnerships: (1) Self-disclosure and feedback: The ability to share relevant information and provide honest, timely feedback; (2) Win-win orientation: Focusing on mutually beneficial outcomes and avoiding creating 'losers'; (3) Ability to trust: Trust is the essential element of all successful partnerships; (4) Future orientation: Emphasizing long-term relationships and adapting to change; (5) Comfort with change: Being open to new ideas, relinquishing control, and (6) Comfort with interdependence: Allowing each partner to do their best work independently while maintaining collaboration.[19]

These attributes are interrelated behaviours that, when consistently applied, promote a culture of collaboration and trust. Adeptness with all six attributes creates an environment where partnerships can thrive,

leading to more robust communication and effective collaboration. Leadership that models these behaviours sets a positive example, helping to build a partnering culture throughout the organization.

In many collaborative frameworks, those involved are called 'stakeholders.' Paul Mattessich and Kirsten Johnson define stakeholders as individuals 'to engage' because they are the most directly impacted by the work being done.[20] In missional contexts, stakeholders often represent a diversity of cultures, languages, and experiences. This diversity enriches collaboration but makes the development of trust more challenging, as it requires careful attention to the relational dynamics at play.

In considering the relational dimensions of partnerships in Christian mission, Cathy Ross highlights three essential elements for effective collaboration: (1) Building trust through shared responsibility; (2) A readiness to serve the common good; and (3) A willingness to accept the costs and limitations that naturally arise in partnership.[21]

These principles lay the foundation for partnerships rooted in mutual commitment and sacrifice.

Phil Butler emphasizes that effective partnerships are crucial in today's rapidly changing world. He argues that through new, inclusive forms of kingdom collaboration, Christians from diverse backgrounds can work together to achieve remarkable, lasting impact – impossible under traditional organizational models.[22] According to Butler, the steps for effective 'kingdom collaboration' are well-known, tested, and replicable.[23] This concept of people working together to achieve what they cannot do alone is deeply biblical, beginning in Genesis 1:26 and recurring throughout Scripture.[24]

Ernie Addicott, reflecting on the rise of partnerships in God's mission, identifies a shift that began in the late 20th century. He contrasts the old mission paradigm, which focused on pioneering, resources, and strategy, with the new paradigm centred on partnering, relationships, and synergy. He calls this 'The Partnership Movement'. Writing in 2005, Addicott contrasts this movement with the '20th-century mission paradigm': 'The old paradigm was about *Pioneering*; the new paradigm is all about *Partnering*'; 'The old paradigm was about *Resources*; the new paradigm is about *Relationships*'; and 'The old paradigm was about *Strategy*; the new paradigm is about *Synergy*.'[25] An emphasis on the Body also means an emphasis on 'the importance of members of the Body working *together* to

fulfil the Great Commission.'[26] Synergy, or 'combined energy,' reflects the biblical image of the body working in harmony, encapsulated in the acronym TEAM: 'Together Everyone Achieves More.'[27] For Addicott, effective partnerships require a shared vision, purpose, high participation, trust, openness, and mutual concern.[28]

Daniel Rickett also explores the relational impact of mission partnerships in the context of the global church. He notes that mission is no longer a matter of the West to the rest but now involves building alliances and coordinating strategies across the global body of Christ. In this new era, partnerships are essential to advancing world evangelization. As Rickett puts it, 'Partnerships are simply a better way to do missions,' furthering collaboration and mutual support that leads to more significant progress in fulfilling the mission of the gospel.[29]

Dana Robert highlights that commitment to relationships is one of the most compelling reasons for collaboration in global mission. This 'relationality' is described using a range of terms – 'partnership, ecumenism, accompaniment, mutuality, and friendship' – all of which point to the central role of relationships in sustaining missional work across cultural and geographic boundaries. Robert notes that for many North Americans engaged in global mission, the pursuit of authentic relationships is the hope of their missional work and the framework through which they collaborate.[30]

Through these reflections, it becomes clear that relational considerations – trust, synergy, shared vision, and a willingness to bear the cost – are at the heart of successful mission partnerships. Making the effort to build strong relationships is fundamental to successful partnerships, particularly in mission work. Trust, communication, and mutual understanding are crucial in overcoming cultural differences and fostering collaboration. Effective partnerships require self-disclosure, a win-win mindset, adaptability, and interdependence. The shift from a resource-driven to a relationship-centred mission paradigm has emphasized partnership, synergy, and shared responsibility. Collaboration across cultures, grounded in the biblical model, unites Christians globally, advancing the mission through mutual support and trust. These values reflect biblical principles and respond to the changing dynamics of global mission today.

Global Relationships

Collaboration and partnerships in mission are poised to grow in scale and effectiveness as we increasingly recognize that the responsibility for mission does not rest with any one organization but involves multiple participants. However, maintaining effective collaboration within existing partnering paradigms presents challenges. For instance, when a partnership is defined primarily by resources such as funds, it can create dependency, leading to complacency or power imbalances. A clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities as collaborators and stewards in God's mission is needed to foster healthier partnerships. Our language should reflect that we are accountable and productive participants, not owners.

Graham Hill and Grace Ji-Sun Kim highlight the importance of agency, particularly for people from the Majority World, defining it as 'the freedom to make unrestricted and independent choices.' Individuals and groups need this freedom to express themselves fully, determine their futures, and meaningfully contribute to mission efforts.[31] Albert Bandura echoes this, describing agency as 'the human capability to exert influence over one's functioning and the course of events by one's actions.' In other words, being an agent means intentionally shaping one's circumstances and impacting one's community.[32]

Sheryl Takagi Silzer highlights the cross-cultural challenges mission workers from the West and the Majority World face. Despite receiving pre-field cross-cultural training, many workers from the West still need help navigating these challenges. Meanwhile, missionaries from the Majority World, often without similar training, also need help working with colleagues from other cultures. These challenges often stem from unconscious cultural practices and habits.

To overcome these barriers, multicultural teams must collaborate to define mutuality and establish shared goals. Silzer notes that workers from the West typically approach implementation through institutional action, focusing on developing new initiatives or programs. In contrast, their colleagues from the Majority World prioritize relationships, viewing implementation as a means to deepen connections with others.

Additionally, there is a difference in contextual orientation: people from the West tend to be individualists, defining themselves as unique individuals, while those from the Majority World may prefer to be

collectivists, finding their identity in their relationship to the collective society, where lives are intertwined.[33]

Accountability in Relationships

Accountability is another crucial aspect of partnerships. As Alex Araujo notes, it is 'a necessary but also a positive component of healthy partnership.'[34] Accountability strengthens partnerships by identifying potential threats and proposing ways to avoid or address them. This concept of accountability dates to Genesis 3, when God calls Adam and Eve to account for their choices and actions. People have been held accountable from the beginning – to God, authorities, parents, spouses, and others.[35]

In many ministry organizations – such as mission agencies, charities and churches – there is sometimes a belief that control is the only way to guarantee accountability. However, decades of experience in partnerships demonstrate that accountability can be ensured without the need for control.

Accountability is defined as being 'subject to the obligation to report, explain, or justify something; responsible; answerable.'[36] Araujo explains that, in its broadest sense, accountability is the condition where one person's motives and actions are subject to review, examination, and judgment by another person or authority.[37] In missional partnerships, accountability is typically voluntary, involving a mutual willingness to be transparent and allow one's motives, actions, and outcomes to be reviewed according to agreed-upon expectations in an atmosphere of good faith and trust.[38]

Thought Questions

1. In what ways can missional organizations better prepare their people to navigate cultural differences while fostering solid and trust-filled partnerships?
2. How does focusing on relationships rather than resources change the dynamics of missional collaborations, and what are the potential long-term benefits of this approach?

Practical Applications

In exploring the importance of building and maintaining healthy missional relationships, we have seen that relationships are the bedrock of effective collaboration in God's mission. Trust and understanding are critical, especially when working across diverse cultures and backgrounds. Missional partnerships are deeply rooted in God's Trinitarian nature, where mutuality, vulnerability, and humility are essential.

How does this work out in practice in missional collaborative efforts? Building relationships in kingdom-oriented partnerships is essential. What are practical ways this can be done? Forming authentic partnerships takes time. When partnerships come together too quickly, hidden issues may arise. Conversely, if a partnership develops smoothly, there's no need for unnecessary delays. Spending time together through activities like eating, travelling, and sharing personal stories fosters trust and deepens relationships, making future collaboration more enjoyable and fruitful.

Practical examples, such as Wycliffe Global Alliance and Oral Bible Translation, demonstrate how relationships are cultivated through shared experiences, servant leadership, and cultural sensitivity. Additionally, we've highlighted the significance of trust, patience, and long-term commitment in developing sustainable partnerships with a shift from resource-driven to relationship-centred mission work. Accountability, mutual respect, and a shared vision further strengthen these collaborations, along with a deep understanding of the agency and contributions of each partner. Ultimately, our approach to missional collaboration should reflect the love and unity of the Trinity, fostering partnerships that serve God's mission in transformative ways.

Here are practical steps to guide your collaborative efforts in mission rooted in these relational principles:

- *Invest time in building trust:* As Daniel Rickett emphasizes, 'Communication is only as rich as trust is deep.'[39] In missional partnerships, trust is the foundation for collaboration. To build lasting relationships, prioritize regular communication and invest in time together. Whether through shared meals, travel, or personal storytelling, these activities foster understanding and strengthen the bonds of trust, making collaboration more fruitful and sustainable. Building trust takes time and should never be rushed.

- *Embrace humility and mutuality:* Missional partnerships require humility. Michael Abel advises that mission partners focus on what they gain rather than what they can contribute. Reflecting on John the Baptist, who said, 'He must become greater; I must become less' (John 3:30), we are reminded that a posture of humility is essential in relationships. By prioritizing mutual service and considering the needs of others, mission partners create space for genuine collaboration.
- *Create shared vision and purpose:* Successful partnerships are anchored in a shared vision and common goals. Like Wycliffe Global Alliance, which unites diverse voices to advance Bible translation, ensuring that all participants are aligned around a collective mission. Develop and nurture a clear vision that reflects God's overarching purpose, ensuring that every partner, regardless of background, can contribute meaningfully toward the common goal.
- *Focus on long-term relationship building:* Relationships are the heart of missional collaboration. Cathy Ross and others highlight that authentic partnerships require intentional time, vulnerability, and patience. Partnerships that develop too quickly may overlook hidden challenges, while those that are carefully nurtured over time can weather difficulties and evolve into solid and lasting alliances. Take the time to listen, learn, and allow relationships to deepen naturally before formalizing agreements.
- *Be culturally sensitive and adaptable:* As noted by Sheryl Takagi Silzer, different cultures bring diverse ways of relating, prioritizing needs, and understanding God's mission. It's crucial to be open to cultural differences, practice patience, and learn each partner's unique values and customs. This adaptability ensures that all voices are heard and solutions are relevant and contextually appropriate.

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Case Study: Partnering Advice

In this interview, David Brooks, who has led and worked in Bible translation-related partnerships for over 35 years, shares insights he's gained.

What are the spiritual dimensions of partnering? It goes back to Christ's prayer in John 17 that we should all be one. When we come together, we can do things we wouldn't ordinarily think possible. Due to what took place during and because of the pandemic, despite some loss of our partnering involvement, we're seeing more and more people wanting to get involved.

The pandemic might have sparked this, but the general unrest in the world has made more people spiritually conscious. In the past, we had international organizations with spiritual goals, like Vision 2025. We're now learning in many ways how we are all connected. The way the church factored in the past is now becoming a significant factor again, bringing community to all our issues, whether in church planting, Bible translation, health care, education, etc. This factoring in of the church is true in the Majority World, though perhaps not as much in the United States or Europe. 80% of Christians in the United States think you can be a 'good' Christian without going to church. Paul wouldn't know what they were discussing, nor would the Majority World. We must draw closer during these times, and that is happening.

What kind of mindset is ideal in a partnership? Leadership is crucial for effective collaboration and requires that the leader champion collaboration. One new leader came into a Bible translation organization indicating she did not want the job, and I told her, 'That's one of the best qualifications for a leader!' This leader talked to the whole team and discovered their organization's reputation wasn't very good. She started addressing internal problems. She didn't do it by herself but brought her team along. She knew they were a good resource.

Do some people understand collaboration intuitively? It is a gift. My gift is that I show up. Partly, it's understanding what happens when you

show up. One colleague and I would always talk, and we would say, 'That person has "it".' We would talk about 'it' as a gift of intuitively knowing how to collaborate. If you find those people, you need to use them. Sometimes, they're in leadership. I'm seeing them in different parts of the world. You need to learn from them and see how and if God wants you to work together.

As most of us working with collaboration know, because of power imbalances, sometimes you must have reconciliation before moving forward. Paul talks about us being ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20). You're constantly building that foundation of relationships, and that's what you lead with. I've talked to organizations who say they partner with hundreds of other organizations. As I listen to them, I see that they're not really partnering but asking these partners to do something for them. True partnering involves an understanding that we're walking this walk together and listening to each other's needs, which can be very different in different parts of the world.

When I was in Indonesia, one foreigner spoke Indonesian fluently. The Indonesians said he spoke better than them. You would think he would relate quite well. But he didn't. We had another person from another country whose Indonesian was poor. But people loved him. He related well. Spiritual maturity was part of it. He was an older man. He listened. That's a big thing about the role of partnering; you need to be able to listen, to put your ego down, and not to lead with what you think is best. That's one thing those of us from the West did a lot: 'We know what your problem is. We'll help you fix it.' Instead, we need to listen to them and understand their point of view. Sometimes, we might think they have a great solution. We then must work with them to find a solution, even if it is not part of our goal in Bible translation. We might not fund or work with them on their solution, but helping them will continue to build our relationship for a future that might include collaboration on Bible translation for us. We want to encourage them and say, look, we can introduce you to somebody. Just walking that walk, building those relationships – that's the key.

Describe the tension between building relationships and achieving collaborative goals. I've had colleagues who are incredible with relationships. They never got anything done. Relationships are critical, but how do we take it to the next step? That's where the importance of a

facilitator comes in. A facilitator can say, ok, we've got the people in the room. What are the next steps? To partner well, you want an organization with a clear identity. They know who they are but can step out of that when necessary. Sometimes, you have to say, 'This just isn't working. It doesn't quite fit. We're going to move forward here – we hope you understand.' You maintain the relationship. Who knows? The Lord might open doors down the road. We've seen that happen as well.

What is the role of the facilitator? I'm very good at starting things and bringing people together. That's probably good for three or four years. During that time, you find the people with those facilitation skills and ensure they engage from the beginning.

There are different stages. At the start, you lay the foundation and build on that. Often, we begin in a facilitation role because we need to get things going, but as you work with others, you need to know when to step out of that role and let others take it. You don't want to stay in that role too long. It is hard to let go, but it is crucial.

How do you know when to formalize a partnership? When you have a task, you create agreements and documentation for partners in the task. When individuals or organizations are involved in collaboration, a couple of them might join in a task. The others are still in the loop or uninvolved but might be praying, contributing some finances, giving valuable instruction, or helping in other ways. Usually, those two organizations will have an agreement. You need some specifics if you have the goals to accomplish something.

These are not just relationships between organizations but between people. If people change, that's a big deal. We look at something that must be done and say, 'God, who do you want to bring here?' We had one organization and partnership that kept changing the people they sent. The impression was that they weren't invested. And we said, 'look, this isn't going to work.' They decided this was important enough to assign one of their leaders to it. That changed everything.

How do you manage power differences in a partnership? Power in a partnership is viewed differently in different parts of the world. If you're working in Africa, where 80% or more of the countries depend on aid from outside, that's also how missions usually operate. A lot of external partners pour in lots of resources. External partners shouldn't fund these things 100%. But we can't go in and say we're only going to do this much

– accomplishing any project or undertaking involves relationships. One Bible translation organization, the external partner, told an organization it had two years, after which funds would be cut, requiring that they raise their funds. The problem is they received no training or guidance on how to do that.

We told one organization that we would cut back funds in two years, but we have yet to do anything to help them raise funding themselves. The decision was made. I went there with some other colleagues to sit down and say, OK, you got the emails; nothing's changed. It looks like you'll fold unless, as partners, we can talk it through.

God intervened, and they made the decisions, and they're engaging well with their churches. But what we didn't do was to say, ok, we're going to give you the money for now. That must be avoided. That's what's happened in the past: We fund some of it, then say sorry, we don't have the money, and then we throw in the money. Talking things through, listening, and hearing what they have to say is what the facilitator does. In the past, we would say sorry, but we don't fund buildings, which might communicate an ambivalence towards buildings when, in fact, they may be needed. So, we listen when they say we'd like to build a structure over here where this church gave us some land. We would say that might be a good idea. We won't fund it, but we can help guide you if you think it's good. But it would be best if you guys made the decision. This isn't going to be easy. We talk through it instead of just saying that's not good. There's a lot of learning.

What lessons have you learned? I have found, especially at the beginning, that there's a lot I don't know. Learning to ask the right questions is essential. Sometimes, you think you already know the answer – ask the questions anyway. You might ask 100 questions, and you'll get four answers that are jewels. I used to joke: In one place I went, they said, 'You don't know the culture.' And I said, 'Yeah, and that's my strength. I'm not going to pretend I know the culture. I'm going to listen to you.'

Finally, leadership is critical. Where I've seen things fail, you either didn't have leadership or you had the wrong people involved. I've had organizations that have sent managers rather than leaders. And I say it at the beginning: send your leader. If they don't have the time, that's fine. It just means your organization probably isn't going to be effectively

involved. Without the leader's involvement, the partnership isn't going to work.

Chapter 12: Missional Friendship and Power Dynamics

Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me – John 15:15b (NLT)

God's friends… no longer live 'under' God, but rather with God and in God. They participate in God's pain and God's joy. They have become 'one' with God – Jürgen Moltmann[1]

Friendship lies at the heart of missional collaboration. It grows out of the relational nature of the triune God and the call for Christians to embrace and embody God's missional purposes. Genuine friendships, grounded in attitudes like listening, giving, and forgiving, form the foundation for partnerships. These values go beyond mere transactions. They create transformative and lasting impact.

We now explore the importance of friendship in mission partnerships, both in nurturing existing relationships and fostering new ones. Inspired by concepts such as Gilbert Steil's meeting at the heart level,[2] means genuine connections form the foundation of missional efforts. Drawing on biblical principles and cross-cultural experiences, we see how the dynamics of friendship, shaped by unity and humility, help overcome power imbalances and foster meaningful collaboration. In doing so, missional friendships not only align with God's purposes but also honour the diversity of his people.

Friendship is Central

The Gospel of John provides a rich theological foundation for friendship. Nancy Bedford highlights its 'vocabulary of friendship,' where John the Baptist is described as the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29), and Martha, Lazarus, and Mary are depicted as Jesus' friends (John 11).[3] Jesus demonstrates ultimate friendship by stating that laying down one's life for a friend is the most significant expression of love (John 15:13), and

elevates His followers by calling them friends: 'You are my friends if you do what I command… I have called you friends' (John 15:14-15, NIV). These passages present a 'community of friends,' or 'community of faith,' in John's gospel.[4]

Jesus' trinitarian relationship is seen when he says, 'I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you' (John 15:15, NIV). Bedford draws from Jürgen Moltmann's interpretation of John 17:21, 'God's friends… no longer live "under" God, but rather with God and in God. They participate in God's pain and God's joy. They have become "one" with God.'[5] Friendship with God surpasses even the status of being a servant or child of God, calling believers to live out their gratitude for this divine friendship through relationships with others.

How Chuang Chua asserts that the triune God invites believers to share in his 'relational life,' first with himself and then with others, making this the fundamental missiological principle – the call to divine and human friendship.[6] Arthur Glasser adds that Jesus saw friendship as the most effective way to build trust and solidarity, aiming to love and befriend people 'to win them' and reconcile the world to God (2 Cor. 5:19).[7]

In John's gospel, Jesus also emphasizes unity: 'The glory you gave to me I have given to them, that they may be one just as we are one – I in them and you in me – that they may be completely one, so the world will know you sent me' (John 17:22-23). The triune God models unity and Christ expects the church and his body to reflect that unity. However, divisions can arise in missional collaboration, or we become competitive. This undermines unity.

As an example, a value of the Wycliffe Global Alliance is becoming a community of trust and friendship, mirroring believers' unity and the triune God's relational nature. This divine friendship with God and among believers forms a foundation for mission.

A Missiological Basis

The desire for cross-cultural friendships is a prime motivator for missional collaboration. Developing 'interracial and intercultural relationships' serves as a means and an end in mission.[8] This relational focus is seen in the principles in *Together Towards Life*, which highlights

how faithful mission occurs through an exchange of 'life and action' in an atmosphere of 'respect and friendship,' requiring a deeper level of 'listening to others.'[9] Building relationships across religious, socio-economic, and cultural divides forms friendships that transcend barriers, laying a lasting foundation for effective partnerships.

Friendship in mission is evident in the 1910 World Missionary Conference, where Samuel Azariah called for authentic relationships, pleading for 'friends' rather than patronage and condescension.[10] His call remains relevant as the global church confronts postcolonialism and dependency. Real friendship across widening economic and cultural divides is difficult but possible. It requires long-term commitment, learning from and living among others, and deep respect. Sherron Kay George highlights the importance of addressing our 'blind spots and actively resist[ing] attitudes and structures of disrespect.'[11] We invite the Holy Spirit, 'who sends, guides, corrects, and continually converts us as we participate in *missio Dei*.'[12] The pathway to partnering in mission 'includes repentance of our wrong and misguided attitudes, even though they are unintentional or cultural'.[13] This self-critique leads to new ways of thinking, acting, and treating others.

Through our stewardship in God's mission, the message should be clear: partners are welcome. Understanding how to serve and interact in unity and community (John 17) indicates our desire to engage in conversation and relationship-building. We use an illustrative round table inviting everyone to be seated as equals before God. This model fosters collective interaction, building trust and friendship as we work together on various issues. It reshapes what it means to be a unified body, saying, 'There's a place at this table for you.'

A missiology of friendship and community fosters greater openness and humility, drawing from Jesus' example of laying down his life for his friends (John 15:13). Knowing the crucified Christ through friendship and community provides a foundational basis for mission. Prioritizing friendship helps to overcome inequality and prejudice, deepening the value of partnerships.

Cross-cultural friendship reflects a Christian vision of unity in God's kingdom, bridging the divides of caste, ethnicity, culture, and empire. While forming such friendships may seem time-consuming, Dana Robert affirms, 'Despite the dangers of unreflective paternalism, friendship

remains the proof and the promise of Christianity as a multicultural, worldwide religion.'[14] Friendship becomes a transformative force that embodies the glory of Christ. The biblical concept of *koinonia*, 'sharing in the love and life of the triune God,'[15] underscores that friendship and community are essential for knowing Christ more intimately and engaging in mission. Since 1910, friendship has been a compelling principle in the spread of Christianity, demonstrating Christ's love that transcends inequality.[16]

Collaborative Groups

The function of groups in collaboration is central to building partnerships and achieving common goals in God's mission. Gilbert Steil emphasizes that a clear vision helps prioritize collective over individual interests. He defines 'collaborative action' as the process where stakeholders unite for the common good. Steil warns that self-interest can undermine change initiatives, and 'whole-system' events, like summits, are crucial for fostering collaboration.[17]

Steil's psychology of collaboration shows that commitment to a cause larger than oneself strengthens group identity as it draws collective action and fosters commitment. Groups naturally form around a clear purpose, which shapes their development. Leaders should ensure equal standing among participants, giving every voice the same weight. The faster the clarity, the quicker the group matures, while distractions slow progress. Achieving this clarity requires structured opportunities for everyone to contribute, such as round tables and rotating leadership. Groups need active engagement, clear membership, power dynamics, and openness to sharing. Small groups (up to eight) and large groups (nine or more) require different facilitation strategies, with clarity of purpose essential for both.

Successful collaboration hinges on Steil's eight guiding 'axioms' or specific conditions: (1) establishing a clear purpose; (2) creating shared context; (3) active engagement involving the whole system; (4) promoting self-management; (5) focusing on a desirable future; (6) discovering common ground; and (7) ensuring equal standing. These principles encourage individuals to prioritize the common good over personal interests, leading to meaningful outcomes where every voice is respected and valued.[18]

The Wycliffe Global Alliance is an example of commitment to the little-heard and unheard voices, geographic areas, and language communities that have yet to participate in the global conversation. To put this into practice, the Alliance facilitates mutual support among partners to ensure everyone contributes effectively toward shared goals and vision. The Alliance's leadership sets tables for group-sharing experiences, advocates for including relevant voices, and cultivates attitudes promoting cooperation. Additionally, they inspire and catalyse innovation, enabling discoveries to unfold rather than rigidly defining the destination. Through these practices, a collaborative spirit is established.

Collaborative Intelligence

Effective partnerships benefit from a 'collaborative-intelligence quotient,' defined by Dawna Markova and Angie McArthur as the ability to think with others for the common good. This involves 'dignifying the differences' by valuing diverse perspectives as essential contributions to problem-solving.[19] Collaborative intelligence helps recognize what expertise is present and what is missing. They call this 'mind-share'.[20]

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's study of 37 companies found that successful alliances depend not only on formal systems but 'a dense web of interpersonal connections and internal infrastructures.'[21] Relationships play a critical role in sustaining collaboration.

Steve Steinhilber, in *Strategic Alliances*, warns that many alliances fail due to weak planning and direction. He says, 'Without strong initial plans your alliances will drift, aimlessly, reacting to every change that comes along.' He claims that up to 'half of alliances break up on the rocks, mainly because of a lack of direction.'[22] Even a solid plan is no guarantee of success. It must be paired with effective leadership and favourable conditions. Senior executives often play a crucial role, as the success of alliances is linked to their job performance, illustrating the importance of leadership involvement.[23]

Alliances blend people and processes, requiring a 'both/and' mindset rather than an 'either/or' approach.[24] Its success hinges on aligning with a broader strategy, building a sustainable framework, and selecting a well-equipped team. Steinhilber identifies seven key traits for team members: cross-functional experience, complexity synthesis, strong communication,

strategic knowledge, global sensitivity, adaptability, and emotional resilience.[25]

Like in friendships, trust, shared vision, and mutual commitment are essential for collaborative efforts. A cooperative spirit, fostered by diverse skills and experiences, drives innovation and long-term success. Strategic alliances thrive when participants are flexible, communicative, and dedicated to the shared purpose, balancing relational dynamics with structured strategy.

The Power of Impact Networks

David Ehrlichman's *Impact Networks* emphasizes that successful networks are built on trust-based relationships rather than control or hierarchy. This approach parallels friendship in mission collaboration, where genuine cross-cultural partnerships thrive on mutual support, not power or control.

Ehrlichman identifies three forms of impact networks: *learning networks*, which focus on knowledge-sharing; *action networks*, which combine learning with coordinated action; and *movement networks*, which connect multiple learning and action networks to pursue broader goals.[26] Like friendships in mission, movement networks create interconnected webs that drive more effective, sustainable efforts. These relationships enable participants to achieve far more collectively than they could alone.

Impact networks, much like friendships, are self-organizing. Mission friendships allow teams to bring their unique strengths and perspectives to the table, fostering creativity and collaboration. This mirrors how impact networks evolve and adapt when participants are empowered. Respecting differences is essential, as diverse cultural, social, and theological perspectives enrich collaborative efforts.

Both impact networks and mission friendships rely on shared leadership, trust, and mutual goals. These relational foundations are essential for overcoming challenges and maximizing collective impact in partnerships.

Transformation Tables

In *Change Your World*, John Maxwell and Rob Hoskins emphasize the role of personal responsibility in driving change. They argue that anyone,

regardless of position or resources, can initiate transformation by changing themselves first and helping others. This personal transformation becomes the foundation for broader change efforts.

A key theme is the power of values, which guide decisions and behaviours, forming the basis for effective leadership and lasting change. The authors describe the 'change cycle,' where individual life-changing experiences ripple outward, affecting others: 'I change, I share, you change, and others change.' The process starts with personal growth.[27]

A collaborative approach is taken through 'transformation tables' where small groups form for individuals to share and apply values to their lives. Maxwell and Hoskins state, 'The fastest way to find common ground with an enemy is to sit at the table and break bread with them. Change happens around the table.'[28] Transformation tables create the ideal environment for growth, offering a dedicated space and time for people to come together with a shared purpose.[29]

Transformation requires proximity and genuine connection. Facilitators of transformation tables create environments of openness, vulnerability, and accountability. Regular meetings help participants reflect on their progress and set goals, fostering gradual growth through repetition and shared experiences.[30]

Leadership plays a central role in driving change, with leaders serving as catalysts who motivate and guide others. Practical steps for initiating change include identifying a cause, becoming a catalyst (someone 'who creates positive change in their world through their ideas, actions, and influence'[31]), forming the right team, collaborating, and measuring impact to ensure progress. The cycle of hope and action is pivotal, encouraging individuals to take steps toward change without having all the answers.

These principles align closely with the value of friendship in mission. For example, transformation through collaboration and shared values, friendship in mission fosters trust, mutual support, and collective action. Friendships enable mission practitioners to build authentic connections and work together for a common cause, sustaining long-term impact.

Balancing Power

Maria, a local leader in a rural community, felt powerless in her partnership with an international mission organization, as she observed

decisions made without her input despite her deep knowledge of local needs. During a crucial meeting, she voiced her concerns, and the organization recognized the imbalance. Over time, Maria's role shifted from implementer to key decision-maker, with her insights shaping more effective, culturally relevant projects. The partnership transformed into one of mutual respect and shared responsibility, demonstrating how dialogue and trust can restore balance and foster true collaboration. Maria represents the good that happens when someone speaks up to address partnering disparities.

Power imbalances often strain partnerships, mainly when 'unequal power relationships and structures within the church and society' exist.[32] Addressing these power dynamics is crucial for creating genuinely collaborative and inclusive mission efforts. Equity and inclusion are central to resolving these imbalances. It's not just about having a seat at the table but ensuring every voice is valued and heard. This calls for a shift in how we approach collaboration, emphasizing mutual respect and shared influence over control.

Jesus exemplifies this model of humble, transformative power. Paul writes, 'God demonstrates his love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8, NET). Christ's sacrificial act bridged the divide between humanity and God, embodying a space where power is used not to dominate but to reconcile and uplift. This model challenges us to rethink how power operates in missional partnerships. For instance, overreliance on funding from affluent donors can create a dynamic where recipients feel controlled or diminished, highlighting power's complex role in mission.

As Alex Araujo observes, 'It is very difficult to relinquish control without first gaining confidence in our ministry partners.'[33] True collaboration requires trust, where power is shared, not imposed. Power shapes partnerships, and fostering authentic friendships creates spaces for flourishing collaboration.

Power Dynamics

Power plays a crucial role in partnerships. Collaborative participants need some degree of power to manage their groups effectively. However, power itself is complex and requires closer examination. Defined as the 'ability

to do or act; the capability to accomplish something,'[34] power often influences the behaviour of others, motivating actions they might not otherwise take.[35] While power can be direct, influence is a subtler form many see as flexible and inclusive, fostering collaboration and mindset shifts that traditional power lacks.

Power can be wielded positively or negatively: 'Rewarding power' motivates by offering rewards for achieving objectives. 'Coercive power' relies on fear of consequences for unmet goals. 'Legitimate power' comes from the acceptance of a leader's authority. 'Referent power' is based on a leader's charisma or success. 'Expert power' derives from a leader's knowledge or skills.[36]

Despite its availability, power can be challenging to balance and use effectively. Moises Naim argues that power today is more accessible to obtain but harder to wield and maintain.[37] Technological advances, like social media, allow new voices to challenge established powers, creating what Naim calls 'micropowers' that are decentralized, nimble forces capable of disrupting more prominent players.[38] As influence spreads, traditional power structures face increasing constraints and critiques.

Power imbalances often arise when one partner dominates decision-making, disadvantaging others. *The Partnering Initiative* notes that equity is essential in managing these imbalances, as a lack of it negatively impacts partnerships in three key ways: (1) Poor decision-making, where valuable input from less powerful partners is overlooked; (2) Reduced commitment, as disempowered partners become less invested; and (3) Unsustainable partnerships, where uneven benefits lead to dissatisfaction or exploitation.[39]

Recognizing where power lies in partnerships is critical. A common challenge is the assumption, often by Westerners, that they are in control. This mindset can unintentionally transfer into mission efforts, emphasizing timetables, methods, and numeric evaluations. Yet, every partnership has power differentials that shape its effectiveness, making it essential to address these dynamics for successful collaboration.

Global Insights

In global mission partnerships, friendship and power dynamics are crucial in collaboration. This analysis draws from the Wycliffe Global Alliance

and its over 100 organizations. The Alliance, focused on resource-intensive Bible translation, faces challenges related to financial imbalances and colonial legacies, which often affect partnerships between Western organizations and their Majority World counterparts.

Discussions with leaders from Africa and Latin America highlight the complexities of dependency on Western funds and the need for equitable collaboration. These leaders emphasize the importance of friendship, trust, and mutual respect in overcoming power imbalances and fostering more effective mission efforts. Their reflections offer valuable insights into creating partnerships prioritising shared responsibility and mutual learning.

Power imbalances and dependency: In many mission partnerships, financial resources create imbalances that impact partner relationships. African leaders, for example, have long grappled with a dependency on Western funds, which has contributed to a sense of powerlessness and a need for local agency. Historically, Western aid has dominated African missions, often stifled local resource development and reinforced a colonial mindset where external parties lead and local voices are marginalized. As Eckhard Schnabel notes, 'the power of money sets the agenda' in mission partnerships, leading to dependency and, at times, a loss of dignity for the receiving partner.[40]

Similarly, Latin American mission leaders have faced challenges in shifting from a culture of receiving to one of local self-reliance. As they see it, the root of the problem is not economic but attitudinal. A shift in perspective – toward simplicity, humility, and dependence on God's provision – has become essential for breaking the cycle of dependency and fostering a culture of generosity from within.

Friendship as a pathway to equality: Power dynamics in mission can be mitigated through genuine relationships based on friendship rather than hierarchy or control. As partnerships mature, they must evolve from transactional to relational, where trust and mutual respect form the foundation of collaboration. In conversations with European and US partners, African leaders have called for a shift from financial dependency to shared responsibility and mutual understanding. They emphasize the importance of friendship, transparency, and open dialogue in fostering true partnerships that honour both sides.

In these conversations, African leaders highlighted the need for partnerships where friendship comes before financial needs and mutual expectations and contributions are clear. European leaders, in turn, committed to listening more, shedding assumptions, and working together as equals. This dialogue reflects a growing awareness that partnership is not just about resources but about recognizing the strengths, knowledge, and contributions each partner brings to the table.

Building new collaboration models: A recurring theme in these discussions is the need to move beyond the traditional donor-recipient model of mission partnerships. As the African and Latin American contexts show, mission collaboration must embrace shared leadership, mutual learning, and a willingness to challenge historical power imbalances. This requires intentional relationship-building and a commitment to understanding one another's contexts and needs.

In the 2019 Wycliffe Global Alliance Africa-Europe funding conversation, participants returned to the drawing board to redefine their approach to mission partnerships. They sought new ways of thinking and working that honoured both continents, recognizing that the old model of one-way financial support was no longer effective. Instead, they focused on co-creating funding strategies, learning from each other, and stewarding God's gifts with humility and open hands.

Power and friendship in mission: The experiences of these global mission leaders underscore the importance of addressing power dynamics in partnerships. While financial resources often skew relationships, intentional friendship, transparency, and shared responsibility can restore balance. As mission partnerships evolve, the focus must shift from control to collaboration, dependency to mutual discovery, and hierarchy to genuine friendship. In this way, friendship can transform mission efforts into more effective, God-honouring collaborations.

Thought Questions

1. How can your missional collaborations reflect the relational nature of the Trinity through deeper friendships?
2. How can you address power dynamics in your partnerships to foster mutual respect and shared influence?

Practical Applications

In God's mission, friendship serves as a powerful and transformative force, reflecting the relational nature of our triune God. It provides a model for how partnerships should function, inviting us to move beyond transactional relationships into spaces where trust, humility, and mutual respect can thrive. These genuine connections help address power imbalances by ensuring diverse voices are heard, valued, and included, fostering partnerships that mirror the unity and love of Christ.

By sharing power and responsibility equitably, we reflect God's kingdom and model how to collaborate with mutual respect, even amidst disagreements. Recognizing all partners as equally capable of hearing from God promotes a culture of respect and preserves fellowship. The core principles of successful mission partnerships – relationships, shared purpose, active engagement, and trust – create an environment where collaboration flourishes and power dynamics are approached with wisdom and care.

A missiology of friendship nurtures openness, humility, and deeper connections, helping overcome inequalities and build effective partnerships that align with God's purposes. Inspired by Jesus' sacrificial love for His friends, missional friendship empowers the church to engage in God's mission authentically and equitably. It bridges divides, navigates power dynamics, and enriches the collaborative process across diverse cultures and contexts.

With these principles in mind, here are practical steps to help you foster missional friendship and build partnerships that reflect God's kingdom and advance his mission in the world:

- *Emphasize authentic relationships:* Genuine friendship is at the heart of missional collaboration. True partnership is not transactional but relational. Cultivate a culture where listening, giving, and forgiving are central, creating a foundation for collaboration that reflects God's love and deepens trust over time. Invest time in building authentic relationships that go beyond surface-level interactions. As Jesus demonstrated, real friendship involves laying down one's life for others (John 15:13).
- *Balance power dynamics with mutual respect:* Power imbalances can undermine effective collaboration. Address these imbalances by creating an environment where every voice is valued and respected.

This requires self-awareness and a willingness to let go of control. Prioritizing mutual respect and shared responsibility leads to more sustainable and impactful collaboration. Make a conscious effort to empower all partners equally, ensuring that power is shared and decisions are made collaboratively.

- *Create space for shared ownership:* Missional partnerships should reflect *koinonia*, that is, shared participation in God's mission. Foster a partnership where leadership is not confined to one partner but distributed among all participants. Use rotating leadership roles or involve all members in decision-making processes.
- *Focus on long-term commitment:* Building deep relationships and effective collaborations takes time. Missional partnerships must be nurtured with patience and long-term commitment. Refrain from rushing into agreements or expecting quick results. Instead, take the time to truly understand each partner's context, culture, and aspirations.
- *Encourage cross-cultural friendship and learning:* Cross-cultural collaboration is essential in the global missional landscape. Prioritize learning from and with others, especially in contexts where cultural differences exist. Build intercultural friendships that transcend ethnicity, class, and nationality barriers. This approach reflects the relational nature of the triune God and helps overcome the historical legacies of colonialism and power imbalances.

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Case Study: Patience and Perseverance in Collaboration

Russ Simons, Global Specialist with World Venture, spent most of his life in the Philippines after his missionary parents moved there when he was four.

For many years, little thought was given to collaboration in mission in the Philippines. Russ explains: In the year 2000, I was returning to the Philippines after spending about ten days in partnership training, and I was excited to see how this would take shape in the Philippines context. I was familiar with nearly all the [mission] leaders in the Philippines, having been there most of my life. I met with my friend Bob, the director of the Philippine Missions Association (PMA), and together, we decided that it would be a good idea to assemble all the mission agencies. The missions movement in the Philippines was starting, so there weren't yet many mission agencies. About five Filipino mission organizations with about 20 missionaries were serving the Muslim people in Mindanao, and all focused on bringing the gospel.

We found a Christian retreat centre and brought everybody together. As people arrived, there was great handshaking and hugging. It was exciting to see each other and see how many there were. They had never done this before, all these mission organizations gathered in one place to pray, plan, and learn from each other.

Things went wonderfully. We spent five days together, and people enjoyed themselves. Then came the last evening before our bus ride back to Manila. At our group meeting that evening, one of the leaders from a mission based in Manila stood up and spoke to all the participants, about 25 to 30 people in the room, particularly addressing the workers from Mindanao. He said, 'We've come up with something we've been working on with great effort for a long time, and we believe it will be a wonderful tool for you in communicating the gospel in a Muslim environment. We've put together a full-length movie with the story of a Muslim family,

carefully crafted and contextualized to avoid saying the wrong things in the wrong way but instead to make the gospel clear and understandable.' Then he turned on the projector. As they watched the film, the leaders from Manila looked around the room and heard an increasing hum and buzz among the people. The local missionaries appeared excited about this media piece and how it might work for them in Mindanao.

When the movie ended, one of the oldest workers almost immediately stood up. He had worked the longest in Mindanao among Muslims and had gone to an Islamic university in Mindanao. He said,

> Wait a minute. You have created a very good movie here and shown it to us. And now you're asking that we use it and implement it. Let me tell you, we had no part in the development of this – we did not even know it was being made. This is how it seems to us workers that you in Manila often operate. You decide what's good for us, send it to us, and don't ask for our input. And we feel like we're constantly having to take this.

He wasn't even finished when another man from Mindanao stood up and said, 'That's exactly right. And you have sent prayer-walking teams to our village, and in a day or two, they just ruined years of relationships we were building.'

Somebody else stood up and said, 'Yes, and the workers you sent to our village messed everything up.'

Then a Manila-based leader from another organization stood up and said, 'This sounds like you're not in favour of prayer. What's going on here? Why don't you appreciate all the work we're doing for you in Manila? Backing you up and providing resources and funds for you. Don't you want prayer backing?'

And one of the other workers stood up and said, 'Of course, we want prayer, but not how you're doing it. It's ruining our ministry.'

One person stood up and said something, almost a curse word, but not. He said, 'You know what you're doing? You're acting just like Manila Imperialism.' Filipinos sometimes talked about 'American Imperialism', a phrase politicians used referring to the U.S. occupation of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. The use of this terminology in the missions meeting was surprising. People just stepped back when somebody said that.

This heated discussion went back and forth and probably lasted about 45 minutes. As it went on, people's voices got louder and louder, and some of them were shaking fists at each other as they talked. I had never seen

Christian Filipinos so angry in public. It was very, very non-cultural for Filipinos to speak out this way, releasing a sudden flood of feelings. When that first worker stood up, it was as though he uncorked something that wouldn't go back into the bottle. And the leaders from Manila kept trying to shout them down.

Finally, another worker, an older man, stood up and said, 'Wait a minute, folks. The enemy is not in here. He's out there and delighted that we're having such a terrible conflict right now.' Well, that kind of silenced everybody, but they grimaced and closed their mouths. Everybody firmly stayed in their position. This man, who made a reconciliatory statement, said a few more things, and that quieted everybody down enough that we could end the meeting. Everyone returned to their rooms without saying anything to the people on the 'other side'. Workers didn't talk to their leaders. Leaders weren't talking to their workers. It was a terrible thing.

The retreat was over in an instant. It was done. The three-hour, crowded drive back to Manila was the quietest bus ride I've ever taken. With a bunch of Christian Filipinos who usually would be singing, laughing, and walking around the bus, everybody was hunched down and grumpy. And I just felt devastated. What a way to kick off partnering in the Philippines. I was so discouraged that I didn't know what to do. I thought that partnering in the Philippines mission environment was over.

Bob and I met a few days later. We prayed a lot. And we said, 'Lord, what in the world took place there?' After some prayer and discussion, the two of us said, 'Let's take a journey, going back to all the leaders in Manila, meeting with them in their offices, and asking if they knew what happened at that meeting. How did they feel about it? What was their take on it?' In every office we visited, it was almost the same. The leaders were shocked and confused. They had no idea their workers felt this way about what they were doing for them from Manila. We felt like we had a big wall we would have to break down if we were ever going to do anything collaborative again in the Philippines.

As we made our rounds, we talked with them about what it takes to be a good partner, thus planting little seeds in each office as we went. It might seem a less efficient use of our time, but we found that those little seeds we planted started bearing fruit. The leaders in those mission offices began to talk differently. They began to speak to each other independently,

calling each other and reminiscing. They self-evaluated after having pointers to help them discuss what went wrong. Then what happened? Thanks be to God, they were humble enough to say, 'We didn't do something right there.'

Then Bob and I went down to Mindanao and gathered workers from the field in small groups, maybe a dozen people at most. We asked them the same questions: What happened at that meeting in Manila? How did you perceive it, and how are you feeling about it now? Again, Bob and I were planting seeds of partnering clues. Over about five years, this small, slow work of planting seeds changed the hearts and minds of many of these folks focused on reaching Muslims in the Philippines.

After that first meeting of five mission organizations, I thought we would never be able to have another such meeting of workers and their leaders. When we started having those meetings in Mindanao with the workers, small groups of a dozen or so, they'd first ask if anybody from Manila was coming. We knew how deep their feelings went. This was months after the first event had happened. We kept having these little meetings, and eventually, we got to where we said, 'This next meeting, we're going to have a bigger one with more of these small groups of 10 or 12 all coming together. But we want you to get together and decide the agenda.' They couldn't believe we were saying that. And when we followed their agenda, they were astonished because they had never been in a meeting like that, where the leaders let the others set the agenda. That also gave them a sense of ownership and assured them of their importance – they were not just the receptors of everything coming from Manila. They had a voice in it. And it helped to turn strained relationships around.

Much has changed since the year 2000. In the Philippines mission movement today, there are probably few who move into the mission environment who don't first think: I wonder who else I could be working with – who else is doing this kind of work? That's an act of God, despite some terrible flops we made initially. And so, ending the story, I'd like to ask, how do you discover these hidden areas of mistrust among people who think they know each other? Doing that can be complicated and challenging, but it is an excellent discussion.

We must realize that partnering is God's work. It's not a matter of efficient management of people and goals; it's not just a matter of strategic planning. It is people focussed on spiritual development and their

characteristics that are true of God himself, the triune God we serve. It's not easy discipleship, but when we partner, we work in discipleship together. Satan is against it because he knows that's an area Christians have not done well in, and it has made them flounder and has weakened them in their expression of the gospel to the world. Also, we can't rely too greatly on the big meeting as our measure of success. We discovered that as mediators, going to individual offices in Manila and small groups in the field yielded much more successful encounters. Trust was building between Bob and me and the people we spoke with so that later, if we asked for a larger gathering, they would trust us because they saw how we interacted with them over a long time.

We know that trust is the glue that holds partnerships together, but it takes time to develop trust. There's no shortcut. It calls for earnest prayer, seeking God's protection, and understanding that we're involved in spiritual work. We may want to work with smaller groups. We approach them with a reconciliatory attitude because we don't know what may lurk under the surface, under the exteriors they present.

Never, never, never, I say, never, give up. God's timing is not ours. We want things to happen quickly. Let's have a quick meeting because then we'll have a partnership. Sometimes, we have said that the best way to kill off a partnership before it starts is to have a meeting. People are often not yet ready to function at that level. As demonstrated in this case study, they don't have trust or relationships.

I've been helping two partnerships that thought they were ending – one in Central Asia and another in North Africa – not because of conflict but because of circumstances they could not control around them. We had to rethink how we would partner because people were expelled from the country where they had come to work with others and had already developed many relationships. How could they continue partnering and sharing the gospel in that country if they couldn't be physically present there?

It is best to be open and flexible and pursue new ways of doing something you thought you had mastered. Partnering is full of marvels. It comes in innumerable fashions. I had to learn that the hard way because after my training, I thought I had a good picture, and *to me,* it looked '*just* like this' when it *actually could* 'look like that'.

The final thing is to come to those opportunities with a reconciliatory spirit, ready to help people come together and be reconciled. Therefore, if you are the catalyst, a facilitator, or someone trying to instigate something collaborative, try to be as objective as possible and not take sides. That will enable you to be the person they can come alongside as they form partnerships.

Chapter 13: Missional Generosity

For I can testify that [the churches in Macedonia] gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will – 2 Corinthians 8:3 (NLT)

These new believers were forced to depend on the generosity of people they barely knew to survive. Their new brothers and sisters in Christ responded! – Christopher R. Bruno, and Matthew D. Dirks[1]

In this chapter, we explore the concept of generosity within mission and ministry, defining generosity as the liberal giving or sharing of valuable resources, encompassing time, compassion, grace, and material possessions. We look at the Old and New Testaments to show how God calls his people to live generously. Various biblical terms surveyed illustrate the deep spiritual roots of generosity. We see how generosity should extend beyond financial giving, highlighting its role in fostering unity and partnership in mission. It also delves into stewardship, where believers are considered caretakers of God's resources, tasked with furthering his mission. We also explore philanthropic approaches, explaining the evolving relationship between donors and mission agencies, and stress the need for transparency, mutual respect, and a biblical understanding of generosity.

Defining Generosity

When applied to mission and ministry, generosity encompasses a broad and meaningful understanding that can enhance collaborative efforts. According to a standard dictionary definition, generosity involves being: 'Liberal in giving or sharing,' 'unselfish,' and 'giving to others something of value.'[2]

Moreover, generosity emphasizes the warm and sympathetic nature of the giver, as seen in acts like a generous gift or praising the work of others. It also connects to charity, where kindness is shown to those in need – demonstrating a willingness to help the less fortunate. Another

significant dimension of generosity is the liberality of the gift, described as largesse and open-handedness.

R. Scott Rodin adds a Christ-centred perspective, viewing generosity as a vital characteristic of a heart that is 'rich toward God,' marking the life of an obedient and joyful steward. He explains that stewardship and generosity extend beyond financial giving to include all aspects of life: time, service, compassion, grace, and our whole being.[3] This approach sees the entire 'church as both givers and receivers,' underscoring a comprehensive understanding of generosity in mission and ministry.[4]

Generosity in the Old Testament

Several Hebrew terms provide valuable insight into the concept of generosity. One such term is *pathach*, meaning 'to open.'[5] This is seen in Deuteronomy 15:8 (NIV), where the instruction is to 'be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.' Another significant term is *berakah*, which translates to 'a blessing.'[6] Deuteronomy 16:17 (NIV) states, 'Bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.' This same word is also used in Proverbs 11:25 (NIV): 'A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.'

The Hebrew term *lavah*, meaning 'to join' or 'be joined,' is used in Proverbs 19:17 (NIV) to convey the idea of lending: 'Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.'[7] Additionally, a notable characteristic of God is described by the word *channun*, meaning 'gracious.'[8] This appears in Psalm 103:8 (NIV): 'The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.'

Lastly, the Hebrew term *chanan*, which means 'to show favour' or 'to be gracious,' is highlighted in Psalm 37:21 (NIV): '... the righteous give generously.'[9] These terms together provide a rich biblical perspective on generosity, illuminating its deep connection to both God's character and the call for His people to live generously.

A synopsis of these verses, their key terms, how these are translated, and insights from Strong's Concordance appears in this table:

Bible reference	*Hebrew*	Translated	Strong's Concordance
Deut 15:8	*pathach*	be openhanded (NIV)	to open
Deut 16:17	*berakah*	your God has blessed you (NIV)	a blessing
Pr 11:25	*berakah*	a generous person will prosper	a blessing
Pr 19:17	*lavah*	whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD (NIV)	to join, be joined
Ps 103:8	*channun*	the LORD is compassionate and gracious (NIV)	gracious
Ps 37:21	*chanan*	the righteous give generously (NIV)	to show favour; be gracious

Table: Synopsis of Old Testament passages and concepts

Generosity in the New Testament

In the New Testament, several Greek terms offer insight into generosity. One such term is *didómi*, meaning 'to give.'[10] This is illustrated in Luke 6:38 (NIV): 'Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.' Another significant term is *charisma*, which means 'a gift of grace' or 'a free gift.'[11] In Romans 12:6–8 (NLT), we read, 'In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well.... And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.'

A third term, *haplotés*, is defined as 'singleness' or 'simplicity' and can be understood as liberality or generosity.[12] Paul uses this term to describe the churches in Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 8:2–3 (NLT): 'They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.' Despite their poverty, these churches 'gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will.'

Another example of generosity is in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. He writes, 'I have all I need because I received from Epaphroditus what you sent – a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, very pleasing to God' (Philippians 4:18, NET). This generous gift from the Philippians was financial and practical aid, symbolizing their commitment to Paul's mission. It demonstrates that 'giving of aid is part of the mutuality… between the church at Philippi and its apostle. The aid serves as a symbol of the Philippians' commitment' to Paul and his mission.[13]

Cathy Ross highlights how the churches in Macedonia and Achaia participated in a ministry to support the church in Judea.[14] Paul affirms this in Romans 15:26–27 (NLT), noting that 'Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem.' Paul stresses that if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to share their material blessings in return. Ross emphasizes that this partnership extended both among believers and with God, who promised to provide abundantly for those who continued to give, leading to praise and thanksgiving (2 Cor. 9:8–11).[15] Paul also urged the Corinthians not to neglect their commitment to generosity, reminding them that God loves a cheerful giver and will meet their needs while their giving results in more thanksgiving to God. Such generosity is an act of worship, inspiring others to worship. The Corinthians had a unique opportunity to share in God's blessings and multiply thanksgiving to God by participating in His work.

The spirit of generosity was evident from the very beginning of the church. In Acts 2, many of the first believers were Jewish pilgrims from across the Roman Empire who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. After converting and following the teachings of Jesus, they often found themselves disowned by their families and left on the streets. 'These new believers were forced to depend on the generosity of people they barely knew to survive. Their new brothers and sisters in Christ responded!'[16] Grasping God's immense generosity toward them, the early Christians displayed profound generosity toward one another. As described in Acts 4:34–35 (MSG), 'Not a person among them was needy. Those who owned fields or houses sold them and brought the price of the sale to the apostles and made an offering of it. The apostles then distributed it according to each person's need.' This early church community exemplified the powerful connection between receiving God's blessings and generously sharing them with others.

A synopsis of these verses, their key terms, how these are translated, and insights from *Strong's Concordance* appear in this table:

Bible reference	*Hebrew*	Translated	Strong's Concordance
Luke 6:38	*didómi*	give (NLT)	to give
Rom 12:6–8	*charisma*	gifts (NLT)	a gift of grace, a free gift
2 Cor 8:2–3	*haplotés*	generosity (NLT)	singleness, simplicity; liberality or generosity

Table: Synopsis of New Testament passages and concepts

Insights from the Old and New Testaments show us that we are to be gracious, a blessing, be openhanded, lend, share wealth, give gifts of grace out of our abundance, and be generous. Through Paul, we see the connection of generosity with partnering and collaborating in ministry. These insights contribute to our biblical foundation of partnering.

A Theology of Generosity

The Lausanne Movement has emphasized the importance of generosity in Christian life. Its *Atibaia Statement* urges believers 'to give of our very being and to share the gifts that God has given us' and how such 'acts of generosity and blessings should be central marks of the Christian church.'[17] Shant Henry Manuel adds a cultural perspective, noting that 'generosity is a divine characteristic in all religions and it is no exception in the Indian culture.' He warns that when Christians are frugal and unwilling to share, it can send the wrong message. Many pastors live below the poverty line, struggling to provide for their families, underscoring the need for generosity by Christians.[18]

As God intends, generosity is deeply rooted in the heart's motivations. In Matthew 6:20–21, Jesus challenges us to 'store up treasures in heaven,' focusing not on material wealth but on spiritual fruits like 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control' (Gal. 5:22–23). This reflects that how a person handles money and possessions is a telling indicator of their spiritual condition.

First-century Christian communities modelled 'sacrificial generosity,' extending beyond their immediate contexts.[19] This behaviour was most noticeable in 'the collection' in Acts 11:27–29 (MSG), where the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to deliver relief to believers in Judea facing famine. Paul used such collections to meet needs, challenge divisions, and foster unity in the church.

In 2 Corinthians 8:2, Paul commends the Macedonian churches for their dedication, praising their financial support and how their giving reflected God's 'intangible spiritual gifts.'[20] Their generosity was a sign of God's transformational work in their lives.

How we manage and use money reveals much about our understanding of God's kingdom and the priorities he sets for His people. Christians are called to live selflessly, sacrificially, and generously. By living simply and centring our hearts on Jesus, we can better allocate resources for God's kingdom. As Matthew 6:23 warns, when generosity is absent, life becomes 'full of darkness,' but when we give freely, light shines into our lives and the lives of others.

God and Mammon

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus' words are clear: we cannot serve 'two masters' (NIV) or 'two gods' (MSG) – the triune God and the false god of Mammon, often understood as the 'Carthaginian god of wealth.'[21] In the ancient world, it was rare for enslaved people to serve two masters, and when they did, it led to divided interests. Here, Jesus uses Mammon – an Aramaic word for possessions or money – as a personification of greed and idolatry.[22] A person either loves Jesus, rejects Mammon, serves Mammon, or despises Jesus. There is no 'middle ground'[23] as Mammon, often translated as wealth, naturally entices us away from God.

Mammon has grown 'fat' and powerful because humanity lusted for it.[24] Christians have a more profound reason to reject it – because it corrupts character and breaks the bonds of fellowship. Although we may desire both Jesus and Mammon, it is impossible to serve them both. Mammon is not our Lord, and when we try to serve both, we 'fall into syncretism, enticed by many idols such as greed, power, and success.'[25]

When money dominates our lives, Christ's ideals for us cannot. Money is not a neutral force. It carries influences that demand our attention and loyalty, reflected in the 'greatest lie' the devil has convinced the world that we live on a planet of scarce resources. This scarcity mindset leads to greed, materialism, and the pursuit of wealth at the expense of spiritual growth.[26]

In contrast, the triune God models generosity. Miroslav Volf explains that within the Trinity, each person 'gives, receives, and returns' because

each loves and glorifies the other.[27] Their self-giving and mutual glorification are one. Volf describes the eternal joy of the Trinity as the 'glory of [their] gift exchange,' which sets the standard for God's followers.[28] We are called to give generously because God has freely given us everything, including our existence. Generosity is rooted in an 'extraordinary desire' to assist others.[29] This should be normal for Christians and a foundational method for advancing the kingdom of God.[30]

Poverty and Wealth

In New Testament times, poverty due to famine was expected, as seen in Acts 11:28. Paul H. Byun points out that 'it is a general consensus that the great majority of ancient people in the Greco-Roman world lived at a near subsistence level, while only a small elite enjoyed economic privileges.'[31] Most early churches Paul and his co-workers established likely belonged to this poor and marginalized stratum of society.[32]

In modern times, Bryant Myers identifies six types of poverty: (1) Material (limited resources); (2) Physical weakness (due to poor nutrition and health); (3) Isolation (caused by remoteness or lack of infrastructure and essential services); (4) Vulnerability (lack of resilience to buffer against disasters or emergencies); (5) Powerlessness (the inability to influence society or one's environment); and (6) Spiritual (broken relationships with God, others, the community, and creation). All of these types of poverty are interconnected, often reinforcing one another.[33]

The tension between wealth, power, and disempowerment further complicates the discussion of money in mission. The relationship between wealth and power is evident, as gaining wealth often leads to increased influence and vice versa, which creates challenges for mission work, as Christianity was never intended to make people comfortable with power and wealth. Jonathan Bonk observes widespread wealth has 'never been the norm of human experience.'[34] Rather, survival and subsistence have been the reality for most pre-industrial societies – a reality that can be overlooked in today's era of economic globalization. This tension remains crucial in mission work, as large parts of the world still suffer from extreme poverty, directly impacting how we approach funding God's mission.

Money and Possessions

In the New Testament, themes of wealth and poverty appear frequently, with Jonathan Bonk noting that they are mentioned once every 16 verses.[35] Howard Sider emphasizes that many biblical references to the poor focus on those economically disadvantaged due to 'calamity or exploitation,' and that God 'acts in history to liberate the poor.'[36] This is evident in Luke 7:22, where Jesus declared that he brought good news to the poor. Notably, the term 'poor' in Jesus' teachings refers to those in economic hardship and all those marginalized by society. These exclusions could be based on religious, social, physical, historical, or cultural factors, highlighting Jesus' concern for all cast aside by the prevailing social order.

Interestingly, poverty can foster a sense of generosity and communal care, as material goods are often shared when resources are scarce. Conversely, economic prosperity can fuel the desire to accumulate wealth, which raises the question: What is the missional balance regarding money and possessions? The principle of stewardship is rooted in creation, where all creation is entrusted to humanity for care (Gen. 1:28). Christians are called to steward everything God has given them, recognizing that all blessings ultimately come from God. As 1 Peter 4:10–11 shows, God's people are to be seen as stewards of the diverse grace of God, and this stewardship is meant to reflect Christ's service to humanity.

The ultimate example of generosity is in the gospel, where the triune God gave Christ to humanity (John 3:16). This gift calls the church to care for the poor, oppressed, and neglected as a tangible reflection of God's ongoing grace and love, leading to 'life that is truly life' (1 Tim. 6:19, NIV). In Matthew 6:20– 23, Jesus emphasizes how we handle money and possessions, revealing our spiritual condition. Money management is deeply connected to our understanding of the coming of God's kingdom, and a lack of generosity brings darkness to life.

God calls Christians to live selflessly, sacrificially, and generously. Living simply within one's means enables believers to contribute more to God's kingdom. Ron Sider offers several practical solutions for fostering generosity: (1) Adopting a simpler lifestyle to free up resources for giving; (2) Defying materialism by caring for others in love; and (3) Working to create a more just society by upholding fairness and justice.[37]

Churches should prioritize stewardship of giving and be entrusted with the resources of God's people for God's purposes. Local congregations

should be instructed in sound stewardship principles, ensuring that ministries are funded through local support. Teaching stewardship can also encourage the many Christians who do not tithe to begin giving. The call to support is rooted in the biblical mandate to love our neighbours and care for the weaker members of the community. Generosity also extends beyond financial giving; it includes offering time, prayer, hospitality, and material resources. A true habit of generosity involves regularly giving to those in need, embodying Christ's selfless love in all aspects of life.

Stewarding Partnerships

Let's explore stewardship further. In the NIV Bible, the word 'steward[s]' appears ten times, as in 2 Samuel 19:17, which refers to 'Ziba, the steward of Saul's household.' Stewardship is defined as 'responsible oversight and protection of something considered worth caring for and preserving.'[38]

Kent Wilson describes a steward as 'someone who manages resources belonging to another person to achieve the owner's objectives.'[39] In a leadership context, Wilson adds that stewardship involves 'the efficient management and growth of organizational resources, through leadership of staff and activities as a non-owning steward-servant, to achieve the mission according to the objectives of the owners.'[40] We are stewards of God's mission. The structures we create are tools to serve that mission, and God provides the resources – people, finances, knowledge, and relationships – necessary to accomplish his work. We are not the owners; we manage God's resources to fulfil his purposes, our God-given privilege.

For Christians, wealth is a matter of stewardship. Wealthy believers can be generous as stewards of God's gifts, especially toward the poor. Christopher Wright refers to these individuals as the 'righteous rich,' who can view their wealth as an 'opportunity for generosity.' This generosity brings two benefits: (1) It blesses those in need, and (2) It reflects God's character.[41] While we are not expected to meet every need, our financial assistance should aim to create 'parity in the midst of drastic and pervasive inequality.'[42]

Since God owns everything, living charitably naturally reflects his extravagant generosity. As the gospel shows, this 'divine generosity' includes God's love, righteousness, hope, and grace. By accepting these

gifts, we enter God's abundant life. A Christ-centred generosity reflects a heart that is 'rich toward God,' and this trait is essential for an 'obedient and joyful steward.'[43] It is a picture of the freedom of following Christ.

Believing in God means believing in his 'blessed community,' the church, and participating in God's 'movement of divine generosity.'[44] As God gives generously, he expects and enables his followers to do the same. Generosity, therefore, is a Christian's thankful response to God's daily generosity. While financial management is part of living generously, it is more deeply characterized by a holistic attitude toward loving and serving people, regardless of geographical, religious, educational, political, or racial barriers.

In summary, generous stewards in God's kingdom give selflessly to their neighbours and creation. Their generosity responds to God's 'immeasurable generosity' through Jesus Christ.[45]

Generosity and the Donor-Philanthropist

Gilles Gravelle describes modern philanthropists who seek to fund God's mission as individuals who, having generated wealth through innovative ideas, now look to support projects that apply new, creative solutions. These philanthropists are not interested in an agency's traditions or status quo 'if those things prevent the development of creative solutions to today's problems.'[46]

Today's donor-philanthropists desire more than just funding mission facilities and practices; they also want to contribute their ideas and time. Transparent reporting is crucial to them. They seek the complete picture, including any challenges or failures encountered in the ministry projects they support. Gravelle notes that wise philanthropists are wary of 'impact reports that only focus on positive outcomes… because they know that in the real world, things rarely go perfectly according to plan.'[47]

These donors are increasingly bypassing Western mission structures, giving directly to indigenous ministries in the Majority World. They are concerned about the rising costs associated with institutional mission agencies and question whether these structures are essential to achieving mission goals.

The language of generous giving has evolved: *Charity* (18th century): Giving to needy causes was seen as a way for Christians to demonstrate

love and compassion. *Benevolence* (19th century): Giving became an act of goodwill, often synonymous with funding church programs. *Stewardship* (20th century): Donors began taking personal spiritual responsibility for managing the money God entrusted to them, focusing on accountability and performance benchmarks. *Partnership* (21st century): Donors now prefer direct involvement with the projects they fund, seeking closer connections and avoiding agency intermediaries.[48]

Christian donors also adopt business language and concepts, such as: *Investment:* Financial resources used to launch and grow ministry efforts. *Business model:* Steps to accomplish the ministry's vision and goals. *Performance:* The execution and fulfilment of ministry goals. *Return on Investment (ROI):* The tangible benefits of a ministry project concerning its cost. *Measurement metrics:* Specific indicators to assess how well ministry goals are being met. *Scorecard:* A comparison between the ministry's mission and its actual accomplishments. *Annual yield:* The ministry's measurable results over a year.[49]

Mission agencies are still adapting to the growing influence of the modern donor-philanthropist. Some agencies fully accept the philanthropist's power and influence in shaping mission work today, while others remain hesitant. Regardless, the donor-philanthropist is increasingly consequential in funding God's mission.

Finding common ground is essential. Mission agencies must provide transparent, responsible reporting while helping donors understand that certain aspects of God's mission may not always align with traditional business practices. This balance allows for greater accountability without compromising the spiritual nature of the mission.

Financial Resources

Alleviating financial dependency in mission partnerships has long been a concern for mission agencies. Financial dependencies, particularly between Western and Majority World mission initiatives, can foster feelings of inadequacy, preventing local churches from becoming self-sustaining. If unchecked, the 'power of money readily sets the agenda' for mission.[50] Mary Lederleitner highlights this issue, noting that 'cultural differences about how funds are utilized and accounted for' can cause cross-cultural partnerships to unravel. When this occurs, relationships are

often damaged, hindering the witness of Christ (John 17:20–21).[51] Lederleitner emphasizes the importance of developing cultural intelligence to ensure we are 'a blessing and not a hindrance to God's purposes in the world.'[52]

This dependency often stems from colonial-era practices, where foreign missionaries financially supported local pastors and evangelists. It can persist today through paternalistic attitudes, whether seen in short-term mission teams who act on their terms or in partnerships where Western mission agencies and churches dominate, leaving local churches as recipients or subordinate partners.

The Western missionary movement rooted in prosperity faces ethical and theological challenges in light of its affluence. Western missionaries are often associated with their nations' wealth, which can make biblical teachings on the poor and wealthy 'very uncomfortable reading.'[53] Missionaries living 'privileged lives among the poor' may struggle to teach generosity credibly.[54] As a result, urban missionaries sometimes focus on areas with more prospects for upward mobility, overlooking neighbourhoods where such progress is less likely.

Western missionaries' wealth and dependency dynamics can also affect mission movements and churches in the Majority World. These movements and churches may need help to be self-supporting and self-governing because the paternalism of Western mission partnerships or Western reliance upon expensive strategies may still influence the control of financial resources. Furthermore, the Western emphasis on accountability – shaped by business marketing practices – can lead to misunderstandings in contexts where such accountability is less prioritized.

Overall, navigating financial dependencies and fostering mutual respect in mission partnerships are essential to ensuring that the global church remains self-sustaining and aligned with God's mission.

Missional partnerships require resources, including financial support, making generous stewardship within these relationships essential. However, neocolonial attitudes can sometimes influence these partnerships. Giles Gravelle explains, 'Neo-colonialism, simply defined, refers to controlling situations in foreign lands through other means now that colonial powers are no longer in place.'[55] Such dynamics occur not only between the Western world and the Majority World but also between

city churches and rural churches, between different cultural groups, or even between generations. They all can carry the mindset of paternalism, 'where the donor believes they know best how to address the needs of others.'[56]

A donor might dictate personnel training and fund allocation, how ministry is communicated and in what language, and how strictly financial reporting is conducted. While these practices are not inherently wrong, imposing a foreign value system that conflicts with local cultural norms can cause more harm than good.

Understanding and practising biblical generosity can help overcome these negative dynamics. When generosity is rooted in mutual respect and shared values, it strengthens partnerships. It ensures that resources are used to honour both the giver and the recipient, fostering true collaboration in God's mission.

Thought Questions

1. How can Christians today better balance generosity with financial prudence to avoid the pitfalls of materialism while still effectively supporting God's mission?
2. How can churches foster a culture of generosity beyond financial giving, encouraging believers to offer their time, skills, and presence to support mission efforts?

Practical Applications

In this chapter, we have explored the biblical foundations and theological significance of generosity in mission. Generosity is not merely about financial giving but reflects God's character and is an integral aspect of the Christian life. It encompasses the giving of time, resources, and talents for the sake of advancing God's kingdom. We've also seen how generosity extends beyond material wealth to holistic stewardship of all God-given resources. Additionally, the chapter highlights the growing influence of modern philanthropists who seek transparency, involvement, and innovation in the projects they support. However, it also warns against financial dependency and paternalism, which can undermine mission partnerships and sustainability. Instead, the chapter emphasizes the importance of mutual respect, shared values, and empowerment within

collaborative efforts. Ultimately, generosity is framed as a divine mandate that unites believers and advances God's mission through love, selflessness, and cooperative stewardship. Living generously reflects Christ's love and brings light to both the giver and the receiver.

With these principles in mind, here are practical steps to guide your collaboration in mission through the lens of missional generosity:

- *Embrace a holistic understanding of generosity:* Generosity in mission goes beyond financial giving – it includes time, compassion, skills, and a heart willing to serve others. As the chapter emphasizes, God calls us to be generous in every area of our lives. Begin by evaluating how you can contribute beyond just material resources. Whether it's through offering your time, sharing knowledge, or extending emotional support, generosity in mission is about giving your whole self in service to others. Encourage those you collaborate with to also adopt this comprehensive view of generosity.
- *Foster a culture of mutual giving and receiving:* Generosity isn't just about one party giving to another – it's a mutual exchange. The chapter highlights the concept of 'being both givers and receivers,' which is crucial for sustainable mission partnerships. Make sure your collaborative efforts prioritize equality in the giving and receiving of resources, ideas, and support. In practice, this means encouraging local leaders, listening to their insights, and sharing the responsibility and benefits of the mission. Such mutuality strengthens relationships and reflects the biblical model of partnership.
- *Practice transparency in resource management:* As discussed in the chapter, modern donors and philanthropists desire transparency in resource use. Whether you're receiving or providing funding, aim for clarity and accountability in allocating resources. Create systems that allow for open discussions about financial stewardship and ensure that all partners are kept informed. This transparency builds trust and reflects integrity and good stewardship, which are central to God's mission.
- *Challenge paternalism and financial dependency:* One key challenge in missional generosity is addressing financial dependency, especially in cross-cultural partnerships. Avoid

creating dynamics where one partner is dependent on another for financial support, as this can hinder the development of local leadership and sustainability. Instead, focus on empowering all partners to become self-sufficient and invest in capacity-building efforts. This will foster long-term health in mission partnerships and reduce the risks associated with dependency and paternalism.

- *Cultivate a spirit of sacrificial generosity:* As the chapter points out, sacrificial generosity is a hallmark of the early church's mission. In your partnerships, embrace a sacrificial mindset, where giving is not just out of abundance but involves personal cost. Whether through financial contributions, time spent, or challenging tasks, sacrificial generosity reflects the love of Christ. This kind of giving goes beyond what is comfortable and challenges individuals and organizations to trust God's provision and put the mission first.

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Case Study: Building Bridges from Local to Global

Peter Keep lives in Melbourne, Australia and leads two organizations, HELP Charitable Trust and HELP CT Limited.

After I became a Christian at 18, I was introduced to the idea of serving in ministry. I pastored my home church in Tasmania and then moved to Victoria, where I pastored a church for 18 ½ years. In 2008, I went to South Africa to participate in a conference where I did some speaking and pastoral work. While meeting attendees from across Africa, I learned of many of the needs in Africa. My wife Anthea and I both felt quite a burden about some social and spiritual needs we saw and heard about in South Africa. On our return, we felt convinced of the responsibility to get involved. We were drawn to the socio-spiritual needs of South Africa and met people like Dean and Laurie Edwall, with whom we have partnered since 2010. We met a group of Rwandans with whom we developed an affinity. They were asking us to go there and train them. I have done this repeatedly since 2009.

A year later, I had the opportunity to go to South Africa again with a person from our church who led a mission. I decided to contact some Rwandans I had met at the conference and ask them, 'If I came to you, is there something I could do for you?' So, I went and did some teaching there. When I went on that trip, I thought, 'This is what I have to do; this is my response.' I thought that would be the end of it. But it was the beginning. I felt God had to do something here. And that led me to leave my church to start developing and investing in this.

I didn't plan to start an organization. I just planned to respond. When people started giving money, I realized I needed some structure. Someone in our church offered to set up a trust for me, the HELP Charitable Trust. Initially, I was the sole trustee, but I realized that didn't provide good accountability. I incorporated others who had been with me on the journey

in church life and were interested in what I was doing into the Trust so that we shared the responsibility. The mission of the Trust is to train and resource pastors and their projects in developing countries. At the time, the Trust had a church and a mission focus. It involved training, sponsorship of pastors, providing Bibles, and all kinds of church work.

We had some projects that were, by nature, more social. We also had some donors inform us that they could no longer give to a trust but instead to an organization with tax-deductible status under Australian law. I was in a quandary of continuing to access funding for the ministry without jeopardizing the relationships built on both sides. Ultimately, our trustees decided to start what we called Help CT Ltd. This company is limited by a guarantee in Australia. Its mission is to resource people and projects to transform communities in developing countries. So, one led to the other, with the second company formed by necessity regarding donations. However, I see it very much as one work, with two separate entities – one focusing more on the church side of things, one focusing more on the community side.

In Australia, not-for-profits are governed by the Australian Charities and Not- for-Profits Commission (ACNC), an organ of the government. It is linked to the Australian Tax Office (ATO). There's an interplay between the ACNC, the ATO, and, to some extent, the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC), depending on what kind of organization you are. For example, it's the ATO that grants tax deductible status, so there's a process you go through. Every jurisdiction will have its own requirements. These are illustrative of ours.

The Australian government will not allow organizations to give tax receipts for what we might call gospel, mission, or church work. The Company (HELP CT Ltd) is only for community work and provides donors with a tax-deductible receipt, called a Deductible Gift Receipt (DGR). We have two constitutions for the two separate companies, both registered with ACNC. Depending on the organization's size, financials and other documentation must be submitted annually for accountability. Strict standards apply to the sending of funds overseas.

The government wants to see a straight line between you – the donor or the person transferring funds – and the recipient of the funds. This is because it is appropriately concerned about preventing money laundering.

Because the Australian government is very concerned that funds from Australia are not funnelled into nefarious purposes overseas, we must vouch for the character of those receiving funds, assuring that they are not engaged in any form of child abuse nor devoting the money for that purpose and that they are not involved in terrorism. Therefore, we have a child protection policy, which asks the person to read and sign that they agree to and will abide by it. They also sign a warrant that they will not engage in terrorism. These processes are demanding but necessary.

Imposing some of these requirements on people we already send funds to has been difficult. New accountabilities imply that we do not trust them. The way I manage that is to explain that this is what the government requires of me so HELP CT Ltd. can retain its registration and, therefore, its ability to send funds to anyone.

In one structure, we have Trustees; in the other, we have Directors. We meet four times a year. Their focus is on good governance. They are ensuring we are doing the right things by the financials, spending according to the budget they have set, and that no money is going where it shouldn't be. Essentially, they are there to ensure that our operation fulfils its mission and complies with Australian law.

In terms of navigating partnerships around money, I think it's not just about money. And by that, I mean if my partnerships with people were only about money, that makes me just a sponsor. And I don't want to be a sponsor. There's a person I mentor, a godly man who's the leader of a denomination in Rwanda. I've been involved with him in training their pastors. We sponsor some of their pastors. I mentor him and meet with him every week. He will often tell me about their needs. And I've said to him, 'You know, one of my problems is that you see me as a resource. And relative to you, I have far more than you do. But I don't have the funds to do what you need to do. I don't have that kind of resource myself. I only have the resources that people give to me.'

Chapter 14: The Spirit of Collaboration

By Susan Van Wynen

Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me – John 17:21 (NCV)

Collaboration honours relationships, community, unity, and mutual accountability – participant at a missiological consultation

Identity is best preserved in the company of others and best nurtured in the company of those who share a commitment to mutual well-being. We see this demonstrated around the world and throughout time. From the Central, Southern, and East Africa Ubuntu philosophy of interconnectedness, 'a person is a person through other people'[1] (or popularized as 'I am because we are') to the words of the Apostle Paul, 'For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ' (1 Cor 12:12–14, NKJV).

An organization's identity is clearest when its words and actions are aligned and its character is consistent and apparent to others. A robust understanding of identity is beneficial not only to the organization but to all those with whom it collaborates. In an era of disruptive and seemingly constant change, such 'rootedness' may seem odd. We live in a world that clamours for novelty and calls for continuous innovation. Relevance and adaptation are in high demand, even when undefined and untested. Many organizations scramble to comply and end up running the risk of losing themselves, becoming diluted to the point of ineffectiveness, or existing merely to keep existing. Only when well-rooted can we grow, flourish, and serve together well. Flexibility and adaptability are essential to effective partnering. But unless you and your partners are also well-grounded in your identities, you will not be able to live and thrive together. Collaboration and interdependence require knowledge of who and what you are (and aren't) so you can become more together.

Missiological Consultations

The identity of the Wycliffe Global Alliance has been explored and discovered (and continues to grow clearer) through a collaborative process of discernment.[2] Collaborative missiological consultations have played a significant role in shaping the Alliance, its message, and mission, from its very beginning. These consultations continue to inform its journey, serving as forums for inquiry and interaction. They have opened the way to even deeper relationships and increased opportunities to contribute to the worldwide Bible translation movements.

Missiological consultations are rich in Scripture exploration and multicultural expression. Times of reflection and conversation encourage processing and application, taking the experience far beyond lecture or workshop formats. Participants, from inside and outside the Alliance, leave ready to see how their learnings and discoveries can help their organization's future take shape within the context of something much bigger than themselves. The Alliance as a whole continues to grow and change in keeping with the consultation findings.

Starting in 2006, more than 30 consultations (each with anywhere from ten to hundreds of participants from around the world) have been held to discuss topics ranging from ecclesiology to funding to community. Missiologist Stephen Coertze oversaw most of these consultations and outlined the critical missiological elements that should feature in a consultative process: '(1) Understand the biblical message and its most significant themes; (2) Develop an awareness of how God is at work, both in history and in the world today; (3) Understand people in their environments; (4) Cooperate with the Holy Spirit; (5) Collaborate with others in community; (6) Understand the interdisciplinary nature of missiology.'[3]

The consultative process is truly collaborative. We can learn much from reading and hearing the outcomes and papers from previous consultations, but the consultative process itself has been and continues to be a vital part of building community and understanding. Organizations will learn best by undertaking such a process themselves, in addition to discovering through the living experience and written documentation of others.

The experience was another obvious factor in the Alliance's growth in comprehending its identity and participating in collaboration. Leaders and organizations came into the Alliance with past histories of partnerships

and collaborative efforts, some successful, some not. The learnings from all this history, combined with the ongoing experiences of the Alliance, have created a growing body of real-life examples and lessons. Numerous organizations and networks, inside and outside the Wycliffe Global Alliance, have benefitted from this journey thus far.

Data Analysis

Through the consultations and other interactions, relationships have grown and deepened. But it has often been a rough road with many surprises, challenges, and highs and lows. What can we learn from observing and delving deeper into this journey? With the help of ChatGPT, we've been able to do a data analysis of key terms used in the 28 Wycliffe Global Alliance missiological consultations from 2006 to 2019. We looked at the language used and noted how it often fluctuated or changed. We can see how certain words sometimes grow in richness and substance while others fall into less frequent use. Both context and convictions have impacted these developments.

As changes in our contexts and circumstances occur, as we develop new relationships and hear from an increasing number and variety of voices, we sometimes see the need to restate and clarify terminology. These changes in terminology may be preceded or followed by giving attention to and making changes in attitudes and behaviours. The following overview provides a unique picture of the Alliance journey, a picture created from words, expressions of missiological and theological reflection, and the practical outworking of the journey experience in collaboration. It is just one way of delving deeper, but it can prove helpful.

Keywords evaluated included *Partnership*, *Collaboration*, *Community*, *Unity*, and *Friendship*. All of these words and concepts are significant to Alliance formation and identity. As you have already seen in this book, the terms *partnership* and *collaboration* are often used similarly, but with *collaboration* gaining usage over *partnership*. Our analysis is not about pinpointing trending words or personal preferences. It's about growing awareness and deepening understanding of how God is at work and how he desires to work through his church and his people. From such ongoing learnings, the Alliance adopts and adapts its language (in multiple languages!) to better reflect who they are and what they are doing. Like

most organizations, it also listens to any concerns or nuances that might impact the meaning of those words. In the following pages of this chapter, we will look at keywords, the patterns they followed, and the learnings they led to as they were explored in the consultations. As you follow along, you may see where your organization has taken a similar path or where you might choose to adjust your course.

Partnership

From the early days of Wycliffe Bible Translators, partnership has been a significant factor, taking many forms, depending on the era and the context. However, the work and ministry of Bible translation would not have been possible without partnerships with donors, organizations, churches, and local communities. Analysis of the use of the word *partnership* does, however, reveal a shift in how partnerships are acknowledged and, since the beginnings of the Wycliffe Global Alliance, shows an increasing use of words like *collaboration* and *community*. Partnership has also shifted from a primary focus on transactional and practical aspects to greater inclusion of more relational aspects emphasizing mutual respect, cultural understanding, and strategic alignment for accomplishing mission goals.

Early references frame partnership as a key strategy for effective work but also highlight the concepts of mutual respect and shared contributions. Partnership was never purely pragmatic and has always included some recognition of biblical principles and relationships within the body of Christ. Partnerships originally focused on working with other mission agencies but quickly came to encompass local communities and churches. By 2008, there was a noticeable increase in websites serving partnerships. These included more integrated messaging and collaborative communication.

Over the years, there is also a noticeably growing willingness and openness to discuss what's required for effective partnerships and what defines 'effectiveness'. Organizational maturation and the responsibility that came with it led to an increasing focus on dialogue and inclusiveness, with a greater emphasis on interdependence, honouring one another, and increasing awareness of God's intention for the body to work together.

How have consultation participants interacted with the concept of partnership?

Acknowledging that we are better together: 'As leaders, we need help from each other.' One person can't do everything, but partnering with others is a particularly powerful means of responding to the changes around us.' 'Partnership is mutual. True partnership embraces the reality that every partner has something to give and something to gain.'

Valuing trust and understanding: Trust was also a factor mentioned regarding careful choice of partners, mutual listening and learning, and growth in cultural understanding. Another emphasis related to trust included 'contributing resources without dominance'. 'We need to build trust through transparency and accountability when developing partnerships.'

Recognizing the benefits of listening to diverse voices: Discussions referenced the desire to partner well with other organizations and 'listen to the Indigenous voices before taking action in Bible translation', recognizing the goal of transformation, not just translation. 'Make space for reflecting with partner organizations in different movements to understand what is necessary for transformation in their community.' 'Working together in multi-ethnic partnerships makes us stronger; we learn more from each other. We are more effective; the more we do in partnership, the more open we are to more partnership.' Consultation participants emphasized the need to listen locally and learn how to partner locally, not just globally, while also noting the need to remember that we are '…part of the larger body, global members of the Body of Christ.'

Emphasizing missio Dei *and the role of the church:* Participating in God's mission and recognizing the role of the church have implications for partnerships – '…seeing what God is already doing. Participation [is about] playing a part in the context of the Body. [It is a] shift from designing something to being sensitive to where the Spirit is moving… seeing God as the moving agent.' 'Increasingly, the church is recognizing that it is the agent for *missio Dei*. The challenge for existing mission agencies (most of whom were formed in the years of the church's lack of priority in mission) is to reform themselves to serve in partnership with the local church.' 'Partnering with the church of the South and East… the situation today is that two-thirds to three-fourths of those who are Christians are now found in the South and East. The church is no longer dominated in numbers by the church of the West and North.' 'We engage in partnership not simply because it is cost-effective or pragmatic but

because partnership reflects God's nature, demonstrates Christian unity, and draws people to God.'

Previous examples of partnership included, 'If you provide this service, we will provide that service' and 'We've got a plan – here's how you fit in our plan.' Thankfully, over the years, *partnership* has taken on a deeper meaning beyond the transactional and the command-and-control scenarios. The term is still commonly used to indicate pragmatic and often temporary relationships. But this is not a bad thing. There should be nuances to terminology, with expressions that indicate limitations of commitment, involvement, and purpose. The important thing is to foster people and God-honouring relationships that ensure everyone involved has voice and a shared understanding of the nature of the relationship and commitment.

Collaboration

The church and mission communities have consistently emphasized collaboration as essential to effective mission work. The initial focus of collaboration was more on practical cooperation and shared efforts, but over time, the concept expanded to incorporate deeper aspects such as mutual respect, inclusiveness, and overcoming challenges together. It includes a nuance of like-mindedness beyond what is communicated by *partnership*. The increasing use of *collaboration* reflects a growing recognition of the complexities involved in working together and the need for sustained dialogue and openness. *Partnership* often implies an agreed-upon plan and that each partner will execute their part. *Collaboration* seems to express, 'We're all in this together; let's figure it out together and see where it leads us.'

Discussions regarding collaboration often give attention to the attitudes and behaviours desired for effective collaboration. They also highlight the need to put aside competitive thinking, behaviours, and language. There is a call and a calling to work, not according to our will, but according to how God intends to carry out his purposes. Missiological consultation discussions concerning collaboration often reflected on the following themes:

Honour and humility: 'Collaboration honors relationships, community, unity, and mutual accountability.' Honouring one another is a high value.

In contrast, many discussions that focused on *partnership* put more emphasis on relating well on behalf of projects, processes, or tasks. Collaboration looks to attitudes and behaviours and is less likely to be seen purely as a means to an end. Relating well in collaboration is more about the people than the projects. 'God values humility over pride and collaboration over isolation.' Humility, closely related to honouring others, also forms part of the foundation for collaboration and represents the discussions that took place among leaders who saw themselves first as Christ-followers. Such reflections highlight the differences we see compared to leaders who operate from a command-and-control model, seeking power and promoting a competitive spirit.

Sharing: Again, discussions regarding *collaboration* were notable in their focus on actual relationships, regardless of what (if any) projects were involved. This holistic emphasis came through clearly in many of the comments from participants in the missiological consultations. The idea of sharing was frequently referenced. Collaboration is '…about the whole church, moving from fragmentation to collaboration, being an authentic witness.' 'Collaboration is about helping each other. We invite engagement in both directions. Planning should be JOINT with input from both/all sides.' 'It's about sharing joys, sorrows, ideas, knowledge, models….'

Addressing complexity and the future: 'How do we work, in silence or collaboration?' The stark contrast of the choices presented by a consultation participant emphasizes just how critical collaboration is to serving well in the mission of God. Another conversation addressed today's complex contexts, citing the benefits of collaboration as '… similar to a body that has complex systems with specific functions but is still the body. The body is complex too but it works well when all the systems work together.' 'Alliance organizations will need to bring people together for collaborative working; this will require them to increase capacity for networking/collaboration. They will need to increase training resources as new partners become involved.' Those involved in the discussion predicted that Alliance organizations would increasingly serve others to enable their ministries. This included collaborative efforts to resource projects even when the Alliance organization itself might not directly benefit, which speaks again to collaboration as attitude and

behaviour even when self-interests are not satisfied. The good of the larger enterprise is more important.

There was further elaboration concerning the future, 'There will be growth of churches and new organizations wanting to take part in and lead the work in the future. These will need to work together collaboratively, not controlled by the Alliance.' 'Despite the obstacles to generosity, when we become aware of [the potential] because it springs from the heart of God, we express it in our acts of faith and community collaboration.' 'Unity in collaboration is key for good solutions to obstacles.'

Collaboration appears to offer an open-ended perspective. The concept encourages people to think bigger and further than previously possible. This is partly because other people are now in the picture but also because the unknown offers possibilities as well as obstacles. When you plan with a partner, ideally, you each know your own part and your limits. When you collaborate, there is no knowing what is possible, but you can discover it together and with the potential of new, life-altering relationships around every bend.

Community

The concept of community has grown from emphasizing relationships and support within a diverse group to recognizing the complexities of community building, including interdependence, mutual respect, and balancing individual and communal aspects. Community is now viewed as holistic and dynamic, integral to training, mission practices, and organizational development. Community is foundational for mission success, which highlights the importance of integrating community principles into all aspects of mission life and work.

Community is associated with relationships, shared passion, and mutual goals. It is grassroots, down-to-earth, addressing real-life issues, and with the potential to lead to real transformation. Acknowledging the previous disconnect that sometimes existed between Bible translation and real-life issues of communities has been a topic of concern in some of the missiological consultations.

The first consultation in 2006 stated, 'Explore the Kingdom concept – reach out to the nations, but also, we should be acting/looking like the Kingdom among ourselves in our own community. We should live the

Kingdom values.' '[We should] operate with an ethos that pays more attention to the relational dimension as against a task-oriented type of management.' By the second consultation in 2007, there was greater diversity among the participants and more guests who were external to Wycliffe. Participants were also seeing the value of reflective practice. 'As leaders, our initial response is to attempt to solve systems structures and processes immediately. Learning to reflect requires some reorientation.' At this point, most of the talk about community was about building a community of reflective practitioners. This would lead to far deeper and broader conversations in the future.

By 2009, the emphasis was on challenges, openness for dialogue, involving more partners, community building for sustaining projects and fostering maturity. From there, the wisdom grew: 'Community involves faithfulness, justice, interdependency, balance between individualism and community participation.' There was discussion of bridging gaps, global sharing of community resources, shared responsibility, collective action, sacrifice, and sensitivity to others' needs. 'Mission calls us to reflect God's nature as a community.' 'Mission preparation and training should include emphasis on embedding community awareness. [Being community] involves openness to growth through pain, offering friendships, dynamic growth.' There was increasing focus on the importance of developing deeper friendships within the community, living in community, and the implications of community in mission practices. Community included donors, organizations, and local communities.

Vulnerability is a key theme: 'Vulnerability and willingness to reconcile true community is built on needing each other and complementarity. We have a collective responsibility.' '[There's a need to be] vulnerable; open to growth despite and through pain (Phil 2:5-11). We are humble or trying to be. We are willing to have the same attitude as Christ and are available, reaching out to offer friendship and relationship. We are God's people, living and serving God in a community that glorifies God. When we agree to work together despite our differences and disagreements, even to the point of making ourselves vulnerable, is when God is glorified.' 'Interdependency is the key to community.' 'We must create a community of trust – safe spaces for contributing.'

Community shapes identity: 'We bring our true identities to community, how God intended us to be; and community shapes our true identity.' 'It's

not community vs individualism but needing to see how God intended individuals to be part of the community.'

Community includes responding together: Reflecting and discerning together in community. Maintaining a spirit of generosity within the sharing community. 'There is safety in community decision-making, but it takes time and patience with resourceful listening. Communal leadership from different voices makes for good Alliance decisions.' Maintain a spirit of generosity within the sharing community. 'To see and understand what is going on in our world requires community. Only together with God's help can we understand and act in appropriate ways. We have a collective responsibility to pay attention/listen.'

Collective responsibility extends to rethinking church and agency: '[There should be] equal value of church and agency in mission. Mutual deference. Joyful fellowship and encouragement. Not imposing my agenda.' 'Relationships often begin with an individual church. We both belong to the bigger church; all part of the Body. Common shared vision, servant attitude.' 'As community we live for one another. Church does not exist for itself but for the other. We have a role as a witnessing group.' 'Community lifts the barrier between 'sending' and 'receiving' contexts. It equalizes the translation process where each one's contribution is regarded as important and helpful to the building up of the Body.' 'Diversity in leadership is the start of a healthy community.'

Community is not a choice. We are made for community. Are we doing it well, or poorly? 'We are community and must act accordingly. Community is not an option; we do not have the option of acting as if we aren't community.' 'We do not create community but because of our common life in Christ, we are community.' One participant's comments summarize the ongoing nature of reflection on community: 'Based on previous experiences, I have found these consultations to be reflective on biblical foundations that should serve as the basis for our ministering and community. Many statements that emerge are profound truths from the Holy Spirit and time is needed to process those. I expect to continually learn during this time.'

Unity

Unity is associated with having a Kingdom perspective. This Kingdom perspective acknowledges that God builds his kingdom for his glory. We

don't build the kingdom, but unity is one of the ways we can reflect his glory. In the Alliance, largely through the missiological consultations, there has been a growing understanding of the value of incorporating theological foundations (as based in the Trinity) as well as practical applications in community-building and collaboration. Theological reflections on the nature and mystery of the Trinity led to discussions on interdependency and unity in diversity. These reflections have been increasingly integrated into practical mission strategies, emphasizing the importance of unity for effective community and partnership.

Unity is closely tied to both collaboration and the responsibilities of leadership. While leaders cannot 'enforce' unity, consultation participants considered it vital to establish it as a primary focus for leaders. As the Alliance grew, a shared leadership, a diversity of voices, prayer, and spiritual discernment have been key to the future and accomplishing common goals.

With the increasing focus on understanding God's mission and his desire for his people to live and work in unity, the path became clearer. Unity is foundational to an organization's growth and well-being. Statements from the missiological consultations affirmed this understanding: Unity is essential for reflecting God's nature and building strong relationships in cross-cultural teams. It is considered a primary goal over task completion. Unity is crucial for spiritual rejuvenation and combating individualism. It does not mean less space for the individual. Unity is not uniformity. Unity implies a healthy relationship. Restore relationships as needed. Develop positive relationships. Pray for unity that will strengthen churches and mission organizations. Pray especially for unity. Prayer is important. The enemy knows that churches and mission organizations are strengthened when united.

A spirit of unity within the leadership community will bring great fruit. Unity is foundational for community. The price of unity and relationship can be painful and messy – but worth it for the glory of God and his mission. Unity is linked to reconciliation through Christ and achieving the mission of God. It is considered key to overcoming obstacles, fostering collaboration, and deepening practical and theological understanding. 'The unity of the church is not only a deep theological truth (John 17). It is also a strategic need.' 'Ephesians 4 …one Lord, one faith, one body. [This is a] foundational principle for maintaining unity.' 'The Ten Commandments

(introduced) instructions on how people are to live in a contrast community – a holy people obedient to God and separated from the pagan environment around them.' '(Our) best contribution may be the demonstration of the unity of God's people.' Of all the key terms, consultation participants most often connected unity directly to Scripture. Though each of the terms covered in this chapter has similar connections, there is something particularly compelling about the call to unity. Knowing it is something we cannot achieve on our own, we are perhaps quicker to look to God's Word and prayer.

Friendship

Friendship is appreciated richly in the life of the Alliance. From the beginning, it has been a highly valued word and concept. Documented references link it to relationships with local communities, among colleagues, between older and younger colleagues, and with God. There is recognition of examples from Scripture, including Abraham's friendship with God and Jesus' with his followers. There are also references in the Alliance to developing friendships and the essentiality of friendship for mentorship and support within missions communities. Friendship is obviously valued for its own sake, so there is no sense of it being just a means to an end.

It is interesting that later in the Alliance story, an appreciation for friendship develops for what it contributes to the larger cause of the ministry, not in a transactional sense but in the sense of new light shed on just how important friendship is for community well-being. Friendship is regarded as a critical component of maintaining unity and dispelling combative forces within mission communities. It is essential for deeper relationships within the community and with Jesus. It is tied to respect and integrating principles of community, stewardship, and funding.

Over time, there was a greater realization of friendship as an integral part of holistic mission, foundational to discipleship, expressing love in Christ, solidarity in suffering, spiritual unity, leadership, community decision-making, and maturity.

There was a deeper understanding of the need for vulnerability and reconciliation and going beyond organizational goals to do mission and friendship. Alliance leaders and consultation participants had a growing

desire to develop a theology of relationships, including the study of the biblical principle of friendship and its impact on cultures.

As the Alliance recognized its place in the context of a polycentric world and as a polycultural organization in a diverse, interconnected (yet geographically separated) world, there was a significant increase in appreciation for friendship as critical to this new context. Moving away from previously established centres of power, Alliance leadership now occurs among and within a widely dispersed community that learns together. It is a relational and responsive community of leaders, each with their own distinctives, serving together in a complex world. Such a community can only exist with a high level of trust and true friendships that go beyond transactional and transient.

Throughout the consultations emerges an increasing awareness of mutual encouragement, patience, and shared blessings. The joys of friendship and recognition of responsibilities came to the forefront as participants frequently mentioned the importance of time spent together. Coffee breaks, after-meeting walks, and meals together are not bonuses but essentials on those rare occasions when meetings are face-to-face.

Friendships have always been a major factor in Alliance relationships, enriched by a deeper understanding of both the spiritual and the pragmatic aspects of friendship. The theology of friendship has drawn the Alliance closer to God and each other. There is a clearer sense of just how critical friendship is to the well-being of organizations and their people. Partnerships and collaborative efforts that span continents and share in ways never before imagined provide new impetus to continue deepening relationships with God and each other. There is also a new urgency and increased willingness to dive into the complexities of cultural and geographic distance, breaking down barriers and leading to new ways of being friends and coming to each other's aid. No organization is too small or has too few resources to play a part in the bigger picture. No organization is too large or self-sufficient enough not to need others who may be more nimble, hold special wisdom, or are just ready to listen and call you a friend.

Quotes on friendship from consultant participants: 'What if our biggest value was creating friendships?' Value: risk belief in friendships. 'Friendship comes within the context of spirituality.' Friendship, discipleship, solidarity in suffering, intercession. 'Friendship with God is

the basis of friendship with each other in accomplishing God's mission.' 'Be willing to be the lesser …put the interest of others before your own.' 'Be a friend, build relationships by learning to listen.' Kingdom friendship opens the conversation for a meaningful relationship.' 'Dreaming together. Think transformational, not transactional.' 'There is a desire to learn from each other. It is worth putting more thought into the potential of kingdom friendships.' 'Jesus calls us friends because he leads us into everything he received from the Father, but we don't always believe we are his friend.' 'Building a friendship takes time and needs to be nurtured to have deep roots.'

These final quotes call us back to the issues of identity and rootedness. Together, in Christ, we find our true selves and our true calling. Several of the consultations developed goals for organizations and suggested guidelines for leaders: All participants, Alliance organizations, leadership, and staff support and practice: accepting God's mission to participate in his mission for his glory; prayer for one another; relationships that represent love and respect; relationships that are sincere as well as strategic; and sharing and good stewardship of resources.

Guidelines for Leaders: Speak with rather than speak for; seek collective wisdom and gifts from the community; develop a theology of relationships; create an atmosphere conducive to friendship leadership; encourage ways of relating that allow for authentic friendships within the Alliance; go beyond organizational goals to do mission and friendship; be a friend to my team; seek to build unity and friendship as a lifestyle; and lead with intentionality.

'The secrets of the Kingdom are seen and heard (discerned), not by the wise and learned but by those who have soft hearts towards God and our community.' True collaboration is a holistic community endeavour.

Four Aspects of True Collaboration

To keep us mindful of what's involved, we can look at four aspects: Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Hands.

The Spirit of collaboration is deeply rooted in its biblical and theological foundation. It is the unity of believers with Christ and each other, a concept that resonates throughout Scripture. The spirit of collaboration embodies the generosity, grace, and gratitude of community life. The Israelites were called to be one as God's chosen people. John 17

presents a beautiful picture as Jesus prays that the believers might be one with God and one with each other so that the world will know of God's love and plan of redemption. The early church demonstrates the living out of that unity, collaboration in ministry, in the sharing of possessions, in love.

The Heart of collaboration lies in nurturing relationships. This is not merely for the sake of *accomplishing* something together, but for the sake of healthy, growing relationships… for the sake of *being* together. Collaboration is just one fruit of such relationships. It comes from hearts more committed to each other than any project or program they've undertaken. Consider Jesus' relationship with the disciples and Paul's relationship with the people he mentored and spent time with. Friendship is at the heart of collaboration.

The Mind of collaboration is a way of thinking. It also includes the attitudes that keep one open to collaboration as a first thought, not an afterthought. This mindset is inclusive and asks, 'What is God putting before us that we can accomplish together?'. It asks, 'Who else should be included in this conversation?'. 'Who else could benefit from/add to this information?' and 'How can we reflect and act with others so that God is glorified and his will accomplished?'

The Hands of collaboration are the actions taken together. It is the coming together of diverse thinking, giftings, and resources. It is the outworking of God's people coming together. It is community in action.

Thought Questions

1. How does your organization's identity influence its ability to collaborate effectively? Are there areas where greater clarity or rootedness is needed?
2. In what ways can the principles of humility, vulnerability, and mutual respect transform your approach to building partnerships and fostering unity in your community?

Practical Applications

Grounded in, and with an ongoing appreciation for, the spirit, heart, mind, and hands of collaboration, we can then move into a greater exploration of the goals of collaboration, the how (methods and means) of collaboration,

with whom to collaborate, and on what to collaborate. Rooted in our identity in Christ and our growing friendships, the world will see: 'May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me' (John 17:21–23, NIV). Here are practical steps to guide your missional collaboration:

- *Align identity with mission:* Ensure your organization's actions and communications consistently reflect its core mission and values. This clarity will strengthen partnerships and enhance collaboration with others.
- *Engage in reflective practices:* Incorporate regular reflection and dialogue in your organization to understand God's work in your context and how you can align with His mission. Use consultative processes to discern and adapt as circumstances evolve.
- *Cultivate trust and mutual respect:* Build trust through transparent communication, cultural sensitivity, and accountability in collaborative efforts. Prioritize relationships over transactional goals to enhance long-term partnerships.
- *Integrate biblical principles:* Ground collaboration efforts in biblical values such as unity (1 Cor 12) and humility (Phil 2:5–11). Let these principles guide attitudes and behaviours within your community and partnerships.
- *Foster inclusive collaboration:* Actively seek diverse voices, including Indigenous and global partners, in planning and decision-making. Emphasize shared contributions and collective discernment to reflect the interdependence of the Body of Christ.

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[1] Ireland 7.

[2] For further details, see Franklin, and Van Wynen.

[3] Franklin, and Van Wynen, 382.

Case Studies: Collaborating in Bible Translation

Collaborative Approach is Reshaping Bible Translation Training

With input from Ling Lam, Bryan Harmelink, and Deborah Crough

Wycliffe Bible Translators (later known as Wycliffe Bible Translators International, now the Wycliffe Global Alliance) has been actively involved in Bible translation and language-related ministry since 1942, with excellent linguistic training available. As the global Bible translation movement grew, it became increasingly apparent that Alliance organizations engaged in Bible translation programs in their various modes – oral, written, or signed – needed more contextually appropriate and comprehensive training curriculums and materials. At that time, no one could have predicted that a wave of collaboration in the Bible translation movement was about to occur.

In 2015, at a meeting of the Pacific Wa'a partnership, Marcia Suzuki, Dean of the College of Applied Linguistics and Languages at YWAM's University of the Nations (UofN), and Bryan Harmelink, Director for Collaboration on the Alliance Leadership Team, began a conversation about translation training. Eventually, Marcia and Bryan's discussion attracted the attention of others involved in Bible translation, but initially, there followed a request from UofN to develop a program to train translation facilitators. The resulting program is MALi BT, Master in Applied Linguistics for Bible Translation, with the first two courses taught in October 2017. Using a more holistic viewpoint and addressing a wider group of trainees, this new and innovative training program is called Language and Translation in the Mission of God (LTMG).

Colleagues from the training schools in the Americas Area met in 2018 to discuss ideas for Bible translation training moving forward, followed by a smaller working group meeting in 2019 to explore possible action steps. At this meeting, the idea surfaced to offer LTMG in Mexico City in early

2020 as an example of a course offering for the various training schools. The course took place right before the global COVID-19 pandemic hit, but during the rest of 2020, several colleagues taught parts of the course to people in their local networks. Then, in 2021, there was a five-part online series once a week in which the same colleagues and others team-taught parts of the course. Since then, the course has been taught in Spanish, Portuguese in Brazil, and LIBRAS, Brazilian Sign Language. Three organizations doing sign language translation in Brazil requested the course and came together in probably the most interactive version of the course so far.

Also, recognizing the need for a different kind of training for translation facilitators, a colleague with Seed Company, who heard about the program, asked if it could be taught at the Bible Institute of South Africa (BISA). The program began there with one cohort in 2019 and now a second cohort is participating in this program, including colleagues from The Word for the World. Also, in late 2019, the course was taught in Singapore to several colleagues from Asia-Pacific.

Adapting to the Local Context

This curriculum contributes to the training and formation of translators and translation facilitators in the 21st century, with a conscious awareness of current realities, encompassing massive growth and changes in the global church and the Bible translation movement. Two of the main consequences of these changes are (1) translation programs are increasingly initiated locally by churches or church-connected organizations, and (2) the primary translators, compared with previous eras, are speakers or signers of the languages in which translation occurs.

LTMG emphasizes an understanding of the mission of God and the role language plays in what God is doing in the world. Bryan describes the course as ‘looking at how the mission of God is so fundamental to our work in the Bible translation movement; … we can come together… work together, listen to each other and serve in the mission of God.’ Taking the course once and helping to facilitate or teach it the next time has been the pattern. ‘This is an important aspect of collaboration… from the early stages of the course, we’ve been training a team of facilitators or teachers who have participated each time the course has been offered.’

The LTMG course has been well received by pastors, Alliance Organization leaders, and other colleagues, as well as deaf and indigenous translators in almost every country in the Americas. We're considering other ways to respond to suggestions that the course should go even more global.

The Impact of Collaboration in Church-Owned Translation

By Melissa Paredes

For over 80 years, Wycliffe and like-minded organizations led efforts to advance the worldwide Bible translation movement. However, the face of Bible translation has changed. Playing a significant role in their communities, local churches don't want to wait years to begin their efforts; they want to start *now*. They are leading in the request for and pursuit of Bible translation, thus accelerating the pace of translations.

Madagascar: Embracing Partnership to Accelerate the Work

The Word of God first came to Madagascar in 1835 with a translation into Malagasy. Since then, translation has taken place in some of the 23 language communities in the country, representing approximately 30 million people, and more than 11 churches began working together to translate the Bible into four more languages. They asked for consulting help on their materials for quality assurance and for training of their people as consultants who will, in turn, train others to do quality assurance.

Within 12 months, they drafted four completed new Bibles, with 300 volunteers undertaking the translation.

Serge and Olivia Razafinjatoniary have been engaged in Bible translation since the early 2000s. Serge is involved in an international initiative to engage more churches and Africans in the mission of God, particularly in Bible translation. Olivia serves in quality assurance of the Bibles translated in Madagascar and other African countries and co-leads an international multi-organizational initiative to develop more Bible translation consultants. She is also training as a sign language Bible translation consultant to serve Deaf individuals and communities.

Of the growing numbers of partnerships, Serge declares that 'many more people groups are out there that we could participate with to get God's Word into their languages... in the same way as they're doing here in Madagascar – [with] all Christian churches combined, holding hands together. The vision is to have an exchange with the outside world.'

Because partnership plays such a crucial role in the Bible translation movement, things are progressing at an unparalleled rate. And the impact is profound. Serge states, 'We might as well ask God to leverage the gifts, talents, and resources he's [given to] his children – through other organizations, churches, and ministries – and pull that together around the same table to maximize not only on the production but on the distribution and the entire mission of God. Partnership is not Plan B; it is Plan A.'

Nigeria: Accomplishing a God-Sized Dream

Nigeria is a country with over 525 languages. When the number of those languages still waiting for a Bible translation project to begin dropped to only a few dozen, the decrease was declared unprecedented, not only in Nigeria but in the history of Bible translation. Jackson Vusaka serves as a Bible translation leader in Anglophone and Lusophone Africa. He observes, 'We're fulfilling what we've always desired: that Bible translation be a ministry of the church.'

Jackson's friend and colleague Johnstone Ndunde remarks, 'Bible translation is a tool in the hand of the church.... What I see happening in Nigeria and what I've seen happen in Madagascar is not unique to those countries.... I continue to see the church rising in many other places and engaging in Bible translation like never before. And when we engage with the church, the usability of the Scriptures becomes guaranteed.... The fact that the Scriptures can bring transformation is guaranteed.'

Johnstone continues, 'I would like to see God bringing unity in the church as they together engage in the work of Bible translation and work with organizations to bring the Word of God to the people. The people are waiting to receive the Word of God in their language, and I think that as we see this happening in Africa, we will see a revival – a movement of God – that comes as a result of people having the Scriptures [in a language] they understand best.'

Partnering in Bible Translation Builds Bridges

The Sengwer Cherangany people, located in the highlands of western Kenya, have long faced factors that brought internal division and crises affecting their very existence. From historical colonial encroachment (including when the gospel came to this region) to government interventions (including language classification and funding stipulations), an identity crisis developed among this people group. Unfortunately, the division over identity also permeated the churches.

With a mutual desire to overcome these issues, church pastors from the divided Sengwer and Cherangany sides agreed to work together, combine their names, and call themselves the Sengwer Cherangany. A Steering Committee of church leaders unanimously committed to working in partnership to produce materials in their mother tongue to help the community regain confidence in its identity, to be acknowledged by other neighboring language communities, and to be considered authentically Sengwer Cherangany.

United through their Bible translation efforts, these pastors and church leaders now recognized each other as fellow servants of God. They gathered in a small church amidst laughter and lively conversation. Then, Pastor Jacob stood to speak.

'As I look around the room of people today,' he said, 'I think back to the sad beginning of the project and marvel at the change. Before this work started, Africa Inland Church pastors, Seventh Day Adventist pastors, and other Protestant church leaders would not sit together and discuss issues. But now, we are even eating together and coming to know good things about our different denominations.' The pastors applauded in agreement. Jacob continued, 'I am coming to understand how God wants us to work together as people of God and that our main objective is to see our people going to heaven. My colleagues, we have so much work to do!'

To help them accomplish their goals, church leaders requested training in language development and Bible translation. Sengwer Cherangany project team members, trained by Bible Translation and Literacy of Kenya (BTL), committed to developing an alphabet, translating the New Testament and distributing it in print and digital forms, producing mother-tongue literacy materials, providing the community with materials like calendars, folk stories, Bible study materials, and promoting engagement with and ownership of translated Scriptures.

It's all a part of a three-way partnership: (1) The Sengwer Cherangany community is sharing the load of leadership along with gifts of volunteer service and provision of meals for events, plus some monetary contributions for materials; (2) BTL is facilitating the project, providing all the training and technical support; and (3) OneBook is financing the project and providing encouragement and prayer support.

This partnership between the Sengwer Cherangany, BTL, the churches, and organizations like OneBook contributes much more to the community than advocacy for indigenous identity and land rights could ever provide.

Chapter 15: Creating Third Spaces

Just as iron sharpens iron, friends sharpen the minds of each other – Proverbs 27:17 (CEV)

…innovation teams create 'safe spaces' to present ideas that are divergent and wild[1] – Daniel Patrick Forrester

It is easy for us to get caught between competing values. We can find ourselves aligned around viewpoints that sharply polarize us. Relatively simple discussions escalate into weaponized arguments. The challenge for Christians at all levels of society, church, and ministry is that they, too, are readily caught up in the same opposing mindsets. This can also happen quickly in partnership efforts in mission.

The idea of the third space offers another way of thinking about collaboration in God's mission. This chapter explores how, by creating spaces where differing voices can meet and work together, we can overcome division and find innovative ways to share God's love through our partnering efforts. Included in these spaces are all people groups, language groups, and cultures in all geographical locations; all generations, men and women; and addressing church and organizational differences usually associated with missions.

Binary Thinking

Imagine standing at a crossroads, but instead of just two paths, an entire landscape of possibilities stretches before you. Binary thinking often makes us believe we can only go left or right, ignoring the myriads of in-between options. This 'either/or' mindset has been a familiar yet limiting way we try to make sense of the world.

Peter Elbow highlights that binary thinking isn't just about simplicity; it can embed dominance and privilege, subtly influencing our judgments and relationships.[2] Viewing the world in simple, either/or terms remains one of the easiest methods for organizing facts and meanings.[3] When we see

issues in black and white, we might overlook valuable insights from the grey areas.

Douglas McConnell points out that binary thinking demands we choose between A or B, never considering that we might be both or even something entirely different.[4] This rigidity doesn't just affect philosophical debates; it seeps into our organizations, our leadership styles, and how we approach problem-solving.

But what if we embraced the 'Genius of the AND,' as James C. Collins and Jerry L. Porras suggest in their book *Built to Last*? They find that visionary companies don't settle for choosing between change, stability, idealism, or pragmatism. These places find innovative ways to integrate these extremes, creating a dynamic balance that drives success.

As participants and leaders in collaborative efforts, we have a crucial role in shifting from binary thinking to a more integral approach. We can borrow from Rene Padilla and Samuel Escobar's advocacy for integral mission, derived from the Spanish word 'pan integral' (whole wheat bread), symbolising wholeness. We can lead our organisations toward more significant innovation and understanding by fostering open dialogue, valuing diverse perspectives, and challenging the false dichotomies that limit us.

While some choices that God gives us are binary – for example, choosing life, blessings, light, salvation, and Jesus, or the opposite: sin, which leads to death, darkness, and separation from God – not all decisions are binary. Some situations require a middle or third space, where more nuanced thinking or negotiation is needed.

Third Space is a Metaphor

Imagine the challenge of navigating a complex journey without Google or Apple Maps or an analogue compass. Metaphors are our navigational tools, guiding us through unfamiliar terrains by connecting new ideas to familiar concepts. In their insightful book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain that 'the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.'[5] Metaphors allow us to bridge gaps in understanding, making abstract or complex ideas more accessible and relatable.

Think of metaphors as bridges that connect the known to the unknown. Lakoff describes them as 'novel or poetic linguistic expressions' illuminating one concept by likening it to something entirely different.[6] This makes metaphors especially powerful when we explore the development of a collaborative third space in God's mission. Using this metaphor can bring clarity and depth to our understanding.

John Driver emphasizes this power by stating, 'Metaphorical language can communicate more powerfully and imaginatively than abstract language...; they [metaphors] are also powerful forces for creating an authentic sense of identity and mission.'[7] Metaphors are woven into our daily conversations, often unnoticed. Yet, they shape our imagination, clarify our thoughts, and open pathways to new insights.

The third space is a compelling metaphor for mutuality in collaborative efforts. Just as a metaphor bridges the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the Third Space represents a middle ground where different perspectives converge to create something new. It's not about abandoning our unique identities or forcing conformity. Instead, it's about fostering an environment where dialogue and collaboration are encouraged and diverse viewpoints enrich collective efforts.

Let's imagine the third space as a vibrant gathering place – a metaphorical table where everyone has a seat and every voice matters. Here, we can weave our individual threads into a rich tapestry that tells a story of God's work in the world. Doing so brings us closer to fulfilling our shared mission with greater effectiveness and deeper understanding.

What follows is a review of various people who have developed different aspects of a third way of thinking and acting that can inform our collaborative missional mindset.

Third Spaces for Community and Connection

Sociologists and city planners know about a third place, a social setting distinct from where we live – our first place – and where we work – our second place. These third places or spaces include cafés, clubs, churches, parks, libraries, and other informal gathering spots where people naturally come together. In his influential book *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg highlights the importance of these third spaces, emphasizing their role in fostering community and a sense of belonging.

For a balanced and healthy life, individuals need to engage in three realms: home life, work life, and social spaces. Third spaces, with their informal and low-profile character, contrast sharply with the structured home and work environments.[8] They act as social 'mixers,' bringing together people from various walks of life in a relaxed atmosphere that encourages connection and interaction.[9] Places like fitness centres and beauty salons become natural hubs where relationships can form organically.

These environments are more than just spots to socialize; they are vital for creating a sense of place within a city. Oldenburg argues that cities lacking third spaces risk losing their 'soul,' missing out on essential social interactions outside work or home. In these settings, people can meet friends, neighbours, colleagues, and strangers, providing a sanctuary for connection and community building.

Historically, different cultures have embodied third spaces uniquely – Paris with its sidewalk cafés, Vienna with coffee houses, Singapore's hawker centres, and Lagos's open-air markets. Despite their differences, these places share vital qualities: neutral, inclusive, low-profile, open beyond typical working hours, and providing a relaxed, supportive environment for conversation and connection.

Oldenburg describes third spaces as 'neutral ground,' where people can interact freely without the obligations of home or work.[10] They offer a sense of social equality, where everyone can engage on an even playing field. The voluntary nature of third spaces – places people choose to visit rather than have to – adds to their appeal and significance. Here, youth and adults unite in relaxed enjoyment, strengthening community ties.

Third spaces are especially significant for newcomers, offering an accessible entry point to meet and mingle with established residents. They foster interactions between people of all ages in a casual, enjoyable atmosphere where conversation – whether light-hearted or serious – is the main activity. In these environments, individuals move from feeling isolated to becoming part of a vibrant social fabric that first and second places may not always provide.

For third spaces to truly serve their purpose in society, they need to be accessible and open for extended hours – ideally, at least 16 hours a day, five or six days a week. While serving food or beverages isn't essential, it does encourage people to visit more frequently and stay longer. Urbanist

Douglas Farr includes coffee shops, parks, pubs, libraries, and even laundromats in his list of third spaces. He believes these places are essential for 'sustainable urbanism' – they are the lifeblood of a city.[11] While these authors might not consider it, churches also qualify as a third space. The buildings might or might not be open all hours, but the community is available.

Just as third spaces are vital in urban planning for fostering community and connection, they offer valuable insights for those involved in collaborative efforts, especially within God's mission. By creating symbolic third spaces in our collaborative work, we establish neutral grounds where diverse perspectives can converge without the constraints of traditional hierarchies or roles. By embracing the principles of third spaces, we enhance our ability to work together effectively, reflecting the unity and diversity inherent in our shared mission.

Third Culture Kids

Building upon the concept of third spaces in urban planning, we can draw valuable insights from the experiences of Third Culture Kids (TCKs) for our collaborative efforts.

TCKs are individuals who grow up between two or more cultures, belonging fully to neither their home culture (first culture) nor their host culture (second culture). Instead, they develop a unique 'third culture' to navigate and bridge both worlds. This phenomenon is common among missionary kids (MKs) and children of military personnel, diplomats, and expatriate families who spend significant portions of their developmental years outside their parents' culture.

Social scientists Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem coined the term 'Third Culture Kid' during their 1950s study of Americans living in India as diplomats, missionaries, aid workers, and educators. They observed that these expatriate communities while sharing the same environment as their Indian hosts, developed distinctive subcultures – a 'culture between cultures' that was neither fully American nor Indian.[12] The children raised in this context became adept at navigating multiple cultural settings, forming their identities within this unique third culture.

A third culture is a hybrid space where TCKs build relationships across diverse cultures without claiming full ownership of any single one. They

assimilate aspects from each cultural world but find their true sense of belonging in connections with others with similar backgrounds. This division of assimilation and connection often leads to feelings of both 'rootlessness and rootedness' simultaneously – a deep understanding of several cultures without being entirely anchored in any of them.[13] They experience life in a way that profoundly shapes their deeper identity.

These 'Global Nomads' or 'Cross-Cultural Kids' frequently move between different cultures, which equips them with unique skills in adaptation, empathy, and communication.[14] Mobility is a constant in their lives, whether through their moves or those of the people around them. Living in this third culture helps TCKs form their identities and navigate life meaningfully across multiple cultural settings.

The experiences of TCKs offer rich lessons for those involved in collaborative missions. Just as TCKs thrive in the space between cultures, collaborative efforts benefit when participants are open to 'in-between' spaces when they become a fertile ground for innovation. TCKs create hybrid identities that draw from multiple cultures. Similarly, collaborative teams can develop a collective identity that honours the diversity of its members while uniting them under shared goals. TCKs naturally integrate diverse viewpoints, thus strengthening collaborative efforts when actively seeking and incorporating varied perspectives, leading to more integral solutions. Constant mobility teaches TCKs to be resilient and comfortable with change. Collaborative projects often involve navigating uncertainties; cultivating this resilience is crucial for success.

By embracing the lessons from Third Culture Kids, we are moving towards forming a new missional leadership mindset – one adept at navigating complex cultural landscapes and influencing our contexts with wisdom and grace. This approach enhances our collaborative efforts and reflects the unity and diversity inherent in our shared mission.

Navigating Cultural Complexities

Building on the concept of third spaces and third cultures, some sociologists have introduced a third-way approach to address the relational complexities of our globalized world. One notable thinker in this area is Homi Bhabha, who offers a neutral third space that helps navigate cultural intersections, particularly in contexts of colonization and post-

colonization.[15] For Bhabha, *First Space* represents modern society, characterized by values like individualism and a relentless pursuit of progress. The dominant culture often sets the norms and expectations in a globalized world. *Second Space* encompasses marginalized groups – women, migrants, the working class, and ethnic minorities – who exist on the fringes of the majority culture. They often struggle to have their voices heard and their identities recognized within the dominant paradigm.

Integrating these two spaces poses a significant challenge because it frequently requires one side to sacrifice fundamental aspects of their identity or values. They can be seen as 'incompatible opposites,' making genuine collaboration and mutual understanding difficult.[16] To bridge this divide, Bhabha proposes the creation of a *Third Space* – a middle ground that respects both sides without being wholly owned by either. This space allows for the development of a new, hybrid culture where differences are not just acknowledged but actively negotiated and reconciled.

Sam George describes this hybrid identity as possessing a duality – two natures, tendencies, or personas fused into one, enabling individuals to switch between cultural spheres seamlessly. While some may view this as 'cultural schizophrenia,' others see it as 'double consciousness,' a valuable ability to navigate multiple cultural contexts effectively.[17]

The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* notes that hybridity involves the emergence of a new culture whose elements are constantly being transformed.[18] These challenge the traditional notion that culture is a unified force tied to a single historical narrative. Instead, culture becomes a living, evolving tapestry woven from multiple threads.

The Third Space is more than a simple blending of cultures; it's a continuous process of transformation that unfolds through ongoing cultural encounters. In this dynamic space, people form hybrid identities that reflect elements of various cultures while remaining distinct from their original roots.

Collaboration in God's mission is not static; it's an evolving journey. Therefore, embracing Third Spaces offers a helpful mindset for navigating cultural complexities in partnering efforts. By establishing a neutral ground, we allow diverse voices to come together without the pressure to conform to a dominant culture. This fosters mutual respect and openness. Recognizing that individuals may embody multiple cultural identities enriches our collective understanding and approach. These hybrid

identities can act as bridges between different cultural perspectives. The Third Space encourages us to remain open to transformation, learning from each cultural encounter and allowing it to shape our mission dynamically.

This concept applies across various contexts – nations, missions, churches, and families. By doing so, we move beyond viewing cultural differences as obstacles and start seeing them as opportunities for growth and deeper connection.

Third Culture Worldview

Building upon our exploration of third spaces and hybrid identities, we now delve into the concept of the Third Culture Worldview articulated by Mark Sayers. Sayers highlights a paradox within Western culture – an ideological belief that a life free from suffering is possible, even as 'everything falls apart while looking beautiful.' He refers to this contradiction as the Third Culture of Western society, a 'beautiful apocalypse' where the facade of progress masks underlying disintegration.[19]

Sayers outlines three distinct cultural paradigms: *First Culture:* This culture believes in many gods that must be obeyed, resembling animistic beliefs. It is characterized by a worldview where multiple deities influence various aspects of life, requiring adherence to numerous rituals and traditions. *Second Culture*: Rooted in the Judeo-Christian ethic, this culture worships one true God and follows sacred commandments. It upholds absolute truths and moral codes derived from religious teachings, emphasizing community, tradition, and a shared moral compass. *Third Culture:* Defining itself by rejecting the sacred beliefs of the Second Culture, the Third Culture deconstructs religious values, leaving no sacred commandments or prohibitions. It promotes individualism and subjective morality, often dismantling traditional structures without offering sustainable alternatives.[20]

The contemporary church faces a significant challenge within this Third Culture context. Without careful attention, it risks 'disappearing into the soil of the third culture,' potentially losing its distinctiveness in a society that deconstructs traditional values.[21] The allure of a life free from

suffering and constraints can subtly erode the foundational beliefs that define the faith community.

To address this challenge, Sayers calls for Christians to become 'extremophiles of faith.' Just as extremophiles are organisms that thrive in extreme conditions, these resilient disciples can find meaning and flourish in complex, even hostile, environments.[22] They are believers who remain steadfast amidst cultural shifts, holding onto their faith while navigating the complexities of the Third Culture.

Understanding and engaging with the Third Culture Worldview is helpful for those seeking to collaborate in God's mission. In a culture that often rejects traditional values, the church and its collaborators must uphold their unique identity rooted in Christ's teachings. This doesn't mean isolating from society but engaging with it authentically without compromising core beliefs. Like extremophiles, mission collaborators are called to adapt and thrive in challenging environments. This resilience enables them to minister and collaborate effectively even when facing opposition or indifference.

Recognizing the differences between the First, Second, and Third Cultures allows for building bridges of understanding. By empathetically engaging with those influenced by the third culture's worldview, collaborators can communicate the Gospel in relevant and transformative ways. The church's future rests with resilient disciples who can navigate the challenges of the Third Culture's Worldview.

Third Space Church

Building on the idea of Third Spaces as catalysts for collaboration and innovation, let's explore the concept of the Third Space Church. This transformative model fosters unity and creativity within the body of Christ.

According to Christopher Baker, Third Spaces enable 'the emergence of hybrid forms' through 'interrogation'.[23] By asking the right questions and engaging in meaningful dialogue, we create spaces ripe with 'new possibilities that "unstick" our minds' from conventional thinking.[24]

This process is designed to discover 'new patterns of Christian praxis and theology.'[25] It helps negotiate a Third Space between the 'post-

colonial' tendencies of the Western church and its evolving purpose within 'postmodern urban space and civil society.'[26]

Rather than relying on past 'top-down methodologies' inherent in Christendom, there's a pressing need to 'engage with a multiplicity of influences that now compete with each other on equal terms.'[27] The Third Space Church brings into the equation 'an acceptance of diversity... and a willingness to embrace the concept of hybridity.' This approach helps the church overcome its fear of 'the Other' – those considered outsiders due to polarization from disparate socioeconomic factors.[28] Embracing diversity and hybridity, the church becomes a space of inclusion and mutual respect.

What may emerge is a Third Space Church committed to partnership and reconciliation. This model promises to work alongside diverse communities to co-create meaningful expressions of faith, develop new forms of worship, ministry, and outreach that resonate in a postmodern context, and foster genuine relationships across cultural, social, and economic boundaries.[29]

Collaborative Innovation

Building upon our exploration of third spaces and their significance in fostering collaboration, let's delve into how leaders can create environments that encourage reflection, innovation, and transformative action in God's mission.

In his book *Consider*, Daniel Patrick Forrester highlights the critical need for leaders to carve out space for deep thinking and innovation. He notes that 'innovation teams create "safe spaces" to present ideas that are divergent and wild. When one idea sticks, the group conceives new products that meet the need. The analysis is done, concepts are born, and prototypes convey the ideas up and down the management chain.'[30] While Forrester is applying innovative thinking to production-related work, the principles can apply to a wide variety of contexts because this process mirrors the essence of the Third Space – a neutral ground where fresh ideas and hybrid solutions can emerge through open discussion and experimentation.

Forrester further emphasizes that 'organizations and leaders who can sustain thinking on the right problems, while absorbing the unknowns that inevitably arise, will prove the most relevant and lasting.'[31] This

underscores the importance of focus and adaptability in uncertain environments.

Reflection plays a pivotal role in this process. Forrester states, 'Time for reflection is an open invitation to discover what awaits us; it's an opportunity we can all take advantage of as data and connectivity compound, and the tempo increases.'[32] We face a choice: prioritize and elevate the practice of reflection or become lost in the endless stream of tasks and distractions. Taking time to reflect is essential for discernment.

Similarly, in his exploration of flexible thinking, Leonard Mlodinow shows how it aligns with the creation of Third Spaces. Elasticity in thought is crucial when navigating challenges that arise where cultures intersect and new ideas are needed. While our cultural backgrounds provide valuable perspectives, they can also limit us. Mlodinow observes, 'A strong cultural identity, if it produces a deeply ingrained approach to problems, can make it more difficult to change that approach, even if it is not working.'[33] Exposing ourselves to other cultures and viewpoints broadens our understanding and enhances our ability to adapt.

Mlodinow explains that 'elastic thinking that produces ideas doesn't consist of a linear train of steps.'[34] Ideas emerge unpredictably – sometimes in solitude, sometimes in collaboration. Though these ideas may seem to come from nowhere, they are the product of our unconscious minds. This elasticity in thinking creates the dynamic, flexible space needed for innovation in Third Spaces, where diverse perspectives converge to generate new solutions.

In mediation, the involvement of a third party – the mediator – introduces the concept of the 'analytic third.'[35] This metaphor represents a 'shared mind' that forms between the parties, existing independently and generating ideas neither could produce alone. This shared Third Space emerges when the mediator and the disputing parties engage in dialogue, creating a unique environment for interaction.

The transformative potential of this Third Space lies in its ability to foster new perspectives and solutions. The mediator and parties co-create the mediation process, shaping dialogue to enable breakthroughs. For those collaborating in God's mission, this highlights the importance of partnership and mutual learning. By engaging with others – individuals, communities, or organizations – we can co-create solutions that reflect the diversity and unity of the body of Christ.

Hope plays a crucial role in these collaborative engagements. It fuels our willingness to engage, even amid disagreements or challenges. Fear without hope can cause a cognitive freeze, stifling creativity and hindering problem-solving. In the context of God's mission, hope is anchored in faith and the assurance of God's promises. It empowers us to step into new spaces, trusting that God is working through our collective efforts.

The 'analytic third' concept enriches our understanding of how Third Spaces emerge through collaborative dialogue. In mediation, this Third Space allows for mutual understanding and creative solutions. Similarly, in mission, Third Spaces are neutral zones where diverse viewpoints intersect to form a new, hybrid reality. These spaces are about more than negotiation – they involve co-creating something new, drawing on the strengths and insights of all participants.

Third Calling

Continuing our exploration of Third Spaces and their significance in fostering collaboration within God's mission, we now turn to the concept of the Third Calling. It focuses on a season of life that offers unique opportunities for individuals to engage deeply and meaningfully in God's work.

Richard and Leona Bergstrom describe the Three Callings: *First calling:* This initial phase encompasses early adulthood, where individuals pursue education, begin careers, establish marriages, secure mortgages, and start families. It's a time of building foundations and setting life trajectories. *Second calling:* As careers become established and families grow, this phase involves nurturing children through schooling and eventually witnessing them move out of the family home. Parents find themselves well-rooted in their professions but may begin to ponder their purpose beyond work and family life. *Third calling:* Described by Bergstrom as a time for 'a new direction, a new beginning, a new purpose and position.'[36] This season emerges as individuals approach or enter retirement, prompting a re-evaluation of life's purpose. Understanding one's unique calling becomes central, providing clarity and framing the path forward.

The Third Calling is not a winding down but an invitation to engage differently with God's mission in fresh and impactful ways. This season

offers the chance to reflect deeply on personal gifts and passions and how they align with God's purposes. It's a time to ask, 'How can I use my experiences to serve others and further God's kingdom?' Individuals can play pivotal roles in mentoring younger generations, sharing wisdom, and guiding others in their spiritual and personal journeys. For some who may be privileged to have fewer obligations, there's freedom to participate in mission work locally or globally, apply skills in new contexts, and collaborate with others in God's mission.

Thought Questions

1. How can mission agencies, ministries, and the church effectively balance its contextual distinctiveness with the need to engage and collaborate across diverse contexts without losing its foundational identity?
2. How might you embrace Third Space thinking to challenge your current approach to leadership and decision-making within your organization or ministry, considering generational, gender, organizational and church-based differences that lead to more inclusive and innovative solutions?

Practical Applications

As we seek to enhance our collaboration in God's mission, embracing the concept of the Third Space offers a transformative approach. It invites us to move beyond binary choices and explore endless possibilities where openness, mutual respect, and inclusivity define our interactions. The Third Space calls us to cultivate a missional mindset that bridges cultures, traditions, and perspectives, creating fertile ground for innovation and problem-solving. Every person's contributions are valued, and authentic relationships are forged. This space challenges us to engage with one another authentically, build partnerships grounded in mutual respect, and align our efforts with God's vision for unity among his people.

Creating third spaces may assist in mitigating the enduring impact of colonialism and imperialism on societies, cultures, politics, and economies. This post-colonialism field delves into power dynamics, exploring how colonial powers exercised authority and how these structures continue to influence relationships today. Central themes

include cultural representation, which critiques how colonial narratives marginalized or misrepresented indigenous cultures; identity and hybridity, focusing on how colonized peoples navigate blended identities shaped by both local and colonial influences; and decolonization, which highlights efforts to reclaim autonomy, cultural heritage, and self-determination. Postcolonial critiques also address global systemic inequalities, advocating for equity and justice. Grounded in the work of scholars who challenge Western-centric perspectives, postcolonial theory examines the complex interplay between 'the colonizer' and 'the colonized,' offering new ways to understand historical and contemporary power relationships.

By physically and metaphorically creating and inhabiting third spaces, we can offer a compelling vision of community and purpose. In these spaces, we acknowledge the complexities of our world while pointing toward the transformative hope found in life with God. In this collaborative journey, we are called to renew our commitment to partnership, reconciliation, and authentic engagement. By embracing cultural humility and valuing the perspectives of others, we can advance God's kingdom in ways that honour all cultures and backgrounds.

Embracing Third Space thinking equips us with a blueprint for fostering equitable and enriching partnerships. It encourages us to step beyond fear and isolation toward a collaborative future where the church is a vibrant, dynamic force for good. With this foundation, here are practical steps to guide your collaborative efforts in God's mission, all inspired by the principles of the Third Space:

- *Create a neutral ground for open dialogue:* One of the critical aspects of the Third Space is creating a neutral ground where people from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives can come together to share and learn from one another. In God's mission, this means creating environments where diverse voices can be heard without the constraints of hierarchy or preconceived notions. Establish spaces that encourage open dialogue and mutual respect, where collaboration is not about imposing one viewpoint but about exploring shared goals and values. These spaces allow for the merging of diverse perspectives, leading to richer and more creative solutions for mission.

- *Challenge binary thinking in decision-making:* The chapter highlights the dangers of binary thinking, where issues are seen as 'either/or' instead of embracing a 'both/and' mindset. In mission collaboration, this kind of thinking can create unnecessary divisions. Instead, encourage decision-making that considers a broader spectrum of possibilities. For example, embrace the dynamic balance of integrating both rather than choosing between stability or change. Collaboration becomes more inclusive and innovative, allowing for flexible thinking and creative problem-solving. Emphasize the value of finding third-way solutions that integrate different viewpoints without forcing participants to choose sides.
- *Create hybrid identities through collaboration:* Just as Third Culture Kids (TCKs) create a hybrid identity from living between cultures, your collaborative mission efforts should encourage the formation of a 'hybrid' identity among team members. This doesn't mean abandoning unique cultural identities but rather integrating different insights, practices, and experiences to form a new, unified mission identity. Embrace the diversity within your team and create opportunities for members to contribute their unique cultural perspectives. This hybrid identity will strengthen the mission by fostering creativity and mutual understanding.
- *Encourage innovation spaces:* Third Spaces in collaboration are also environments for innovation, where participants feel safe to present divergent and wild ideas. In God's mission, these spaces can be crucial for brainstorming new evangelism, outreach, and community engagement approaches. Encourage a culture where risk-taking is not only allowed but celebrated. As the chapter notes, these spaces should be supportive and low-pressure, allowing new ideas to emerge without fear of failure. This approach fosters a spirit of experimentation that can lead to breakthrough solutions in mission.
- *Embody flexibility and resilience:* Collaboration in mission, especially in diverse cultural contexts, requires flexibility and resilience. The chapter emphasizes that Third Spaces thrive in environments of constant change, where people can adapt and learn from one another. Encourage your team to approach challenges with an open mind and a willingness to change. Build resilience by embracing discomfort and uncertainty as opportunities for growth.

Just as TCKs learn to navigate multiple cultural contexts, mission teams can develop the ability to thrive in ever-changing environments, making them more effective in their global mission efforts.

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[34] Mlodinow, 109.

[35] Jacobus (Kobus) Kok, and Barney Jordaan, "The Metanarraphors We Lead and Mediate By: Insights from Cognitive Metaphor Theory in the Context of Mediation in a Vuca World," in *Leading in a Vuca World*, ed. Jacobus (Kobus) Kok and Stephen van den Heuvel (Cham, DE: Springer, 2019), 19.

[36] Richard and Leona Bergstrom, *Third Calling: What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?*, Kindle ed. (Edmonds, WA: Re-Ignite, 2016), Loc. 329.

Case Study: Third Space in Practice

Janice Price advocates the creation of a Third Space that bridges the gap between modern colonialism of the West – marked by domination of resources and cultural power – and the Majority World, where many lack financial influence and power.[1] While that may describe some mission contexts, it would be healthier to stress that, as mission leaders, we desire to see relationships built and all people respected and heard. Therefore, the Third Space offers a framework for developing a missiological understanding of friendship, deepening the value of partnering in God's mission. True cross-cultural friendship requires building enduring relationships between individuals and among communities, genuinely learning from and valuing another culture or religion, and immersing oneself in the daily life of another culture, not as an outsider but as a participant. This approach calls for a renewed commitment to friendship in mission, making it a central priority rather than a peripheral activity.

For collaborative missional leaders, embracing the Third Space means exploring new paradigms and strategies where culturally specific insights and experiences are shared openly.[2] This can lead to profound personal and cultural transformation. Key aspects include recognizing that all cultures have valuable insights to offer, engaging in activities that build trust and understanding, and being mindful of different customs, values, and communication styles.

While this journey may involve being misunderstood in multiple cultural settings and require significant effort, the potential benefits for the global church are substantial: gaining a broader perspective on God's work around the world, developing more effective mission approaches because diverse experiences inform them, and seeing the unity and strength that come from genuine collaboration.

By making friendship a central priority in our mission, we move towards a model of collaboration that honours God and reflects the diversity of his creation. This Third Space becomes a place where

partnerships flourish, and together, we can work towards reconciliation and transformation in our communities.[3]

Using Third Spaces and Third Tables

The Wycliffe Global Alliance offers a compelling example of how Price's advocacy of Third Spaces can enhance global mission efforts. By creating Third Tables, they have developed strategies to bring together diverse cultures, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation in God's mission.

Creating Third-Space Strategies requires intentional effort and thoughtful consideration. Key questions arise: What processes can an organization use to develop and implement a Third Space? How can these strategies foster innovation and lead to better solutions? It is crucial to approach this with humility and cultural sensitivity. Dominant cultures often assume their way is the 'universal' standard, which can unintentionally overshadow other valuable perspectives. Creating an alternative space requires deliberate planning with the involvement of all parties. It may also be helpful for someone unbiased, from outside the groups, and ideally with expertise in navigating change and a high level of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) to act as the facilitator.

The Wycliffe Global Alliance has experimented using Third Tables to create collaborative spaces where mission communities from the West and the global South and East can come together. These Third Tables serve as neutral environments where participants, as equals, engage in dialogue, share ideas, and build trust.

One example is the Leaders Journeying Together Third Table event in May 2015. Inspired by the concept of Third Culture Kids, this initiative invited participants from Western countries and the Global South and East to contribute their values as gifts to a Third Table. Gifts from both sides were shared and evaluated. Each group identified behaviours and values that were helpful or unhelpful to the mission, focusing on aspects like leadership styles, power dynamics, and community orientation. Positive 'gifts' were exchanged between the groups, fostering shared understanding. For instance, the global South shared the value of 'community and collective input,' which Western participants embraced. The West offered 'dealing with conflict with love and respect,' which was

welcomed by the global South. This mutual exchange allowed both groups to appreciate and integrate valuable practices from each other's cultures.

Another example is the Wycliffe Global Gathering Third Table event in May 2016. At this global gathering, over 180 participants came together to identify and exchange gifts that could strengthen their communities. Participants from five regions offered core values from their cultures to help build a healthy biblical community. Through discussion and voting, 12 out of 15 proposed gifts were accepted. The top three gifts centred on relationships: 'Friendships, Relationships, Ubuntu,[4]' 'Working Well Together,' and 'Trust in Relationships.' These priorities highlighted the universal importance of relational harmony in collaborative mission work.

The results and impact of these Third Table experiences were significant. They provided safe spaces for participants to bridge cultural gaps, fostering collaboration and cross-cultural understanding. Participants recognized and valued each region's diverse strengths in God's mission and developed a deeper appreciation for each other's contributions. The process built trust and helped participants better understand the nuances of cultural differences. Engaging in these dialogues enriched their collective approach to mission work, leading to a stronger, more unified community with a renewed focus on common goals.

Applying Third Spaces and Third Tables in collaborative mission demonstrates how these concepts can be powerful tools for organizations seeking to enhance cooperation in God's mission. Organizations can foster mutual understanding by creating intentional neutral spaces where all participants feel valued and heard, free from the dominance of any single culture. Utilizing skilled facilitators with high cultural intelligence to guide conversations and navigate complexities is essential. The key aspects include encouraging the mutual exchange of gifts – sharing values and practices that can enrich the collective mission – and focusing on relationships by prioritizing trust and understanding as foundational to collaboration. Involving participants from diverse backgrounds in identifying and integrating shared values strengthens the collaborative effort.

The Wycliffe Global Alliance created a model for working together more effectively by engaging in these Third Space dialogues. This collaborative approach has led to a unified community where Western and

global South perspectives are valued and integrated into a shared mission. There is a renewed focus on common goals and a strengthened commitment to advancing God's mission collectively. Mutual respect and trust have deepened, with relationships transcending cultural barriers.

The Alliance's use of Third Tables illustrates the transformative potential of these spaces in fostering collaboration across cultures. As we seek to collaborate better in God's mission, we can adopt similar strategies by creating our own Third Spaces where diverse voices are welcomed and heard. Allowing these neutral spaces to become incubators for new ideas and solutions fosters innovation. Using these environments to strengthen relationships and work more effectively helps build stronger partnerships.

Third Space Framework for Mission Collaboration

By intentionally embracing Third Spaces in missional efforts, as exemplified by the Alliance, we can enhance collaborative efforts, honour the richness of diverse perspectives, and advance God's mission with unity and purpose.

What follows is a simple framework for creating and managing a Third Space. We advise giving the process plenty of time and not being tempted to rush it.

Rationale: Third Spaces create neutral, collaborative environments where mission partners can engage in open dialogue, free from hierarchical or cultural constraints. This allows for trust-building, identifying shared goals, and working through complex issues while focusing on God's mission.

Key benefits:

- Fosters companionship, collaboration, and co-creation across cultural and organizational contexts.
- Moves away from traditional power structures, creating a place for mutual respect and joint leadership.
- Honours God's call to unity by working through complex issues with humility and grace.

Creating safe spaces: A Third Space must feel secure for all participants:

- Safety means feeling valued and heard.

- Respectful dialogue without fear of being judged or dismissed.
- Shared values that foster mutual trust.
- Ability to disagree without damaging relationships.

Facilitators should lead by emphasizing these core principles, ensuring participants understand the importance of creating such an environment.

Building trust: Trust is at the core of Third Spaces. Trust is difficult to regain once broken, so intentional efforts to maintain it throughout the process are crucial. Some key aspects include:

- Keeping promises and demonstrating reliability.
- Transparency and open communication.
- Vulnerability and authenticity in sharing experiences.
- Preserving dignity during conflict and resolving it respectfully.

Identifying issues: Partnerships often face unresolved tensions. It is important to create a process where participants can share these issues without fear of retaliation or judgment. In this phase, all groups participating in a Third Space:

- Identify unique issues that have caused friction (e.g., communication breakdowns, leadership expectations).
- Prioritize three key issues that must be addressed, focusing on what can realistically be resolved within the time frame.

Process to work through safety, trust, and issues

Step 1: Creating safety: The groups discuss what makes them feel safe and agree on essential behaviours to offer the other side. Each group presents these behaviours, ensuring both sides feel comfortable moving forward.

Step 2 Identifying trust-building practices: Groups discuss what has built trust in their relationships and where it has been broken. Together, they create a list of actions to enhance confidence, especially during difficult conversations.

Step 3: Identifying issues: Groups prioritize the most pressing problems. They discuss them without judgment, focusing on listening and reflecting on what has been heard.

Process for resolution and commitment

Step 1: Presenting the issues: One group presents an issue; the other listens and reflects without judgment. The roles reverse, allowing each group to present a problem and listen without reacting emotionally.

Step 2: Responses and commitment: Groups respond by accepting the issue, asking for more time to consider it, or rejecting it based on current capacities. Participants then return to the group circle and make commitments to work on the accepted issues.

Step 3: Commit to changes: Groups articulate specific steps they will take in their organization or partnership to address the accepted issues. Commitments should be tangible and time-bound, ensuring accountability for future actions.

Time frame: A Third Space may need at least half a day but will benefit from taking place over two to three days, allowing more time to strengthen relationships and build trust. Each part of the framework can be scaled based on the complexity of the issues and the relationship history of the partners involved.

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[1] Janice Price, *World-Shaped Mission* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), 59.

[2] Kwanghyun Ryu, "In Search of Spirituality for Intercultural Mission: Hospitality, Solidarity and Marginality," *Transformation* OnlineFirst (2024): 5, https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/02653788241244541.

[3] Lisa Washington Lamb, "Leaders Who Look for More: Barriers and Supports to Majority World Leaders' Successful Advanced Theological Training," *InSights* 6, no. 1 (2020): 39.

[4] Ubuntu is a Southern African philosophy that emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity, where a person's identity and well-being are shaped by their relationships with others, promoting values of compassion, cooperation, and collective responsibility.

Chapter 16: The MESA Culture

By David Cardenas

Imagine that you received an invitation to a formal event for leaders of Christian organizations. The organizer informs you of the reason, the place, the time, and the dress code for the event. Once at the venue, a staff member leads you to a table where your name appears on a card with a welcome note. The table is very well decorated, with quality tableware and cutlery of different sizes. You realize that to be at that table requires that you behave according to that context, which involves considering the program of the event, some minimum rules of etiquette, and interacting with the other people at your table at the appropriate times.

A different atmosphere is found at home at the family table. The culture at home determines the expected behaviours at the table, of course, also according to the culture of the nation or ethnic group of which one is a part. When I was a child, the Cardenas family had its rules at the table. My mom and dad had chairs that only they occupied, as well as chairs for my siblings and me. We would pray before we ate, and sometimes we would sing a praise song. At the end of the meal, Mom would say who had to do the dishes. My parents set the guidelines for how we were expected to behave at the table.

There are more ways to behave at the table, for example, when participating in a picnic, a family celebration, having coffee with friends, or even when participating in the Lord's Supper or Communion. Table behavior is determined by the time, place, occasion, and the social or cultural expectations and norms – implicitly or explicitly stated by the host – among other factors. We can say that these tables have a culture.

Tables in the Third Space

Tables are present in many cultures. They can have multiple purposes, including as a space where social interactions or conversations on various topics take place.

As a space for dialogue, the table is understood as a way to discuss and share information on an issue from diverse perspectives. These spaces are applied in academic, government, and economic contexts and, of course, in Christian missions. Dialogue tables can lead to more informed and better solutions in a group. If they are applied to bring discordant parties together, they can be a tool to seek new paths, or exhaust instances of conflict resolution.

In urban societies, some social interactions occur in places called 'third spaces' that – by the way – have tables. Examples are restaurants, coffee shops, bookstores, parks, and town squares.

The concept of third space was introduced and used mainly by sociologists and urban planners, including well-known author Ray Oldenburg.[1] The third place is referred to as a social environment different from the two usual social environments, such as the home ('first place') and the workplace ('second place'), i.e., a place different from where the person lives and works. A third place offers a different atmosphere from home or work.[2]

Some characteristics included in a third space: it is a neutral place where people can come and go easily; it is inclusive, does not require formal memberships; it is low-key; it is open at times beyond business hours; it has a fun atmosphere; it provides support and a sense of emotional well-being and lends itself to conversations; food and drink, while not essential, are important; and it is highly accessible, welcoming, and comfortable.[3]

Interestingly, this concept has been used in missions in recent years, especially when efforts from various cultural and organizational contexts are involved, working together in God's mission. A third space in global missions would bring together organizations from the nations from the Global North or West, as well as organizations from the Global South and East, in a neutral, shared space that serves as a safe place to dialogue and develop values that allow the community of leaders to work as friends in trust.[4]

The concept of third space was intentionally considered by the Wycliffe Global Alliance at the Third Space Forum – held in April 2015 in Turkey –

to help grow leaders to lead in God's mission intergenerationally and cross-regionally. This concept has been very effective in building roundtables of Bible translation in Latin America, as it indicates that the space belongs to everyone, where leaders can have a seat at the table, speak, and be heard, sharing their concerns and needs and serving collaboratively with others. But, collaborating well among leaders and organizations from multiple contexts can involve dealing with the blessings and victories, as well as the tensions, frustrations, disagreements, and pains of the past, in aspects related to how we make decisions, how we lead, how we are accountable, how resources are distributed and used, among other things. These issues could be kept silent over time due to fear, control, power imbalance, shame, mistrust, or lack of a safe space.

Collaborating allows us to join efforts and serve with greater impact in the Kingdom of God. However, not all organizations involved in a collaborative context are equal. It is common for one to have more power, people, money, knowledge, experience, and influence than the others. When this is the case, attitudes and decision-making will influence how collaboration flows. For example, with financial resources, there is a risk of a dependent relationship when we assume that the money will come from donors in certain countries or regions of the world, intrinsically linking the issue of power. It is possible, in giving and receiving, that you have experienced an organization or person placing conditions on collaboration, such as the language used in relationships, the type of reports to be submitted, the decisions made regarding the use of resources, control in certain circumstances, or the imposition of their experience on how things are done. The cultural and organizational values between the giver and the receiver are different, which can generate discomfort. Talking about this is not easy or comfortable. While intending not to affect the relationship, many feelings of frustration, anger, shame, and disrespect may never be expressed or discussed.

A third space can be an alternative for ministry organizations to deal with these realities. It is a primary responsibility of leadership to enter safe third spaces, leaving behind their familiar spaces to explore and discover new ways, because the old ways, which have served us well in the past, may no longer be well aligned with the current realities of mission.

According to the experience in the Wycliffe Global Alliance, the third space provides a safe space for respectful conversations, but this does not happen by itself. It requires having the will and courage to convene or invite others to participate, humbly identifying the issues and concerns to address, appropriate facilitation, agreeing on values (respect, friendship, trust, etc.), ensuring that all voices are heard (polyphony and linguistic hospitality), giving opportunity for reconciliation, allowing the necessary time for conversations, and complying with agreements.

Collaboration emerges from third spaces when dignity is imparted, the other is listened to and respected, and reconciliation takes place. Dignity in collaboration occurs when applying the gospel principle that we clothe ourselves with humility, treat others with respect, and consider them better than ourselves. All this comes before talking about projects that involve resources in collaboration.

The invitation to tables in God´s mission underscores the authentic relationships, mutuality, and servant posture needed for everything we do in ministry for God. The tables can give us a perspective that emphasizes a relational way of serving one another, not simply a transactional way of working.

Jesus and the Table

The idea of tables is millennia old and also appears in the Bible. For example, Jesus frequently enjoyed being with people at a table in his day because of the power this occasioned to bring people together to converse, strengthen friendships, exhort, teach, restore, celebrate, remember, entertain, and dream. In Luke's gospel, we see several instances of Jesus participating at various types of tables, eating with the Pharisees, with the publicans, on the grass with over 5000 people, at the house of Zacchaeus, at the home of Martha and Mary, at the Passover celebration with his friends, at the house of one of the two Emmaus walkers, and finally, eating bread, fish, and honey with his disciples after he rose from the dead. Each occasion had a unique purpose. Jesus and the table also point to the end goal of our mission – the great banquet table to which all nations are invited. Jesus and the tables represent the gathering spaces where we give others access to our lives and spend joyful moments sharing food and

stories that build vibrant relationships committed to the causes of God's kingdom.

Bible Translation Roundtables in Latin America

> *I am convinced that the Word is the power of God that changes the world, the power that transcends history and continues to transform lives today. However, many people do not have it available, lack access to it, or do not have the resources to use it properly. That is why I participate and promote the Bible Translation Dialogue Tables in our country and our region, because they are an ideal space to make the need visible, cultivate unity, promote collaboration, and provoke the synergy we need as the Body of Christ, in order to bring the Word of God to everyone in a way that they can understand it and to experience the love of the Father in a way that can transform them.* – Carlos Gomez, Panama. Director of PAAM and Global Partnerships coordinator in Latin America.

Latin America has been blessed with the Word of God translated into linguistic communities, thanks to the hard work of several international ministries during the twentieth century. In recent decades, the expansion of the Bible translation movement in Latin America has resulted in the participation of more ministries, denominations, churches, and networks. While the expansion has been very favourable for the advancement of Bible translation, it has brought with it various tensions among leaders due to differences related to the use of power, resources, ways of working, decision-making, accountability, and, very importantly, the desire to be treated with dignity in collaborative relationships.

To catalyze change, since June 2018, the Wycliffe Global Alliance has been pioneering a collaborative model of Bible Translation and Scripture engagement in Latin America called Mesas (roundtables). At each national table, Alliance organizations, Bible agencies, mission organizations, denominations, churches, indigenous communities, and missionary networks build a work culture in Bible translation based on values such as friendship, trust, respect, and unity, which opens the way for greater collaboration in the mission of God. A multi-national, multi-organizational team called the Peripheral Team was established to influence, mentor, and catalyze the development of the Mesas.

Effective facilitation from the beginning of each table is essential. An outsider is often the key to convening and facilitating the process because the parties may not have the confidence to respond to a particular

organization's call. After the group has built trust, leaders can decide who has the skills to move the process forward.

Based on the testimony of roundtable participants, the roundtables have contributed to a much healthier ministry climate among organizations in countries where the Bible translation movement is strong. They have also promoted unity and built trust and friendship in countries where duplication of efforts, lack of dialogue, and little collaboration were evident. The positive change from past attitudes and behaviours has been remarkable.

In these roundtables, centred around a common vision of language communities transformed by the Word of God, the participants representing organizations and churches meet and work together on various strategic elements of Bible translation ministry, sharing activities, advancements, and new initiatives in Bible translation, organizing and interpreting information on Bible translation needs, exploring and experiencing collaboration in Bible translation, cultivating a biblical culture of generosity for Bible Translation, and planning and executing joint projects, among others.

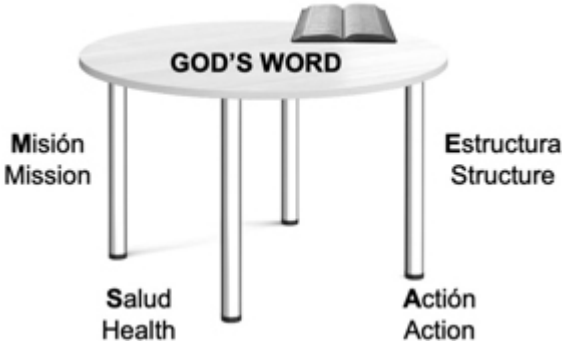
As of 2024, the roundtables are taking place in 14 countries in the Latin American region, including Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia, El Salvador, Peru, Guatemala, and Mexico, among others. They periodically convene more than 160 leaders representing more than 140 ministries through virtual and face-to-face meetings, annual meetings, and other events. Each table has identified a facilitation team to guide their efforts and ensure they stay aligned with the vision and values of the roundtables.

In a positive way, this model has been disrupting how biblical organizations and churches have historically related to each other and carried out Bible translation in Latin America. The roundtables offer a fresh alternative to organizations accustomed to competing for projects or carrying out transactional collaboration. Based on a culture inspired by the third space, the values of the tables inspire attitudes and behaviours that demonstrate the Kingdom of God.

> *The Bible Translation roundtables are a valuable support for the Three Waves movement, allowing us to share the Bible translation needs of the indigenous churches of the Amazon and lowlands. In addition, the roundtables encourage dialogue between organizations, avoid duplication of efforts, and generate a space that contributes to the voice of the indigenous leadership of the Amazon and lowlands to be heard and valued.* – Javier Mayorga, Colombia. Director Three Waves Movement in South America

The MESA Culture

The Peripheral Team designed and developed the concept of MESA to strengthen national roundtables as a third space. MESA is a Spanish word that means table in English and imparts a similar meaning in many languages and cultures. The idea of coming around the table crosses cultures. Besides being the meeting space for dialogue and collaboration, MESA is an acronym representing important aspects to understand, practice, and develop, illustrated in this diagram:



The MESA Culture proposes an organized and practical way to form and guide dialogue tables as third spaces applicable to diverse mission contexts.

The Tabletop: Every table has a top, representing the purpose and dream a group intends to achieve. Having a reason for the table to exist will help people stay aligned with the cause that brings them together and determine the topics for discussion. In the case of Bible translation tables, it involves having God and His Word as what will be discussed.

The Values of the MESA Culture

Along with the cultures of individual organizations, the national context influences people's attitudes, expectations, and behavior when they engage in multi-organizational dialogue. For example, there are several countries in South America where distrust and disunity characterize the climate of relationships between churches and mission organizations. As a result, there is little dialogue and great difficulty in thinking collaboratively. Spending time together reflecting on the culture of the Kingdom of God and its values has often led to the transformation of people's attitudes.

However, because the transformation of long-standing attitudes requires such a radical change, sometimes neither the person nor their organization is ready to participate at the table.

Through dialogue and reflection in the exploratory workshops for forming the national roundtables, the participants identified ten values: *treat others with respect, facilitate linguistic hospitality, honour diversity, practice dialogue (listen-talk), cultivate deep trust, build unity, give and receive generously, collaborate well, and refuse to compete or duplicate*. At the dialogue tables, the values of the table serve as parameters for guiding participants' behavior and attitudes.

The experience of the Peruvian Bible translation table illustrates the value of *honouring diversity*, thus recognizing and enhancing the cultural and organizational richness at the table. In August 2023, the table participants held a retreat. Recognizing the importance of including more voices from the local organizations working in Bible translation, they invited 15 indigenous leaders (out of 31 participants) to join the retreat. Honouring diversity in this way also reinforced the values of *building unity* and *cultivating friendship.*

But we had to go deeper. At the retreat, during a workshop on polyphony – which is about valuing the multiple voices in a group – the indigenous leaders told the group that because they felt limited in understanding Spanish language conversations, they often preferred to remain silent so as not to be embarrassed in front of others because their Spanish was not good.

After discussing how the choice of language can limit some voices from being heard and having influence, the Peruvians strongly embraced the value of *linguistic hospitality* to ensure that the indigenous leaders at the table felt free to speak, would be treated with respect, and their voices would be heard and included in making decisions. To support their commitment, they agreed to use interpreters when possible and encouraged indigenous participants to ask for clarification and for others to speak slowly, when needed. The value of practicing linguistic hospitality in this example was made possible by other values, such as respecting others and practicing good listening and speaking in dialogue.

The roundtables of Bible Translation and Scriptures engagement are a platform to get to know and make known the ministries that are involved. Faith Comes By Hearing allows us to collaborate with other ministries and join efforts so that the Word of God reaches every

language, ethnicity, and nation in the fastest and most efficient way for the blessing and transformation of every human being. – Abdiel Lopez, Guatemala. Latin America North Coordinator. Faith Comes By Hearing

Since MESA's values propose a radical change in attitudes and behaviours, each table has invested time in understanding, discussing, and practicing them. While a shared vision is necessary for collaboration to work, much greater collaboration happens when there are shared values.

The Values of Our Experience in Latin America

This diagram illustrates one way of picturing the interaction among the various values. To collaborate well and avoid duplication or competition, a solid foundation of friendship and respect is required. From there, the group can grow in deep trust, etc.

When I facilitated a roundtable workshop for a group of global leaders, several leaders stated that 'collaborating well' was their preferred way to build trust. Through the positive experience of working on a shared task, without initially knowing each other well, they felt more prepared to develop a friendship.

Values have the power to impact and transform how we think and behave at the table and in collaborative relationships. They are not simply elements applied as a formula to produce instant change but can serve as part of a process that involves both the spiritual and the practical. The work of God is required to see transformation in the hearts of leaders and organizations. At the Bible translation roundtables in Latin America, we

continually seek to understand better, remember, and practice biblical values.

After considering the tabletop and table values, let´s examine four elements of the MESA culture, represented by each of the four table legs:

M for Mission. This element defines the purpose of the table and answers the question: Why are we here, and what do we want to achieve? Having a clear purpose will help the group define its objectives and outcomes. At the Bible translation tables, each table group discusses, discerns, and identifies the goals and objectives they intend to achieve. Working through this process as a community leads to greater commitment from the members, providing a compelling reason to be at the table and involved in the action. The alternative—imposing objectives from outside—runs the risk of undermining the trust and participatory processes of the group.

E for Estructura, or Structure. This aspect refers to how a table organizes itself: who facilitates dialogue and how, who should be at the table, how we ensure that all voices are heard (polyphony), and how linguistic hospitality is practiced when there are multiple cultures and languages at the table.

Roundtables are designed to allow as many people as possible to participate and find at least one specific area to serve or collaborate. It is necessary to keep the structure as simple as possible. If there is too much structure, the table ceases to be a third space and collapses under the weight of its structure.

Table participants expect to speak and be heard, as well as to listen to one another. It can be frustrating if one or more voices dominate the dialogue and decisions are made without adequate discussion and consensus-seeking. Appropriate facilitation is crucial to ensure that all are heard and respected and to help amplify those voices that characteristically have been diminished by historical and cultural factors. Practicing linguistic hospitality requires intentionality and commitment to put an abstract value into practice. It is rooted in God’s purpose in desiring that people of all languages and cultures be able to interact with Him in their own language rather than in the language of others. The triune God gives voice to all.

S for Salud, or Health. Salud addresses the importance of the table as an organic system, caring for good health and identifying threats to its well-being. Table health is concerned with interpersonal relationships inspired by the friendship of Jesus. Good relationships directly impact the values of friendship, trust, and unity among the group. Health also involves caring for and defending the table as a third space for all and promoting dependence on God and His Word in everything the table does. This includes following biblical principles for handling conflicts or tensions when they occur. We desire to carry out our individual and shared ministries—whether church planting, Bible translation, works of mercy, and much more—in ways that respect one another despite our differences and refrain from exploiting people or sacrificing healthy relationships when we collaborate.

A for Action. Action refers to the projects and activities of the table to achieve its purpose and reach its objectives as established in the table's Mission. Values of collaborating well, refusing to duplicate and compete, and generously giving and receiving are very important. Each table decides what issues to reflect on, what solutions they come up with for a common problem or opportunity, what activities to carry out, and what projects to pursue collaboratively. Table agendas are planned collaboratively and respond to the interests and concerns of the members.

The MESA culture enables organizational leaders to experience God's grace in a fresh way, especially where there has been disconnection, distrust, or competition.

All four elements are essential to maintaining balance in a roundtable and constitute a holistic process. If one of them is absent, the table will be unstable and can collapse at any moment. These elements can also be used creatively to evaluate the progress of the roundtable.

> *Prior to the Bible translation roundtables model, SIL had limited opportunities to interact with other national and indigenous organizations involved in the Bible Translation Movement. Thanks to the dialogue tables, we have a consistent way to share information and resources, and to collaborate on specific projects. The concept of friendship as a basis for ministry is not only a theological truth; it is also a tangible motivation that encourages us to continue serving together.* – David Pickens, SIL Director for Latin America.

Testimony of the Roundtable in Colombia

Before 2018, the Bible translation ministry in Colombia was characterized by tension among organizational leaders related to a history of territorialism, duplication of efforts, competition, and a weak culture of collaboration. Indigenous organizations felt that their voices had not been considered and respected by national and international "partners" when these groups made decisions about projects and allocated resources. Thus, when the Colombian Bible translation roundtable began in 2018, we held annual retreats to foster reconciliation, trust, unity, and friendship among ministry leaders.

Applying the third space concept was essential to help leaders feel safe enough to get to know each other as individuals, learn about each other's work in their organizations, identify appropriate expectations for the table, and envision what they could accomplish together. They also identified values to guide how they behaved at the table and decided on a good facilitation process led by people the group trusted. The table started with six ministries and today has more than 18.

One especially difficult goal that the table finally accomplished was to create a collaborative database on the status of Bible translation in Colombia. Historically, numerous organizations had the power of information and only shared it with many restrictions. However, they overcame their differences through considerate and extended dialogue and agreed that collaboration was the best way to work.

Another barrier to overcome was getting the indigenous church represented in the conversations. Several carefully facilitated dialogues took place with leaders of indigenous networks. These conversations built trust, and the leaders recognized the table as a safe place for them, which offered a dignified and respectful way of relating and making decisions.

As we evaluated the Bible translation situation in other Latin American countries, we discovered similar tensions to those in Colombia. That motivated the Wycliffe Global Alliance to form additional tables for dialogue and collaboration in Latin America. Creating a culture of friendship, trust, respect, and collaboration takes years, and we continue to cultivate, nurture, and protect it in each of these tables.

Thought Questions

1. In your own context, what groups are you already participating in, or could you help create, where you could introduce attitudes and

practices of a third space to build greater friendship, trust, and collaboration?

2. In one or more of these groups, consider the relevance of the ten MESA values to your particular ministry vision and goals. What other values are of equal or greater importance in your context? Which foundational values is everything else built on?
3. At the end of this group process, pause and ask yourselves: how satisfied are you with the process used to identify these values? Which of our own values did we practice – or not practice – in our discussions?

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[1] Oldenburg.

[2] Kirk Franklin, *Towards Global Missional Leadership* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2017), 139.

[3] Matthew Carmona et al., *Public Places, Urban Spaces: The Dimensions of Urban Design*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Architectural Press, 2010), 139.

[4] Franklin, *Towards Global Missional Leadership*, 143.

Chapter 17: Collaborative Missional Leadership

By David Cardenas

Leadership in business and government spheres is characteristically defined in terms of power, control, position, success, fame, and followers – the more, the better. Regrettably, these same characteristics have often influenced the global church's understanding and practice of leadership.

But as we observe Jesus' leadership in the gospels, we find something quite different: a shepherd who exercised his influence in line with the values of the Kingdom of God, and who served the most needy and marginalized peoples. And while the model of servant leadership is quite well-known in many Christian circles, this chapter is focused on a quality of leadership that is central to the Kingdom and vital for meeting the challenges of our contemporary world: collaborative mission leadership, by which leaders invest in uniting and working with others in God´s mission.

Traditional models of leadership focus on consolidating power at the top. Fundamentally, collaborative missional leadership transforms that model into one in which leaders share their power and work together to advance God's Kingdom. This quality of cooperation – organic, ecosystemic, and communitarian – can produce exceptional impact and create much joy in the process. This has been my experience in leading and influencing missions for more than two decades in the context of the church, local and regional collaborative networks in Latin America, dialogue tables, and working groups on various mission topics. I know of no better way for leaders to support the Body of Christ in its mission to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel in the world.

This chapter commends collaborative missional leadership not only as an appropriate response to the challenges of the twenty-first century context, but because it is grounded in the nature of God, and involves four dimensions of leadership: spiritual, attitudinal, relational, and functional.

World and Mission Contexts Challenge the Way We Work and Lead

As we face the first quarter of the twenty-first century and beyond, exploring collaboration will continue to be an essential theme for mission work among leaders of Christian organizations of all kinds. The breadth, diversity, and complexity of the church in the current century, as well as missionary organizations, movements, networks, or associations, require consideration of how to lead and function with the organic life of the Body of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission. Never in the history of the church have existed as today, thousands and thousands of churches, organizations, and networks of Christian collaboration.

Collaboration is both a biblical principle and an aspect that significantly impacts how we work in Christian organizations. Consequently, the actions, attitudes, decisions, and investment of resources presented by your staff regarding service with others will contribute to the transformation of your organic participation in the body of Christ, in other words, how you become part of the ecosystems of the Kingdom of God.

Ordinarily, and in various ways, every ministry – including its leaders – is part of relational ecosystems. In these systems, among other benefits, information is exchanged in multiple dimensions, connections developed, resources mobilized, knowledge exchanged, and solutions sought. Leading well in these circumstances requires leading collaboratively.

Moreover, we live in an increasingly interconnected world, making it possible to access and exchange information in real-time, via online platforms. Digital collaboration tools used in the workplace are becoming increasingly common. These have helped overcome geographical and mental barriers between people, allowing teams to work collaboratively to accomplish tasks. Video conferencing, instant messaging, and applications also allow people to interact with each other or with those in other organizations regularly, either on-site or remotely. Collaboration opens up the workplace to new collaborators, so anyone anywhere can contribute to the work. One challenge, however, is that online collaboration can reduce face-to-face personal relationships.

Not only the church but also leaders in society, government, business, and education, among others, need to work and lead collaboratively. Facing challenges and finding solutions effectively requires setting aside the search for fragmented and even isolated solutions.

How do we lead collaboratively? Leading today in the context of church and mission may require leaders with a different profile from traditional hierarchy and control-based leadership. Forms of leadership that focus on people as individuals seek to enhance the leader's performance and success, but such models are not the most appropriate for operating in the missional context of an organic church and a world characterized by constant connection, change, and complexity. Such forms are likely to collide with other forms of leading that are relational, distributed, and interdependent.

Collaborative leadership is an essential consideration in the dynamics of church and Christian and missional organizations. That is why leadership must be able to transform and adapt to new missional and organizational needs and contexts.

Grounded in God

Missional collaboration is not a derivation or adaptation of organizational theories on collaboration developed in the secular sphere. From a biblical worldview, collaboration finds its reason for being in God because the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, is a community and functions in harmony. Therefore, our collaborative work must be understood as a spiritual act, not strictly organizational. Likewise, collaboration is the way the Body of Christ functions. This is God's will and design and allows the flow of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is our source of inspiration for missional leadership, a journey he accompanied from beginning to end, in close communion with the Father and the Spirit. Therefore, community is the fundamental dynamic of the triune and missionary God. For example, in John 5:19, Jesus said: 'The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does' (NIV). The first partnership in mission is in the Trinity.

Through his teachings and interactions with his disciples, Jesus presented the model of a leader in mission, not only guiding but loving, listening, serving, and empowering, seeking collaboration as a way to function effectively.

The Great Commission was given not to a single person, ecclesiastical entity, or organization but to all of Jesus' disciples for every time and

place in history. Therefore, it is a shared mission, and the whole church is needed to carry it out. Guiding the efforts we are called to in the Kingdom of God, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, requires increasing our understanding and practice of collaborative leadership. This leadership must contrast with the ways we have tended to lead in secular and even Christian settings, where individualism, personal success at all costs, self-centeredness, competition, and duplication of effort are some of the typical hallmarks. These behaviours also correspond to the organizational culture since an organization builds a system of values and practices inculcated implicitly or explicitly by its leaders.

In the church and the mission of God, the task is carried out in communion with him and in community with his body, serving together, and exchanging gifts, wisdom, and service.

What Does Collaborative Missional Leadership Look Like?

If missional collaboration is to go beyond an exchange of information, resources, and actions, understood as the way to function organically in the Kingdom of God, we must learn to lead collaboratively.

The culture of collaborative mission leadership involves principles that radically impact how we think and act with others in both local and global contexts. It has the potential to transform organizational culture and all its processes, including policies and practices. It can strengthen the organization and its linkages with other organizations and individuals to enrich actions and outcomes.

Christian ministry today requires leaders who are willing to live and develop interdependently within the context of the body of Christ, applying the blessings that can come from discernment and the search for collective wisdom, the exchange of information, ideas, and experiences, the generation of participatory synergies through individual gifts and talents, and the imagination of new scenarios from multiple perspectives.

With mutual discernment and wisdom guided by the Holy Spirit, it is possible to address complex issues in the church, Christian organizations, and mission contexts. Commitment to a shared vision alongside individuals' actions can encourage the creation of innovative solutions and serve in God's mission with others.

Collaborative leadership involves transformation in the use of power and authority, thus creating work environments that cultivate trust, treat others with respect, value the diversity of gifts, build unity, listen to multiple voices, and encourage everyone to contribute to the achievement of goals.

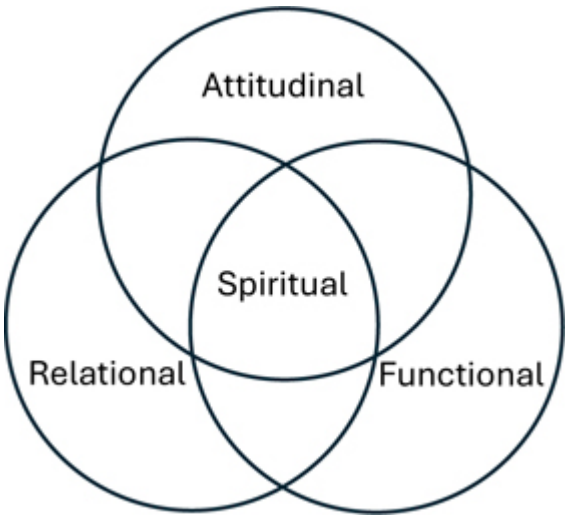
Collaborative leadership allows for a shift from a system centred on the ego of the leaders (ego-system) to an ecosystem. It moves from being an organization where each person is concerned with his or her own achievements to maintain their position to a system where everyone complements each other and sees each other as an ecosystem where talents are integrated and achieved together.

Collaborative leadership is not restricted to having a place for collaboration on an organizational chart, although there may be a dedicated position for collaboration in the organization. It is a mindset that involves a biblical understanding of the body of Christ, accompanied by capabilities that encourage people to collaborate for mutual benefit and pursue common goals, sharing responsibilities, risks, and rewards.

In ministries that involve young people – especially those known as millennials – this type of leadership can provide spaces where they feel listened to and valued, including their proposals and ideas. From a social point of view, this generation is considered very collaborative and can bring the energy that a Christian ministry needs. Not being sensitive to their collaborative way of working can lead to them not feeling valued and jumping to another place or situation.

What a Collaborative Leader Looks Like

Leading collaboratively requires more than acquiring another skill. It is a change in thinking, attitudes, and behaviours, both personally and organizationally. To explain this, I offer four dimensions: spiritual, attitudinal, relational, functional. These are interrelated:



Spiritual

Collaboration is a characteristic of the Trinity and part of God's design for the communal functioning of the church and his mission. It is a matter immersed in the Bible. Therefore, the collaborative leader finds in God his permanent source of inspiration on how to lead from love.

The Spirit's presence is needed to discern God's will in each collaboration. Encourage other leaders with whom you collaborate to seek first God's direction in the work you have committed to doing together and how to bear witness for Christ, even when collaboration is difficult.

Collaboration, framed in the mission of God, justifies and defends the perspective that the glory of God should always be sought, not personal or organizational glory.

The spiritual dimension impacts the other three dimensions: the attitudinal, relational, and functional.

Attitudinal

A collaborative leader influences a collaborative work culture distinguished by relationships governed by biblical values such as love, respect, solidarity, friendship, trust, unity, and humility.

A collaborative environment does not create itself. It must be built with leaders who deploy another kind of 'power' – that of serving (Matt 20:26-28). It can involve the transition from a culture of top-down control, independent silos, territorialism, power struggles, individual interests, and information hoarding to a culture where influence, dialogue, partnership,

mutual empowerment, support, joint knowledge development, and shared accountability are practiced.

Demonstrates empathy by valuing people's emotions, cultural context, life story, and faith in Jesus.

Values diversity. Appreciates and recognizes people's strengths, abilities, experiences, points of view, and ways of thinking. It is an art to bring the strengths and gifts of each person to solve problems, innovate, have new ideas, and open new opportunities. Valuing people and treating them with honour increases the likelihood that they will remain willing to collaborate, especially when they are volunteers.

Encourages innovation and creativity. Encourage people in the team or collaborative environment to tap into their creative resources. For example, when designing the agenda for a meeting or event, or dreaming up a new project. New ideas have the power to propel people forward and enjoy working together.

Relational

Fosters relationships based on good communication and trust, promoting cooperation by integrating people into multi-gifted teams. A friendship perspective on God's mission refreshes and strengthens relationships in the Kingdom of God. Rather than perpetuating silos, collaboration promotes connection.

Invites participation. It makes people feel they are in a safe space, valued, and included. In that atmosphere, they appreciate the strengths in the group and learn lessons from what has worked well and not so well. It encourages people to express their opinions and treats them with respect, without fear of judgment. Participation helps people engage and move forward together toward a shared goal. In an organization, collaborative leadership fosters participation in various instances within the organization, at the governance level, with teams at all levels, and with allies of the organization for the joint construction of proposals and scopes.

Helps to apply biblical management to tensions and conflicts. Even in collaborative processes, disagreements occur. Conflict can be an opportunity for growth and maturity. The leadership applies biblical guidelines to help with conflict management, which may involve dealing with internal barriers and power-grabbing.

Understands and takes advantage of the benefits of the local and global environment. Identifying and discerning possibilities for collaboration with others in line with the organization's goals can motivate people to create or be part of collaborative spaces, networks, or roundtables, extending the boundaries of the organization itself, influencing others to build value in community and seek the greatest benefit to collaboration.

Functional

Understands and demonstrates that the generous *sharing* of resources, knowledge, and information in a collaborative way is most constructive in meeting missional challenges.

Creates an environment of trust in which openness, dialogue, and the possibility for each person to contribute are valued. The application of the third space concept can be very useful. The ability to learn from each other and work together creates an attractive collaborative workplace. As trust grows, the sense of commitment improves, which inspires even more collaboration.

Encourages the use of collective wisdom. It promotes the use of the knowledge of team members in the organization or collaborative environment to innovate, propose solutions, solve problems, and overcome obstacles. There are times when the challenges and initiatives of an organization or network are not a matter of one type of capacity. Each party can collaborate by contributing knowledge and experience to generate solutions to the challenges.

Shared responsibility makes it easier for people to commit to roles and actions because there is an environment of motivation, trust, and a strong sense of shared purpose. Establishing roles in collaborative environments is imperative, leaving no room for ambiguity, inactivity, or discouragement. In an organizational structure, hierarchies are not necessarily eliminated, as they may be improved on and become useful tools in collaboration.

Cultivates balance in decision-making. When the voices of all necessary participants are heard, there is a greater possibility for decisions to be made by those involved. It requires the art of dealing with those strong voices in a group that influences the thinking of others, resulting in yielding to the person with the strongest personality or opinion.

Use influence. Through credibility, enthusiasm, and trust-based relationships, the leader moves the group toward collaboration. A favourable outcome lies in generating an environment of trust, respect, and a shared vision that allows all team members to be convinced of the common purpose that unites them and what they can achieve together.

Recommendations

If you want to see more collaborative leaders in your ministry, intentionally cultivate the value of collaboration. This will influence a change in mindset, the organization's beliefs about collaborating with others, and reframe policies and criteria. There is nothing better than starting with the Bible and what it says about working with others.

More than likely, there are people within your organization who have the passion and capacity to develop collaboration in the ministry ecosystems. Identify those people, give them latitude, and, if necessary, create the spaces in the organizational chart for them to function appropriately.

Also, provide training in collaboration. Collaborating well may require a skill set that differs from other types of leadership. Use the contents of this book as a theoretical and practical resource.

Leading collaboratively involves connecting with leaders in other organizations and networks. Therefore, identify what needs, gifts, and opportunities could arise through collaboration. Then, enter into a process of participating in dialogue tables, networks, partnerships, or alliances. Taking part in these collaborative settings may require investing resources, participating in meetings, and even paying for memberships.

Conclusion

If we can grow in a culture of collaboration in the Kingdom of God, it will enable us to offer a testimony that is a sweet fragrance for Christ, and the world will observe and respond to our unity. Getting it right requires knowing how to lead collaboratively.

Developing a culture of collaboration in your organization, network, or dialogue table responds to God's will, for he designed his body to work

together. The Trinity is our greatest reference point for what it means to be a collaborative community.

Collaboration is our best approach to address the most pressing local and global needs of the Great Commission. We are compelled to become more engaged in collaborative environments and strengthen the relationships we have with other ministries.

A collaborative culture is built by transforming our beliefs and values regarding our relationships with others. Reflection on the Word of God and materials about collaboration are a great help. The spiritual, attitudinal, relational, and functional dimensions of collaborative leadership can encourage growth in developing this way of leading.

To make a significant impact on the Great Commission, we need to enter a new era of leadership development. It may be time to swap ego and rigid hierarchies for collaborative leadership.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways could collaborative leadership contribute to your current Christian ministry? What could be better or different?
2. Think about the four dimensions of collaborative leadership. Which characteristics stand out to you? How can you grow in some of them?
3. How can you develop collaborative leadership in others?

Case Study: Paul, a Collaborative Mission Leader

By David Cardenas

> *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* – (Gal 3:28, NIV)

During Paul's ministry, documented both in Acts and in the Pauline letters, we find mention of more than 70 people who may have been sponsors and collaborators of the apostle, who came and went from different churches in the regions. For example, there were people who: brought offerings (Phil 4:18), brought greetings and requests for support from the church (1 Cor 1:11), brought special instructions to the churches from which they had come, provided secretarial services as mentioned throughout Chapter 16 of Romans, and even those who provided medical services like Luke (Col 4:14).

One must read carefully and grasp his descriptions of people to understand his philosophy of ministry regarding collaboration. It is true that he, on some occasions, had to carry out this work alone, but it does not mean that he lacked people who were walking and watching around him.

Collaborative Leadership Involves People from Different Generations

The first people involved in Paul's ministry were Jewish converts to Christianity. On the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas were assisted by the young John Mark (Acts 13:5), Barnabas' cousin. All three were Jews of the dispersion, Barnabas and Mark being natives of Cyprus.

On the second journey, after disassociating himself from Barnabas, Paul recruited Silas as a companion (Acts 15:40), who was a distinguished member of the Jerusalem church, and incorporated young Timothy into the team when he passed through Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:1–3). In Corinth the team is expanded with the addition of Aquila, who was from

Pontus, and Priscilla, who was probably from Rome (Acts 18:1). For both journeys, we see an apostle working intergenerationally.

In the third missionary journey and in his trajectory as an apostle, Paul makes mention of people of Gentile background who accompanied him. For example, Titus is one of those mentioned in the visit he made to Jerusalem; he was an uncircumcised Greek (Gal. 2:3).[1] Now we see an apostle working cross-culturally.

In spite of the desertion of John Mark on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:13), which caused Paul not to receive him back as part of the team at the invitation of Barnabas (Acts 15:37–38), years later, Paul tells him to join the team to be part of the mission 'because he is helpful to me in my ministry' (2 Tim 4:11 NIV).

Leading Collaboratively Can Involve People from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Erastus, who was his assistant (Acts 19:22), was also the treasurer of the city of Corinth (Romans 16:23). Among other collaborators and relatives of Paul were Lucius, Jason and Sosipater of Jewish origin (Rom 16:21). Sosthenes, the Jew who had organized opposition to Paul and tried to neutralize his ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:17), appears as his colleague and participates in the ministry to strengthen the church in Corinth (1 Cor 1:1). The Macedonians Gaius and Aristarchus are referred to as Paul's companions during the turmoil in Ephesus (Acts 19:29), as well as Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius of Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia (Acts 20:4), who accompanied him on his tour of Asia. There are many more co-workers mentioned in the letters of the apostle Paul. Among Paul's most active companions were Silas, a Jew from Jerusalem; Timothy, the son of a Greek and a Jewish mother; and Titus, of Greek background.

When Paul addresses his letter to Philemon, a rich and noble Greek man, to receive back his slave Onesimus, he refers to him as 'our fellow worker' (Phlm 1:1 NIV) and also sends his greetings to Archippus, 'our fellow soldier' (Phlm 1:2 NIV).

From the cultural characteristics of the series of people mentioned who accompanied Paul, it is clear that he was aware of the ethnic differences and prejudices that existed at the time, and yet, for the sake of love and

mission, he teamed up with people of different backgrounds. The ethnic issue was one that Paul handled very wisely. At that time, it was not customary to see people from different cultural backgrounds working together in the same religion. At the beginning, the believers were from Jewish backgrounds; then a large number of Gentiles were added. With this fact, Paul managed to establish collaboration in a very particular way: accepting, bringing, discipling, and managing collaboration with everyone.

This fact, in itself, is an invitation to all of us who serve in God's mission to work with cultural openness.

Leading Collaboratively Can Involve Both Women and Men

The role women played in the ministry of the apostle Paul is striking. In Philippi, a Roman colony where there was no synagogue, he met Lydia, the seller of purple, from the city of Thyatira (Acts 16:14). Lydia offered her home to establish the church and became a woman who actively participated in that new congregation. Women can also be found participating in the cause of the gospel, like Damaris in Athens (Acts 17:34). Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, has several mentions that put her in a special place. She was involved in the tent-making business, as was her husband (Acts 18:3). They, along with Paul, went to Asia (Acts 18:18) and interestingly were sent by Paul to Ephesus to correct Apollos (Acts 18:26). The apostle recognizes them for their work of leadership and service, referring to them as 'co-workers in Christ Jesus' (Romans 16:3–4 NIV). They were described as a couple to whom all the churches of the Gentiles should be grateful, an honourable mention that must have been the result of the extraordinary influence of this marriage in the ministry.

Regarding Phoebe, Paul describes her as a person who 'has been the benefactor of many people, including myself' (Rom 16:2, NIV), besides mentioning her leadership as a deaconess in Cenchrea. He then acknowledges Mary, 'who worked very hard for you' (Rom 16:6, NIV) and sends greetings to Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persida, who laboured much in the Lord (Rom16:12). Even Evodia and Syntyche, famous also, the description that the apostle Paul makes of these women, is that these women fought with him in the gospel.

As for the case of Euodia and Syntyche, women 'they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel' (Phil 4:3, NIV), Paul calls their

attention to ‘to be of the same mind in the Lord’ (Phil 4:2, NIV). The incident they had with each other is not described, but was serious enough for Paul to know about it and mention them publicly in his letter to the Philippians, since he considered them as Christian women, mature and active in the work of the Lord, who could not continue to be at odds with each other.

Women participated in a relevant way in the mission that the apostle Paul carried out. Jewish women ordinarily had a much more conservative background than those of Greek background. This cultural fact was sensitively captured by Paul, who respected Jewish culture by not inciting them to participate visibly in public affairs. In the Greek world, the participation of women was not very different from Jewish women. They were disqualified from political life or discussing government affairs, confined to their homes until they married, and excluded from discussions of morality. Even so, the apostle Paul took the risk of opening a space for them to participate.

The apostle Paul extended the limits of collaboration beyond what was typically permitted within the religious and cultural canons. According to Justo González, the same roads along which the Christian merchants and missionaries travelled were also covered by people of many different religions, and all of these religions intermingled and confused in the plazas and forums of the cities.[2]

The leaders of those religions surely travelled to promote their religion, but none did it like the apostle Paul. He had the ability to bring people from diverse backgrounds, disciple them, lead them, send them, and coordinate their work in fellowship. Paul recognized them publicly and gave them a place of honour. They maintained a strong network of fellowship and communication.

Paul was able to bring together Greeks, Jews, and Jews of Greek background in multicultural teams. He took the risk of working with people from different social levels, including women and young people, considering that for the gospel to expand, there is no other way than that of mission in community.

Thought Questions

1. How can Paul’s example of involving people across generations, genders, and cultural backgrounds in his ministry inform your

approach to building diverse and inclusive leadership teams today? Consider the intentionality required to bridge gaps between different groups and how this can strengthen mission efforts.

2. What lessons can be drawn from Paul's ability to navigate contextual sensitivities (e.g., the inclusion of Gentiles and women) while maintaining the unity and focus of his mission? Reflect on how cultural openness, contextualization, and adaptability can help overcome barriers in your current ministry context.

1. Paul's collaboration involved recognizing and honouring the contributions of many different individuals. How can you create a culture of affirmation and mutual respect within your team to foster stronger collaboration in God's mission? Consider specific practices to celebrate diverse contributions while working toward common goals.

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[1] Daniel Carro, José Tomás Poe, and Rubén O. Zorzoli, *Comentario Bíblico Mundo Hispano: Tomo 21* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 1995), 45.

[2] Justo González, *Historia Del Cristianismo, Tomo I* (Miami, FL: Editorial Unilit, 1994), 33.

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Collaboration in God's mission is a biblical mandate and a practical necessity in today's diverse and interconnected world. ***Collaborative Missional Leadership: The Art of Working Together in God's Mission*** provides rich encouragement from Scripture, theology, social sciences, and real-world case studies for building partnerships that honour God and advance his Kingdom.

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The gospel is at its most transformative when it brings people from diverse backgrounds together to establish a New Creation. To that end, I highly recommend this resource.

Dr Jay Mātenga, Executive Director,
World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission

In the Philippines, it's maglakbay nang magkaagapay, *'walking shoulder to shoulder'. Similarly, the Japanese term* yorisō, *'stand alongside', emphasizes caring companionship. Such cultural idioms reflect a collectivist-society collaboration, and Franklin uses this to develop mutually beneficial relationships that lead to effective missional engagement. I readily recommend this book.*

Dr R. Daniel Shaw, Sr. Prof. Anthropology and Translation,
Fuller Theological Seminary / SIL International

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