

## PART II



### For Synods

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**T**here are many participants in a companion synod relationship. Within your own synod, your bishop and a committee may set the tone and scope of the relationship. Within your companion's synod, the bishop may guide the relationship with less lay involvement.

Individual congregations within your synod may also be actively involved. ELCA Global Mission staff, mission personnel and regional representatives, if called upon by your synod, may also be resources for your relationship. This section examines the roles of each participant.

#### **Within the ELCA, the bishop sets the tone**

As leaders, role models, and representatives of the ELCA, bishops set the tone and the manner of companion relationships. The constitution for synods outlines the job of bishop, in part, as being the chief ecumenical officer (S8.12.h.3) and fostering "awareness of other churches throughout the Lutheran world communion and, where appropriate, engag[ing] in contact with leaders of those churches." (S8.12.h.5)

In companion synod relationships, it is critical that bishops connect with the leadership of companion churches at a very personal level. In addition, bishops can:

- Provide spiritual leadership to the relationship
- Give ritual leadership to the inauguration of a covenant by presiding at the service and signing the covenant, and paying attention to matters of protocol that can impact cross-cultural relationships
- Give special attention to the situation of women and youth in the companion church and show public respect for them by including them in delegations and seeking their input
- Carry a bishop's travel kit with items that express the bishop's public office such as a bishop's purple shirt (where expected), bishop's cross, Bible, and gifts that symbolize the spiritual nature of the companion relationship

Newly elected bishops are encouraged to establish a personal relationship with the leadership of the companion synod in a timely manner. For more on the role of the bishop, see “Some thoughts about being companions” in Appendix 1.

While the bishop plays an important role, the relationship should not become dependent upon the person of the bishop. Bishops come and go, and a well-grounded relationship will endure through many changes. The companion synod committee is a key component to this continuity.

### **The committee provides continuity**

Depending upon the synod, a companion synod or global mission committee will nurture the relationship by linking congregations, synodical leaders, the companion church, and ELCA Global Mission to the relationship.

A typical committee has five to seven or more members elected from the synod or appointed by the synod council. Constitutional bylaws should clarify how the committee relates to the bishop, synod staff/office, synod council and assembly, synod planning and budgeting process, and other committees such as Outreach and Communication.

### **The committee’s duties and activities include:**

- Communicating with the companion church
  - Finding translators
  - Sending newsletters, prayer requests, personal correspondence
- Cooperating with the synodical office
  - Coordinating official correspondence between bishops/presidents
  - Sharing official documents, covenants, etc.
  - Establishing and maintaining the covenant
  - Planning bishop’s visits and hosting bishop’s visitors
- Facilitating synodical relationship and projects
  - Planning visits and projects
  - Hosting visitors
  - Administering synodical projects
  - Arranging exchanges
- Communicating to congregations
  - Educating congregations about the relationship
  - Inviting active participation
  - Sharing resources and breaking news
  - Guiding sister congregation relationships

- Planning the program
  - Establishing specific goals and objectives of the Companion Synods Program
  - Envisioning and creating activities and strategies for implementing the goals
  - Outlining budgets, timelines, and individuals responsible for activities and strategies
  - Publicizing and communicating each activity

### **Forming or maintaining the committee**

Seek committee members who:

- are committed to global mission and the accompaniment model for mission
- have excellent organizational skills
- are creative, patient, flexible, open, and hospitable
- are of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, and interests

Including representatives from stewardship, youth ministry, Women of the ELCA, and other synod ministries offers two benefits. First, it will be easier to communicate the work of the synod to your companion church. Second, when visitors come, they will have ready access to ministries they may be interested in seeing.

Membership terms will help keep the committee fresh and creative. Stagger terms to maintain continuity and a mix of newcomers and veterans. Take advantage of former committee members when difficulties arise!

### **Guiding principles for companion relationships**

Companions are ambassadors for Christ and for one another, and ought to:

- Conduct themselves in ways that show deep respect and the ability to interpret differences in cultures and traditions.
- Develop skills for setting boundaries and offering dignity in response to inappropriate requests or offers by companions and synod members. (See *Global Stewardship Principles*, pg. 11)
- Remember that larger church structures and relationships exist among the churches. Consult with ELCA Global Mission regarding projects, partner relationships, and written agreements that may be in place with your companion church.

### **Do you have a covenant?**

A covenant between companions is a mutual document that states the vision, mission, and purpose of a relationship, and outlines specific goals or pathways the relationship will take. It can help focus your relationship and help congregations better understand it.

If you are launching a new relationship, develop a covenant in cooperation with your companion church. Working together, you will deepen your understanding of one another's expectations. Consider including goals for the next few years, or a commitment to review and revise the covenant by a future date. See Appendix 2 for sample covenants.

If your relationship has been underway for some time, take a look at your covenant. Should it be renewed or rewritten to reflect the ways in which your relationship has grown?

Celebrate a new or revised covenant by inviting both bishops to sign it in a worship service during a delegation's visit.

### **Relations between the companion and the committee**

The companion synod committee is an ELCA institution that works well in our own context, where bishops have assistants and a synod's specific ministries are supported by a committee of laypeople and clergy.

You will probably not encounter a similar committee when you relate to your companion. Typically, your main contact—at least at the beginning of a relationship, before visits take place—will be the bishop, president or other church leader, who may be too busy to respond to correspondence from your committee. Be patient. Don't use a local missionary as a go-between. Ask your companion church leader to identify the best person for your committee to contact regularly. As visits and exchanges help companions get to know one another better, communicating will be easier.

## **Missionaries and regional representatives can be good resources**

Missionaries and regional representatives serving within your companion church are an excellent source of information, especially about your companion's country, culture, and church. They may also be eager to meet your committee or delegation when visiting the

companion. However, unless making arrangements for visiting delegations is part of their job description, please do not ask them to arrange programs or accommodations for your committee. And please don't make them the focus of your correspondence. Remember, the goal of the Companion Synods Program is to relate to members of another church, not to ELCA missionaries.

### **How ELCA Global Mission can help**

ELCA Global Mission can assist your committee by:

- Consulting or troubleshooting on projects, partner relationships, and written agreements that may be in place with your companion church
- Arranging orientations that help new committees or new relationships take an intense look at the relationship and the people in it
- Advising your committee on how it can arrange travel, visas, insurance, and orientations

#### **For companion synod relationships in Africa**

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#### **For companion synod relationships in Asia/Pacific & Europe/Middle East**

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## Global Stewardship Principles

**A**ccompaniment emphasizes relationships before resources. Money can represent power, and when it becomes part of the relationship, it may disrupt the mutuality and equality of the partnership. Development of programs and allocation of resources flow from how companions relate, rather than vice versa. Accompaniment means mutuality in the sharing of gifts for ministry. Use the following principles to guide financial decisions.

■ ***Establish the relationship first, and then consider sharing financial gifts.***

Share financial assistance and gifts only *after* the relationship has been well established through mutual visits, ministries, communication, and spiritual fellowship. Prematurely sharing financial assistance will put the ELCA synod in the dominant and controlling role in the relationship and destroy mutuality in mission. The bishop's leadership is critical in this quest to avoid inequitable power dynamics.

■ ***Follow their agenda, not yours.***

Projects and plans for spending monetary gifts should originate in the companion church. ELCA synods

should not decide what their companion church needs, or tell them what to do with a financial gift.

■ ***Benefit the community rather than individuals.***

Gifts given to the companion church should work for the greater good of the community or the whole church—not benefit one family, individual, or congregation. As you travel to the companion church, do not distribute money and gifts to individuals you encounter.

■ ***Support development rather than dependency.***

Financial gifts should empower or help develop self-sufficiency. Gifts that underwrite a pastor's salary or administrative costs of a synod budget will only make a companion church dependent on ELCA support. Development gifts, such as helping build a school, investing in a guesthouse, or starting a coffee-growing project, can help the companion church achieve or sustain self-sufficiency.

■ ***Research the context to determine a project's longevity.***

Gifts should be for projects that make sense in the cultural context of the companion church. Machinery that is obsolete or cannot be maintained or repaired does not serve its purpose very long.

■ ***Understand the context and preserve the balance of power.***

Sometimes a development project can unwittingly upset the balance of power within a community. Digging a well may seem like a good community project, but who owns the land that the well will be on? Who will maintain the well? Who will control access to the well? Who will profit from the well? Who will lose? Similarly, consider how a project might affect the balance of power within the companion church. Will a congregation become so self-sufficient that it no longer relates to the larger church body?

■ ***Work toward cross-cultural transparency.***

Make sure both companions understand what is being given, where it is going, and what it is for. Understand the cultural concepts of money before giving. What does transparency mean, for example, in places wary of bank accounts? Your two synods should agree on how gifts designated for particular projects will be accounted for. In the case of grants, it is up to the companion to decide how to distribute and spend it. If it's a grant, let go.

■ ***If you start a project, make sure you can complete it.***

Starting a school but running out of money before the roof is on is simply a waste of money. Do not get halfway through a project and abandon it. Instead, hold fundraising events and secure the money prior to beginning the project.

■ ***Use synodical oversight.***

All financial gifts should be given from the synodical office to the companion church office—especially gifts that come from congregations. If one parish has a generous U.S. benefactor, and a parish down the road receives no such support, resentment can build. Give church to church, not congregation to congregation.

■ ***Make sure the money gets there.***

Checks can get lost in the mail, and wire transfers can be expensive. The best way to get money to your companion is to bring it with you during a visit. If you use a wire transfer, send a confirmation of the transfer to your companion that they can show the bank. Pay all transfer fees, and make sure your gift covers any additional fees the companion may incur for receiving the money. If you do send a check, know that the bank may hold it for 30-40 days before the companion can withdraw the money. To minimize money transfer problems, consider sending an annual gift, rather than small gifts whenever a congregation takes up a special collection.

## Cross-cultural issues that can influence your relationship

Cross-cultural relationships between companions can be exciting *and* challenging. When companions are in two different countries, the cultural factors of language, time, and money will influence the relationship.

### Language

English may be the second, third, or fourth language of the members and leaders of your companion church. Some leaders will need translation and interpretation assistance from colleagues or missionaries in order to understand and respond to your synod's communications. Explore ways of responding and communicating in the language of the companion church. For ideas for seeking translation help, see pg. 31.

No matter which language you use to communicate, make sure that the words you choose convey mutuality and respect.

- Avoid “up and down” talk—go “down to Brazil” instead of “to Brazil”—that may unintentionally introduce a hierarchy.

- Avoid the term “mission field,” which may tell a self-governing, independent companion that we still see it as dependent.
- Refer to the particular country, culture, or people of your companion—not an entire continent. “Africa” is not a homogenous country, but a continent of many nations, peoples, and ecosystems!

Avoid economic, political, social, and class comparisons and judgments. In Jesus Christ, these differences are transcended in the fellowship and *koininia* of the Holy Spirit. All temptations to compare should lead us to examine our own assumptions and values.

### Time

Visitors from other countries regularly remind us that North Americans are slaves to the clock, often at the expense of hospitality and respect for others. Be sensitive to the differing values of time. Punctuality or quick responses to requests and communications may not be possible because of differing concepts of time and because of practical realities and limitations in certain situations.

### Money

Money represents power, and when it becomes part of the relationship, it disrupts the mutuality and equality of the partnership. Strive to live out accompaniment by always emphasizing relationships over resources. Use Global Stewardship Principles on pg. 11 as a guide in considering financial arrangements.

### What about material gifts?

Before sending clothing, blankets, school supplies, books, or medical supplies to your companion, consider:

- Is what you are sending needed?
- Is clothing appropriate to the climate and conditions?
- How much will it cost to ship?
- Will books make sense in the cultural context?
- Who will receive, store, and distribute items?
- Will the packages actually reach the intended recipient?
- Who will pay the customs costs to bring the items into the country?

Consider sending in-kind gifts through established organizations such as Lutheran World Relief or Global Health Ministries. Organizations such as Heifer International use monetary donations to purchase animals from the country for families in need to develop self-sufficiency.

In Section IV, you'll find a series of orientations that prepare travelers to participate in visits to and from your companion. These cross-cultural exercises will benefit everyone who participates in your companion relationship. Consider using them in committee meetings to increase the cross-cultural awareness of all your committee members.

In some circumstances, material gifts are appropriate. Churches have asked for bicycles to help pastors get from one congregation to the next (be sure to send bicycle pump and tire repair kit). Some synods have shipped containers of relief supplies to their companion churches in times of crisis. Use the principles listed above to determine whether sending a material gift is appropriate, and remember the words of Ken Grosch, former director of Global Health Ministries: "If you send junk in the name of Jesus, it still remains junk."

### Send gifts through ELCA Global Mission

Numerous ELCA Global Mission projects are supported through donations from individuals, groups, and congregations. These projects, called "Level Two," are not covered through the ELCA budget, but are above-and-beyond contributions. The projects have been approved by and are considered priorities for companion churches. For information about projects within your companion church contact:

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### **An ice cream parable**

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*A delegation from a companion church in East Africa visited their companion synod in the Midwest. In a show of hospitality, several congregations joined together to host an old-fashioned ice cream social. The visitors from Africa absolutely loved the ice cream, and talked of how it was the most delicious thing they had ever tasted. Even in correspondence after the visit, they recalled how much they had enjoyed the ice cream social, and wished everyone in their congregations could have experienced it.*

*So the Midwest congregations decided that they would send ice cream makers to Africa! How thrilled our companions will be to make their own ice cream, they thought. Money was raised to purchase and ship a half-dozen electric ice cream makers to the villages in East Africa.*

*When the ice cream makers arrived, the people eagerly opened the boxes. They made arrangements to borrow a generator in order to plug in the ice cream maker, and debated whether goat's milk would work, and then realized that they needed ice to make ice cream. Where would they get ice? And even if they traveled to the city for it,*

*how would they get it home without melting? And the well-intentioned ice cream makers served no purpose at all, until someone discovered that if the motor and lid were taken off, the bottom worked fine as a water bucket for the goats.*

*This parable reminds us that it takes more than good intentions to be helpful. Can your gift be used, maintained, and repaired? Does the companion church want it? Who will benefit?*

## Building your relationship

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*A basic knowledge of your companion's country, church, and culture is an important sign of respect, as is openness to learning from your companion—a key component of accompaniment.*

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In a relationship characterized by accompaniment, “Hello” is a universal place to start. Greetings can launch a relationship, but then what? There are many activities you can choose from. Be sure in all of these to consult your companion, so your activities are mutual, not just your agenda!

All activities will shape your relationship. Use the Planning Implications Assessment on pg. 21 to make sure that activities you plan are consistent with your goal: to walk together with your companion in service to God's mission.

### **First, get to know your companion**

Can you find your companion synod on a map? Do you know the name of the president of the country? Typical foods in the country? Chances are, your companion church can answer all of these questions about the United States. Make getting to know your companion a priority.

- Implement a synodwide strategy to teach congregations about your companion church, its country, and related issues. Start with your committee, and then move into the synod.
- Learn from ELCA Global Mission country packets ([www.elca.org/countrypackets](http://www.elca.org/countrypackets)), LWF resources, local libraries, or former missionaries, international students, and others who know the church or country.
- Knowing the climate, food staples, form of government, and economy of a place will help you get to know the people. Can the children of your synod even imagine a place without easy access to a fast-food chain or a grocery store? What can they learn from the children of your companion church?

A basic knowledge of your companion's country, church, and culture is an important sign of respect, as is openness to learning from your companion—a key component of accompaniment.

## Communicate regularly

Reaching out through letters and telephone conversations is another good way to build your relationship.

- Encourage regular correspondence between bishops and companion presidents. After a visit in which people have gotten acquainted, exchange letters with those you have met. Use conventional mail, e-mail, and fax as appropriate.
- Exchange prayer requests, worship material, songs, newsletters, and stories of interest.
- Send greetings and encouragement in times of celebration or sorrow.
- Hold amplified telephone conversations during worship services, so that churches can exchange formal worship greetings in front of a large gathering.
- Exchange audio recordings with greetings, conversations, messages, or music.
- If technology permits, establish a Web site specifically for the companion relationship. For a model, visit the Greater Milwaukee Synod's El Salvador Web page, [www.milwaukee-synod.org/salvador](http://www.milwaukee-synod.org/salvador)
- Videotape interviews, greetings, and others presentations. DVDs have universal usage, but tapes produced on equipment from other countries may need to be transferred for display on North American equipment and vice versa.

## Pray for one another

Partnership in prayer is fundamental to the Companion Synods Program. What are the concerns of your synod? Your companion? Share needs with one another for mutual prayer support. Prayer activities could include:

- Weekly petitions used in every congregation
- Prayer requests for members' daily prayer life
- Prayer covenants that commit you to pray for one another regularly
- Common prayers for both companions, translated and used regularly or on specified occasions
- Prayer partnerships between congregations or other groups
- Days of prayer with certain emphases or for specific occasion
- "Prayer Around the Cross," a setting available from ELCA Global Mission, can be adapted to include news and issues from your companion's country

## Worship can deepen the relationship

Worship and other gatherings provide another way for companions to learn about one another. Consider exchanging or sharing:

- Songs and hymns (use the language of companion church, or translate)
- Prayers, invocations, benedictions, or complete worship services
- Customs, rituals, and other symbolic actions designed with your companion

- Banners, paraments, and other worship articles
- Themes and sermon texts
- Sermons or brief greetings
- Seasonal greetings (learn to say, "Christ has risen!" in your companion's language at Easter, observe customs or rituals of the companion)

## Advocate for your companion

People in relationship speak out on one another's behalf. Companion Lutheran churches of El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia, and Jordan and Palestine are among those that live under political oppression or danger. These churches request your prayers and also ask that you speak on behalf of their liberation to the governments and international agencies of the world. Companions in countries suffering extreme poverty, economic oppression, and massive debt may want you to study the root causes of their situation and follow up with an appropriate response to the U.S. government—the world's leading political and economic power.

As the relationship with your companion church grows, you will become aware of specific needs within its country, and you may be asked to speak out on a particular issue.

- Learn all you can about the situation, from your companion and from other groups dealing with the same issue.
- Tell stories of your companion's difficulty to your synod, and encourage synod members to take action.

- Encourage bishops and synod councils to give their voices to advocacy.
- Contact members of the U.S. Congress, ambassadors, the President, and heads of foreign states on behalf of Christian brothers and sisters around the world.
- Participate in the Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice. Held in March, this event sponsors speakers, fellowship, networking, and the opportunity to speak to Senators, Representatives, or their key foreign policy staff. For more information, see *www.Advocacy-Days.org* or *www.loga.org*
- If your companion church requests that you advocate for a very specific concern within its country, contact the ELCA Washington Office at *www.elca.org/advocacy/federal*
- Seek assistance regarding advocacy from the ELCA Washington Office, or the Lutheran Office for World Community in New York, as well as related agencies such as Bread for the World and Amnesty International.
- Be open to change. Advocacy may cause you to examine long-held assumptions, personal lifestyles, and commitments.

### Visit one another

Visits allow companions to understand one another better than any letter, video, or slide show ever will. They also invite more people into the companion relationship.

- Identify specific purposes and expectations for visits between companions: e.g., congregations and their members; exchange of leaders; specific groups such as women, youth, or educators; specific study topics or issues; specific events such as a festival, an anniversary, or an assembly.
- When you host guests, focus on listening more than “showing.” Create occasions where synod members can listen to the witness and testimony of guests. Listening is receiving; and receiving is allowing yourself to be changed by someone else.
- Frequent visits to your companion can become a burden to a companion church with limited resources. Always plan visits in conjunction with—and by invitation of—the companion church.

### Exchange people

Exchanges of longer duration can be arranged for people who have particular expertise or ministry to offer within the companion church’s setting. Think outside the box! Bible camps, colleges, clusters, conferences or synod offices, medical facilities, social agencies and institutions, and rural programs can all set up exchange programs. Other exchange options:

- Parish pastors
- Youth workers or education staff
- Bible camp staff
- Men’s and women’s organization members
- Youth (remembering that different cultures have different definitions of youth)
- Specialists in outreach, evangelism, or stewardship
- Communicators
- Social workers
- Doctors or health workers
- Agriculturalists
- Musicians, dramatists, or other artists

### Advocacy

Churches have no problem responding to God’s call to feed the hungry, heal the sick, and visit the imprisoned. Yet God asks for both mercy and justice, and justice can often be achieved only through the mechanism of government. Biblical advocates like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos told how governments as well as individuals will be judged by the way they treat the weakest and most vulnerable. Just as Jesus frequently confronted the political leaders of his day to change the system to care for the marginalized, we, too, speak out for those in need.

## Tanzania and Nebraska: Pastor exchange

*I was taken aback by the beauty of Tanzania—the beauty of the country and the beauty of the people—when I first went to Tanzania as part of a pastor exchange. I was blessed to live and serve among the people of two small rural villages on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. My days were filled with the pastoral responsibilities of visitation, preaching, leading worship, and officiating at funerals and baptisms. Daily I experienced joy centered in the incredible hospitality showered upon me. These experiences pushed me to ask the important question: What is it about the Tanzanian experience of God that I cannot live without?*

*Their hospitality goes further than a friendly smile—greetings of *ambo abari* and *aribu sana* and*

*handshakes are genuine extensions of warmth and hospitality from the youngest child to the eldest senior. This depth of hospitality is rooted in African culture and is given profound meaning and expression in their Christian faith: as Christians we never look eyes with someone who doesn't matter to God, therefore, each person ought to matter to us. The Tanzanian Christian witness gave me deeper understanding to this Christian truth.*

*While Tanzanian hospitality made me feel unconditionally welcomed, my comfort in Tanzania did not dull my awareness of the political and economic histories, and current realities that distinguish my life from that of the people I met. Those realities came through in visits to homes, schools, hospitals, and businesses, in*

*conversations about HIV/AIDS, the work of the church, and the current economic conditions in the nation. It struck me as very grace-filled that I was never made to feel apologetic for the conditions of my life, my race, my culture, my country or my language. I was received with trust and invited to share, to question, and to learn. My own experience counted as people inquired about my life and work.*

*A final thought . . . there is an increasingly common use of the term "global village" in the United States. Yet, there can only truly be a global village if people of the village know one another . . . and I am so thankful for the great joy that comes from knowing my Tanzanian brothers and sisters in Christ.*

—The Rev. Martin Russell

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The Rev. Martin Russell was a parish pastor at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Wayne, Nebraska, when he spent nearly two months in the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania on a clergy exchange. Two pastors from the Nebraska Synod went to Tanzania, while two pastors from the Northern Diocese came to the Nebraska Synod to serve their parishes.

The pastors applied for the exchange and were selected by the synod's global mission committee. The congregation and individual pastor each contributed \$1000 toward the cost, and the global mission committee put in another \$2000. While Swahili is the national language of Tanzania, English is also widely spoken. The pastors from the Northern Diocese spoke English. Church members in Tanzania were able to serve as translators for the U.S. pastors, whose English sermons were translated into Swahili.

Russell has led six "Vision Trips" to Tanzania since then. Unlike trips that center on service projects, such as building a school or house, Russell's trips focus on building friendships, meeting and experiencing life with the people of Tanzania.

Though both Russell and the pastor who came to his congregation have moved on to other ministries, the congregations involved in the exchange remain connected.

## Organize a service project

Short-term service projects or volunteer programs can be profound and life changing. Take care while planning these volunteer programs.

- Avoid projects that are paternalistic and perpetuate attitudes and behaviors of “doing for them” instead of accompanying and meeting with mutuality. Despite their good intention and generosity, these projects can diminish grassroots initiative and participation, and may not be healthy in the long term.
- Keep ELCA Global Mission informed of service projects being considered. If problems arise with a proposed project, the synod, the companion church, and ELCA Global Mission can work together to keep the goals of mutuality, interdependence, and accompaniment at the forefront of the service project.

Volunteer programs available within ELCA Global Mission may be found in Appendix 3.

## Foster congregation-to-congregation relationships

Sister congregation relationships can help establish more personal relationships with a larger number of synod members. The goals of such relationships are to:

- Increase global awareness in the congregation
- Build support for global mission
- Pray faithfully for global sisters and brothers

- Bring home the dynamic witness of Christians in other countries
- Personalize global mission for members of the congregation

If congregations are interested in building such relationships, ask your companion whether they would be interested in establishing a sister congregation relationship. After the Nebraska Synod and the Northern Diocese in Tanzania agreed to explore such a relationship, the synod used the following steps to establish congregation-to-congregation relationships.

1. A synod congregation puts in a request for a relationship to the synod office.
2. The synod office asks the congregation for a short description of its ministry.
3. The synod office forwards the request and ministry description to the executive committee of its companion church.
4. The companion church reviews the request and description, and looks for a good match within the church. When a match is found, the congregation is consulted to see whether it wants to participate.
5. After a commitment from the congregation in the companion church, the match is made. The synod congregation receives information about the companion congregation.
6. When both congregations make a commitment to the relationship, it is considered an official relationship.

7. Correspondence, sharing photos, and possibly a visit secure the commitment and relationship.

## The synod's role in congregational relationships

Congregations need guidance in establishing and maintaining their relationships. Synod staff or companion synod committee members can:

- gather leaders from each congregation for training
- encourage mutuality and walking together
- monitor service projects and visits to and from companions. Service projects need to fit the overall goals of the companion church. Three or four congregations deciding to send visitors to the companion synod in the same year could strain the resources of the companion.
- monitor financial activities. Sending money directly to a sister congregation, bypassing their church office, could create resentment and difficulties within the companion church if one congregation suddenly receives much more than others.

Just as the body has many parts, but is one body, so the ELCA has many congregations, but is one church. The synod's role is to see that the congregations work within the mission goals of the ELCA and its partner churches, not as congregations following their own agendas.

## Malawi and Northwest Wisconsin: Congregation-to-parish relationships

*The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin congregation-to-parish relationships got started during Bishop Bvumbwe of Malawi's two-year study stay in the United States. During this time, he visited many synod congregations and spoke at synod assemblies. The impetus to connect an ELCA congregation with a Malawi parish resulted from congregations wanting a more personal relationship with the church in Malawi.*

*Bishop Robert Berg and Bishop Bvumbwe established ground rules and a framework for making matches. Congregations interested in being matched attended an all-day workshop, with both bishops present. The agenda focused on the history of the companion relationship, the history and structure of the Lutheran Church in Malawi, hopes and dreams of the congregations being matched, and guidelines for the relationship. A primary guideline is that the matches are to be built on "walking together" mutually, not a financial relationship.*

*If financial gifts are given, they are sent via the synod office where they are held until the church in Malawi requests the funds. The funds are wired directly to the church headquarters in Malawi, so that accountability exists throughout the system.*

*Congregations may send correspondence or visitors in order to develop relationships. A Web site has been established to allow communication between the synod congregations for sharing ideas about relation-building, posting photos, links, and files for congregations to use. A few people in Malawi who have access to the Web are also part of the group.*

*The matched congregations are asked to pray for one another each Sunday. Sunday school children have written letters or had learning projects in their classes. The Women of the ELCA developed a "Sewing for Sustenance" project that raised money to buy treadle sewing machines, fabric, thread, and training expenses for women in Malawi. It was a huge success because the women understood what sewing and access to equipment would mean to the women in Malawi.*

*Following the 2003 Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Canada, the synod hosted a Mission Fest. Bishop Bvumbwe and Mrs. Mable Madinga, head of the Diakonia Ministry in Malawi, attended. Matched congregations flocked to the Fest, because one of the workshops was exclusively for them to get updates on their parish match and to talk about ways to further develop the relationships.*

*One of the major difficulties in building relationships is communication. In Malawi, e-mail is only available at the church headquarters. Mail is slow and unreliable, which is difficult for those in the United States who are accustomed to instant communication.*

*Since the first training workshop, two additional workshops have been held for new congregation matches. The first two workshops were videotaped and edited into one-hour highlights so that Sunday schools, committees, and future training groups can benefit from them. Congregations need to attend a workshop before being matched.*

*Bishop Bvumbwe holds similar workshops with the parishes in Malawi. It is interesting to compare the hopes and dreams of the relationship completed by workshop participants in Wisconsin and in Malawi. While congregations in Wisconsin and parishes in Malawi have different things to share, they both have a common desire to strengthen their faith by connecting with Christians in another place.*

*—Diane Kaufmann, Malawi companion congregation parish coordinator  
Northwest Synod of Wisconsin*

# Planning Implications Assessment

**U**se this sheet to evaluate the impact of possible projects and activities before you commit to them.

## Accompaniment

- Does this activity further mutuality and accompaniment?
- Who are the givers and receivers, the learners and teachers in this project?
- How does this project open us to receive the gifts and witness of others?

## Attitudes

- What attitudes underlie this activity? Is it paternalistic?
- Will it instill paternalism in those who participate?
- Will it reinforce old stereotypes or create new ones?
- Will it help to overcome paternalism or stereotypes?
- What message is being sent about our companion?
- Does it create an attitude of openness?

## Values

- Does this project reflect or perpetuate materialistic values?
- Is there a balance between the value of individuals and the value of the group?

- What values of our society are reflected in these plans?
- Are there Christian and/or moral values at stake in this project?

## Christian Witness

- What does this program communicate about the gospel? The church?
- How is it “good news”?
- How does it further Christian discipleship in those who participate?
- How does it call forth commitment and response?
- What is the change or growth in people that is being called forth?

## Commitments

- Are there long-range commitments or implications?
- Is the project honest?
- Who needs to be informed about it?

## Limitations

- What are the limitations in cost? In language? Other?

## Approach

- Is there a balance between experiential and cognitive learning?
- Is the method in harmony with the purpose of the activity?
- Is it in harmony with accompaniment and the purpose of the Companion Synods Program?

## Assessing your current relationship

**E**very companion relationship will benefit from regular review. Assessing your relationship often will guide you in maintaining, strengthening, or refocusing it as needed.

Begin by determining whether you are meeting the objectives of the Companion Synods Program.

- Are you nurturing and strengthening one another within the body of Christ through prayer, study, and communication?
- Are you using the accompaniment model for mission to walk together in Christ, relate to the companion church as an equal partner, and focus on mutual sharing, not on what you can give?

- Are as many congregations as possible involved? Do the majority of the congregations in your synod pray for and know about your companion church?

Next, use the Companion Synod Assessment sheet on page 23 to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your participation in the Companion Synods Program. If a question can be answered with “No,” or “We don’t do this,” might that be an area that needs attention?

# Companion Synod Assessment

**T**he purpose of the Companion Synods Program is to nurture and strengthen the body of Christ by providing opportunities to participate in the ministry of the companion church through prayer, study, communication, exchange of visitors, and sharing of resources. Use the following questions to envision the realities and possibilities of your companion synod relationship.

## **The committee**

- What does each member bring to the companion synod committee?
- What does the synod expect from the committee?

## **The synod**

- What is the synod's vision for the companion relationship?
- What are the fruits of the relationship so far?
- How has the synod been affected by the relationship?
- What are the synod's short-term goals and hopes for the relationship?
- What are the synod's long-term goals for the relationship?
- What have been the synod's most positive experiences?

- What have been the synod's greatest frustrations?
- How has the global perspective of the synod and its congregations been changed as a result of the relationship?
- How has synod life been influenced by the relationship?

## **Publicity**

- How is the companion church placed before the eyes and ears of the synod members?
- What events have encouraged participation in the relationship?
- How has the companion church been highlighted at synod gatherings?
- How are correspondence, prayer requests, and advocacy issues from the companion passed on to congregations?

## **Accompaniment**

- What steps have been taken to introduce synodical leaders to the accompaniment model for mission?
- How are congregational members and children being introduced to the accompaniment model for mission?

- What safeguards are in place to assure that congregations and leaders relate in ways that focus on a collegial, rather than a teacher-student, relationship?

### **Visits to companion synod**

- How has the ministry of the synod been influenced or changed by visits to the companion?
- How do visitors to the companion share their experiences?
- How has the ministry of the synod been influenced or changed by visits from the companion?

### **Congregation-to-congregation relationships**

- Are congregation-to-congregation relationships promoted?
- How are the relationships arranged and maintained?
- What successes and benefits have come to congregations with relationships?
- What problems or challenges have arisen as a result of the congregational relationships?

### **Advocacy**

- What role has advocacy taken within the relationship?
- How does advocacy for the companion happen?

## **Best practices for successful companion synod relationships**

### **Intensive personal involvement**

- Synod leaders work closely with companion church leaders.

### **Commitment to mutuality**

- A mutual planning process with multiple partners
- Make mutuality of mission a priority
- With your companion, develop a protocol for relating to one another, and working in conjunction with ELCA Global Mission staff.

### **Communication**

- Maintain a channel of regular communication and prayer requests.

### **Frequent visits**

- In conjunction with your companion, fund trips or host visitations regularly, perhaps once or twice a year.

### **Diverse representation and involvement**

- Women, youth, and individuals with multicultural backgrounds are involved in leadership, visits, and decision-making.

### **Work with ministry**

- Work with the companion church on evangelism and outreach, health programs, primary education, and development programs.

### **Leadership development**

- Assess leadership development needs and develop programs for leadership, including scholarships and exchange programs between lay and ordained leaders.

## Beginning an additional relationship

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*Having more than one companion church can help synod members grasp the wide diversity of the world's Christians.*

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**H**aving more than one companion church can help synod members grasp the wide diversity of the world's Christians.

Working with ELCA Global Mission, some ELCA synods with a successful companion relationship have entered into an additional relationship.

All companion synod relationships are established through the mutual consent of an ELCA synod and the synod, diocese, district or national church from around the world. ELCA Global Mission coordinates new relationships in order to ensure that relationships and resources are distributed evenly, and to prevent duplication of efforts, especially in places like Tanzania that have many companion relationships.

There are four steps involved in beginning an additional relationship:

1. Determining feasibility
2. Discerning a decision
3. Formalizing the new relationship
4. Getting started

### **Determining feasibility**

To determine whether an additional relationship is feasible for your synod, you'll need to answer some hard questions about your synod, your committee, and its capacity.

Begin by assessing the state of your current relationship. (If you have more than one, evaluate both.) Use the Companion Synod Assessment Tool on page 23 to evaluate its health and determine whether it expresses the accompaniment model. Consider the following questions as well.

- Why does your synod want a new relationship?
- Is there broad-based support for the new relationship? A large support network is needed to nurture a companion synod relationship, especially through a change in synod leadership. If the relationship is driven by one person, it will flounder when that person is no longer involved.
- Does your current committee have enough members? How well does it nurture the relationship?
- If you start a new committee, who will serve on it?

- How will it relate to the existing committee? Will there be one committee with a sub-committee for each relationship, or a separate committee?
- How will the committees share information, exist in harmony, and avoid competing for attention?
- Look at the resources your synod invests in the committee. Will an additional relationship drain resources from the existing committee, or from other synod ministries?
- Are you prepared for a relationship that is very different from the current one?
- Is everyone clear that the new relationship is an additional connection to the world, and will not replace the current relationship?

Once you have answered these questions, talk to ELCA Global Mission about potential companions who are looking for a first-time or additional relationship. ELCA Global Mission will give you information about prospective companions.

## Discerning a decision

When you have determined that an additional relationship is feasible and have the name of a possible companion:

- Gather a small group to discern whether to move ahead with the process.
- Select someone to be the main contact with ELCA Global Mission during this step.
- Both potential companions pray, reflect, and learn about one another as possible companions to discern whether they might be compatible.
- The ELCA Global Mission area program director and the Companion Synods Program staff will work with both parties to keep the discernment process in motion.

## Formalizing the new relationship

When both companions agree to move ahead, the relationship is formalized through an exchange of letters between the bishops/presidents of each companion. Your new

or expanded companion synod committee will need to formalize the relationship—perhaps by presenting a motion to the synod council, or a resolution to the synod assembly. Send copies of your letters and resolutions to ELCA Global Mission.

## Getting started

### Share the good news with your synod

Share the news of your new relationship with the people of your synod.

- Inform pastors and lay leaders with a long article in the synod newsletter that offers details about your new companion and clarifies who is responsible for maintaining contact. Be sure to include information about future plans, and solicit the participation of leaders and congregation members.
- Reach most synod members with a Sunday bulletin insert (or series of inserts) that includes basic information on the country, the church, and offers ways to get involved in the relationship.

## **Organize and orient your committee**

Create a committee that is big enough to begin the task and carry it through for its early years.

- Seek representation from different groups, including people with a natural interest in the companion church.
- If there is a language barrier, seek members who can serve as translators.
- Determine how the new committee will communicate with other companion synod committees and synod staff.
- Take a look at how you can be involved in events and activities, like the annual synod assembly, that can help you lift up companions and attract participants.

Ask ELCA Global Mission to assist you in orienting the new committee. An orientation will benefit everyone in understanding what is needed to develop a lasting relationship, and make use of the best practices that come from other synods engaged in multiple companion relationships.

## **Learn about your new companion**

Look for materials that will help committee members deepen their understanding of your new companion.

- Information about the history of the country, its culture, and current issues will be useful.
- Invite someone from the country or who has lived there to meet with the committee and suggest additional resources.
- Consult your companion church for more suggestions.

## **Communicate with your new companion**

Decide who from your synod will be responsible for communicating, how frequently, and by what means. Will you communicate with a bishop, a president, or a committee? Most companion synods rely on e-mail and communicate with companions monthly or quarterly.

## **Make your first visit**

The best way to get people interested in participating in the new relationship is to offer an opportunity to visit. Begin planning a group visit that will introduce participants to your companion and its ministries. Your companions will feel honored by your presence. It will be tempting to carry large gifts or do a mission project, but you will honor your hosts more if your group can just be present, share their lives, and willingly visit what hosts feel is important for you to see.

The first visit may or may not involve your bishop or synod staff. Once your synod and the companion

have reached the point of signing a covenant, the bishop will be involved. But whether he or she goes on the early visits depends more the dynamics of your synod.

A key part of preparing for every visit is cross-cultural training—even for seasoned companion travelers. You are visiting a new place with a different culture, and cross-cultural training will help you appreciate and understand more. Use the orientation outlines in Part IV to prepare travelers.

## **Give the people-to-people relationship time to grow**

As North Americans, our first response to poverty is to offer money and materials. We think we know what needs to be done and want to jump right in with our own ideas and resources. Be patient. Listen. Your companions will be more likely to tell you what they need once they get to know and trust you.

## **Invite your new companion to visit**

Early in your relationship, invite your companion to send a small delegation to visit, possibly during a synod assembly or some other significant event. Reciprocity is important. Your companion needs to get to know your synod and its people. The visit will help make the companion relationship come alive for them, and inspire more people to get involved.

## **Look at the future together, and shape a covenant**

Once you and your companion are better acquainted, consider hosting a mutual planning event. Together, you can develop joint expectations for the shape of your relationship over the next three to five years and form a covenant to guide it. Hosting the event in your companion's country will help invite more companion participants into the relationship.

This would be a good time to invite your ELCA Global Mission Companion Synods Program director to participate or even lead this event. Take care to include equal numbers from both synods, and include congregational and synod leaders. Use the meeting to address projects, visits, communication, and other issues, and to draft a covenant that captures your common understanding of the relationship. When the covenant is drafted, the group can plan events in each country to publicly sign and affirm the covenant.

## **Consider cross-companion synod activities**

*An ELCA visitor worshipping in El Salvador heard that the Greater Milwaukee Synod was asking for prayers for Tanzania, another of its companions. The Salvadoran congregation prayed for the brothers and sisters in Tanzania.*

*The Nebraska Synod is a companion both to the Northern Diocese of Tanzania and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina. The synodical women's organization brought four women from each of the churches to Nebraska at the same time, to build a triangle of relationships. Possibilities for the future include delegations of Nebraskans and Argentinians to Tanzania, or Tanzanians and Nebraskans to Argentina!*

Companion synod relationships link multiple participants. Seek ways to link your two companions directly, or cultivate relationships with ELCA synods that also relate to your companions. Some ideas:

- Share expenses in inviting companions to the U.S.
- Coordinate visits from delegations to the companion
- Collaborate in a large development project
- Add a contact person from the other ELCA synod to your mailing list so that they are automatically informed of your plans, and request that you be added to their mailing list