Presbyterian Life & Witness
Serving God's Mission in the World

Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership

This document paraphrases a policy statement adopted by the 215th General Assembly (2003).

Summary

As heirs to God's grace in Jesus Christ, and joint heirs with all who confess him Lord, we affirm our place as Presbyterians in the whole body of Christ, the church.

We understand "mission" to be God's work for the sake of the world God loves. We understand this work to be centered in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and made real through the active and leading power of the Holy Spirit. Recognizing our human limitations and because of our fundamental unity in Jesus Christ, we believe we are called to mission through the discipline of partnership.

The practice of partnership guides our whole connectional church. It guides us individually as members, officers and pastors. It guides us collectively as congregations, presbyteries, synods, General Assembly ministries and related institutions.

In doing mission in partnership, we seek to be guided by certain principles:

- Shared grace and thanksgiving;
- Mutuality and interdependence;
- Recognition and respect;
- Open dialogue and transparency;
- Sharing of resources.

Connection

We give visible recognition of our belonging to one another as one denominational family. We give this recognition as Presbyterians through our connectional system of congregations, presbyteries, synods, General Assemblies and related institutions. The one table around which we gather is God's table, and the one mission to which we are called is God's mission.[1]

God's Mission

As Christians, we understand "mission" to be God's work for the sake of the world God loves. We understand this work to be centered in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and made real through the active and leading power of the Holy Spirit. The "where" and "how" and "with whom" of mission are of God's initiative, sovereign action and redeeming grace. The message we are called to bear is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

"The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission."

—*Book of Order* (F–1.01)

That mission occurs in proclamation and evangelism,[2] in the exercise of compassion in the world,[3] in establishing God's just, peaceable and loving rule in the world through God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ,[4] and in our care for creation.[5]

"In the present age the church's ministries of evangelism and caring for creation, of compassion and reconciliation are signs of God's reign and offer hope in the midst of life-denying situations. That hope is not dependent on the success of the church's ministries or the effectiveness of its worship, but is sustained by the power of God present with the church as it ministers and worships."[6]

Partnership

As Presbyterians, we recognize the Reformed tradition as one part of the larger body of Christ, the church. Other communions in the household of God have equally unique and valued places at the table of God's mission. Recognizing our human limitations and because of our fundamental unity in Jesus Christ, we believe we are called to mission in the discipline of partnership. We believe that doing mission in partnership broadens our awareness of how interconnected God's mission is at the local, national and global levels. Jesus invites us as friends to follow his commandment of love and to bear fruit that will last (John 15:12–17). Like Paul and Titus, we become partners with each other and with Christ in united and mutual service (2 Cor. 8:16–24). Guided by Christ's humility, we work to empty ourselves of all pride, power, sin and privilege so that God may be glorified (Phil. 2:5–11). Within and beyond our connectional community, doing mission in such true partnership opens us to opportunities for mutual encouragement, mutual transformation, mutual service, and mutual renewal.

The practice of partnership guides our whole connectional church. It guides us individually as members, officers and pastors. It guides us collectively as congregations, presbyteries, synods, General Assembly ministries and related institutions. Through prayer, humility and a mutual openness to one another, we develop a cooperative witness that exalts the Lord we serve.

The discipline of partnership assumes that mission can best be done by joining hands with those who share a common vision. Partnership in mission involves two or more organizations that agree to submit themselves to a common task or goal, mutually giving and receiving and surrounded by prayer so that God's work can be more faithfully accomplished. Theologically and biblically, partnership is based on the fundamental belief that God's love for the world is greater than any one church can possibly comprehend or realize.

Knowing the breadth of God's love for the world, we affirm that there are different forms of partnership with different patterns of cooperation. We may join around a common goal with other churches, with secular organizations or with other faith communities. In any case, work for the common good extends partnership—and the service of God's mission—to all people.

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1. *Book of Order* (W-7.2000)
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Book of Order* (W-7.3000)
4. *Book of Order* (W-7.4000)
5. *Book of Order* (W-7.5000)
6. *Book of Order* (W-7.6000)

Principles of Partnership

In doing mission in partnership, we seek to be guided by certain principles:

1. Shared Grace and Thanksgiving

Partnership calls all partners to confess individual and collective failings, to seek forgiveness for complicity with powers of injustice, to repent from histories of shared exploitation, to move toward common celebration of Christ's sacrifice of reconciliation, and together to give thanks and praise to God for all gifts of grace and renewal.

- Is there courage to confess human sins and confront the forces that deny the abundant life God promises to all in Jesus Christ?
- Is God's forgiveness mutually shared in Jesus Christ?
- Does the community of partners join in thankful worship to celebrate God's gift of grace and renewal?

2. Mutuality and Interdependence

Partnership calls for interdependence in which mutual aid comes to all, where mutual accountability resides, and no partner dominates another because of affluence or "expertise."

- Is each partner's self-reliance affirmed, with mutual giving and receiving?
- Is there space for all partners to be guided by self-determination?
- Beyond unhealthy dynamics of power and dependency, is there openness to new dynamics of mutual service and mutual renewal?

3. Recognition and Respect

Partnership calls all partners to respect other partners in Christ, and to recognize one another's equal standing before God.

- Is there recognition of the self-affirmed identities of each partner?
- Are the unique contexts of all partners recognized and respected?
- Are gifts and needs of all partners affirmed and respected?
- Are cultural differences being mediated with sincerity and in a Christlike manner?

4. Open Dialogue and Transparency

Partnership calls for open dialogue where a common discernment of God's call to mission is sought, where Scripture is the base for prophetic challenge, where local initiative is respected, where differences are meditated in a Christlike manner, and where all partners are transparent with regard to their activities and support.

- Is there local initiative in mission discernment and mission activity?
- Does God's Word shape us to lovingly confront one another's failings and prophetically challenge the world's systems of power and domination?
- Is there transparency with all partners about what is being done in mission, even if there is disagreement?

5. Sharing of Resources

Partnership calls for the sharing of all types of resources: human, cultural, financial and spiritual, especially including friendly conversation and faith-transforming life experiences.

- Do partners minister to and inspire one another, listen to and critique one another?
- Is there mutual accountability in the exchange of all resources, including human, cultural, financial and spiritual resources?
- In trusting relationship, have partners moved beyond two-way relationships into open mission networks and ever-expanding webs of mission relationships?

As heirs to God's grace in Jesus Christ and joint heirs with all who confess him Lord, we commit to wrestle with these questions. We look toward the promise of Christ. We count on the subtle power of the Holy Spirit to guide and limit us. Standing firm in common praise to the Triune God, we hope that our practice of partnership may be transformed, that our participation in the *Missio Dei* may more fully contribute to the abundant life that God promises all people and all creation.