

## Seven Reasons to Establish Faith-Based Partnerships:

1. We belong to a universal church that is invited and commanded by Jesus to work and pray for the unity and solidarity of all humankind. We are all members of one family of God recognizing the presence of Christ in all.

Our own church community, our understanding of the Bible and God and our personal faith development are deeply enriched when we discover the various ways the Holy Spirit inspires various cultures around the United States and the world.

2. It promotes mutuality, respect and peace in our families, society and world. Just as a healthy friendship and marriage bring out the best of both partners, so does twinning.
3. Twinning is a commitment not to having a mission but being the mission of Jesus in order to expand the self-identity of a parish, to create larger consciousnesses and bigger, more compassionate hearts.
4. It invites a Vatican II understanding and ecclesiology where ordinary laypeople on both sides of the relationship take on the responsibility to develop their own leadership, outreach and empowerment.
5. It helps to eliminate the grave sins of racism, sexism, classism, militarism, paternalism, materialism, imperialism and xenophobia as ordinary people learn and appreciate each other's cultures and spirituality through mutual respect and sharing of gifts, talents and resources within the body of Christ.
6. Twinning encourages a hunger for Catholic social teaching to study and solve the deeper causes of poverty, hunger and exploitation locally and globally.
7. Twinning invites a move away from models of dependency and charity to models of social justice and empowerment.

(From the Mission Office of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati)

explanation of what mission work has become and who really is a missionary these days. But the view of the missionary has changed significantly since the days prior to the Second Vatican Council. Under Vatican II, parishes have been highlighted as focal points for doing grassroots mission work, specifically through the twinning process, Nordenbrock says.

Going beyond a parish's boundaries to answer the bishops' call in *Called to Global Solidarity*, is that parish's "involvement in mission," he explains. "When I speak with parishes, I like to echo the challenge: Parishes need to be more Catholic and less parochial."

Nordenbrock adds that since Vatican II, there has been a shift in how mission is perceived and executed, recognizing a new model in the church's approach to living out the missionary command of Jesus. The missionary call, he says, is shared by the whole church and is not "just a call given to only a few, usually members of the religious congregations. While still relatively few may experience the personal vocation of being a foreign missionary, this shift in understanding underlines the need for all the baptized to participate in the mission that is the church, and the importance of all church institutions, such as parishes, need to be involved in mission."

He adds that one of the realizations in faith-based partnerships that are engaged in "mission" work are that these are endeavors between people of faith, not the labors of what he calls "initial evangelization." No longer in the mode of "saving the souls of pagans," now there is an important element of sharing faith between communities that goes to the very heart of the relationship.

A previously held attitude that much of the missionary apostolate was thought of as a rich church handing down charity to a poor church also has been relegated to history. "But

when missionary work arises out of a Vatican II ecclesiology, then the desired relationship is one where there can be a mutual sharing of gifts within the body of Christ. We seek to recognize, embrace and nurture a relationship with the mission church as a relationship between equals.” In fact, the very nature of twinning today embraces that concept of “sharing among equals” from the outset. Think of all the successful partnerships you have knowledge about, and you will agree that this equilibrium is a critical element for success.

“Perhaps one of the greatest gifts that the mission church can give us is that in its witness of faith, we are held up to a mirror that allows us to examine our own lives of faith,” Nordenbrock says. “As we come to know brothers and sisters of faith from a culture other than our own, we learn of new ways of understanding the Scriptures. We see new models of being a parish community. We encounter experiences of God’s interaction with God’s people that are different from our own. And in the relationship with the mission church, we can see how our own experiences of faith and church are bound by our own culture and fail to fully express the richness of the relationship between God and God’s people. If we approach the missionary activity as a mutual sharing within the body of Christ, then in our desire to evangelize, we receive the gift of being evangelized and of having our faith renewed.”

That, he notes, is probably the greatest benefit that a parish in the United States receives through twinning: The partnership itself helps renew the parish. “But the motivation for entering the twinning relationship has to come from a desire to faithfully represent a Vatican II understanding of the church and a willingness to accept their responsibility for participating in the missionary activity of the church.”

“Things don’t happen in a vacuum” in the creation of faith-based partnerships, explains Robert Cook, a missionary for the Des Moines, Iowa, Presbytery who for many years worked in Berlin, El Salvador. “I think the universal truth of these partnerships is that, among many initial moves, one has to take the first step: to visit the people and explore the place where you plan to form a relationship. You have to smell the poverty and get a sense of the environment. You have to take the photographs to share with folks back home. It’s impossible to bring that smell back home, so when you set up these initial visits, you want to make sure you have someone who is really good at communicating and analyzing what it is they have seen. When you sit back and think about it, there’s really something of the gospel in all this. Seeing, believing, telling.”

### **How Many Parishes Are Involved in Faith-Based Partnerships?**

A study conducted in 2001 shows that out of the approximately 19,000 parishes in the United States, nearly 1,400 say they support a poor parish in the United States or have a faith-based partnership established abroad. The study, conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, reports that of the parishes involved in overseas partnerships, 83 percent are involved with partners in Central America or South America. The CARA report states that 55 countries receive the benefits of United States parishes engaged in such partnerships.

What kind of parish is involved in twinning? Typically, larger parishes are embarked upon these faith-based partnerships. CARA’s report suggests that parishes engaged in twinning average 1,400 registered households and \$380,000 annually in weekend Mass collections. Parishes involved in the partnerships contributed from \$1,000 to \$10,000 annually to

their twinning partners, along with providing clothing, food, construction items, educational materials and religious supplies. And, the vast majority of parishes that have become engaged in programs in Latin America have done so since 1990. That is not to say, however, that smaller parishes do not or cannot get involved in twinning. The opposite is true.

Another study, conducted by the United States Catholic Mission Association (USCMA) in 2003, provides anecdotal accounts of how parishes in the United States have become involved in faith-based partnerships. The study "Partnering Relationships for Mission" confirms that Latin America remains the most frequent destination of twinning relationships, due in no small part to the proximity of its countries to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

The USCMA found that the primary theological motivation behind the twinning partnerships in the programs it queried was the 1997 United States Bishops' statement *Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for United States Parishes*. Other documents cited in the study included the Vatican II document *Ad Gentes* and Pope John Paul II's pastoral letter *Redemptoris Missio*. Also listed as important documents for parish twinning information were the United States Bishops' statement "To the Ends of the Earth," and David Bosch's *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Orbis, 1991).<sup>6</sup>

Globalization ranked high among nearly every institution queried by the USCMA as a critical factor in developing and maintaining faith-based relationships. "The globalization phenomenon which is bringing people of different countries and cultures together has increased the need to evaluate if parishes and dioceses are answering the call to look beyond their own borders to become truly 'catholic.'" <sup>7</sup>

A 2002 study of twinning relationships in the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis found that the trend of establishing faith-based partnerships, while having its origin in the 1980s, has largely been a phenomenon of the past fifteen years, with the largest surge in interest coming since 1995, and it continues to accelerate.<sup>8</sup>

“Parishes that embark on these relationships are testing new waters,” Nordenbrock concludes. “For a United States parish to enter into an ongoing relationship with a faith community in the missions is to choose to embrace a new way of being a parish.

“But it is a great, great way to reenergize that parish.”

## United States Parishes Faith-Based Partnerships in Latin America

In 2004, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released the results of a study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) on supportive relationships between Catholic parishes in the United States and Catholic parishes in Latin America and the Caribbean. Conducted by CARA in 2001, the study consisted of two parts. Using its National Parish Inventory (NPI), CARA first identified United States parishes with supporting relationships with less affluent parishes—often called “sister parish” or “twinning parish” relationships. Then CARA surveyed parishes with sister parishes in Latin America and the Caribbean to find out about the nature of the relationship, when it was established, and the type of support it provides.

The 2001 NPI was completed by 5,381 parishes, about 30 percent of all Catholic parishes in the United States. Eighty percent of those responding answered questions about supportive relationships with other parishes. Of these, 29 percent reported having one or more supporting relationships, including 18 percent with a parish outside the United States, 10 percent with a parish inside the United States, and 1 percent with parishes both inside and outside the United States.

CARA’s follow-up questionnaire to pastors of the 332 parishes with partnerships with a Latin American or Caribbean parish resulted in a response rate of 74 percent. Among the topics covered were the types of support provided by the United States parish, visits back and forth between the two parishes, how the relationship was initiated, promotion of partnerships by the diocese and others, and information that would help the parish in the relationship. Among the findings:

- Parishes were asked how often, if ever, they provided each of nine types of support to their sister parishes. The most frequent types of support are intercessory prayers at Mass, letter writing and providing food, clothing and school supplies.

- Visits are more commonly made by United States parishioners than by those from the sister parish. Slightly more than half of pastors (53 percent) reported that no parishioners from the supported parish have visited them. By comparison, only one-third (34 percent) report that none of their own parishioners have visited the supported parish.
- Nine in ten parishes in partnerships of solidarity report the current partnership is the first they have had with a Latin American parish. Slightly more than half of the responding parishes initiated their partnership before 1996. Roughly the balance (45 percent) started their partnerships since that year. Most partnerships were initiated by someone in the parish: 59 percent of cases it was by a parish priest, 23 percent by the pastoral council, 4 percent by a lay ecclesial minister, 9 percent by a bishop and 2 percent by a religious community.
- Two-thirds of the surveyed parishes reported their diocese promotes these partnerships. Of these, 13 percent say it was the bishop who initiated their present partnership. Half of the parishes with partnerships of solidarity in Latin America and the Caribbean say their parish has worked with other groups that promote these partnerships.
- When asked what information would be most helpful to sustaining the relationship with a sister parish in Latin America or the Caribbean, cited as “somewhat” or “very helpful” were data on the Catholic church in that region or country (75 percent), missionary activities in that region or country (67 percent), how other parishes or dioceses support parishes in the area (66 percent), cultural similarities and differences between United States parishes and these sister parishes (66 percent), and other ways to support parishes in poor countries (61 percent).

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