

June 2016: The Rhythm of Partnership

Let it begin with me.

“You walk down a dirt path in a Haitian village and come to the edge of someone’s yard, called a *lakou*. It’s more than a yard. Much of life happens outside—washing clothes, repairing farm tools, cooking, eating. Walking directly into this space would be like barging through someone’s front door in Pittsburgh.

You call out, *Honé*, meaning “honor.” This announces that you visit with honor for them, their family, their property. You’re acknowledging their humanity, their dignity, their right of response. You’re confirming that it’s up to them whether you will enter and on what terms.

Respé, meaning “respect,” is the word you wait to hear. Perhaps the woman cooking a pot of rice in the cooking shack recognizes your voice and calls out without seeing you. Or maybe it’s someone you’ve never visited before and the person walks up without saying *respé* to inquire about the reason for your visit. Honor and respect are established as integral to your interactions moving forward.

The ritual slows one down to recognize there is a *you* and an *I*, to commit to the work of respect that is ahead. Best friends still call out *honé* and await *respé*.”

Quoted with permission from *Slow Kingdom Coming* by Kent Annan, Intermarsity Press, 2016.

Presbyterians do mission in partnership. Perhaps no other element characterizes our church’s shared understanding of what it means to engage in mission in the way of Jesus Christ.

Doing mission in partnership is slow: In the same way Jesus took 30 years to learn the language and culture of the people he was called to serve—to develop the deep relationships that Gospel-sharing requires—it takes time to do mission in partnership.

Doing mission in partnership means I don't always get my way: Though I may have an advanced degree or unusual spiritual wisdom or I just know how to get things done, doing mission in partnership requires that I allow partners to have the first word (if our shared work happens in their community, it is *they* who should initiate the work) and the last word (if they say “no” to my idea, or even respond to it with silence or “underwhelming affirmation”—and the essence of cultural proficiency is being able to read this vacuum—I need to consider the probability that the Spirit is leading us in a direction I had not anticipated.

Doing mission in partnership is NOT giving partners a blank check, passively acquiescing to their every recommendation, or stifling the questions that naturally arise when two people walk down the road together. If *domination* is always wrong in partnership relationships, so is the overly facile attitude of complete *deference*, where U.S. partners, aware of the temptation of controlling a mission relationship reduce that relationship to a funding relationship: “Whatever the partner requests, we'll support.” This attitude, often caused by our own sense of guilt for the inequalities that separate us from our global partners, makes a mockery of partnership in mission. True partnership requires that each partner bring their best gifts to the table—their best ideas, most earnest hopes and dreams, and their resources both monetary and in-kind. It also requires that, in a spirit of humility, each partner bring to the table their own needs, their experience of woundedness, their own brokenness. This is the table where Christ makes us one.

What happens when we do mission in partnership? Together, God's Spirit helps us change the world, one need, one injustice, one life at a time, beginning with our own life. Will you join us?[1]

[1] Our General Assembly in 2003 approved a beautiful description of what it means to do mission in partnership and provided some helpful questions we can use to test if our actions are consistent with our intentions:http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/global/pdf/presbyterians_do_mission_in_partnership.pdf