

# **Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership**

2003 General Assembly Policy Statement

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

## **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:

1. Shared Grace and Thanksgiving.
2. Mutuality and Interdependence.
3. Recognition and Respect.
4. Open Dialogue and Transparency.
5. Sharing of Resources.

## **Statement**

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 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.<sup>1</sup>

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) declares that wherever one part is engaged in God's mission, all are engaged.<sup>2</sup> Whenever and wherever one engages in that mission, one bears witness to the saving love of God in Jesus Christ. Through this love, empowered by the Holy Spirit, all are made one. This unity is a gift of God's grace that extends across cultural, linguistic, economic and other barriers that divide us within the Body of Christ and across the human family.

## **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 is 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 PC(USA) claims responsibility for bearing the Good News in this way:

"The Church is called to be Christ's faithful evangelist

1. going into the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all he has commanded;
2. demonstrating by the love of its members for one another and by the quality of its common life the new reality in Christ; sharing in worship, fellowship, and nurture, practicing a deepened life of prayer and service under the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
3. participating in God's activity in the world through its life for others by
  - healing and reconciling and binding up wounds,
  - ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely and the powerless,
  - engaging in the struggle to free people from sin, fear, oppression, hunger and injustice,
  - (giving itself and its substance to the service of those who suffer,

- sharing with Christ in the establishing of his just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world." <sup>3</sup>

## 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 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 (II Corinthians 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 (Philippians 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 who 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.

## 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.
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."
3. **Recognition and Respect.** Partnership calls all partners to respect other partners in Christ, and to recognize one another's equal standing before God.
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 Christ-like manner, and where all partners are transparent with regard to their activities and support.
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.

## Partnership Commitments

Doing mission in partnership, we commit to be guided by these principles both individually and collectively. In the spirit of candid evaluation, we commit to asking ourselves discerning questions. For each principle, certain approaches are suggested:

### Shared Grace and Thanksgiving

Is there courage to confess human sins and confront the forces which 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?

### Mutuality and Interdependence

- 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?

### Recognition and Respect

- 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 Christ-like manner?

### Open Dialogue and Transparency

- 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?

### Sharing of Resources

- 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?
- 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. We hope, standing firm in common praise to the Triune God, 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.

## Notes

1. in Latin, Missio Dei
2. *Book of Order* (G-9.0103)
3. *Book of Order* (G-3.0300)