



GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP WITH AN OVERSEAS PARTNER CHURCH

Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) International Mission

Background and Overview

It is the belief of LCA International Mission that in most cases, we can best serve in God's mission overseas by supporting our partner churches through the work that they are doing in their countries and with their nearby neighbours. We have a particular emphasis on supporting the Lutheran Churches in our near neighbors in Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Malaysia, Sabah, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Indonesia.

It is our real desire to see a strengthening of the relationships we have with these Churches especially through more personal contact and interaction with the members of the LCA and our partners. LCA International Mission are therefore willing to help facilitate connections and develop relationships between Lutheran communities here in Australia with LCA's partner churches. The following is a 'checklist' to help congregations and groups systematically work through the establishment of a partnership.

Please note: LCA International Mission believes it is important to maintain sustainable partnerships when working in overseas mission. Therefore we encourage congregations and individuals (where possible) to work together with the overseas partner churches with whom the LCA partnerships have already been established and where much of the groundwork in developing relationships has already been done.

Step 1: Reflection and Discussion

The first step is to reflect on why you want to be involved, what may be of particular interest and what you are prepared to commit to a partner relationship. Here are a few suggestions/questions that will help you work through this process:

- **Prayerful** consideration – **seeking God** on where he is calling you to connect and serve.
- Do you already have some existing links with a particular country that may generate sustained interest in a partnership – questions to ask 'Do we know former missionary/ies?', 'Do we have a history of service in the country?', 'What personal connections do we have in these partner churches and countries?'.

- What is underpinning your desire to serve others in this way? A particular interest in overseas mission? An integral part of your total ministry? A reflection of yourself-understanding as a Christian/Christian community?
- What are your special interests as a group or individual? LCA International Mission recommends that care is taken to ensure the interests of one or two don't dominate over the voices of others as this will create a potential problem for long term commitment down the track.
- What strengths, giftedness do you and/or your congregation or group have to offer and are willing to offer?
- Who is the person or persons driving this idea? Do you have enough people interested to help sustain a partnership over at least a five year period? What would happen if a key person were to 'drop out' or leave?
- How do you understand the nature of partnership? LCA International Mission considers it a two-way relationship – not just you giving what you have and what you can do, but looking at ways in which you and/or your community can receive from the people of the overseas partner church.
- Please read the document "Understanding Partnership" (A position paper developed by LCA International Mission, Australian Lutheran World Service [ALWS] and Lutheran Education Australia.)

Step 2: Contact LCA International Mission to develop a Plan of Action

If your community has resolved to further explore a partnership overseas, LCA International Mission will assist you work through the options and next steps:

- Arrange a meeting with Program Officer Erin Kerber to discuss your ideas and hear and learn of some possible partnerships.
- If the congregation selects a partnership 'in principle' it will usually be beneficial for one or two congregational members to undertake an exploratory visit prior to making a final decision. The visit will include:
 - Introduction to the appropriate church officials in the partner church.
 - Depending on the particular partner, further introductions may be necessary – i.e. to staff directly involved in the proposed partnership.
 - Discussion about the nature of the partnership to ensure expectations of each partner are understood: for example – frequency and nature of visits and ongoing correspondence (letters and photos). And importantly, establish an agreed period of partnership (recommended minimum of five years).
 - LCA International Mission recommends that the initial contact and/or visit be **relationship based** and not necessarily activity driven and needs based.
 - In everything, try to maintain a relational based partnership. Many overseas countries see Australia/ians as very wealthy (and we are), however this can sometimes get in the way of developing healthy, balanced partnerships. A major concern is to avoid the establishment of a culture of dependency.

- If, following the visit, the congregation affirms its commitment to the partnership, LCA International Mission will facilitate a three or four-way partnership agreement between the partner church, specific partner within the church (e.g. school or local congregation), LCA International Mission and your community.
- Once a partnership has been formalised, a plan will be developed to ensure that your community lives up to your commitments under the agreement.
- Using the 'Understanding partnerships' document developed by the LCA as a framework for best practice, in consultation with your new partner church, you will be encouraged to develop healthy, and sustainable goals and practices for strengthening your partnership.
- Plan for completion of the partnership. Develop and agree to an exit strategy in consultation with your partner church.

Step 3: Monitor and Nurture the Partnership

It is vital that the partnership doesn't end with the signing of an agreement and approving a plan. This only represents the beginning of the relationship. Your community will need to:

- Be prepared to be FLEXIBLE as a plan is always subject to change, and not everything will fall into place as hoped.
- Be prepared to listen to your partners and learn from them.
- Ensure you have a team or some strategy in place to regularly review your plan to see it's on track. If you are experiencing difficulties feel free to discuss them with LCA International Mission
- Keep LCA International Mission informed about what is happening – sharing the joys as well as the difficulties. This is helpful for LCA International Mission for their own monitoring of these partnerships, and is also a way in which stories can be shared with others to enthuse and encourage them to be involved in a similar way.
- As you started prayerfully, continue to keep the partnership and your partners in your prayers and integral to the life of your community.

Partnerships work best when congregations have the understanding that this is an opportunity not just to give, but to have the grace to receive.

Please feel free to contact the Program Officer for LCA International Mission with any questions you may have.

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