

*Guidelines for
Establishing a
Parish-To-Parish
Companion
Relationship*



How to Go About Linking with Another Parish

Companion relationships between parishes are a wonderful way to broaden the scope of your ministry, to strengthen a partnership for ministry and mission, to share the life and work of the Episcopal Church, and to grow in cultural awareness, understanding and respect for each other. They are intended to be models of community, and mutually beneficial.

The Companions in Mission Committee offers this guide for setting up Parish-to-Parish Companion Relationships.

**Companions in Mission Committee
Diocese of Connecticut**

Discernment

Begin a discernment process within your parish, including prayer and reflection:

- ◆ Why do you want to explore a companion relationship with another parish?
- ◆ Do you want to be linked to a parish in the diocese, nation or in another country?
- ◆ Is there a region of the diocese, country or world you are drawn to?
- ◆ Are you interested in a parish that is urban, rural or suburban?

Make an inventory of your assets as a parish, human, material, spiritual – what do you have to offer as a companion?

Just as important: think through what would you envision as a benefit for your church in a relationship? If you don't know what you hope to gain as well as give, the relationship may well become lopsided and fail to thrive.

Contact the Companions in Mission Committee to find out if there are parishes interested in partners in the areas you've defined, or how to find out if your interest is international.

Get in touch with the parish you're interested in linking with – rector-to-rector might be the best starting contact, but it is a good idea to broaden the communications base quickly.

- ◆ Begin corresponding via mail or email, exploring the ways your two parishes might get together or work on mission projects together.
- ◆ Plan a meeting or trip for a group from one parish to visit the other, if the interest is strong in pursuing a relationship.

If you would like a consultant to come help you with discernment, contact the Committee chair, the Rev. Kate Heichler, 203-415-1962.

Working Out the Relationship

If you've begun conversations with another parish, and want to pursue formalizing a relationship, the following steps will help:

- ◆ Appoint from each parish 3-5 representatives (adults, youth and clergy).
- ◆ If the parish is local, schedule a meeting of all interested people from both parishes, including the representatives. If it is far away, you might try a phone meeting, or on-going email exchange with a group.

At that meeting:

- ◆ Begin with some social time and introductions.
- ◆ Have each person talk about what they hope to gain from this relationship. (*If the meeting is*

“live,” have someone take notes on a board or newsprint.) This will be helpful in getting people’s agendas on the table.

- ◆ Then have the group brainstorm all the possible ways the two parishes can be connected – through worshipping together, social times together, prayer, mission projects to a third party, mutual mission projects – let the imaginations fly!

Have someone record all the ideas. Some of these activities might include:

- Regular prayers for each other included in Sunday worship;
- Mission or outreach projects to a third party, or for each other (remembering the importance of mutuality);
- An annual dinner or celebration together;
- Worship together
- Visits involving lay persons and clergy;
- Friends/amigos/pen pal program (*traditional or electronic*)
- Summer and holiday youth activities
- Training of lay persons
- Clergy exchanges

Schedule a further meeting of the representatives from both churches.

At that meeting you can:

- ◆ Establish the term of the relationship.
(*We recommend 3 years, extending for 3 more; if desired*).
- ◆ Prioritize the ideas generated at the larger brainstorming meeting and develop a list of goals and/or activities.
- ◆ Map out (and write down!) a strategy for reaching the goals of the companion relationship.
- ◆ Set up an ongoing liaison committee to manage the companion relationship – don’t leave it up to the clergy! Establish a regular meeting or communications schedule.

Some Important Issues

- ◆ Mutuality – make sure both churches are clear about what they hope to give and what they hope to gain from partnering with the other – and make sure those lists are balanced.
- ◆ Discuss communications –
 - Who should be talking to whom?
 - What form of communication works best – phone, email, face-to-face?
 - Are there cultural differences in ways of communicating that will need to be surfaced and arranged for?
- ◆ Talk about some cultural norms and how they might differ between the two parishes – issues

like responding to phone or email; or punctuality. You won't surface all the issues – just set up a mechanism that allows each party to bring them up as they surface naturally.

◆ Discuss financial burden-sharing

A parish-to-parish companion relationship is one of sharing a mission and ministry, not one of financial assistance. Financial responsibility by each parish should be discussed and agreed upon before any exchange projects are undertaken.

Discuss a process for review and evaluation of goals and communications, and a process for each parish to share its review with the other. The liaison committee can establish a corrective plan to better meet proposed goals.

Formalizing the Relationship

Write up a formal covenant agreement addressing:

- ◆ basic descriptions of each parish
- ◆ goals and activities agreed upon
- ◆ communication
- ◆ evaluation
- ◆ frequency of contact
- ◆ any other agreements made.

(A sample Covenant is included here to start your process.)

Invite the Vestry of each parish to affirm the Covenant.

Plan a worship service to celebrate the Relationship – if the two parishes are far from each other and worshipping together is not possible, try to do it in each parish when a group from the other parish is visiting. (See *Book of Common Prayer: A Form of Commitment to Christian Service* for ideas on planning the liturgy.)

Please send this Covenant to the Companion Relationship Committee – kateheichler@sbcglobal.net.

Or mail to:

The Rev. Kate Heichler,
Trinity Emmanuel Church
20 Brookdale Road
Stamford, CT 06903

Questions:

Call Kate Heichler at 203-415-1962,
or email kateheichler@sbcglobal.net.

A Sample Covenant...

I. Mutual Expectations

The companion relationship between the parishes of _____ and _____ will be characterized by a spirit of companionship, mutual affection and shared responsibility. Reciprocity in the exchange of gifts and services will be sought whenever possible. Following the vision statement, "Companions in Transformation," submitted by the Standing Commission on World Mission to the 2003 General Convention, we will not consider the relationship as one in which one parish gives and the other merely receives, but as a covenant to become for a time partners in mission, and, even more, companions on the way of Christ. To say this is to emphasize the building of personal and corporate relationships, rooted in Christian fellowship and discipleship, above the doing of projects, important though these may be.

II. Time Frame

The initial timeframe for this covenant is for five years, commencing _____. Within the final year of the timeframe a review of the covenant will be made with the participation of all parties. A renewal of the covenant for another period of time will be considered at that time. There will be a formal and liturgical celebration of the relationship and its accomplishments at the conclusion of the companionship relation.

III. Communications

Each parish will designate one person conversant in the language of the other partner who will take responsibility for communicating on a regular basis (*weekly? monthly?*) news, prayer requests, answered prayer, and issues pertaining to joint activities. Ideally, these communications will be by email and phone – and in person, if geography permits.

IV. Companion Relationship Liaison Team

Each parish will designate 2-3 people to serve on a Liaison Team to help foster communication between the partner parishes, and monitor mutually agreed-upon activities. This group will include a clergyperson from each parish. This Liaison Team will meet _____ (*frequency will depend upon location of the two partner parishes; try to plan a meeting at least once or twice a year, and monthly, if the companion parishes are local.*)

In addition to monitoring joint activity and dealing with any funding or finance issues that may arise, this group will be place where tensions and conflicts can be raised and discussed, where cultural differences are surfaced and can be discussed and resolved.

V. Mutually agreed-upon activities

Bearing in mind that the purpose of the relationship is first to grow as companions in Christ, and only secondly to undertake projects, ideas for projects and other activities will be solicited in a meeting of the Companion Relationship Liaison Team. Those ideas can be brought to each parish and prioritized to form an action list, and progress can be monitored by the Liaison Team.

These activities and projects might lay out specifics in the following areas:

Spiritual – mutual prayer for each other and worship together, when possible

Relational – activities, visits, exchanges, and other methods by which people in the two parishes can get to know each other's settings, concerns, strengths, and needs, and strengthen each other's faith.

Practical – mission work done at one or both parishes

Missional – a mission project undertaken by the two parishes together to benefit a third entity

Financial – support given to one or both parishes to help further their mission and ministry.

Youth – activities or plans that involve the children and youth of each parish.

V. Evaluation

The Companion Relationship Liaison Team will evaluate the relationship every _____ months, looking at level of contact, depth of interaction, support in prayer and worship, progress on mutually agreed-upon activities, and any other criteria the Liaison Team deems appropriate.

V. Anything else you want to add to your Covenant!