

GLOBAL PARTNERING GROWING PAINS – I Agencies & Churches Grapple with 2009 Challenges

by *Ellen Livingood*

The global partnerships movement is maturing from childhood to adolescence. A multitude of widely varying alliances is reshaping how Kingdom forces are being marshaled around the world. We are all learning as we go and grateful for God's blessing even as we move into uncharted territory. As our experience grows, some of the issues partners must tackle come into clearer focus.

How do we establish thousands of healthy partnerships and maintain them efficiently and productively? In this and the next two issues of *Postings*, we present a series of articles highlighting some of the challenges churches and mission organizations need to address in order to steward the movement to the next level.

In this *Postings*:

1. Defining Models and Terminology
2. Developing "Value Added" from All Partners
3. Expanding Field Capacity to Facilitate Partnerships
4. Engaging the Breadth and Depth of Church Resources

In the February 2009 *Postings*:

5. Building Big-Picture Vision, Knowledge, and Ministry Integration
6. Valuing Short- and Long-Term Contributions
7. Integrating Local and Global Church Vision and Involvement
8. Improving Funding and Accountability
9. Documenting Partnership Stories

In the March 2009 *Postings*:

10. Increasing Partnership Readiness
11. Funding Partnership Overhead
12. Establishing 1+1=3 Partnerships
13. Structuring Partnership Lifecycles
14. Providing Leadership Continuity

1. Defining Models and Terminology

I just concluded seven workshops across the US on the topic of partnership, and the dialog emphasized how much we need more precise and universally understood definitions and descriptions. Some participants were happy to call any church-missionary connection a partnership. Others reserved the term for very specialized or complex collaborations they were developing. Some church leaders on the workshop panels assumed that partnering with agencies was restricted to improved cooperation on missionary sending and care.

If partnering is going to grow robust, both our models and our language need to expand and mature. More consensus in describing and differentiating various categories and structures of partnership would frame beneficial dialog and move us forward with greater efficiency. I have been experimenting with some prototypes and would be interested in hearing from others doing the same.

One aspect of this clarification process is nomenclature. The adoption of a more appropriate and narrowly defined

vocabulary is overdue. Here are some terms I have tentatively adopted and will use in this series of articles:

Site partners. (Sometimes referred to as national partners, non-Western partners, or receiving partners) Collaborating churches, individuals, or other organizations situated in or very near the locus of the partnership work. These are the partners best equipped to set the agenda.

Linking partners. (Sometimes referred to as church partners, Western partners, or supply-line partners) Collaborating churches, individuals, or other organizations which are at a distance and give to/receive from the partnership efforts via visits and other connections.

Partnership developers. (Sometimes referred to as church mobilizers) Men and women (or organizations) who recruit partners, help establish the partnership, and then nurture the involvement of the linking entities.

Partnership facilitators. (Sometimes referred to as partnership coordinators) Individuals (or organizations) usually but not always resident on site, who shepherd the implementation of partnership activity and build bridges for all partners to understand each other and work together harmoniously and synergistically.

Church partnerships. Collaborative efforts that include at least three things from the church:

- Committed ownership of clear missional objectives/goals
- Investment of multiple resources, not just finances
- Intentionally collaborative effort

Let's talk  about it.

Agencies and Churches: How do you react to this vocabulary? Do you have other suggestions of terminology and definitions you think would be broad-based and helpful to the ongoing dialog about partnership? What do you need to define more clearly in order to communicate effectively internally and externally on the topic of partnership?

Business as Mission (BAM) is integrally related to many partnership efforts and also desperately in need of standard prototypes and common terminology. I have discovered several valid efforts at classifications, but none seems to have gained broad acceptance. For example, recently I heard two BAM leaders define "tentmaker" in almost opposite ways. To reduce confusion and wasted time, we need universal nomenclature.

2. Developing "Value Added" from All Partners

"It's better to do it together!" may be the motto of the partnership movement, but often both churches and agencies have been far too vague about why. Each partner needs to clarify what they bring to the table and precisely how cooperative efforts will increase the likelihood or speed of success.

Let's talk  about it.

Agencies: What exactly do you offer churches to improve their impact and yours on the field, and to expand the vision of their congregation? Are you outlining concrete opportunities for collaboration? Collecting/Developing and proffering high-quality training resources to prepare churches to be valuable partners in the areas where you work? Designating and training partnership developers and facilitators ready to come alongside churches to help establish and nurture partnerships, and troubleshoot throughout the collaborative process?

Site Partners: Do you consistently look beyond receiving to identify reciprocal contributions you can give your linking partners? As you gain experience and benefit from

partnering, are you helping other site entities prepare to partner successfully? Rather than expanding the number or size of your own partnerships, are you willing to encourage some of your linking partners or potential partners to adopt lesser-resourced site partners and then assist those relationships to flourish?

Linking Churches: Have you surveyed the variety and depth of God-given gifts invested in your people? Do you know specific expertise that is "shovel ready" to be mobilized? While God will certainly uncover and expand your contributions as your partnership develops, you need to be able to list individual and corporate giftings that you believe could be leveraged in a global partnership. Completing a gift inventory, especially one oriented to external, not just internal, ministry is very helpful. One such inventory is available at: www.catalystservices.org/churches/GRI.shtml.

Is your congregation willing to commit to both thorough preparation and consistent involvement—even if it becomes tough and requires sacrifice? Will you take your partnership as seriously as your church mortgage, not by measuring it solely or even primarily in financial terms, but considering it a similarly serious obligation?

3. Expanding Field Capacity to Facilitate Partnerships

Almost all partnerships demand significant time from well qualified field facilitators—expats or nationals sufficiently fluent in not just the language but also the culture of the partners to be able to serve as a bridge. There are four categories of facilitators:

Natural facilitators: Some networking types just instinctively develop and facilitate partnerships, but it is not unusual to find that these instinctive facilitators feel they already are at or near capacity with the relationships they are currently brokering.

Are there ways to increase the capacity of facilitators? Two partial solutions: (1) Divide the task among several people. While one person usually needs to lead the process, responsibilities can be shared. (2) At least one organization requires linking partners to field a partnership coordinator—a two-year worker tasked with working alongside the facilitator to handle the logistics of short-term visits as well as much of the communication between site and linking partners.

Unavailable facilitators: Other expat workers and nationals have the potential to be facilitators but they are so busy with other responsibilities that they have no margin to develop into this type of role. There will never be enough time unless agencies, sending churches, and site entities clearly believe that mobilizing healthy partnerships will multiply the facilitator's impact, not diminish it, and therefore choose to reduce other assignments to clear time for nurturing the partnership.

Undeveloped facilitators: Some potential expat or national facilitators aren't involved because they currently lack the vision and/or training for such a role. Obviously vision casting and skill development are the keys here. After those with a gift mix for a facilitation role are identified, they will need training, resources, and coaching.

Unrecruited facilitators: "Partnership facilitator" has not been a category on the missionary needs list, but for churches and other organizations intent on expanding their global collaborations, it must become a priority.

Let's talk  about it.

Agencies: Are you discussing with current partnership facilitators how to expand their capacity? Do you have a clear definition of facilitator qualifications and what the role entails in order to identify those who could become facilitators? (See the April 2008 issue of *Postings* www.catalystservices.org/bm~doc/facilitators.pdf for help in this area.) Do you offer training for facilitators? (Contact Catalyst Services about our training of partnership developers and facilitators.)

Churches and agencies: Are you actively recruiting and sending workers with vision and skills for partnership facilitation?

4. Engaging the Breadth & Depth of Church Resources

One of the greatest needs of the partnership movement is creativity in utilizing the phenomenal untapped resources of people who sit in church services week after week with no idea how God could use their gifts, expertise, and passions for global impact.

I recently spoke with a church leader taking a team to work with national partners in the Central African Republic. For their two-week stay, site partners have set up 12 different ministry opportunities for them engaging a wide variety of natural talents, expertise, and spiritual gifts. Previous visits have used other skills and more are in the pipeline. For example, their site partners have asked them to send a professional preservationist to guide in protecting documents that reflect a century of Christian missions in their country. The breadth of involvements draws on gifts and expertise across the congregation, yet this church is

currently seeking a second partnership because they recognize that their potential is not fully tapped!

Let's talk  about it.

Church partners and agencies: Creatively engaging expertise involves identifying useful gifts and finding ways to employ them. Discuss whether one or more of these ideas will expand the number of partner resources you can mobilize:

- **Peer-to-peer relationships.** Only a few partnerships have maximized the connections that naturally emerge



between people who share the same profession, hobby, or interest. For example, one linking church had several members in law enforcement. The partnership facilitator organized a visit that featured a meeting with their peers in his city. There was immediate connection and credibility that would have been impossible for the worker to have established on his own. In some cases, on-site believers are intentionally included in the introductions and handle later follow up. Depending on language proficiency, long-distance, peer-to-peer friendships can be maintained via email or Skype connections and strengthened through repeat or reciprocal visits. Other creative examples: bicycle tours, art shows or lessons by artists working in different media, farm tours, scholar exchanges at universities—almost any interest can open doors.

- **Fielding individuals rather than groups.** Why is it often assumed that linking churches must send people in teams? In some situations, larger groups may be most effective, but more often sending 1-3 people at a time for more individually focused tasks better addresses needs. Scheduling and logistics are easier for both sides too.
- **Serial trips.** The value of linking-partner visits is sometimes limited because there is no one to follow up when the short-termer leaves. But what if the opportunity were constructed as a series of visits—say as three, one-week trips per year? For many professionals—such as businesspeople or teachers—serial visits will provide continuity of contact and can be built into and around personal schedules. One business training program follows a timetable of quarterly one-week seminars. Between sessions there is intensive student implementation guided by the facilitator.
- **Revolving placements.** The valuable potential of retirees is often underutilized because many are unable or unwilling to commit to a one- or two-year assignment. But linking churches could consider

recruiting several individuals/couples to share a role, each signing up for two, three, or six months, including a short overlap to train and pass off the responsibilities to the next person. This approach can be especially effective for tasks such as running a hospitality house, providing maintenance services, or some staff positions in hospitals, training centers, or schools.



Ellen Livingood launched Catalyst Services three years ago to further church/agency collaboration. She is available to help your church or organization work through these questions, and to train field and administrative staff in how to develop and nurture healthy partnerships.

Interchange Postings

Catalyst's **Postings** e-newsletter is a monthly publication designed for mission agency personnel and local church leaders involved in collaborative global efforts. The practical articles highlight what churches and agencies are doing to mobilize believers, especially those of younger generations, to expand the Kingdom.

Don't miss future issues!

To subscribe to future issues of this FREE e-newsletter, go to www.catalystservices.org/resources/IP-sub.shtml.

Want to read more?

Find all the past *Postings* at www.catalystservices.org/resources.

Contact us

To ask questions, suggest future topics, change your email address, or unsubscribe to this monthly publication, email info@catalystservices.org.

© 2009 Catalyst Services, Inc.