



Global Partnership for Local Mission

A Bible Study resource (approx. 1.5 hrs long) to be used by parishes thinking of setting up a world church link. It could also be used by an existing link as a means of review and/or reflection of their link.

1. Opening reflection (10 mins)

Think of a time when you have visited a place with a difference culture from your own (in this country or abroad).

What did it feel like to be somewhere unfamiliar? What did you notice was done differently?

When you last had a conversation with someone who had a very different background from your own, what differences in perspective did you notice?

How might perspectives from other parts of the world help us in addressing the challenges we face in the Western church?

Reviewing your partnership: what new perspectives has your partnership already offered you a. on your own situation, and b. on the situation of your partner church and its context?

2. Reconciliation and the gospel (20 mins)

Read 2 Cor 5.16–20

Paul here uses the language of ‘reconciliation’—turning us from enemies to friends of God—to sum up the good news of what God has done for us in Christ.

Is this language you normally use to describe what your faith means to you? Is there anything surprising about this language in Paul?

In the ancient world, it would be usual to expect the person who has caused offence to initiate reconciliation, and the person who has been wronged to be the one ‘reconciled’ or changed (from anger to friendship).

In what ways is Paul’s language here distinctive? Why is this important?

We often take Paul’s language here to be primarily about our status before God—but it is clear that this must affect our attitude to others too. ‘From now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view’ (2 Cor 5.16, NIV). The phrase is literally ‘according to the flesh’, meaning ‘from a merely human perspective’. Paul extends the idea of reconciliation in Eph 2.

Read Eph 2. 11–22

Paul here depicts humanity as divided into two groups—Jews and Gentiles—who are kept apart by a ‘dividing wall of hostility’ (2.14, NIV). He might have been thinking here of the wall around the Temple in Jerusalem which prevented Gentiles from entering the inner parts of the Temple, but this symbolises a deeper divide of values and lifestyle.

Both groups are ‘reconciled’ to God—but as a result, they have peace both with God and with one another: ‘he put to death their hostility’ (v 16).

How important is peace-making within the life of your congregation?

How does our changed relationship with God affect our relationships with one another in practice?

Have you come across examples of peace with God leading to peace between people who would otherwise be in conflict with one another?

It is clear that this is not incidental to what God has achieved in Christ; Paul claims that God’s whole purpose was to create a ‘new humanity’, with a fresh start, living at peace with one another, and unified.

How far is this goal reflected in your understanding of yourselves as a congregation?

Which of these are you best at: emphasising the ‘new creation’ in Christ (compare 2 Cor 5.17), being unified, or living in peace?

How might this vision shape our relations with Christians from other parts of the world and other cultures?

Reviewing your partnership: how has your partnership contributed to your sense of being a part of this ‘new humanity’ at peace in Christ? Has your relationship mirrored other kinds of global partnership (eg through trade or aid) or has it expressed a different dynamic?

3. Unity and diversity in the people of God (25 mins)

The unity that the gospel creates amongst diverse people is anticipated in the calling of the twelve apostles, and expressed in the leadership of the early church.

Read Matt 10.1–4

Matthew introduces the twelve apostles (the only time he uses this term) in pairs, since they are about to be sent out like this. Five have already been introduced through ‘call’ narratives, but we know little about the others. Andrew and Philip have Greek names, and they and Simon originally came from Bethsaida, to the east of the Jordan and outside Galilee. James and John seem to be local to Capernaum in Galilee, and might have been part of a group who were expecting God’s intervention in history through the promised Messiah. Matthew, as a tax collector, was in effect a collaborator with the Roman occupiers. Simon ‘the zealot’ was probably a member of the revolutionary party wanting to expel the Romans by force. Judas was either one of the most violent

revolutionaries, the ‘dagger men’, or was from Moab in the south—depending on the interpretation of ‘Iscaiot’.

However we read the details, it is clear that this is a very diverse group who would naturally have held sharply contrasting views, socially and theologically.

How does your congregation compare with this in its range of cultures and views?

Why do we find it hard to hold together a range of views within the local congregation?

Read Acts 13.1–3

Antioch (in eastern Turkey) was the first major city outside Judea and Samaria with a Christian congregation, and was the first place where the term ‘Christian’ was used (Acts 11.26). There is no single leader, but a diverse group of five ‘prophets and teachers’. Barnabas was a priestly Jew from Cyprus (Acts 4.36). Simeon was probably a black African. Lucius was a Roman from the north African coast, modern-day Libya. Manaen came from the royal household of Herod Antipas. Saul was a lay Pharisee from southern Turkey prior to his encounter on the Damascus Road.

How diverse ethnically is your congregation? How does it compare with the diversity of your area or city, or with the country as a whole?

How might (does) a global partnership contribute to your sense of diversity?

Read 1 Cor 12.1–7

We might think that the role of the Spirit in forming us together as the body of Christ would be to eliminate or at least reduce the differences amongst us. But in this passage, Paul emphasises two things. First, it is the Spirit who unites us in our faith (and note the early ‘Trinitarian’ shape of vv 4 to 6 ‘Spirit...Lord...God’), and who is at work in every member of the church. But it is also the Spirit who gives different gifts and is at work in people in different ways—notice how the word ‘different’ alternates with ‘same’.

What is demanded of us if we are to make space for these different gifts and ministries within our congregation—what attitudes and ethos will we need to encourage?

The security of common faith is vital in creating space for different ministries. What do we need to do to strengthen that sense of security?

Reviewing your partnership: At what points has your sense of common faith with your global partner been tested? How have you handled that? Have any disagreements that have arisen been due to differences in culture, differences in gifts and ministry, or more fundamental differences in understanding?

4. Partnership (25 mins)

How would you characterise Paul and his ministry—as a team player, or as a stronger and independent leader?

Read Romans 16.1–16

Paul here sends greetings to 25 or more people (depending on how you count them). Much of the debate on this passage has centred on the exact role of Phoebe, who appears to be the person taking this letter to Rome, and possibly therefore its interpreter, and Andronicus and Julia, and whether they were apostles. But note how many times Paul refers to someone as a 'co-worker' or 'friend', or expresses some kind of debt of gratitude.

Who would you include if you were to draw up such a list of people to whom you are indebted for your Christian life and understanding?

Who would you include as a congregation if you were to draw up such a list?

Read 2 Cor 8.8–15

Paul is here discussing the collection he is making to help the congregations in Macedonia. Paul emphasises two key principles: first, that our lives should be modelled on the example of Jesus' generosity to us (v 9); and second, that there might be 'equality' (vv 13, 14). This is a principle that has marked the early church from the beginning (see Acts 2.44–45).

Are there other motives we might have for global partnership? How do Paul's principles challenge these motives?

Western churches are often financially better off than churches elsewhere in the world. But those other churches often seem to have greater confidence and be more effective in their witness.

What might 'equality' look like in relation to these issues within a global partnership?

Read Phil 2.1–5

In this, one of Paul's later letters, he reiterates the theme of unity in the Spirit—'fellowship in the Spirit' v 1, 'like-minded' v 2, and so on.

Are there any 'vain conceits' (v 3) held on to by the Western church?

What does it mean to 'value others above yourselves' in the context of the global church?

In verse 6, Paul talks of Jesus not considering 'equality with God something to be grasped' or 'snatched' or 'held on to' (translations vary).

What would we need to let go of in order to invest in a global partnership?

Reviewing your partnership: Has your global partnership functioned effectively as just that—a partnership? Or has there been a sense of dependence, one way or the other? Have you been able to move towards 'equality' of resources and spiritual energy? Are there things either party needs to let go of in order for the partnership to be more effective?

5. Closing reflection (10 mins)

Review your conversation this evening and the issues that have been raised.

Which areas of reading and discussion have been most familiar to you?

Which of the ideas this evening has been most surprising or striking for you?

How has your understanding of what it means to be 'church' changed?

In what ways might a global partnership enable you to be more truly the body of Christ in your locality?

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