



The Growing Need For Collaboration

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The dramatically changing landscape of world evangelization is forcing new alliances in missions. In the past, since there were relatively few local ministries, missionaries could advance the gospel simply by showing up. Over the past three decades, however, advances by so-called two-thirds world churches and missions have altered the landscape. In the face of extraordinary success by local ministries and increasing challenges to the traditional methods of sending North Americans, many missions have begun to recognize the missing links in their ministry capacity and to seek allies in the global neighborhood of Christians.

Simultaneously, international travel and communications have become more accessible to North Americans, allowing them to bypass traditional missions and engage directly in overseas ministries either through their local church or independently. This forces missions to accommodate direct involvement or lose donors to hands-on ministries. It also creates new demands for collaboration.

In the old pattern of missions, the rule was: Make your plans, send your people, and you will make progress. Send more people and you will make more progress. There were only a few exceptions to this pattern, such as emigrant missionaries and those who supported indigenous missions.

In the past few decades, the old pattern has been broken. Today you can find communities of Christian witness nearly everywhere. And they are growing. Few places remain where North Americans should pioneer a ministry without at least conferring with local Christians and others who are also active in the area.

I certainly am not suggesting that world evangelization is coming to a close or that there is no place for North American missionaries. On the contrary, the task has never been larger or the cost greater than it is today. More than four billion people still do not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Most of them live in nations where Christians are harassed, imprisoned, or even executed because of their faith. Yet in spite of the cost, local Christians are sharing the love of Christ and planting churches with astonishing success, very often in places out of reach to conventional missionary methods. Their courage and sacrifice calls for our partnership, but not necessarily our technology, our methodology, or our wealth. What it calls for, and what two-thirds world Christians ask for, is our personal, passionate involvement as co-workers in the ministry of the gospel.

In this new world, the rule will be: Build alliances, coordinate your strategies, and you will make progress. Focus more on working together and you will make more progress. We have come to that historical moment when, if we are to be for the gospel of Christ, we must also be for each other.

The world is changing in ways that make partnerships virtually essential to world evangelization. Partnerships are simply a better way to do missions.

The Imperatives of Partnership

What does it take to partner effectively in ministry? What can ministry leaders do to create the relationships needed to share the love of Christ in today's increasingly hostile environments? To have productive partnerships, we must have vision, relationship, and results. No one of these can be ignored. Reduce partnership to vision, and it becomes no more than good intentions. Reduce it to relationship, and it becomes fellowship without a purpose. Reduce it to results, and it loses its capacity to remain faithful. Vision, relationship, and results depend on one another for wholeness. They are interwoven in partnership and in ministry at its best.

By *vision*, I mean a compelling view of the future – a picture of what the partnership can achieve. By *relationship*, I mean the way partners feel toward one another – genuine expressions of respect, concern, and trust. By *results*, I mean the things partners get done together – the outcomes of joint effort.



Figure 1. The Imperatives of Partnership

Taken together, the three dimensions provide an overview of the simplest and most fundamental ideas of partnership (as shown in Figure 1). Taken separately, each one adds depth and detail to different aspects of partnering. In all, there are nine parts to the whole picture of partnership, three within each dimension, (as shown in Figure 2).

Building a partnership with this model is somewhat like using a zoom lens on a camera. Vision, relationship, and results are wide-angle views. Each allows you to see the major parts of partnering, but the detail isn't visible. Zooming in on one dimension allows you to see more about each of the major subparts. For example, the close-up view of vision sees shared vision, compatibility, and ground rules. After having considered those subparts and their interrelationships, you can then zoom back to the wide-angle to review the other parts of the entire picture.

Whether you look at partnership through the three wide-angle views or the nine close-up views, each is essential to the effective design and management of a partnership. Think of it as the parts of the human body; at times, some parts require more attention than others, but a lack of attention to any part could prove harmful or even fatal to the whole.

One way to clarify the various parts of partnership and how they interact is illustrated in Figure 2. By asking the key questions of a partnership as if it were currently underway, the interplay of each imperative becomes more evident.

	<u>IMPERATIVE</u>	<u>KEY QUESTION</u>
<u>Vision</u>	Discover Shared Vision	What has God invited you to do together?
	Determine Compatibility	What binds you together? What could tear you apart?
	Set Ground Rules	How will you work together?
<u>Relationship</u>	Appoint Champions	Who is responsible to make it work?
	Understand Cultural Differences	What cultural differences may help or hinder the relationship?
	Build Trust	What gives you confidence in each other?
<u>Results</u>	Measure Results	How will you know if you've helped others as intended?
	Keep Records	How will you keep track of agreements, contributions, and outcomes?
	Learn and Change	How will you handle changes, opportunities, and disappointments?

Figure 2. The Imperatives of Partnership Design

Each imperative is linked to all the others. For example, the vision you share depends in large part on the degree of your shared values and priorities. How you achieve your vision depends in part on how you work together. Creating a climate of trust and understanding depends on the skill and commitment of alliance champions. Achieving the results you promised reinforces trust. Getting the right results, however, depends on the clarity of the vision and the ability to learn and adjust as circumstances and expectations change.

When these imperatives are mutually understood and internally consistent with the aims and priorities of each partner, they can produce a surprisingly strong partnership.

At a deeper level, it is about brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ. Brotherhood in the global neighborhood is a relationship of Christians from different cultures and walks of life that seek to honor their oneness by bearing one another's burdens and joining in the work of the gospel. Such brotherhood is practiced in its highest form in intercultural partnerships. ■

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