

# Global Mission Partnerships: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future

ALAIN EPP WEAVER<sup>1</sup>

What shape will mission partnerships between churches of the Global North and churches of the Global South take in the future? How will those mission partnerships learn from past experiences?

These questions animated a consultation earlier this year organized by the Council of International Anabaptist Ministries (CIM) on “The Mission of God and Global Partnerships.” Held January 9–11, 2018, on the campus of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, the consultation included paper presentations, panels, and workshops from church leaders, mission workers, and mission scholars from Canada, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Mexico, the United States, and Zimbabwe. These presenters were joined by staff from CIM member agencies (such as Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Mission Network, MB Mission, Eastern Mennonite Missions, Virginia Mennonite Missions, and more) in reflecting on the future of global mission partnerships.

The consultation proceeded from the recognition that the demographic center of global Christianity has shifted from the Global North to the Global South, where churches are experiencing rapid growth and are animated by a passionate commitment to sharing the gospel in word and deed with their neighbors near and far. The rise of global Christianity is challenging understandings of mission as being unidirectional (as from North America and Europe to the rest of the world) and as requiring Western finances and status to be successful. New visions of mission have slowly emerged as multidirectional global partnerships of churches (be they from the North or the South) join the work of God’s reconciling Spirit in the world.

Yet churches in the Global North retain significant power, consultation participants acknowledged, both in terms of financial resources and access to other resources (networking, education, training, etc.), and such power imbalances can lead to distorted mission partnerships. In light of these realities, con-

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<sup>1</sup> *Alain Epp Weaver directs strategic planning for Mennonite Central Committee and is the author of Mapping Exile and Return: Palestinian Dispossession and a Political Theology for a Shared Future (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).*

sultation presenters addressed the following questions to examine what makes for robust global partnerships:

- What missiological visions have emerged among Anabaptist churches across Africa, Asia, and Latin America? How do these churches hope to partner with churches in Canada and the United States as they live into these visions?
- What are elements of successful mission partnerships that are marked by mutual transformation, support, and sharing? What element(s) of Anabaptism might aid us in fostering effective and healthy global partnerships? What practical steps can we take to ensure mutuality in mission partnerships when imbalances in access to and control of financial and other resources threaten to undermine such mutuality?
- What lessons can we learn from our past about what hinders and what fosters mutual mission partnerships? What patterns continue today, and how can we avoid colonial patterns of mission?

Throughout the consultation, a listening committee appointed by CIM member agencies sought to identify key learnings from the meetings that should inform the future of global mission partnerships. The committee named the following learnings:

1. Painful legacies of colonialism and racism continue to distort mission partnerships between churches in the Global North (including Canada and the United States) and churches in the Global South. We cannot ignore these legacies and must continue to grapple with them.
2. Strong mission partnerships are rooted in Scripture, in Jesus's example of servanthood, and in grateful response to God's gift of grace; strong mission partnerships are sustained by prayer and fasting.
3. Contribution of various types of resources is a sign of ownership of the partnership and its vision. Giving is a privilege. In authentic partnerships, we challenge one another to give in gratitude.
4. Time is needed for building strong mission partnerships; this comes into tension with pressures for "efficiency" or for immediate action.
5. We should not ignore or deny power imbalances, but rather be open and transparent about the types of power different parties to a partnership have. It is important to recognize different types of resources, strengths, and sources of power. At the same time, we dare not be naïve about the power money brings with it, and we must discern on an ongoing basis how money can both support and distort mission partnerships.

6. We have questions about whether or not “partnership” is the right word for what we seek. Do words like “communion” or “fellowship” perhaps better reflect the mission relationships we hope for?
7. Authentic mission partnerships are not top-down; they emerge “from below,” from a posture of humility and service.
8. Strong mission partnerships emerge when we build on relationships and histories of trust.
9. Strong mission partnerships emerge when we undertake new initiatives that have joint ownership (not just buy-in).
10. North American Anabaptist mission agencies must consider ways they can deliberately cede power and control in mission partnerships.
11. CIM leadership should strongly consider ways of formalizing regular participation of church leaders from the Global South (e.g., from Mennonite World Conference) in CIM meetings in a way that is not simply a token presence but that brings those leaders together with CIM members for prayer, discernment, and reflection.

CIM member agencies, like other mission agencies of the Global North, have undeniably fallen short time and again of an ideal of global mission partnerships marked by equality, mutual accountability, and support. Nevertheless, by God’s grace, mutuality in global mission partnerships has broken into the midst of colonial legacies and ongoing imbalances of power. May CIM member agencies continue to confront how legacies of colonialism and racism have distorted global mission partnerships, and seek true mutuality in those partnerships.