

Conférence Episcopale d’Haïti

PARTNERS IN MISSION GUIDELINES FOR SOLIDARITY AND “TWINNING” RELATIONSHIPS¹

INTRODUCTION

The Church in Haiti has a long tradition of mission solidarity with many parts of the Church around the world. This solidarity is seen in many ways and accounts for the ties of friendship that span the globe and demonstrate the character of true charity described by Pope Benedict XVI in the encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*: charity is a “gift, acceptance and communion.”²

Such generosity was seen in the tremendous outpouring of love and support following the earthquake that struck Haiti on January, 12, 2010. Many of these mission relationships are long standing partnerships and have contributed greatly to the infrastructure of the Church in Haiti, as well as the creation and support of Catholic schools, Catholic healthcare institutions, and other Catholic social service agencies throughout the country. The global Catholic community’s longstanding companionship with the Church in Haiti continues to impact millions of children who now have the opportunity to go to school, countless individuals and families who now have access to medical care and safe water, and millions of parishioners who benefit from parish community centers.

In the aftermath of the earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas, and placed enormous stress on outlying areas that welcomed those who fled the earthquake zone, the bishops in Haiti are urging all Church partners to renew their commitment to Haiti. To help in the process, the bishops have developed a set of guiding principles contained in this document aimed at promoting ecclesial communion. It is our hope that this moment of trial represents an opportunity for all those who care for Haiti and its people to embrace a vision for global solidarity, partnership and respect that reflects the Gospel call to fraternity, to be in communion with our brothers and sisters around the world, especially those who are most in need of care.

The following guiding principles have been drawn from the experiences of partnership relationships in Haiti and elsewhere as well as a comprehensive study of such relationships that was undertaken by the U.S. Catholic Mission Association.³ They proceed from the reality of the local Church in Haiti and the primary responsibility of each local bishop for pastoral activity in his diocese. They acknowledge that like all relationships, there are ups and downs, moments of strength and weakness, moments of collaboration and misunderstanding. They are offered as guidance for those involved in partnership relationships between the Church in Haiti and the

¹ These guidelines recognize the various ways in which solidarity is expressed between Church units e.g. parishes, dioceses etc. They include sister parish, twinning and partnering. While recognizing the use of these difference terms, these guidelines prefer to refer to such relationships as “partnering for mission.”

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 3.

³ Partnering Relationships for Mission: An Inquiry and Overview of Diocesan and Parish Twinning. 2004, U.S. Catholic Mission Association.

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Church in other parts of the world. While developed in the context of the post-earthquake reality in Haiti, they can equally be applied to all efforts at ecclesial partnerships in whatever part of the Church.

1. Emphasize relationships as well as resources

A true partnership implies the building and nurturing of a relationship over a period of time that transcends one act of working together (such as a project), or of sending a series of checks. If the partnership is based solely on resources, then the partner with few material resources is excluded from full and mutual participation. When the relationship itself is highly valued, it allows for mutual participation and transformation, and all are invited to participate equally, as we all have the ability to love and pray and be present to one another. Partners learn from one another. It is important that adequate planning, including a timeline of activities and/or visits, be undertaken before a partnership is entered into and that an agreement be drafted and agreed upon by the local bishop. Indeed, as *Ecclesia in America* teaches:

The Bishops, whose duty it is to promote communion among the particular Churches, should encourage the faithful to live this communion more and more, and to assume the “responsibility of developing bonds of communion with the local Churches in other areas of America through education, the exchange of information, fraternal ties between parishes and dioceses, and projects involving cooperation and joint intervention in questions of greater importance, especially those affecting the poor.”⁴

2. Ensure coherence with the pastoral plan for the Local Church

The tragedy of the earthquake can be turned into an opportunity for the Haitian Church and her global partners to provide leadership for the Haitian reconstruction process by offering a model of coordinated, high quality rebuilding. This will require communication and coordination among all Church actors. The Haitian bishops, in cooperation with representatives of the Church from around the world, are establishing an architectural and engineering unit within the Bishops’ Conference called PROCHE. This initiative is designed to provide a contact point for all Church-related reconstruction projects so that an overview of all projects can be maintained and priorities can be set for larger projects. The organization will operate under the leadership of the bishops of Haiti and will be staffed with certified architects, engineers, and consultant to facilitate Church building projects that meet earthquake- and hurricane-resistant construction standards and appropriate building codes. It will also involve pastoral ministers, social workers, local professionals and community representatives to promote participation by the communities



Benjamin Depp for CRS.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 37.

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being served. *As leaders of the Church in Haiti and other parts of the world, we are requesting that all stakeholders channel their assistance through PROCHE, which will ensure safety and quality by providing a technical and budgetary review of proposed construction projects and by endorsing those projects that are in full compliance with standard and codes, that are fiscally sound and that respect pastoral objectives and methods and promote integral community development. PROCHE will also support information-sharing and coordination among all stakeholders.*

3. Respect Local Church Organization and Planning

The Church’s efforts to rebuild its own structures and programs, and its support for broader reconstruction in Haiti, will be more effective if there is more cooperation and less fragmentation among Church organizations and programs. Parishes and other groups in Haiti and around the world that are engaged in partnering relationships are urged to keep their local bishops informed about these initiatives. No building activity should be undertaken by Church partners in Haiti without the approval of the local bishop and, if applicable, the religious superior.

4. Practice mutuality and equality

Ongoing and mutual giving and receiving, learning and teaching are essential for global solidarity partnerships. True mutuality allows each of the partners to function from a place of strength. Each must acknowledge the valued role of the other. It is important to intentionally incorporate opportunities for ongoing dialogue, planning, assessing, challenging, and reflecting together. Indeed, solidarity partnering is a form of mission that has been long recognized by the Church.⁵ As a form of mission of the local Church in both countries, such partnerships should come under the supervision and organization of the diocesan mission office or other appropriate diocesan body.

5. Support responsible local leadership

The true measure of success of any global solidarity partnership is not how many wells were dug or clinics held, but whether the capacity of the local community to lead its own development is strengthened. The goal of any partnership should lead to sustainable development, according to needs of the local Church, and should be designed to reduce the need for outside help. How is Haitian leadership being respected and promoted from the beginning of any initiative? Are skills being developed that would allow Haitians to manage similar projects in the future? Is local decision-making and leadership being supported?



David Snyder for CRS.

⁵ The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. (1999). *Cooperatio Missionalis*: Instruction on Missionary Cooperation, n. 18.

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6. Promote transparency and accountability

Implicit in these principles is the expectation that leaders of both partners will carry out their roles in an honest, transparent and responsible way. Transparency and accountability are essential for strong global partnership relationships. All partnerships should be characterized by open sharing of information so that mutual trust can be developed. Funds provided to Church partners in Haiti should be used in a manner consistent with donor intent and should be reported both to the local mission office or diocesan authority in the sending country as well as the local bishop in Haiti. The results of the project should also be reported to the donors. It is our strong desire that a monthly report on building projects funded by Church entities from around the world be drafted and made available on the appropriate website.

7. Work to promote greater justice and peace

Global solidarity partnerships can provide the experience and the understanding of the challenges facing Haiti to enable those in Haiti to participate in their own country’s decision-making, and to enable those in other parts of the world to participate in donor government policy-making in ways that promote the best interests of the people of Haiti and meet their needs most effectively. Participation in efforts to promote more just policies is a valuable dimension of the partnership experience. All of these activities should be undertaken in consultation and collaboration with Haitian and should promote integral human development for Haitians.

CONCLUSION

Global solidarity partnerships are a vital expression of the Church’s call to be missionary. Indeed, mission is not the sole preserve of religious or priests or the consecrated laity but should be the concern of every Catholic since it goes to the heart of what it means to be Church. As Pope John Paul II taught us in *Redemptoris Missio*, “Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and mission.”⁶ The experiences associated with these missionary partnerships give new meaning to the Gospel call to evangelize and to be evangelized in return. They reflect the reality of Christian love that transcends borders and cultures making us truly one. They reveal new ways of understanding the Scriptures and provide new models of being a Catholic believing community, whether school, college, university or medical facility. Through our fellowship, we are followers of Christ as his missionaries and disciples, called to take up his cross daily as we wait in joyful hope for our Savior’s coming when “God will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 90