Title:

Emerging Dimensions of Mission in a Global Body: Tracking and Evaluating Partnerships between American Congregations and their Global Counterparts

Abstract:

Many churches are now directly engaging in global ministry by fostering a long-term partnering relationship with a congregation in a different part of the world. These international congregational partnerships (ICPs) have many different names (partnerships, parish twinning, sister-churches). But they share the common characteristic of multiple, short-term flows of people and resources over a sustained period of many years. Much research has already been aimed at discovering if these sustained exchanges will increase the positive impact that congregationally based global ministry has on their host organizations and their wider communities, while minimizing their negative potential. This dissertation examines the spread of this approach to global ministry among American churches, identifying the key factors that influence the development of ICPs. It also constructs a consensus on the theological, conceptual, and operational dimensions of partnership from the existing literature. Then it seeks to discover whether ICPs between US churches and their global partners actually embody the consensus model in practice. And it explores how differences in belief, thought, and practice concerning partnership impact the overall health of international relationships between local congregations.

Emerging Dimensions of Mission in a Global Body:

Tracking and Evaluating Partnerships between American Congregations and their Global Counterparts

A Dissertation

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For My Parents, Bill and Cindy,
Who taught me the value of an education
and made me all I am;

For LPB,
Who set my feet on the path of a Missiologist
and showed me what to become;

And most of all for Lisa,
Who walked every step of this journey with me
though neither of us knew the way,
I am forever glad of the company;

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

It is a pretty simple concept. At least I thought it was. A local congregation, seeking to expand its global outreach, enters into a long-term relationship with a church in another part of the world. This relationship becomes a conduit for exchanging resources, ideas, and teams of people with the purpose of accomplishing something together that contributes to what God is doing in the world. We might call it a "partnership;" or maybe something else. "Adoption" sounds a little too paternalistic. "Sister-church" or "twin" sounds more like it. Whatever we call it, it sounds exactly like what we were looking for. And how hard can it be? After all, we are already brothers and sisters in Christ. It turns out, living like siblings with Christians half a world away is pretty difficult. There has to be a way to do this well.

The days of my sojourn in the field of International Congregational Partnership (ICP) began well before my seminary education when, as an associate pastor at a small church in northern Indiana, I became convinced that this model was the key I had been looking for. The church wanted to start sending yearly short-term trips and I was trying to find a way to make global engagement a more integral part of our weekly congregational life. And it seemed to me that developing relationships with sister churches would allow us to anchor our practice of short-term mission in a single context, allowing us to have increased impact over time. And it would do so in a way that invited us to a more robust engagement as a congregation in God's global mission. I even worked with some missionary contacts to develop a pilot program that would help multiple congregations in our denomination form similar global partnerships. I will not narrate all of my adventures in partnership here. Suffice it to say that my efforts yielded results that ranged somewhere between halting progress and dismal failure. But I was firmly convinced that the problems I faced were failures of execution, not shortcomings of the sister church model itself.

Shortly after this foray into partnership, I found myself pursuing graduate and postgraduate studies. So, when it came time to decide on a direction for academic research, it was a fairly simple

choice. I needed to know why some partnerships flourish while others flounder, and how those

successful partnerships manage to miss all the pitfalls I had encountered. I found that I was not alone. I

encountered hundreds of academics and practitioners who were asking similar questions. Some of them

had experienced the success in mission partnerships that I was seeking. Many of them had the courage

and humility to open up about their experiences of failure (which I could certainly identify with). Most

were suspended somewhere in between, trying to figure out if things were going well or poorly, and

unsure of how to tell the difference.

       A question had taken shape in my mind.

       "Are there patterns of belief, thinking, and behavior concerning partnership that

       lead to healthier international congregational partnerships?"

This is the question that my dissertation will seek to answer. The purpose and significance of this

question should be readily apparent. ICPs are an important and growing part of congregational life in

America.[1] But many congregational leaders feel under-prepared and under-resourced to create and

sustain an international partnership.[2] There are plenty of training materials and how-to books that claim

to have the secrets of a good partnership. But few of these materials are able to back up their claims of

what makes a good partnership with academically rigorously data. Those that do, offer a never-ending

stream of models and suggestions (sometimes converging, sometimes diverging). In the field of mission

partnerships, what congregational leaders lack most is clarity. And that is the very thing they need if

they hope to navigate the many hazards of intercultural partnership successfully.

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[1] Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 19–20, 90–93; Robert Priest, Douglas Wilson, and Adelle Johnson, "US Megachurches and New Patterns of Global Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 2 (April 2010): 97–104. Wuthnow notes the proliferation of congregational partnerships as a major factor in the global engagement of US congregations. Priest et all found that a full 85% of US megachurches have at least one ICP. In chapter 4 I will offer evidence that about half of all US churches have some kind of partnership, and nearly 20% of all US churches are involved in ICPs.

[2] My own research has revealed a real hunger among mission pastors and lay leaders involved in ICPs to know if they are "doing it right," or how they can do better.

My hope with this dissertation is to give congregational leaders who are participating in this exciting mode of missional engagement a clear pattern for partnership; one they can feel confident in. This project is only a preliminary step in that direction but, with continued research and refinement, it promises to create a model for ICPs that combines the practical, theoretical, and theological considerations that healthy ICPs have in common. In order to do that, I will have first have to establish which ICPs have the healthiest partnerships. Then I will have to note the practices, ideas, and beliefs about partnership that inform their approaches and see if there is a recurring pattern among the healthiest partners.

I will begin this process in Chapter 2 by surveying the missiological literature on partnership. This chapter will present an overview of current ideas about mission partnerships and narrate how those ideas developed. I will then argue that the findings of the last century of studying of partnership converge on 25 key points, which constitute an emerging consensus on partnership. I will also establish the need for a large-scale study of American congregations and their majority-world congregation partners in order to determine (1) to what degree the emerging consensus on partnership is being expressed in real-world partnerships and (2) whether those 25 key points actually have the kind of impact the literature suggests.

In Chapter 3 I will outline the methods I used to create and deploy such a study. I will sketch some important conceptual developments in the study of complex social systems and the importance of these developments for the complexities of ICPs. Then I will relate how I implemented the Global Congregational Survey (GCS), the first large-scale survey of US churches and their global partners to use statistical analysis to create a detailed picture of the practices (and outcomes) of ICPs.

Chapters 4 through 8 will contain the findings of the GCS. Chapter 4 will summarize the practice of partnership among American congregations. It will locate ICP as one mode among many in the different scopes and scales of global engagement exercised by US churches. Demographic information

like the size of the congregation, its denominational affiliation, its location in the United States, and whether it is part of an urban or rural community will be used to construct a profile of the kind of church that is most likely to take part in an ICP.

Chapter 5 will evaluate the overall health of the partnerships surveyed by the GCS. It will measure how well each partnership is doing in three important domains: performative (the partnership accomplishes what it sets out to), affective (both partners have a favorable experience of the relationship), and transformative (the partnership positively influences the kind of church each partner is becoming). This chapter will provide the interpretive key for the chapters that follow. The answer to the research question will be determined by relating issues of belief, thinking, and behavior operating in each ICP to how healthy that partnership was determined to be.

Chapter 6 will explore the theological dimensions of partnership expressed by US churches and their global partners. Partnership is not only a social phenomenon, or a set of practices (though these are important parts of mission partnership, to be sure). It also has deep theological significance. The theological themes and biblical pericopes employed by a given partnership show significant correlation to what kind of outcomes that partnership will likely experience.

Chapter 7 will develop an understanding of the conceptual frameworks used by the ICPs studied by the GCS. The defining concepts of what a partnership is will be probed, as will the ways those concepts impact and reinforce each other. Conceptual frameworks are more than just the sum of their constituent parts and the patterns illuminated by the GCS show that certain combinations of ideas can have a powerful effect on the health of an emerging partnership.

Chapter 8 will account for the structures and practices implemented by American churches and their global counterparts in the pursuit of partnership. The current literature on partnership contains a wealth of practical advice for churches involved in ICPs. In this chapter I will unpack 17 suggestions for how to go about partnering to see if they are all as essential as the literature seems to suggest.

Finally, in Chapter 9, I will summarize the patterns of belief, thinking, and practice that led to better outcomes for the churches represented in the GCS. The crucial elements of each chapter will be combined to present a fully orbed picture of partnerships that are flourishing. The theological, conceptual, and operational dimensions of those partnerships will be fleshed out as a proposal for what an ICP can and should look like. Then I will conclude by suggesting possible directions the discussion on ICPs might take in the future.

Before I conclude this introduction, I want to note the scope and delimitations of my study. I want to be clear about what I mean by "Christian congregation," "mission partnership," and "international congregational partnership." This dissertation is concerned with how ICPs are practiced among Christian congregations. In this definition I include any Christian congregation that is made up predominantly of laypersons and which holds to the doctrine of the Trinity and an orthodox Christology.[3] Congregations that are made up entirely of members of a religious order are not included in this study.[4] Neither are Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter Day Saints, and Unitarian congregations.

I also want to be explicit about my use of the language of partnership. Too often this term has been left poorly defined, contributing to a significant problem for the study of partnership. Anyone familiar with a missionally engaged organization (be it a church, or a parachurch agency, or even institutions of higher learning) has probably heard talk about that organization's "partners" or how their new "partnership initiative" is going. But the more one listens, the more one realizes that they are all talking about fundamentally different relationships. An issue that has plagued mission partnership from the beginning is the lack of a clear and commonly held definition of "partnership."[5] An incredible variety

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[3] For a definition of consensual orthodoxy and a defense of it as a mark of Christian community see Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), 170–74.
[4] Though they certainly merit close examination as brokers of transnational flows of goods, ideas, and people. An excellent recent example can be found in Casey Ritchie Clevenger, *Unequal Partners: In Search of Transnational Catholic Sisterhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).
[5] This case is made brilliantly in Jonathan Barnes, *Power and Partnership* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 416–18.

of missionally engaged organizations are pursuing partnerships; and because they often fail to define what they mean by "partnership" (or they define it in different ways) the current landscape of mission partnership defies any attempt at summarization. The result is a multitude of approaches to partnership, each implementing its own model based on the exigencies of each particular relationship. This ill-defined landscape makes it very difficult to speak meaningfully about mission partnerships since, to borrow a phrase from Stephen Neill:[6] if everything that a missionally engaged organization does is "partnership," nothing is "partnership."

The types of mission partnerships that appear in contemporary practice are difficult to enumerate. A representative, though not comprehensive, list of the kinds of partnership dealt with in the missiological literature can be found in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

Congregation<->Congregation	Congregation<->School	Congregation<->Denomination
Congregation<->Sending Agency	Congregation<->Training Org.	Agency<->Denomination
Congregation<->Development Agency	Agency<->School/Seminary	Congregation<->National Pastor
Agency<->Agency	Congregation<->Missionary	Agency<->National Pastor

Adding to this already incomprehensible complexity; the scale of the organizations within each category varies quite widely, from small churches of only a few dozen people to enormous multi-national corporations. Naturally, the models of mission partnership that are appropriate to one type and scale would not necessarily be helpful to a different type or on a different scale.[7]

One does not have to reflect very long to realize that the problem of imprecise definition still very much plagues the concept of partnership in mission. The treatment that partnership receives in Stan Guthrie's summative work on contemporary missiology perfectly illustrates the problem of

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[6] Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension: The Duff Lectures* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1959), 81.
[7] An excellent discussion of this dynamic can be found in Phill Butler, *Well Connected: Releasing Power, Restoring Hope through Kingdom Partnerships* (Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic, 2006), 239–57.

definition.[8] Guthrie affirms partnership as a defining feature of missionary strategy in the 21st century. But when he ventures a typology of partnership, he attempts to include every type, every model, and every scale that is currently being implemented. The resulting definition of mission partnership is so broad that it encompasses literally anything a missionally engaged organization of any kind does with someone who can be construed as "other." Locating a given "partnership" within this complex matrix of types is exhausting and it makes it very difficult to have a meaningful discussion of what a partnership is and how it should be carried out. Additionally, as Johnathan Barnes notes, the increasing divergence of various understandings of partnership has led many to simply abandon the paradigm altogether.[9]

I do not wish to go that far, but I do want to be very clear about my working definitions. When, in this dissertation, I refer to "mission partnerships" I am referring to the broadly construed definition described in the immediately preceding paragraph. That is, I mean the full range of cooperative action that is taken by any actor on the missiological stage. However, when I refer to "international congregational partnerships," I mean a long-term relationship directed toward co-operative action between a local congregation in the United States and another local congregation in a different country. These relationships are also referred to as "ICPs," "twins," and "sister-churches." But in each case, the more limited scope and scale of partnership is in view.

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[8] Stan Guthrie and Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions in the Third Millennium: 21 Key Trends for the 21st Century* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2002), 115–25.
[9] Barnes, *Power and Partnership*, 2013, 418.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

I am far from the first person to seize upon the occasion of a dissertation to explore the

intricacies of international congregational partnerships (ICPs). For over a century, missiologists have

looked intently at the dynamics of collaborative ministry on a global scale, examining all kinds of

different institutional partnerships, seeking some insight into what it means to be partners in mission.

And they have produced a very large, and growing, body of literature on the subject. The main question

of my study is whether there are patterns of belief, thinking, and behavior concerning partnership that

lead to healthier partnerships. That question has arisen in my mind after many years of considering this

literature. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to learn from those who have walked this path

before me. Beyond the typical purpose of locating my study in the current literature, my intention in this

chapter is twofold. First, I want to use the insights of prior studies of mission partnership to construct

the theoretical framework which I will use to analyze the data in chapters 4-8. Second, rather than

simply rehashing the methodological approaches that have already been masterfully applied by so

many, I would like to find gaps in the current literature that might suggest a new approach to the study

of mission partnership; one that can carry the body of literature forward to new possibilities. To

accomplish this, I will first survey the ever-expanding missiological literature dealing with partnership.[10] I

will then construct a theoretical framework for my dissertation using the existing literature's greatest

strength: the establishment of a consensus view on what a mission partnership ought to be. Finally, I will

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[10] It should be noted here that I will be dealing with several different scales and institutional types of partnership in this review, not just ICPs. My intention is not to ignore the idiosyncrasies of different types of partnership but rather to seek insights from studies of every type of partnership that might inform partnership between congregations. Additionally, I will mention that, of the dissertations published on the subject of mission partnership since 2005, seven deal exclusively with ICPs. An additional six dissertations deal with partnerships between congregations and other kinds of organizations. And only three address partnerships that do not specifically include a congregation in their study.

present this dissertation as a response to what I see as the main limitation of the current literature: the methodological constraints of qualitative research.

Survey of the Literature on Partnership in Mission

Plenty of ink has been spilled by missiologists wrestling with notions of what partnership is, how it relates to mission, and how it should be practiced. One of the most obvious insights from this effort is how uneven the development of the body of literature has been over time. What began as a slow trickle of lectures and articles (with occasionally longer publications interspersed) at the turn of the 20th century increased to a steady stream during the 1990s. And, since the coming of the 21st century, partnership has exploded onto the missiological scene. In this section I will provide a brief overview of how the literature on partnership has developed over the last 110 years, though periods of Foundation (1910-1989), Expansion (1990-2000), and Explosion (2001-Present). The first period was marked by the slow, incremental development of an idea. The second period (fueled by multiple societal factors) saw a rapid acceleration in missiological interest in partnership. This swelled into an eruption of literature aimed at both scholars and practitioners in the third period. Lately, there has been a slight decrease in the rate of new publications on partnership as well as a more circumspect tonal shift that seeks to impose some order on a sometimes chaotic body of literature.

Foundation: 1910-1989

The roots of the current missiological discussion on partnership can be traced to the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. It may well be that partnership as a missionary phenomenon predates the Edinburgh Conference. Some trace partnership's place in missionary practice to the international networks created by the Student Volunteer Movement of the late 19th century[11] or even to

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[11] Dana Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 53–60.

the foundations of the modern missionary movement.[12] Others have suggested that partnership is as

ancient as the Christian missionary endeavor itself.[13] Meanwhile, recent attempts to locate partnership

theologically in the Immanent Trinity imply that missionary partnership is an idea that predates space

and time.[14] But the antiquity of the phenomenon is not really in question here. The primary concern of

this chapter is the development of the notion of partnership in the missiological literature, and

partnership did not enter significantly into that literature until 1910. The terminology employed by the

report of the Committee on Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity at the Edinburgh Conference is

basically unrecognizable to the current state of the discussion. However, there are several key factors in

this report which set the trajectory for more than a century of partnering, for better and for worse. The

report signified a real commitment among missionaries to identify with one another as fellow workers,

although it largely saw co-operation in mission as something pursued between missions rather than

between the churches sending missionaries and those to whom they were sent.[15] In the commission's

eyes, "fellow workers" meant "fellow westerners." The report also focused its attention entirely on the

practical reasons for partnership, leaving a vacuum for theological legitimation that would take decades

to fill. However, it is remarkable for its confession that the practice of comity was insufficient on its own,

and that true cooperation required a more comprehensive approach to mission.

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[12] An excellent recent dissertation reexamines William Carey's missionary enterprise as an exercise in partnership. Andrew D. McFarland, "William Carey's Expectation for Missionary Cooperation: An Inquiry into the Significance of Interdependence in the Missionary Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts of the First Baptist Mission in India" (PhD diss., Wilmore, KY, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2020). McFarland convincingly argues that, while the language is quite different from modern articulations of partnership, the practice of cooperative ministry (even as it is understood today) was clearly a central part of the Baptist Missionary Society's work in Serampore.

[13] Shant Henry Manuel, "Partnership in Mission" (DMin diss., Wolfville, NS, Acadia University (Canada), 2001); Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2004); Michael L. Sweeney, "The Pauline Collection, Church Partnerships, and the Mission of the Church in the 21st Century," *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 2 (April 2020): 142–53. All three authors trace modern notions of partnership in mission to Paul's collection and his missionary band as early examples of churches working synergistically in mission.

[14] An exemplary case can be found in Archbishop of Tirana and all Albania Anastasios, *Mission in Christ's Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010).

[15] Andrew H L Fraser, *Report of Commission VIII: Co-Operation and the Promotion of Unity* (New York: Fleming H Revell, 1910).

The discussion of partnership took a quantum leap forward at the 1928 Jerusalem International Missionary Council. This council's Committee on Cooperation laid out a much more comprehensive rationale for partnering in mission; including the enrichment of the entire body of Christ, the removal of stumbling blocks to the gospel, and the need for diversity in the church in order to fully express the Glory of God.[16] Unfortunately, while the major concern of the council was breaking down the distinction between older and younger churches, the committee failed to produce much change in missionary practice. Participants from majority-world churches were invited to speak, but western churches and missions agencies were unwilling or unable to share any real decision-making power.[17]

The next major contribution to the nascent missiological partnership literature was John Mott's *Cooperation and the World* Mission.[18] Originally published in 1935, this work lays out a framework for partnership that sounds remarkably like contemporary treatments of the issue. Decades ahead of his time, Mott's work truly set the stage for the missiological community to wrestle with what cooperative mission means and how it should be practiced. Mott introduced a number of maxims that have become axiomatic in partnership studies. He argued that partnership can only thrive where there is engaged leadership with personal connection to the work. It requires careful planning and probably more time than most are comfortable giving it. It needs to flow from a vision that is central to each organization. Willingness to suffer and the ability to see conflict as an opportunity to grow together are keys to sustaining a partnership. Additionally, healthy and sustainable partnerships must attempt things which could not be achieved by either party on their own. And they require unity that does not erase

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[16] Jerusalem Commission VII, *International Missionary Cooperation* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1928).
[17] Barnes, *Power and Partnership*, 2013, 170–82.
[18] John R. Mott, *Cooperation and The World Mission* (Concord, NH: Rumford Press, 1935).

uniqueness.[19] Still, while this book set the stage for missiological reflection on the phenomenon of partnership, the practice of missionary partnership had not yet come into its own.

The IMC meeting at Whitby in 1947 was the coming of age of partnership as a theory, as documented in Kenneth Scott LaTourette and William Richie Hogg's report from the general meeting.[20] There had been some advances made at the Jerusalem meeting in shifting the basic concept of partnership[21] from one of cooperation among missionaries to one of partnership between missionaries and their sending churches. Whitby's theme of "partnership in obedience" solidified this definitional shift. But it stopped short of extending the definition of partnership to cooperation between "sending" and "receiving" churches. Still, while the council stopped short of abandoning uni-directional models of mission, for the first time such models were acknowledged as practically and theologically untenable. The vision for including majority-world churches as fully vested members of decision-making and agenda-setting bodies was begun at Whitby, though in practice it quickly stalled. The failure of partnership in the wake of Whitby was not a failure of rhetoric but of implementation. In some ways the rhetoric of partnership has remained largely unchanged since 1947, however true partnership has remained elusive in practice. Something was still missing.

One thing that was lacking was a theological grounding for partnership, and a concurrent understanding of the relationship of partnership to mission. As Colin Marsh points out, the emergence of the Missio Dei paradigm in the 1950's was a tremendous boon to theories of partnership in mission in

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[19] Mott, 23–44. Many of the studies published in the last decade are essentially recapitulations of Mott's findings, albeit with more rigorous evidence for their conclusions. Given Mott's significant involvement in the Jerusalem Council, it seems it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of Mott's influence in forming the early discussion on partnership.

[20] Kenneth Scott LaTourette and William Richie Hogg, *Tomorrow Is Here: The Mission and Work of the Church as Seen from the Meeting of The International Missionary Council at Whitby, Ontario, July 5-24, 1947* (New York: Friendship Press, 1948).

[21] It is worth noting that Whitby was also where the shift in terminology from "missionary cooperation" to "missionary partnership" was decisively implemented.

both respects.[22] The implications of placing mission within the cooperative life and action of the Trinity were realized fairly quickly. As mission came to be understood in missiological circles as something the Godhead partners in and invites all churches everywhere to join him in, partnership slid from the theological periphery to the generative center of mission. But even with this powerful new theological legitimation, partnership remained an elusive goal; leaving many to muse, as Max Warren did, that partnership was "an idea whose time had not yet fully come."[23] The 1960's and 70's saw a rise in "partnership" language in missiological circles, especially in the World Council of Churches (WCC). But that was soon followed by disillusionment as in many cases "partner" became just another word for "patron" or "parent."[24] Theologizing was not enough to sustain a theory of partnership through the rigors of implementation in a complex world, something else was still needed. The foundations of practical and theological necessity had been laid, as had the basic concepts and practices that have come to define contemporary missiological understandings of partnership. The last piece of the puzzle, a shift in the attitudes and postures that partners to take toward one another, was primed to slip into place.

This shift came at the end of the 1970's as a call to take friendship and mutuality in partnership seriously.[25] The call went out in response to the widening gap between rhetoric and practice where mission partnerships were concerned. Several authors, embracing the vision for partnership laid out over the last 40 years but decrying its poor implementation, began to call for a new mode of relating among the churches of the world. This new wave of partnership studies called for partnership to be

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[22] Colin Marsh, "Partnership in Mission: To Send or to Share," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 366 (July 2003): 370–71.

[23] Max Warren, *Partnership: The Study of an Idea* (London: SCM, 1956), 11.

[24] Barnes, *Power and Partnership*, 2013, 356–59.

[25] See Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, 51–56. Robert notes that the call for "friends" was made by Indian Bishop V.S. Azariah back at the Edinburgh Conference in 1910. While the request had a tremendous emotional impact on the hearers, the efficacy of the call was blunted by intransigence toward revising existing power structures. As the title of Jonathan Barnes' book suggests, the distribution of power in a partnering relationship is so significant an issue that no amount of rhetoric is able to obscure it. It has to be addressed explicitly.

realized within a framework of mutuality and interdependence. David Vikner,[26] writing as a dissenter

from the call for moratorium in his day, advocated for a new mode of relationship among churches of

the world which dignified the paternal models of the past as necessary steps in developing mutuality.

Problematic glorification of the past aside, he was one of the first voices to call for a marked

transformation of the status-quo. Interestingly, Ogbu Kalu was actually a supporter of moratorium, yet

he came to a position on partnership remarkably similar to Vikner's.[27] Using the biblical image of the

Body of Christ, Kalu made several points that set the stage for true mutuality in partnership. Affirming

the calling, giftedness, and togetherness of the entire body is crucial to mission in a global era. Kalu saw

moratorium not as a repudiation of mission, but as a call to reevaluate the relationships among

churches around the world. The kinds of partnerships that arise from Kalu's vision are not cast in the

parent-child mold, but are true fellowships of equals. Likewise, David Bosch sought to assist mission

partnership in surviving its own implementation.[28] Bosch argued that, broadly speaking, mission

partners had yet to find a way to relate to one another that did not have a dehumanizing effect. The

proper relational paradigm for partnership, he argued, is not parent-child but brothers and sisters, not

missionaries-recipients but friends. Bosch is unique among authors calling for such a shift in that he

offers clear, practical steps by which to implement such a change. He noted that mutuality requires an

acknowledgement of and appreciation for what can be given and received by both parties. Mutuality is

not about merely reciprocating in kind. It requires reliance on one another to meet our needs. A shift in

paradigm from parent-child relationship to sibling relationship driven by reciprocal reliance, by true

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[26] David L. Vikner, "The Era of Interdependence," *Missiology: An International Review* 2, no. 4 (October 1, 1974): 475–88.

[27] Ogbu U. Kalu, "Not Just New Relationships but a Renewed Body," *International Review of Mission* 64, no. 254 (April 1, 1975): 143–47.

[28] David Bosch, "Towards True Mutuality: Exchanging the Same Commodities or Supplementing Each Others' Needs?," *Missiology: An International Review* 6, no. 3 (July 1, 1978): 283–96.

mutuality, is what had been missing from the initial, furtive, forays into the world of mission

partnerships.

This slow ferment of missiological ruminations on partnership throughout the majority of the

20th century produced a shared foundational concept of mission that sought to move beyond uni-

directional flows and frame mission as a fundamentally cooperative act. It also called out for a

transformed sense of belonging among the churches of the world, one that placed all churches on an

equal footing with regard to status. It sought to locate partnership in the theological and missiological

center, as an act of the Triune God on mission. And it attested to the need for genuine mutuality. Not

simply the abandonment of dependent and paternalistic relationships, but the establishment of

interdependence and a sibling relationship among churches around the world. The full implications of

these foundations were still being teased out as the 1990's rolled around. But the stage had been set for

the propagation of the partnership paradigm in missiology.

Expansion: 1990-2000

While Johnathan Barnes rightly points out that the WCC had cooled significantly on the idea of

partnership by the end of the 20th century;[29] the amount of missiological literature dealing with

partnership started to rapidly accelerate. This might be due to the rapid proliferation of the mission

partnership discussion among evangelical missiologists.[30] There is certainly an element of this

explanation at work. The vast majority of the works published in the 90's were written from an

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[29] Barnes, *Power and Partnership*, 2013, 402–4.

[30] For an excellent summary of the development of partnership as part of a constellation of ideas that impacted evangelical missiology in the late 1900's see: Al Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 21–97. Tizon points out that partnership was largely missing from early discussions in evangelical missiology. But it came on strong in the 90's. He notes that evangelicals were heavily influenced by the WCC's discussions of partnership thanks to the participation of INFEMIT members in both missiological bodies. These missiological bridge-builders sought to fulfill the promise of partnership without getting bogged down by the same setbacks elaborated by Barnes. By the time of the Cape Town Commitment two years after Tizon's book, partnership had become a significant part of an evangelical understanding of mission. Lausanne Congress, "The Cape Town Commitment," Lausanne Movement, October 2010, https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctcommitment. See especially the last section that calls for partnership to condition the entirety of the practice of mission.

evangelical perspective.[31] This might explain the shift in *who* was writing about partnership, but it does

not explain why authors were writing *so much more*. If Janell Kragt Bakker and Paul Borthwick to be

believed,[32] the expansion of the partnership literature in the 90s, and the explosion that has followed,

are products of the times. Both authors note that the technological and economic globalization that

characterized the transition from the 20th to the 21st century created conditions in which partnership

was not merely possible but practically necessary as a means of engaging in cross-cultural ministry. The

networks of communication and transportation that are needed to sustain global partnerships started

becoming widely available at the end of the 1900's. And the acceleration of those technologies saw a

concurrent surge in the practice of mission partnerships and, thus, in missiological reflection on those

experiences. This era also saw the development of two streams within the missiological literature on

partnership, one aimed at practitioners and the other written for a scholarly audience. While there was

some overlap between the two, and authors often published within either stream, there remains a clear

difference between the intended audiences of these two literatures. This section, and the one that

follows, will look at each of these streams in turn.

Practitioner-oriented Literature

As partnership became an increasingly popular means of pursuing mission, missiologists and

practitioners had greater opportunity to reflect on and theorize about it. The 1990's saw several works

enter into the literature that reflected the importance of partnership for mission practitioners. One of

the most significant of these was a report of the Consultation on Partnership in Wheaton, IL, published

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[31] The only two significant exceptions I could find are Stanley Skreslet, "The Empty Basket of Presbyterian Mission: Limits and Possibilities of Partnership," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 19 (July 1995): 98–104; David Keyes, *Most Like an Arch: Building Church Partnerships* (Chico, CA: Center for Free Religion, 1999) Keyes wrote a case study of a partnership between an American congregation and an African congregation from a Unitarian perspective. His work would become the predominant methodological template for the dissertations that would follow. Skreslet, a Presbyterian, offered a very pointed critique of partnership that will be examined shortly.

[32] See Janel Bakker, "Sister Church Phenomenon: A Case Study of the Restructuring of American Christianity Against the Backdrop of Globalization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, no. 3 (July 2012): 131–33; Paul Borthwick and Femi B. Adeleye, *Western Christians in Global Mission: What's the Role of the North American Church?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 17–60.

in 1992.[33] The consultation was jointly hosted by the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association and the

Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America.[34] This book represents one of the

most comprehensive early articulations of partnership among evangelicals and has been essential in

setting the trajectory for the movement.[35] While there were several other books articulating an

evangelical approach to partnership at that time,[36] the themes laid out in the EFMA/IFMA monograph

encapsulate the priorities of the partnering movement at the time. These works tended to focus on

legitimizing the movement through establishing the biblical basis for (and examples of) partnership.

They also sought to establish reproduceable processes which would lead to successful partnerships.

Initial theories recognized that there are differing levels of cooperation, and different modes of

partnership. Though it is often unclear which level or model of cooperation they were advocating for,

the authors acknowledged that each approach could be appropriate depending on the cultural

expectations and goals of prospective partners. There was agreement, however that every partnership

requires shared vision, mutual commitment, strong interpersonal relationships, and clearly defined

expectations. Most theories of partnership at the time also included a laundry list of attitudes or values

that contributed to healthy partnership. While these were described as essential to partnership, they

usually remained on the periphery of the models being articulated at the time. Aside from general

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[33] James H. Kraakevik, ed., *Partners in the Gospel: The Strategic Role of Partnership in World Evangelization* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, 1992).

[34] The two organizations have since merged to form Missio Nexus. Incidentally, the theme of Missio Nexus' 2018 Annual Conference was Mission Partnerships. It seems the issue remains salient for the (mostly evangelical) constituency of the organization nearly 30 years later.

[35] Another consultation two years later, hosted by the World Evangelical Fellowship's Mission Commission produced another widely-cited book: William D. Taylor, ed., *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1994). This book had several of the same contributors as the previous consultation and reached similar conclusions. However, this work is notable for its broader inclusion of majority-world voices in the discussion.

[36] c.f. Luis Bush and Lorry Lutz, *Partnering in Ministry: The Direction of World Evangelism*, 1st edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990); Taylor, *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions*. These books show significant influence from the discussions surrounding the Wheaton consultation. While the authors have their own perspectives, thematically they deal more or less identically with the same issues being discussed by the wider academic community.

Christian virtues like love, servanthood, trust, respect, and accountability these lists also included some practical advice. These included: making relationships the main priority, deciding ahead of time how much doctrinal variation can be tolerated, letting partnerships develop/change over time, and keeping the leadership of the organizations engaged. All these concerns are present in one form or another in the studies that will be discussed in the next section.

<u>Scholar-oriented Literature</u>

As mission practitioners and leaders were debating the place of partnership in their organizations, academic institutions were taking notice of partnership's increased importance, as attested by the dissertations that began to be produced on the subject.[37]A representative example of the approach taken in these dissertations can be found in the work of George Young Paek.[38] This dissertation described four modes of partnering ranging from fraternal (exchange of information and social capital), to organic association (extended, small scale exchange of resources), to multi-national (large scale integration of resources and processes), to task-oriented (project focused co-operation). He suggested that each of these arises from different contexts to meet different goals. The appropriate mode should be selected based on the context as well as an understanding of their compatibility with local value systems. Paek then proposed that partnerships of any kind are constituted by three elements which must be shared: personnel, resources, and culture. These must be combined by a process of prayer and mutual ownership which progresses in stages from interaction, to planning, to sharing, to acting. While Paek was hardly the first (or last) to take such an approach, his research is illustrative of the method that would come to dominate theories of partnership for the next 20 years. It is based on

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[37] Early examples include: Calvin Cheong-ling Chu, "Partnership in Missionary Sending with Special Reference to the Hong Kong Chinese Missionary Movement" (DMiss diss., Pasadena, CA, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993); Steven John Chambers, "The Partnership Conversation: The Contribution of Cross-Cultural Experience to Contemporary Mission Understandings" (DMin diss., Toronto, ON, Victoria University and University of Toronto, 1993).

[38] Greg Young Paek, "Toward a Relevant and Practical Partnership Between Foreign Missions and the Indigenous Mission Forces" (DMiss diss., Pasadena, CA, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1996).

case studies, is deeply concerned with practicability, and seeks to construct a theory of partnership

based on constitutive elements, essential processes, and progressive steps.

Meanwhile, other authors, such as Stan Skreslet, were offering less optimistic critiques of

partnership.[39] Skreslet thought that missiologists were going too far in calling partnership a "model" of

mission. He preferred to view partnership as a "means" of mission rather than a distinct model. Using

the experience of the PCUSA as an example, he argued that partnership is helpful as a corrective to ways

mission had been practiced in the past. But it is not a valid model since it does not answer the

definitional and motivational questions of a model of mission. He proposed that further study of

partnership must either assent to being categorized as a strategy or else come to grips with his

definitional and motivational concerns. Skreslet raised some fair points in his article, particularly

concerning problems of definition and poor execution. While the theoretical underpinnings of

partnership in mission were getting fleshed out in this period of expansion, there was still work to be

done. First, the gap between rhetoric and reality needed to be closed. Second, what exactly

missiologists meant by "partnership" had yet to be fully elucidated.

Explosion: 2001-Present

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the missiological community has been inundated with

examinations of partnership in all the various modes presented in Chapter 1. Many of these works

sought to close the gaps in definition and practice that had been noted by Skreslet. Others tried to break

new ground, bringing new theories to bear on the discussion or examining aspects of collaborative

ministry heretofore unexamined. Like the expansion of the literature in the 1990's, the literature on

partnership that was produced in the 2000's can be easily bifurcated into works written for practitioners

and those written for scholars.

Practitioner-oriented Literature

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[39] Skreslet, "The Empty Basket of Presbyterian Mission: Limits and Possibilities of Partnership."

A very influential addition to the discussion was made by Phill Butler in 2005.[40] As one of the

driving forces behind the Wheaton conference in 1991, Butler had his finger on the pulse of evangelical

partnerships and has been a major influence in shaping the movement's ideas about partnership. For

Butler, the essential elements of a partnership are: shared vision, prayer, engaged facilitators, and

achievable hope. These are combined through a lengthy process of prayer, conversation, and consensus

building; with participants taking care to focus on the process not outcomes or events. In Butler's model,

partnerships progress through a series of steps from exploration, to structural formation, to operation

and revision. After explaining these briefly, the majority of the book is taken up with practical

suggestions for exploring, designing, and implementing a partnership (including prototype agendas and

checklists). All this has made Butler's work an invaluable resource for putting hands and feet on

partnerships.[41]

A couple of years later, Dennis O'Connor published another significant entry into the body of

work on mission partnership.[42] O'Connor's book is significant for a few reasons. First, his was the first

book published for a general audience that focused exclusively on international partnerships between

local congregations. Second, it was the first major contribution from a Roman Catholic perspective.

O'Connor notes that Catholics had been involved in the practice of twinning parishes in different parts of

the world since at least the 1970's.[43] His book sets out the theological foundations of partnership as well

as practical considerations for parish leaders engaged in this kind of ministry. Though his terminology is,

understandably, distinct; O'Connor's work largely parallels the insights of the other works in this section.

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[40] Butler, *Well Connected*.

[41] Another very important early book dealing with partnership was Ernie Addicott, *Body Matters: A Guide to Partnership in Christian Mission* (Edmonds, WA: Interdev Partnership Associates, 2005). Addicott was a close colleague of Butler and the two books share many similarities. One of the unique contributions of Addicott's book is that it contains a diagnostic tool for gauging the health of a partnership.

[42] Dennis O'Connor, *Bridges of Faith: Building a Relationship with a Sister Parish* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007).

[43] O'Connor, 19–21.

His book reflects the somewhat obscured reality that while Catholic voices are under-represented in the

literature on missiological partnership, they have been instrumental in the ongoing scholarly

discussion.[44]

A landmark contribution was made in 2010 by Mary Lederleitner. Dr Lederleitner presents

several suggestions for ways to navigate perennial pitfalls in mission like conflict resolution and

economic disparity. She begins, quite uniquely, with cross-cultural communication and the importance

of "bridging people" as keys to successful partnership. She then moves on to describe most potential

difficulties as the result of negative attribution, hidden self-interest, or unintended consequences and

suggests ways to address these problems in partnerships. She also advocates for biblically and culturally

sensitive modes of accountability as well as processes that affirm the dignity of everyone involved. She

is particularly concerned that partnerships should build the latent capacities necessary to sustain local

ministries. She concludes with practical suggestions for dealing with conflict over the misappropriation

of funds. Her book has become a foundational text in the conversation on partnership.

More recently, Daniel Rickett published a book advocating for a model of mission partnership

that seeks to encapsulate all the theoretical work done on partnership in the past two decades.[45]

Rickett's book is meant to be a practical guide to mission partnerships and for the most part this book is

oriented to how to accomplish certain tasks. Perhaps because they are drawing on the same evangelical

discussions, the models of Rickett and Butler are remarkably similar. Rickett presents partnership as

constituted by three main elements: vision, relationships, and results. The first element is made up of

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[44] An important forum for the ongoing discussion of partnership in mission has been the Third Wave of Mission track at the American Society of Missiology Annual Meeting. "Third-Wave Mission Track" (American Society of Missiology, Wheaton, IL, 2015); "Third-Wave Mission Track" (American Society of Missiology, St. Paul, MN, 2016); "Third-Wave Mission Track" (American Society of Missiology, Wheaton, IL, 2017); "Third-Wave Mission Track" (American Society of Missiology, South Bend, IN, 2018); "Third-Wave Mission Track" (American Society of Missiology, South Bend, IN, 2019). In all of these meetings Catholic scholars have contributed substantially to the conversation as well as the leadership of the group. Dr Mike Gable, Mike Haasl, Dr Kim Lamberty, and Dr Don McCrabb have all been important contributors.
[45] Daniel Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work* (Spokane, WA: Partners International, 2014).

shared purpose or vision, compatibility, and mutually agreed upon ground rules. The second element is

held together by "alliance champions," cross-cultural understanding, and mutual trust. And the third

consists of achieving something that is meaningful to both partners, agreeing on how to document and

track progress, and learning to dynamically adjust to changes. In Rickett's framework, these elements

are combined through clear, consistent dialog between partners. This book is really the product of years

of refining the work begun in Kraakevic's volume 20 years earlier. While there have been several

subsequent short-form works on partnership (like blog posts and podcasts) created for popular

consumption,[46] and one recent book-length case study,[47] they all reflect the heavy influence of Butler,

Lederleitner, and Rickett.

Scholar-oriented Literature

One of the first forays into mission partnerships in the academic community during this period

was an article in *Missiology* by Anne Reissner.[48] Reissner uses the metaphor of a dance to suggest the

"steps" which make up a smooth partnership. These steps include: indwelling (or hospitality), indirection

(or suspending judgement), inquisitiveness (questioning assumptions), iconoclasm (willingness to let

beliefs be questioned or changed by the other), and imagination (creative vision for what is possible).

She also calls for a focus on networking as the new means of relating to one another in mission. Her

article is brief and a little light on details, but it set the tone for much of what would soon follow:

alternating between practical advice grounded in sociological or communication theories and appeals to

well-known themes in Christian theology.

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[46] See, for example, the aforementioned MissioNexus 2018 conference or the resources they have published on partnership found here: Missio Nexus, *Partnership Resources*, 2021, 2021, https://missionexus.org/tag/partnership/.

[47] Eloise Hockett and John Muhanji, *Lessons from Cross-Cultural Collaboration: How Cultural Humility Informed and Shaped the Work of an American and a Kenyan* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017). This book takes a narrative approach and, like similar works, is very light on theory. Still it is useful because it gives real-life examples of some of the abstract concepts that fill the partnership literature.

[48] Anne Reissner, "The Dance of Partnership: A Theological Reflection," *Missiology: An International Review* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 3–10.

Tacking hard toward the latter impulse in that same volume, Charles Van Engen sought to anchor the practice of partnership in biblical theology; turning to Ephesians 4:1-5:2 in order to uncover the theological motivation, agency, means, and end of partnership.[49] The gist of his argument is that the motivation for partnership lies in the very nature of the church. The church is an interconnected organism; thus, it pursues partnership because being together and acting together in Christ is the natural state of Christians. This means that the innate method of expressing agency in the church is to serve one another in love and humility. Van Engen briefly expounds on the Holy Spirit as the means of cooperation and closes by noting that the end of cooperation between churches in to equip one another until they all reach the full measure of Christ together.

In his 2003 dissertation, Shant Manuel also sought to develop a theology of mission partnerships, in this case by beginning with the biblical concept of fellowship or *koinonia*.[50] Manuel emphasizes that the key dynamic connoted by koinonia is participation in one another. Partnership, then, means partaking in one another, as was modeled by the early church. This definition of partnership marked a new direction in the study of partnership that stood in contrast to the practically oriented studies being produced at the time. Manuel's explication of partnership focuses on mutuality, generosity, and service as the pathway into participation. The biblical examples of koinonia which he offers emphasize sharing of material resources, sharing in one another's sufferings, and empowerment/kenosis. While these dynamics are certainly meant to ground partnership theologically, they do so in a way that is intensely interested in praxis.[51] He suggests that Paul's missionary band, as

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[49] Charles Van Engen, "Toward a Theology of Mission Partnerships," *Missiology: An International Review* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 11–44.

[50] Manuel, "Partnership in Mission". Similar emphases can be found in Philip Wickeri, *Partnership, Solidarity, and Friendship: Transforming Structures in Mission* (Louisville, KY: Worldwide Ministries, PCUSA, 2003).

[51] It also bears noting that Manuel sees Covenant as an important theme for a theology of partnership. He argues that God's covenants constitute a kind of partnership contract that is entered into for the sake of accomplishing God's mission. Though this may work as a legitimation of partnership, he fails to comment on the implication in terms of power differential of modeling contracts between equals on ones between God and humans. However, covenant is a promising theme that deserves to enter more fully into the partnership literature.

well as his collection for the saints in Jerusalem, serve as prototypical examples of partnering mission and can provide insight for today into how we approach cooperation in mission (most importantly, in empowering local leadership and providing networks for transferring people resources across geographical locations).

A different approach that gained early popularity in this period was diagnosing and correcting perennial problems in partnership. Hartwig Eitzen's dissertation, for example, analyzes a partnership based on its approaches to four typical points of conflict.[52] He suggests that most problems in partnership arise because of different expectations when it comes to money, power, communication, and cultural values/assumptions. He suggests that if partnerships are going to be successful, they will need to first build consensus on these four issues. Similarly, Kai Funkschmidt outlines two common issues that typically arise in partnerships, economic inequality, and power differentials. He then turns to scripture to find theological resources to address these issues.[53] He first notes that partnerships don't form in a vacuum. Churches already have modes of relating to one another, and these outlooks can be predicated on unhealthy colonial or nationalist views of the cultural "other." These attitudes must be openly addressed and replaced for true partnership to take root. He also reminds his readers that the biblical concept of koinonia does not predicate itself on equitable economic exchange. On the contrary, early churches were places of tremendous economic inequality, yet generous togetherness. What made these communities remarkable was not the way they redistributed economic capital but the reality that they assigned equal social capital to everyone and valued the contributions that everyone made to the community, regardless of its economic benefit.

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[52] Hartwig Eitzen, "Dependent, Independent, Interdependent? A Case Study in Mission Partnership Between North and South America" (PhD diss., Deerfield, IL, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2003).

[53] Kai Michael Funkschmidt, "New Models of Mission Relationship and Partnership," *International Review of Mission*, October 2002.

Another early attempt to redress power disparity in mission partnership was made by Ammon

Eddie Kasambala.[54] He recasts partnership as a process of reconciliation through which churches in

"sending" and "receiving" contexts re-imagine their respective callings to mission and the relationship

between their contexts. In Kasambala's estimation, partnership is defined, not by activity, but by

relationship marked by mutuality and interdependence. Recognition and authentic appreciation of the

unique giftings of everyone involved is the key. He suggests that in an age of partnership what is most

needed is the willingness to accommodate each other in our common pursuit of God's mission. Mission

is the mission of God, in partnership with the church, for the sake of the cosmos. And as such must be

marked by equally generous giving and humble receiving from all human parties (mutuality) and reliance

upon the gifts of the other to meet local needs (interdependence).

Other authors began using case studies to develop best practices in partnership, as was done by

Samuel Reeves.[55] This exploration of a partnership between congregations in Liberia and the United

States not only illustrates the principles of partnership that were becoming commonplace in the

literature (like theological grounding and practical necessity); it demonstrates a keen interest in the

practicalities of mission partnerships. A proper understanding of mission as the Missio Dei, an emphasis

on the unity of the Body of Christ, and the development of trust and risk tolerance are seen as the

underlying keys to beginning a partnership.[56] Reeves also suggests seven best practices for partnership:

beginning with a specific mission in mind, engaged leadership that communicates the vision, a team that

implements the vision, finding partners who share the same mission, an effective communication

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[54] Amon Eddie Kasambala, "A Critical Diagnosis of Partnership in Light of Inequality and Independence: A Third World Problem," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 25, no. 2 (2004): 162–76.

[55] Samuel Reeves, *Congregation-to-Congregation Relationship: A Case Study of the Partnership Between a Liberian Church and a North American Church* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004). Reeves' work is exemplary of the approach and findings of other very similar works, such as; Daryl Westwood Cartmel, "Partnership in Mission" (DMiss diss., Pasadena, CA, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000); Howard D. Owens, "Franco-American Mission Partnerships: A Phenomenological Study of Partnering American Missionaries and Local Christians in France" (PhD diss., New Orleans, LA, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

[56] Notions echoed by Jonathan Rowe, "Dancing with Elephants," *Missiology: An International Review* 37, no. 2 (April 2009): 149–63.

strategy, regular times of prayer, and mechanisms that keep both churches contributing without

developing economically dependent relationships. It is also noteworthy that Reeves concludes the study

with a wealth of primary resources, survey instruments, and training materials in his appendices.

A slightly different approach to the study of partnerships was taken by C. M. Brown in his

dissertation in 2007.[57] While most authors at the time were focusing on the practical elements of

partnership, Brown uses a grounded-theory approach; focusing on the social dynamics that constitute a

partnership. He argues that partnerships require significant social capital (which he defines as a critical

mass of people who are heavily invested in the life of the organization) as well as the willingness to

invest that capital in a partner institution. The mechanisms of that investment may vary widely, but in

order to be successful Brown suggests they must have clear decision-making processes (especially

where priorities and resources are concerned) that are sensitive to what is culturally appropriate in both

settings. Processes for exchange also need to clearly grant power to the local partner to determine how

resources will be used, regardless of which party initially controls the resources. Finally, every

partnership needs at least one bi-cultural mediator who can serve as an effective guide to everyone

involved as well as a go-between when tensions build up between communities.

Stanley Kruis has also made a very helpful contribution to this discussion by noting that often

the unexamined assumptions of partners arise from the institutional models they use to frame their

understanding of the church.[58] His dissertation lays out the major value-themes operative in

international mission partnerships (interdependence/complementarity, concerns over dominance and

funding, shifts in control, valuing mutuality, use of local resources, and actively seeking expanded

partnership). Kruis then examines four ecclesiological typologies (institution, community, servant,

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[57] C. M. Brown, "Exploratory Case Studies and Analyses of Three Intercultural Congregation-to-Congregation Partnerships" (PhD diss., Deerfield, IL, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2007).
[58] Stanley D. Kruis, "Ecclesiological Assumptions and International Mission Partnerships: A Philippine Case Study" (PhD diss., Pasadena, CA, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009).

house-church) and the assumptions about the church that flow from them. He suggests that while all partnerships have their weaknesses, most of the major value-theme conflicts (which center on power and dependence) are exacerbated by differences between congregations using different institutional models. He then suggests a potential dialog format to help partners understand their own institutional assumptions and accommodate those of their partners.

At about the same time, a short but telling addition to the missiological discussion on partnership was made by Robert Priest, Douglas Wilson, and Adelle Johnson.[59] This summary of research on US megachurches' international engagement included a section on attitudes toward partnership. It serves as a rare source of quantitative data in the literature. In a survey of over 400 churches the authors found that most US megachurches are highly committed to international mission. They support their own missionaries, and send a very high number of short-term missionaries internationally. They also found that 94% of those churches think developing church-to-church partnerships should be done, and 85% have at least one international congregational partner. Priest et all conclude that partnership is a growing trend among US churches, and it does not seem to be slowing down.

Two other contributions in 2010 sought to ground the missiological discussion theologically; focusing specifically on the doctrines of the Trinity and the Missio Dei.[60] In these treatments, the Trinity is described first as the model for partnership as well as its means.[61] Partnership, as an inherently cooperative enterprise, flows naturally and logically from the dynamic inner life of the Trinity. God exists in relationship; therefore, the Immanent Trinity serves as the model for partners seeking to join in his mission. Likewise, the Economic Trinity serves as the means of partnership. The mission of the Trinity is

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[59] Priest, Wilson, and Johnson, "US Megachurches and New Patterns of Global Mission."
[60] Sherron Kay George, *Better Together: The Future of Presbyterian Mission* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2010); Cathy Ross, "The Theology of Partnership," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 3 (July 2010): 145–48. George's book was largely based on an earlier work in the same vein: Sherron Kay George, *Called as Partners in Christ's Service: The Practice of God's Mission* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2004).
[61] See especially Ross, 146-47. She calls for trust, risk, and responsible controls; arguing that these are all aspects of God's dealings with humans.

primarily expressed in terms of cooperation within the Godhead. Churches enter into partnership

because that is how God accomplishes his mission. And they pursue mission in partnership because God

has called and equipped his church to join him in his mission. Partnership, then, is intrinsic to the

church's participation in mission. Christians enter mission in partnership with the Holy Spirit, and by

extension, with the universal church as fellow workers. The logical outworking of placing mission within

the domain of the Trinity is that partnership becomes the primary dynamic by which mission is enacted.

Another attempt to balance theological and practical concerns in partnership was made by Leon

Spencer.[62] Looking specifically at partnerships between post-secondary academic institutions, Spencer

suggests several factors that make for more robust partnerships. First, they need to be theologically, not

just practically, grounded. Second, participants must take the time to arrive at mutually agreed upon

decisions. This requires willingness to be honest about institutional needs as well as strengths. Third,

local initiative should drive action. Fourth, there needs to be a commitment to culturally appropriate

transparency. Every culture has models of accountability, and all sides need to be willing to adjust to

those criteria. Fifth, partners should build systems and programs that are sustainable given the local

institution's resources. He closes by suggesting that partnerships need to develop processes that are

workable for everyone involved, take time to maintain and celebrate human relationships, and provide

distinct periods of evaluation that allow unfruitful partnerships to end without either party losing face.

This is especially important when one partner, for whatever reason, is no longer willing to cooperate.

As the literature on mission partnership continues to unfold, a recent flurry of dissertations

(each taking slightly different approaches to evaluating the phenomenon) has emerged, beginning with

one by David Wesley.[63] Wesley crafts an account of a multilateral partnership among congregations and

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[62] Leon Spencer, "Not Yet There: Seminaries and the Challenge of Partnership," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 3 (July 2010): 150–54.

[63] David Wesley, "Collective Impact in Congregational Mission: A Multisite Case Study of a Congregation to Field Partnership" (PhD diss., Deerfield, IL, Trinity International University, 2012).

other organizations seeking to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Swaziland. His case study lays out

several relational dynamics that were foundational to the emergence of the partnership. He begins with

the need to address understandings of otherness that are ungenerous or sometimes outright pejorative.

He also noted that the most effective parts of a partnership come about when there is genuine dialog

fostered among all parties. One of Wesley's unique contributions is that he explores the possibilities of

multi-lateral partnerships for solving major crises that no organization can respond to on their own.

In 2013, Ivan Cheung developed a model that, like Butler's, was focused more on the practical

elements of partnership.[64] In Cheung's view, partnerships consist of five basic elements: people,

relationships, ministry philosophy, vision, and finances. The dynamics by which these elements interact

involves an interplay of trust, risk, and control. Partners must engage regularly in activities that allow

them to build trust in each other's ability to deliver on their promises. Additionally, as trust is built it

must also lead to increased tolerance for risk. And finally, both partners must feel that they have an

appropriate amount of control over how each of the five elements of the partnership are being used.

While Cheung's model bears significant resemblance to the others in this section, it is remarkable for

two reasons. First, Cheung puts the primary emphasis on people and relationships rather than

practicalities or shared ideas or beliefs. Ideological agreement is, of course, significant. But, given the

immense importance of relationship, Cheung argues that it is better to begin one's model with

interpersonal dynamics rather than a sense of vision or purpose. Second, Cheung explicitly

acknowledges that material resources are a fundamental element of partnership. While other models

address the dynamics of material exchange, Cheung insists that material resources be considered a

constituent part of every partnership.[65]

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[64] Ivan Liew Weng Cheung, "Partnerships Between Local Churches and Missions Agencies: Optimizing Missionary Mobilization and Member Care" (DMin diss., Wilmore, KY, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2013).
[65] Similar conclusions were reached in three roughly contemporaneous dissertations. Stephen C. Mickler, "An Analysis of the Impact of PaulAnn Baptist Church and Her Partners among the More Materially Poor in the Global South" (PhD diss., Deerfield, IL, Trinity International University, 2010); Stephen Offutt, "The Changing Face of

A major contribution to the body of literature was made in 2013 by the sociologist Janell Kragt

Bakker.[66] Bakker ties the explosive growth of partnerships to the shifting demographics of the global

church, to the waning economic and political influence of the West, to new global social connections

gained by massive transnational migration, and to the transformations in communication and travel

technology wrought by globalization. The emergence of these realities, she argues, begs for a new

paradigm for mission; and partnership fits that bill quite nicely. For Bakker, partnership is fundamentally

a social phenomenon and is often driven by familiar social patterns. She points to several common

themes in the development of the mission partnerships she studied. The leadership of each organization

gives at least tacit approval, the relationship is driven by catalysts (usually transnational members), and

there is significant participation from the rank and file of the congregation. According to her research,

motivations for partnership tend to have less to do with convincing arguments and theological

frameworks and more to do with personal connections to people in the partnering organization. The

theoretical/theological frameworks used in a given partnership vary widely and are quite fluid, but the

following items are present to some degree in nearly every case: partners highly value a two-way

mission model, distancing themselves from a sender-receiver model; they emphasize solidarity over

charity; and they at least aspire to embody holistic mission.

Evangelicalism in the Global South: Networks and Moral Entrepreneurship in El Salvador and South Africa" (Ph.D.,
Boston, MA, Boston University, 2009); Steven Charles Pennington, "Negotiating the Maturing Relational Dynamics
between National Churches and Missions Agencies: A Narrative-Based Missiological Model Emerging from the
History of the Kenya Assemblies of God" (PhD diss., Springfield, MO, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary,
2013). Mickler's work is largely descriptive, though it serves as a good example of using existing literature to frame
the analysis of a case study. Offutt is mainly concerned with describing the channels and content of the global
flows between minority and majority-world contexts. He is not interested in shaping theory or best practices, but
he does identify international congregational partnership as an important channel for global flows. Pennington's
unique contribution is that he notes the importance of rites of passage in establishing identity and relationship in a
community and relates this directly to partnership between organizations. He calls for public celebrations to mark
the establishment and achievements of mission partnerships.

[66] Janel Bakker, *Sister Churches: American Congregations and Their Partners Abroad* (New York: Oxford University
Press, 2013).

The last few years have seen several attempts to close gaps in the existing literature.[67] A good

representative of the majority is a dissertation by Nathan Penner.[68] Penner writes an analysis of power

differentials in partnerships between NGO's in North America and Southern Africa. Penner's unique

contribution is twofold. First, he does more than most authors to thoroughly examine the social

dynamics of power differentials. His work has good insights into how power is understood and

expressed between groups. He suggests that addressing the control of resources is fundamental to

addressing how power is distributed in a partnership. He also contributes to the literature by bifurcating

the conceptual underpinnings of partnership into two levels, one level in which partners share cultural

expectations of what a partnership is and how it should function and a second level in which cultural

expectations diverge. Penner suggests that framing partnership this way helps direct partnering

institutions toward conversations that address divergent understandings, while predicating their

relationship on common ground.

Another significant contribution was made by Jay Madden.[69] This dissertation uses a case study

to track the spiritual transformation of participants in an international congregational partnership.

Madden notes the key themes that participants mentioned as significant factors leading to their

experience of spiritual transformation. One significant theme is an emphasis on building relationship

through partnering activities, as is demonstrating commitment to the relationship when things get

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[67] Two such attempts include Elizabeth E. Broschart, "Twenty Years of Partnership Between Pittsburgh Presbytery and the Synod of Blantyre, CCAP: The Gift of Joy" (DMin diss., Dubuque, IA, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, 2014). Broschart's case study of a 29-year-old partnership uses a theological lens to analyze the partnership, suggesting that a trinitarian framework, hospitality, generosity, and testimony as necessary spiritual practices to nurture partnership. Chad Timothy Hunsberger, "Launching a Strategic Missional Partnership between Park Place Baptist Church, Pearl, Mississippi, and Nuevo Pacto Baptist Church, Tegucigalpa, Honduras" (DMin diss., Louisville, KY, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014). Hunsberger's work is essentially a narrative of how a certain partnership was set up. It does not really subject the narrative to any theoretical analysis. In both cases, the findings fall in line with the other works treated here.
[68] Nathan James Penner, "Cross-Cultural Partnerships and Asymmetries of Power: Cultural Models of Southern African and North American NGO Partnerships" (PhD diss., Pasadena, CA, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2014).
[69] Jay Madden, "Mutual Transformation as a Framework for Church Global Mission Partnerships" (DMiss diss., Pasadena, CA, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2019).

difficult. Additionally, he finds that participants' acknowledgement of mutual need is closely correlated

to transformative impact. Madden's work is also noteworthy as one of the most thorough explorations

of the importance of perichoresis and the Immanent Trinity for mission partnerships.

A very recent dissertation by Simone Twibell brought a much-needed new perspective to the

study of mission partnerships by examining the impact of mission teams sent from Latin America to

Nazarene churches in the Chicago area.[70] Twibell's findings largely confirm those of the studies already

examined, but she makes two important contributions. First, the voice of majority-world partners has a

prominent role in the findings. This is all too rare in the literature and is a welcome addition. Second,

rather than introduce a new theory of partnership, she frames her study using key themes in the

existing literature. In a sense, Twibell is moving from producing theory to testing theory in the field. The

main factors she focuses on include having people who can serve as bridging social capital (a la Brown)

and an emphasis on avoiding economic dependency while also fostering relational interdependence.

The most recent addition to the body of missiological partnership literature was made by

Andrew McFarland.[71] McFarland uses recent theories of partnership, most notably the work of Butler

and Ross mentioned earlier, to frame William Carey's work with the Baptist Missionary Society as an

early experiment in collaborative mission. McFarland maintains that Carey was keenly aware of the

importance of developing trust, investing in relationship, sharing vision, resolving conflict while

respecting difference, and building the capacity of local leaders and churches. One of the most intriguing

implications of this dissertation is that it opens up new avenues for tracing the history of mission

partnership. Rather than searching for the presence of the term "partnership," McFarland uses

phenomenological descriptions of partnership to define the practice, then searches for the presence of

those phenomena in historical data. This could prove a fruitful avenue for research in two ways. First, it

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[70] Simone Mulieri Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships: A Case Study of the Dynamics and Impact of Reverse Short-Term Missions" (PhD diss., Deerfield, IL, Trinity International University, 2019).
[71] McFarland, "William Carey's Expectation for Missionary Cooperation."

provides a pattern for studying the operation of partnership in other eras of mission that have long been left out of partnership studies. Second, McFarland's phenomenological definition of partnership might provide a way forward for a body of literature still struggling with the problem of defining "partnership." Perhaps "partnership" is not best defined by the mere use of the term, but by the presence of a certain set of ideas and practices.

Main Strength of the Current Literature

Looking back over the last 100 years of publications on mission partnership, what stands out immediately is how consistent the literature has been about what constitutes an adequate practice of partnership. Many of the same themes expounded by John Mott in 1935 are still framing the discussion for more recent authors like Butler, Kruis, and Twibell. It would seem that the missiological community is moving toward consensus on what partnership is and how it ought to work. The recurrence of multiple themes suggests overall agreement based on years of similar experiences. Similarly, the differences among the studies surveyed above seem to be mostly superficial; variations of terminology rather than of substance. Where studies do actually differ, it is because one author brings something new to their study not because their findings exclude elements used by another author. Current articulations of partnership may differ slightly in their emphases and terminology, but there is more than enough room in them to embrace each other's distinctions. With that in mind, it may be possible to articulate a consensus model of partnership.

Establishing a consensus on partnership from the literature requires attending to places where authors have largely agreed that a given idea or practice is a significant factor in the success of a mission partnership. In reading through the literature, I have been able to identify 25 key variables that recur at a significant rate in both the practitioner-focused and scholar-focused literature. These variables tend to fit into one of three broadly construed dimensions of partnership: a theological dimension, a conceptual dimension, and an operational dimension. In Figure 2.1 I enumerate these variables, group them

according to corresponding dimension, and note which authors in the literature review include each

variable in their findings.

Figure 2.1

Color Key	Theological Dimension	Conceptual Dimension	Operational Dimension
Theme	**Authors who incorporate the theme into their understanding of partnership**		
Theology of Partnership	Bush, George, Cheung, Manuel, Ross, Wickeri, Van Engen, Marsh, Spencer, Funkschmidt, Reeves, Broschart, Madden		
Relational Priority	Kraakevik, Cheung, Chu, Bakker, Penner, Broschart, Pennington, Hunsberger, Madden, McFarland		
Shared Calling	Kalu, Kraakevik, Butler, Rickett, Bakker, Reeves, McFarland		
Mutual Valuation	Bosch, Cheung, Spencer, Adler & Offutt, Addicott, Kasambala, Madden, Twibell, Wesley		
Space for "Others"	Mott, Bosch, Rickett, Bakker, Reisner, Funkschmidt, Hockett & Muhanji, Mickler, Broschart, Twibell, Wesley		
Time-Tolerance	Mott, Kraakevik, Spencer, Lederleitner, Hunsberger		
Non-Dependence	Lederleitner, Funkschmidt, Kruis, Reeves, Mickler, Twibell, Wesley, McFarland		
Interdependence	Bosch, Bakker, Funkschmidt, Kruis, Kasambala, Rickett, Rowell, Twibell		
Spaces for Dialog	Butler, Rickett, Tizon, Eitzen, Lederleitner, Kruis, Twibell, Wesley		
Clear Expectations	Kraakevik, Park, Brown, Rickett, Kruis, Penner, Pennington		
Decisions by Consensus	Kalu, Paek, Butler, Addicott, Cheung, Rickett, Spencer, Penner, Twibell		
Regular Review/Revision	Kraakevik, Butler, Brown, Rickett, Reeves, Hockett & Muhanji, Penner		
Clear Lines of Communication	Brown, Butler, Rickett, Reeves, Penner, Pennington, Twibell		
Prayer	Paek, Butler, Reeves		
Trust Building Exercises	Kraakevik, Cheung, Addicott, Rickett, Mickler, McFarland		
Local Control of Decisions	Manuel, Brown, Kruis, Spencer, Cheung, Offutt, Mickler, Hunsberger, Twibell		
Culturally Appropriate Accountability	Kraakevik, Spencer, Lederleitner, Brown, Mickler, Twibell		
Celebration	Spencer, Pennington, Rickett, George		
Hospitality	Rickett, George, Robert, Reisner, Spencer, Funkschmidt		
Personal Contact	Rickett, George, Robert, Reisner, Spencer, Rickett, Funkschmidt, Bakker		
Commitment thru Trouble	Kraakevik, Tizon, Addicott, Hockett & Muhanji, Penner, Madden, McFarland		
Champions	Butler, Rickett, Bakker, Reeves, Twibell, Wesley		
Buy-in	Mott, Kraakevik, Bakker, Chu, Reeves, Hunsberger, Twibell		
Organizational Penetration	Butler, Bakker		
Mediators	Brown, Lederleitner, Twibell, Wesley		

Figure 2.1 represents the constitutive elements of partnership that are advocated by multiple

authors in the literature. In order to be included in this list, an idea had to appear at least once in both

practitioner-oriented and scholar-oriented works. It should be noted that I defined the presence of each

of these elements functionally rather than etymologically. The terminology employed by authors writing

at different times and in vastly different contexts varies considerably.[72] But if they are employing those

terms to refer to the same basic phenomenon, that phenomenon made the list. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 will

provide much more in-depth analysis of what these elements are and how they function with respect to

mission partnership. But, for the sake of clarity, I will briefly define them below.

Before doing so, I should also note that grouping these elements into dimensions based on their

function (informing what partners believe about partnership's place in their faith, the concepts used to

define partnership, or the practices and structures used to operationalize a partnership) is of my own

devising. I introduce it to the discussion here for two reasons. First, I am trying to impose a little order

on the chaos. Rather than just produce a laundry list of partnership themes, I want to start saying

something meaningful about how these ideas are related to each other. Very often these factors are

explored in relation to a given partnership, but not in relation to each other. I think it is important to

know, not only how each concept impacts a given partnership, but also how it functions more broadly

within an economy of ideas. Second, these dimensions will provide a framework to guide the analysis of

this dissertation, so that concepts can be evaluated with respect to how well they function within the

economy of ideas.[73] In order to do so, a consensus model of partnership will have to answer three

questions. (1) What is a partnership? (2) Why is partnership important? And (3) what does a partnership

need? The first question can be answered by dealing with how partners conceptualize the notion of

partnership (Conceptual Dimension). The second will be answered by understanding how mission

partners theologize themes of partnership (Theological Dimension). The third is a question of how to

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[72] A great example here is the use of the term "Champions" which is employed by Rickett (63). Butler (201) and Lederleitner (199) prefer the term "facilitator." Additionally, Bakker bifurcates the role between "Catalysts" who get the relationship started and "Champions" who provide long term oversight (117-121). But conceptually, while they are building on one another's concepts in unique ways, they are all referring to a similar role within a partnership.

[73] As the dissertation progresses, I will describe these dimensions of belief, definition, and practice as the "Heart," "Head," and "Hands" of partnership, respectively. Later, in chapter 5 I will introduce an evaluative dimension to the study of partnership, which I will call partnership "Health." I wish to express my gratitude to the US Department of Agriculture and the 4-H Council for obvious influence of the four "H's" on my thinking; an influence it took me an embarrassingly long amount of time to recognize.

make these abstractions about partnership operational (Operational Dimension). While these will all be addressed more fully in Chapters 7, 6, and 8, respectively;[74] some preliminary comments are in order.

Theological Dimension

In an effort to keep the list manageable I do not go through and record every theological concept listed in the literature. Instead, I simply note that a large number of authors have insisted that theology has an important role to play in creating and sustaining partnership in mission. My original intention was to record discrete theological concepts that appear in the literature, as I do with conceptual and operational elements. The reason I did not had to do with the difficulties in measuring the impact of discrete theological concepts that I faced in later stages of the dissertation.[75] But I also took this approach because I think it is worthwhile to examine underlying assumptions. Before we can address the impact of a discrete theological concept on partnership, we need to begin with a prior question: "does theology really make a difference in partnership." Recent contributions have suggested that it may not be all that significant.[76] Or, at least, not significant in the ways one might expect. So, it is worth addressing the connection between theology and partnership more broadly before diving into an examination of the impact of specific doctrines.

Conceptual Dimension

The conceptual dimension deals with how authors define what "true partnership" is. There are plenty of definitions out there, but they seem to cohere around the following factors. First, there is overwhelming agreement that in a mission partnership relationship is king. It takes priority over the

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[74] The reason they are answered in a slightly different order is that mission partnership, especially as it is addressed in the consensus literature, has its genesis in theological understanding. Other conceptual aspects of partnership, while essential, are predicated on and conditioned by prior theological assumptions about partnership.

[75] The main issue was that I wanted to avoid presenting leading questions in my survey. If, for example, I presented a population of committed, church-going Christians, many of whom are on staff at a church, with a theological concept like "humility," or "fellowship," or "the Trinity;" and then asked them if that idea is important for their partnership, they would likely respond affirmatively regardless of the actual import of that notion to their partnership. Instead, I asked them to list and rank important theological concepts in blank spaces.

[76] See, for example, Bakker, *Sister Churches*, 238.

programs that a given partnership may employ. Some authors, notably Daniel Rickett, extoll the

importance of relationship while maintaining that considerations like shared vision and expectations still

need to be addressed first.[77] Most agree, however, that partnerships do best when humanizing

relationships are seen as prior to all other considerations.[78] Still, Rickett can be forgiven for placing such

emphasis on vision, since shared vision figures so prominently in the literature.[79] This prominence

attests to how crucial it is that mission partners enter into partnership with the sense that they are

being called by God to something greater than they could ever achieve on their own.[80]

Mutual valuation is shorthand for a very complex idea. It is the notion that was introduced by

Bosch, but explored by many since then,[81] that the resources held by partners are necessarily part of the

partnership. Everything a partner brings to a partnership needs to be clearly understood by everyone,

and the intrinsic value of those contributions needs to be explicitly acknowledged. As Adler and Offutt

point out, this is not always reciprocity in kind. Instead, it often means that one side contributes more

material resources, and the other side contributes more intangibly. But the exchange is only mutual if

both sides acknowledge the equal value of what the other contributes. Another important conceptual

factor is the creation of space for others. This requires an opening of partnering institutions' identity in

such a way that their idea of belonging creates space for cultural "others." This entails a combination of

intercultural-competency and radical hospitality.[82] Additionally, several authors have noted the

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[77] Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*, 26.

[78] See Bakker, *Sister Churches*; Penner, "Cross-Cultural Partnerships and Asymmetries of Power"; Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships."

[79] Reeves, *Congregation-to-Congregation Relationship*; Butler, *Well Connected*; Bakker, *Sister Churches*; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*; McFarland, "William Carey's Expectation for Missionary Cooperation."

[80] Most authors agree that this vision should be something received from God and point beyond the capacities of partners to achieve on their own. This is why I prefer the language of "calling" to "vision."

[81] Most importantly by Cheung, "Partnerships Between Local Churches and Missions Agencies: Optimizing Missionary Mobilization and Member Care"; Gary Adler and Stephen Offutt, "The Gift Economy of Direct Transnational Civic Action: How Reciprocity and Inequality Are Managed in Religious 'Partnerships,'" *Journal for the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 3 (September 2017): 600–619; Madden, "Mutual Transformation as a Framework for Church Global Mission Partnerships"; Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships."

[82] A great explanation can be found in Bakker, *Sister Churches*, 163–65. Other treatments include; Mott, *Cooperation and The World Mission*; Reissner, "The Dance of Partnership"; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*;

importance of time-tolerance for mission partnership.[83] This means resisting the urge to push for results and being willing to let decisions and development take as long as they need. Lederleitner suggests that certain types of time-orientation are correlated to greater impact.[84]

The last two definitional concepts to include in the consensus on partnership are both ideas related to economic dependency.[85] The first: non-Dependence, deals with avoiding economically dependent relationships. These formulations usually entail a combination of creating projects that can be sustained using local resources and building the human and economic capacities (often through education or training) of partner organizations.[86] The other concept: interdependence, seems to be mutually exclusive with the first.[87] It acknowledges that one partner depending solely on the other is not acceptable. But advocates of interdependence suggest that the corrective for such a state of affairs is for partners to rely on one another to meet important needs. To authors in favor of interdependence, the worst part of dependency is not dependence but the fact that goods are flowing in one direction, instead of bi-laterally.[88]

Operational Dimension

Hockett and Muhanji, *Lessons from Cross-Cultural Collaboration: How Cultural Humility Informed and Shaped the Work of an American and a Kenyan*.

[83] Mott, *Cooperation and The World Mission*; Mary T. Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010); Hunsberger, "Launching a Strategic Missional Partnership between Park Place Baptist Church, Pearl, Mississippi, and Nuevo Pacto Baptist Church, Tegucigalpa, Honduras."

[84] Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*, 199.

[85] Foundational texts on economic dependency include Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997); Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009).

[86] Important contributions in this regard have been made by Funkschmidt, "New Models of Mission Relationship and Partnership"; Reeves, *Congregation-to-Congregation Relationship*; Kruis, "Ecclesiological Assumptions and International Mission Partnerships: A Philippine Case Study"; Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*; Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships"; McFarland, "William Carey's Expectation for Missionary Cooperation."

[87] Though Funkschmidt, "New Models of Mission Relationship and Partnership"; Kruis, "Ecclesiological Assumptions and International Mission Partnerships: A Philippine Case Study"; and Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships" all manage to hold the two concepts in creative tension with one another.

[88] Kasambala, "A Critical Diagnosis of Partnership in Light of Inequality and Independence"; Bakker, *Sister Churches*; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*; Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships."

The operational dimension of the literature on partnership includes the structures and practices used to put a partnership into practice. There literature is in complete agreement that good mission partnerships do not simply happen. They require certain structures and practices to create and sustain them. The first thing partnership needs is ample space for informal dialog. Several authors note the importance of space for social interaction.[89] Others are even more explicit, noting that dialog is the primary means of constructing the webs of significance and belonging that constitute social realities.[90] As such, they are of supreme importance to the creation of partnerships. There is also considerable agreement that partnerships need to be structured in ways that make everyone's expectations and responsibilities as clear as possible.[91] Another important structural consideration is how decisions are made. A growing number of authors claim that a slow process of negotiation and consensus-building is the best method for making decisions in partnership.[92] This does not allow for speedy resolution of issues that arise, but it does make sure everyone's voice is heard.[93] The last two structures that recur in

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[89] Eitzen, "Dependent, Independent, Interdependent? A Case Study in Mission Partnership Between North and South America"; Butler, *Well Connected*; Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne*; Kruis, "Ecclesiological Assumptions and International Mission Partnerships: A Philippine Case Study"; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*; Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*.

[90] See Wesley, "Collective Impact in Congregational Mission," 163; Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships," 106.

[91] Kraakevik, *Partners in the Gospel*; Paek, "Toward a Relevant and Practical Partnership Between Foreign Missions and the Indigenous Mission Forces"; Brown, "Exploratory Case Studies and Analyses of Three Intercultural Congregation-to-Congregation Partnerships," 2007; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*; Penner, "Cross-Cultural Partnerships and Asymmetries of Power"; Pennington, "Negotiating the Maturing Relational Dynamics between National Churches and Missions Agencies."

[92] Examples include Kalu, "Not Just New Relationships but a Renewed Body"; Paek, "Toward a Relevant and Practical Partnership Between Foreign Missions and the Indigenous Mission Forces"; Cheung, "Partnerships Between Local Churches and Missions Agencies: Optimizing Missionary Mobilization and Member Care"; Spencer, "Not Yet There: Seminaries and the Challenge of Partnership"; Pennington, "Negotiating the Maturing Relational Dynamics between National Churches and Missions Agencies." Pennington notes that this is especially important when dealing with control of resources. .

[93] Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships," 103.

the literature are (1) the inclusion of mechanisms for regular review and revision of the policies and

priorities of the partnership;[94] and (2) clear lines of communication and documentation.[95]

Lastly, there are a whole host of best practices that appear consistently in the literature. These

include regular times of prayer for the partnership (and partners);[96] early participation in exercises that

build trust,[97] letting questions over how resources should be used and programs deployed be directed

by local initiative,[98] and the creation of accountability structures that are culturally appropriate.[99] Some

authors also suggest that it is important to set aside time to celebrate the existence of a partnership, as

well as the things it accomplishes.[100] Regular exchange of hospitality, giving partners the opportunity to

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[94] A great explanation is given in Penner, "Cross-Cultural Partnerships and Asymmetries of Power," 233. See also; Chu, "Partnership in Missionary Sending with Special Reference to the Hong Kong Chinese Missionary Movement"; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*; Spencer, "Not Yet There: Seminaries and the Challenge of Partnership."

[95] See Penner, "Cross-Cultural Partnerships and Asymmetries of Power," 239. Also; Reeves, *Congregation-to-Congregation Relationship*; Brown, "Exploratory Case Studies and Analyses of Three Intercultural Congregation-to-Congregation Partnerships," 2007; Butler, *Well Connected*; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*.

[96] See Reeves, *Congregation-to-Congregation Relationship*, 91. Also; Paek, "Toward a Relevant and Practical Partnership Between Foreign Missions and the Indigenous Mission Forces"; Butler, *Well Connected*.

[97] One of the best discussions of this can be found in Cheung, "Partnerships Between Local Churches and Missions Agencies: Optimizing Missionary Mobilization and Member Care." He develops a socio-structural argument for trust-building in pp. 55-76; then provides lots of practical advice in pp. 142-160. See also; Reeves, *Congregation-to-Congregation Relationship*; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*; Mickler, "An Analysis of the Impact of PaulAnn Baptist Church and Her Partners among the More Materially Poor in the Global South"; McFarland, "William Carey's Expectation for Missionary Cooperation."

[98] Both Mickler, "An Analysis of the Impact of PaulAnn Baptist Church and Her Partners among the More Materially Poor in the Global South," 208; and Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships," 209, deal explicitly with the rationale for local control of resources. One of the best arguments is that local leaders understand the local context and will have to deal with the consequences of each action. See also, Manuel, "Partnership in Mission"; Brown, "Exploratory Case Studies and Analyses of Three Intercultural Congregation-to-Congregation Partnerships," 2007; Kruis, "Ecclesiological Assumptions and International Mission Partnerships: A Philippine Case Study"; Spencer, "Not Yet There: Seminaries and the Challenge of Partnership"; Cheung, "Partnerships Between Local Churches and Missions Agencies: Optimizing Missionary Mobilization and Member Care."

[99] Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*, 110–21, contains the most thorough treatment of the process; Mickler, "An Analysis of the Impact of PaulAnn Baptist Church and Her Partners among the More Materially Poor in the Global South", also includes some excellent examples of relationship rather than cold rationality as a successful basis for accountability. See also; Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships," 103; Kraakevik, *Partners in the Gospel*; Brown, "Exploratory Case Studies and Analyses of Three Intercultural Congregation-to-Congregation Partnerships," 2007; Spencer, "Not Yet There: Seminaries and the Challenge of Partnership."

[100] Pennington, "Negotiating the Maturing Relational Dynamics between National Churches and Missions Agencies." Pennington notes on p.250 that this is often even more important for majority-world partners. See also; Spencer, "Not Yet There: Seminaries and the Challenge of Partnership"; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*.

welcome, care for, and depend on one another is also a key factor.[101] Along the same lines, several

authors maintain that every opportunity should be made to maximize personal contact between

members of partnering organizations, in both formal and informal settings.[102]

Finally, the missiological discussion of partnership agrees that partnerships do best when

partners demonstrate their commitment to remain in relationship before they actually face trouble.[103]

Many studies also find that partnerships flourish when there are "champions" in the organization who

take responsibility for advocating for and enacting the partnership.[104] They suggest that having

significant buy-in from the leadership of both organizations is crucial.[105] And some also advocate for

maximal organizational penetration,[106] which simply means that the partnership is integrated into

several parts of the organization's life. Finally, there is broad agreement that having culturally fluent,

neutral parties who can serve as mediators when conflict becomes inflamed[107] is an important practice

for mission partnership.

The greatest strength of the current state of the study of mission partnership is how

complimentary everyone's findings seem to be. The flood of studies of partnerships of different kinds

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[101] A great exploration of the intricacies of this exchange can be found in George, *Called as Partners in Christ's Service*, 62–72; Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, 55, 141; Reissner, "The Dance of Partnership"; Funkschmidt, "New Models of Mission Relationship and Partnership"; Spencer, "Not Yet There: Seminaries and the Challenge of Partnership."

[102] A typical argument is made in Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*, 64. See also Bakker, *Sister Churches*.

[103] One of the better treatments of the issue can be found in Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne*, 225; Kraakevik, *Partners in the Gospel*. Also, consult; Addicott, *Body Matters*; Penner, "Cross-Cultural Partnerships and Asymmetries of Power"; Madden, "Mutual Transformation as a Framework for Church Global Mission Partnerships"; McFarland, "William Carey's Expectation for Missionary Cooperation."

[104] Exemplary descriptions can be found in Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*, 63–73; Butler, *Well Connected*, 201–20; Bakker, *Sister Churches*, 117–21.

[105] Perhaps best explained in Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships," 108. Though the following bear examination: Mott, *Cooperation and The World Mission*; Kraakevik, *Partners in the Gospel*; Chu, "Partnership in Missionary Sending with Special Reference to the Hong Kong Chinese Missionary Movement"; Reeves, *Congregation-to-Congregation Relationship*; Bakker, *Sister Churches*; Hunsberger, "Launching a Strategic Missional Partnership between Park Place Baptist Church, Pearl, Mississippi, and Nuevo Pacto Baptist Church, Tegucigalpa, Honduras."

[106] Butler, *Well Connected*, 143, 190–91; This is also addressed in Bakker, *Sister Churches*.

[107] Characteristic arguments can be found in Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*, 151; Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships," 104–6. See also: Brown, "Exploratory Case Studies and Analyses of Three Intercultural Congregation-to-Congregation Partnerships," 2007; Wesley, "Collective Impact in Congregational Mission."

and in different contexts produced in the last 20 years have largely reached the same conclusions. The

last few pages of this chapter have unpacked 25 recurrent themes in the missiological literature on

partnership that constitute an emerging consensus on what partnership is and how it should be

practiced.[108] This is an excellent foundation for future studies to build on, and a legacy of which past

contributors can be immensely proud. The question is, "where does the study of partnership go from

here?"

Main Limitation of the Current Literature

The current missiological conversation around partnership has produced a wealth of descriptive

case studies. The section above demonstrated that these studies largely contain complementary

findings. However, when it comes to making general, prescriptive claims about transnational mission

partnerships, the current research is caught between a rock and a hard place; between descriptive

methodology and the immense complexity of partnerships. On the one hand, the scope of the

qualitative approaches taken by the current literature is too narrow to make general, prescriptive

conclusions about partnership (no matter how much one desires to do so). On the other hand, a

quantitative sociological approach[109] might seem suited to answer questions of general applicability. Yet

the nature of partnership is such that very often things like personalities and first impressions, variables

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[108] It is also worth noting that this consensus is also reflected in ongoing academic discussions dealing with partnership sponsored by the Evangelical Missiological Society and the American Society of Missiology Randall Schmor, "Sister Church Partnerships: Missional Living on a Global Scale," in *Strategic Issues in Local Church Mission* (Evangelical Missiological Society, Dallas, TX, 2016); Reid Kisling, "Church-to-Church International Partnerships: A Case Study of How a Haitian Church Impacted a U.S. Church's Understanding of Mission," in *Strategic Issues in Local Church Mission* (Evangelical Missiological Society, Dallas, TX, 2016); "Third-Wave Mission Track," 2017; "Third-Wave Mission Track," 2019; "The Future of Short-Term Missions," in *The Past and Future of Evangelical Missions*, 2020.

[109] Similar to the approach taken by Nancy Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); and Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches*. These studies touch very lightly on ICPs. But the scope of their research and their definitions of partnership are far too broad to speak meaningfully to this study. Additionally, despite their titles, they only barely begin to scratch the surface of how partnership is actually developed and practiced by churches. And both works are focused exclusively on the responses of American congregations. Both authors call for further research in these areas, and I intend to answer that call.

for which it is very difficult to control, are just as determinative as things that can be measured in a sociological survey. In the rest of this section, I will briefly expand on these issues. I think the current literature on partnership is in desperate need of the kind of wide-scoped, theory-testing research that the latter approach can offer. But we must be very clear about what kind of conclusions can realistically be drawn from such a study.

The practitioner-oriented works mentioned above are very helpful books, and often based on many years of experience. But the evidence for the approaches they advocate is purely anecdotal. A few of the scholar-oriented works take a similar approach, at least in part; relating the experiences of churches in partnership but creating a purely descriptive product. Other works take a different approach, mining abstract resources (like biblical and theological studies) to produce a theology of partnership. All of these are worthwhile endeavors. But, from a researcher's point of view, while they provide very helpful insights, these works contribute theories in need of testing rather than prescriptions that should be taken *prima facie*.

The majority of scholar-oriented approaches to mission partnership (including the vast majority of dissertations) use case studies to explain the success (and/or lack thereof) of a particular attempt at international local church partnerships. The logical flow of these studies can generally be summarized as "because of conditions *x, y,* & *z;* the partnership resulted in *a* or *b*;" where "*x,*" "*y,*" and "*z*" equal any number of variables pertaining to partnership and "*a*" and "*b*" equal a given desirable or undesirable outcome. These studies typically draw heavily on the practice-based literature to select their variables and inform their evaluations. And, like the practiced based approaches, each one concludes by suggesting the keys to making mission partnerships work.[110] This approach, while instructive, does not

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[110] There is, of course, research which does not neatly fit these categories. The most significant of these include Jonathan Barnes, *Power and Partnership* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); Manuel, "Partnership in Mission"; Christopher R. Little, "Mission in the Way of Paul: With Special Reference to Twenty-First Century Christian Mission" (PhD diss., Pasadena, CA, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2003). Barnes takes an historical approach, while Little and Manuel both examine partnership from a biblical/theological perspective. While these authors may not

really assist me in answering my question. The question of whether there are patterns in partnerships that lead to more desirable outcomes is inherently a question of general applicability. The body of research on partnership that currently exists (whether based on case studies or seeking theological or historical legitimation and guidance) is too limited in scope by its qualitative methods to speak to general applicability.

Qualitative research has many virtues. It defines the terms for studying a new field, identifies the key variables at work, and suggests theories about what is really going on beneath the surface. It produces descriptions that are thick, and thoroughly enmeshed in their respective contexts. But, because the findings of a case study are by design limited to that specific case, case studies cannot answer questions about general applicability. Methodologically, they designed to make claims about a very narrowly defined population and thus can speak authoritatively about outcomes experienced by the particular partnerships that were studied. Since the scope of their findings are limited to their immediate context, they are too narrow to address the issue of whether most churches *generally* could experience better outcomes by adhering to a given set of prescriptions (though that does not stop most authors from suggesting that might be the case). The field of mission partnerships has been well-served by many excellent qualitative approaches. What remains to be seen is whether those studies have produced an approach to partnership that is applicable beyond the scope of individual case studies. That is what I want to uncover. The way I will go about it will be explored in the next chapter.

The careful reader of this chapter will have noted that this consensus is drawn from a literature that, while quite broad, is still almost entirely western. This is a regrettable fact of the state of the current literature. While authors have been calling for years for more input from majority-world voices,

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use case studies as such, they are still engaged in a qualitative analysis of conditions and outcomes in partnership and their conclusions also focus on what can make for a "good" practice of partnership in mission. Though Little's dismissal of partnership would suggest that such a goal is unattainable, he is nonetheless engaged in the same mode of reasoning ("factors x, y, and z equal a resounding b").

there is not a great deal of work in this regard in the current literature. So, while the consensus posited

above certainly includes majority-world voices, it should be noted that it is biased toward western

interests and priorities. Of course, there are significant exceptions to this rule. As was noted earlier,

Taylor's work includes several majority world contributions which harmonize with the emerging

consensus. Other significant contributions to the conversation on partnership have included Kalu,

Kasambala, Lee, and Muhanji. Additionally, five of the dissertations dealt with above: Cheung, Chu,

Kruis, Manuel, and Paek, which introduce some of the most significant developments for the consensus

on partnership, are written by majority world scholars. Admittedly, these scholars were working at

western institutions and working with a largely western literature. But their contributions mark a turning

point in the development of the literature toward a wider inclusion of majority-world voices in the

development of the consensus. That their contributions focus on relational priority, mutual valuation,

interdependence, and consensus-building may give some indication of what is most important to

majority-world partners. It is also telling that (with the exception of prayer, trust-building, and local

control of decisions) the consensus on best practice is driven entirely by western authors. It might be

that majority world scholars are less interested in technique, or perhaps they would suggest practices

that are not on the radar of western scholars. One can only hope that increased inclusion of majority-

world voices will provide an answer.

Conclusion

More than a century of consistent reflection on mission partnership has produced a remarkably

cohesive account of what makes for a good partnership. There is substantial agreement in the existing

literature that the 25 variables enumerated in Figure 2.1, the theological, conceptual, and operational

elements of partnership, are what lead to better outcomes for mission partnerships. What remains to

be seen is (1) whether that consensus is finding consistent expression in the ways churches actually

practice international partnership and (2) whether those elements can actually be correlated to desirable outcomes.

Perhaps the easiest point upon which to find complete agreement in the literature on mission partnership is that partnerships are all inherently "messy." There are a lot of moving parts in a partnership, and they are so dependent on context that it is difficult (if not impossible) to guarantee that the approach taken in one case will lead to the same outcome in another. In short, there is no "silver bullet;" no general theory of partnership that explains everything that can ever be experienced by two congregations (or any other organizations for that matter) seeking to work together in mission. Things like personality clashes or serendipitous moments of connection between congregants are variables no general theory of partnership can account or control for. No doubt, that is why most researchers have limited the scope of their studies to a single context.

Yet there is an unyielding drive in all of the above-mentioned works to figure out what makes mission partnerships tick; to discover their true significance and how they can be done well. Even though authors agree that much depends on the exigencies of particular partners, they seem equally convinced that study of one partnership can yield insights that are useful in many partnerships. Still, studies of ICPs must contend with partnership's complexity and contingency. So, the question becomes whether there is a valid way of studying partnership that speaks meaningfully to multiple contexts without reducing the object of inquiry to a universal law or formulaic principle which we know would be impossible to defend. To put it another way, the question before us is whether we can we study mission partnerships in a way that provides reproducible clarity without ignoring partnership's inherent complexity, its contingency, or its context. This question will be answered at the beginning of my next chapter.

<center>**Chapter 3 – Methodology**</center>

<center>*Introduction*</center>

As can be seen in the preceding chapter, a thorough review of the literature has led me to a clear articulation of a thesis: there are patterns of belief, thinking, and behavior concerning partnership that lead to healthier partnerships. This thesis attempts to show the interaction between the theological, conceptual, and operational dimensions of partnership. But it also illuminates the need for a new methodological direction for the study of partnership. This direction should be wider in scope than previous studies of international congregational partnerships (ICPs) if it hopes to make generalizable claims about partnership. And it also needs to be able to relate the emerging consensus on partnership to the way ICPs are being implemented in actual practice. After much consultation with my committee, it was decided that the most likely way to accomplish this was to create an online survey and distribute it to a large, random, sample of churches involved in ICPs. The result of this process was the Global Congregational Survey (GCS), which was deployed between August 2019 and February 2020. In this chapter I will narrate how the GCS was constructed and deployed, and what I did with the data I gathered.

The writing of a chapter like this one presents a bit of a dilemma. On the one hand, the methodology section of any dissertation is seldom the most gripping reading to begin with. Lengthening it with a pedantic recounting of every step of the research process seems an almost unforgivable encumbrance. But on the other hand, when a researcher is employing a somewhat new technique for a given field, and if their main hope in dissertating is to provide that field with a new avenue for research, it seems necessary to be as detailed about the methodology as possible. Thus, I have included a rather strenuous account of how this project was pursued in hopes that those who might come after may fall into fewer mistakes than I did and have a much easier time of it as a result.

Methodological Presuppositions of the GCS

In Chapter 2 I began arguing for a quantitative study of partnership in the missiological literature. But there are all sorts of quantitative approaches that can be appropriated. So, I will begin by explaining why I chose this particular research path and some of the underlying assumptions that guided me. The GCS was heavily informed by interaction with sociological forays into complexity theory. Once the sole domain of mathematicians and physicists, complexity theory (more popularly referred to as "chaos theory") is finding increased application in the social sciences.[111] Complexity theory developed in the mid-20th century as a way to describe dynamic, recursive, irreducible, multi-valent, self-organizing systems which exhibit low-predictability and interact dynamically with their environment. As such, this approach seems very well suited to the study of partnership.

As it has been appropriated by sociologists, complexity theory does not seek a mathematical proof or calculus that governs social systems.[112] Instead, its aim is to find patterns in how complex systems organize themselves. Essentially, using complexity in a social setting is about mapping the congruities and patterns among given variables (like beliefs, concepts, and practices) that emerge in social systems (like mission partnerships), which are highly sensitive to initial conditions (like culture, religious tradition, personalities, demographics, and resources). By creating a large and random sample, researchers lessen the probability that patterns are determined only by initial conditions or environmental factors. They can never eliminate that possibility, but the clearer the pattern the more likely that there is something in the variables that is driving the outcomes.

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[111] Key examples can be found in Ken Hatt, "Considering Complexity: Toward a Strategy for Non-Linear Analysis," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 313–47; Czeslaw Mesjasz, "Complexity of Social Systems," *Acta Physica Polonica, A.* 117, no. 4 (April 2010): 706–15; Scott E. Page, "What Sociologists Should Know About Complexity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (August 2015): 21–41; Sylvia Walby, *Globalization and Inequalities: Complexity and Contested Modernities* (Los Angeles ; London : SAGE, 2009., 2009); Keith Warren, Cynthia Franklin, and Calvin L. Streeter, "New Directions in Systems Theory: Chaos and Complexity," *Social Work* 43, no. 4 (July 1998): 357–72.

[112] Mesjasz is quick to point out that using complexity theory for quantitative analysis in the social sciences is not the same as in physics. It does not derive increased rigor or legitimacy from mathematical or statistical proofs. Rather, quantitative analysis allows patterns to emerge that can then be used to make qualitative assessments.

This dissertation's methodological approach, adapted from one first suggested by Ken Hatt,[113] entails a three-step process: (1) identify the key components of the emerging system; (2) establish their connection and relationship; and (3) assess the overall pattern of the system. Again, this is primarily a reflective and descriptive exercise. But the strength of such an approach is that it offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of what is really going on in a very "messy" system. I am convinced that the best way forward for the study of ICPs is to take a complexity theory approach. Such a study would be able to search for insights from multiple contexts without being entirely constrained by them. But the question at hand would not be whether there is a general law governing partnership. Instead, the study will determine if successful international congregational partnerships exhibit a consistent pattern in how they develop. That is precisely what the GCS has been designed to do.

Research Design of the GCS

Using Hatt's typology outlined above, I designed the GCS to measure the prevalence of key components in an ICP, to show how they related to each other, and to present a pattern with respect to outcomes that could be evaluated. These first two tasks (to identify the key components of the system in question and establish the relationship of those variables) were largely accomplished in the previous chapter. The last several decades of scholarship have produced a surprising degree of agreement on the necessary, irreducible components of partnership in mission.

There are 25 variables that affect how a given partnership emerges, according to the consensus found in the literature (see Figure 3.1). The first variable is theological grounding (the Theological Dimension), which I call the heart of partnership. The next seven variables all deal with how partners define the concept of "partnership" (the Conceptual Dimension), what I call the head of partnership. There is general consensus that relational priority, shared sense of calling, clearly defined and mutually valued resources, space for the other, willingness to take time, non-dependence, and interdependence

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[113] Hatt, "Considering Complexity," 314–47.

are all important notions in defining a "true partnership." Finally, there are 17 structures and practices

used to operationalize a partnership that the literature suggests will impact the way an ICP develops

(the Operational Dimension). I call this the hands of partnership. Creating space for dialog, defining

expectations and responsibilities, arriving at decisions through negotiation and consensus, reviewing

practices regularly, and crafting clear lines of communication and documentation are all essential; as are

prayer, trust building, local control of decisions, culturally appropriate accountability, celebration,

exchange of hospitality, personal contact, commitment, people who champion the relationship, buy-in

from leadership, organizational penetration, and mediators. A robust study of ICPs should be attuned to

whether and how all of these factors influence the kind of partnership that develops. These 25 variables,

and their relationship to one another, are visualized in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1
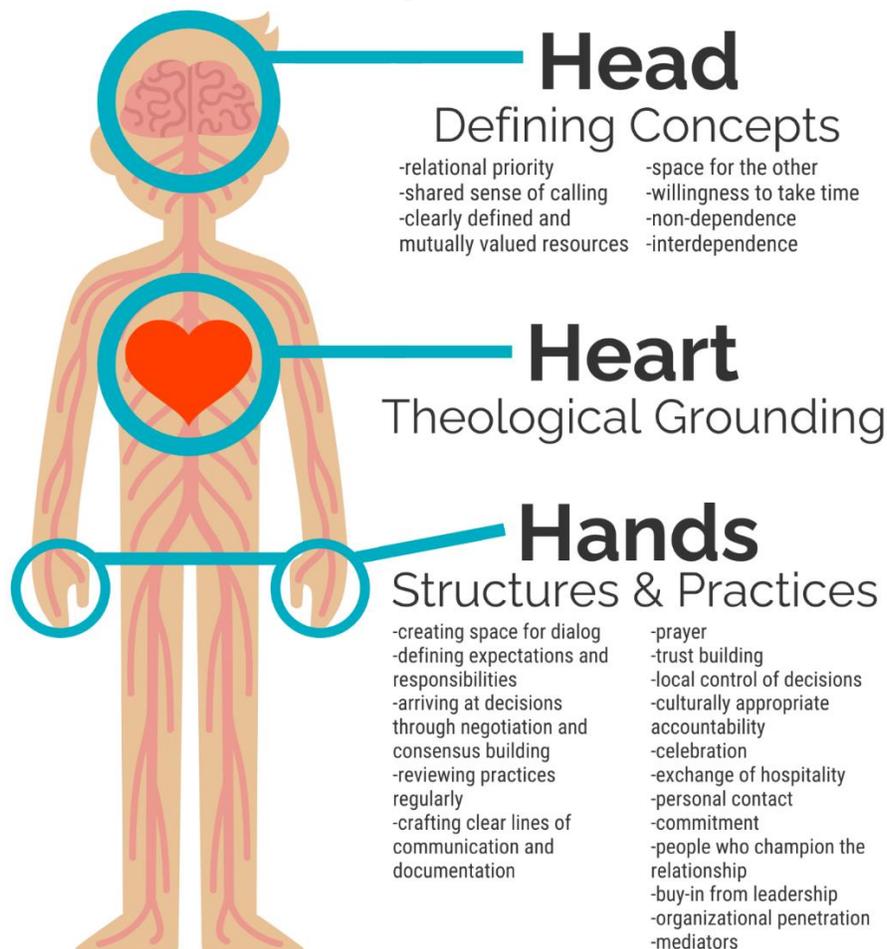
The next step toward implementing the GCS was to design an instrument capable of measuring

these variables and correlating them to the kind of outcomes they experienced. This would allow me to

move toward the final step of assessing the emerging pattern of ICPs. Since I planned to send surveys all

over the world. I decided an online delivery system would make the most sense; so, I crafted an

instrument using the online platform SurveyMonkey.com.[114] The survey makes extensive use of a Likert

scale to measure to what degree a given variable is or is not operant in each ICP. Typically, respondents

were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with a statement. Possible responses included:

strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. A

few short answer and multiple-choice questions were also added, but they served the same purpose.

The survey included an informed consent page that explained that all data would be aggregated and

kept separate from identifying information. Additionally, no answers would be shared with church

leaders or with a congregation's sister church. This was done with the hope that it would encourage

respondents to tell hard truths. The GCS also gathered some demographic information like

denomination and congregational attendance. It ended with an evaluation section that measured the

relative health of a given ICP.[115] Mapping the outcomes of emerging ICPs provided the interpretive key

for the GCS. I used this information to correlate the relative importance of the 25 variables in a given

partnership to the kind of outcomes that materialized.

The survey was developed by creating a database of possible questions that related to the 25

target variables. Initially I had a database of around 250 questions. These were refined, re-organized,

and pruned down over three months of constant iteration. I am eternally grateful to the many

colleagues and family members who served as beta-testers in this stage. Eventually, I had a survey

instrument that included 76 total questions. Once a final form had been approved by my committee and

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[114] A copy of the final form of the survey can be found in Appendix A, pp. 190-203.
[115] More information on the evaluation can be found in Chapter 5.

Institutional Review Board, I had the survey translated into Spanish and reviewed by native speakers from two different countries.

Because I was using an online delivery system, I created a website so that I had a place that looked professional where potential participants could find information about myself, the research, and what I planned to do with their responses.[116] I included explanations and videos and encouraged ongoing communication by posting initial findings on the site. My intention was to provide a more personal and responsive form of communication that might put potential participants at ease and make them confident enough in the project to give answers to a complete stranger who contacted them out of the blue. The whole process was time consuming but worthwhile. It mostly entailed registering a domain and setting up a website using WordPress. I also purchased dedicated email services via Google's G-suite package, which proved to be worth the cost.

Finally, before I could deploy the GCS, I needed to identify a statistically valid, representative sample of churches involved in an ICP. Partnerships are extremely dependent on initial conditions. Therefore, it was very important to select as random a sample as possible for this study. A snowball sample might oversample for a given initial condition (e.g., a certain denominational tradition or regional culture) thus limiting the general applicability of the emerging pattern. Unfortunately, no database of American congregations with international partnerships exists, so I had to build one. To do so I used a modified form of the approach taken by Nancy Ammerman in *Pillars of Faith*.[117] Dr Ammerman also sought to populate her study of US congregations as randomly as possible. She seemed to succeed in doing so.[118] Since I decided to study both US congregations and their sister congregations in other countries, I modified her parameters slightly. Also, in the interest of limiting the time and cost

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[116] https://globalchurchpartnerships.org

[117] Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners*, 2005.

[118] For specifics see Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners*, 279–82.

associated with sampling such a large population, I decided to sample only certain states, and only two

counties from each state selected.[119] Participants were selected thusly:

- I selected eight US states using a random number generator at Random.org; one state from

    each of eight socio-economic regions as defined by the US Bureau of Economic Analysis.[120] I

    separated the counties in each state into two groups (urban and rural),[121] and randomly selected

    one county from each group. Using this method, the following 16 counties were selected:

    o   New England: Cheshire County and Rockingham County, New Hampshire

    o   Mideast: Monroe County and Rensselaer County, New York

    o   Great Lakes: Adams County and St. Joseph County, Indiana

    o   Plains: Harvey County and Johnson County, Kansas

    o   Southeast: George County and Hinds County, Mississippi

    o   Southwest: Maricopa County and Pinal County, Arizona

    o   Rocky Mountain: Arapahoe County and La Plata County, Colorado

    o   Far West: Storey County and Washoe County, Nevada

- I purchased a database of Christian congregations in each of these counties from Infogroup

    Academic.[122]

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[119] In this respect I am incredibly grateful to Dr Gary Adler for an exchange of emails in which he related his past experience studying the global engagement of American congregations using a similar method.

[120] US Department of Commerce, "BEA Regions," *Bureau of Economic Analysis* (blog), n.d., https://apps.bea.gov/regional/docs/regions.cfm.

[121] To do this I grouped them according to whether or not they met the definition of an "Urban Area" (50,000 residents) as defined by: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, "Population Density and Urbanization," *Demographic and Social Statistics* (blog), 2017, https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sconcerns/densurb/densurbmethods.htm.

[122] This list included any congregation that might be recognized as confessing an orthodox Christology according to the Nicene Creed. As noted in Chapter 1, non-Christian congregations (such as Jewish and Hindu temples, mosques, and gurudwaras) as well as non-orthodox groups (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Unitarian/Universalists) were excluded from the study.

- All congregations were contacted a minimum of three times to ascertain their eligibility to participate in the GCS. Any congregation involved in an international relationship was invited to the study provided they met the following criteria:[123]
  - Their partnering relationship was with another congregation. For my purposes, multi-site churches were considered a congregation, but not: a diocese, NGO, denomination, or other mission agency. The partnership had to be between "grass-roots" level religious communities that were open to laypersons.[124]
  - The non-US partner was located in Anglophone Africa, India, or Latin America.[125]
  - Leadership of both congregations formally recognized the relationship.
  - The duration of the relationship was at least two years before the study began.[126]

My intention in choosing these criteria for participation was to cast as wide a net as possible. However, it must be acknowledged that there are many partnerships that will necessarily be excluded by the GCS. The first criterion is meant to limit the scope of the GCS to only ICPs. Local congregations enter into all kinds of institutional partnerships,[127] sometimes with other congregations, sometimes with parachurch or government agencies, sometimes with educational institutions. All of these are partnerships worth studying, but this dissertation is concerned only with partnerships between sister

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[123] The following is a slightly modified form of the parameters used by Janel Bakker, *Sister Churches*. The most significant difference is that I chose to exclude her last two qualifications, which deal with (1) exchanging more than just resources and (2) the engagement of non-clergy. These were excluded from my requirements because I am interested to see if and how those factors impact partnership health.

[124] I allowed each congregation to define what constituted a "partnership" for itself. This meant that the study included a wide variety of definitions, models, and archetypal metaphors for "partnership." This is exactly what I wanted though, because it would allow me to see if how these varying assumptions might impact the kind of partnership that emerges.

[125] This limitation was imposed for two reasons. (1) Current literature suggests this is where most US churches form partnerships and (2) language proficiency in those regions would necessitate making the survey instrument available in only English and Spanish.

[126] This qualification was added because I wanted to study ICPs that had time to develop a shared history and a shared sense of how the relationship was going. A comparison of this data with early-stage ICPs (which have their own rapidly-changing dynamics) would surely be worthwhile, but it is beyond the scope of this study.

[127] I will say more on this in Chapter 4.

churches. Similar explorations of partnerships between churches and parachurch organizations, or of

partnerships between denominations and/or dioceses, would make for very interesting comparison. But

making clear distinctions between modes of partnership is the only way to make those comparisons

meaningful.

The second criterion, which essentially imposes a language requirement, is purely practical in

nature. It allowed me to move forward with the study without producing a survey instrument in more

than two languages. There were 30 ICPs identified in Phase 1 that did not receive an invitation to the

GCS. About half of those were left out because of this requirement. It is regrettable that those voices

were not heard, and I hope to include them in future studies, but sadly I did not have the time or

resources to translate the survey into multiple languages.

The third and fourth criteria were mostly concerned with making sure I was sampling mature

partnerships. ICPs are nebulous, especially when they are just beginning. The vision for the project may

not be shared equally through the congregation, or even the congregational leadership. The partners

may not yet be on the same page about their expectations for the relationship. Like other modes of

partnership, this stage in a partnership's development certainly merits further study. But since it has its

own unique challenges and conditions, it would be best to study early-phase partnerships on their own.

ICPs whose status is not clear within the congregation are something that should be studied further, but

they are beyond the scope of the current project.

But, with these few caveats, the guiding principle of this study was to construe partnership as

broadly as possible so as to include the largest number of ICPs. And on the whole, that is what was

accomplished. As will be unpacked in the next chapter, Phase 1 was able to locate a large number of

ICPs across a very diverse cross-section of the denominational landscape. Interestingly, this number may

not square with the records of denominational leaders. One of the advantages of this approach to

populating the GCS is that it requires the partnership to be sufficiently important to the life of the

church that the staff answering the phones are at least aware of its presence. Sister churches that are so

in name only, or partnerships that exist mainly on paper, or ones that used to be important but have

fallen by the wayside, will remain beyond the reach of this study. This might skew how many healthy

partnerships we measure, as some languishing, unhealthy ICPs may have been weeded out by the

selection process. But this study might also provide denominations an opportunity to measure how

effectively churches, and especially church staff, have been educated about their partnerships by

comparing the rate at which they appeared in this study with their own records. If a denomination has

recorded about the same number of partnerships as was found by in Phase 1, that would be ideal. It

would also be fairly unlikely. If the denomination records significantly more partnerships than were

discovered in this study, they may have a problem with how partnership is understood and

communicated to and within their congregations. If the denomination's records are significantly lower

than what is represented here (as could conceivably be the case for some denominations), it is possible

their congregations would prefer to pursue partnership without the knowledge of the denomination.

This phenomenon will get a closer look in the next chapter.

Data Collection

Now, having laid the foundations for the GCS, I deployed the study. Data was collected in two

phases. Phase 1 consisted of contacting every church in the 16 counties listed above to ascertain their

eligibility and willingness to participate. Phase 2 consisted of sending surveys to the churches that

indicated interest, and to their international partners. Each phase yielded a trove of data that will be

unpacked in the chapters ahead.

Phase 1

In the first chapter I narrated some of my own, circuitous journey in developing ICPs. Creating

and sustaining a sister church relationship involves many false-starts, setbacks, and unexpected

digressions. And it should come as no surprise that my study of ICPs proceeded in much the same way.

Phase 1 began on August 11th, 2019 and continued through November 20th, 2019.

The list I secured included 1249 congregations. Initial contact with these churches was made via email. An email was sent to each one introducing the study, presenting the eligibility requirements, linking to further information on the website, and inviting them to participate and/or respond with any questions. From the list, 181 emails turned out to be out of date for one reason or another. Replacement addresses for 136 churches could be found via web searches, meaning only 45 churches were unreachable via email. The emails were sent out in a staged rollout from August 11th to August 19th. In this first wave, groups of 150-200 churches were emailed at a time. The reason behind this was two-fold. First, lower volume would allow me to work out any problems that might arise in making contact without having to correct 1200 iterations of the same mistake. And second, it was hoped that sending fewer emails at a time might help avoid spam filters. These reasons turned out to be better founded. I can also report that while spam filters may struggle to deal with poorly worded emails from obvious scammers, they filter out carefully worded contacts from PhD students quite efficiently. Every email sent from August 16th to August 18th (an estimated total of 400) was returned undelivered. After several attempts to adjust my method of contact, and thanks to the tireless efforts of Stoil and Plammen at Google Cloud Services (eventually requiring the intervention of Google's engineering team) the emails started flowing again.[128] Follow up emails to all 1204 contacts I had addresses for were sent on August

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[128] I learned a great deal about how email filters work through all this. It is highly recommended that future studies take advantage of contact managing services like those offered by Infogroup, Mailchimp, or a similar entity. I would also urge patience if a researcher decides not to go this route, because even though I had ensured compliance with CAN-SPAM and other anti-spamming laws, and followed the extensive recommendations made by Google, they still had to manually override their outgoing filter to make sure my emails went through smoothly. There is evidently a good reason that companies like Mailchimp charge significant amounts of money to manage email blasts to large lists of recipients. And if you have the resources to pay it will be well worth it. But if you do not, you will have to pay with equally significant amounts of time and frustration.

27th. I did not receive a single response. It turns out people who work at churches find it very easy to ignore emails; even the ones that aren't stopped by spam filters.

Fortunately, the contact list I had secured also included working phone numbers for all 1249 congregations. While this approach took much longer, it was much more successful at making contact with congregations and it provided a great deal of information that I had not initially planned on gathering. Calls were made between September 10th and November 10th, 2019. As Phase 1 progressed, I noted a few tendencies concerning the business hours for churches. Many offices are closed on either Friday or Monday and long lunches are pretty typical, both of which make it difficult to make contact. So, calls were made Tuesday thru Thursday between 10am and 12 pm and again between 2pm and 4pm, local time. If a church did not answer the first time I called, I would call them back at a different time of day. If they were not contacted on the second call, they were marked "no contact" and no further effort was made to reach out. Messages were not left for initial points of contact, though if a staff member indicated that the church might be interested in participation and email was not an option, a message would be left.

Using this method over half of congregations on the list (664) were contacted successfully. These were spread evenly through all 16 counties. When contact was made, I introduced myself and asked whether their congregation had an international partnership with another church;[129] recording all responses. The most common responses were "yes," "no," or "we partner with someone other than a church." If clarification was needed,[130] I would supply it here. If they responded that they did have an

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[129] The exact script I followed was "Hi I'm Danny from Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, KY. The reason for my call is I'm doing my doctoral research on American churches and their global partners and I was wondering if your church has an international partnership with another church." Only rarely would I depart from this script, usually when experience suggested it was a good idea. For example, I would drop the language of "international partnership" when calling Roman Catholic congregations and instead ask if they had a "sister parish in another part of the world." That was a category that rectory staff would recognize much quicker.

[130] I would estimate that somewhere between a third and half of the church staff I contacted had no frame of reference for what an "international partnership with another church" might mean. Most other clarifications had

ICP, I would extend an invitation to the GCS. Sometimes they would ask for more information, though just as frequently they would accept on the spot. Follow up emails, either with more information or with links to the survey, were sent immediately. About a third of the informational emails sent out were never replied to, but most churches who were involved in ICPs requested links to the GCS. Regardless of the answer to the first question; denomination, attendance, and other mode of global engagement were also tracked.[131]

This approach allowed me to gather information about churches that have ICPs, but it also told me about those who take different approaches to their global engagement. In a way, the failure of the email method was a blessing in disguise, as sending emails would never have yielded this kind of data. Using the email method, churches who didn't have ICPs had no way to share information with me. Phone calls required more intensive engagement on my part, but they also provided much richer data. This unforeseen source of information will be unpacked more fully in the next chapter. The phone calls also gave me access to some great "inside information" through unstructured interviews that would arise based on the contact's willingness to have a conversation. This willingness could vary wildly based on an unpredictable confluence of factors.[132] Very often the staff at churches who were involved in ICPs would take 20-40 minutes out of their day to talk about how their sister church partnerships came about, what kinds of things they did together, and what sort of problems they had encountered.

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to do with what constituted a partnership (see note 122) and whether a partnership with a denomination or mission organization qualified (it did not).

[131] Occasionally, contacts simply refused to provide any information, which was entirely their prerogative. I was also unceremoniously hung up on twice and shouted at on multiple occasions. Usually, this kind of reaction was because my call presented an inconvenience, though sometimes there was apparently more at work. Predominantly Hispanic congregations, for example, were understandably reticent to provide an outsider with information about how many people attended or what kind of international connections they have. I also found a similar pattern among historically African American churches in the deep south. Several contacts made it abundantly clear that they had no interest in helping me. Both cases are a regrettable reflection of the world we live in.

[132] I distinctly remember one contact who was very willing to participate and tried hard to answer all my questions before casually mentioning that it was hard for her to answer some questions since the church had been robbed that morning and the computer with all their records was gone. I thanked her profusely and stopped taking up her time.

Finally, denominational affiliation was confirmed by checking each congregation's website. This was done for all 664 congregations I was able to contact by phone, regardless of whether they were involved in an ICP. It also provided the opportunity to gather data on how the church presented its sister church relationships to the public and supplied other information like the local congregation's history.

Phase 2

Phase 1 was primarily concerned with locating American congregations with ICPs. A side effect of this phase was that I was able to get a sense of the global engagement of US churches more generally and to situate ICPs within that landscape. Phase 2 was largely concerned with deploying the GCS to US congregations and their international partners. It began on September 10th, 2019, and ended on January 31st, 2020, running concurrently with Phase 1 for the first two months. As US congregations with ICPs were identified, they were invited to participate in the GCS. This usually involved contacting other people within the congregation (pastors, missions directors, or ministry participants). Many phone messages were left, and all were followed up on. I also sent dozens of introductory emails containing information about the GCS. Once a congregational representative agreed to participate, I enrolled them in the study.

I created a unique link to the survey for every congregation that was enrolled and sent it to them immediately. I also created an introductory email with information on the study and a different link for each contact to forward to their international partners. I would also ask if the international partner preferred contact in Spanish, in which case all communication would go out in Spanish.[133] All links were created by embedding code in the URL that would allow me to track responses based on region, whether the county was urban or rural, whether the congregation was in the US or not, and a discrete ID number. This allowed me to anonymize the data so that I could analyze it without any

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[133] In an effort to provide equal access, I created a Spanish version of the GCS, a Spanish version of all the informational pages on my website, Spanish subtitles on all instructional videos, and Spanish translations of all emails. My thanks to Reinaldo Gracia Figueroa for his assistance.

reference to the name of the congregation. So, I was running reports on the responses of Southwest-Urban-Partnership-Number-Sixteen-(American) or Great-Lakes-Rural-Partnership-Number-Three-(Non-American). I asked each congregation to have one person who is highly involved in the partnership take the survey. On two occasions, church staff sent collectors to multiple individuals involved in the partnering ministry. In these cases, the responses given within each congregation were averaged (mean) to come up with a total. Thank-you emails were sent upon completion. Follow up emails were sent to all participants who had not responded after two weeks and four weeks had passed from their enrollment. Reminders were also sent one month and two weeks before closing Phase 2 at the end of January, 2020.

All told, 161 surveys were sent out, 81 to American congregations and 80 to their international partners. The reason for the extra American congregation being included was that this congregation was very keen to participate, but their partner was unwilling (even though they qualified). A total of 31 surveys were returned, 24 from American congregations, 7 from their international partners. This represented a total response rate of 19%, although the rate was markedly higher among American congregations (30%) than among international counterparts (9%). One reason for this disparity might have been that, while I had made personal contact with the American congregations, my contact with their international partner was indirect and mediated through their partners. This meant that I was back in the same place I was when I was sending out email contacts, I had not given them enough of a reason to pay attention to my emails. It is also possible that inviting them through their partner made international congregations less likely to participate if they thought they might offend their partner. A more comprehensive attempt to address the low response rate and major disparity between American and international response rates will follow in Chapter 9. For now, I will simply note the overall response rate was about what I had expected, though I had hoped that the disparity would be resolved by using the American sister church to make the introduction to the survey. That clearly did not have the intended impact. It is also interesting that the average response time for all participants was 16 minutes,

which was about what I had estimated it to be in the introductory materials sent to respondents. And the vast majority of completed responses were turned in within a day of the links being emailed or of a reminder email being sent out.

Data Analysis

The data produced by Phase 1 is fairly straightforward and required only minimal, descriptive data analysis, accomplished in an Excel spreadsheet. Responses were coded based on modes of global engagement, what county the American partner was from, denominational affiliation, and how many people regularly attend weekend services. This data is largely presented as is, without any need for complicated statistical analysis. The data produced by the survey deployed in Phase 2 underwent more extensive analysis. Once the study was closed, responses were gathered and entered into a numeric database. Responses were coded based on how strongly they reflected the presence of a given variable. A score of 5 (highest possible) meant the variable in question was very prevalent in the partnership, a score of 1 (lowest possible) indicated it was not prevalent at all. This database was processed using PSPP[134], a free, open-source statistical analysis software designed to work similarly to IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). I performed Chi-tests for single factor analysis. ANOVA tests with Tukey post-hoc analysis were used to look at variation between groups. The tables produced by all these tests can be found on my website.[135]

Chapter 4 presents the data gathered in Phase 1. Chapters 5-8 will present an extensive analysis of the data gathered in Phase 2. The first step in analyzing the results of the GCS was to use the results of the evaluative section to break the sample into three groups. As will be discussed later in Chapter 5, there were several respondents who did not fill out the evaluation section. This means that the total number of congregations represented in the evaluation, 16, represents the entire population of US

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[134] "GNU PSPP," *Free Software Foundation* (blog), accessed February 2, 2020, https://www.gnu.org/software/pspp/pspp.html.

[135] https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

congregations having an ICP[136] with a confidence level of 80% and a +/-8% margin of error. While this margin is not ideal, it is certainly reasonable enough for the present study. As Hatt and Mejascz pointed out,[137] the main goal of applying complexity theory to quantitative sociological analysis is to establish patterns in emerging systems. A divergence of 8 percent still gives a fairly clear indication of a pattern in how congregations arrange their ICPs and the kinds of outcomes they are experiencing. It must be noted that, in fairness, the picture that emerges with this sample is a little blurry. Of course, it would be improved by a margin of error that only skews by 1% in either direction. But as a preliminary attempt to establish an emerging pattern among ICPs, the accuracy of the current study is perfectly adequate.

Group 1 consists of congregations whose partnership evaluations ranked in the 80th percentile or higher. Group 2 consists of congregations whose partnership evaluations ranked between the 50th and 80th percentiles. Group 3 consists of congregations whose partnership evaluations ranked in the 50th percentile or lower. It should be noted that the groups are not broken into even thirds. Instead, they trend upward logarithmically. Group 3 represents the bottom two quartiles of the population. Group 2 represents partnerships that are in the third quartile, and Group 1 represents the very top quartile. The healthiest of the healthy. Chapters 6-8 will examine the differences in patterns among the 25 variables between these groups.

One of the main ways these differences will be represented in the coming chapters is in bar and whisker graphs similar to the one found in Figure 3.2. I have included this diagram to make it easier to interpret the ones to follow. I will use some idealized data in Figure 3.2 as example of what to look for.

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[136] Using the findings of Phase 1 discussed in Chapter 4, I estimate this population to be approximately 34,640 congregations, or 17.32% of 200,000. Chaves, "National Congregations Study," estimates the number of US Congregations to be 200,000.

[137] See notes 111 and 112 above.

Figure 3.2
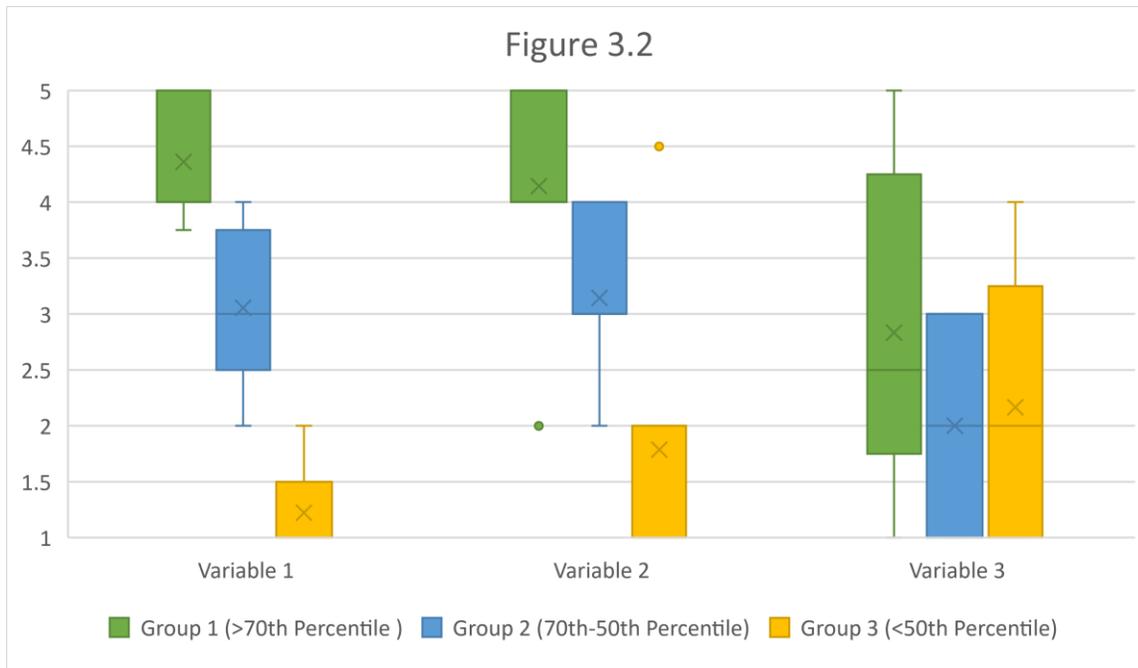
The purpose of the graph is to show patterns in the prevalence of variables in a way that allows us to make comparisons between different groups. Here you can see three hypothetical variables and how they differ (or do not differ) between groups. First, a quick note on the makeup of box and whisker graphs. The boxes and whiskers of each color indicate the distribution of responses within each group. The boxes show the middle quartiles for each group. The whiskers indicate the upper and lower quartiles. The median response in the distribution is indicated by a solid line and the mean is indicated by an "x." A dot that is separated from the box and whisker represents an outlier in the distribution. Often the median line will be difficult to find. That is because, if it aligns with a gridline, it looks like a continuation of that gridline, as is the case for all groups in Variable 3. Sometimes the median is at the edge of a box, especially when there is an outlier or a very wide distribution involved. This can be seen in all three groups of Variable 2.

If the hypothesis is that a given variable has a positive correlation to healthy outcomes, one would expect to see the distribution for Group 1 clustering fairly tightly toward the top of the graph (indicating that it is consistently practiced by the highest percentiles). One would also expect to see a

clear stair-step pattern between the groups in each variable (indicating a lesser or less-consistent

presence of the variable is connected to less desirable outcomes). That is what we see under Variable 1.

The distribution of responses in the first bar is very high and there is little overlap between groups

(indicating that the groups are not just different, they are consistently different). Also, there is a wide

gap between the medians and means of each group. All this is a good indication that variable 1 is

strongly correlated to which group a respondent is in.

There is a similar pattern among the responses for Variable 2. The main difference is that both

Group 1 and Group 3 have pretty extreme outliers. This might mean we have to be more cautious about

how strongly we state the relationship between Variable 2 and which group a respondent ends up in.

But the general shape of the distributions and the major difference between the central tendencies is

sufficient to justify some confidence that there is some correlation between the variable and

partnership health.

Variable 3 shows just the opposite. There is major overlap among all groups and the means and

medians are all clustered rather closely. We can see that this variable is implemented very inconsistently

in each group. And there is no significant difference in the pattern between groups. Thus, there does not

seem to be much reason to suggest any connection between this variable and partnership health. In the

coming chapters I will employ this kind of analysis to examine whether the variables identified can be

correlated to more positive or negative outcomes.

Chapter 4 – Mapping the sister church phenomenon in the United States

Introduction

For some time now, scholars in a number of different fields have been remarking on the

increased global reach of American congregations.[138] Meanwhile, as Chapter 2 pointed out, intensifying

focus on the partnering activities of American churches has given rise to a host of missiological

proclamations about the coming of the age of mission partnership.[139] What is somewhat less clear from

the existing literature is just how widespread the phenomenon has become, especially at the grassroots

congregational level. But beyond the question of how pervasive international congregational

partnerships (ICPs) are among US congregations; several concurrent questions also arise. How does the

sister church approach compare to other kinds of partnership practiced by US congregations? Where are

partner churches located? What denominations to they hail from? How large or small are these

churches? Better understanding the answers to these questions can help form a profile of American

churches that engage in partnerships and perhaps give some insight into the motivating factors behind

the phenomenon. In this chapter I will make use of the information gathered during the first phase of

the research project[140] to answer each of these questions in turn. I will conclude with a summary sketch

of the kind of churches in the US that have international congregational partnerships. In doing so, I will

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[138] Robert Wuthnow and Offutt, Stephen, "Transnational Religious Connections," *Sociology of Religion* 69, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 209–32; Kraakevik, *Partners in the Gospel*; Bosch, "Towards True Mutuality."

[139] Similar discussions can be found in Bakker, *Sister Churches*, 44; Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*, 21; Guthrie and Bonk, *Missions in the Third Millennium*, 118–19. Of particular interest is a footnote in which Lederleitner quotes Scott Moreau's claim that churches and mission agencies claiming some kind of mission partnership have increased by 6900%!

[140] As was related in the previous chapter, the first phase of my project entailed thousands of phone calls to congregations across the United States. States were grouped according to the eight regions used by the US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis. One state was randomly selected from each region. From each state, counties were placed in one of two groups based on population and two counties were randomly selected, one urban and one rural. In total, then, all congregations within 16 counties across the US were contacted at least once and about 2/3rds were successfully contacted. They were asked about the kinds of mission partnerships they have and the number of attendants they host on an average weekend.

also venture an explanation of what impels an American congregation to find a sister church in another part of the world.

Modes of Partnership

The first phase of the GCS provided some much-needed insight into the kinds of mission partners that American congregations are seeking out. This is important because it tells us not only what kinds of mission initiatives congregations find compelling, it speaks to their values and priorities because this is where they have chosen to invest their limited time and resources. It turns out that mission partnerships of one kind or another have become quite pervasive among American congregations. 43% of American churches would say they have some kind of mission partner.[141] Of these, a plurality partner directly with another congregation, while most others work with a parachurch agency of some sort. Other major partners for American congregations include local (non-international) churches and organizations. They also participate in diocesan partnerships handled at a level above the local church in the denominational structure. After this, there is a group of partnership types that hover between one and two percent including: partnering directly with missionaries or national church planters,[142] partnerships mediated by denominational or other voluntary affiliate networks,[143] partnering with children's homes and orphanages, or partnerships between congregations and educational institutions (from primary schooling through seminary education). One of the more unique avenues for partnership, which I think merits further study, is a phenomenon noted among five Roman Catholic parishes whose priests were on loan to the diocese from a religious order. This allows the priests to leverage their

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[141] Unless otherwise stated all statistics given in this chapter are taken from a sample size of 664 congregations, which reflects the total population of US churches with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of +/-1.4%.

[142] In this case, "missionaries" refers to people who have crossed international borders to engage in mission while "national church planters" refers to people who may (or may not) have crossed cultural or intra-national borders, but are still working within their nation state of origin (e.g., a Dalit church planter from Chennai working in New Delhi).

[143] Some churches don't have a national denominational structure but still find ways to connect non-hierarchically. Some examples in this study include the association of Calvary Chapels, Nfluence Network, and Vineyard Churches.

order's transnational connections to enhance the global engagement of the parish they serve.[144] All this

information is represented in Figure 4.1. This dissertation specifically addresses the most prevalent form

of partnership among American congregations: ICPs. While there are certainly nuanced differences

among all these types of partnership, there are also plenty of insights to be gleaned from a study of ICPs

that will be applicable to the other types.[145]
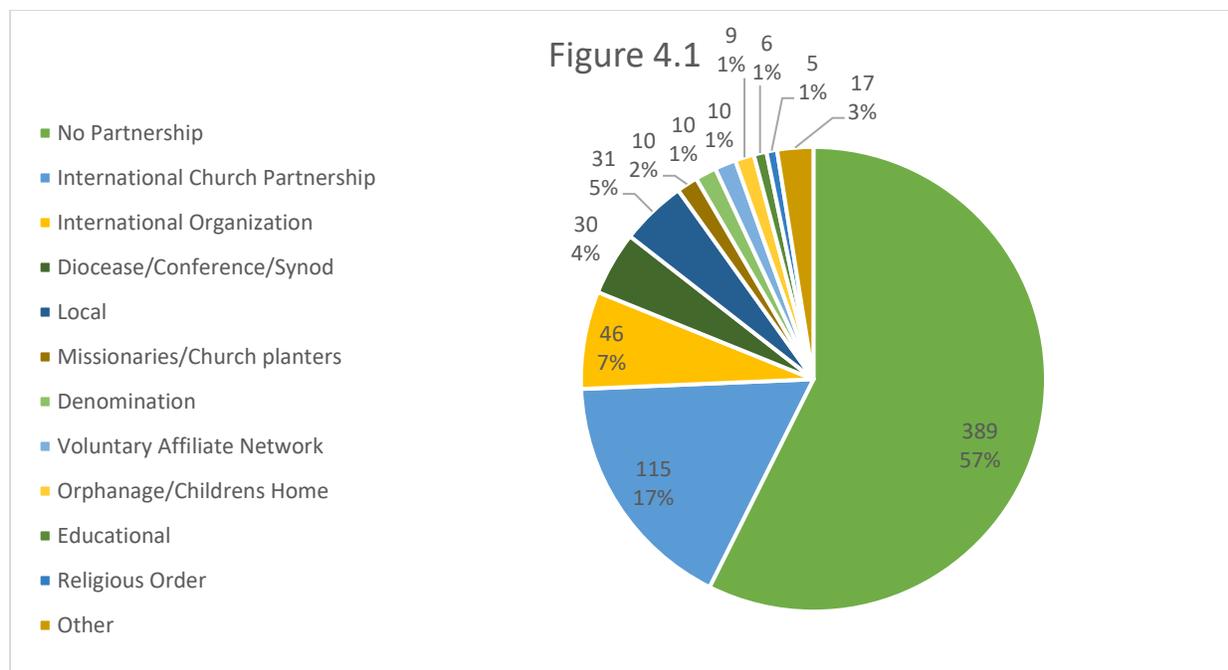
Figure 4.1 shows that mission partnerships are being pursued by a minority of US churches; but

it is a very large minority (43%). It should be noted that many churches pursue more than one mode of

partnership. The breakdown of various modes of partnership found in Figure 4.1 represents churches

who reported a sister-church relationship vs a different kind of approach. Thus the 115 churches in the

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[144] A truly excellent exploration of the transnational dynamics within a Catholic religious order (though not in a parish context) has just been published in Clevenger, *Unequal Partners: In Search of Transnational Catholic Sisterhood*.

[145] While doing the literature review for this project I came across this recent dissertation in a keyword search: Lynne Scott Safrit, "The Intersection of Academia and Industry: Avoiding Pitfalls and Navigating Successful Partnerships" (PhD diss., Chapel Hill, NC, The University of North Carolina, 2014). Safrit enumerates a list of characteristics that makes for good partnerships between industries and academia. Startlingly, this list almost exactly reflects the emerging consensus on mission partnerships discussed in Chapter 2 (albeit with less theological language). One conclusion to be drawn is that there is something about the dynamics of partnership between organizations that holds true regardless of shape, scope, or purpose. .

"ICP" category may well have other institutions they partner with, and they may also engage in

traditional missionary support. [146] But a sister church approach is at least part of their global

engagement. Meanwhile the other modes listed, for example the 46 congregations in the "International

Organization" category, reflect those churches who have institutional partnerships with parachurch

organizations, but not with sister churches. There may also be overlap with other non-congregation-

centric modes here as well as with the traditional approach. The churches recorded as "no partnership"

reported that they exclusively take the traditional approach to international missionary engagement.

While the majority (57%) of churches did not report having a mission partnership, most of them

still engage in more traditional missionary support. Churches who do not form partnerships are still

often highly globally engaged congregations. But a major segment of American churches is choosing to

participate in global ministry by seeking institutional partners. Among these churches, a sister church

approach is wildly popular. Among US churches that have institutional partnerships, nearly half (42%)

form with sister churches. And if partnerships between dioceses and partnerships mediated on a

national scale are included, this number jumps to 60%. American churches still create partnerships with

a host of parachurch organizations, but nearly two-thirds of churches with some kind of partnership

prefer to partner with other churches when it comes to global engagement.

Analysis

Figure 4.1 makes it clear that mission partnerships are very important to American

congregations. Direct involvement via partnership is on the cusp of supplanting the traditional approach

as the primary way churches engage in global mission. This has important implications for the way

churches think of their place in mission and their relationship to other Christians. As Jonathan Barnes

has pointed out, the language we use to describe our relationships is very important.[147] The connotation

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[146] By "traditional" I mean the local church is a locus for recruiting missionaries to sending agencies, praying for them, and giving them speaking opportunities, and of course financing their ministries.
[147] Barnes, *Power and Partnership*, 2013, 413–15.

of being a "sending" or "receiving" church suggests an element of patronage with its emphasis on

exchange over belonging. What is more, this language predicates a church's status in the relationship on

goods that one does or does not have. Even less materialistic language of "home" and "field" still

focuses on distance and difference between Christians. It reinforces the foreignness of the other and

invites comparisons that focus on dissimilarity. However, the linguistic connotations of being a "partner"

or "sister" church are quite different. The relational paradigm is not focused on patronage but equal or

even familial ties. Status in the relationship is not predicated on disparity but on relationship and

belonging, criteria to which all Christians have equal access. The focus is not on distance but closeness;

not on difference but on what is held in common. It should be noted that it is entirely possible for such

language to be used superficially. After all, Barnes concludes that this has largely been the case in the

WCC's practice of partnership.[148] But I do think it is important to note that a near majority of American

churches have opted for modes of global engagement that reinforce the idea of togetherness with

Christians around the world. This is an important trend to keep an eye on, both to see if it continues to

gain momentum and to see if it leads to genuine changes in the kinds of relationships that develop

between American Christians and their brothers and sisters around the world.

The expansion of partnering modes of mission is also significant for the long-term economic

viability of the traditional model of missionary sending. If American churches are going to continue

investing time, energy, and money into local mission initiatives it will mean that a once fairly stable

economic base for traditional missionary approaches will continue to disappear.[149] This is likely what is

driving the phenomenon noted in an earlier chapter: that everything has become partnership.

Traditional sending agencies have seen the proverbial handwriting on the wall; and have adjusted their

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[148] Barnes, 416–23.

[149] I want to be clear here. I am not suggesting the traditional approach is obsolete or even that the approach itself
is disappearing. But I am saying that one of its major sources of funding is drying up as congregational resources
are diverted toward other initiatives. There is a long, and at times rancorous, ongoing discussion about the
comparative value of short-term and long-term missionary activity. I am by no means taking sides in this debate.

approaches accordingly.[150] Even in the traditional approach there is now much more emphasis on

focusing missionary support on a smaller number of workers, resourcing national missionaries, and

increasing the level of a congregation's involvement beyond giving and praying.

One way to explain this shift of modes of global engagement among US churches is to view it as

a change in how churches decide to allocate resources from economic efficiency to personal

engagement.[151] The traditional approach favors economic thrift at the expense of personal engagement.

A partnering approach does the opposite. Spreading the cost of missionary support across multiple

congregations is a very economically efficient approach. It follows the logic of risk mitigation, lower

barriers to entry, and profit maximization that marketplaces are very familiar with. A missionary with

four supporters who loses three supporters is in dire straits. But a missionary with 300 supporters who

loses three of them faces only minor economic disruption. From the congregational perspective, a very

small church may not have enough material and financial resources to support a missionary family; but

they might be able to afford a 1/500th share of multiple missionaries' support. Thus, by spreading the

cost of missional engagement as widely as possible, the potential economic disruptions to missionaries

in the field are lowered and a significant number of congregations are included in the system who would

otherwise not be able to contribute. In both these cases, economic profits are maximized. All of these

reflect a general concern for making the traditional mode as efficient as possible. And efficient

stewardship of resources is certainly an admirable thing in missionary engagement. But an approach

that focuses on a few specific locations does not enjoy all these economic efficiencies. The fact that

many US churches decide to do it anyway suggests they have found something they value even more

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[150] I recently attended the Evangelical Missiological Society's annual meeting, which included a two-day track called: "The Future of Short-Term Missions." Here, on several occasions and with representatives of multiple organizations, I had discussions about how there is a major push toward partnership among many different institutions without a really clear indication of what is meant by "partnership."
[151] Here, and elsewhere in the dissertation when I offer possible explanations for the data, I am relying primarily on the phone interviews I conducted in Phase 1, as well as the many academic conferences dealing with partnership that I have attended in the past 8 years.

than economic efficiency: experience.[152] Partnering modes of engagement are closer to home than

traditional approaches. They require more investment of time from the congregation and a higher

degree of personal involvement from more people. And they deliver an experience that is personally

meaningful at a time when people are desperate for a meaningful experience of their faith.[153] It seems

that, in order to pursue that experience, about 43% of American churches are willing to give up some

tradition and efficiency. It will be very interesting to see if that percentage continues to climb.

Location

So, where are all these churches who are forming international congregational partnerships?[154]

One might think that the phenomenon of ICPs would be spread pretty evenly across the United States;

or that, like many other innovations, the pursuit of ICP's is more prevalent on the coasts, and fades

toward the middle of the country. But on either count, one would be almost entirely wrong. The truth is

that congregations with global sister churches form an odd regional patchwork across the US, with

several significant factors impacting where they spring up. In this section I will describe the geography of

ICPs in the US and explore some of the factors that influence their development in each region.

As can be clearly seen in Figure 4.2, there is a huge disparity in the incidence of congregational

partnerships based on geographic region. In some areas of the US as many as 30% of all local

congregations have an international sister church. But in other areas, that number falls precipitously to

around 8%. Clearly whatever factors are at work here unevenly affect different parts of the country. A

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[152] In Bakker, *Sister Churches*, 216–22, Bakker argues that practice-oriented spirituality is one of the main factors driving the expansion of the sister-church phenomenon. The powerful combination of social service and spiritual solidarity offered by this approach appeals strongly to Americans hungry for an authentic experience of their own faith.

[153] Rob Haynes unpacks this craving for experience among American churches very well and he makes some very helpful suggestions for how to positively direct that desire. See Robert Haynes, *Consuming Mission: Toward a Theology of Short-Term Mission and Pilgrimage* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018).

[154] In this chapter, I am focusing on where the American partner surveyed by the GCS is located. The reason I fail to discuss the location of international partners is that I just did not get enough information about where their partners are located to make statistically significant conclusions. I'd like to be able to say things like "most international partners of US churches are in Latin America" or "US partner churches tend to be located in large urban centers." But I was not able to get solid enough data to do so.

deeper understanding of what is going on in Figure 4.2 can help us better understand what motivates

some congregations to pursue sister church relationships and others to take a different approach.
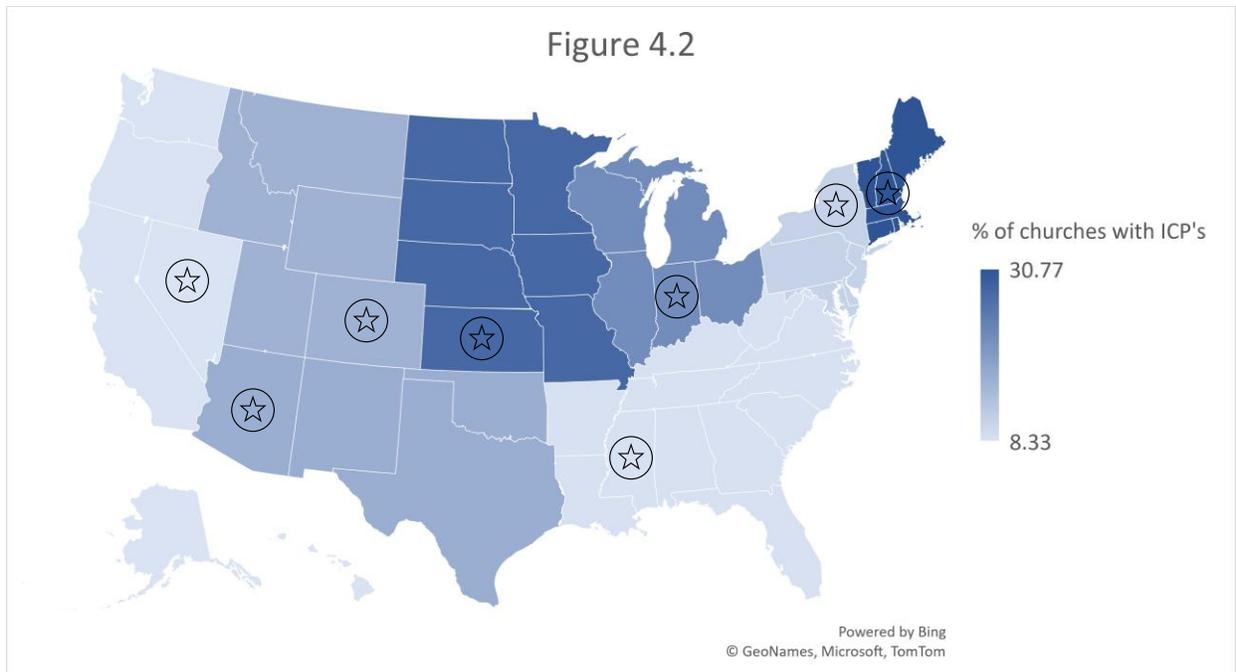
Figure 4.2

For this deep dive we can turn to Figure 4.3, which takes a more granular look at the geography

of mission partnerships in general, and of ICPs in particular. In this table the 664 churches contacted in

Phase 1 are separated according to their socio-economic region. These are further separated into urban

and rural categories,[155] though a combined figure is also given. Column A gives the number of

congregations in each category. Column B shows the percentage of all churches in that region who have

any kind of mission partnership. Column C presents the percentage of all churches in that region who

have an **ICP**. Column D restates the percentage of ICPs if the divisor is not all churches in the region, but

rather only those churches in the region who have some kind of mission partnership. For convenience,

the table is color coordinated to show whether a given percentage is above or below the national

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[155] There are often significant differences between urban and rural populations, in demographic terms like ethnic diversity, wealth disparity, age distribution, and access to resources; but also in terms of values and lived experience. Separating urban and rural populations can help give some idea of whether these issues are correlated with how likely a church is to pursue mission partnerships in general, or ICPs specifically. No division is given for the West and Southeast because there were not enough rural congregations in either sample. So, the churches represented in those two regions are entirely urban.

aggregate of each column. The purpose of the table is to demonstrate how common or uncommon it is in each region to find congregations with ICPs. The information presented here not only gives us some idea of how common ICPs are in the general population. It also lets us know how popular sister church partnership is in an area compared to the other partnership modes discussed above.

The first thing that jumps out from this table is how prevalent both mission partnerships and ICPs are in the Northeast and Great Plains, particularly among churches in rural populations. In both regions at least half of all congregations participate in some kind of mission partnership. And the rate of ICPs in the general population is well above the national average of 17%. This is even more pronounced in rural areas where 44% of churches in the Great Plains and half of the Northeast have an international sister church. In the Great Lakes region, while the overall incidence of mission partnerships is slightly lower, ICPs are roughly as common as they are in the plains. And here, too, they seem to be slightly preferred by rural churches. This is quite different from the way things are in other regions of the US. On the whole, in the West, the Rockies, and the Southeast, churches' interest in partnership as a way of directly engaging in mission hovers around average (either slightly above or slightly below), and the interest in ICPs over-against other modes of partnership is also about average. But those numbers are largely being carried by urban population centers. There is far less interest in ICPs among rural churches west of the plains as compared to their central and eastern rural counterparts. While mission partnership is abnormally strong in the Southeast, and about average in the West, in both cases churches seem to show little interest in congregational partnerships, vastly preferring to find other institutional partners. Meanwhile, ICPs seem to be nearly unheard of in the Mid-Atlantic region, especially outside of urban centers. In this area, the traditional mode of missionary engagement is by far the most popular means of global engagement.

Figure 4.3

COLOR KEY	70th percentile within a column	50-70th percentile within a column	50-30th percentile within a column	30th percentile within a column

	Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D
Location	# of responding churches	% of all churches with at least one kind of mission partnership	% of all churches with ICPs	% mission partnerships that are ICPs
Northeast Urban	18	50	22.22	44.44
Northeast Rural	8	50	50	100
Northeast Total	26	50	30.77	61.54
Mideast Urban	73	36.98	10.95	29.63
Mideast Rural	15	20	0	0
Mideast Total	88	34.09	11	26.66
Great Lakes Urban	46	36.96	21.73	58.83
Great Lakes Rural	13	53.85	23.08	42.86
Great Lakes Total	59	40.67	22.03	54.17
Great Plains Urban	74	50	25.66	51.35
Great Plains Rural	9	55.55	44.44	80
Great Plains Total	83	50.6	27.71	54.76
Southeast Total	35	45.71	8.57	18.75
Southwest Urban	269	40.89	17.84	43.63
Southwest Rural	24	25	4.16	16.66
Southwest Total	293	39.59	16.72	42.24
Rockies Urban	48	52.03	16.66	32
Rockies Rural	8	37.5	12.5	33.33
Rockies Total	56	50	16.07	32.14
West Total	24	41.66	8.33	20
Urban Total	587	42.76	17.38	40.64
Rural Total	77	36.36	16.88	46.43
Total	664	42.02	17.32	41.22

Analysis

One of the key purposes of this chapter is to construct a profile of a church that is likely to participate in an ICP. If we look at the commonalities of churches who form these kinds of partnerships, perhaps it can tell us more about what is driving the phenomenon. When it comes to the geographic distribution of churches engaged in ICPs, no single, simple explanation for why a church seeks a sister congregation is immediately apparent. They are distributed very unevenly. And patterns that hold true in one region are reversed in another. But a closer look at those differences reveals that, rather than a single pattern, there are multiple issues driving the uneven distribution of ICPs across the US. Three major factors are the support of denominational leadership, access to partners, and organizational flexibility.

One of the great benefits of conducting the Phase 1 research via telephone calls was that I was occasionally able to get some "inside information" from the people I contacted. This provided some great insights into what was going on behind the scenes. People spoke to the values and ideas that sparked their interest in ICPs. They also sometimes shared the history of who was involved and how the partnerships took shape. When reflecting on these conversations, a few consistent patterns emerged which are characterized below.

First, the Northeast region ended up being something of an outlier in the prevalence of ICPs among its general church population. This is mostly due to the fact that the United Church of Christ makes up a significant portion of the congregations there, and there has been a concerted effort on the part of a particular bishop to create ICPs among every congregation in the diocese.[156] While this may not end up being the primary driver of the prevalence of ICP's generally, the ability of denominational

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[156] This is absolutely an important field for future research, especially if the researcher can compare top-down and bottom-up approaches to instituting mission partnerships. Furthermore, these were designated ICPs rather than diocesan partnerships because the local congregations take direct responsibility for the partnering ministries and are given significant control over the selection and construction of the partnership. There are facilitators at the diocesan level to serve as resources, but they do not administer the partnerships on behalf of the congregation.

initiative and support to create a significant outlier is certainly noteworthy. Almost a third of

congregations surveyed in that region are in an ICP because a single person with significant influence

bought into the idea of ICPs. Again, that is not how ICPs usually form. But the initiative of powerful and

well-connected people (like bishops) is clearly a potent factor in those instances where it is directed

toward the establishment of sister congregations. This top-down approach may not yield the same

results every time.[157] But it is a factor in explaining the distribution of ICPs found by my research.

The second, and far more common, factor that is driving the geographic distribution of

congregations forming ICPs is access to potential partners. Partner availability does not account for why

a congregation might choose partnership over a traditional approach. But it does speak to why they

might choose one mode of partnership over-against another. Put briefly, churches who want to form

mission partnerships do so with the partners who are most readily available.[158] A great illustration of

this can be found in the Rocky Mountain region. There, partnering approaches to international mission

are taken by a majority of churches. But ICPs account for only about a third of these partnerships

(slightly less in the urban sample). This might seem surprising, especially when juxtaposed with other

"flyover" regions of the US like the Great Lakes or Great Plains. Here there are roughly similar rates of

mission partnerships, but a significantly higher proportion of those partnerships are ICPs. And in the

Great Plains, the rate of ICPs is highest among rural congregations. But the dearth of ICPs in the Rockies

makes sense if you think in terms of what kinds of international connections are available to

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[157] I would suspect that it does not.

[158] To give some sense of where mission organizations are located, and thus how easily churches in each region might be able to access them, I consulted: Missio Nexus, *Organization Directory*, 2020, 2020, https://missionexus.org/directories/directory/#!directory/map. Missio Nexus is one of the largest inter-denominational mission networks in the US. Their records show that Denver/Colorado Springs has the largest concentration of any metro area in the US with 29 organizations. New York and Philadelphia combined have 18, and Chicago and Southern California both have 15. Atlanta is next at 14. But it is even more telling to look at the distribution across the regions used in this study. The average number of organizations per region is 32. And there are more in the Southeast region (78) than any other two regions combined. The Great Lakes is second with 35. The West has 33 and the Rockies 32. The Mideast and Southwest both have 25. The Plains has 22. And the Northeast has 4.

congregations in each region. Colorado is a hotbed of Evangelical parachurch organizations. There are

many NGOs, relief organizations, etc. that are readily available to congregations in the Rockies

(particularly in the urban centers where the offices can be found). It would honestly be more surprising

if ICPs were prevalent there given the ready availability of other kinds of partners in the region. The

relative location of these organizations is also likely one of the factors that keeps the rate of ICP's low in

the Southwest and Southeast regions as well. In both of these regions, the rates of mission partnerships

as a whole are fairly typical, but ICP's are very low.[159] But in the windswept Plains or the fields of the

Great Lakes, there is a much lower concentration of organizational headquarters. They exist, of course.

And churches in those areas partner with them. But in these areas, especially among small, rural

churches, the most common connection to the international church is missionaries themselves. In fact,

according to one (albeit dated) reckoning as many as 80% of missionaries hail from smaller

congregations.[160] And often the main indigenous institution those missionaries can put their American

supporters in contact with is a local church. As was noted in Chapter 2, missionaries often serve as

"bridge people" when forming and enacting mission partnerships between congregations.[161] The ready

availability of these "bridge people" accounts for the higher instance of ICP's in certain regions, just like

the lower instance of ICPs can be explained by the abundance of other kinds of international mission

partners.

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[159] The exception being the Urban Southwest, where ICPs are most commonly formed with congregations in nearby Latin America (where there is plenty of bridging capital). It is also worth noting that many of these congregations have large contingents of "snowbirds" who live half the year in Arizona and half the year in states where ICPs are much more common.

[160] Ron Klassen and John Koessler, *No Little Places: The Untapped Potential of the Small-Town Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996). My thanks to Timothy Paul Erdel, "Global Ripples from Two Small, Struggling Congregations: Devon Missionary Church, Manchester, Jamaica (1873-) and College Park Missionary Church, Mishawaka, Indiana (1903-)" (North Central Region of the Evangelical Missiological Society, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 2016) for pointing this out to me. Dr Erdel's paper is an excellent case study of the often haphazard, yet faithful grassroots missiology of small suburban and rural congregations.

[161] An exemplary case can be found in C. M. Brown, "Exploratory Case Studies and Analyses of Three Intercultural Congregation-to-Congregation Partnerships" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2007).

However, availability of potential partners is not the only issue at play. Beyond the question of

what kind of partner to select, there is the prior issue of why choose partnership at all. This is

unquestionably a complex question. But given the information available in Figure 4.3, and in the interest

of offering a complete analysis of the data,[162] I would like to venture at least a partial explanation. The

numbers from the Mideast show a clear preference for traditional rather than partnering modes of

international engagement. In fact, except for a handful of urban churches, ICPs are practically unheard

of in this region. When I was conducting phone surveys about whether a congregation had an

international sister church, I recall having to explain the nature of my question in the Mideast more than

in any other region. It is just not something on the radar screen for many of these churches. And I think

that this is at least partly due to the nature of organizations. Particularly really old ones. A cursory look

at the church websites of participants revealed that the Mideast region had many of the oldest

congregations surveyed.[163] Perhaps there is something in an older institution that resists adopting a new

approach (like mission partnerships), particularly when the familiar way of doing things (in this case,

traditional approaches to mission) are still viable. If this is the case, it would certainly explain why

churches sampled from the Mideast showed very little interest in ICPs, or mission partnerships in

general. And it would also suggest that this resistance is unlikely to abate any time soon, at least without

a top-down change such as the one taking place in the Northeast. This could also explain why the

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[162] One final word here, I have largely ignored the Western Region in this analysis. This is because the random sample selected was two fairly small counties in Nevada. And they are hardly representative of a population that includes California, Oregon, and Washington. So rather than watch a paragraph die the death of a thousand qualifications, I have chosen to leave a close analysis of the dynamics at work in that particular region to a future study. It should be noted though, that in the current methodological design, the findings of one region may need to be held lightly without necessarily compromising findings for the US as a whole or affecting comparisons among other regions.

[163] According to Mark Chaves, "National Congregations Study, Cumulative Dataset (1998, 2006-2007, 2012, and 2018-2019)," *The Association of Religion Data Archives* (blog), accessed November 17, 2020, https://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/NCSIV.asp; among all US congregations the mean year in which a church was founded was 1930. The majority of Mideast congregations contacted were well older than the standard deviation of 55 years.

churches contacted in the Northeast have adopted a top-down approach; because without it, long-

established congregations are unlikely to change the way they have grown accustomed to doing things.

Denomination

In constructing a profile of US congregations with ICPs, it is also helpful to know their

denominational affiliation. Knowing if there are Christian traditions that tend to form ICPs, and if there

are some that do not, might help us better understand what makes a congregation decide they want to

engage globally by finding a sister church. The denominational affiliation of every church that reported

participating in an ICP can be found in Figure 4.4. There were 115 congregations contacted in Phase 1

that participated in an ICP. The percentages found in Figures 4.4 and 4.5 represent the population of US

congregations with an ICP with a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of +/-3.85%. For

readability, the denominations have been grouped by branches (e.g., Baptists, Anglican Communion,

Lutheran, etc.) and their wider confessional tradition (Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Evangelical

Protestant, Pentecostal, and Unaffiliated).[164]

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[164] A quick note on categories here, lines between denominational and theological affinity can sometimes be a little blurry. The main purpose of this chart is to show the impact that denomination has on partnerships. Theology will be dealt with more explicitly in the next chapter. So, quibbles over whether non-denominational churches are or are not Evangelical, or whether Pentecostals or Evangelical Lutherans belong in another camp, can be set aside for now. What this chart presents is how ICPs are distributed among congregations with different denominational structures. This, incidentally, is why the congregations within the Nfluence Network were included with the denominationally unaffiliated. The Nfluence Network is an informal association, and lacks the institutional structures that are commonly associated with denominations.

Figure 4.4

Roman Catholic 6.96% Mainline Protestant 28.71% Evangelical Protestant 20.88%
Pentecostal 4.35% Unaffiliated 38.26%
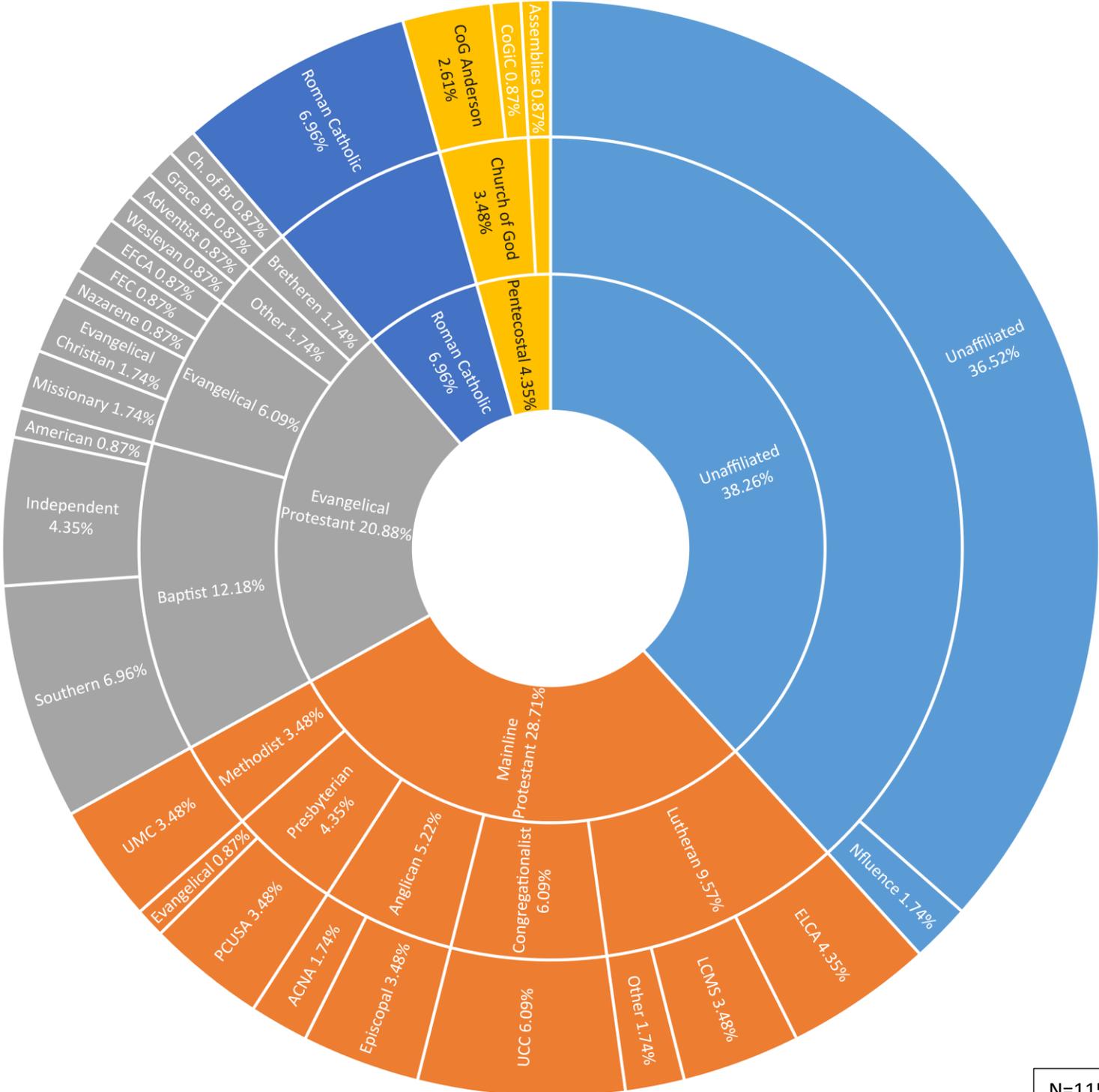
N=115

The percentage of congregations with ICPs that belong to each of the denominations listed

above can be found in Figure 4.5. I have also included the percentage of all US congregations

represented by those denominations for comparison.[165]

Figure 4.5

Denomination	% of all US Congregations	% of Congregations with ICPs
Roman Catholic	22.56	6.96
Southern Baptist Convention	8.38	6.96
American Baptist Convention	0.95	0.87
Other Baptist	6.91	4.34
United Methodist Church	7.54	3.48
Other Methodist	0.58	0.87
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	3.54	4.34
Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod	1.75	3.48
Other Lutheran	0.60	1.74
Presbyterian Church (USA)	2.58	3.48
Other Presbyterian	0.51	0.87
Assemblies of God	1.91	0.87
Church of God in Christ	0.70	0.87
Episcopal Church	2.23	3.48
United Church of Christ	1.74	6.09
Church of the Brethren	0.23	0.87
Church of the Nazarene	0.49	0.87
Seventh-day Adventist	0.79	0.87
Various Church of God	1.21	2.61
Other Mainline/Liberal	0.54	1.74
Other Conservative/Evangelical	1.93	6.09
Not Affiliated with a Denomination	13.13	38.26
Confidence = 90%, MoE = +/-3.85%		N=115

There is a lot of information to unpack here. First, churches with ICP's are not spread evenly

among all denominations. If they were, the numbers in each column would be roughly similar. But 38%

of all congregations with an ICP are denominationally unaffiliated. When you consider that only about

13% of US congregations are non-denominational, it is obvious that they are vastly disproportionately

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[165] See Chaves, "National Congregations Study, Cumulative Dataset (1998, 2006-2007, 2012, and 2018-2019)", question 8. The percentages referenced here are slightly different from the ones found on the website because I have removed congregations excluded from my study (as discussed in Chapter 1) from the equation.

represented among churches pursuing ICPs. On the opposite side of the disproportionate representation

continuum, Roman Catholic parishes account for nearly 22% of US congregations but they only

represent 6% of congregations with ICPs. Evangelical churches, in general tend to be slightly more highly

represented among churches with ICPs than they are in the general population. The main exception to

this being Baptists (of all stripes) who are slightly less prevalent among churches with ICPs than they are

in the general population. Conversely, mainline protestants generally are underrepresented among

churches with ICPs, with two notable exceptions. First, the United Church of Christ accounts for three

times more of the share of the sister-church population than they do of the general population. This

significant gap is second only to unaffiliated churches in terms of the proportional increase in

representation. Second, while the difference is not orders of magnitude, Lutheran congregations are

represented at a notably higher rate among sister churches than they are in the general population.

Pentecostal groups are distributed at about the same rate among US sister churches as they are among

US churches generally. Some skew slightly higher, some slightly lower. But on the whole, they are found

at about the rate one would expect based on the demography of US congregations.

So, to summarize the denominational makeup of US congregations engaged in ICPs: it is

complicated. Like many other facets of US congregational life, the impact of denominational loyalty is

unclear. On the one hand, a plurality of sister churches in the US do not have any denominational

affiliation at all. If one simply looked at Figure 4.4, they might conclude this phenomenon is being driven

almost entirely by non-denominational churches. But on the other hand, the majority of sister churches

are denominationally affiliated. Larger denominations (Roman Catholics and Methodists, for example)

are not as invested in finding sister churches as one might expect, given how many congregations they

account for overall in the US. But there are many other large denominations like Baptists, Lutherans,

and Presbyterians whose distributions in Figure 4.5 match more closely. Others, like the United Church

of Christ, are sampling far higher among churches with ICPs than their relative size would suggest.

Smaller Evangelical denominations in particular (and, to a lesser extent, Pentecostal denominations) seem to have latched onto the sister church phenomenon with unusual vigor. They account for only around 2% of US congregations but have about as many sister congregations as Roman Catholics or Lutherans. Still, despite this uneven distribution, it is fair to say that the sister church phenomenon in the US does not belong to any one particular denominational body or confessional tradition. Instead, it has been embraced widely by most if not all, though to varying degrees.

Analysis

It may not be surprising that sister churches are common among unaffiliated congregations. But the degree to which non-denominational churches are represented among churches with ICPs is remarkable (especially given their comparatively low prevalence among US congregations). Still there is a certain logical consistency to it. It makes sense that a non-denominational church would use this mode of engagement when seeking to engage in global mission. For one thing, they lack the denominational connections that other churches clearly utilize[166] when they chose a mode of partnership. Without a built-in infrastructure for global engagement, it is incumbent on non-denominational churches to build one. And that is precisely what many of them are doing.

While it seems almost obvious that unaffiliated churches would seek out international partner congregations, it is surprising that so many churches who enjoy those denominational connections are doing the same thing. It could be that denominational loyalty is waning among US congregations,[167] leading them to do more on their own. This explanation certainly fits with several conversations I have

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[166] See the earlier discussion of partnerships made and mediated at a diocesan and/or denominational level.

[167] A recent landmark study by the Barna Research Group found that American Christians are increasingly skeptical about the value and purpose of denominations. Barna Research Group, "Five Trends Defining Americans' Relationship to Churches," *Barna State of the Church 2020* (blog), February 19, 2020, https://www.barna.com/research/current-perceptions/. Another interesting discussion of the waning role of denominations in American church life can be found in Roger Olson, "The Future of Denominations in the Twenty-First Century," *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 39, no. 1 (April 2016): 12–40. Finally, in Bakker, *Sister Churches*, Bakker sees the declining influence of denominations as one of the primary drivers of the sister-church phenomenon. As denominations wield less influence in congregational life, congregations must take more direct responsibility for their sense of connection to the wider Christian community.

had with partnership directors who work in different denominational offices. They each report that churches in their denomination will often form partnerships with international congregations without informing the denomination. Local congregations seem loath to do anything to increase the attention or scrutiny they get from the home office. There could be several reasons for this. Local leaders may not want to follow a required program, they may feel excessive pressure with the denomination looking over their shoulder; or they may not want the kind of accountability that comes with centralized oversight. The desire to save face with the denomination if things do not go well is also worth consideration.

But that is only part of the story. It may also be that there is something in US church culture that encourages rapid diffusion of innovation. The creation of shared spaces (to an extent seminaries, but also conferences, and virtual spaces like blogs and podcasts) to talk about things like missional approaches, to workshop ideas, and learn from each other can help spread ideas like congregational partnership very quickly. Evangelicals seem to have been very effective in this regard.[168] This might account for their outsized representation in the ICP population. It could also be that the theological affinity between Evangelical Protestant denominations and many unaffiliated (but still evangelical) churches make it more likely that innovations like ICPs will spread as members and leaders pass from one group to the other. The connection between denominationally unaffiliated and affiliated evangelical congregations, both in the way they define their relationship and in the way people move between them, is a promising avenue for future research.

One might expect Mainline Protestant churches to be far less interested in ICPs, especially given the dismal portrayal of the World Council of Churches' experience in partnership given by Jonathan Barnes.[169] But it would seem that, despite the WCC backing off their formerly enthusiastic embrace of

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[168] Witness the pride of place given to ICPs at recent evangelical gatherings like those of the Evangelical Missiological Society or Missio Nexus.
[169] See discussion of Barnes above.

partnership, that skepticism has not trickled down to the congregational level. At least not yet. Mainline

churches are still very much interested in developing deep partnering relationships with their global

counterparts. And some of them, especially the United Church of Christ and both Evangelical and

Missouri Synod Lutherans, have shown unique interest in and dedication to this mode of global

engagement. From the discussions I had with representatives of all these denominations, it seems like

the key factor in Mainline participation in ICPs was certainly support from the denomination

(particularly the regional synod or diocese). This was also the case among the Roman Catholic churches I

sampled. Among churches with a hierarchical polity the likelihood of a local congregation having an ICP

depends mostly on whether or not the bishop thinks they should.

Average Attendance

Phase 1 of the GCS also had some interesting information on the size of churches who take part

in mission partnerships. This last bit of data will help construct a fully-orbed profile of churches with

ICPs. Churches contacted during Phase 1 were asked to report how many people attend all weekend

services during a typical week. As can be expected responses ranged widely, between 10 per week and

11,000 per week; with a median of 200 attendees per week.[170] But, again, this is the distribution of all

churches generally. What will be instructive is to see what, if any, connection attendance has when this

population is segmented based on mode of global engagement.

Churches who take a traditional approach to mission, that is, those who do not pursue any

mode of partnership, follow a similar pattern to the general population. They have the same median

number of attendees, 200/week, though the distribution skews slightly smaller. The distribution of

churches who pursue a mode of partnership other than ICPs matches that of the general population

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[170] Given the extreme outliers, it is also to be expected that the mean (505/week) and median (200/week) congregation size show considerable difference. These differences are even more pronounced when the congregations are segmented based on their approach to mission partnerships. We are dealing with a large and somewhat volatile population, with extremes at either end, so I will mostly use the median for comparison here.

almost exactly when it comes to regular attendance, with a very similar median, 207/week.[171] However,

the distribution of churches with ICPs differs significantly from those already presented. This group

skews heavily toward higher attendance,[172] though the median remains 300/week. This is because,

while the distribution is skewed at the high end, it also skewed at the low end. This is because churches

with ICPs that reported lower attendance reported *much* lower attendance.[173] So while it is certainly

accurate to say that larger churches tend to show an interest in ICPs, or even that the churches forming

ICPs tend to be larger; one must not lose sight of the significant number of very small churches who are

also actively pursuing sister church relationships.

Another way to conceptualize the data on average attendance is to break a population into size

cohorts to see how each group is proportionately represented in a population. This is what I've done in

Figure 4.6. This approach gives us an idea of the composition of each of the different modes of global

engagement with respect to average attendance. The top bar indicates the proportional representation

of four size cohorts among all US churches according to regular attendance. So about 74% of all US

churches have fewer than 500 congregants on a given weekend, 12% host between 500-1000, 9% have

between 1000-2000, and 6% average over 2000 regular attendees. The second bar gives a breakdown of

churches taking the traditional approach. The third bar includes congregations whose global

engagement includes all modes of partnership that are not ICPs. And the fourth bar represents all

congregations with ICPs.

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[171] And a similar mean, 573/week.
[172] As can be seen in the massive jump in mean: 1017/week.
[173] About a third of smaller congregations reported typical weekend attendance of 150 or fewer.

Figure 4.6
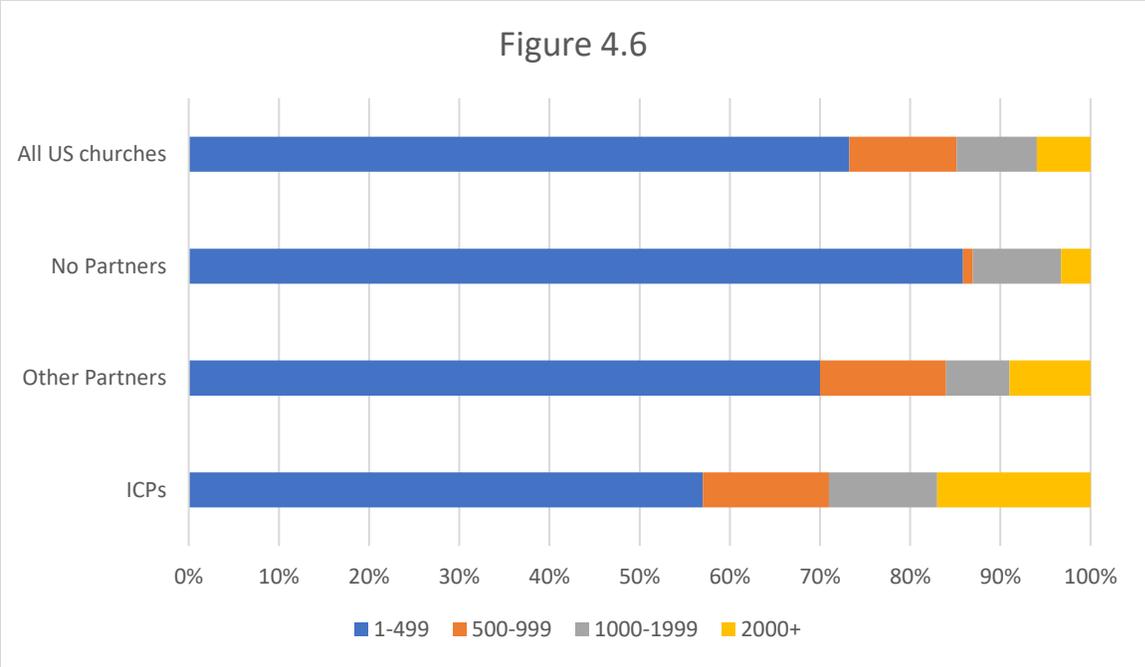
The strengths of this approach are its simplicity and the ease with which one can make comparisons between groups. First, we can see that smaller congregations are disproportionately represented among churches taking a traditional approach, they account for a full 85% of churches in the traditional camp. Meanwhile almost no churches at the 500-1000 range are still taking the traditional approach. Instead, congregations of this size are spread pretty evenly between ICPs and other modes of partnership. Second, the churches pursuing non-ICP modes of mission partnership are pretty typically distributed; but churches who partner specifically with international congregations tend to be much larger. In other words, choosing to form a global mission partnership has no significant correlation to size. But choosing a mode of partnership that focuses specifically on developing sister church relationships does seem to be influenced by the size of a congregation. Both the 500-1000 and 1000-2000 cohorts are slightly more prevalent in the ICP group than in the general population. But the 2000+ cohort makes up three times the share of the ICP population than they do of churches in general. Essentially this means if someone picked two churches at random, one from a list of every church in the

US and one from a list of every church in the US that has an ICP, they would be three times more likely to select a mega-church from the second list than from the first one.

Analysis

So, what does all this say about the global engagement of US churches? Well first of all, congregations who choose to engage with global partners other than sister congregations are pretty typical when it comes to size. There are as many large or small churches among them as are found in the general population. This data also says that churches who prefer the traditional approach skew strongly toward lower attendance, while churches pursuing ICPs skew strongly toward higher attendance. In other words, size doesn't affect how likely it is that a church will create a mission partnership; but it does impact the kind of partnership they will develop. But why is this the case? I would like to posit a few theories. While the following suggestions by no means constitute the last word on the subject, they might provide a way forward in further research into the connection between church size and mode of global engagement.

First, ICPs are popular among very large churches because those are the churches with the resources to pursue them. As will be discussed in future chapters, sister church partnerships are extremely resource intensive. They require a lot of time and attention from church staff and often no small amount of money to maintain. Larger churches are accustomed to taking on large, resource intensive projects. ICPs do not present an insurmountable obstacle in this regard. On the contrary, they look like exactly the kind of approach a church of 6,000-11,000 regular attendees needs in order to keep their congregation missionally engaged. The more people required the better. It allows mission leaders to engage a maximum number of congregants without having to oversee a thousand smaller projects. Conversely, the traditional approach is much less resource intensive and therefore appeals more strongly to smaller churches, many of whom find themselves strapped for cash or volunteer labor.

It is also possible that ICPs appeal to larger congregations because they provide something those congregations find equally compelling: a high degree of autonomy. Think of it this way. Given a choice between modes of partnership that are mediated through denominations, districts, and parachurch organizations or a mode that provides direct, unmediated involvement in global ministry; which choice might one expect a large institution that is used to pursuing ministry at its own initiative to make? Granted, the first option has many benefits, most of which are tied to the efficient use of resources. But minimizing costs is not always the primary concern for very large churches. So why would they accept the inherent limitations of the first option if they are not in need of its primary benefit? The answer according to Figure 4.6 is that, apparently, they do not. Instead, it seems that larger churches opt for ICPs, at least in part, because of the freedom from denominational[174] scrutiny discussed in the last section. It gives them a way to directly engage in global ministry while maintaining a high degree of control over the agenda and narratives being employed.

So, it is fairly obvious why larger churches would want to take part in ICPs. What is less clear is why smaller churches are doing the same thing. Obviously, resource and autonomy concerns cannot be the only issues at work here. While big churches make up a much larger proportion of congregations with ICPs than they do among other missional approaches, the majority of congregations with ICPs are still smaller than 500 regular attendees. Many of them much smaller. It seems logical that these congregations would far more interested in traditional or more heavily mediated approaches to global engagement. But they have still chosen direct engagement.

What motivates smaller churches to participate in ICPs?[175] I would contend that small congregations seek out sister churches in spite of their size, not because of it. They are likely motivated by a whole host of concerns that have nothing to do with attendance or resource availability. Instead,

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[174] (or other institutional)
[175] Note this is an altogether different question from whether they are successful in doing so, a question to be examined in Chapter 6.

they are motivated by all the reasons already explored in this chapter. As was noted before, an ICP approach may reflect the most readily available partners. It might speak more meaningfully to deeply held values of the congregation (like direct involvement or personal connection). It could be that the congregational leadership is deeply committed to this approach. It is likely a combination of these and many more factors. While church attendance is an important part of piecing together a profile of churches engaged in ICPs, it is important to remember that big churches and little churches do all kinds of things for reasons other than because they are big or little. In fact, many smaller churches are determined to pursue this new form of global engagement and considerations like autonomy and resources do not seem to matter to them one bit.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped out the contours of the sister church phenomenon as it appears across the United States. It has taken into consideration the place of ICPs within the constellation of approaches to global engagement adopted by American churches. Various socio-economic aspects of congregational life from geographic region to population density to denominational tradition to weekly attendance have been assayed. Drawing on all these factors, it is possible to begin piecing together a picture of the kinds of churches in the US that are seeking out sister congregations in other parts of the world to facilitate unmediated global engagement. While this profile is not exhaustive, it is indicative of the main trends in the employment of ICPs by US congregations.

Churches that are actively engaged in ICPs tend to place a high value on relationship. It is not enough for them to be globally engaged, they want that engagement to deliver a sense of connection to a people and a place. They also care deeply about the personal involvement and experience of congregants. The traditional model of global engagement is less appealing to them because the congregation's role in it is too passive. Its version of missionary involvement fails to deliver the kind of

experiential immediacy that these churches find in ICPs. And they are willing to sacrifice some economic expediency in order to secure that feeling of connection and involvement.

Churches tend to form ICPs rather than other modes of global partnership for a whole host of reasons. Perhaps the main reason is simply that churches are opportunists when it comes to partner selection. In geographic or denominational situations where other potential partners present themselves as likely global partners, churches are quite willing to go that route. But when there are fewer options open, or the main avenue to global engagement is a global worker known by someone in the congregation, it often means the church will use those personal bridges to form connections between congregations.

But as important as leveraging congregational connections is, the support (or directive) of denominational or congregational leadership is clearly another important piece of the puzzle. When church leadership is convinced of the importance of ICPs, they can be very effective at multiplying them. The availability of resources in a congregation and the need for a labor-intensive means of missional engagement also play a part in a church deciding to form an ICP. Sister church connections can require a lot of work to plan and sustain. This is especially true when multiple yearly trips are involved. So, a very large church that wants to get as many of its people involved in its global ministry as possible has good reasons to seek out a mode of engagement that requires a lot of personal involvement. Some congregational leaders may also appreciate the high degree of autonomy they have in pursuing an ICP. While negotiating an agenda and creating and maintaining channels of communication across major differences of language and culture can be time-consuming; some leaders much prefer it to being told what to do by someone who is not on their local staff. Typically, no church is motivated by just one of

these factors.[176] Instead, several (or all) factors work together in concert; necessitating and reinforcing one another to a greater or lesser degree, depending on each unique situation.

Finally, an American congregation with an ICP stands a decent chance of being non-denominational. This kind of global engagement helps create a sense of connection to a wider body for churches that are entirely independent. It not only speaks to their spiritual need for interdependence,[177] it also addresses the practicalities of possessing wider networks of support and belonging for churches who do not possess them by virtue of accepting denominational oversight. Similar concerns might also explain why many churches whose denominational networks are smaller are also keen to form ICPs. But larger denominations are also very involved in the sister church phenomenon. Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Roman Catholics account for the vast majority of churches in the US. And they are also highly engaged in ICPs. Perhaps the most important thing to say about the expansion of the sister church approach with respect to denominations is that it is not the exclusive domain of any one denominational tradition. It has spread everywhere, albeit unevenly, and taken root in all corners of the denominational landscape.

Now that we have a clear picture of the churches engaged in ICPs and the main motivating factors, it is time to turn to more practical considerations about how those partnerships play out in reality. In the chapters that follow I will take a deep dive into what these sister church partnerships are actually accomplishing, how churches anchor partnership in their faith, ways congregations define the concept of partnership, and what kind of structures and practices are used to enact these partnerships.

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[176] The possible exception being when a directive comes from a denominational official to a congregation that is really not otherwise interested in this kind of approach. While rare, this does happen as Phase 1 research certainly found.

[177] The connection between mission partnerships and biblical motifs of interdependence is one of the most well established (or belabored) facets of the literature. Classic examples include Stephen F Bayne, *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ* (S.P.C.K, 1963); and Vikner, "The Era of Interdependence". A more recent discussion can be found in Eitzen, "Dependent, Independent, Interdependent? A Case Study in Mission Partnership Between North and South America."

By the end, I will present a clear picture, not only of who is engaged in ICPs, but of the patterns of belief,

thinking, and behavior that lead to healthier partnerships between sister churches.

Chapter 5 – Health: How congregations experience their partnerships

Introduction

The previous chapter mapped the general practice of international partnership among American congregations. Now I am going to look more deeply into what some of those congregations and their international sister churches had to say about their experience of international partnership. The Global Congregational Survey (GCS) included questions about theology of partnership, how the concept of "partnership" gets defined, and what sort of structures and practices are employed when working with international sister churches. It also included a section that asked about how congregations experience their partnerships. What is their partnership leading to? What is it accomplishing? What kind of church are they becoming as a result? These are questions of evaluation and they are where I am beginning my analysis of the Phase 2 data. I have decided to start with this section because it is the interpretive lens through which I will analyze the rest of the data. The fundamental question of this study is whether there is a pattern in what churches believe, think, and behave concerning partnership that leads to healthier partnerships. In this chapter I will unpack the range of outcomes that the respondents to the GCS are experiencing and place them in groups based on those outcomes. I will examine the overall health of these congregational partnership in three dimensions: performative, affective, and transformative. All of these aspects of health can work together to make a partnership flourish. They can also align in ways that create problems. Finally, I will sort the congregations into groups based on their overall health. In the chapters that follow I will track how each group theologizes, conceptualizes, and operationalizes their partnerships and note which elements of partnership (when practiced consistently) correlates strongly with differences between the healthiest and least healthy partnerships.

There were 19 respondents representing 16 congregations that filled out the evaluative section

of the GCS. [178] The possible reasons that ten respondents left this section blank will be discussed more

fully below. Of those respondents, 14 were members of American congregations. Five were members of

an international congregation. 13 American congregations and three international congregations were

represented. This means that the findings of this study are not purely an American take on ICPs, though

the perspective does skew toward the American population.

Preliminary Assumptions

A definition of "success" in international congregational partnerships can be very elusive.[179] As

was pointed out in Chapter 2, the literature on missionary partnership generally, and congregational

partnerships particularly, is moving toward convergence. In this case, the vision of a flourishing[180]

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[178] The number of congregations represented in this section of the GCS was 16. The number of total responses in this section was 19, which means that 10 of the 29 respondents to the GCS left this section blank. Additionally, one congregation sent the survey to two congregants and another congregation sent it to three. Thus, when this chapter refers to respondents, the N=19, but when it refers to congregations, N=16. The responses of congregations with multiple respondents are represented in this dissertation using the arithmetic mean of the responses of the respondents from each respective congregation.

[179] Shockingly few authors have explicitly defined their measure of success for a partnership. A few exceptions include: Broschart, "Twenty Years of Partnership Between Pittsburgh Presbytery and the Synod of Blantyre, CCAP," 29–30; Barnes, *Power and Partnership*, 2013, 410–23; Bakker, *Sister Churches*, 40–41; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*, 23–27. Broschart defines success in terms of visible changes in the organization. Barnes and Bakker both define success as living up to the partnership's aspirations. Rickett views success as being satisfied with the vision and relationship of a partnership. He also includes the very practically-oriented notion of "results" in his definition.

[180] I hesitate to use the word "successful" here and elsewhere because it is so problematic. Pronouncing a partnership "successful" begs the obvious question: "successful at what?" There has been a great deal of critique of many partnership studies for being too performance-oriented rather than relationship-oriented. These critiques are certainly valid, and I tend to agree that the "being" of a partnering relationship is of more enduring significance than the "doing" of partnership, though I also resist the idea that "doing" and "being" constitute a dichotomy that is either necessary or helpful. Elsewhere, I have argued that a covenantal approach to partnership takes a more holistic view of "being" and "doing" by keeping both the contractual and familial nature of partnership in view, while subordinating both to partnership's sacral nature: Danny Hunter, "Toward a Theological Model of Mission Partnerships," in *Controversies in Mission* (Evangelical Missiological Society, Dallas, TX, 2015) The language of "success" or "achievement" has connotations that emphasize the performative dimensions of a partnership; but is less attuned to a holistic view of what makes a partnership "good." The language of "flourishing" or "health" is certainly inclusive of performance, without being unnecessarily exclusive of other dimensions of goodness in partnerships. That is why I choose to employ it throughout this dissertation.

partnership coheres around three points. Healthy partnerships: (1) succeed in what they attempt to accomplish, (2) create positive feelings between partners, and (3) shape the local church's understanding of itself and its place in the world. Each of these measures is a crucial dimension of a healthy, flourishing partnership. Similarly, to a marriage, congregational partnerships are at their best when they people in them feel that the relationship is not stale or stagnant. Instead, they trust that the relationship is able to do what they need it to (Performative Dimension). Partnerships flourish when participants are happy being in a relationship with each other, and when the relationship creates more positive feelings than negative ones (Affective Dimension). And partnerships reach their true *telos* when the relationship has a transformative impact on the identity and purpose of those involved. The partnership does not exist for its own sake, but to cause the partners to become something they could not be on their own (Transformative Dimension). These three dimensions of a flourishing partnership (performative, affective, and transformative) form the basis for the evaluative section of the GCS. The remaining sections of this chapter will note how the churches that responded to the GCS experience their partnership in each of these dimensions in turn, before discussing how all three work together to form a complete picture of the overall health of each partnership.

Performative Dimension

I will begin with the performative dimension of health; a measure of how effective congregations in partnership are at accomplishing their goals, stated and unstated. In the GCS, respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements pertaining to the performative dimension of health:[181]

- This partnership has very clear goals.

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[181] Responses were recorded on a Likert Scale as shown in Appendix A, p. 201.

- This partnership accomplishes what it sets out to do.

- This partnership accomplishes many things, but not necessarily what it sets out to do.

The first question gives a clear picture of how goal-oriented a given partnership is, as well as how likely it is to succeed in accomplishing those goals. If sister congregations have taken time to refine the articulation of their goals, it is safe to say that they place a high value on what they are trying to accomplish. It is also a fairly well-established fact that clear goals are more likely to be achieved than unclear ones.[182] The second question is fairly straightforward; it clues us in to how satisfied respondents are that their expectations for performative outcomes are being met. The third question is meant as an acknowledgement that much of partnership is done "on the way."[183] It is meant to capture how well partners accomplish things they did not expect to have to accomplish. It also is a measure of the flexibility of the partnership; how well it is able to adjust mid-course and still get things done. Needs often change as time runs on and flexibility in being able respond to shifting conditions is a hallmark of a healthy organism.

If the congregational partnerships responding to the GCS were experiencing unqualified success in the activities and projects they sought to accomplish through their partnership, the arithmetic mean of their responses to these questions would be 5. An average of 4 would suggest their partnership was having a moderate degree of success in achieving their practical goals. Scores ranging from 3 to 1 would be suggestive of outcomes ranging from little to no success, in terms of what partners are able to accomplish together. Figure 5.1 presents the actual arithmetic mean for each congregation in this section.

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[182] Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*, 107–10; Butler, *Well Connected*, 180–86.
[183] Butler has an entire section where he unpacks partnership as an emerging process rather than a static entity. Butler, *Well Connected*, 121–200.

Figure 5.1

Reported experience of performative success

Value	Value
2.33	
3.00	
3.33 3.33 3.33	
3.67 3.67 3.67	
4.00 4.00 4.00 4.00 4.00 4.00	
4.33 4.33	
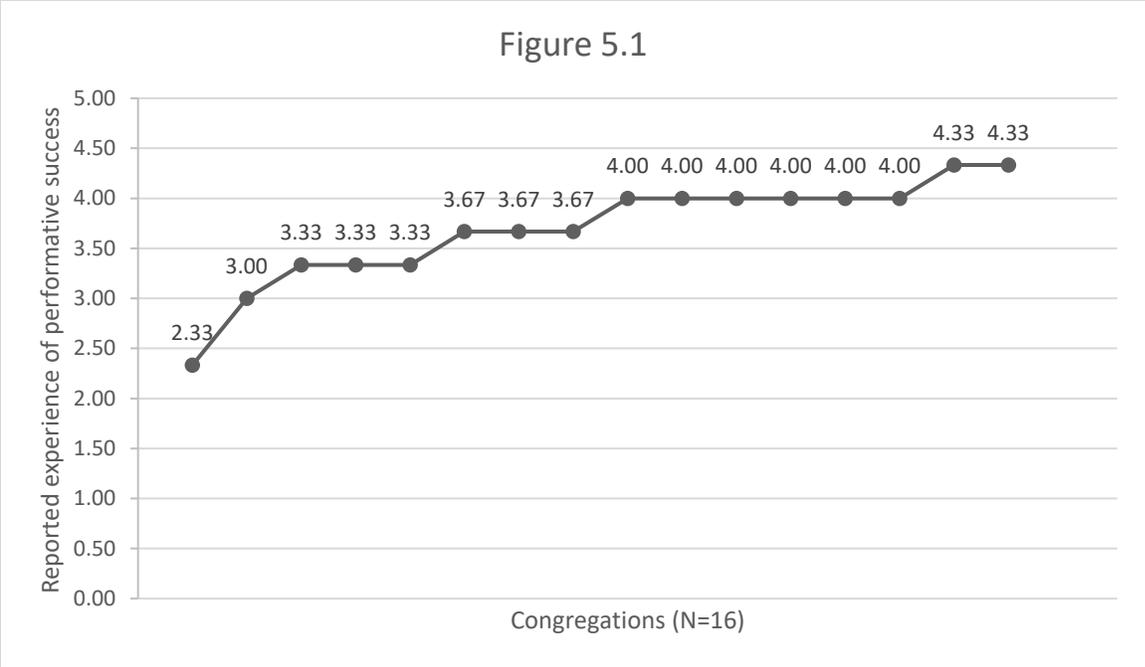
Congregations (N=16)

The congregations of the GCS reported a fairly narrow band of performative outcomes that mostly ranged from little to moderate success. A quick comparison of figure 5.1 with the rest of the graphs in this chapter shows that the responses to the performative section were both the most consistent, and on average the lowest, among the dimensions of health measured by the GCS. Partners' experience of performative success only varied to a slight degree. This was not at all the expected outcome. In fact, I expected that performative outcomes would be the most varied of the three dimensions measured, largely because that is what anecdotal evidence suggests should be the case. But that is not what the GCS showed. Instead, all responses fell within two degrees of difference (2.33 to 4.33), and 14 out of 16 responses (87.5%) fell within a single degree of difference (3.33 to 4.33).

There may have been some contributing factors at work here. The tables[184] show a statistically significant correlation between performative outcomes and a congregation's weekly attendance as well as whether a congregation was urban or rural. In terms of attendance, congregations with fewer than

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[184] https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#demographics (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

1000 regular weekly worshippers (N=11) were somewhat less likely to score below a 4 on their performative outcomes (N=4) as they were to score a 4 or above (N=7). But for churches whose weekly attendance is above 1000 (N=6) only one scored below 4 in term of performative outcomes. Thus, it seems that churches with over 1000 regular attendees are far more likely to be satisfied with the achievement of their partnership goals than their smaller counterparts. Similarly, among congregations in a partnership whose American partner is located in a rural area (N=6), only one scored a 4 or above. While congregations with urban American connections (N=13) scored 4 or above in all but one case. So, being an American congregation in an urban setting, or having a partner in an urban American setting, is a strong indicator of performative success.

A careful reader of the tables at globalchurchpartnerships.org/data will recognize that the part of the country that the American partner hails from is, technically, a statistically significant factor in performative outcomes. But all congregations sampled were equally likely to score a 4 or above (N=8) in the performative dimension as below a 4 (n=8). There is nothing remarkable about this distribution. Neither denominational affiliation nor whether the congregation is American or not has a significant relationship to performance.[185]

It is also of note that partnering congregations reported a much lower overall experience of performative impact in their partnerships than of affective or transformative impact. In figure 5.1 only half of congregations sampled scored a 4 or above. But in figure 5.6 (a measure of the overall health of the partnership) 75% of congregations recorded an aggregate a score of 4. And, while 31% of congregations recorded an overall health score of at least 4.5; none reached that score in terms of their

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[185] https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#demographics (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

performative outcomes. This disparity shows a significant gap between partnership's ability to deliver practical results and its ability to shape the relational and spiritual lives of participants.

Analysis

All these data pose some very interesting questions. Perhaps the most pertinent is why, of all the dimensions of health studied, is performance the hardest one for partners to do well? Is it possible that achievement of a particular goal is not as important to the overall health of a partnering relationship as we think it is? This data set makes that conclusion seem likely. Congregations with partners in other parts of the world often enter into those relationships with a goal in mind. But, while most partners are able to achieve a moderate degree of success in that regard, there are no resounding, unqualified success stories. Instead, achieving goals is hard work and is accomplished haltingly and unevenly. This should help frame expectations of what a partnership is (and is not) capable of delivering. Accomplishing projects and practical goals in partnership happens unevenly, even in the best of cases. If sister churches are willing to take halting, sometimes erring, steps toward a goal, this data suggests they can expect a moderate degree of success. But if they are entering into the relationship expecting more or less perfect achievement of their goals, they are in for a rude awakening. That is not something that partnership is capable of delivering.

The demographic data behind performance is also fascinating. It is clear that the population density where the American partner is located as well as overall congregational attendance both have an impact on performative outcomes for both partners. It is likely that those two variables (attendance and population density) are closely related. Having a larger congregation and/or living in an urban setting gives a congregation greater access to resources that can help them achieve their goals. It is possible that urban churches simply embody a more fast paced, goal-oriented lifestyle and thus

experience more positive performative outcomes than relationship-oriented, rural churches.[186] Further study into what kind of goals churches set in partnership and whether goals differ based on urban or rural setting would be helpful in teasing out these implications.

Affective Dimension

Next, I turn to the affective dimension of health; how partners feel about their sister congregations and the relationship they share. In the GCS, respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements pertaining to the affective dimension of health:[187]

- Generally speaking, I have good feelings about this partnership.

- We are better as a church because we are in this partnership.

- I am more excited about this partnership now than when it started.

- If we were starting this process all over, I would want to be in partnership with our current partner.

The nature of these questions is fairly straightforward. The first one measures how positively or negatively the respondent experiences the relationship. The second, while it may seem to have more to do with the transformative element, actually gets at the overall satisfaction respondents have with their

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[186] This is a slight restatement of a well-established trope in the partnership literature. The hyperorientation of American partners to matters of performance, juxtaposed against a majority-world concern for relationship that downplays the practicalities of partnership has become axiomatic in studies of mission partnership. Authors who express this kind of view include: Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*; Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*; Barnes, *Power and Partnership*, 2013; Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*; Penner, "Cross-Cultural Partnerships and Asymmetries of Power." But the GCS was unable to determine this kind of dichotomy between American and majority-world congregations. It may be that this dichotomizing of relationship and performance is not as important for making sense of how partnerships work as was previously thought. Or it may be that the difference really lies between urban and rural cultures, rather than between national cultures. .

[187] Responses were recorded on a Likert Scale as shown in Appendix A, p. 202.

relationship. As was mentioned above, the affective dimension is not just about good feelings, but also

feeling fulfilled and confident in the relationship. These elements are all part of having a happy, fulfilling

relationship. This question helps clarify to what extent respondents feel their partnership is necessary

and fulfilling. The third question gauges whether or not the relationship has gone stale. Is the original

enthusiasm still present, or has the partnership become just one other thing for the church to do? True,

as relationships age, they change. The spark of youthful attraction gives way to the steady intimacy and

confidence of a seasoned marriage. That is why the last question was included. It is not about having the

same feelings they had in the beginning. It measures whether, after all the ups and downs, setbacks and

triumphs, the relationship is one that respondents consider life-giving enough to keep pursuing.

If the congregational partnerships responding to the GCS were experiencing strong positive

feelings toward their partner and satisfaction with the relationship, the arithmetic mean of their

responses to these questions would ideally be 5. And average of 3 would indicate evenly mixed positive

and negative feelings and essentially no satisfaction with the relationship. An average of 1 would mean

they experience strong negative feelings toward and extreme dissatisfaction with their partnering

relationship. Figure 5.1 presents the actual arithmetic mean for each respondent in this section.

Figure 5.2
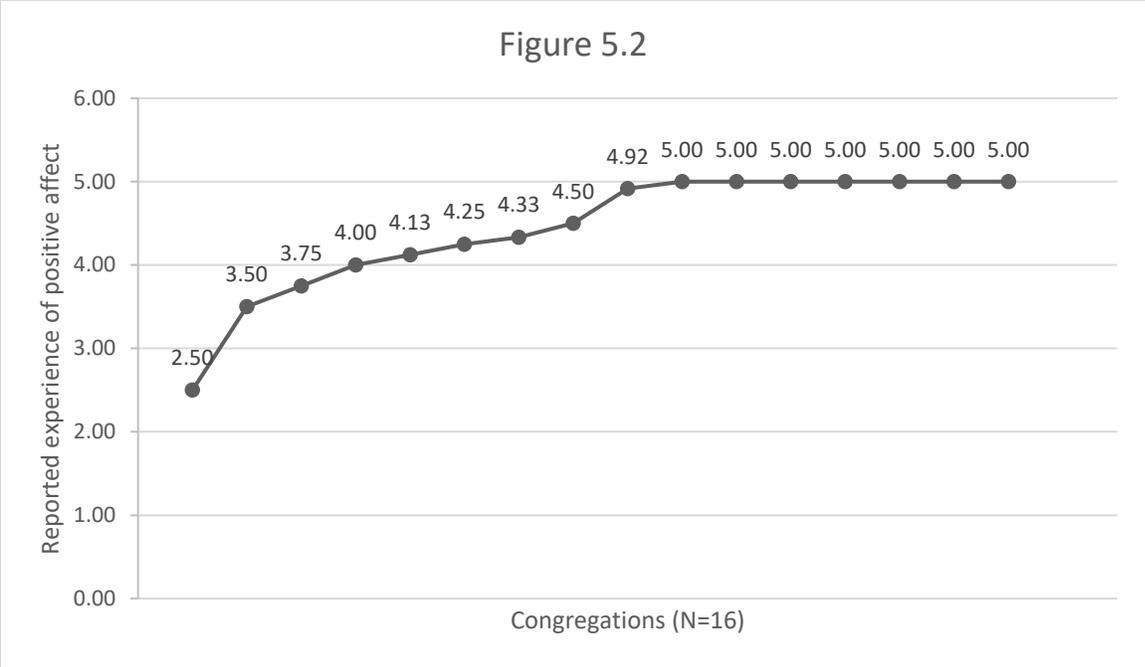
The respondents to the GCS reported a slightly wider range of positive affect than of performative success. Additionally, the scores for the affective dimension were, by far, the highest among all three aspects of partnership health. The range spanned more than two degrees of separation, though all but one fell within two degrees (3-5); and 13 of 16 congregations fell within a single degree of separation (4-5) – reporting that their partnerships brough them mostly positive feelings and a relatively high degree of satisfaction with their relationship. If the performative evaluation revealed no unqualified success stories, the affective evaluation revealed a near-majority of them. Of the 16 congregations represented, 7 rated every single affective question at 5. Nine congregations averaged 4.5 or better. Even the lower half of respondents reported more positive than negative affect, with only one congregation recording a mostly negative experience of their partnering relationship. Clearly the congregations sampled by the GCS are enjoying mostly positive feelings about their partnerships.

The tables[188] show similar influences to those mentioned in the performative section. With regard to weekly attendance, 7 out of the 11 congregations with fewer than 1000 regular attendees reported an average affective rating of 4 or above, 4 of those congregations rated below 4. In other words, smaller churches were about twice as likely to have very positive feelings toward their partners instead of moderately positive or negative feelings. But among churches with 1000 or more weekly attendees, all 6 rated their affect at 4 or above. The population density where the American partner is located also has a significant impact on affective outcomes. 92% of congregations with an urban American connection (N=13) reported an average score of 4 or above. Those located in or connected to rural America (N=6) were equally likely to score below or above 4.[189]

Analysis

So, what do all these numbers tell us about the health of sister congregations with regard to their relationships to one another? Well, for one thing, they confirm that relationship is what congregational partnership does best. It is far and away the highest-scoring dimension of health in the GCS. A stunning 56% of congregations reported an exceptionally high rating (4.8 or more) in terms of affect toward their partner and relationship. This falls to 25% in the transformative dimension, and 0% in the performative. All things being equal, building a positive relationship with Christians in totally different parts of the world is what partnership is best equipped to deliver. While other measures of health show varying results, good feelings toward a partner seem to be the easiest (or at least most likely) result to come by. And those that do experience good feelings, experience exceptionally good

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[188] https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#demographics (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).
[189] The distribution of congregations reporting at or above vs below 4, based on the geographic region in which American partners are located, is basically identical to the distribution for the performance section. The one exception is that two congregations in New England (all located in rural areas) scored higher. This should hardly be surprising as we have just seen that rural congregations on the whole did better in this section. For specifics, see https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#demographics (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

feelings. If the performative evaluation helps set moderate expectations for what partnerships can accomplish, the affective evaluation indicates that partners can expect more from the quality of their partnering relationships. Really good relationships are well within grasp for sister churches, and they are probably the thing that congregations can most look forward to when developing a new partnership. Whatever else can be said about partnerships, they are clearly much better at making people feel good about their partners than they are at doing stuff.

There is also an interesting correlation between churches who have more access to resources and the affective health of their partnerships. And that make sense, it is easier to feel good about a relationship when you have the resources to make it work well, or when it gives you access to resources you would not otherwise have. As we saw above, smaller congregations were nearly twice as likely to have positive feelings about their relationship than they were to have neutral or negative ones. But larger congregations all had positive feelings. Urban churches are also far more likely to have positive feelings, though it should be pointed out that the lowest score in this dataset came from an urban congregation. This congregation is also one of the smaller churches, suggesting they may not have as much access to resources as larger urban churches. So, size or location on their own are no guarantee of success but they do seem to work together to indicate greater access to resources for a congregation to draw on. And access to those resources does have some impact on affective outcomes. There is certainly not as much impact as with performative outcomes. For example, rural connections are not very likely to score 4 or above in performance (17%), but they are much more likely to score well in terms of affect (50%). Lack of resources poses a serious threat to performative outcomes, but it is far less serious of a threat to the feelings that sister churches develop for each other. There is some indication that access to resources does help develop more positive feelings. But it is far less determinative of relational quality than it is of performative success.

Transformative Dimension

Now I will turn to the transformative dimension of health, how partnership impacts congregations' understanding of themselves, their relationship to the world, and their relationship to God and his mission. In the GCS, respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements pertaining to the transformative dimension of health:[190]

- This partnership has shaped my understanding of what it means to be "the Church" (Ecclesiological Understanding).

- This partnership has given our church a deeper understanding of its place in God's mission (Missiological Understanding).

- I have a sense of connection to the church in other parts of the world because of this partnership (Global Connection).

- Our church is better equipped to serve our own community because of this partnership (Equipping for Local Ministry).

- Our church's spiritual life is more vibrant because of this partnership (Spiritual Vitality).

These questions were not easy to narrow down. After all, there are all kinds of transformations possible when Christians from around the globe are engaged in collaborative ministry.[191] But the intent of the questions should be fairly obvious. The first deals with whether and to what degree the respondent's ecclesiology has been shaped by its global relationships. Does "the Church" mean something different when a local congregation is globally engaged compared to when it is only involved

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[190] Responses were recorded on a Likert Scale as shown in Appendix A, pp. 202-3.
[191] One of the few recent dissertations to grapple with transformative impacts is Madden, "Mutual Transformation as a Framework for Church Global Mission Partnerships," 164. Several of the impacts measured here are suggested by Madden. But they are also present in the assumptions of other authors like Bakker, *Sister Churches*; Broschart, "Twenty Years of Partnership Between Pittsburgh Presbytery and the Synod of Blantyre, CCAP"; Clevenger, *Unequal Partners: In Search of Transnational Catholic Sisterhood*; and Twibell, "Integrated Partnerships."

in its own neighborhood? The second gauges the missiological transformation of congregations. It probes whether mission takes a greater role in the life of a globally engaged church, and whether that role changes as a result of contact with Christians in other parts of the world. The third question is about identity and belonging. It asks whether an encounter with a cultural stranger who is also a sibling in Christ opens space to identify national and socio-cultural "others" as "one of us." The fourth question deals with bringing international ministry home. It measures whether international partnership actually equips churches for living faithfully to their calling in their own neighborhoods, or if partnership is an experience that remains disconnected from the daily life of the congregation. Finally, the last question acknowledges that there are all kinds of goods exchanged in international congregational partnerships. Of course, material goods are involved, so are spiritual goods. The intangible benefits of encouragement and renewal in one's faith, as well as the enrichment of new theological perspectives and practices are powerful components of the international engagement of local congregations.[192] This question asks respondents how much these factors figure into their experience of collaborative ministry.

If the congregational partnerships responding to the GCS were experiencing a renewed sense of identity or calling, an expanded sense of belonging to Christians in other parts of the world, a more vibrant spiritual life, or an enhanced ability to serve their own community; the arithmetic mean of their responses to these questions would ideally be 5. Figure 5.1 presents the actual arithmetic mean for each respondent in this section.

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[192] Haynes, *Consuming Mission: Toward a Theology of Short-Term Mission and Pilgrimage*; Wesley, "Collective Impact in Congregational Mission."

Figure 5.3
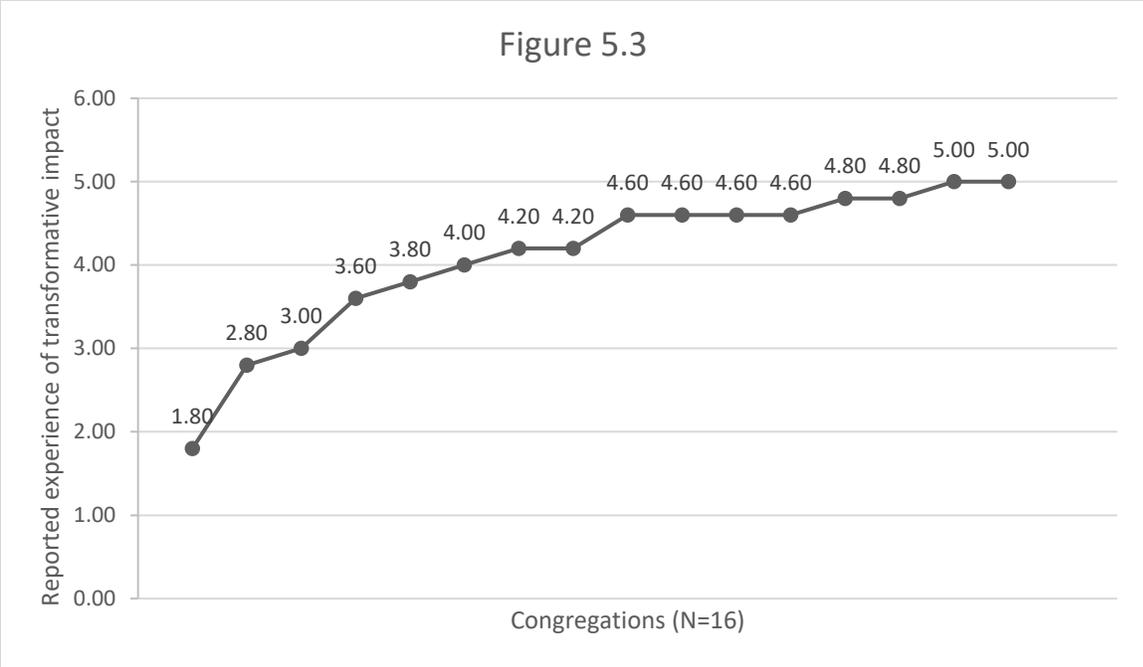
The transformative impact of partnerships had the most widely distributed outcomes of all the dimensions of health. Congregations reported over three degrees of separation in their responses (1.8-5). And, while 69% still scored at least a 4, only 25% rated exceptionally high (4.8) in transformative impact and only 2 congregations returned an average of 5 (compared to 7 in the affective dimension). Transformative outcomes, then, arise much more unevenly than affective ones; and the thresholds for both high and low degrees of transformation are more extreme than are found in either the performative or affective dimensions. Here there are a few unqualified success stories, and a majority of moderate to high successes. But still, 19% of congregations report seeing little to no impact on their own church as a result of their partnership. If partnerships are supposed to lead to a renewed understanding of involved congregations and their relationship to God and the world, the GCS suggests most partnerships are only moderately successful. The reality is that having a sister church can, often very powerfully, create new understandings. But it can also have very little impact on the life of a local church.

The demographic data behind the transformative dimension of health follows similar pattens to those found above.[193] The size of the congregation is a significant factor, with 4 of 11 congregations under 1000 attendees scoring below 4; and 7 of them scoring 4 or above. Meanwhile, congregations over 1000 (N=6) have only one that scored below 4. That means that smaller churches are roughly 50% more likely to be transformed by their partnership, than to experience no transformation. But larger churches show an increase of 500% from those who have little to no impact to those who have higher degrees of transformation. Additionally, 92% of urban respondents (total N=13) scored highly in the transformative dimension (4 or above), while 83% of rural respondents (total N=6) scored lower (below 4).[194]

These data are an overall picture of the transformative impact of partnerships. But they beg the quite obvious question of whether there are certain kinds of transformation that are more common for congregational partners. Figure 5.4 provides a breakdown of the kinds of transformation that partners experience with respondents grouped according to weekly attendance. Figure 5.5 provides a similar breakdown with respondents grouped by population density.[195]

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[193] See https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#demographics (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

[194] The distribution of congregations reporting at or above vs below 4, based on the geographic region in which American partners are located, is identical to the distribution for the performance section, likely owing to the same dynamics of resource availability. For specifics, see https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#demographics (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

[195] This is a simplified version of the tables found at https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#demographics (Password:GCSDissertation2021!). It should be noted that there is a slight difference in the N for these tables. This is because I was unable to obtain information on weekly attendance from two respondents. Thus Figure 5.4 has an N of 17, while Figure 5.5 has a N of 19.

Figure 5.4

Reported Change in Ecclesiological Understanding				
Under 1000 attendees (N=11)		*Total N =17*	*1000+ attendees (N=6)*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
4	7		1	5
Reported Change in Missiological Understanding				
Under 1000 attendees			*1000+ attendees*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
4	7		-	6
Reported Change in Global Connection				
Under 1000 attendees			*1000+ attendees*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
1	10		-	6
Reported Change in Equipping for Local Ministry				
Under 1000 attendees			*1000+ attendees*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
5	6		1	5
Reported Change in Spiritual Vitality				
Under 1000 attendees			*1000+ attendees*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
4	7		4	2

Figure 5.5

Reported Change in Ecclesiological Understanding				
Rural Congregations (N=6)		*Total N =19*	*Urban Congregations (N=13)*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
2	4		1	12
Reported Change in Missiological Understanding				
Rural Congregations			*Urban Congregations*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
4	2		1	12
Reported Change in Global Connection				
Rural Congregations			*Urban Congregations*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
-	6		1	12
Reported Change in Equipping for Local Ministry				
Rural Congregations			*Urban Congregations*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
6	-		2	11
Reported Change in Spiritual Vitality				
Rural Congregations			*Urban Congregations*	
1-3	*4-5*	*Score*	*1-3*	*4-5*
5	1		5	8

There was little difference between changes in ecclesiological understanding and the average transformative health among respondents to the GCS. The one exception is that rural populations reported markedly higher increase in ecclesiological transformation than their average (66% positive vs 17% positive, respectively). Missiological transformations, were a little bit closer to average. Churches with higher numbers of attendees reported slightly more impact than their average, as did rural churches. But when it comes to fostering a sense of global connection, the vast majority of all congregations, regardless of resource access, reported a high degree of change as a result of their partnerships. There was one small, urban congregation that reported no impact, but the rest reported significant change. However, congregations across the board reported slightly below average changes in their ability to better serve their own community as a result of their partnerships. This was especially pronounced among rural populations. Large church reports were in line with their averages, but smaller churches reported slightly less transformation in this regard as did urban churches, while rural churches were unanimously below average. A sense of increased spiritual health as a result of partnerships was recorded at exactly the same rate as the overall transformative average by both rural congregations and smaller ones. However, larger churches reported significantly below average change in this respect (33% positive vs 83% positive, respectively) as did urban churches (62% vs 92%, respectively). This is the one element of transformation in which better resourced churches are clearly underperforming. So, in summary, transformations in a congregation's sense of global connection and spiritual vitality appear to take place without reference to greater availability of resources. In fact, in these cases resource scarcity may even confer an advantage. But in terms of a change in ecclesiological and missiological understanding, or an increased ability to minister locally it appears that resource access does confer a significant advantage.

Analysis

The GCS uncovers some very important things about the transformative potential of international congregational partnerships. First, it shows that transformation is possible, but by no means a guarantee. There are several churches that have experienced a very high degree of transformational impact as a result of their partnerships. But nearly as many see little to no effect. Most lie somewhere in between. This can have an important effect on how partners frame their expectations. It is healthy for partners to assume their relationship will change them, hopefully in positive ways. But framing that expectation from the outset and pursuing it intentionally will help make those assumptions a reality. It is also helpful to realize that change takes time, and while transformation is an important part of a partnering relationship it does not always come in the timeframe, or in the ways, that we expect. Partnerships are generally better at transformative impact than accomplishing projects, though the outcomes vary more widely.

In fact, the GCS shows that when transformation happens, it happens unevenly. Impact depends heavily on what kind of transformation a congregation is looking for. Clearly partnerships are much better at delivering some transformations than others. For example, they are wildly successful (almost unanimously) at giving congregations a sense of connection to the global body of Christians. As with the other elements of health mentioned in this chapter, the impact of partnership on different aspects of transformation seems to depend to some degree on the availability of resources, but the main factor in this regard may be what churches have on their agenda.

Partnership is very important in shaping the ecclesiological self-understanding of rural churches. This difference is likely because it gives them an experience of accompaniment and connection in the face of difference that is otherwise difficult for them to access; but is more readily available to congregations in more cosmopolitan environments. Collaborative ministry seems to be less impactful on the missiological understanding of rural churches, while having significant impact in this regard for larger churches. However, among the rural churches who reported little missiological impact, the vast majority

(75%) recorded that they neither agreed nor disagreed that their understanding of their church's place in God's mission had changed as a result of their partnership. This suggests that they may not be looking for that kind of impact from their partnership; that they simply do not think of the relationship in those terms. It could be that missiological transformation is simply not on the agenda for rural congregations, at least not to the degree that it is among urban congregations.

Similarly, rural churches' reports of low impact on being equipped to serve locally may be due to the fact that 67% of them also neither agreed nor disagreed; suggesting they are not thinking in terms of the local impact of their international relationships. And while it is true that both larger congregations and urban ones reported consistently low impact of partnership on the spiritual life of their congregations, every single one of those low responses were "neither agree nor disagree." So, it would seem likely that churches with more material resources are not necessarily less spiritually vibrant than globally aware as a result of their partnership. Instead, they are simply less aware of how their partnership impacts their collective spiritual life than how it impacts their sense of global connection.

Conclusion

When all is said and done, the GCS lends tremendous insight into the health of its respondents' partnerships. In this chapter, I have unpacked the findings of the GCS with regard to the performative outcomes, affective effects, and transformative impacts experienced by each congregation as a result of their mission partnerships. Figure 5.6 shows the average overall health score of the congregations in the GCS. The numbers given here are the average score for each church in all three dimensions of health measured by the GCS.

Figure 5.6
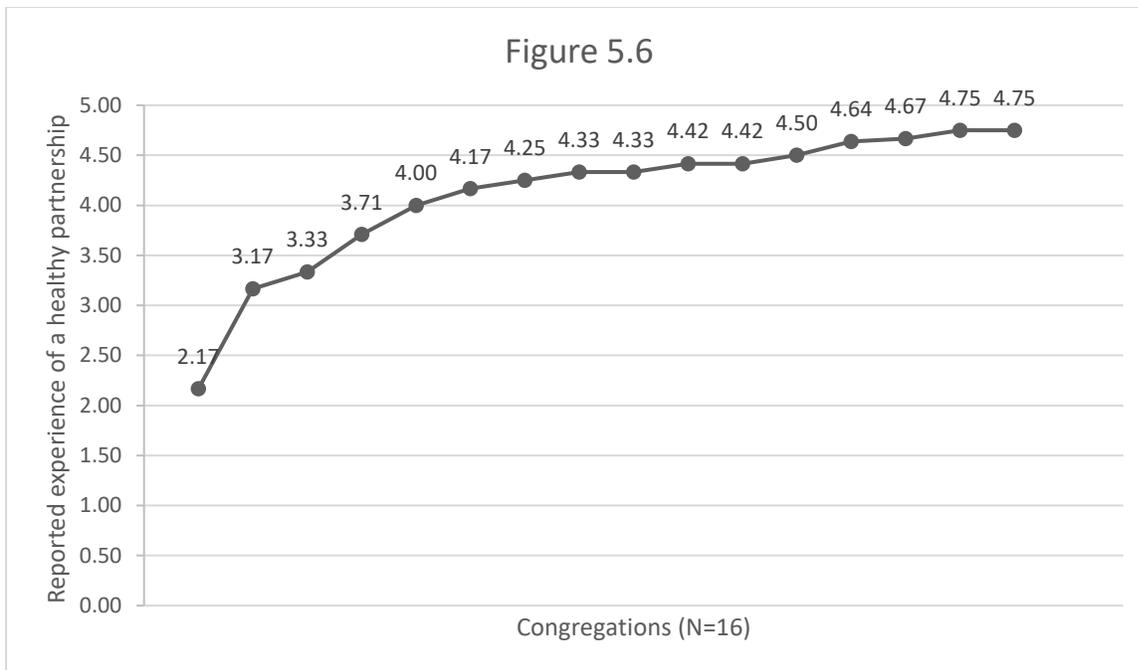
A couple of things bear noting here. First, is that 75% of the respondents to the GCS scored a 4 or better overall in the evaluative section, indicating that they have moderately to extremely healthy partnerships. In fact, only one partnership strays down toward what might be characterized as an unhealthy partnership. I am tempted to suggest, as this dataset certainly does, that the majority of churches are abnormally successful in international partnerships. However, I suspect there is something else going on here. After all, only 19[196] of the 29 individual respondents who filled out the rest of the GCS also filled out the evaluative section. This means that roughly a third of the congregations sampled declined to comment on the state of their partnership. It may be that those respondents would score in a similar distribution to figure 5.6; but I would find that highly unlikely. I can say with some degree of confidence that, from the communication that I had with some participants, those who left a given section blank did so for good reasons, at least in their minds. I noticed that most were terribly self-conscious about their partnerships. Many did not want to fill out a section if they were not going to give what they felt were the right answers. And they were quite loath to paint their partnership, or especially

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[196] Recall that I mentioned earlier that these 19 individuals were affiliated with 16 congregations.

their partners, in an unfavorable light. Despite constant reassurance to the contrary, many people felt

their partnership had to "measure up" to some unspoken expectation in order to participate in the GCS.

I have had discussions with colleagues in the partnership field who have had similar experiences. One

colleague, who works in a denominational partnership office, said she finds many congregations

unwilling to even disclose that they have international sister churches, because they do not want to face

scrutiny from the denominational office if they feel they are not performing adequately. While it seems

that American churches are increasingly interested in pursuing international partnerships, they are also

unsure whether they are doing it right. And they do not seem willing to talk about them unless they are

sure. So, the finding that 75% of congregations are experiencing healthy partnerships is likely a

reflection of the fact that people who have healthier partnerships are more likely to tell researchers

about those partnerships. Maybe most partners are just abnormally successful. But given the

extraneous factors just mentioned, it is likely that many of them simply decline to report negative

outcomes rather than say something that might reflect poorly on their partner or on themselves.

The chapters that follow will concern themselves with explaining Figure 5.6. What are the

patterns in belief, thinking, and behavior that the healthier churches share, which are missing from

those who scored further down? As we will see, the theological underpinnings used to anchor the

practice of partnership, the conceptual frameworks that inform the definition of "partnership," and the

structures and practices employed when working together all play a major part in how healthy a

partnership is likely to become.[197] Of course, there are other possible explanations for the difference in

outcomes shown in figure 5.6 which have already been addressed in this chapter. National origin or

denominational affiliation did not have a significant impact on how healthy a partnership became. The

two factors that seemed to have the greatest impact were the population density where the American

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[197] This is clearly demonstrated in https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#ANOVA
(Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

partner was located and the size of the congregation. Both of these factors cohere around the issue of access to resources, both human and material.

While access to resources generally seems to have a significant impact on the overall health of a partnership, it would be disingenuous (not to mention profoundly unhelpful) to simply say that the best thing a church can do to ensure a healthy partnership is to be large and/or urban. Congregations do not usually have much of a say in those matters. It may be more helpful to congregations with less access to material and human resources to say that their partnerships would be enriched by finding creative access to resources. This might entail partnering with better resourced mediating institutions (such as denominational or extra-ecclesial missionary agencies) rather than with international congregations directly.[198] Under-resourced congregations engaged in international partnerships might also benefit from sharing resources with each other: creating multi-lateral partnerships, forming co-ops, etc. in order to broaden their resource base. One definite advantage that better resourced congregations have is that they are often working with a larger and more globally connected staff. It is far easier to nurture a healthy international partnership when there are missions pastors on staff and a large and highly organized pool of volunteer labor. When the health of the partnership is incumbent upon a one or two person staff, it is harder to allocate the attention needed to create better outcomes. In this case, working with a consultant or sharing a missions staff among multiple congregations might help under-resourced churches improve the overall health of their partnerships.

One last task remains before leaving this chapter behind. In order to facilitate the analysis that will take place in the coming chapters, I am dividing the congregations who responded to the GCS into

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[198] This may be why Chapter 4 found that a significant number of congregations (particularly smaller ones) engage in partnerships with NGOs and other agencies. Those organizations probably offer resources smaller congregations often lack.

three groups based on their relative position in figure 5.6.[199] The relative position of these congregations is represented in Figure 5.7.
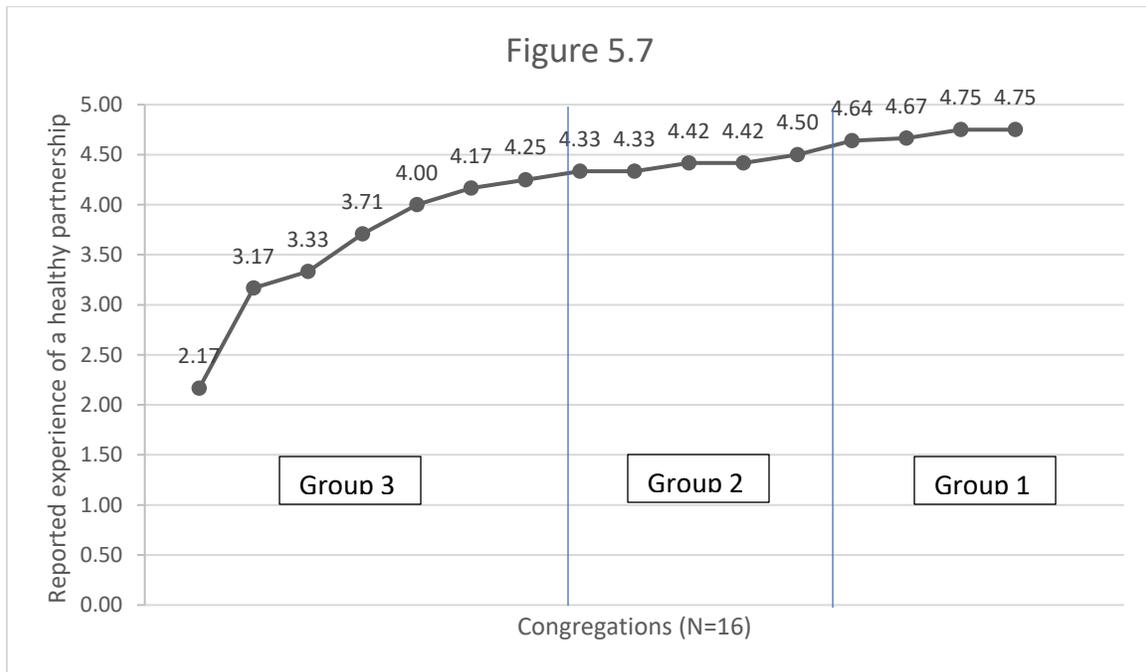
Figure 5.7

Group 1 consists of congregations that scored in the 80th percentile or higher (4.616 or higher) in Figure 5.7. This group has demonstrated the greatest degree of overall health in their partnerships and will be considered the benchmark for the hypothesis "there are patterns in belief, thinking, and behavior concerning partnership that lead to healthier partnerships." There are six respondents, representing four congregations, in Group 1. Two respondents from two congregations are American, and four respondents from two congregations are international. Group 1 is exceptional, not only because of the health of its partnerships, but because the same number of American and international congregations are represented. And there are actually more respondents from outside the US than from US congregations represented in Group 1.

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[199] As was noted in Chapter 3 (p. 63), these Groups are distributed logarithmically to emphasize difference in the overall health between groups.

Group 2 consists of congregations that ranked between the 80th and 50th percentile in Figure 5.7 (between 4.616 and 4.33). These congregations still scored very well in overall health and are experiencing very positive outcomes. They just ended up in a lower percentile because the sample skewed so high. While not necessarily the benchmark for the hypothesis, they should demonstrate a trend that proves the hypothesis. There are five respondents, representing five congregations in Group 2. All of them are American.

Group 3 is made up of congregations that scored below the 50th percentile (4.32) in Figure 5.7. While some of these congregations scored well in one of the dimensions of health, they did not score consistently enough across all three. Others scored consistently poorly across all dimensions. In either case, they will be used to disprove the null hypothesis. If there is an aspect of belief, thought, or behavior concerning partnership that is consistently practiced by Group 1 but not by Group 3, it can be assumed that is a factor strongly correlated to partnership health. Eight respondents, representing seven congregations, are in Group 3. Only one respondent, representing one congregation, is from an international congregation, the rest are American.

Chapter 6 – Heart: How congregations theologize their partnerships

Introduction

In the previous chapter I grouped the respondents to the Global Congregational Survey (GCS) according to the percentile of their overall health score. Over the next three chapters I will provide in-depth analysis of each of the proposed consensus elements of a good partnership as laid out in Chapter 2[200] through the lens of the comparative health of each group of respondents. As was stated earlier, the expectation is that the prevalence of each of these elements will correlate strongly with a higher health score, while the absence of a given element will correlate with a less healthy partnership. I will begin this analysis with an examination of theology; specifically, of how congregations pursuing mission partnerships with sister churches anchor their collaboration in the things that matter most. If the thesis of this dissertation is that there is a pattern to what churches believe, think, or behave concerning partnership that leads to healthier ICPs; this chapter seeks to illuminate the impact of belief on this formulation. My intention in this chapter is to demonstrate that a robust theology of partnership leads to better outcomes for partnering ministries. While it is certainly not the only important factor in international congregational collaboration, theology really does lie at the heart of partnership.

The sections below will ask three questions of the data collected by Phase 2 of the GCS. First: "how important is theology to congregational partnerships?" Second: "what kind of theologizing do congregations engage in concerning their partnerships?" And lastly: "how much theologizing is actually happening?" I will answer these questions in turn using the responses supplied in the GCS; then close with some summary comments on how churches approach their partnerships theologically and what kind of impacts those approaches might have on partnership health when engaged intentionally.

Importance of Theology

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[200] See pp. 33-42.

In the GCS, respondents were asked to list up to five theological themes and five biblical

passages or stories (with each set being ranked in order of importance) that have been used regularly

when talking or thinking about their partnerships.[201] It was expected that, if these congregations were

using theological language as they talked about their partnerships, respondents would be familiar with

that language and able to articulate it. In this way, the GCS does not actually measure whether churches

use theological language as they set up their partnerships. Instead, it measures which theological ideas

about partnership have been communicated effectively enough that they can be recalled immediately

as respondents fill out a survey. My working assumption in taking this approach is that it is far more

interesting to find out what theological ideas occupy permanent brain space among people involved in

the day-to-day operation of an ICP than it is to find out what the official documents record.

It is also worth noting that the N for both theological and biblical responses in this chapter is

12.[202] There are three congregations represented in Group 1, three in Group 2 and six in Group 3. This

means that the distribution of the sample is statistically normal. Still, I will have to be very careful about

the conclusions I draw from this segment of the GCS. While it is still possible to make descriptive claims

about how theology functions in the congregations that responded, any generalizable claims about the

function of theology in partnerships will be preliminary and tentative conclusions, at best.

Of course, it may well be argued that any attempt to measure theology or its effects, especially

via quantitative analysis, is in a precarious state to begin with.[203] Indeed the very notion is almost

laughable. Theology is the domain of ineffability, of transcendence, of mystery. If we truly posit a God

who possesses the qualities traditionally ascribed to him by Christian theologians (omnipotence,

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[201] See https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#theology (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

[202] 41.38%, or 12 of 29 total respondents recorded at least one answer to the question about theological themes. This was also the case for the question about biblical pericopes. 58.62%, or 17 out of the 29 total respondents, recorded no data. Thus, the N for both theological and biblical themes in this chapter is 12.

[203] A rare example of quantitative analysis of theological data can be found in Madden, "Mutual Transformation as a Framework for Church Global Mission Partnerships."

omniscience, omnipresence, etc.),[204] the difficulty of quantifying anything to do with him is immediately

evident. Additionally, assuming we might devise an adequate method, the subjectivity of human

observers with respect to the object of their theological study suggests we may not have the faintest

idea of what to measure. These are valid cautions, and I will not dismiss them lightly. We may well

conclude that statistical data do not tell us anything significant about theology, as such. But they do tell

us something very significant about the way real humans experience and respond to theology. For

instance, the data from the GCS shows that churches enjoying better partnerships make their theology

explicitly about collaboration, rather than mission in general. And they anchor that theology in themes

that are central to their faith. These are not really findings about theology itself, but the human

construction and application of theology. And, significantly for the present study, these findings

illuminate the impact that human engagement with theology has on collaborative relationships.

This chapter, then, is not intended to function prescriptively but rather descriptively. The

conclusions I draw here demonstrate how specific churches experiencing different levels of health in

their partnerships situate those relationships theologically. This will allow me to note patterns in

theology and health which are suggestive, if not positively indicative, of a theological bent that is helpful

in making partnerships healthier. I cannot claim that this chapter's findings are statistically significant[205]

or absolute in any sense. Perhaps more than any other chapter of this dissertation, the present chapter

requires an abundance of caution about the kinds of conclusions I may draw. However, caution and

epistemological humility do not preclude the drawing of any kind of conclusion, regardless of how

heavily conditioned those findings must necessarily be.

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[204] A concise but thorough discussion of the development of these superlatives can be found in Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*, 39–54.

[205] A quick glance at https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#theology (Password:GCSDissertation2021!) will show that only the impact of theological themes on the performative and transformative dimensions of partnership can claim to be statistically significant. But the wider question of whether statistics can tell us anything significant about theology remains.
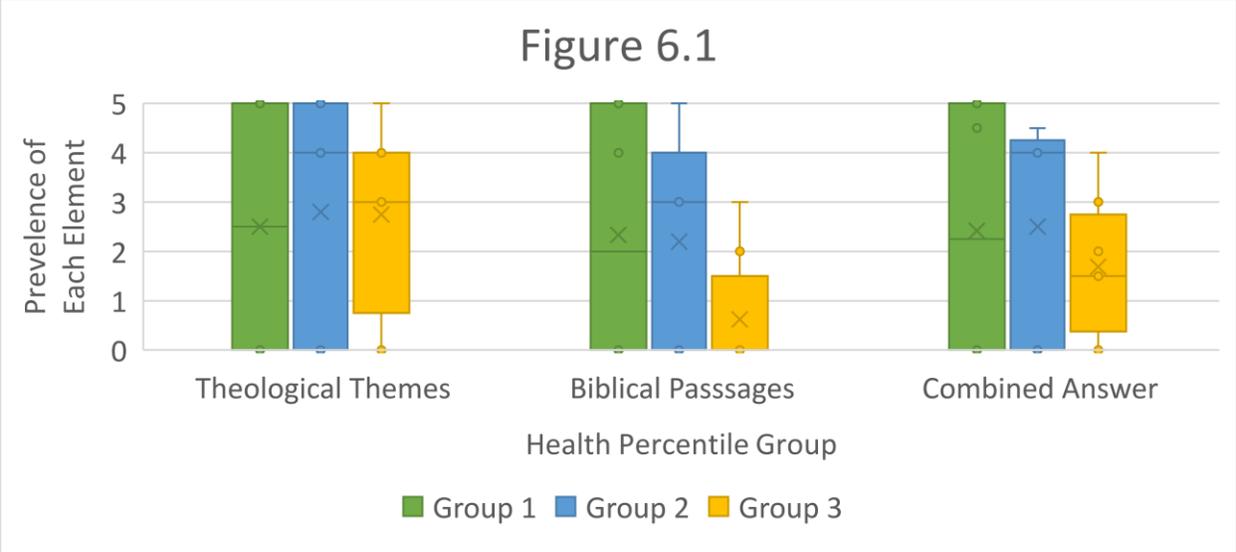
Figure 6.1

Figure 6.1 shows a summary of the part of the GCS dealing with theology. The two key elements

of the consensus on partnership to be measured here are theological ideas and biblical stories or

passages. This graph shows the number of responses recorded for each element within the three health

groups, as well as the combined influence of these elements in each health group. Each set of boxes and

whiskers represents the distribution of responses for each element within a given group. The vertical

position of each box indicates how many responses were recorded by the congregations included in the

group. The relative length of each set boxes and whiskers shows how consistently the theme is practiced

in a given percentile group. Ideally, the boxes would be fairly narrow with short whiskers, indicating that

the majority of congregations in that health category recorded the same prevalence of theological or

biblical notions tied to partnership. That is not the case, however, which means congregations are

somewhat inconsistent in their approach to theology.

For example, among congregations who scored in the 80th percentile or higher in overall health,

respondents were just as likely to list five theological themes as they were to list none at all. This is also

true of the middle health group with respect to theological themes. Similar patterns emerged with these

two groups with respect to employing biblical stories or passages in their partnerships. But the

congregations with the lower scores tended to list between one and four themes and largely struggled to come up with any biblical passages.

Analysis

As figure 6.1 makes pretty clear, the total number of responses in this section is not a consistent or reliable indicator of successful partnerships. The responses do not really cluster anywhere, suggesting that an effectively communicated theology of partnership is the least consistently practiced element of partnership explored by the GCS. The mean number of responses (indicated by an "x") for all percentiles is fairly consistent, falling between 1.6 and 2.5. But perhaps the most surprising finding is that the median number of responses (indicated by a line in the bar) for the middle health group (4) is almost twice the median for the healthiest partnerships (2.25). All of this strongly suggests that, whatever its import, a large amount of theological grounding does not necessarily lead to better partnerships.

However, to stop there and draw the conclusion that theology makes no difference is premature. A close examination of figure 6.1 reveals an interesting exception. While each health-score group is equally likely to be able to articulate any number of theological themes in connection with partnership, the stair-step pattern begins to emerge again when they are asked to relate partnership to biblical passages or stories. It is true that some respondents experiencing healthy partnerships were not able to relate their partnerships to theological themes or biblical narratives. But there is a clear pattern that less successful partnerships do little-to-none of this biblical association. Meanwhile, partnerships that do more biblical association have a higher ceiling for how healthy they might become. This is highly suggestive that being able to anchor partnership in biblical themes provides some benefit to congregations. The difference between the results for theological themes and biblical passages in figure 6.1 is very interesting. It may be that theological ideas such as "unity," "love," and "Trinity" are too abstract for lay-driven partnerships to act upon. But, when those notions are grounded in a narrative with which congregants can identify, they find it easier to articulate and enact those values.

Up to this point I have only drawn conclusions based on the number of responses collected

about theology,[206] but what about the content of those responses? Surely the nature of theology

suggests that quality is more important than quantity. There may not be enough evidence to say that

"more is better" when it comes to theology and partnership. But perhaps there are patterns in the

responses themselves that correlate to more positive outcomes for ICPs. In the GCS, respondents were

asked to list theological themes and biblical passages or stories in order of importance. Those responses

were grouped into broad categories[207] and weighted based on their reported importance.[208] Figures 6.2

and 6.3 contain all the responses, weighted by significance, given by respondents in each health group.

The weighted score is given as a sum, not an average, of the weight points assigned to a given theme by

the respondents in each group.[209]

It should be pointed out that, when reading the weight scores, comparing the numbers is only

useful when done within groups and *not* between groups. For example, it may be tempting to look at

the relative scores of "Mission/Great Commission" and "Trinity" in Figure 6.2 (15 and 6, respectively)

and draw the conclusion that mission is far more important to Group 3 than Trinity is to Group 1. That is

not necessarily the case. The numbers are meant to indicate relative importance *within* the group. So,

we can say with a fair degree of certainty that Trinity is much more significant than diversity or

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[206] And I will expand this analysis further below.

[207] For example, responses like "evangelism," "reaching the lost," and "salvation" were grouped together under "Evangelism."

[208] Most important = 5 points, next most important = 4 points, etc.

[209] The reason a sum is given rather than an average is to keep the table from skewing in favor of themes that get mentioned less often. For example, if "Theme A" was mentioned by two respondents, once as most important and once as least important, it would receive an average score of 3. And if "Theme B" was only mentioned one time, and that respondent listed it as its third-most important theme, it would receive the same average score even though it was mentioned half as many times. Since this study is trying to discern the most important themes being used by churches, both the weight and the recurrence of the theme indicate significance. Reporting the average score of a theme would give an indication of the weight of a given response, but not its recurrence. If, instead, we record the sum of all scores for Theme A and Theme B, they are recorded as 6 and 3, respectively. This reflects both the weight and the recurrence of each theme. This, by the way, is exactly what happened with "Trinity" (theme A) and "Service to Others" (theme B) in Group 1 of Figure 6.2.

generosity are to Group 1 churches; or that mission is far more significant than stewardship is to Group 3 churches. But we cannot simply compare numbers between groups because there are not the same number of respondents in each group.[210] Instead, to facilitate comparison between groups, the themes in each group are placed in tiers, indicated by background shading. This means that the most important themes to each group shows up in the first tier, second most in the second tier, and so on. That allows us to make some comparisons among the groups based on relative significance without being skewed by the number of respondents in a given group.

Figure 6.2
Theological Themes listed by Respondents in each Health Group (weighted score in parentheses)

Group 1 (80th percentile or higher)	Group 2 (between 80th & 50th percentile)	Group 3 (below 50th percentile)
Trinity (6)	Discipleship (10)	Mission/Great Commission (15)
Forgiveness of Sins (6)		
Evangelism (5)	Evangelism (9)	Service to Others (9)
Unity of Christians (5)		
Prayer (5)		
Love (4)	Love (5)	Care for the Community (8)
Co-laboring with Christ (4)	Holy Spirit (5)	
Revival (4)		
Service to others (3)	Grace (4)	Discipleship (7)
Grace (3)	Worship (4)	
Faith (3)		
Generosity (2)	The Church (3)	Love (5)
	Faith (3)	Unity of Christians (5)
		Glory of God (5)
Diversity (1)	Forgiveness of Sins (2)	Sovereignty of God (4)
	Diversity (2)	
		Co-Laboring with Christ (3)
		Faith (3)
		Humility (3)
		Stewardship (1)
N=3	N=3	N=6

Figure 6.2 sheds light on what people emphasize when they theologize about their church's mission partnerships. It provides a plethora of insights into how churches craft a theology of

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[210] In fact, there were as many respondents from Group 3 who filled out this section of the survey as there were in the other two groups *combined*. There were 3 respondents in Group 1, three in Group 2, and six in Group 3.

partnership. But more importantly, it allows us to note the similarities and (significantly) the differences

between the theological emphases of healthier partnerships and less healthy ones.[211] A quick look at the

chart will show that, while there are several themes that appear in multiple health groups, they usually

are given very different emphases. Curiously, "love" and "faith" are the only themes that find their way

into all three groups, and they both rate much higher among healthier groups. Meanwhile, "mission" is

the *summum bonum* of Group 3 and it doesn't even appear in the responses from Groups 1 and 2.

Likewise "evangelism" is very important for the first two groups, but nowhere to be found in Group 3.

Churches in partnership are doing all kinds of theologizing, but the themes they use to construct their

theology of partnership, and the emphasis they put on those themes, varies wildly.

These findings also show some interesting similarities in how churches craft a theology of

partnership. All the respondent churches in the GCS engage theologically with important missiological

concepts; things like mission, service, discipleship, and care for other humans. And all of them frame the

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[211] One way to make sense of figure 6.2 might be to view it in light of the denominational affiliation of the respondents. I would suggest that taking this approach would be a mistake, especially if the reader tries to pit one denominational tradition against another. Respondents to the GCS represent a very broad sampling of denominational backgrounds. But the group of respondents who filled out the theological section skews heavily evangelical compared to the complete pool of respondents. Denominations represented in the following tables include: Hopewell Network (Charismatic/Pentecostal), Iglesia Evangelica Tabernaculo de Dios, Evangelical Lutheran, Missionary Church, Non-denominational, United Methodist, Roman Catholic, Church of God – Anderson, Southern Baptist, Independent Evangelical, Independent Fundamental Church, and one unreported. This might explain some of the emphasis that is placed on evangelism and "reaching the lost" in figure 6.2. Seeing theological points of emphasis like "evangelism" and "forgiveness of sins" that resonate more with evangelical respondents at the top of the list, while mainline theological emphases like "grace" or "diversity" fall to the bottom, could be interpreted a number of ways. One might assume that evangelical churches are just better at crafting theologies of partnership that are impactful, or that they communicate those theologies more effectively to their members, than mainline churches. And this may be the case. But the sample for the theological section is neither large nor representative enough to draw conclusion. Conversely, it may be that the advantage of emphasizing a category like "evangelism" has more to do with its relative significance to each congregation. This interpretation suggests that evangelical churches who are successful in partnerships have been very effective in grounding their partnerships in theological themes that are most important to them; themes like sharing the gospel or offering forgiveness for sinners. And mainline churches have done likewise (though in this section their low sampling rate makes it seem that they have been less effective). This latter interpretation seems a more likely explanation. Viewing the data through the lens of the theological proclivities of denominational traditions is not the most helpful approach to this data set. But it is an approach that many will naturally take, so it deserves to be dealt with. What is suggested by the GCS is not that one tradition has theological resources that are more effective than those of other traditions. Instead, these findings indicate that that each tradition is most effective when they anchor their practice of partnership in the theological themes that speak most deeply to their congregants.

issue of partnership within their call to divine, self-giving love. Themes of "Evangelism" and "Mission" are predominant in each group. Clearly it is important for churches to anchor the practice of partnership in their missional identity. Whether they express that in terms of the Great Commission or the evangelization of non-Christians, it is clear that a robust theology of the local church's responsibility to proactively engage the world provides the baseline for theologization about partnership.

The prevalence of major missiological themes in figure 6.2 also indicates that congregations who pursue international partnerships are highly missiologically literate. They are not only familiar with the perennial issues of mission theology; they employ those themes in their discourse frequently and with great emphasis. What is more, the fact that these themes are explicitly tied to *international* partnership suggests that respondents construe the missional calling of the local church as global in scope. It is this conviction that each congregation is called to a global participation in mission that forms the bedrock for how churches theologize their partnerships. Everything else is built on that confession.

"Love" is also an important theme that all the groups have in common. Whatever else it means for congregations to live and work in partnership with other Christians around the world, it simply must mean walking together in love.[212] It might be possible to characterize the entire GCS as an attempt to measure how well sister churches love each other. Even the most mundane practices of partnership, if construed as an opportunity to love, can be profoundly meaningful. So, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that love lands in the third tier of importance for Groups 1 & 2; but falls to the fifth tier among less healthy ICPs.

But figure 6.2 is far more interesting for the differences between how each group constructs a theology of partnership. The most striking difference among the groups is that "Trinity," "Unity of All Christians," and "Co-laboring with Christ," all fall in the first three tiers of importance for Group 1, but they fall much lower (or are missing entirely) in the other groups. Meanwhile, "Mission/Great

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[212] I will address the intersection of love and partnership more fully below.

Commission" is the most significant theme by far in Group 3 and it does not even make an appearance in the other groups. It is exceptionally counterintuitive that, in a study of mission partnerships, a strong emphasis on mission is correlated with poorer outcomes. Something is happening here. What that is may not be immediately evident, but I would suggest that these differences are all part of the same tendency: viz. that themes that speak explicitly to partnership (rather than missiology in general) figure highly among the healthiest partnerships while being almost entirely absent among less healthy ones. In other words, flourishing partnerships craft theologies that specifically address why partnership is important and how it should be practiced in a way that is authentically Christian. And they fit that into a broader mission theology. Less healthy ICPs do not draw on theological resources to undergird their practice of partnership except as a general expression of their missional calling. It is one thing to use theology to argue for participation in mission. But to craft a theology that calls for collaboration and mutuality among Christians of varied backgrounds is something else entirely.

A few other trends from figure 6.2 bear further consideration. Discipleship, for example, figures very prominently for Group 2, and is not insignificant for Group 3. But the highest scoring congregations do not even mention it. It is possible this means that maturing in Christlikeness is not important to the healthiest ICPs. But this discrepancy may be down to a difference in terminology. After all, so many of the other themes that are listed by Group 1 congregants are indicative of a life oriented to formative ministry ("love," "prayer," "being conformed to the life of the trinity," etc.). The churches from Group 1 may not use the term "discipleship," but they certainly describe the fruit discipleship bears.

Another telling observation is that "Prayer" makes its appearance toward the top of the list in Group 1. But it is utterly absent from the other groups. I find it very hard to believe that is a coincidence. While there is certainly more to a robust theology of partnership, a priority on prayer and a deep appreciation for what it is able to accomplish is clearly an important part of the most impactful theologies.

Finally, it is quite interesting to me that published theologies of partnership have placed great importance on what I call the "virtues of partnership." By that I mean they list Christian virtues that, when cultivated intentionally, make us better at working together.[213] Virtues like generosity, hospitality, humility, and diversity feature prominently in these discussions, as do classic virtues like faith, hope, love, grace, etc. While all of these are present in figure 6.2, it is fascinating that they are far less prominent in the minds of practitioners than they are in the literature. Perhaps these virtues are less important than scholars have imagined. Then again, the importance of these virtues may find implicit expression in the practicalities of partnerships explored in the coming chapters rather than being explicitly articulated in theological reflection. For example, as we will see in chapter 8, Group 1 churches emphasize hospitality in their practice of partnership. But apparently, they do not feel the need to explicitly anchor that practice in a theology of hospitality in order for it to be effective.

Of course, there is far more that might be said here. There is certainly a more comprehensive way to approach this figure 6.2 to create a grassroots theology of partnership, but the GCS does not really provide the data we need to treat it properly. "Worship" provides a great example. We know that it is important for churches in Group 2. But we do not know why it is important, or how it finds expression in their communal life or partnering ministry. Examining the documents involved in these partnerships, interviewing those involved, some participant observation; these would all provide a more robust picture of the role of any of these themes in the life of the church. But they will have to be left for another dissertation; one whose aim is to articulate a grassroots theology of partnership. The aim of the

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[213] Each of these authors have contributed significantly to the theological literature on partnership. While they all take slightly different tacks, they all serve as illustrations of this tendency. George, *Better Together*; O'Connor, *Bridges of Faith*; Dana Robert, "Cross-Cultural Friendship in the Creation of Twentieth-Century World Christianity," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 35, no. 2 (April 2011): 100–107; Lausanne Congress, "LOP 24 - Cooperating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-Church Relationships," Lausanne Movement, accessed October 27, 2015, http://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-24; Amy MacLachlan, "Mission as Partnership," *The Presbyterian Record*, January 2012; Wickeri, *Partnership, Solidarity, and Friendship: Transforming Structures in Mission*; Manuel, "Partnership in Mission"; Ross, "The Theology of Partnership"; Broschart, "Twenty Years of Partnership Between Pittsburgh Presbytery and the Synod of Blantyre, CCAP."

current study is to observe patterns in the theologization of partnering congregations to see if certain topics are correlated to certain outcomes. And that has been accomplished.

While it is important to connect mission partnerships to the missional calling of the church, the healthiest outcomes are enjoyed by those ICPs who go beyond general missional theology and emphasize theological themes that are relevant to shared ministry. An emphasis on the unity of all Christians is essential. Focusing on the call to mission as a call to co-laboring with Christ makes it abundantly clear that all Christians (regardless of available resources or national origin) enter that mission on an equal footing. And reflecting on the self-giving life of the Trinity not only provides a powerful image for how we are called to relate to Christians around the world, it allows churches to locate partnership at the very heart of Christian theology rather than at the theological periphery.[214] Meanwhile, dual emphases on the importance and potency of prayer as well as the expression of love for one another provide additional insight into how the healthiest partnerships theologize differently.

Figure 6.3

Biblical Passages and Stories listed by Respondents in each Health Group (weighted score in parentheses)

Group 1 (80th percentile or higher)	Group 2 (between 80th & 50th percentile)	Group 3 (below 50th percentile)
Jn 14:6 (5)	Mt 25 (7)	Mt 28: 16-20 (18)
Mt 28:16-20 (5)		
Acts 10 (5)		
Acts (5)		
Rom 5:8 (4)	Acts (5)	Mt 25 (9)
1 Jn 4:7-10 (4)		
Ephesians (4)		
Jn 3:16 (3)	The Prophets (4)	Acts (4)
Rom 12:4-5 (3)	2 Cor 8 (4)	Lk 6:20-26 (4)
The Prophets (3)	Ex 23 (4)	
Genesis (2)	Phil 1:3-8 (3)	
Mk 16:20 (2)	Lev 19 (3)	
Rom 5:1 (2)		
1 Jn 5:7 (1)	Heb 13 (2)	
Mt 10:40 (1)		

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[214] This is elaborated best by Madden, "Mutual Transformation as a Framework for Church Global Mission Partnerships," 12–20.

	Rom 12:4-5 (1)	
N=3	N=3	N=6

Finally, Figure 6.3 shows the biblical passages that inform congregations' theological ideas about

their mission partnerships. As I mentioned earlier, the differences between groups in Figure 6.1 suggests

the importance of anchoring theological abstractions in the biblical narrative. So, it is crucial to

understand which passages congregations prefer to tether their theology of partnership to. This chart

skews heavily toward the New Testament, especially the Gospels. There are several very familiar

missiological texts here, references to the Great Commission and the book of Acts abound, predictably.

It is also no surprise that Group 1 draws more on the Johannine literature, given the theological

emphasis that group placed on Love and the Trinity. John's Gospel and Epistles abound with those

themes.[215] But the most telling thing about this chart, especially when compared with Figure 6.2, is the

paucity of responses in Group 3. Even though there are by far more respondents in Group 3, they only

draw on a few passages. Most of them actually only mentioned the Matthean Commission. While all

three groups drew on similar numbers of theological themes, Group 3 engages with fewer than half as

many biblical passages as group 2, and fewer than a third as many as Group 1.

Analysis

As I begin my analysis, I should mention that this table does present a significant difficulty. As

was also the case with several theological topics, the lack of specificity in some responses makes it

difficult to draw conclusions about their significance. "Acts." "The Prophets." "Genesis." I am tempted to

make some educated guesses about what respondents might reasonably have been referring to. But

there is also a world of difference between analyzing responses and hypothesizing what a response

means. In the interest of acting in good faith toward my respondents, I will resist the urge to put words

in their mouths.[216] The majority of the texts related by respondents fall into two broad categories: (1)

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[215] An excellent examination of these themes can be found in Andreas J. Kostenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel (New Studies in Biblical Theology)*, n.d.

[216] Ephesians may be the exception, since it is a smaller book, the chances of guessing right are much higher.

texts centered on motivation and (2) texts centered on ecclesiology. Those in the first category tend to

focus on either sending/salvation texts or texts that encourage compassion or solidarity with the

marginalized. Those in the second category are mainly concerned with how Christians are to understand

and relate to other members of the body of Christ.

The conspicuous reoccurrence of sending texts like Matthew 28:16-20 and Mk 16:20 in addition

to ones explaining the nature of salvation, as John 3:16 and 14:6 or the passages from the fifth chapter

of Romans, are to be expected given the significance of those themes in figure 6:2. These texts not only

show up in all three groups, but they are weighted by respondents as very important in their theological

discourse. This speaks to their importance in framing the motivation for partnership. Passages that allow

people to identify with the saving mission of Jesus, and to locate their partnering ministries within that

mission, clearly have a powerful place in the collective imagination of churches pursuing ICPs. The

tedium of packing supplies and the frustration of communicating across wide gaps in culture and

language is far more easily sustained when it is transformed from mere tedium and frustration into

something of ultimate significance, something holy. Each of the respondents who replied to this

question declared that they are not pursuing partnership for its own sake. Rather, they believe that they

are up to the same thing God is up to;[217] identifying their efforts in global collaborative ministry with the

same mission Christ shared with his disciples. Participation in God's mission is a powerful motivation

that shows through in the biblical engagement of partnering churches, but it is not the only one.

Respondents to the GCS also recorded several passages dealing with compassion for the

marginalized such as are found in Matthew 25 and Hebrews 13, or in the early verses of Exodus 23 and

Leviticus 19. It is also worth noting that the version of the Beatitudes that made it into this list is the

Lukan version which speaks of literal (not spiritual) poverty and hunger and goes out of its way to

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[217] One respondent specifically drew attention to the way Mark 16:20 frames ongoing mission in the Church as co-working with Jesus.

criticize the complacent. These passages all focus on the obligation of Christians to tend to the needs of

vulnerable people. And while they are not given the same weight as the missional motivation passages

noted above, they still are given significant place in churches' dialog around partnership (particularly in

Groups 2 and 3).

This is also an important motivating and sustaining factor for mission partnership. Collaborative

ministry is viewed by many congregations as an opportunity for them to live faithfully to their calling to

serve the marginalized. This philanthropic impulse is fairly well-documented in the annals of the global

engagement of American Congregations.[218] But it is worth noting that none of the partners surveyed

from outside the United States listed any of these compassion-for-the-marginalized passages in their

responses. While there are certainly good intentions behind this motivation, including a desire for

faithfulness to biblical injunctions; the fact that this is a major motivation for American congregations

but not at all important for their partners alludes to a potential problem. As Jonathan Barnes points out,

one of the strongest criticisms of western attempts at "partnership" from their majority-world partners

is how easily it becomes a substitute for paternalism.[219] This is not to say that the impulse to take

biblical injunctions about seeking the flourishing of marginalized populations seriously is necessarily

paternalistic. But if a congregation's main mode of obedience to those injunctions is to enter into a

partnership with a sister church, it is certainly worth considering the attitudes they have toward their

sister church. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that these passages are emphasized more among groups

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[218] Representative arguments can be found in Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches*, 79–84, 181–83. See also: Priest, Wilson, and Johnson, "US Megachurches and New Patterns of Global Mission"; Adler and Offutt, "The Gift Economy of Direct Transnational Civic Action: How Reciprocity and Inequality Are Managed in Religious 'Partnerships.'"

[219] Barnes, *Power and Partnership*, 2013, 412–18. Barnes points out that humanitarian impulses, however well intentioned, often blind partners to inequalities of resources and power that allow them to preserve paternalistic patterns of haves and have-nots rather than addressing the other as an equal. He also notes that the gap between rhetoric and reality in this respect has led to many abandoning the practice of partnership altogether. .

that scored on the lower end of the health scale; while among Group 1, they figure much less prominently.

So, churches are motivated to partner because they want to do mission and they want to show compassion to others. Indeed, while texts like those listed above certainly play an important role in sustaining churches in their collaborative ministries; those texts can play that same role for essentially any missional engagement of the church. They speak to why the church should be motivated for mission generally; but not to why they should pursue partnership specifically. Fortunately, there is more going on in figure 6.3. Churches also engage with a startling variety of texts to inform their relationship to their sister churches. While the sending and compassion texts allows churches to locate their practice of partnership within their missional calling, these ecclesial passages inform the nature of a partnering relationship.

Acts 10 narrates the process of the fledgling church coming to terms with the inclusion of Christians from a radically different cultural background by recognizing the presence and working of the Holy Spirit in the "others." Romans 12 offers Christian communities the metaphor of a body, with each part belonging to each other and functioning for the benefit of the whole. Matthew 10:40 anchors the practice of hospitality in the welcome of God himself, while 2 Corinthians 8 exhorts believers to radical, sacrificial generosity. And, in the introduction to his letter to the Philippians, Paul models "partnership in the gospel" that is dripping with genuine affection, joy, and constant prayer. All of these passages convey potent messages about how Christians are supposed to think about and relate to one another.[220] And they do so in a way that gives congregational partners an ecclesiological foundation that is drastically open to and oriented toward fellow Christians; regardless of the degree of cultural difference.

Tangentially, with as highly as "Love" rated in the findings of figure 6.2, I was surprised that 1 Corinthians 13 did not even make a showing here. Though the exclusion of the famed Pauline excursus

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[220] And, after all, isn't that exactly what ecclesiology is about?

on love may be surprising, the inclusion of its Johannine counterpart is a welcome development. It may

be worth considering the juxtaposition of those passages for a moment. The Corinthian passage is

focused primarily on the practical expression of divine, self-giving love within and between members of

the Body of Christ. Paul includes the chapter within a discussion of how the church is to relate to itself,

as a body with many (and very different) members. The passage from the fourth chapter of 1st John

explores the nature and source of that same divine, self-giving love. It points to the mysterious reality

that any love shown toward fellow Christians flows out of a loving relationship with God, a love that is

predicated entirely on the initiative of God. God acts in love and therefore Christians are able to love

him and act in love toward each other. Choosing the latter passage over the former suggests that it is

important for churches in partnership to look not only to the practicalities of loving members of a

diverse body, but to anchor that love in the bedrock of Christ's love for them, a love that empowers

them to love beyond their personal capacity. Or maybe I am just making too much of a quirk of under-

sampling.

If these passages on ecclesiology speak more specifically to the nature and practice of

partnership, then it is little wonder that they are much more prominent (in both number and weight) in

Group 1. The ecclesial passages are left entirely out of the lowest-scoring group. And among those in

Group 2, there are three such passages mentioned, all in the bottom tiers. Meanwhile there are six

ecclesiological passages among the responses from Group 1, and they appear prominently in the highest

tiers of importance. While this is not exactly proof positive, it is highly suggestive that the biblical texts

that are most impactful on the health of a partnership are the ones that speak directly to collaborative

ministry and the relation of one part of the Body of Christ to the others.

So, what are we to make of the information in figure 6.3? First, it seems that biblical passages

are potent sources of motivation for congregations to engage in collaborative ministry. Being able to

locate a partnership in the biblical mandates for compassion and participation in mission sustains

churches through very trying circumstances by giving their efforts transcendent significance. While

focusing too much on the humanitarian impulse brings with it some serious potential for problematic

relationships, it cannot be denied that it is an important motivation for many American congregations.

But, more importantly, figure 6.3 a clear pattern that shows a difference between churches whose

partnerships are very healthy and those that are less healthy. For one thing, the biblical engagement of

healthy partners is extremely robust. They draw from a wide variety of texts, from both the Old and

New Testaments, to construct their theology of partnership. Those who scored lower in overall health

only recorded a few passages that were significant to them, all from just three books of the Bible. But

perhaps most importantly, healthy partners draw on biblical resources to address partnership's ecclesial

implications specifically. They look to scripture to inform their ideas about and attitudes toward their

partners. Among less healthy partnerships there is a great deal of emphasis on biblical motivation for

churches to participate in mission generally, but very little about whether and in what way

congregations around the world should be working together.

Amount of Theology

Figures 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, and 6.7 show the relation between the number of theological themes

recorded by a respondent and the score of the performative, affective, transformative, and overall

dimensions of their health evaluation, respectively.[221] The size of each bubble increases according to the

number of datapoints represented in that position. For example, in figure 6.5, of respondents who listed

4 theological themes, one scored 2.5 in overall health and two scored 5 in overall health. The bubble on

the intersection of 4 and 5 is twice as large as the one at the intersection of 4 and 2.5. Meanwhile, in

that same chart there were four respondents who reported five theological themes and scored 5 on the

health evaluation. This use of size for each datapoint allows me to represent more accurately where the

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[221] Detailed tables along with measures of statistical significance can be found at
https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#theology and https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#ANOVA
(Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

critical mass of responses truly lies. The solid line on each graph shows the expected ideal relation: fewer responses should correlate to a lower health score; more responses should coincide with a higher health score. With the exception of a few outliers, the data largely fits the expected pattern.

Figure 6.4

Number of Thelogical Themes Listed

N=12
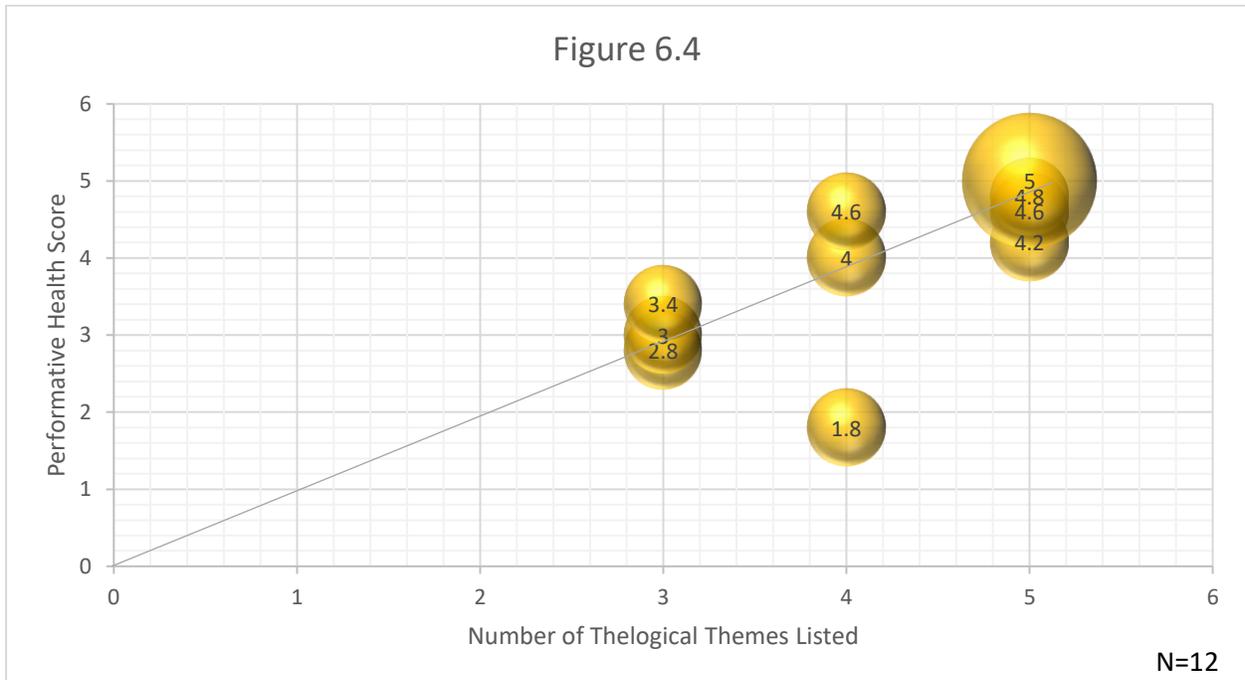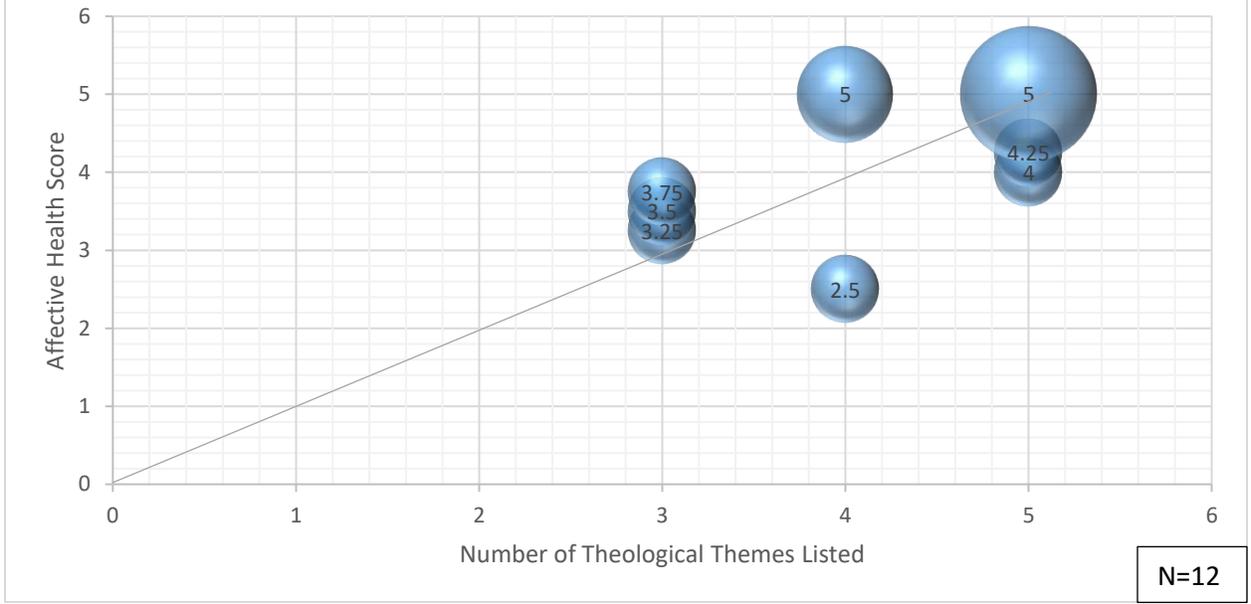
Figure 6.5

Figure 6.6

Figure 6.7
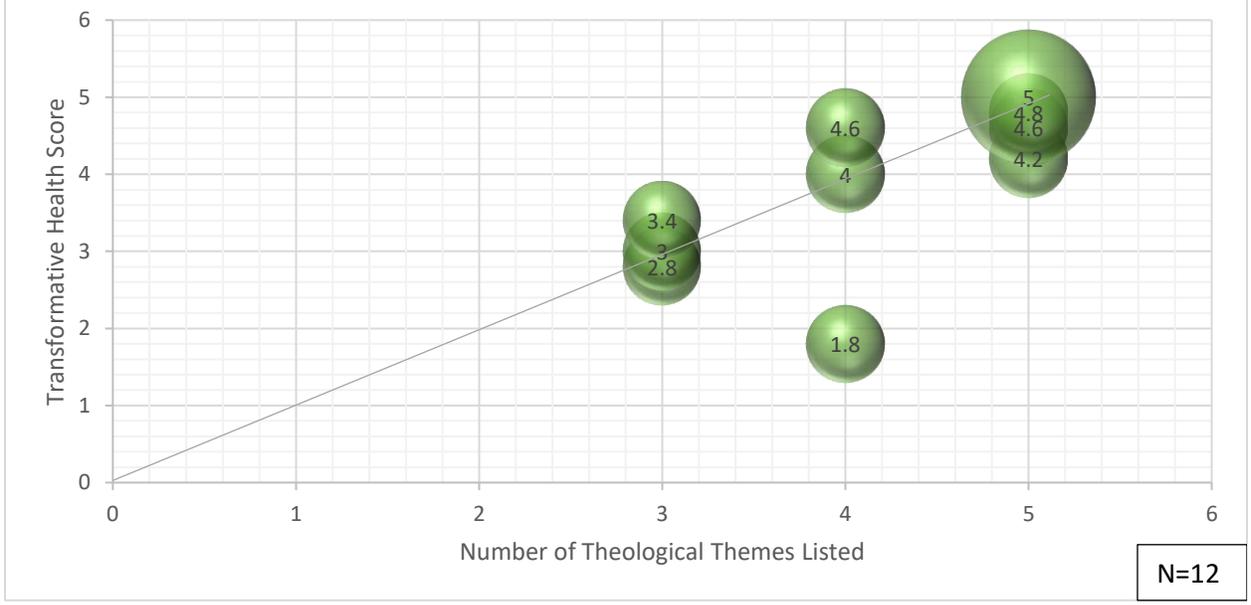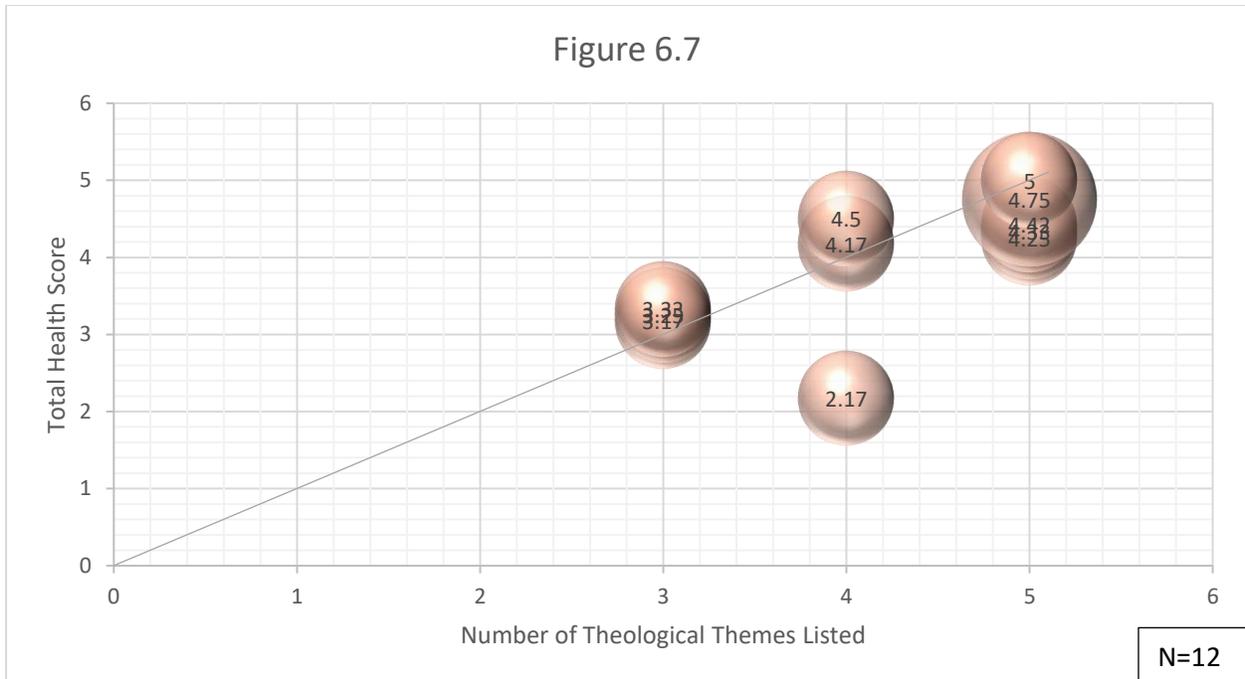
Each respondent who answered the theological questions on the GCS managed to come up with at least three theological themes. And among those respondents there is a clear indication that the more themes they have listed the better the outcomes enjoyed by the partnership. This is true of every dimension of health explored by the GCS. There are a few outliers that stray from the expected mean. The most significant of these is the congregation that received an overall health score of 2.17 yet still managed to come up with four theological themes. But overall, there is a definite pattern here: when congregations have more theological ideas that are strongly tied to their notion of partnership, they tend to have partnerships that (1) succeed in what they attempt to accomplish, (2) create positive feelings toward their partners, and (3) shape their understanding of their church and its place in the world.

Figures 6.8, 6.9, 6.10, and 6.11 show the relation between the number of biblical passages and stories recorded by a respondent and the score of the performative, affective, transformative, and

overall dimensions of their health evaluation, respectively.[222] As with the last set of charts, the bubbles

are weighted by number of responses at a given point and the solid line on each graph shows the

expected ideal relation: fewer responses should correlate to a lower health score, more responses

should coincide with a higher health score.
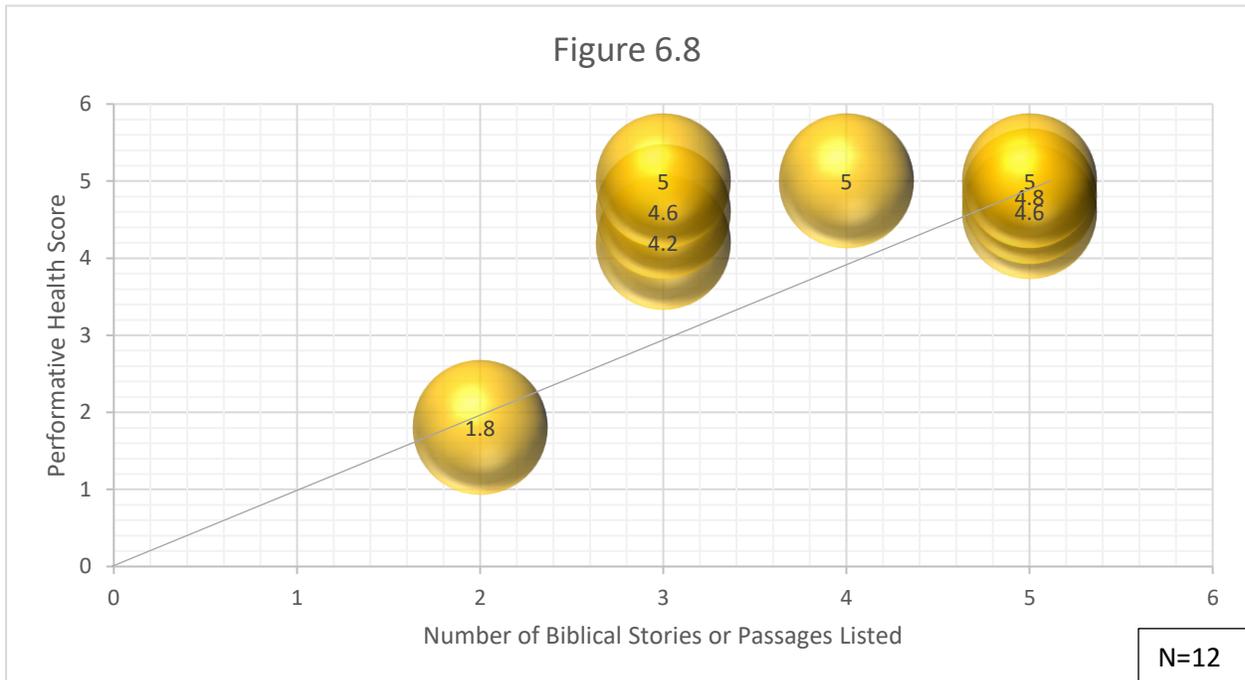
Figure 6.8

[222] Detailed tables along with measures of statistical significance can be found in at
https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#theology and https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#ANOVA
(Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

Figure 6.9

Affective Health Score (y-axis)
Number of Biblical Stories or Passages Listed (x-axis)

5
5
5
4.25
4
2.5

N=12

Figure 6.10

Transformative Health Score (y-axis)
Number of Biblical Stories or Passages Listed (x-axis)

5
4.6
4.2
5
5
4.8
4.6
1.8

N=12

Figure 6.11

Total Health Score (y-axis, 0 to 6)
Number of Biblical Stories of Passages Listed (x-axis, 0 to 6)

2.17
4.43
4.25
4.75
5
4.75
4.5

N=12
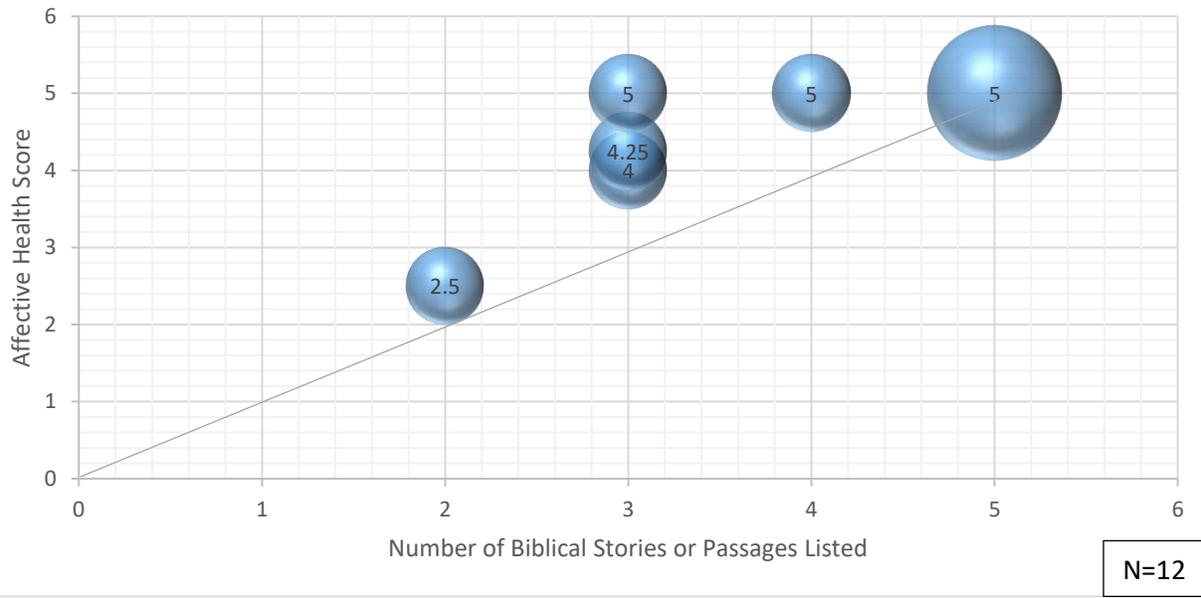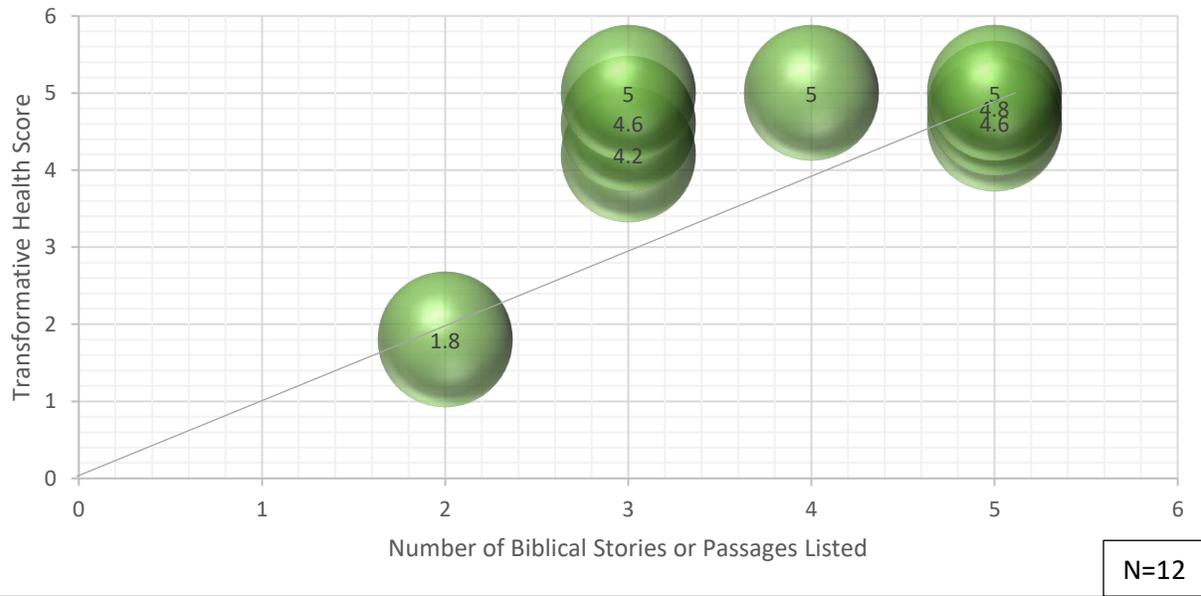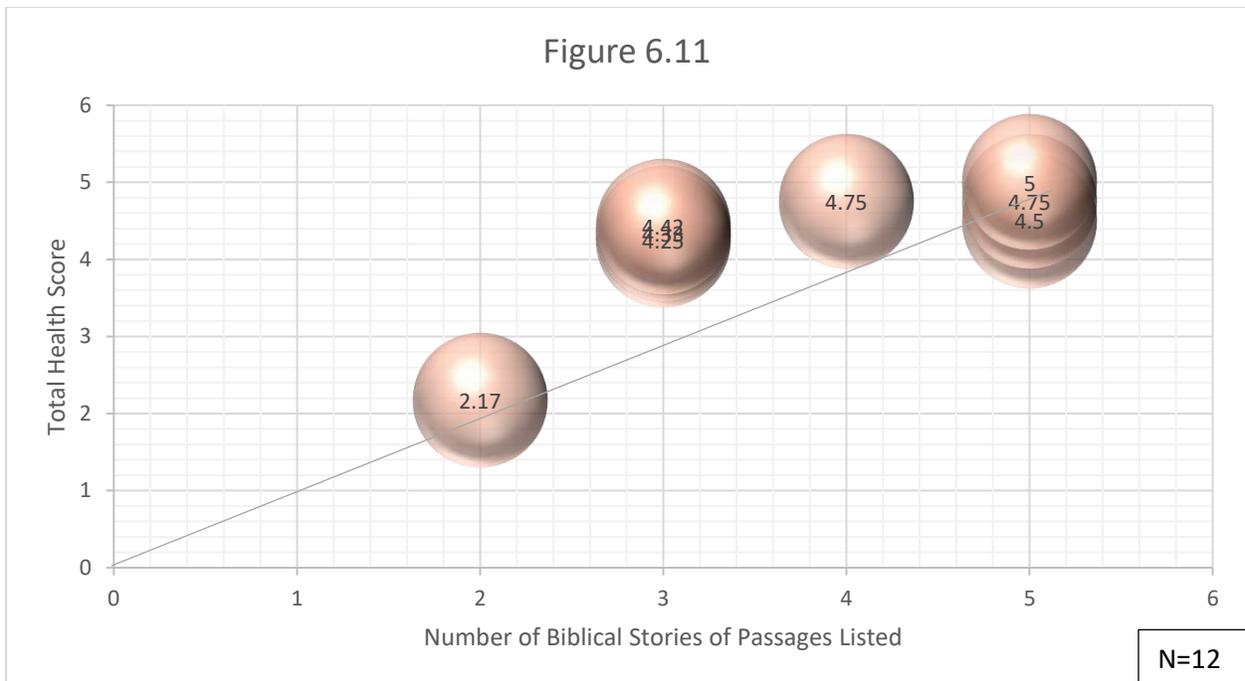
Analysis

There is something different going on in this set of charts. They do not cluster around the ideal

line at all. Virtually all respondents who returned three or more responses to this question scored very

highly for the whole evaluation. As with theological ideas, biblical insights into partnership seem to be

more impactful when there are more of them to engage with. When there are just one or two, they do

not seem to have much impact on the health of a partnership. This is likely what is driving the shift in

figure 6.1 discussed above, where the stair-step figure suddenly snaps into focus for the biblical passage

section. There is definite value in anchoring abstract theological concepts in the biblical narrative. But

biblical grounding is not necessarily a guarantee of better outcomes. Rather it seems the combination of

scriptural foundations and theological exposition sets a kind of ceiling for outcomes. A robust, well-

communicated, and engaging theology of partnership, grounded at multiple points in the biblical

narrative in ways that allow people to identify with and enact theological abstractions may lead to

better outcomes. Or it may not. But a lack of that kind of theology definitely will not lead to a healthy

ICP. Having a healthy partnership is clearly more than a matter of theological grounding. But the

presence or absence of theological grounding sets the upper limits for the potential of a given

partnership.

Conclusion

As I draw this chapter to a close, let me return to my earlier caveat. These findings are not a

guarantee of success. The data do not indicate that employing any of these suggestions will make for

healthy partnerships in every instance. But, as can be seen in figure 6.1, they do set a ceiling for how

healthy a partnership is likely to become. The pattern that emerges from the GCS is that a robust,

biblically grounded theology does not mean your partnership will always succeed, but a lack of one is a

clear indication that it will be troubled.

This examination of patterns in how much and what kind of theologization about partnership is

most closely correlated to healthy outcomes has yielded three main findings. First, theology is best done

robustly, or not at all. A fully fleshed out theology of partnership has much more impact than one that

touches on only two or three ideas. Likewise, the more (and more varied) biblical passages that frame

the practice of partnership, the healthier the partnership may become.

Second, theology that specifically addresses collaborative ministry and the relationship between

Christians is demonstrably more effective than a theology that only addresses general missiological

principles. Mission theology is certainly important for churches engaging in international partnership.

But churches who are able to draw on rich theological understandings of the unity of the body of Christ,

the pattern of the self-giving love of the Triune God, and the shared calling of all Christians to work

together with God in his mission find themselves operating in more meaningful and healthy

relationships with their sister churches.

Third, grounding theological precepts in biblical examples has a profound effect on the health of

a partnership. Scripture is a powerful motivator, and it is very effective in allowing congregations to

imbue their collaborative ministries with ultimate significance. This is how congregations see their

theology impact their partnerships. These theological factors may not guarantee a healthy partnership. But they do provide a foundation that suggests how healthy a partnering ministry is likely to become.

I recently planted a tulip tree in my back yard. There are lots of practical factors that will determine how that tree will grow in the coming decades: rain patterns, fertilization, ice storms, pests. But if I had not planted it in healthy, slightly acidic soil; it would not have a chance to flourish, even in the best of circumstances. The patterns of belief observed by the GCS suggest that theology functions in a similar fashion for partnerships. It is the soil in which these precious relationships are planted. There are a myriad of practices, structures, and ideas that will inform how healthy a partnership becomes. Those will all be examined in the next two chapters. But the theological richness and depth in which those partnerships are located sets the upper limits for how well the best executed of collaborative ministries may develop.

Finally, it must be mentioned that there remains an excellent opportunity to use the GCS to express a grassroots theology of partnership as it is being constructed by American congregations and their global partners. While this exercise is, regrettably, beyond the scope of this initial report on the study's findings; it will be one of the most promising avenues for future exploration. Doubtless a second or third edition of the GCS, which will hopefully yield a higher rate of response in this section, will prove invaluable for providing an even more robust picture of how congregations involved in ICPs are theologizing about their endeavors.

Chapter 7 – Head: How congregations conceptualize their partnerships

Introduction

A constant issue facing International Congregational Partnerships (ICPs), as was noted in

Chapter 1, is the question of how to define the term "partnership."[223] This chapter is concerned with

what partners think a partnership is. It probes particular conceptions of what constitutes an adequate

expression of partnering ministry. The literature is moving toward convergence around seven points

which define the concept of partnership. These are:[224]

(1) Relational Priority – Partnership means putting the relationship ahead of things like programs.

(2) Shared Calling – Partners are called together to something they could not be/do on their own.

(3) Mutual Valuation – Resources (material and spiritual) are clearly defined and mutually valued.

(4) Space for "Others" – A combination of radical hospitality and cultural competence.

(5) Time-Tolerance – Willing for processes and decisions to take the necessary time.

(6) Non-Dependence – Focus on sustainability/capacity building.

(7) Interdependence – Bi-directional flows of resources, people, and ideas.

The basic thesis of this study is that there are patterns of belief, thought, or behavior concerning

partnership that lead congregations to experience more (or less) healthy partnerships. In this chapter, I

am looking for patterns in how churches think about partnership. And I will focus on how changes in

those patterns affect how healthy the partnership is. To do this, I take the information from the Global

Congregational Study (GCS) that deals with the seven conceptual building blocks just mentioned and

observe how these themes play out within and between the health groups established in Chapter 5.[225]

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[223] See p. 6-7 above.

[224] This is a brief synopsis. These seven concepts are defined and discussed more fully, and their development in the partnership literature traced, in Chapter 2, pp. 36-38.

[225] Groups are based on the percentile rank of the overall health of the partnership, Group 1 being congregations in the 80th percentile of the evaluation or higher, Group 2 between the 80th and 50th percentiles, and Group 3 lower than the 50th percentile.

First, I will look for patterns in how these discrete concepts impact partnership on their own. Then I will examine patterns in their combined impact. I will close with brief summary remarks and some suggestions for a path forward.

Impact of Each Concept

The GCS measured the overall prevalence of seven defining concepts of partnership among responding congregations. Figure 7.1 provides a summary of its findings. The concepts are presented here according to their order in the paragraph above.[226] This graph shows the prevalence of each concept within each of the health groups. The "Total" shows the combined influence of all seven elements on each health group by presenting the mean of all responses. Each bar represents the distribution of responses for the designated concept in a given group. The vertical position of each bar indicates how prevalent (or not) a given theme is among the congregations included in the health group. The whiskers extending from the bar show the upper and lower quartiles in each group, with the bar indicating the middle quartiles and central tendencies (the line is the median and the "x" is the mean) of the groups. The distance between whiskers gives a sense of how consistently the theme is practiced in a given group. Ideally, the bars would be fairly short with short whiskers, indicating that the great majority of congregations in that health category recorded the same prevalence of a given conceptualization of partnership. Additionally, it would be best to see a clear stair-step pattern between the health groups, with minimal overlap between groups, indicating that there is a clear correlation between the presence of a concept and whether a church falls into Group 1, Group 2, or Group 3. The more overlap there is between Group 1 and Group 3[227], the less sure we can be that concept is related to partnership health. If

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[226] 1=Relational Priority, 2=Shared Calling, etc.
[227] In this chapter, I did not find any statistically significant difference between Groups 1 and 2 or Groups 2 and 3. Consequently, group 2 is not substantively dealt with in the analysis. For more information see https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#ANOVA (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

there is little to no overlap between groups, it suggests that the concept in question is strongly

correlated to partnership health.
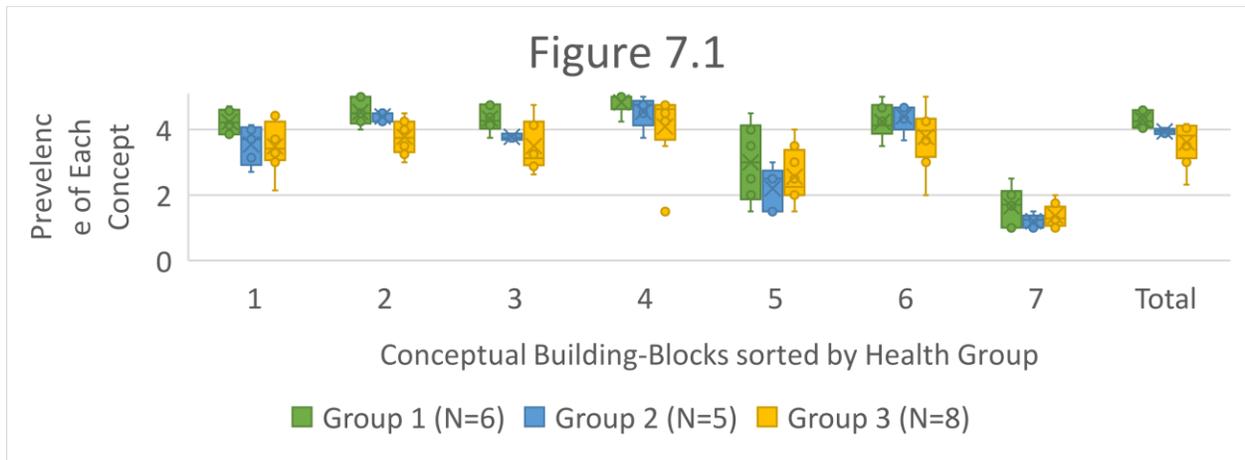

Figure 7.1

Figure 7.1 is suggestive that there is a connection between the conceptual framework used to

construct a partnership and the outcomes experienced by those partners. But the nature and

importance of that connection is unclear. The means (denoted by an "x") found in Figure 7.1 give an

idea of how consistently a concept is emphasized by congregations in that health group. So, a difference

in means between groups indicates a difference in how consistently that concept figures into a

conceptual framework for partnership. Figure 7.1 shows that every concept measured by the GCS is

employed more consistently among healthy partnerships than among less healthy ones. The degrees

vary somewhat (.84 degrees of difference between Groups 1 and 3 in the prevalence of "Space for

Others" and a mere .29 degrees of difference for "Interdependence") but there is a clear pattern of the

consistent presence of each of these ideas in a partnership's conceptual framework being linked to the

kind of outcomes a partnership is likely to experience. Moreover, while a higher score in any one of

these concepts may not necessarily be a guarantee of partnership health, a score of 3 or below is clearly

associated with poorer health (except where Time-Tolerance and Interdependence are concerned).

However, Figure 7.1 also shows there is still a lot of overlap between health groups when a

given concept is strongly present. With the exception of having a shared understanding of the value of

what each partner brings to the relationship[228], there is significant overlap between the lower quartiles

of Group 1 and the upper quartiles of Group 3 with respect to each remaining concept of partnership

measured by the GCS. In other words, some churches may be strongly influenced by one of these

concepts of partnership and still experience less healthy outcomes. While there is some difference[229]

between groups, but it is hard to say there is a strong correlation between the prevalence of a given

concept and how likely a congregation is to have a healthy partnership. For example, there are at least a

few congregations in Group 3 who recorded as much emphasis on having a shared sense of calling with

their sister church as the majority of churches in Group 1 reported. And there was one congregation in

Group 1 whose sense of avoiding dependency in their partnership was lower than the average

congregation in Group 3. So, while there is definitely a tendency for each of these concepts to be more

prevalent among healthy churches than less healthy ones, there is no single concept of partnership

which automatically confers better outcomes on a partnership.

It is also interesting that most of these concepts are at least somewhat present in every one of

the congregations surveyed. Even in Group 3, the average score for the prevalence of a given concept of

partnership is 3.6.[230] And among the healthiest partnerships, this jumps up to 4.3. This means even the

least healthy partnerships recorded that these concepts were operant in their partnerships to at least

some degree. Meanwhile, healthier partnerships had a stronger sense of these ideas in their own

partnerships. In all but two cases, the average response in all health groups was above 3. But neither

"Time-Tolerance" nor "Interdependence" figured very significantly in making partnerships better. The

responses on the prevalence of "Time-Tolerance" as a defining principle of partnership ranged from 1.5

to 4.5 with no significant difference in outcomes. For "Interdependence," the very highest score was 2.5,

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[228] Denoted by a "2" on the graph.
[229] And as can be seen in the tables at https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#ANOVA
(Password:GCSDissertation2021!), it is a statistically significant difference.
[230] That is, closer to "somewhat agree" than to "neither agree nor disagree."

with an overall average of 1.4 and basically no difference between the means of the groups. This

suggests that, for all the importance laid on interdependency, bi-directional flows of people and

resources are barely present at all in sister church relationships. And while some[231] might think

expectations about time form a significant barrier to flourishing in partnership, it seems those

expectations are not really a factor in how well a partnership functions.[232]

The final element of Figure 7.1 that bears close examination is the last group of bars; the ones

marked "Total." These represent the average prevalence of all seven concepts together in each health

group. While the significance of discrete concepts measured by the GCS is somewhat obscure, the

combined influence of these concepts is much clearer. There are .7 degrees of difference between the

means of Groups 1 and 3. There is also no overlap whatsoever between Groups 1 and 3, the only part of

Figure 7.1 of which this is true. This means that, if a congregation's combined prevalence of these

concepts was above 4.5, they experienced healthier outcomes every single time. If it was lower than 4.5,

they experienced less healthy outcomes, every single time. It also means the healthy partnerships

sampled by the GCS consistently rely on a combination of these ideas to inform their idea of what a

partnership ought to be.

Analysis

So, what does Figure 7.1 tell us about how conceptual frameworks impact the health of a

partnership? It depends on where we focus. If we are looking at the degree of absolute difference

between health groups, "Mutual Valuation" gives the clearest advantage to partnerships that emphasize

it. If we are looking for differences in how consistently a concept is practiced within each group[233],

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[231] See, for example, Mott, *Cooperation and The World Mission*; Hunsberger, "Launching a Strategic Missional Partnership between Park Place Baptist Church, Pearl, Mississippi, and Nuevo Pacto Baptist Church, Tegucigalpa, Honduras."

[232] My suspicion is that factors examined in other chapters, especially the structures and practices found in Chapter 8, are sufficient for helping churches deal with different time-tolerances.

[233] That is, difference between means.

"Shared Calling" and "Mutual Valuation" are important factors (both show .76 degrees of difference between Groups 1 and 3). Creating "Space for Others" is even more significant (.84 degrees of difference). Still the other concepts measured by the GCS perform about the same regardless of whether we measure the degree of difference or the consistency of difference. It seems like placing a priority on relationships and avoiding dependency in those relationships was pretty important for all partners, with no clear advantage in outcomes conferred by these attitudes. Some churches are willing to let processes take a long time, others are in more of a hurry to get things done. But neither is more likely than the other to experience a healthier partnership. And, while interdependence is a much-vaunted value in the conversation about sister churches, it is not actually being practiced very much at all. And where it is it does not seem to impact the health of a given ICP very much.

The short version is that there is not really a conceptual "silver bullet" that necessarily makes all partnerships healthier. Instead, there are a few ideas, like a shared sense of calling or creating space for strangers, that give some indication of correlation with which health group a congregation falls into. But most of these concepts seem to have little to no connection to the overall health of a partnership, at least at first blush. This is what makes the result for the combined impact of these concepts so surprising. When we look at the rightmost set of bars on the graph, there are tight bars with short whiskers and a clear stair-step pattern, indicating a strong correlation between a congregation having all these concepts working together and which health group that congregation ends up in. Essentially, Figure 7.1 is showing that there is not a single concept present in healthy partnerships that is altogether missing from less healthy ones. Instead, the difference between more and less healthy partnerships comes when those concepts are combined.

When it comes to making partnerships healthier, conceptual frameworks are more than just the sum of their parts. The overall impact of discrete concepts measured by the GCS ranges from little to none. But when these concepts are informed and strengthened by each other, they have a clear positive

effect on the health of an ICP. Instead of reducing conceptual frameworks to single ideas, then, it may

be more useful to talk about how complexes of ideas work together to impact partnership health.

Impact of Combining Concepts

This, of course, begs several pertinent questions. Are there certain groups of ideas that are more

impactful than other ones? Which complexes of ideas are the most impactful? Are there some concepts

that catalyze other ones? To get at the answers to these questions, I created a chart that assembled the

above concepts in every possible combination of three,[234] to see which ones lead to the greatest

difference in outcomes. The results were sorted, left to right, based on the least amount of overlap

between Groups 1 and 3 (signifying correlation to healthy outcomes) and the greatest difference in

means (signifying consistent implementation) between those groups. Results can be found in Figure

7.2.[235]

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[234] Combinations of three show complex interactions between multiple concepts without producing iterations that are too complicated for clear analysis (which would be the case for combinations of four or five). Analysis of pairs will follow later in the chapter, but since it has been established that complex relationships between the variables are what make the variables potent, I will first examine them in more complex relationships before triangulating the impact of pairs.

[235] There are 27 combinations listed here because 8 of the 35 possible combinations were not statistically significant and were therefore excluded. Additional information can be found at https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#concepts and https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data/#ANOVA (Password:GCSDissertation2021!). The reason I ranked these groupings by absolute difference before difference of means is that I am most concerned with whether the data can be strongly correlated to outcomes. Thus, it is more important to note an absolute difference between health groups because this indicates that a given church is more likely to fall into one health group or the other based on the combined strength of a given set of concepts. Meanwhile, the difference in means gives us a good idea of how consistently each set of concepts is practiced within health groups.

Figure 7.2
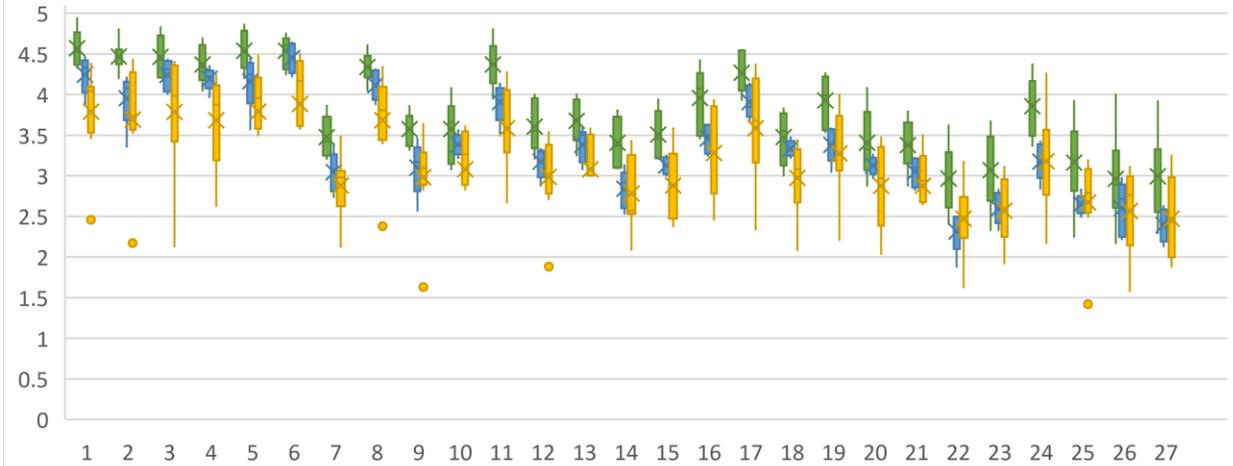
Grouping of Concepts			
1	Shared Calling	Mutual Valuation	Space for Others
2	Relational Priority	Mutual Valuation	Space for Others
3	Mutual Valuation	Space for Others	Non-Dependence
4	Shared Calling	Mutual Valuation	Non-Dependence
5	Relational Priority	Shared Calling	Space for Others
6	Shared Calling	Space for Others	Non-Dependence
7	Relational Priority	Shared Calling	Interdependence
8	Relational Priority	Shared Calling	Non-Dependence
9	Relational Priority	Space for Others	Interdependence
10	Space for Others	Non-Dependence	Interdependence
11	Relational Priority	Shared Calling	Mutual Valuation
12	Mutual Calling	Space for Others	Interdependence
13	Shared Calling	Space for Others	Interdependence
14	Relational Priority	Mutual Valuation	Interdependence
15	Shared Calling	Mutual Valuation	Interdependence
16	Shared Calling	Mutual Valuation	Time-Tolerance
17	Relational Priority	Mutual Valuation	Non-Dependence
18	Shared Calling	Non-Dependence	Interdependence
19	Relational Priority	Shared Calling	Time-Tolerance
20	Mutual Valuation	Non-Dependence	Interdependence
21	Relational Priority	Non-Dependence	Interdependence
22	Relational Priority	Time-Tolerance	Interdependence
23	Shared Calling	Time-Tolerance	Interdependence
24	Relational Priority	Mutual Valuation	Time-Tolerance
25	Space for Others	Time-Tolerance	Interdependence
26	Time-Tolerance	Non-Dependence	Interdependence
27	Mutual Valuation	Time-Tolerance	Interdependence

The trick to not being completely overwhelmed by the volume of information in Figure 7.2 is to remember that its main function is to show which combinations of concepts created the largest difference between Groups 1 and 3. Combination number "1" showed the least amount of overlap between the groups (.083 degrees of difference). Combinations "2," "3," and "4" showed the next least amount of overlap (.416 degrees of difference); but "2" shows 1.583 degrees of difference between means, while "3" and "4" show 1.333 and 1.083 degrees of difference between means, respectively. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Combination "27" has more than double the overlap of Combination "1" (1.917 degrees of difference); though the means of Groups 1 and 3 are still separated by one degree of difference. All this means that a church that scores 4.3 in the combined presence of Shared Calling, Mutual Valuation, and Space for Others has a 99% chance of landing in Group 1. But a church that scores a 3 in Mutual Valuation, Time-Tolerance, and Interdependence is only 50% more likely to be in Group 1 than Group 3. And where there is a tie between combinations, as with "2," 3," and "4," the sets of combinations are ranked according to how different the scores are for the average healthy partnership and the average less healthy partnership.

One way to simplify all this information is to use it to re-frame the search for key concepts in building mission partnerships. Instead of looking for concepts that transform partnerships on their own, we can use Figure 7.2 to help us see which concepts are most powerful when they are combined with other ideas about what makes for a good partnership. When looking at the top combinations in Figure 7.2 the first thing that springs to mind is that there is a lot of repetition. Shared Calling, Mutual Valuation, Space for Others, and Relational Priority make frequent appearances at the top and they are usually found in combination with each other. It is fairly easy to calculate a weighted score for each of the seven concepts in the GCS by assigning a value for each concept whenever it makes an appearance

in Figure 7.2.[236] This weighted score will give an indication of how powerful a given concept is when it is

placed in conversation with other concepts. As we can see from Figure 7.3, Shared Calling is by far the

most impactful concept when it is placed into a wider framework. Trailing slightly behind, and in a

virtual tie, are Mutual Valuation and Space for Others. Relational Priority hangs somewhere in the

middle, not quite on par with the top three concepts, but still well ahead of the bottom of the pack.

Time-Tolerance has a comparatively insignificant impact on partnership health, even when it is

combined with other concepts into a more robust conceptual framework. Non-Dependence and

Interdependence have a fairly low impact as well, though they are significant by comparison to Time-

Tolerance.

Figure 7.3		
Rank	*Concept*	*Weighted Score*
1	Shared Calling	218
2	Mutual Valuation	198
3	Space for Others	194
4	Relational Priority	177
5	Interdependence	158
6	Non-Dependence	147
7	Time-Tolerance	42

Based on this weighted-score analysis it is possible to separate the concepts measured by the

GCS into groups based on how strongly they impact partnership health when they are working together.

The high-impact factors are Shared Calling, Mutual Valuation, Space for Others, and Relational Priority.

Low-impact factors include Interdependence and Non-Dependence. Time-Tolerance might be added to

this group as well, though it is really more of a non-factor.

The next thing to do with Figure 7.2 is to look for the most potent pairings of these concepts. To

begin, it would be helpful to focus on groupings that are most strongly and consistently present among

healthy partnerships. Among groupings where the majority of healthy partnerships recorded a response

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[236] For example, the three concepts in the highest grouping each receive a weighted score of 27, the three
concepts in the next-highest grouping receive a score of 26, and so on.

of 4 or above,[237] Combinations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, and 17 were the most consistently high groupings.[238]

Several things stand out about the CHG. First, there is a very high recurrence of high-impact factors in these combinations. I will say more about this below but for the moment I want to focus on the differences between these combinations before I examine their commonalities. For example: Mutual Valuation and Relational Priority are concepts that healthy partnerships combine with other concepts to great effect. When a church combines these two concepts with low-impact factors, as is the case in Combination 17 (Non-Dependence), the overlap between Groups 1 and 3 suggests that church has a significantly higher chance of experiencing less healthy outcomes. When a church combines those two concepts with Shared Calling, as in Combination 11, Figure 7.2 suggests they will be half as likely to experience negative outcomes. And if that church combines Mutual Valuation and Relational Priority with Space for Others (Combination 2), the chance of landing in Group 3 drops even further. In other words, the combination of Relational Priority and Mutual Valuation is at its most potent when combined with an emphasis on creating Space for Others.

Another difference in the CHG that bears examination is how Relational Priority works with the other high-impact factors. Given the emphasis placed on relationship in much of the current work on mission partnerships, it is somewhat surprising to see it rank in the middle of the pack. Within the CHG, Relational Priority was most strongly correlated with positive outcomes when combined with Mutual Valuation and Space for Others (Combination 2). When it was combined with Shared Calling there was a slight fall-off the likelihood of positive outcomes (Combinations 5 [Shared Calling and Space for Others] and 11 [Shared Calling and Mutual Valuation], respectively). Combination 2 also stands out as the grouping that has the most consistent practice among healthy partnerships. The majority of responses clusters very tightly around 4.46 with just a few outliers. Tellingly, the only other combination in the

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[237] Indicating a moderate to high presence of all three concepts in a grouping.
[238] I will refer to these combinations as the Consistently High Grouping (CHG).

CHG where this is the case, Combination 8, has only one concept in common with Combination 2:

Relational Priority. Additionally, Relational Priority makes the most difference when combined with the

two lowest factors (as can be seen when comparing Combination 22 to Combinations 23, 25, and 27).

My last attempt to simplify Figure 7.2 is to look at how the high-impact factors (HIF) function

when they are paired with each other. Figure 7.4 shows how the six possible combinations of HIF's

functioned in tandem. Space for Others and Mutual Valuation are clearly the most potent combination,

combining with other concepts four times with a weighted score of 94. Shared Calling combined with

Space for Others and Mutual Valuation four times each, for weighted scores of 87 and 76, respectively.

Relational Priority paired with Mutual Valuation and Shared Calling five times each, but for relatively low

scores. The combination of Relational Priority and Space for Others was only statistically significant

when three other concepts were added, though it scored comparatively well, notwithstanding.

Figure 7.4			
Concept	*Concept*	*Number significant combinations*	*Combined Weighted Score*
Space for Others	Mutual Valuation	4	94
Space for Others	Shared Calling	4	87
Shared Calling	Mutual Valuation	4	76
Relational Priority	Mutual Valuation	5	72
Relational Priority	Space for Others	3	68
Relational Priority	Shared Calling	5	57

Radical hospitality (Space for Others) combined with clearly defined and communicated notions

of the value of what each partner brings to the table (Mutual Valuation) are the most impactful

concepts when working in tandem. A shared sense of calling is also extremely important when

combined with either of these notions. Putting the relationship first may not have as clear an impact on

what kind of outcomes a partnership experiences, but it is still significant when working with the other

high-impact factors.

Analysis

So, what is the GCS saying about conceptual frameworks? This deep dive into the way concepts

combine with each other, and the likely impact on outcomes resulting from those combinations, has a

much clearer pattern than the discrete concept approach. Shared Calling, Mutual Valuation, and Space

for Others are the strongest elements by far, and they work together for the clearest advantage in

probable outcomes. When their synergy with all other factors is considered, it is clear that these three

concepts form a kind of triumvirate of concepts that sets the tone for what it means to partner together

among the healthiest partnerships. When sister churches frame their understanding of their relationship

based on shared sense of calling, clear appreciation for the contributions of everyone, and a

commitment to open their concept of "us" to cultural strangers; that robust conceptual framework

makes it far more likely they will enjoy a flourishing partnership.

If those three concepts are the major factors in building a conceptual framework for

partnership, Relational Priority is the catalyst for making each of those concepts even more potent.

Figure 7.3 shows the first three HIF's clustering near the top and the LIF's clustering near the bottom of

the range of scores. And suspended between them is Relational Priority. It is slightly nearer the HIF's,

which is why it certainly deserves to be listed among them. But it still is operating on a slightly less

potent level than the others. What is interesting about this is that Relational Priority is very effective at

catalyzing the other factors. For example, the narrow difference between Combinations 1 and 2

suggests that the lack of a shared sense of calling can largely be overcome by commitment to the

relationship. Though it must be said that possessing both would be far preferable. Relational priority is

even more impactful when catalyzing low-impact factors. Comparisons at the bottom of the list

(Combinations 22 through 27) suggest that, of all the concepts that improve outcomes most when lower

impact factors are at work, Relational Priority makes the most difference. Regardless of the other

concepts used by a church to create a conceptual framework, putting the relationship first makes

outcomes more consistent. It functions with respect to other concepts the way salt does with spices in

cooking. It brings out the flavor and makes them even more effective.

Meanwhile, issues like avoiding economic dependency and fostering reliance among sister churches do not necessarily indicate a higher probability of healthy outcomes on their own. But they do make frameworks containing the other concepts even more effective. Nearly everyone, regardless of the health of their partnership, employs the concept of avoiding dependent relationships. They try to focus on sustainability and capacity building. And the more consistent they are, the better the outcomes. However, almost none of the partnerships surveyed by the GCS exhibited the consistent bi-directional flows of people, resources, and ideas that would indicate an interdependent relationship. However, while truly interdependent sister congregations are hard to find, striving toward that end has an even greater impact on the kind of partnership that develops than mere dependency avoidance. Interdependence, while rare, remains an important goal for congregational partnerships.

Conclusion

The GCS provided tremendous insights into how congregations in healthy partnerships conceptualize the nature of partnership. Ideas of Relational Priority, Shared Calling, Mutual Valuation, Space for Others, Time-Tolerance, Non-Dependence, and Interdependence are all practiced more consistently among healthier partnerships than among their less healthy counterparts. But these concepts are far more powerful when they are combined with each other than when measured on their own. Shared Calling, Mutual Valuation, and Space for Others constitute the driving forces in the healthiest conceptual frameworks; while Relational Priority catalyzes each of the other concepts, deepening their overall impact. Additionally, partnerships are healthier when their conceptual framework moves beyond seeking to mitigate dependency and seeks to foster genuine reliance on one another.

This has some important implications for ICPs, and for the field of mission partnerships in general, going forward. First, we need to move beyond a siloed approach to definitional concepts. Ideas like radical hospitality and a sense of being called by God to something greater are not as significant on

their own as they are when placed into a wider constellation of ideas about what "true partnership" really entails. The definition of partnership is one of the major stumbling blocks to its study and implementation in the field of missiology. Perhaps one of the reasons that a definition of a "true partnership" remains elusive is that we keep trying to define it in discrete terms when it really is a combination of multiple essential ideas. Attempts to define partnership in terms of a single *sine qua non* will only perpetuate the current state of affairs. Going forward, we must resist the urge to essentialize partnership into one or two concepts because, as the GCS has made abundantly clear, the defining concepts of partnership exist as a complex web of definitional notions.

The GCS also draws attention to the fact that interdependent international relationships between congregations are incredibly hard to find. While there is a laudable focus among respondents to the GCS on building the capacities of international partners, there remains a clear sense that the Non-American congregation needs the contributions of their American sister far more than the American church needs what their international sister provides. The prominence of Mutual Valuation in this chapter makes it very clear that American congregations value the resources brought to them by their sister churches. But the dearth of interdependence suggests they also think they can get those resources without their partners. When it comes to the contributions American congregations make to their global partners, there is a sense that those are far more essential. What it would take for American congregations to rely on their partners as much as their partners rely on them, and exactly what that would look like, remains an open question.[239] As is the question of whether American congregations are actually willing to attempt something in their own neighborhood that requires resources from outside their own congregation. Looking forward, I can see no more pressing issue for global congregational

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[239] An excellent contribution in this regard has been made by Adler and Offutt, "The Gift Economy of Direct Transnational Civic Action: How Reciprocity and Inequality Are Managed in Religious 'Partnerships.'" Their use of gift-exchange theory to explain how the spiritualization of material gifts allows for greater reciprocity is an excellent beginning here. What is less clear is how widespread this approach is becoming and by what means churches can be encouraged to do this consistently. .

partnerships than the question of how to convince American congregations of the necessity of relying

on the rest of the global Body of Christ.

Chapter 8 – Hands: How congregations operationalize their partnerships

Introduction

The final aspect of partnership to be explored by the Global Congregational Survey (GCS) is now

in view. The impact of patterns of belief and thought on partnership health in the congregations

sampled by the GCS have been examined in the previous two chapters. Now I turn to patterns of

behavior that churches involved in ICPs use to operationalize their relationship. In this chapter I will

attend to both the practices that constitute these patterns of behavior and the structures those

behaviors create. The GCS gathered extensive information on five operational structures and twelve

operational practices identified in the literature review[240] as significant for congregational partnerships.

The GCS found three of these structures and six of these practices that met the threshold for statistical

significance.[241]

In this chapter I will explore the operational factors that congregations employ in enacting their

partnerships and examine how these factors correspond to the overall health of sister churches. I will

start with the operational structures that the literature suggests should lay the groundwork for a

flourishing partnership. Then I will turn to several "best practices" that have been suggested. In both

cases I will also demonstrate the impact these operational factors have on the health of sister church

relationships. I will conclude by constructing an operational model for healthy congregational

partnerships and making a few brief remarks about a way forward.

Before I delve into the specifics, though, let me offer a summary of the findings of the GCS with

respect to how congregations operationalize their partnerships. Figure 8.1 provides an idea of the

collective prevalence of the operational structures and practices that were identified as significant in the

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[240] pp. 39-42.

[241] See https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data2 (Password:GCSDissertation2021!). Factors that did not meet this threshold will be included in Figures 8.2 and 8.3, but they will only be dealt with in passing given the lack of statistically significant findings about them.

literature review. It also shows differences in how consistently these factors are implemented between

health groups[242].

Figure 8.1
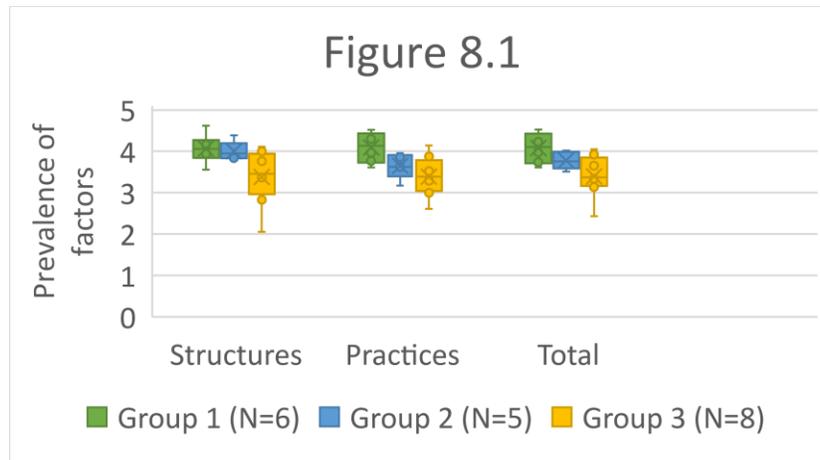
As you can see, there is a clear difference in outcomes between Groups 1 and 3 with respect to

the robustness of the structures and practices used to enact their partnerships. Tight boxes with short

whiskers show consistent practices within a group. In the case of Group 3, the long whiskers indicate

that less healthy partnerships are also less consistent in the number of operational structures and

practices they employ. The stair-step pattern in each category indicates a clear difference in outcomes

between health groups. For example, only one congregation in Group 3 scored a 4 in "Structures" or

"Practices," and the highest combined score was 3.8. Meanwhile, 50% of congregations in Group 1

scored a 4 or higher. There is a clear difference in means (indicated by an "x" in each bar), and an even

greater difference in medians (indicated by a line), between health groups.

The pattern demonstrated by the GCS is that congregations who consistently practice the

operational factors explored in this chapter tend to have healthier partnerships. There is some overlap

between the upper quartiles of Group 3 and the lower quartiles of Group 1, which means that it is

possible that slightly less consistent implementation of these operational factors can still lead to positive

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[242] Groups are based on the percentile rank of the overall health of the partnership, Group 1 being congregations in the 80th percentile of the evaluation or higher, Group 2 between the 80th and 50th percentiles, and Group 3 lower than the 50th percentile.

outcomes. But without exception, congregations that reported either somewhat or strong agreement

that these factors were operant in their partnerships also reported the highest levels of partnership

health.[243] Now I will turn to a closer examination of these factors, beginning with the structures

employed by sister congregations partnering together.

Operational Structures

The GCS gathered information on five operational structures employed by congregations in their

international partnerships. Of these, three structures met the threshold for statistical significance.[244] The

results for all structures are shown in Figure 8.3.

Figure 8.2

Operational Structures (**Statistically Significant Factors**)	
1	Informal spaces for dialog
2	Decisions made by negotiation and consensus
3	**Expectations and responsibilities clearly defined**
4	**Mechanisms for regular review and revision of processes**
5	**Clear lines of communication and documentation**
T1	**Combined – all factors**
T2	**Combined – significant factors**

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[243] Because of this clear difference in outcomes, and because the majority of statistically significant discrete factors show clear differences in outcomes, I will focus on my analysis on the factors individually, in contrast to the collective approach taken in the last chapter. Examining complexes of structures and activities would no doubt be an excellent next step in understanding the dynamics of partnership health. But for the present study it is neither necessary nor within the scope of the project. But most importantly it would be preferable to do that kind of analysis on a data set that offers statistically significant findings for more of the operational factors measured by the GCS.

[244] See https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data2 (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

The statistically significant factors here are clearly defined responsibilities (3), regular review and revision of processes (4), and clear lines of communication and documentation (5). The impact of creating informal social space (1) or of decision-making processes (2) on partnership health are unclear. While there are very clear differences in the means of Groups 1 and 3 for the significant factors, there is not a great deal of absolute difference between the groups. By that I mean there is significant overlap between the upper quartile of Group 3 and the lower quartiles of Group 1 in factors 3, 4, and 5. So about 25% of churches in Group 3 have expressed their expectations and responsibilities at least as clearly as 50% of churches in Group 1. That amount of overlap essentially doubles when it comes to having review and revision processes in place. What is interesting, though, is the reason for the overlap. In the case of expectations, the groups overlap because all the groups scored relatively highly. While Group 1 is consistently high, Group 3 is much more inconsistent.[245] But when it comes to revision both healthy and less healthy partnership are very inconsistent. The pattern for lines of communication looks similar to the results for setting expectations. There is a little more overlap between health groups, and that is because healthy congregations are a little less consistent in this regard than they are with expectations.

So, the absolute difference between groups is a little murky. But still there is a very clear tendency for churches who scored highly in each structure to end up with healthier partnerships. Lines of communication has a difference between means of .75 orders of magnitude. That is to say, the average congregation in Group 3 only slightly agreed that they had clear lines of communication, but the average Group 1 congregation fell somewhere between somewhat and strong agreement. Similarly, when it comes to defining expectations and responsibilities, there is a difference of one order of magnitude between Groups 1 and 3. Interestingly, while structures that allow for regular review and revision had the most overlap, they also had the greatest difference between means (about 1.65 orders

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[245] With scores ranging from 4.43 to 1.43.

of magnitude). So, even though churches in both groups are very inconsistent in their implementation of this kind of structure, the average healthy partnership does much more to make course corrections than the average less healthy partnership.

This leads to a fairly similar pattern when we are looking at the combined impact of all the operational structures, especially when we only combine the statistically significant factors. There is some overlap, but that is largely due to inconsistencies among the healthier partnerships. Yet all of the less healthy partnerships averaged less than 4 for the prevalence of the significant factors, while more than 50% of healthy partnerships were well above 4. Additionally, there is over an order of magnitude of difference between Groups 1 and 3 when it comes to the average prevalence of significant factors.

Analysis

Clearly there is some relationship between operational structures and partnership health. The results of the GCS show the importance of structuring a partnership so that it has processes for review, clear lines of communication, and clarity when it comes to responsibilities and expectations. The remarkable differences between the means of the health groups are ample evidence of this. Still any conclusion I draw also must account for the significant overlap between the groups with respect to all of these factors. It may be possible to enjoy a healthy partnership without these structures. And it may be that, on rare occasion, a church can have these structures in place and still not enjoy positive outcomes. But it should be pointed out that, while there is some overlap, there is also a point where that overlap stops. In other words, while congregations in both high and low health groups report a certain prevalence of each factor, there is a threshold at which all the congregations reporting a strong presence of a factor are in Group 1. So, the real difference between Groups 1 and 3 is not a difference of presence but of degree. If a church agrees somewhat that they have structured their partnership to allow for regular review and revision of their policies, we cannot guess whether they are in a healthy or less healthy partnership. But if they agree just a little more strongly, we can say with a high degree of

confidence that they are likely to experience better outcomes from their partnership. The difference

between a congregation scoring a 4.2 or 3.8 seems pretty narrow, but it is indicative of consistency of

implementation. If a person working in a sister church ministry is aware of a policy about lines of

communication, they will have at best a moderate degree of confidence in answering questions about it.

But if they see those policies implemented regularly, and if they see consequences of not implementing

them, they will be much more confident in saying that this is an important part of the partnership. This

is likely what is driving the very high scores that we see among the majority of Group 1 in regard to

expectations, revision, and communication. While most congregations have some kind of policy relating

to these factors, congregations that practice them and communicate those policies consistently

invariably have better partnerships.

In the final analysis, expectations, communication, and revision correlate very strongly with

having a better partnership. But it is not enough for a church to set up the partnership to run a certain

way, they have to follow through. If they fail to do so, the kind of outcomes they can expect starts to

vary. The threshold for whether clear expectations, responsibilities, or lines of communication will have

an effect on partnership health is pretty high (in both cases, about 4.45). Any more than a half degree of

deviation in the presence of these factors seems to make very little impact on partnership health. In

other words, sister churches do not just need clarity about these factors, they need the stakes and

consequences to be consistently demonstrated. Procedural *glasnost*, by which I mean transparency over

what will happen and who will make it happen are hallmarks of healthy partnerships. And if there is a

threshold at the top, there is also one at the bottom. At some point (on average 3.37 or "very slightly

agree"), when the above structures are not consistently implemented, we can be fairly certain that a

congregation is not enjoying a healthy ICP. Equivocation on those matters is what nearly all unhealthy

partnerships have in common. Clarity over who to contact (and how often) is something that most

partnerships do pretty well. But the few who do not do it well, score very low in overall health.

The threshold for the impact of review and revision is not quite as extreme but it is still about 4. A variation of a degree of magnitude still allows for some positive outcomes, but it falls off pretty steeply after that. Revision may not quite be as important as clear expectations and communication, but it at least falls in the category of "highly advisable" if not absolutely necessary.

Operational Practices

The GCS also gathered information on twelve operational practices identified in the literature review as significant for congregational partnerships. Of these, six practices met the threshold for statistical significance.[246] The results for all practices are shown in Figure 8.3.

Figure 8.3
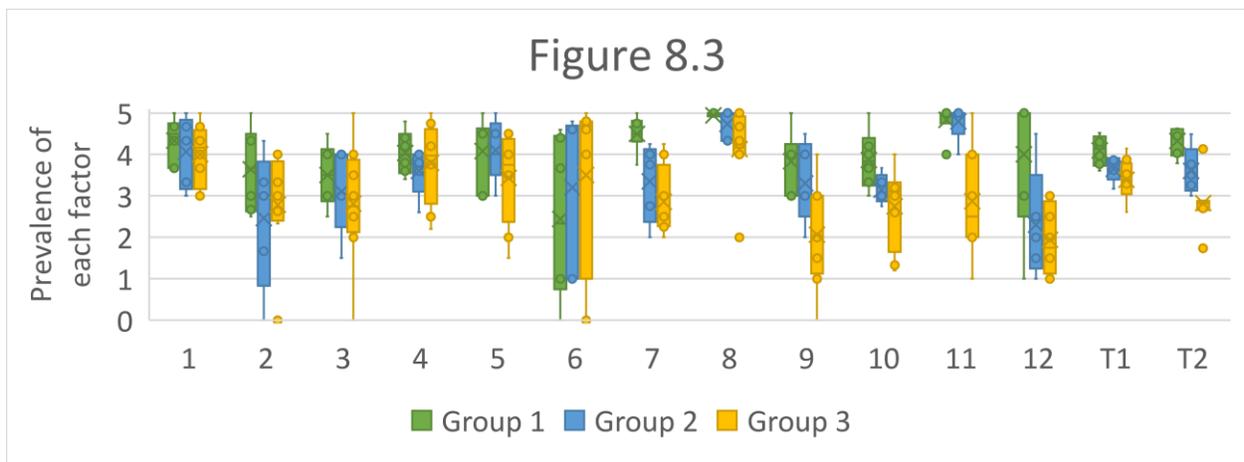
Operational Practice Labels (*Statistically Significant Factors*)	
1	Prayer with and for partners
2	Local control of resources and decisions
3	Take time to celebrate the relationship
4	Maximize personal contact
5	"Champions" to keep the relationship in view
6	Effective mediation of conflict
7	**Participate in exercises that build trust**
8	**Culturally appropriate accountability**
9	**Regular exchange of hospitality**
10	**Commitment to work through problems**
11	**Buy-in from church leadership**
12	**Organizational penetration**
T1	**Combined – all factors**
T2	**Combined – significant factors**

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[246] See https://globalchurchpartnerships.org/data2 (Password:GCSDissertation2021!).

The statistically significant factors here are: exercises that build trust (7), culturally appropriate accountability (8), regular exchange of hospitality (9), commitment to work through problems (10), buy-in from leadership (11), and organizational penetration (12). The impact of prayer (1), local control of decision making (2), celebrations (3), personal contact (4), partnership champions (5), and mediation (6) on ICPs represented in the GCS are unclear. That is a really large number of factors that did not exhibit statistically significant results, and that will be dealt with below. For the moment, I want to focus on the factors that are statistically significant. I will begin with the combined impact of these factors and then examine them individually, beginning with the practices that showed the most absolute difference between health groups and moving to the ones that have more overlap.

From Figure 8.3 we can get a general sense that these six statistically significant factors are at least somewhat important in understanding the differences in operational practices between healthy and less healthy partnerships. But when we look at the combined results for these factors it is abundantly clear just how important they are. While, ideally, we would see no overlap between Groups 1 and 3, that is not really the case in any of the charts in this dissertation. This is probably because partnerships are just too complex to consistently fit an ideal. But the combined total of these six operational factors shows the clearest absolute difference in outcomes in this study. Not only is there no overlap between Groups 1 and 3, there is a gap of almost an entire order of magnitude between them. The vast majority of responses from Group 3 register some kind of disagreement that these factors are operative in their sister church relationships. But the vast majority of responses from Group 1 show between moderate and strong agreement, with a mean response of 4.33. Outliers notwithstanding, there is a major difference between Groups 1 and 3 with regard to the practices they employ, and the consistency with which they employ them. These six factors are consistently practiced by the healthiest partnerships. And they are just as consistently absent from the least healthy ones.

Technically, practicing culturally appropriate accountability (8), which also entails affirming the validity of a partner's accounting practices, shows the least amount of overlap between Groups 1 and 2, but it also has the least difference between means and the highest average response for both groups. The reason for the tiny amount of overlap is that both groups are pushing against the ceiling for the prevalence of a factor. The median response for Group 1 was 4.95, and for Group 3 it was an exceedingly high 4.13. This was, by far, the highest average response for Group 3 for any of the operational factors. But as impressive as this might seem, the responses to this question were almost guaranteed to be high. For one thing, the questions aimed at this factor were designed to measure a congregation's understanding of, and appreciation for, the accounting practices of <u>both</u> their congregation and those of their sister church.[247] So, if a church understood its own accounting practices well and thought they had a valid system to keep track of money, they would average a score of 2.5 at the very least. And that is assuming they had no understanding of their partners' accounting practices and thought they were completely wrong-headed. But, as we discussed in Chapter 5, it is likely that the vast majority of congregations who responded to the GCS did so because they felt confident about their partnerships. So, churches who had major misgivings about their partners' accounting practices were unlikely to respond. That means the worst thing a GCS respondent was likely to say about their partner church's accounting is that they neither agree nor disagree with it. That means the worst response we could expect is an average that falls evenly between a 5 for their own accounting and a 3 for their partners. And that is almost exactly what we have: 4.13. So, while there is technically more absolute difference between groups with regard to accounting practices, I hesitate to mark this one out as the most important factor among the operational practices of sister churches.

For all of the charts in this dissertation an overlap of less than half a degree of difference is very rare (outliers like the one just discussed notwithstanding). So, it is pretty clear that having buy-in from

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[247] See Appendix A, pp.198-9.

congregational leadership (11) is a major difference-maker. Not only is there only a tiny amount of overlap, there are almost two whole orders of magnitude between the means of healthy partnerships and less healthy ones when it comes to how engaged their leadership is. With a mean score of 4.88 and essentially no whiskers showing inconsistencies, it is abundantly clear that this is a hallmark of healthy partnerships.[248] And it is a little surprising that there is any overlap at all. There were two congregations in Group 3 who scored at or above a 4 here. But the only reason they are not listed as outliers is that some congregations scored extremely low. And if you look at the median response for less healthy partnerships it is pretty clear that they tend to feel little to no support from congregational leadership.

The next most significant practice is implementing exercises to build trust (7). Usually this begins early on in the relationship, when partners try doing something small together so that they can demonstrate capacity, commitment, and good will to each other. While there is an overlap of half a degree of difference between extreme lows for Group 1 and extreme highs for Group 3, they still show significant differences in outcomes between the groups. There are 1.5 degrees of difference between the mean responses, and 2 degrees between the median. So, healthy partnerships score consistently high on exercises that build trust. Less healthy partnerships score lower, or at least less consistently.

Regular exchange of hospitality (9) (hosting leaders and members of sister congregations) showed twice as much overlap between Groups 1 and 3 as trust-building did. It is still not an overwhelming amount, but it does mean that I cannot state absolutely that this is something that healthy partnerships always do that less healthy partnerships never do. Sometimes the outcomes vary when the prevalence ranges from a score of 3 to 4. But while the median healthy partnership somewhat agreed that they exchange hospitality regularly with their partners, the median less healthy partnership somewhat disagreed. There are some less healthy partnerships that do exchange hospitality to a small degree. And a healthy church is as likely to score below a 4 as above it. But it is telling that every church

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[248] Even the one major outlier scored a very respectable 4, still well above the median response for Group 3.

that reported a prevalence of 4 or more was in a healthy partnership. The presence of this threshold for

positive outcomes means I can still say with confidence that hospitality is an important contributing

factor to partnership health, if not absolutely determinative.

The result for commitment to work through problems (10) was very similar to hospitality. There

was the same amount of overlap between groups and an identical mean for Group 1, though Group 3

had a much higher mean and an even higher median here than with respect to hospitality. Still, there

was a little over 1 degree of difference between the means. This gap is the difference between a church

reporting that they would like to be in a relationship with their sister church, even if things became

difficult and essentially saying "maybe we would not stick around." Perhaps most surprising is that the

average response among healthy partnerships was 3.87; a pretty tepid commitment. Still the majority of

healthy partners said they were more likely to stick with the partnership through trouble than the vast

majority of less healthy partners. And, as with hospitality, the only congregations to clear the threshold

of 4 were all in Group 1.

The last significant factor to discuss is organizational penetration (12). This happens when the

partnership is integrated into multiple ministries of the church rather than being a stand-alone program.

Figure 8.3 makes it clear that this really is not happening very much. The less healthy partnerships are

not doing it at all. They all report answers between 1 and 3, indicating some degree of disagreement

that this is a factor in their partnership at all, with the average response being well below 2. Integrating

sister churches into the fabric of congregational life just is not on the radar for churches with less

healthy partnerships. It is on the radar for most healthy partnerships, but its implementation is

inconsistent, verging on erratic. The range of answers in Group 1 runs the entire gamut of possibilities,

which is why the amount of overlap between groups is 3.5 times what it is for other factors. This is

indicative of inconsistency. But the most fascinating part of the data on organizational penetration is

that, despite the wide range of responses for Group 1, the average response is still 4; meaning that the

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majority of healthy partnerships integrate their ICPs into congregational life to at least some degree. Not

only that, but the difference of means between groups in this factor is greater than for any other factor.

In other words, while there is still plenty of room for improvement, organizational penetration is the one

thing healthy partners do most effectively compared to less healthy partners.

Analysis

Perhaps the most important takeaway from this chapter is the clear indication from the

combined significant factors in Figure 8.3 that there are vast differences in the practices employed by

healthy partnerships and their less healthy counterparts. The extreme differences in the prevalence of

these factors between health groups suggests that the most important thing a church can do in pursuing

a healthy partnership is attend to its practices. While previous chapters presented ample evidence that

ideas and beliefs make a difference in the quality of a partnership; the evidence seems overwhelming

that what sister churches actually do makes the greatest impact by far.

In terms of which practices make the most impact, buy-in from the leadership is a good place to

start. This may or may not mean that the pastor is actively involved in the partnership, but at the very

least it means the people involved in partnering ministry know that the leadership of the church values

the relationship and wants to see it succeed. Of all the practices that nurture a healthy partnership, this

one has the clearest impact. There are very rare cases where the leadership of a church is on board, yet

the partnership still suffers. But every single healthy ICP has pastoral leadership that highly values the

partnership. ICPs without this support invariably experience less healthy outcomes. The implications are

straightforward. If you want a healthy partnership, make sure it is a priority for the church leadership. If

the initiative is not coming from the pastoral leadership, it might be worth getting them on a trip or two

to get them more personally involved with the partnership.

Early emphasis on exercises that build trust are also really important. Several churches reported

that they started with small cooperative ventures meant to show competence and establish

commitment to working together. And the majority of healthy partnerships scored really high in this

regard. There is a little overlap between health groups, but the means are vastly different. This suggests

that a high priority on activities that demonstrate and build trust are really important for nurturing

healthy partnerships. While some churches who did these kinds of exercises still reported less healthy

outcomes, it could be that these exercises are more visible, or more memorable, or more repeated

among the healthiest partnerships. Perhaps it is not enough to do one or two exercises, maybe they

need to be repeated more often. And it may be that there is a difference in the way those exercises are

remembered or revisited in order to reinforce the relationship. More research into the nature of these

differences would no doubt shed some more light here. But the fact remains that trust building activities

tend to be very good for sister churches.

The results for culturally appropriate accountability were all really high, for reasons that were

explained above. It could be that all international congregational partnerships do this really well. Or

perhaps they all at least think they do. Being able to compare the responses of sister churches would no

doubt shed more light on which is the case. Sadly, that was not practicable given the dataset available.

But, as I alluded to earlier, the sampling method skewed toward the top of the chart. And they did so in

such a way that any responses that were below a 4.5 would necessarily mean that there is some degree

failure to either understand or appreciate how accountability works in the sister church's cultural

context. The fact that none of the churches from Group 1 scored below 4.5, and that the average for

Group 3 was well below that threshold, suggests flexibility and cultural intelligence (particularly when it

comes to money) is a major point of difference between healthy and less healthy partnerships. Sister

churches do better together when they not only understand how money needs to be accounted for in

their partner's culture, but why it needs to be done that way. And it also helps if they are able to

acknowledge that, even though systems of accountability may differ, they are equally valid.[249]

Hosting people from sister churches is another important factor in sister church health. The vast

majority of churches who reported some degree of regular exchange were in Group 1; as were all the

congregations who reported more than a moderate degree. Essentially, this means that less healthy

partners tend to be the ones who do not spend much time with one another. While more healthy

partners tend to spend much more time hosting each other. This correlation could be because regular

exchange of hospitality makes for a much healthier relationship. But it could be because people in an

unhealthy relationship tend not to enjoy one another's company. I find it likely that both explanations

are at work here; that exchange of hospitality is both an expression of the state of the relationship and a

means to improve it. If sister churches notice that they are not spending much time together, they may

want to consider the health of their partnership. And, likewise, if they find the health of their

partnership lacking, they may want to begin remedying that by giving church members more time

sharing in each other's homes and lives.

Discerning the impact of commitment to stick with a sister church through problems is

somewhat problematic. This is probably something that international congregational partnerships as a

whole could do better. All congregations in Group 1 demonstrate this commitment to some degree; so,

there is some warrant to suggest that consistent commitment to the relationship, come what may, leads

to better outcomes. But there is also ample evidence that this kind of commitment is fairly rare. It does

seem like making the decision to stay together ahead of time, before trouble actually arises, leads to

better outcomes. Churches who reported a moderate or higher degree of conviction to remain were

invariably part of better partnerships. The outcomes for churches who reported a positive but lower

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[249] The definitive account of the justifications for and practical implementation of this kind of approach can be found in Lederleitner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships*, 101–21.

degree of commitment had more varied outcomes. But sister churches who did not make that

determination at all, or who had one foot out the door (so to speak) invariably had worse outcomes.

This suggests that partners should be honest with themselves and each other about the likelihood of the

relationship being troubled from time to time and affirm to one another that this will not mean the end

to the relationship. Failure to do so, or signaling that you may not be in it for the long haul, does a huge

disservice to the partnership.

Finally let us take a look at organizational penetration. It is fascinating that the thing that

healthy partnerships are least consistent in doing is the very thing they do (on average) so much better

than less healthy partnerships. Essentially, not all congregations pursue partnership in a way that

integrates their partnership into other ministries of the church. Some prefer to silo it off as a kind of self-

contained ministry program. But there are some that make connections like including their children and

youth ministries in ICP initiatives. They may have small group ministries pray regularly for their sister

congregation. Some rely on their sister church to help them become better at outreach to certain

segments of their own neighborhood (refugee populations, for example). Granted, this is not really

happening much. But when it is present to **any** degree, those partnerships are always in Group 1. It is

still possible to have a healthy partnership without organizational penetration. But when the

partnership interfaces with multiple facets of congregational life, the relationship is always the healthier

for it. And given the high average prevalence of this factor in Group 1, it is safe to say that the majority

of healthy partners take steps to increase the organizational penetration of their partnerships.

Meanwhile, partners whose relationships with their sister congregations are one dimensional, less

visible, or non-essential (or are at least perceived that way) have more varied outcomes.

Conclusion

Reflection on the results of the GCS provides some key insights into the operation of

international congregational partnerships. Using these insights, it is possible to begin constructing a

model of the operational structures and practices that lead sister congregations into healthier

partnerships with one another. A model of operational structures would include three pillars:

expectation, communication, and revision. Commitment to a high degree of clarity concerning what

partners can expect from each other, who is responsible for which duties, and how communication and

documentation should flow between partners is paramount. As we saw from Figure 8.2, any deviation

from being as clear as possible on these points leads to inconsistent or negative outcomes. The

healthiest partnerships are the ones who set a very high threshold for these factors. ICPs should also be

structured in such a way that there is a mechanism by which their processes and expectations can be

reviewed and revised. Consistent feedback, even when it is negative, is essential for a healthy organism.

Just imagine the state of a person whose brain never received any information about how the body was

performing and consequently never changed course. Such a person would probably not last more than a

few minutes. Should we expect any different from a partnership that is unable to evaluate its own state

and how well it is functioning?

     A model of operational practices would have to place leadership buy-in and exercises that build

trust in a league of their own. These are clearly the most impactful practices that partners can employ

when they want to improve the quality of their partnerships. Without them, there can be little hope of

enjoying a healthy relationship. Next, regular exchange of hospitality, commitment to work through

problems, and culturally appropriate accountability form a nucleus of highly recommended practices.

There is some evidence that a congregation can have a healthy partnership without them; but when

they are consistently employed these practices lead to healthier results. Organizational penetration also

seems highly advisable. While it is not really practiced consistently enough to be included with the

others, there is convincing evidence that integrating partnerships into the life of the church is correlated

with healthier partnerships.

Before closing, I want to mention a few of the operational factors that did not meet the threshold of statistical significance to be included in this chapter. The GCS gathered data on the spaces for dialog that partnerships set up as well as the decision-making processes they employ. It also gauged how consistently practices of prayer, lines of communication, regular celebration, and personal contact were employed. And it asked about whether sister congregations had designated "champions" to keep the partnership on track and whether they used mediators to help manage conflict. Many of these factors are considered extremely important in the functioning of a mission partnership.[250] Unfortunately, the GCS was not able to make a statistically significant determination about their impact on partnership health. Still, given their prominence in the literature, I am not convinced they should be jettisoned entirely. The reason for their exclusion from this study is that their distributions did not match the expectation for a random representative sampling closely enough for anyone to be confident in the applicability of the finding. A larger study would likely change that, so I would still recommend that all of them remain on the research agenda for people looking into the impact of discrete practices on mission partnerships. Without further study, we cannot make a determination about how much impact things like decision making processes, spaces for dialog, prayer, local control of resources, partnership champions, or effective processes for mediation have on partnerships that employ them. But they are still worthwhile objects of study, especially if we take the consensus on partnership seriously.

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[250] For a brief overview of the dozens of authors who have noted their significance see p. 34.

Chapter 9 - Conclusions

This dissertation set out to determine if there are patterns of belief, thinking, and behavior concerning partnership that lead to healthier international congregational partnerships (ICPs). As was noted in the review of the literature, several authors have already suggested that is the case, and there is growing consensus on what those patterns might be. What was unclear is whether those patterns were finding expression among all ICPs, generally speaking. It was also unclear if those patterns were correlated to healthier outcomes. The insights gleaned from the Global Congregational Survey (GCS) have brought those patterns and their relationship to partnership health into sharper focus.

Summary of Findings

Phase 1 of the GCS provided a vista from which to view the place of partnership in American congregations. It found that nearly half of US congregations are involved in one kind of mission partnership or another. And that among these, ICP's are the most common form of partnership, with about 17% of all American churches involved in an ICP. But these are very unevenly distributed around the country. Regional differences, or differences between urban and rural populations, are not able to explain why ICPs form in certain pockets. Instead, this seems to be driven by the availability of potential partnering institutions. In places where other potential partners (like schools or missions agencies) are more prevalent, congregations prove quite willing to partner with them instead of with sister congregations. But when there are fewer options open, or when the main avenue to global engagement is a global worker known by someone in the congregation, it often means the church will use those personal bridges to form connections between congregations. And, while the whole spectrum of Christian denominations is represented, there is about a 30% chance that a randomly selected church with an ICP will be non-denominational. This kind of global engagement not only addresses intangible concerns about the place of non-denominational churches in the global body of Christ; it also addresses the practicalities of possessing wider networks of support and belonging for churches who do not

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possess them by virtue of accepting denominational oversight. Similar concerns may also be driving the development of ICPs among congregations that are denominationally affiliated, but who have a diminishing sense of the relevance of denominational belonging in congregational life.

Phase 1 also found that churches form ICPs for different reasons. First, congregations in ICPs tend to place a high value on relationship. It is not enough for them to be globally engaged, they want that engagement to deliver a sense of connection to a people and a place. They also care deeply about the personal involvement and experience of congregants. The support of denominational or congregational leadership is clearly a driving factor as well. When church leadership is convinced of the importance of ICPs, they can be very effective at multiplying them. The need for a labor-intensive means of missional engagement also plays a part in a church deciding to form an ICP. Sister church connections can require a lot of work to plan and sustain. This is especially true when multiple yearly trips are involved. So, a very large church that wants to get as many of its people involved in its global ministry as possible has good reasons to seek out a mode of engagement that requires a lot of personal involvement. ICPs may also appeal to churches because of the high degree of autonomy in setting the agenda for an ICP.

Phase 2 of the GCS also indicated a high degree of uncertainty among US congregations about how well their partnerships measure up. Many respondents, or participants who withdrew, indicated that they were reticent to fill out a portion of the survey if they felt they would not give the "right answers." Additionally, they were quite loath to paint their partnership, or especially their partners, in an unfavorable light. Despite constant reassurances from the researcher, many people felt their partnership had to satisfy some unspoken expectation in order to participate. While American churches are increasingly interested in pursuing international partnerships, they are also unsure whether they are doing it right.

Additionally, Phase 2 found some extraneous factors that seemed to be correlated to increased partnership health. Two factors that seemed to have the greatest impact were the population density where the American partner was located and the size of the congregation. Both of these factors cohere around the issue of access to resources, both human and material. While access to resources generally has a significant impact on the overall health of a partnership, it is overly simplistic to say that the best thing a church can do to ensure a healthy partnership is to be large and/or urban. Instead, churches with limited human and material resources should be encouraged to develop creative access to those resources. This might entail partnering with better resourced mediating institutions (such as denominational or extra-ecclesial missionary agencies) rather than with international congregations directly. Under-resourced congregations engaged in international partnerships might also benefit from sharing resources with each other: creating multi-lateral partnerships or forming co-ops, in order to broaden their resource base. Working with a consultant or sharing a missions staff among multiple congregations might help under-resourced churches improve the overall health of their partnerships.

Phase 2 also showed clear patterns of belief about the theological significance of ICPs that are shared by the healthiest partnerships. A robust, biblically grounded theology sets a good baseline for success in partnerships. It may not guarantee a healthy partnership, but the lack of a robust theology will guarantee a less healthy partnership.

Furthermore, theology that specifically addresses collaborative ministry and the relationship between Christians is demonstrably more important for ICP health than a theology that only addresses general missiological principles. Mission theology is certainly important for churches engaging in international partnership. But churches who are able to draw on rich theological understandings of the unity of the body of Christ, the pattern of the self-giving love of the Triune God, and the shared calling of all Christians to work together find themselves operating in more meaningful and healthy relationships with their sister churches.

Finally, grounding theological precepts in biblical examples has a profound effect on the health of a partnership. Scripture is a powerful motivator, and it is very effective in allowing congregations to imbue their collaborative ministries with ultimate significance. Biblical engagement is the means by which congregations enable their theology to impact their partnerships. These theological factors may not guarantee a healthy partnership. But they do provide a foundation that suggests how healthy a partnering ministry is likely to become.

The GCS also provided tremendous insights into patterns of definitional concepts that the healthiest partnerships use to frame their understanding of ICPs. The primary takeaway from this part of the study is that ideas are most powerful when they form a matrix of meaning with other ideas, as opposed to being siloed off on their own. Shared Calling, Mutual Valuation, and Space for Others constitute the driving forces in the healthiest conceptual frameworks; while Relational Priority catalyzes each of the other concepts, deepening their overall impact. Additionally, partnerships are healthier when their conceptual framework is intentional about avoiding economic dependency. But the healthiest ICPs move beyond dependency mitigation and seek to foster genuine reliance on one another to meet the needs of the congregation (both spiritual and material).

The GCS also made it apparent that genuinely interdependent international relationships between congregations are incredibly hard to find. In most cases, the non-American congregation needs the contributions of their American sister far more than the reverse. American congregations may value the intangible resources brought to them by their sister churches, but they expect to find those kinds of resources elsewhere, as well. It is less clear where the international partner would find a replacement for the American partner's contributions (especially financial contributions). The goal of both congregations relying on each other to meet one another's needs is still not generally being met. Though there are some success stories in this regard. And there is some ambiguity over whether American

congregations are actually willing to attempt something that requires resources from outside their own congregation.

Last, but not least, the GCS traced the patterns of how the healthiest ICPs operationalize their partnerships. It found that clear expectations, clear communication and documentation, and mechanisms for regular review and revision must be built into whatever structures constitute an ICP. Commitment to a high degree of clarity concerning what partners can expect from each other, who is responsible for which duties, and how communication and documentation should flow between partners is paramount. Congregations also should structure their partnerships in such a way that programs, priorities, processes, and expectations can be reviewed and revised.

The model of best practices that emerged from the GCS suggests that leadership buy-in and exercises that build trust are the most important elements. Without these, there can be little hope of enjoying a healthy relationship. Having the backing, if not the direct involvement, of congregational leadership keeps an ICP on track. And there is no substitute for the ability to demonstrate trustworthiness and capability when building a partnering relationship. Opportunities to do this should be taken early and often.

Regular exchange of hospitality, commitment to work through problems, and culturally appropriate accountability form a nucleus of highly recommended practices. There is some evidence that a congregation can have a healthy partnership without them; but when they are consistently employed these practices regularly lead to healthier results. Organizational penetration also seems highly advisable. While it is not really practiced consistently enough to be included with the other best practices, there is convincing evidence that integrating partnerships more fully into the life of the church is correlated with healthier partnerships.

Future Study

All that remains is to suggest a way forward for the study of ICPs. My sense of where the field is heading is that scholars and practitioners alike are interested in seeing more data-driven evaluations of partnership. Plenty of theories of what makes for a good partnership has been produced in the last twenty years. Scholars do not need to keep re-inventing the wheel. There is already broad consensus in the literature over what makes for a good partnership. What is needed is a robust agenda of testing and refining the existing theories so that the field can move toward the clarity that exists on the other side of complexity. This dissertation has been an excursus in that direction, but continued efforts are needed. In the suggestions that follow, I will begin with a few methodological suggestions for future studies. If I were to continue this project, or to advise someone in setting up similar research, these would be the improvements I would recommend. I will close by suggesting some items for future study that might be added to the research agenda.

First, I would highly suggest that future research have an extensive online presence. While making first contact via email proved to be unfruitful, I was very glad that it led me to set up online platforms for information and contact. The whole process was time consuming but worthwhile. It mostly entailed registering a web domain and setting up a website using WordPress. This allowed me to put general information in a readily accessible place, so I could refer people to one place to get answers to the most frequently asked questions. Having a professional-looking domain also lent an air of credibility to the project that was valuable when making cold contact with potential participants, especially international ones. I also purchased dedicated email services via Google's G-suite package. In the event that anyone wishes to perform similar research I would highly recommend using this or a similar service, even though it comes with a cost. The technological support that came with it more than justified the purchase price.

Much was done to make the sample as representative of the general population as possible. But there is still room for improvement. My main suggestion, if one could afford the expense, is sampling

more states per region. This would increase the accuracy of the sampling, especially in the West where Nevada may not have served as a fair representative. This really would have been a preferable route for this dissertation, but the constraints of time and, especially, funding limited this study to one state per region. On that note, many of the suggestions I am about to make are directly related to available funds. Given the importance of ICPs to US congregations, there really should be more funds available. While I was unsuccessful in securing the grants needed to take the study of ICPs to the next level, I am convinced there are plenty of institutions with an interest in funding this kind of research. What is most needed is for some entrepreneurial creativity to rally the interest behind a clear research program. I also think that having more institutional support, like a center for the study of mission partnership housed at a research school, would be very helpful in positioning the field to move to the next stage.

Another important improvement to the GCS would be to offer it in more languages. Several ICPs had to be excluded from the study because of language barriers. This iteration of the GCS was able to reach English and Spanish speakers. Future studies would do well to include multiple languages if possible. Based on the contacts I made I would suggest Creole, French, Portuguese, and Mandarin as the first languages to be added.

Other improvements to the GCS should be aimed at improving the response rate. The response rate (19%), while low, was about what could be reasonably expected when sampling a group of largely volunteer workers and offering no incentive for completing the survey. Among only American congregations, the response rate was actually much higher than one might expect (30%). An easy way to bring that rate higher in future research would be to budget for a nominal incentive for completion. This could be in the form of a very small reward offered to everyone (say, a $5 gift), or an entry into a drawing for a more lucrative incentive (like, a $100 gift). The latter approach would be preferred since it does not become more costly as the number of participants increases (thus economically penalizing the researcher for being successful). This might raise the overall response rate, but I suspect the disparity

between the number of American and non-American respondents (30% and 8%, respectively) would remain without efforts to intentionally close the gap.

My intention in contacting international partners via their American contacts was twofold. One, it seemed the most likely way to find these congregational partners. If there is no database of American churches with ICPs, there is certainly not a worldwide database. And constructing a list of international partner churches the way I constructed a list of American partners would be an incredibly difficult (though not, technically, impossible) undertaking. My other intention, was to contact potential international participants through friendly channels. I thought that international partners might be more likely to answer an email from their sister church than from a random stranger. This may be the case, but my experience suggests things are more complicated than that. Though I do believe that this avenue provides the best way to locate international partners, I would suggest a slightly different means of first contact for future study. While constraints of time did not make this an attractive option for this dissertation, a more time-intensive approach might yield better results. I would suggest, instead of sending an invitation to the survey via the US partner, having the US partner introduce the researcher via an email. Then the researcher can develop some personal rapport through direct contact, the way the initial phone call with the American partner did. Perhaps the researcher could set up a phone or video call if possible. This would be an extra step that would take a good deal more time. But it would doubtless yield a better result than a measly 8% completion rate.

As for the research agenda for future studies of ICP, I have a few suggestions. The most pressing need is for further efforts to be made to refine the existing consensus on partnership. The GCS provided some helpful movement in that direction, but there are still refinements that need to be made.

The importance of theology for ICP's has been established, but more work remains to be done on the particulars of a theology of ICPs. I noted at the end of Chapter 6 that there is an excellent opportunity to use the GCS to express a grassroots theology of partnership as it is being constructed by

American congregations and their global partners. A potential future iteration of the GCS, which will hopefully yield a higher rate of response, will prove invaluable for providing an even more robust picture of how congregations in international partnership are theologizing about their endeavors. This would be even more interesting when compared to the theologies of partnership that have been produced by theologians in the last three decades. Comparing theologies constructed in different cultural contexts would also be a promising avenue for research.

The work on conceptual frameworks is in a good place, though more research on the practical implications of interdependence, and a realistic strategy for its implementation is a pressing need. Though the call for interdependence between congregations around the world has been going out for at least half a century; there is remarkably little interdependence among contemporary ICPs. Perhaps the greatest question for global congregational partnerships today is how to convince socio-economically secure congregations of the necessity of relying on the rest of the Body of Christ to meet their needs.

Additionally, there needs to be greater clarity concerning best practices. Unfortunately, the GCS was unable to make a statistically significant determination about their impact of roughly half of the practices it studied. Without further study, we cannot make a determination about how much impact things like decision making processes, spaces for dialog, prayer, local control of resources, partnership champions, or effective processes for mediation have on the partnerships that employ them. The consensus on partnership certainly agrees that these are important factors in the health of an ICP. If future studies find that to be the case, so much the better. But if they consistently are left out of the findings, perhaps they are not as impactful as we think they are. Future studies should carefully attend to these factors to see whether they should continue to be included in the consensus on partnership.

Beyond the refinement of the consensus model, there are several issues that need to be addressed by missiologists writing about partnership. The most pressing of these is the problem of definition. It is not just that there is no shared definition of "partnership," those of us involved in the

discussion need to come to an agreement on the criteria for selecting a definition. Is mere collaboration on any project sufficient to be deemed a "partnership?" Shall we define it in terms of the presence of certain structures and practices? Should a certain theoretical element (like mutuality or shared calling) be the defining characteristic? Or should a state of affairs stand up to a theological definition in order to be deemed worthy of the name "partnership?" Perhaps the fact that all of these elements are operative in the emerging consensus on partnership is already pointing toward an answer. Maybe the term "partnership" should be reserved for arrangements in which all three of these elements (theological, conceptual, and operational) are present to some degree. And terms like "collaboration," "alliance," and "network" can be reserved for endeavors that fall short in one or more of these areas?

An issue that I raised briefly in Chapter 4 was the practice of some Roman Catholic parishes with priests "on loan" from religious orders leveraging the global reach of those orders to increase the global engagement of the parish. This kind of multi-valent transnationalism is intriguing, especially when the priest is from a majority-world context. Further examination of these arrangements, especially in comparison with more familiar types of ICPs, presents a fascinating new avenue for research.

Chapter 4 also explored the impact that diocesan or district-wide leadership can have on the development of ICPs. Further studies into the dynamics of a top-down approach to establishing ICPs within a denomination would be a great place to focus further research. Studies could explore how power dynamics impact the way partnership is received in the congregation. Do pastors resent being told to do something else, or does the fact that the whole diocese is doing it create a sense of excitement? What impact does the amount of support offered by the diocese have? Are partnerships that are mandated from denominational structures as healthy as ones pursued at the congregation's initiative? Are they healthier? How do changes in diocesan leadership impact ICPs? A more complete understanding of these issues would do much to further our understanding of ICPs.

Along a similar line, given the importance of leadership buy-in and the presence of champions in the congregation for ICPs, it might be helpful to explore how partnerships navigate transitions in congregational leadership. What happens when pastors leave, when new pastors do not share the same missional priorities, or when champions or other highly-engaged participants leave the church? Does it matter why leaders and participants leave? Are there some partnerships that are able to survive these changes, and if so, how do they do it? There are some really important issues here that bear further study.

Finally, the present crisis related to the COVID-19 epidemic presents some major obstacles to ICPs. The ways that sister churches have adjusted their practices in response to shutdowns, as well as the long-term effects this has on the health of the relationship and the way partners communicate and create a sense of belonging are pressing needs for research. What does partnership mean when partners suddenly are not able to visit one another? Do video-calls and emails effectively take the place of face-to-face meetings and short-term mission trips? Will the epidemic be a bump in the road for ICPs, or will it have long-lasting effects on how congregations relate to each other across national borders? These are questions currently crying out for answers. Researchers might also find it useful to examine how churches are leveraging their transnational connections to meet the unique needs and challenges posed by the pandemic.

The last century of research has produced a solid consensus on mission partnership. The next century of research is poised to bring fresh insights into how the elements of that consensus necessitate and reinforce one another, refining our understanding of why partnership in mission is important, what it truly means, and how it ought to be pursued. And it will put an ages-long discourse about missional co-operation into conversation with contemporary contexts whose hyper-connectedness and complex problems cry out for cooperative solutions. The age of partnership has come, but it is just beginning.

Appendix A – GCS Survey Instrument

1. Thank you from the research team at Global Church Partnerships!

This survey is the first of its kind; designed to gain insight into how churches around the globe labor together in God's mission. Your willingness to participate in this study means the world to us and we can't wait to start sharing the results of this pioneering research with you. Here are a few things for you to keep in mind as you begin:

- Privacy matters to us. All of your responses will be completely confidential. Your particular responses do not have any identifying information associated with them and they will not be shared with any other institutions.
- Relationships matter to us. We are doing this because we care about congregational partnerships. But we know some of our questions might be controversial. This project is designed to look at bigpicture trends, not at specific cases. In other words, we are not going to make examples out of anyone's partnerships. Information that may be embarrassing or critical for a person or congregation will not be shared with *anyone*.
- Accuracy matters to us. Because of this, please answer all questions as honestly as you can. The GCS is only as good as the information we get. For this study to have any transformational impact on congregational partnerships, we need to get an accurate picture of what people actually think and do (and not just what they say), and the outcomes that leads to.
- Your time matters to us. We know you're all busy people and we are truly humbled that you would choose to spend your time on this study. Efforts have been made to make this survey as quick and easy as possible. *Try to give yourself about 20 minutes to take this survey.* And thank you so much for helping all of us improve our partnerships!

Thank you so much for your participation in this groundbreaking study!

If you have any problems or questions while taking the survey, email us at:
help@globalchurchpartnerships.org

2. Informed Consent Acknowledgement

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Danny Hunter from Global Church Partnerships and Asbury Theological Seminary. This study seeks to better understand what makes relationships between congregations in different parts of the world lasting and transformative. It is hoped that its findings will help improve congregational partnerships everywhere by finding patterns among the most successful international partnerships.
You are invited because:

○ Your church has a relationship with another congregation in a different country.
○ Leadership of both congregations formally recognize the relationship.
○ The duration of the relationship is at least two-years.
○ You have been chosen to participate on behalf of your congregation.
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete one survey (of about 20 minutes) answering questions about the nature of your church's partnership.

All contact with the research team will be handled through email. Your replies will not include any identifying information and they will not be shared with any other persons or institutions (including your own). When the study is

published, your responses will be part of the aggregate data, but information about you, your congregation, or your partners will not appear.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell Danny Hunter who can be reached at danny.hunter@globalchurchpartnerships.org. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdrawal from the process at any time.

If you have any questions about the research study please contact Danny Hunter at danny.hunter@globalchurchpartnerships.org.

Typing your full name into the box below means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, click the box below. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

* 1. What would you like to do?

   I would like to participate in the study

   I would like to withdraw from the study

2. Please type your full name in the space provided

3. Beginnings

For the next several pages we will be asking you to reflect on your church's journey in partnership.
Each page will deal with a different part of setting up and running a partnership.

If you don't know an answer, just give it your best guess! If you need help at any point, click the "Exit" link above to save your progress and send us an email at: help@globalchurchpartnerships.org

Please let us know how strongly you disagree or agree with the following statements.

1. When we first began, the people who set up the partnership spent a great deal of time together

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

2. Before we tried a large cooperative venture, we worked together on a smaller scale

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Setting up this partnership took

Less than 6 months

6-12 months

1-2 years

More than two years

Prefer not to answer

4. We started this partnership because both congregations shared a vision for what God wanted us to become or accomplish together

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

5. This partnership grew out of existing relationships between people in both congregations

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

4. Partnership's Place in our Church

1. This partnership is an important part of who we are and what we do as a church

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

2. This partnership enables our church to do or become something we could never achieve on our own

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

3. Both partners have the same idea of what this partnership is about

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	

4. I have a clear understanding of what my congregation contributes to this partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

5. I have a clear understanding of what our partner congregation contributes to this partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

6. Our congregation needs our partner's contributions

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

7. Our partner congregation needs our contributions

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

8. Our congregation has integrated our partnership into other ministries of our congregation (kids ministry, small groups, etc.)

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

9. If the partnership stopped today, it would disrupt multiple ministries of our congregation

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

10. There is at least one person who keeps our partnership in front of the church and its leaders at all times

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

11. Our partnership is highly valued by the senior leadership of our congregation

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	

5. Exchange

1. Between our two congregations, one has more money and influence than the other

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

2. If so, efforts have been made to address this disparity

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer or N/A

3. If so, I feel those efforts are adequate

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer or N/A

4. When it comes to sending people and resources, one church does most of the giving and the other does most of the receiving

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

5. Our Church's **leaders** visit our partner church _____ often than their leaders come here   much more   more   as much

    less

   much less

    Prefer not to answer

6. Our church sends _____ **teams** than we receive   many more   more   as many   fewer   many fewer

Prefer not to answer

7. We give _____ **money** than we receive   much more   more   as much

     less

much less

     Prefer not to answer

8. Gifts from our partners come without stipulations

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

9. When teams, money, or goods are exchanged in our partnership, both partners share expectations of what will be done with them

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

10. I am confident that our partners use their money and power in ways that put our interests above theirs

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

6. Connections

1. I know the names of at least three people from our partner congregation and something significant about their lives

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

2. I stay in contact with people from our partner congregation outside of officially organized events

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

3. In what ways to you typically connect?

- Email
- Social Media
- Phone Calls
- Other (please specify)

- Video Conferencing
- Mail
- Face-to-face

4. How often do members from both sides of the partnership meet together?

	Every 1-3 months	Every 3-6 months	Every year	Every two years	Longer than every two years	Prefer not to answer
Formally						
Informally						

5. Whenever we hold a meeting between partners, the amount of time spent interacting informally is

Much shorter than formal interaction	Somewhat shorter than formal interaction	About the same as formal interaction	Prefer not to answer	Somewhat longer than formal interaction	Much longer than formal interaction	interaction formal

6. When we achieve something together, we take time to celebrate it together

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

7. We often have events with our partners just to celebrate our relationship

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

7. Decisions

1. One church makes most of the decisions in this partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

2. Most decisions are arrived at

during formal meetings	informally before meetings	Prefer not to answer

3. Our congregation largely sets the agenda for any **monetary gifts** that come from our partners

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

4. Our congregation largely sets the agenda for any **teams** that come from our partners

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

5. I'm very confident that my church has a voice in any given decision

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

6. I'm very confident that my partner church has a voice in any given decision

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

7. If a decision takes a long time, the delay becomes a problem

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

8. We have set times to discuss issues and make changes

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

9. Whenever we hold a meeting about the partnership, the first thing we do is pray

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

10. We spend a great deal of time in prayer **with** our partners

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

11. We spend a great deal of time in prayer **for** our partners

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

8. Lines of Communication

1. Our church always gets the information it needs from our partners

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

2. The information we get from our partners comes in the format that is most helpful to us

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

3. I am confident in our partners' ability to account for any donations

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

4. We account for money and other resources in a way that is normative in our culture

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

5. We understand how our partners account for money in their culture

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

6. I know the best way to contact whoever I need to in this partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

7. We regularly talk about what works well and what doesn't

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

9. Managing Conflict

1. If something isn't working well in our partnership I know exactly how to proceed

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

2. We have an official policy on how to resolve conflicts in our partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

3. If so, the conflict resolution policy is followed whenever a conflict arises

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer or N/A

4. If so, I am confident that the policy will resolve the conflict fairly

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer or N/A

5. When conflicts arise in the partnership, is there a person or organization that serves as a go-between to help manage the conflict?

Yes

No

Prefer not to answer

10. Mediation

1. Our go-between has our partners' best interests at heart

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

2. Our go-between has our congregation's best interests at heart

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

3. Our go-between

Understands both cultures well

Only understands our culture well

Only understands our partners' culture well

Doesn't understand either culture well

Prefer not to answer

4. Our go-between is

Affiliated with our congregation

Affiliated with their congregation

Affiliated with both congregations

Not affiliated with either congregation

Prefer not to answer

11. Theology

Reflect on the discussions, prayers, sermons, and documents that are used in your partnership. With those in mind, kindly answer the following. If you need to leave fields blank, that's absolutely fine.

1.   Please list *in order of importance* the most significant theological themes that are used when discussing your partnership?

First

Second

Third

Fourth

Fifth

2.   Please list *in order of importance* the most important biblical stories or passages that have shaped your understanding and practice of partnership?

First

Second

Third

Fourth

Fifth

12. Evaluation

This is an opportunity for you to personally reflect on the state of the partnership. Again, please remember that these responses are completely confidential so you can be as honest in your answers as you like; no-one's feelings are going to be hurt. We'd like to know what you think the partnership is doing well and what you think can be improved.

1.   This partnership has very clear goals

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

2.   This partnership accomplishes what it sets out to do

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

3.   This partnership accomplishes many things, but not necessarily what it sets out to do

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

4. Generally speaking, I have good feelings about this partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

5. We are better as a church because we are in this partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

6. I am more excited about this partnership now than when it started

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

7. If we were starting the process all over, I would want to be in a partnership with our current partner

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

8. This partnership has shaped my understanding of what it means to be the Church

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

9. This partnership has given our church a deeper understanding of its place in God's mission

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

10. I have sense of connection to the church in other parts of the world because of this partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

11. Our church is better equipped to serve our own community because of this partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

12. Our church's spiritual life is more vibrant because of this partnership

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree or Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Prefer not to answer

13. Demographics

This information will help us understand how things like denominational tradition or size impact partnerships. If you aren't sure of an answer, just give us your best estimate. It's ok to leave the field blank too.

1. What is your congregation's denominational affiliation?

2. Approximately how many people attend your weekend service(s)?

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