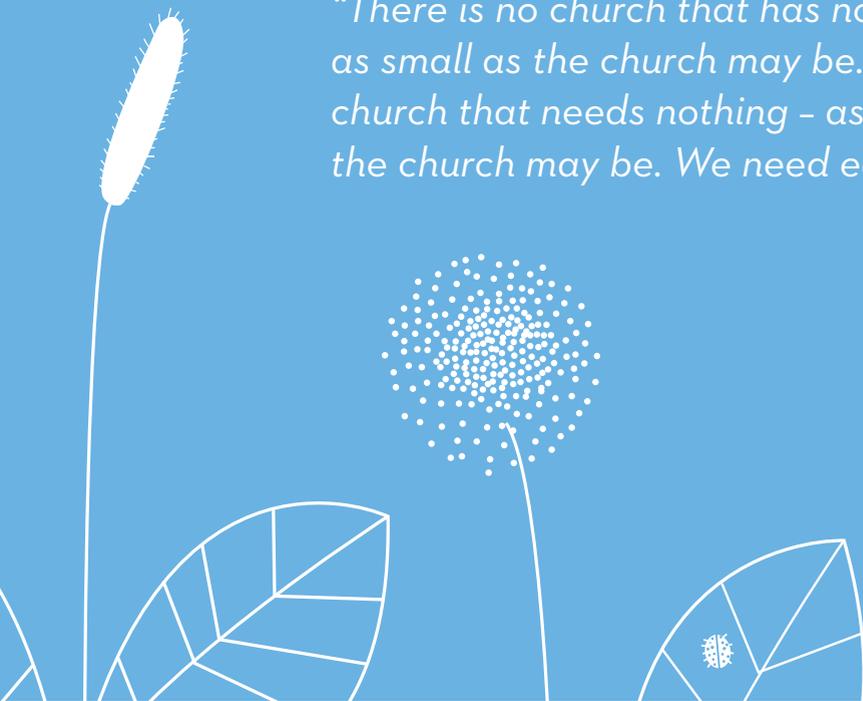


MAKING FRIENDS!

*A handbook on partnership relations
between congregations*





“There is no church that has nothing to give - as small as the church may be. And there is no church that needs nothing - as big and rich as the church may be. We need each other.”

– Bishop Kibira, Tanzania –

Foreword

How can we establish or maintain a meaningful and beneficial contact with a sister parish or congregation? The handbook "Making Friends!" will attempt to provide some ideas for doing that, whether the relationship is with a tiny parish on the other side of the globe or an immigrant church just around the corner.

The authors of the booklet are often asked for advice from parishes that want to link up with a sister congregation. It helps to be able to speak from experience, so the handbook contains a number of practical examples.

A large, well-established and resourceful church in the rich part of the world like the Church of Norway, can do well to remember the words of the Tanzanian bishop Josiah Kibira about how the church is a mutually dependent world-wide community. Kibira touches the very nerve of partnership relations when he says that "There is no church that has nothing to give – as small as the church may be. And there is no church that needs nothing – as big and rich as the church may be."

Making friends invites us to listen to other voices and stories than our own. Good luck with the invitation – and enjoy the result!

Tønsberg and Oslo, December 2008

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Knowing and loving

"To know her is to love her", we say – but we can also turn the phrase around and say, "To love her is to know her."

Loving relationships are important for people – and for churches. We live in a global village, and loving relationships between sister congregations or local communities in different parts of the world can give us insight and knowledge of each other's everyday life.

One universal Church

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Church is described as the Body of Christ. This is a description of the world-wide fellowship that binds churches together throughout the world. "In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (verse 13). Together with churches throughout the world, we are sent to the world as limbs on the same body. There are many different limbs – "many parts, but one body" (verse 20). As part of the world-wide church we have the possibility to link up with sister churches and sister congregations in other parts of the world, make friends with, get to know, share and cooperate with people across cultural boundaries. The encounter with Christian faith practised in ways that differ from practice in our own country can be a valuable experience for people of all ages.

The fact that we belong together at the deepest level provides us with the best motivation for friendship and solidarity. As parts of the Body of Christ, we can never stop caring for one another. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it" (verse 26).

Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJ-HL) defined once what he meant by friendship (Norwegian Church days, Trondheim 1997):

1. Equality (mutual dependence, being willing to learn)
2. Partnership in being sent (an understanding of God's One Mission, that we are sent together)
3. A grass roots basis (based and coordinated locally on both sides)
4. Openness and transparency
5. Sharing resources (that everyone is a recipient, and that this is not just a question of money)
6. A shared vision (that faith is strengthened and deepened)
7. For the whole Church (that the fellowship doesn't just influence a narrow circle).

Mission and partnership: Opening windows

Many parishes in the Church of Norway have mission agreements with one or more mission organisations through the Joint Council for Congregations in Mission (JCCM). Through the mission agreement, the parish supports a project which is often linked to a specific church or congregation in another country. Through such mission agreements, the parish opens a window. The parish is helped to look beyond itself, to become aware of the world-wide church. We discover people with whom we can share our resources, our care and our prayers. This can create both enthusiasm and generosity for mission in the church.

When parishes are linked, the focus is somewhat different. A window involves more than just being able to look out; it brings the landscape into the room. Through the window we can receive impulses and challenges. Mission involves more than just giving. It is just as much a matter of receiving. Having a sister congregation is also a form of mission. Making friends means mutual sharing. The emphasis is not on what the other part doesn't have, but on sharing what both parts have – whether it's a question of faith, prayer, church activities, culture or resources.

It means developing our relationship with one another, having direct contact and two-way communication. Mission projects and linking with a sister congregation are not necessarily a case of "either-or". They can be mutual. A mission project can develop into a partnership relation based on direct and mutual contact. Through a mission agreement, several parishes have contracts for both a mission project and a partnership relation. At the deepest level, both involve supporting each other to fulfill our calling to be a missional church at the place where we are.

Amadou Diallou, a church leader from Mali, says, "We need you. We are not out to get your money or possessions, we need your prayers so that we can persevere in faith and the Kingdom of God can grow among us. We are also happy that we can help you in prayer. It encourages us so much, that we can be joined together in prayer all over the world."

Preparing to make contact

What do you want to do, where and why? A number of questions need to be answered before you start. It's very important to be clear about the purpose of a partnership relation – what motives, aims and expectations you have.

- Think through and discuss bishop Munib Younans definition of friendship (page 7) as the basis of your involvement.
- Why do you want to link with a sister congregation?
- What do you want to achieve?

- What form of contact do you want?
- Which members of your congregation are to be involved?
- Do you want to make friends with a congregation in your own denomination or in another denomination?
- Do you want to involve other denominations in your own country in an ecumenical project?
- Do you want to involve other bodies in your community (local government, schools, the business community)?
- What are you willing to invest in the form of commitment and effort in order to establish and maintain the friendship?

Making contact

How can we find a sister congregation and in which country?

1. Contact representatives for relevant organisations. If you want to link with another country, it would be natural to contact mission organisations, diocesan or denominational offices, church relief organisations or local authorities. These may already have links with equivalent bodies abroad.
2. Resources in the local community. Is there someone in your congregation who has special knowledge or experience from other countries or districts? (Exchange students, missionaries, relief workers, members of the business community...) What nationalities are represented in the congregation or the local community? If a country you have links with has citizens in your local community, these can be a useful resource and may be interested in taking part in your partnership relation.
3. Language. Find out which language you can communicate in – English, Spanish, French, Swahili, Hindi, Urdu e.g.
4. Take into account possibilities for visits – distance and travel costs.



Who should take part in organising the friendship?

The project can be vulnerable if it is dependent on one person who, for example, has met or had contact with someone in another country. Activists are important, but the project must be “owned” by as many people as possible.

It is advisable to appoint a committee for the friendship project, preferably with representatives from different sections of the congregation/community (young people, adults, immigrants). The friendship project should be agreed on by the church council or equivalent body, and a coordinator/contact person should be appointed. Likewise, a committee and coordinator should be appointed by the equivalent body in your sister congregation or community.

Friendship agreement

When the formal link is established, it will be natural for a delegation consisting of 2-3 persons from one of the participating congregations to visit the other, in order to work out a platform for the contact between them. This can eventually be formalised in a friendship agreement. This agreement should be at a general level, without too many specific details of activities (see examples from Lilleborg and Nidaros, appendix 1 and 2)

Maintaining contact

Friendships need to be nurtured and maintained. The committee and the coordinator should play a major part in this (writing a log about the contact, filing documents such as letters, accounts of visits, minutes of meetings etc).

1. Visiting one another

Ensure that different people are given the opportunity to travel. This increases motivation and can be good for the group. Agree to take turns in visiting each other. Think about the damage that air travel does to the environment – and the possibility of buying climate quotas for the trips. Accommodation in homes can be a pleasant experience and increase mutual understanding.

(The economic aspect of exchange visits: membership of the organisation Friendship North/South can be an advantage, see page 30.)

2. Worship and church life.

Church of Norway parishes that have sister congregations often pray for them in their worship every Sunday or on special Sundays, or they incorporate elements from worship in their sister congregation in the service (see the refrain used in Lilleborg church, page 21.) The hymn book “Syng h p” contains songs and prayers from 52 countries. Prayer materials

from many countries are to be found in the World Council of Churches prayer cycle, see <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/prayer-cycle.html>.

It’s also a good idea to share experiences of working with liturgy and worship, Christian education, diakonia and work among children and young people. Bible study groups in the two congregations can study the same Bible passages and share their reflections about them. The congregations can discuss common concerns, for example working for peace and reconciliation, environmental issues, a just distribution of resources, unemployment, gender issues, mission.

During exchange visits, it will be natural for the visitors to participate actively in worship (prayers, preaching, greetings, songs etc). Remember to provide translation facilities.

3. Cultural exchange

Exhibitions of art, children’s drawings, traditional tools, garments, food etc from the sister congregation. Exchange of stories of everyday life. Exchange of resource persons (choirs, church musicians, local artists, ministers, sports teams). Make recordings of the church’s children’s choir, youth choir, adult choir – use your imagination!

4. Gifts

Take care to preserve the mutual and equal nature of the friendship. The following story from Kjell Nordstokke, *Verdensvid tjeneste* (Verbum 1994) illustrates this:

The gift that was never given

Some time ago, a church in England linked up with a sister congregation in Sudan in Africa. The English congregation wanted to help their African friends, so they wrote and asked if there was anything they could raise money for. After a while the answer came: the catechist needed a bicycle. It took him a long time to walk from village to village, so with a bicycle he could save a lot of time. The congregation in Sudan didn’t have the economic resources to buy a bicycle. At the same time, the Africans wanted to know if there was anything the Europeans needed, so that they could give a gift in return. A letter soon arrived in Africa, saying that the money was raised so that the catechist could get his bicycle. Concerning the gift in return, the church in England could not accept anything. The congregation had more money than they needed, and there were undoubtedly many causes that the Sudanese could spend their time and money on. So the English congregation politely declined to receive anything from them. A new letter arrived soon from Sudan, saying that the money for the bicycle should not be sent.

See also page 15.

5. Contact other congregations with friendship agreements for cooperation and advice.

6. What if things go wrong?

In all human relationships, conflicts of interest, misunderstandings, disagreements etc can arise. This is not uncommon when different cultures meet. The conflicts can be between congregations in different countries, or internally within the friendship group or the local community. The worst that can happen is that the conflicts cause the whole friendship agreement to fail, so it's important to act before things go so far. Consider whether you can turn the conflict around, from being a problem to being an opportunity. You could discuss the matter with a third party who can give advice.

"If you want to understand what a man thinks, listen to what he says."

– Goethe –

Cultural differences can also be the reason for conflicts. Read the passage on page 15 about "crossing the cultural divide" – and discuss how it can be possible to avoid or tackle such dangers of conflict.

«I am not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of rights!»

– Desmond Tutu –

Political conflicts can also be an aspect of friendship between congregations. Many congregations in troubled parts of the world have said that knowing that they have friends in Norway who are aware of their situation has made their daily life a little less unbearable.

Check list for sister congregations

- ✓ Specify your criteria, motives and expectations before making contact.
- ✓ Make use of both established organisations and personal contacts.
- ✓ Appoint a contact person, in order to ensure continuity.
- ✓ Appoint or elect a friendship committee. Be realistic when choosing a sister congregation.
- ✓ Take linguistic and economic consequences into account.
- ✓ Make a formal decision in the church council or equivalent body.
- ✓ Give priority to personal encounters between members.
- ✓ Before an exchange visit: check visa, vaccination, insurance and other requirements.
- ✓ Documentation by pictures is good, but be considerate when taking photographs.
- ✓ Be aware of your role as "ambassadors" when travelling abroad. You are representatives for your church.
- ✓ Remember the need to inform. Write about your friendship contacts in your church magazine, your church website and the local newspaper.

- ✓ Find out whether you can apply for financial support for partnership relations and/or information about other countries. (In Norway this is possible through Friendship North/south and the Church of Norway Development Education Service respectively.)
- ✓ Channel grants to projects and gifts of money through established organisations, so that money is not the direct link between two sister congregations.
- ✓ Be on the alert for new possibilities for extending the relationship.

Some pitfalls in partnership relations

Wealth and poverty

For Norwegians – and others from wealthy parts of the world – the encounter with poverty can be problematic. We have learned that we should share our wealth, and when we meet people who live under more difficult conditions than we do, we want to do something specific to help them with things that we think they lack (even when they don't ask). To simply send money is not so simple! A relationship where we always give and they always receive is not a friendship based on equality and reciprocity.

In some cases it will be perceived as offensive and impolite if visitors from an economically rich country offer to give their hosts money. Gifts of money can also cause inequality and conflicts in the local community, even though the rich visitor had only good intentions. Avoid this! A good rule is to channel gifts of money through missionary organisations or other organisations or institutions that have close contact with and knowledge of the local culture.

In partnership relations it's important to emphasise that wealth is not just a matter of money. The cultural wealth that can be found in many countries – songs, music, visual arts, living worship – can be inspiring and enriching for people from the North to experience and to accept as a gift.

Great expectations

Some parishes that started a partnership relationship soon became disappointed because their sister congregation didn't respond as often as they had expected. Be realistic! You may not receive replies to letters and e-mails immediately. Cultures differ, and so do resources. For some, the problem can simply be that it's difficult to buy stamps at the local post office, or that people are hesitant to write in English in case they make a fool of themselves by getting the grammar wrong. That's why it's important to be realistic about expectations to each other and to be able to talk about it.

Receiving and showing hospitality

In many cultures hospitality is very important. Many people pride themselves in making their guests feel at home. They do this by arranging private accommodation and letting the guests

sleep in the best beds in the house and eat the best food. The guests should express their gratitude, both out of politeness and because this provides a good opportunity to get to know their hosts and their hosts' culture and everyday life. Should the guests offer to pay? For Norwegians this would seem natural, but in some other cultures it would be regarded as impolite to offer to pay. This should be clarified beforehand. In some cases to give generously in the offering in church would be a good way to repay the hosts' generosity. It might also be possible (via an intermediary) to offer to give the housewife money for the food.

Receiving guests in Norway can also be a dilemma. Visitors to Norway will expect their hosts to show the same hospitality as is normal in their own culture. To accommodate guests in the best hotel in town is not always the best way to show hospitality. Private accommodation should be arranged as far as possible. This applies especially when the visitors come from collective cultures – cultures where fellowship in the family or local community is valued higher than an individualistic way of life.

Crossing the culture gap

Getting to know people from another culture is exhilarating. But the cultural differences can be problematic and can cause irritation and misunderstandings. Some of these can be avoided if you are aware of the differences beforehand. One good advice in partnership relationships is therefore to try to learn about the culture and social conventions in the country you have contact with. This applies to all forms of communication, but especially when visiting one another. Use the local library; invite a missionary or a migrant from the other country to share their experiences.

To be aware of our own culture – why we do things the way we do – is also important. In the encounter with other cultures, we learn to see our own culture with other people's eyes. Awareness in the following areas is especially important:

Time

Different cultures experience time in different ways. In the West, we think of time as a scarce resource that we must use in a responsible manner. Punctuality is important. Other cultures can have a completely different concept of time. Perhaps our attitude to time seems meaningless, disrespectful and undignified. There would be a clash of cultures with an African who discovers that the time for the appointment was not just approximate – and that the bus left on time and not when it was full.

"You have the clock, we have time", a church leader from Madagascar said to his impatient Norwegian colleague.

Food and politeness

In Norway we learn that it is polite to say thank you for a meal. In for example India, this is

directly impolite, since it implies that the host didn't provide the food voluntarily. When we entertain visitors in Norway, we bring out good food. The same applies in countries where Norwegians are guests. Not to eat, or at least not to taste the food we are offered, can be regarded as an insult, or as a sign that we are ungrateful; only sickness or religious reasons are acceptable excuses. It's a good idea to have discussed this beforehand. That Nordic visitors need their food to be well cooked (because of the difference in prevalent bacteria) will often be understood and accepted.

Receiving visitors

A parish received exchange visitors from Thailand. They were accommodated in a flat that the parish rented for them. The idea was that they would have some privacy and be able to cook for themselves. The intentions were good, but the guests didn't appreciate it. They came from a collective culture, so they felt isolated and regarded their hosts as inhospitable. It would have been better to offer them private accommodation. Advice: consider private accommodation.

Gifts

In most cultures, exchanging gifts strengthens friendship. Not to accept a gift can be perceived as an insult. In Sri Lanka it's impolite to open a gift while others are watching, while in other cultures it's impolite not to do so. Be cautious: some gifts are humiliating – ballpoint pens from the local bank, balloons and second-hand clothing are not always the best choice. Be simple: don't play Santa Claus! Symbolic gifts are common. Examples are a Bible, a hymn book, pictures from your home country, something characteristic for your culture, recordings of the church choir, decorations for the church.





Examples of partnership relations

Here are a number of examples of different kinds of partnership relations and cultural contact. These are samples rather than a complete or representative list of contacts between North and South. But we hope that they can provide inspiration and background information for congregations that have established partnership relations as well as for those who are contemplating doing so.

Nøtterøy parish, Tunsberg - Isla del Valle, Ecuador

Since 2003 the parishes on Nøtterøy have had an agreement with the Norwegian Mission Alliance via JCCM. They raise money for the Mission Alliance's diaconal projects (such as microcredit, literacy, school buildings, welding courses) in the slums of Guayaquil. As a spinoff from this agreement they have established a partnership relation with one of the congregations where the Mission Alliance works, Isla del Valle. One of the goals for this relationship is summed up thus in the partnership agreement: "That the congregations, on Nøtterøy and on Isla del Valle, are encouraged to think through what it means to be a living, Christian church in their daily life. Not far away, but near at hand. Not self-centred, but with solidarity in all phases of life."

Several delegations from Nøtterøy have visited Guayaquil, and in 2005 the parish welcomed visitors from their sister congregation. The parish priest Christopher Woie wrote this in the parish magazine: "What did Miguel and Jorge think, when they saw the wealth on Nøtterøy? When they saw the affluence? Huge houses with enough room for many people, but with only a few living there! In the slums many people live in a few square meters. They didn't criticize us, just said it in a gentle way: 'You have so much to be grateful for. In Ecuador we have a saying: born with bread under your arms. You have enough food. You can go to bed satisfied and get up satisfied the next morning.'

- Sister congregation. Perhaps our friends there can give us more than we give them. And the food for thought that they give us can be more important than the money that we give to the church or school in the slums.
- They make us realize that we belong together, that we are brothers and sisters. We can share our joys, but also our sorrows – our pain, our failures, the times we fall short as the church in face of the challenges we meet. They pray for us. They – our friends in the slums, far away yet near to us. Because prayer means nearness. God's nearness. It will soon be Ad-

vent and Christmas. In the church on Isla del Valle, the 100 cheerful Sunday school children will rejoice because Jesus was born. Born for them in the slums, for us. Jesus became poor to make them rich, to make us rich. It might be – in the final analysis – that we are equally rich after all. When life's account is closed, we know perfectly well: you can't take it with you when you go. That life from God, faith in God, hope in God are our most important, most precious possessions. Because Jesus, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us – in Isla del Valle and Nøtterøy.”

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Sauda – San Juan del Sur Nicaragua community partnership

Partnership relations between Sauda and San Juan del Sur (SJdS) in Nicaragua have existed for 20 years (1988-2008). A large number of groups in the local community are involved: Sauda parish (Church of Norway), three junior schools as well as the middle school and sixth form college, two kindergartens, Sauda local authority, Sauda Union of Teachers, Sauda Nurses' Association, ELKEM/Statkraft, Save the Children, political parties, various clubs and societies. Approximately 150 people have their wages docked to contribute.

Ståle Pedersen, primus motor of the project and for many years leader of the partnership committee, writes, “There's been a lot of activity, many visits and return visits, many cultural events in both communities, and many friendships have been established.”

“We have had many projects going. Without them the partnership would have been dead and buried years ago. We've arranged solidarity evenings for school classes, parents and the kindergartens. The proceeds are sent to our sister school, sister kindergarten, public health sector etc. If we had only sent drawings, letters and photos, the process would have seized up long ago – partly because the schools and kindergarten in SJdS sometimes don't have paper and writing materials.

“And it's obvious for most people – especially children – that friends help one another when necessary. These projects have meant a lot in SJdS. School and kindergarten buildings have been built, other buildings have been renovated, they have provided educational materials, sanitary installations, running water and toilets, school meals, wells, spectacles and eyesight tests, a health centre and contributions to the health sector, an ambulance and running costs for it (in cooperation with twin towns in the USA, Germany and Spain), a mother and child project and a nutrition project, books for the library, cultural activities – concerts, drama, dance etc.

“When it comes to culture exchange, the emphasis has been on music, drama and the visual arts. In 1997 a choir from Sauda with more than 40 members toured Nicaragua with the peasant mass Misa Campesina (which had been translated into Norwegian in 1989), accompanied by both local and Norwegian musicians. The Nicaraguan musicians made return visits year after year, the latest being in 2008 to celebrate the 20th anniversary. At the service on 31st August, Misa Campesina was performed by a local choir, and Katia Cardenal and her band from Nicaragua took part in the liturgy along with dancers from the sister congregation.

Ecumenical partnership service

“On 14th October 2007 we held a partnership service- for the fifth year running. This is an event that we are happy to take part in. It's important to be able to demonstrate that irrespective of confession or denomination, whether we are believers, doubters or unbelievers, independent of colour, gender or ethnicity, there are basic values that we can affirm – friendship, love for our neighbours, caring, solidarity, sharing.”

In general

“Partnership has meant a lot for us. It has generated strong commitment in the whole community, children have learnt that not everybody lives under the same conditions as we do in Norway and they have developed an attitude of caring and sharing. Hopefully, this will help to prevent racism and xenophobia. And we have been enriched by fantastic experiences of culture from Nicaragua and SJdS.”

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For more information see www.saudakommune.no

Bugården, Sandefjord – El Alto, Bolivia

An example of how a congregation established a partnership relation

For Bugården parish, the partnership began when they needed to decide on a new mission agreement for the congregation. Was it possible to combine a traditional mission project that they raised money for with a relation to a sister congregation? A congregation they could exchange visits with and have contact with through prayer? They contacted the diocesan consultant for congregation in mission, who put them in touch with the Mission Alliance. From among the projects the Mission Alliance could offer them, they chose training of youth leaders in El Alto, Bolivia. In El Alto the Mission Alliance cooperates with 13 congregations on various diaconal projects, and they accepted the task of investigating whether one of these congregations would be willing to link up with Bugården. Today, the Presbyterian congregation Forteleza in La Paz and Bugården are sister congregations. They pray for each other, and a group from Bugården has already visited Bolivia.

Music, songs and prayers from Bolivia are used in services in Bugården. The encounter with a down-to-earth faith in the poverty-stricken El Alto has been a real challenge to the Norwegian congregation. A partnership relation has been established, and both parties feel that it is meaningful and enriching. This is solidarity in action through partnership. It can be a challenge for Norwegians to encounter materially poor congregations in the South or East. We want to do something to help them. We often see this from the benefactor's point of view. It isn't easy to be on the receiving end. Fortaleza congregation doesn't receive any financial help from Bugården – that would have spoiled the reciprocal partnership relation. Through supporting the Mission Alliance's project, from which Fortaleza also benefits, Bugården helps indirectly.

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Lilleborg parish, Oslo – Banat Local Church, Sudan

October 2008 was a month of celebrations for the congregation in Lilleborg. They celebrated the tenth anniversary of their partnership relation with Banat Local Church in Sudan. In 1997 Lilleborg congregation got to know The Revd David U. Demey who was visiting Norway on a pastoral exchange scheme organised by The Christian Council of Norway. He was the minister of a Baptist church which gathered refugees from Southern Sudan in Banat Local Church, Khartoum (in the Muslim Northern Sudan). In the course of a year, a friendship agreement was drawn up (see appendix 1). "In this way a partnership that transcended continents, cultures and confessions was formed", says parish priest Signe Fyhn, who has taken part in the partnership throughout the ten years.

The partnership between the two congregations is based on mutual contact, intercession, cultural exchange and exchange of information. This makes it vulnerable to local changes and requires stable participants on both sides (ministers, church council, volunteer workers). The visits both ways have played an important role in deepening and strengthening contact. These visits have been made possible by external financing of cultural activities involving the two congregations (for example from Friendship North/South and Norwegian Church Aid, see page 30).

The refugees in the North must now decide whether to return to the South after the peace treaty in Sudan. Many of the church members have returned and are now rebuilding their home district, Mabaan, after many years of war. The Revd David Demey is a key person in

this rehabilitation phase, both as leader of the congregation and as advisor to the regional governor of Mabaan.

In Lilleborg, the tenth anniversary has been celebrated by open meetings, services and a cultural festival, as well as by the publication of an informative booklet with stories, interviews etc from Mabaan in Southern Sudan. But also the congregation's daily life and liturgy is affected by contact with Sudan. In addition to intercessions for their sister congregation every Sunday, a prayer verse with a tune from Banat Local Church is often sung:



God our Maker, hear our prayer
Show us Jesus, your Servant and Son.
Come Holy Spirit, give us new hope
Strengthen our faith in all the good you have done.

Norwegian words and arrangement: Gro Marie Woldseth and Gro Bergrabb, English words: Ivan Chetwynd.

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Laksi, Bangkok – Bærland, Stavanger

A new Norwegian congregation has been founded as a result of a partnership with Laksi congregation in Bangkok. It all began with a partnership project between Stavanger diocese and the Norwegian Mission Society in 2001. A missionary who had served in Laksi returned home and used his experience to found a new congregation within an already existing parish, Ålgård. Today, it's possible to recognise a number of features from Laksi in Bærland congregation, and Bærland sends impulses back to the congregation in Bangkok.

This is an example of what can happen when we dare to let ourselves be influenced
This places our relation to sister congregations in an interesting perspective in connection with the changes that are taking place today in the Church of Norway: liturgical reform, programmes for church growth etc. Partnership relations are no longer just an extra thing to do, but something that can affect and develop the way we are a church.

Specifically, Bærland has adopted the following elements from Laksi:

- An active use of ministries among members based on spiritual gifts/personal resources (Laksi has a list consisting of 40-50 tasks which people can volunteer to work with, on the basis of interest or personal resources)
- A team of volunteers that leads worship
- The importance of meeting both in small groups and in larger gatherings
- Tithing (if tithes are not paid, the leader or minister receives no salary)
- Involvement of members in worship (a youth band and singers instead of an organ)
- An emphasis on establishing networks rather than on activities
- Table fellowship (dinner) after worship

In addition to the direct transfer of ideas that the missionary has implemented, there have been reciprocal visits. Members of the steering committee from Bærland have visited Thailand. A comprehensive schedule introduced them to much of the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT). One of the main purposes was to strengthen ties between Laksi and Bærland also among young people. The participants have kept in touch afterwards by e-mail. Bærland and Laksi have also taken part in youth exchanges through "Team Network" (Hald International Centre) and the English Centre in Laksi. This increases the possibilities for meaningful contact that can result in practical cooperation in church work.

Thirteen members from Laksi made a return visit to Bærland.

- They took part in cell/bible study groups, fellowship meals, church outings and worship.
- They participated with preaching, dance and testimonies (sharing their faith).
- They met a number of their fellow countrymen who otherwise have no contact with the church in Norway.
- The hosts found this "refreshing and out of the ordinary".

For more information and contact:

Oddbjørn Stangeland, minister in Bærland and member of the staff of the Centre for Church Growth at the School of Mission and Theology.
E-mail: bpresten@frisurf.no

Knut Hallen, Executive Coordinator, JCCM
E-mail: kha@kirken.no



Eritrea – a country with many partnership relations in Norway

Here are examples of different forms of partnership relations with the same country.

Partnership Trondheim – Keren

The partnership between Trondheim and Keren in Eritrea has existed since 1992. It was established with help from Norwegian Church Aid which has an office in Asmara and constantly enables visits to and from Norway. In Trondheim, the local council, parishes, Sør-Trøndelag University College, primary and secondary schools, the school for the deaf, St Olav's Hospital and the Eritrean Society are all involved.

Eritreans in Trondheim – a resource for the project

In the "Partnership Trondheim-Keren", Eritreans have been members of the committee and taken part in the project from the beginning. They are a resource both in connection with culture and language. They act as consultants, bridge-builders and translators. They can be interpreters when that is necessary – also in "translating" oddities in Norwegian culture for visitors from Eritrea.

The Eritreans in Trondheim also act as ambassadors for their country and for the partnership project in the local community, for example when schools have projects or campaigns. This can bring the far-away foreign country nearer to the children – and immigrants can perhaps be shown more respect after meeting children in this way. "The Eritreans have given those of us who sit in the partnership committee a deep appreciation – and sometimes a literal taste! – of their culture, for example by inviting us to parties with food and dancing, and simply by becoming our friends", committee leader Jon Smidt says.

See www.trondheim-keren.org

Contact:

Jon Smidt
E-mail: jon.smidt@alt.hist.no

Read the book: *Let the Camel Smile – friendship and challenges in Eritrea*. Marte Taylor Bye and Erik Dahl (ed.). Norwegian edition published by Drømsmia forlag in cooperation with Partnership Trondheim-Keren, 2007.

Bjørgvin diocese - ECE *(The Evangelical Church in Eritrea)*

The first partnership agreement between Bjørgvin diocese and ECE was established in 1997 for a four year period. For the latest, see appendix 3. A study guide in Norwegian published in 2000 for use in the diocese, "Søsterkyrkja vår i Eritrea" ("Our Sister Church in Eritrea") contains a lot of information about Eritrea and educational and diaconal programmes in ECE (HIV and aids projects, school for the deaf, theological seminary etc).

In the newest partnership agreement, religious education is a main focus

"In this four year period we will have a common focus on Christian education. Initiatives connected with the agreement must be discussed between the parties. We will pray for each other and we will try to extend our knowledge of each other, involving various groups in our churches in the friendship cooperation. First and foremost we will exchange human resources. Our aim, however, shall not be to establish big and expensive projects."

In Bjørgvin, it is the diocesan synod rather than local parishes that is responsible for maintaining the partnership agreement and joint projects. However, parishes are invited to participate, for example through intercession and Bible study (see appendix 4).

Contact:

International committee in Bjørgvin Diocese,
Diocesan director Helge Taranrød
E-mail: ht@kyrkja.no
www.kirken.no/bjorgvin

Other relations with Eritrea

Vennsapsgruppa Kragerø-Adi Tekelezan

Contact: Gretha Lande

E-mail gretha.lande@kragero.kommune.no

Vennskap Stavanger-Massawa

Contact: Eldbjørg Sanni

E-mail elbjorg.sanni@svithun.no

Vennskap Grong-Areza

Contact: Marvin Hansen

Telephone +47 743 31 138



Partnerships with Norway

Norwegian dioceses and parishes are already involved in many partnership relations that others can participate in.

National partnership relations in the Church of Norway

The Church of Norway has established partnership agreements with

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brazil (IECLB, Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil). 2003-2011

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (ELCSA). From November 2005

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). From 2001. Responsibility: Borg Diocese.

Contact:

Sven Oppegaard
E-mail: sven.oppegaard@kirken.no

The dioceses

have different partnership relations throughout the world. See the map in appendix 7. The dioceses receive "sister church funds" from the Norwegian State Church Endowment Fund (OVF) every third year in accordance with a rota.

Agder/Telemark
www.kirken.no/agder

has recently concluded an agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (EELC, Église Évangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun).

Bjørgvin
www.kirken.no/bjorgvin

Religious education: partnership agreement with the Evangelical Church in Eritrea (ECE) – see appendix 3.

Borg
www.kirken.no/borg

Peace and reconciliation: Contact with churches in Romania and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) www.holyland-lutherans.org – in cooperation with the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations.

Hamar
www.kirken.no/hamar

Exchange of youth workers and other church workers: Cooperation with the Lutheran Church in Nicaragua, "Fe Y Esperanza" and Centro Interclesial de Studios Teologicos Y Sociales (CIEETS) – in cooperation with Norwegian Church Aid. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand. Possible partnership agreement between Hamar diocese and Central Diocese, ELCSA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa).

Møre
www.kirken.no/more

Exchange and diakonia: The Northern District has contact with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary. The diocese also has contact with Newcastle diocese in the Church of England.

Nidaros
www.kirken.no/nidaros

Church life – sister churches. Agreement signed with the Western Synod of Mekane Yesu Church in Ethiopia (EECMY). Other contacts: Härnösand diocese in the Church of Sweden (border gatherings, mid- Scandinavian meetings, retreats, contacts related to Southern Sami church life). Lappo diocese in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland (mid-Scandinavian meetings).

Nord- og Sør-Hålogaland
www.kirken.no/nord-haalogaland and www.kirken.no/sor-haalogaland

Cooperation Council of the Christian Churches in the Barents Region (SKKB, Samarbeidet kristne kirker i Barentsregionen) consists of Christian churches in Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, Northern Finland and North-west Russia.

Nord-Hålogaland
www.kirken.no/nord-haalogaland

Informal contact with Russia. Apart from SKKB there are no official partnership relations at diocesan or rectory level. Some parishes have contact with Russia and are involved in partnership relations and diaconal projects there.

Sør-Hålogaland
www.kirken.no/sor-haalogaland

Ended an agreement with the Russian Orthodox Church in St Petersburg (the Orthodox Academy) after ten years. SKKB: see above.

Oslo
www.kirken.no/oslo

South Eastern Diocese of ELCSA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa). Partnership agreement signed between Ullern congregation and an ELCSA congregation in Durban; participation in youth exchange under the Peace Corps programme, together with Ullern area.

Stavanger
www.kirken.no/stavanger

Congregation and mission: Partnership agreement with Cape Orange Diocese, South Africa (Stavanger Diocese, Stavanger region of the Norwegian Mission Society and Norwegian Church Aid). Church of England, Carlisle Diocese.

Tunsberg
www.kirken.no/tunsberg

Ecumenical: Tunsberg Diocese has a partnership relation with Nakada and Qus Diocese of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt (an assignment from the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations). As part of the diocese' relation to the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, Drammen Rectory has had contact with E-Khema Diocese in Cairo. Cooperation/partnership relation with Strängnäs Diocese, Church of Sweden. Pastoral training in cooperation with the Institute of Pastoral Care & Counseling, Modum, St Luke's Foundation, Sweden. Informal relations with the Lutheran Church in Lithuania.

Joint Council for Congregations in Mission (JCCM)

Through JCCM about 900 of Norway's 1300 congregations have signed mission agreements. The six mission organisations in the JCCM community (see below) work regularly in partnership with local churches all over the world. Many of them will be able to help others establish partnership relations. To extend a mission agreement into a partnership relation connected to one of these organisations can provide a high degree of nearness. The mission organisations have good and long-term experience in cooperation with different churches. They often have people who are familiar with both the local culture in which the sister congregation lives and the situation in Norway.

In cooperation with local churches all over the world, these six mission organisations work on

- church growth and church development
- diakonia
- leadership training
- peace and reconciliation
- dialogue between religions.

The JCCM organisations represent considerable competence in intercultural communication and are part of an extensive network of individuals and churches. Make use of the contact your congregation may already have through a mission agreement. If you do not have a mission agreement, contact one of the JCCM organisations or the consultant on congregations in mission your diocese for help. They are familiar with local conditions and can give advice on congregations that would be suitable partners for you.

Member organisations in JCCM:

Areopagos:
www.areopagos.org
areopagos@areopagos.org,
Tel. +47 23 33 17 00

The Norwegian Church
Ministry to Israel:
www.israelsmisjonen.no
post@israelsmisjonen.no
Tel. +47 22 98 85 00

The Norwegian Mission
Society:
www.nms.no
post@nms.no
Tel. +47 51 51 61 61

The Norwegian Mission
Alliance:
www.misjonsalliansen.no
info@misjonsalliansen.no
Tel. +47 22 94 26 00

Normisjon:
www.normisjon.no
normisjon@normisjon.no
Tel. +47 23 30 10 00

The Norwegian Himal-
Asian Mission:
www.tibetmisjonen.org
post@tibetmisjonen.no
Tel. +47 22 76 90 10

The National Council:
www.kirken.no/english
www.menighetogmisjon.no
knut.hallen@kirken.no
Tel. +47 23 08 12 00

Pastoral Exchange

The Christian Council of Norway

The Christian Council of Norway is one of the organisers of pastoral conferences in the Great Lakes area of Central Africa, and previously also in Sudan. The pastoral conferences are an important meeting place for national Christian councils in Rwanda, Burundi, The Democratic Republic of Congo and Norway. The aim of the conferences is to strengthen the churches' participation in solving conflicts and establishing peace through joint ecumenical action. The meetings between church leaders from these countries have been and can be the beginning of partnership relations between congregations or rural deaneries/dioceses.

Norwegian Association of Clergy and JCCM

Pastoral Exchange North-South is a joint project between the Church of Norway, the Norwegian Association of Clergy and JCCM. Two Norwegian ministers visit two ministers in the South and vice versa to exchange experiences of what it means to be a minister in different situations.

The aim is

- to develop a local church engaged in mission and service
- to deepen their understanding of their own congregation as part of the world-wide church

- to develop a pastoral identity characterised by solidarity and a global perspective
- to inspire participants to communicate with different religious groups

This is an opportunity to enrich and deepen a partnership relation that has already been established or to start a new one. Ministers in the Church of Norway can apply to take part in specific projects that are announced through Inter Collegas. See www.kirken.no.

The Norwegian Association of Clergy also has a solidarity project with Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia via the Norwegian Mission Society. See www.prest.no

Contact organisations and websites

Friendship North/South

Friendship North/South is a network for partnership relations and offers various tools for exchange and cooperation.

Advice -Arranging contact, establishing partnership relations, advice to groups in the South and the North.

Meeting places -Arranging courses, conferences, seminars, interactive websites.

PR -Equipment, pictures, videos, stands, posters.

The network's records -Passing on good examples, ideas and experience from partnership relations. The archives contain examples of statutes, travel regulations, PR strategies, newspaper cuttings etc.

Administrator of funds that partnership groups can apply for to finance their activities.

Agitator over for political and administrative authorities, pressing for appreciation of the values of partnership relations and for funding of the network.

A specialist environment with resources and methods for initiating dialogues and dealing with problems that may arise.

Read more on: http://www.vennskap.no/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1121&Itemid=1212
Congregations are encouraged to become members of Friendship North/South in order to have access to these possibilities.

The Church of Norway Development Education Service (KUI)

The Church of Norway Development Education Service aims to create conditions for more congregations to experience the inspiration that partnership relations provide.

KUI publishes information on its website, www.kui.no.

KUI publishes material that can inform and enlighten – for example the booklet AMISTAD – vennskapskonfirmanter (2000).

KUI gathers and passes on impulses from worship all over the world – liturgies, songs, music, art works from the universal church – see for example “Syng Håp” (Sing Hope) – songbook and cd. See KUI's website and liturgy database.

KUI cooperates in organising national and regional partnership conferences – for example in Hamar 1998 and 2005, Ålesund 2007, Agder og Telemark 2009.

Contact KUI if you have questions about partnership relations.

Contact:

Estrid Hessellund
Address: Den norske kirkes nord/sør-informasjon (KUI)
Postbox 799 Sentrum, N-0106 Oslo.
Tel. +47 23 08 12 76
Mobile: +47 47 06 98 78
E-mail: estrid.hessellund@kirken.no

Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations (MKR)

The Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations has an extensive network of contacts throughout the world via the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, regional councils of churches, the Porvoo Community (Lutheran and Anglican churches in Europe). This means that parishes in the Church of Norway have the opportunity to establish partnership relations with other Lutheran congregations and with congregations belonging to other denominations (Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist etc).

Contact:

Beate Fagerli
E-mail: beate.fagerli@kirken.no
Sven Oppegaard
E-mail: sven.oppegaard@kirken.no
Address: Postbox 799 Sentrum, N-0106 Oslo
Tel. +47 23 08 12 00

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA/KN)

Through its partners in 60 countries, Norwegian Church Aid is involved in catastrophe relief, long-term development and political lobbying on behalf of the churches in Norway.



Many partnership relations have been born with NCA as midwife. NCA was a pioneer in this area and in the 1990s published a handbook on partnership and cultural exchange, "Mellom Toten og Timbuktu" (Between Toten and Timbuktu). NCA was also one of the midwives when Friendship North/South came into the world (see above).

Resource persons from sister congregations make an active contribution to NCA every year, through lectures, fund raising, observation of World Aids Day 1st December or political campaigns. NCA can arrange new partnership relations. NCA has long experience in arranging for secure support to projects, also to larger scale projects. NCA discourages congregations from giving direct support to projects.

Contact:

Einar Tjelle

E-mail: etj@nca.no

Asle Kristiansen

E-mail: akr@nca.no

Address: Postbox 7100 St Olavs Plass, N-0130 Oslo

Tel. +47 22 09 27 00

See www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en

Links to other countries

Danmark: www.venskabsmenighed.dk

This website of The Council on International Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark contains inspiration, examples and ideas for partnership relations in Danish. For general information in English, see <http://www.interchurch.dk/mkreg>.

Appendixes:

Appendix 1: Example of a friendship agreement Lilleborg – Sudan

Appendix 2: Example of a friendship agreement Nidaros Diocese – Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Appendix 3: Example of a friendship agreement Bjørgvin Diocese – Evangelical Church of Eritrea

Appendix 4: Example of a study guide for congregations (Bjørgvin – Eritrea).

Appendix 5: A session on friendship for 14-15 year olds and other groups within a congregation

Appendix 6: Example of a greeting to parishes in Stavanger Diocese in connection with World Aids Day.

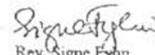
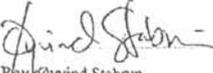
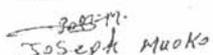
Map over partnership relations involving dioceses in the Church of Norway.

Friendship agreement between Sudan Interior Church, Banat Local Church and Church of Norway, Lilleborg Church.

Banat Local Church and Lilleborg Church have agreed on having a friendship exchange between the two congregations. The intention of this agreement is to develop a close friendship between the two congregations, a friendship based on personal contact between individuals. The friendship is based on a mutual understanding between the two congregations and their contexts. One of the main purposes for this agreement is to get an understanding that we belong to one universal Christian Church and that this one Church unites us as human beings in spite of the cultural differences between our two countries and congregations. The agreement is therefore dealing with an exchange between the following aspects:

1. Information about the political and social situation in the two countries and cities. An exchange of information concerning the everyday life of individuals, activities within the two parishes and challenges that the congregations are facing in their work.
2. An exchange of joyful news or reports concerning individuals and the congregations.
3. Reports of local problems and challenges within the two congregations. The intention of this exchange of information is to be able to get a deeper understanding of each other's situation.
4. Both congregations will pray for the other congregation and the parish members based on the information exchange. It is important that the intercession takes place during the worship services at least twice a month.
5. An exchange of theological and ecclesial thoughts/reflections between the two congregations.
6. It would be fortunate that an exchange of visits takes place.

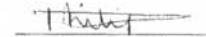
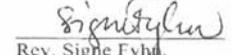
The information exchange will be done through letters, faxes, videos, pictures, music, services taped on cassettes etc. As we see it friendship is not based on financial support, that is why this is not a part of the agreement. This does not mean, however, that financial support can not take place in a given situation.

 Rev. Signe Fyhn Rector	 Anne Brit Bjork Chairperson of Lilleborg parish council	 Rev. Øyvind Stabrun Curate
 Rev. David U. Demey Rector	 Chairperson of Banat parish council	 Joseph Muoko Elder of Banat Local Church

Renewal and confirmation of the friendship agreement between Banat Local Church (BLC) and Lilleborg congregation.

Since the signing of the friendship agreement in October 1998, there has been 4 exchange-visits between the two congregations. In October 1999 a delegation from Lilleborg visited BLC. In May 2000 a delegation from BLC visited Lilleborg. In October 2003 a delegation from Lilleborg visited BLC and in September 2004 a delegation from BLC visited Lilleborg. At each of these occasions the friendship agreement was discussed and confirmed. Since E-mail has become available, this is the primary form of contact on the normal basis along with telephone contact. We still find the original friendship agreement to be satisfying. By this we wish to confirm it.

Oslø 20.09.04.

 Joseph Muoko Pokka.	 Rev. Philip K. Eisa Kwaye.	 Andrew Gang Daud.
 Anne-Brit Bjork.	 Rev. Signe Fyhn.	 Rev. Tore Laukvik.

Friendship agreement between the Diocese of Nidaros within the Church of Norway and the Western synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane

The Western synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Diocese of Nidaros within the Church of Norway (through the Diocesan Council) have agreed upon forming a friendship agreement between our two churches. Our two churches unite in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. We recognize that there are differences between our two countries, but through the mutual understanding of our cultures we consider each other as people of God, united in the universal Church.

Objectives of this agreement

Through this agreement we wish to share our Christian faith and life. We will promote friendship and the mutual understanding of our two cultures and ways of life, and so inspire each other to fulfil the commission given to our churches

- We want to connect local congregations to the universal Church
- We want to increase the mutual understanding and love between different churches
- We want to share information, spiritual incitements and experiences, which may enrich, develop and renew life in our churches
- We want to underline the necessity of the missionary commission given to the Church

Initiatives

We will exchange at least two letters a year, containing:

- Information about the political and social situation in our region
- News of a positive and inspirational character concerning individuals and congregations
- Reports about problems or particular challenges within the church
- We will pray for each other in our worship services and during other events in the diocese /synod
- We will arrange visits from Ethiopia to Norway, and from Norway to Ethiopia
- We will arrange exchange of church workers, such as pastors, diacons and evangelists.
- The objective is to simultaneously put into practice the ministry of both countries
- The Diocese of Nidaros will challenge its parishes to enter into a mission project agreement, amongst others, the Norwegian Missionary Society in the EECMY

Projects

The Diocese of Nidaros works in missionary and aid projects through the Norwegian Missionary Society, Norwegian Church Aid and other organisations. All assistance, both financial or through personell will normally be made through these organisations.

Evaluation

After 4 years the two churches will evaluate the experiences achieved through this friendship agreement, with the purpose of its continuance.

FRIENDSHIP AGREEMENT

The Evangelical Church of Eritrea (ECE)
and Bjørgvin bispedøme (The Diocese of Bergen, Church of Norway)

hereby signs the following agreement on bilateral co-operation and exchange.

We are happy for the richness and variety of experience in the worldwide church, and we want to exchange information and share our experience for the benefit of both parties. Our co-operation is based on our belief that we belong to the one body of Christ. Through the friendship we wish to make the unity real and to help each other to live in our own neighbourhood according to the Gospel.

We will pray for each other and we will try to extend our knowledge of each other, involving various groups in our churches in the friendship co-operation. First and foremost we will exchange human resources. Our aim, however, shall not be to establish big and expensive projects.

In this four years period we will have a common focus on Christian education. Initiatives connected with the agreement must be discussed between the parties.

If one of the parties wants to withdraw from the co-operation, there must be a written message in proper time before the agreement will be cancelled.

For the next four years (2005-2008) we agree on the following program:

- a delegation from the ECE will visit the Diocese of Bergen.
- a group from Bergen will visit ECE to participate in a program on Christian education
- Bergen shall seek to make available literature for pastors and church staff of the ECE
- Bergen shall seek to contribute to the Christian education in ECE by sharing its experience of teaching methods and material for the education of children in the church.
- we shall pray for each other and inform our local congregations in our respective churches so that we can all join in our prayers.

This co-operation will be evaluated after four years (2009)

Bergen, January 2005

.....
On behalf of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea
Rev. Asfaha Mehari
President, ECE

.....
On behalf of the diocese of Bergen
Ole D. Hagesæther
Bishop, Bergen
Kari Sørheim
Moderator, Diocese council of Bjørgvin

FROM THE BOOKLET "SØSTERKYRKJA VÅR I ERITREA" (Our sister church in Eritrea) BJØRGVIN DIOCESAN COUNCIL 2000.

Study Guide

What follows is not a plan for a complete course of study. But since Bjørgvin diocese has a sister church in Eritrea, it might be a good idea to make this the theme for discussion and study in the many bible study groups in our parishes.

We suggest that the topic for these discussions should be a comparison:
How can differences in history and living conditions explain what it means to be the church in Norway and in Eritrea?

A simple outline:

First meeting

Study the map of Africa and the boundaries on the Horn of Africa.

Ask someone in the group to prepare an account of Eritrea's history, including the presence of foreign powers from Europe, Arabia and Africa. An Eritrean can claim to feel half western and half African. What is the main reason for this? Search for possible references to this part of the world in the Bible or in legends (clues: Sheba, Solomon's mines).

Second meeting

If you take part in a service in the Evangelical Church in Eritrea in Asmara and close your eyes for a moment, you could imagine that you were at a Swedish prayer meeting or in a chapel in Western Norway. Discuss the cultural impulses that missionary activity brought with it, both positive and negative. Eritrea is one of few examples of places where Islam and Christianity live together in peace. What is threatening this, both in Eritrea and in other places? What do you know about the African Orthodox churches?

Third meeting

What is the state of mission awareness in our congregations? Does your congregation have a mission project or a partnership agreement? Read the account (in the booklet) from the Beleza Heights about mission dreams that came true in the end. Discuss this with the words patience and perspective in mind. What should our mission strategy be today?

A SESSION ON FRIENDSHIP for 14-15 year olds preparing for confirmation

Theme: "Without friendship, no life" – Cicero –

PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

- To help young people to reflect on what good friends mean to them
- to teach them what values are important for good and lasting friendships
- to teach them the importance of having friends who are different from themselves
- to make them curious about friendship with young people in other countries and cultures

Summary of a session

1. OPENING: WHAT MAKES A GOOD FRIENDSHIP?

Collect a pile of newspapers and/or magazines. Divide the participants into groups and tell them to cut out pictures that they think illustrate friendship. Glue the pictures on a large sheet of paper – and discuss them.

- What kind of friendship do the pictures illustrate? • What can they tell us about how friendships are formed?
- What can they tell us about how friendships are destroyed?

Play a track from a cd – preferably one that the young people are familiar with.

Suggestion: "You've got a friend"

(Words and music by Carole King. Screen gems-EMI Music inc. Published by permission of EMI Music Publishing Scandinavia AB)

You've got a friend

When you're down and troubled and you need some loving care
And nothing, nothing is going right.
Close your eyes and think of me, and soon I will be there
To brighten up even your darkest night.

You just call out my name and you know wherever I am
I'll come running to see you again.
Winter, spring, summer or fall, all you have to do is call
And I'll be there, you've got a friend.

If the sky above you grows dark and full of clouds
And that old north wind begins to blow.
Keep your head together and call my name out loud.
Soon you'll hear me knocking at your door.

You just call out my name and you know wherever I am
I'll come running to see you.
Winter, spring, summer or fall, all you have to do is call
And I'll be there. Ain't it good to know that you've got a friend.

When people can be so cold, they'll hurt you and desert you
and take your soul if you let them.
Oh, but don't you let them
You just call out my name and you know wherever I am.

I'll come running to see you again.
Winter, spring, summer or fall.
All you have to do is call
And I'll be there, you've got a friend.

Discuss what this song says about friendship. Who is the first person in the song? Who offers friendship? Dare we put ourselves in the first person's place – offer friendship in the same way?

Work in groups with the following task: Good friends... don't gossip about each other, don't victimize each other... Continue the list.

Read Proverbs 17: 9 and 17:

"One who forgives an affront fosters friendship, but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend."

"A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity."

How do these proverbs compare with the list you made?

Conclude this part of the lesson by saying a little about how we are created for friendship, quoting God's words:

'It is not good that the man (or woman!) should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' –Genesis 2:18

2. WITH WHOM SHOULD WE MAKE FRIENDS?

"Birds of a feather flock together", the proverb says. Do you agree? Think of those you hang out with? Are you friends because you resemble one another, or for other reasons?

Jesus and his friends

This can be a short survey of some key passages in the gospels and/or a discussion of these themes: Jesus, friend of those whom others condemned or felt themselves too good to mix with. What does the phrase "Son of Man" tell us about Jesus as a friend? "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.' (Matthew 11:19)

"The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" (Luke 7:34)

Jesus even called Judas, who betrayed him, his friend. What do you think Judas felt about that?

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹ At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do

Jesus called his disciples "friends" and thus emphasised that he relied on them and expected things of them? What kind of friendship did Jesus have with his disciples? In what way was it a binding friendship?

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. (John 15:14-17)

Trust, reliability, forgiveness

End this part of the session by looking at the rules you made for a "good friendship". Do these rules apply to Jesus' friendship with his disciples? Discuss how important trust and reliability are for a friendship. Peter (the story of how he denied Jesus) can be used as an example of how it sometimes can be difficult to be as reliable as we intend to be. Discuss how trust, reliability and forgiveness can be key values in a friendship.

3. FRIENDSHIP ACROSS BOUNDARIES

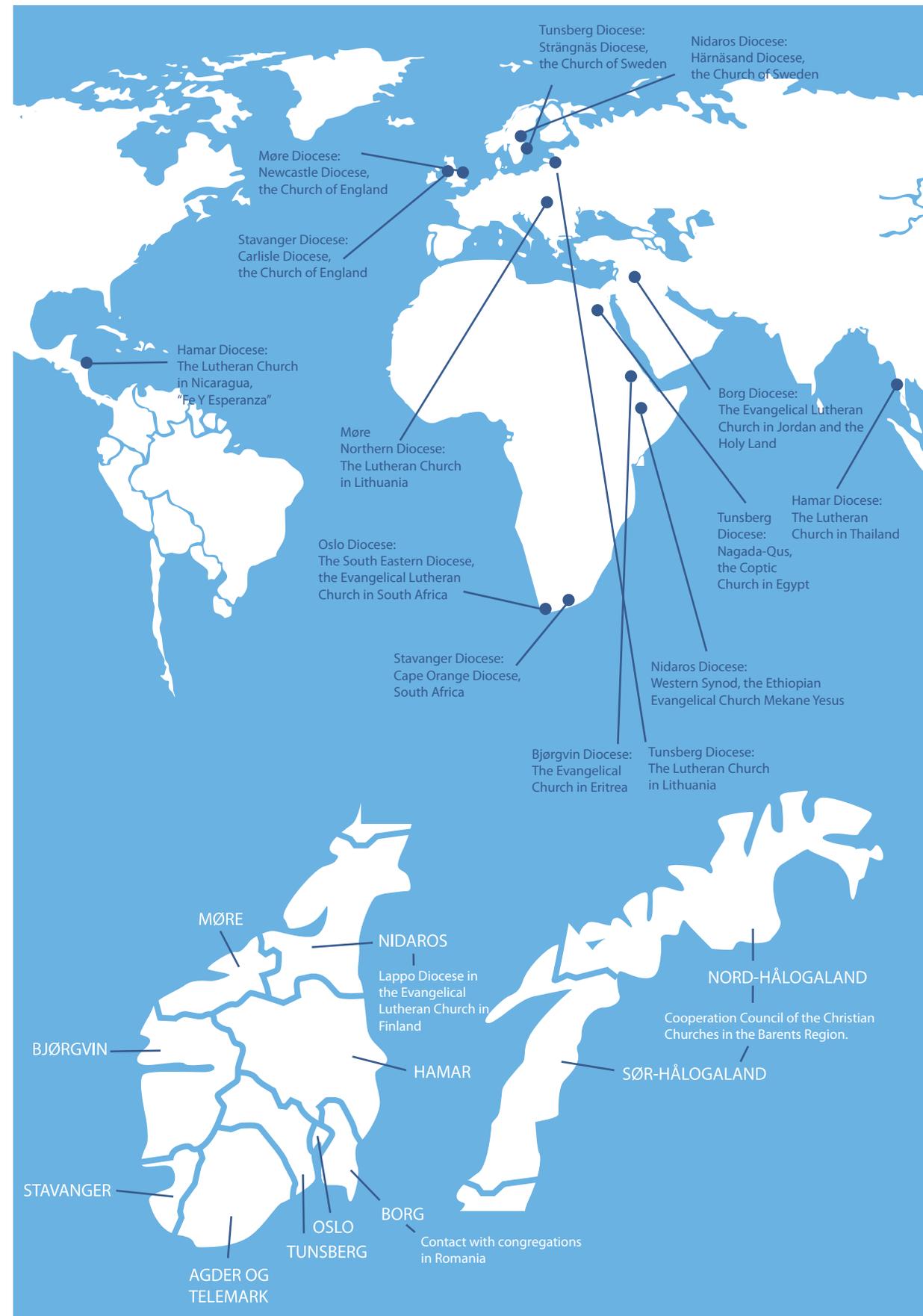
Is it possible to be friends with someone on the other side of the world, whom you have never met?

Use the following passage from the book "The Little Prince":

It was then that the fox appeared.

"Good morning," said the fox.

"Good morning," the little prince responded politely, although when he turned around he saw nothing.



“No church is so poor that it doesn’t have something to share with others, and no church is so rich that it can’t receive something from others.”

– Bishop Kibira, Tanzania –

To be a church is to belong to a world-wide fellowship. Through partnership relations between congregations, we are invited to listen to other voices and experiences than our own.

The Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, the Church of Norway Development Education Service, diocesan offices and the Joint Council for Congregations in Mission often receive requests from parishes for advice about making friends with other congregations.

This booklet will try to give both inspiration and specific ideas as to how to establish and maintain meaningful and valuable contact with a sister congregation – whether it is a tiny congregation in a far away country or an immigrant congregation just around the corner.



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