

From Helping to Solidarity

Most “sister parish” or “parish twinning” relationships are born of a beautiful impulse: to help other human beings who are struggling or more economically disadvantaged than themselves, to help those who are in need. It is an impulse that is generated in significant part by the gospel mandate to love, especially as revealed in Matthew 25:31-46: “When I was hungry you gave me food...”

The parish twinning phenomena is a wonderful church movement that stands in sharp contrast to certain forces present within U.S. culture.

The contribution of the Church and of evangelization to the development of peoples concerns not only the struggle against material poverty and underdevelopment in the South of the world, but also concerns the North, which is prone to a moral and spiritual poverty caused by overdevelopment. A certain way of thinking, uninfluenced by a religious outlook and widespread in some parts of today's world, is based on the idea that increasing wealth and the promotion of economic and technical growth is enough for people to develop on the human level. But a soulless development cannot suffice for human beings, and an excess of affluence is as harmful as excessive poverty. This is a "development model" which the North has constructed and is now spreading to the South, where a sense of religion as well as human values are in danger of being overwhelmed by a wave of consumerism.³

Thus, the true beauty and unique opportunity of parish twinning goes far beyond “helping others.” Sister parishes create **the opportunity to build and engender real and even long-term relationships** with people who are of another culture and often are often terribly economically disenfranchised--- and to begin to see and understand the world through their eyes. That experience will call into question many of the assumptions about wealth, economic development, and affluence that we in the United States are taught from a very young age.

Through relationship we genuinely and experientially adopt the truth that we are all called to *oneness*, to become one Body in Christ. We can then more readily recognize that the current reality and the systems that created it are unacceptably unjust. We are beckoned to change those systems for the sake of the one we have come to know and love (and those others who share their same plight)....

Sister parishes and solidarity twinning relationships are an invitation to a relationship whereby people from opposite sides of the divide between rich and poor, or between two different cultures, come together and get to know one another more fully as human persons, the joys as well as the struggles, the gifts as well as the needs. The hope is that people on each side of the divide will be seen as multi-dimensional and partners will learn to appreciate the various aspects of the things that shape the other—their history (personal, community, and national), their culture, their family life, their faith and the varied cultural expressions of their faith.

³ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 59.

PARISH PARTNERSHIP MANUAL

Like two people moving towards marriage, as relationships are established and trust is built, talk may turn toward hopes, goals, and ideas for building a lasting, healthy partnership.⁴ As with planning for marriage vows, both sides of the partnership should participate in envisioning their future. We encourage parish partnerships to create together a common Vision Statement and Mission Statement, from which their various activities can be mutually developed.

Furthermore, by honestly addressing questions of power and historic attitudes of superiority and inferiority in the relationship, strong and healthy parish partnerships can be built and sustained---and a new world in the image of the reign of God, in what Pope John Paul II referred to as the globalization of solidarity, can be possible.

⁴ Marriage is a fairly apt image for a parish twinning relationship. Like pre-Cana courses, twinning relationships require some formation and preparation before entering them. Like marriage, we enter it not “to fix” the other’s problems, but to enter into the place of mystery where love draws us in unknown directions. We are present to the other and engage with them, not on our terms, not on totally their terms, but on open, negotiated, prayer-directed terms. Within this mystery we grow closer, we come to learn more about the other, about ourselves and about the depths of God’s love.

Adapted from an article written by Mike Haas, Center for Mission in the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, for use in the From Mission to Mission publication “What About Short-Term Mission?”