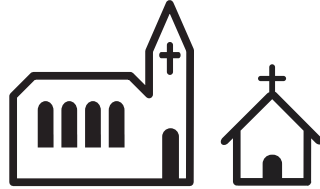


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# Guidelines for twinning

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**This document provides some guidelines for congregations who wish to twin with another congregation, either overseas or in Ireland.**

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# What is twinning?

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*Twinning is a form of partnership.*

**As the idea of 'twin' would suggest, it is one where the relationship is of a 'sibling' type rather than for instance a 'parent-child' type.**

Congregational twinning is an intentional, partnering relationship with a congregation from another culture or geographical region – a cross-cultural partnership in the gospel.

It gives the opportunity for fellowship and shared learning among believers from different backgrounds. Through good communication and the building of a godly relationship, the twinning aims to strengthen and encourage both partners as they seek to be part of God's global church.

This leaflet will help you to think through some questions you need to ask and issues which should be addressed if you are to have a successful twinning relationship with the other congregation. You will be encouraged to consider why we should twin with others, our expectations from such a relationship, practical matters to be thought through before starting and pitfalls to guard against.

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# Why do twinning?

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*Motivation for twinning is key to the development of the partnership.*

**Be clear why you want to set up the twinning. What are your expectations for the relationship? Is it well founded in the gospel? Are there practical outcomes that you can define and reasonably hope to achieve? Is the church leadership really behind the venture?**

**1. There are biblical encouragements for this type of partnership:**

- Paul encouraged the new gentile congregations he served to consider, support, encourage and learn from each other and from the 'Jewish' Christians. He quoted from **Deut 32:43** "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people".
- The New Testament describes a church of diverse congregations united together as parts of a body with one head – a relationship which like twinning promotes fellowship and enables mutual encouragement e.g. **Romans 1:12; 1 Cor 12:12**
- The Greek word *Koinonia* is translated many different ways in the New Testament: fellowship, community, participation, sharing, contribution. These reflect the relationship that John describes in **1 John 1:3-4**. This is a relationship of sharing a common life with other believers; one we also share with God the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. This is a relationship, a partnership in the

gospel where we share with one another spiritually and materially. Twinning mirrors this relationship between church communities.

- Partnership in the gospel – **Philippians 1:3-5**:  
*"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."*

**2. There are practical benefits in such a partnering:**

- It broadens our vision for world mission and the global church
- It enables us to learn about and from the church in other cultures:
  - share faith in Jesus and insights on our walk with the Lord;
  - share joys and sorrows – pray for one another and so build up God's Kingdom on earth;
  - we can share best practice for worship and ministry and can help each other in outreach and mission.

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# Key things to keep in mind as you approach twinning in your congregation

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## *Relationship & Communication*

- The first priority is establishing unity in Christ Jesus through friendship and partnership.
- Relationship-building and communication are vital elements of twinning.
- Twinning needs to be seen as a whole-church involvement, not just for leaders. The partnership has to be much more than just the minister relating to the minister.
- Thorough investigation and preparation by leadership and organisers prior to any commitment is vital as a foundation for relationship-building.
- Language is difficult especially if there is no English. Sometimes what we say is not necessarily what our partner thinks we said. We can so easily be misunderstood.
- Communication needs to be regularly maintained. Who on either side is responsible for this?
- Does a relating culture already exist in the congregation? If not, how will we relate across cultures?
- The relationship ought to be dynamic, moving and growing. There needs to be a spark of interest in the congregations.
- Keep the original focus and purpose of the twinning in view.
- While money/financial support **should not** be the first priority on either side of the relationship, the congregation must be willing to invest financially in the partnership.
- Who is the 'boss'? – Find out what the cultural norms are regarding church hierarchies, leadership and decision-making. This may be different from how we operate, so sensitivity is important.

## *Expectations – we all have them*

- The success or failure of the twinning depends on the extent to which people's expectations are met. So, discuss and devise clear expectations on both sides with regard to what the twinning will look like.
- What was the thinking at the inception of the relationship?
  - Was it very much paternal? Helping the 'poor Africans'?
  - What impact will this now have on relating/expectations?
- Define some basic achievable goals for the start of the relationship:
  - It could be as simple as prayer twinning, with a commitment from each side to pray each month for the ministry of each other's congregations.
  - Groups within the congregations could link and share information about activities with youth, women, men etc.
  - An initial visit for information gathering might pave the way for the relationship and grow into a basis for team exchanges.
- Discuss your understanding of **Christian** and how this matches with your partner.
- Visits – who goes; how often; who pays? Is this the best use of resources?
- Return visits? Who pays? Is this helpful? Staying in homes of the host congregation is such a wonderful way to build up relationships.
- The twinning should be time limited. This gives opportunity for review and evaluation as well as a 'get out clause' for each side. A possible term could be three to five years.
- Draw up a partnership agreement that both sides can sign and use as their guide throughout their twinning relationship.

## *Whose agenda? This question must be asked.*

- As you think and pray about a possible twinning relationship it is important to remember that you are coming alongside to help with what is already happening rather than driving your own agenda. A sibling rather than a paternal relationship.
- Listen to your partner. You must get honest feedback.
- Develop a common cause and style of working together which will lead to true partnership.
- What are you offering to your partner? What do you need to learn from your partner?

## *Practical matters to consider.*

- A budget should be set aside for funding the Twinning programme as part of the mission plan for your church.
- Twinning should not be the only local or global mission concern within your congregation. It is important to support mission and ministry in other contexts and situations too but do not spread your focus too thinly.
- Be creative in how you twin and build partnership.
- Try to learn as much as possible of the language used by your twin.

## *Possible pitfalls*

- Twinning is not a quick fix or easy answer to getting more involved in global mission
- Unclear or unrealistic expectations lead to misunderstandings, frustrations and disappointment.
- Inadequate communication will lead to relationship breakdown.
- The twinning relationship can become fixated on finances.
- Stereotyping of each other due to past experiences of different cultures.
- Tensions and breakdowns in relationship.  
(Possible pitfalls taken from *Draft Guidelines for Twinning*, Church of Scotland)

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# Keep the goals of the twinning central

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*In Matthew 28, Jesus called his followers to be involved in making disciples of all nations...*

**Is all of our activity for our twinning about keeping that goal the sole purpose? If not it is time to refocus.**

## *Remember Koinonia*

- **Pray** – spend a lot of time praying about this as a Kirk Session, mission committee, and congregation.
- **Network** and **learn** about possible partnerships. Contact mission organisations/agencies who can help you as you begin this journey.
- Remember building **relationships is key**.

## *Other resources*

**Mission Overseas: TAKE 2** (June 2014) contains two very helpful case studies on twinning in its centre pages. 'Mission in Partnership' and 'Drogheda - Kambui Partnership' will provide useful information if you wish to see how others have set up a twinning partnership.

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