



Guidelines for International Ecumenical Partnerships

of the Protestant Church of Baden

Departement for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations
of the Protestant Church of Baden



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"No one carries a roof alone"

(Proverb from Cameroon)

FOREWORD

Dear Reader!

Our regional church is richly endowed by many direct relationships and partnerships of congregations and church districts in our country with congregations and districts in the partner churches linked to us by the Evangelical Missionary Society Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS and Basel Mission German Branch), the Gustav-Adolf-Werk (GAW) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). This brings to life what was already stated in the Union Charter of 1821 "Thus united in themselves and bound in friendship with Christians around the world ...".

Ecumenical partnerships are an important task in our church. They are not luxuries that we can afford in better times but can do without in times of diminishing resources.

Partnerships are learning fields for ecumenism, and they give ecumenism a face. They help us to discover that being church is possible in a very different way than we are. Thus, ecumenical encounters are also a source of inspiration for the renewal of our own church.

In this sense, these guidelines are supposed to be helpful and encouraging to take the risk of partnerships, but also to reflect on them. The experience of many of our partnership groups has been incorporated into these guidelines, and hopefully this experience might be helpful for other partnerships as well.

We wish you a joyful and enriching interaction with these guidelines.

Karlsruhe, Germany, May 2021

The Senior Church Officer of the Department for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations

Dr. Matthias Kreplin

1. Partnerships are an Expression of global Communion

Church is only church in community. This community also includes people who live far away or in a completely different context. Through the cross and resurrection of Christ, all Christians and churches are members of his body. This worldwide fellowship is a spiritual one and needs to be shaped continuously. This is affirmed in the basic Order of the Protestant Church in Baden (GO Article 4).

Ecumenism, founded in Christ, establishes a community of unequals. Ecumenical partners live their faith in different traditions and situations. Therefore, it is necessary that they are willing to accept each other as equal in value and equal in rights (Gal. 3:28; Rom. 15:7). They want to share their different gifts, possibilities and experiences, their spiritual, material and personal resources as well as their lackings and needs (1 Pet. 4:10). The partners see themselves as part of a mutually committed community that is committed to growing together and working for each other and with each other towards common goals: the proclamation of the Gospel, the integrity of creation, climate justice, overcoming poverty and discrimination, and working for peace.

A proven way of shaping this fellowship is through ecumenical associations at continental and world levels. They offer the opportunity for exchange, mutual correction and enrichment, as well as for common witness and service. As a member church of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the Protestant Church in Baden is a member of both the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). It is a member of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS), the Gustav-Adolf-Werk (GAW) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). It is involved in the work of Mission 21 through the Continental Assembly Europe.

The universality of the communion of the body of Christ is expressed in the ecumenical associations but is only indirectly effective in them. This ecumenical fellowship comes alive through direct partnership relationships with individual churches. In this way, what constitutes the fellowship - exchange, giving and taking part, sharing, learning from and with one another, standing up for one another - can become concrete. This is why the Protestant Church in Baden maintains such partnerships with its church districts and congregations, and occasionally also through schools, especially in the community of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Basel Mission German Branch.

Church partnerships affect the church as a whole and are not limited to the level of church leadership. They become particularly vibrant when they have become an element in the life of church districts and congregations. The Protestant Church in Baden supports its congregations and districts in fostering partnerships.

Partnerships with churches and congregations can come about through specific arrangements. Sometimes they start "by chance" through personal encounters and develop independently. The Protestant Church in Baden sees a special responsibility towards the partner churches within the community of its established church associations.

The following points of view and guidelines are intended to be an aid for church partnerships.

2. Learning Fields in Ecumenical Partnerships

2.1 Opportunities

Through a partnership, the local congregation experiences itself as a member of the worldwide body of Jesus Christ. This offers the opportunity to also have ecumenical missionary experiences.

Partnerships are a concrete way to experience the ecumenical breadth of the church. They can ensure that the church and its congregations do not revolve more and more around themselves.

In the mirror of each other's experiences, in the expression of their life and faith, we learn to understand ourselves anew. The more we share weaknesses and strengths, weal and woe, the more enriching the community of partnership becomes.

The diversity of expressions of faith in piety and practice can encourage the discovery of new forms of spirituality for worship, congregational life and the individual.

The regular exchange of partners through letters, information and visits, as well as digital formats, offers many opportunities to overcome the limitations of our thinking and acting in our own church and to open ourselves to the foreign and new.

In some partnerships with a church, district or congregation in the Global South or even in Central and Eastern Europe, we are confronted with one-sided, financial dependencies. It is caused by unjust political and economic structures, which we are challenged to help overcome.

Through encountering faith and life in our partner churches, we learn how God's word has taken its course in a different world. This can be an impulse to follow the course of God's word and action in our own context.

One offer in this regard is, for example, the EMS project "Reading the Bible through the eyes of others".

In communion through Christ with our brothers and sisters, we are obliged to share in their needs and to stand up for them to the best of our ability.

By visiting and sharing, we can help each other with the experiences and questions that arise, open our eyes to deficits and encourage steps towards renewal. In each case, the possibility of communication in terms of language must be taken into consideration.

The experiences we gain through partnership relationships show us our responsibility to stand up for strangers who, because of persecution and need, seek protection, welcome and a dignified life with us. Likewise, they can help to deepen relationships with international communities in Germany.

In the knowledge of mutual intercession and by celebrating Partnership Sundays with us and with our partner congregations, we develop a community that connects us with each other across all borders.

2.2 Special Challenges

There are also project partnerships. The partnerships thrive on mutual give and take; in one-sided project-oriented relationships, the focus is on financial responsibility.

One's own point of view, experience and values easily become the yardstick against which partners are measured. In a mature partnership, quick judgements and ready-made opinions are forbidden. Unreservedly approaching each other and wanting to understand each other are the foundations for the growth of communion between the partners. In any case, the cultural characteristics of the respective partner needs to be accepted.

The Protestant church in Baden strives to provide offers for the networking of the various partnerships (joint seminars). Involvement in the regional church partnerships can become a great enrichment. Those who are only concerned with the concerns of the immediate counterpart run the risk of losing sight of the larger community of the church as a whole.

The material resources of one side can lead to one-sided dependencies and degrade the others to mere recipients, reducing the broad field of sharing to financial aspects. We recommend partnerships with a clear focus on one or even more projects. Our aim is to accompany and qualify project partnerships in their assumption of responsibility for development policy and thus to integrate them into the church's overall responsibility for development policy issues.

3. Building Partnerships

3.1 Sponsorship

Practical partnership work in the Protestant Church in Baden takes place both at the level of church districts and at the level of congregations or congregational groups. For the individual congregation, the greater immediacy and the possibility that more congregation members can be involved in the partnership work speaks for itself. A church district has the advantage that partnership relations are shared by several congregations, perhaps even by the district synod. The tasks are shared by a larger circle and with greater publicity.

3.2 Backing of Partnerships

If you are interested in setting up an international ecumenical partnership, we recommend that you contact the Regional Church officer for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations or the Department for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations in the Church administration. They advise, mediate and accompany church partnerships. Each partnership should come about through decisions of the responsible bodies in Baden (parish council, district church council, district synod) and the corresponding bodies on the partner side. For monitoring and implementing partnerships, it is helpful if working groups on both sides are responsible for the partnership activities and report regularly.

4. Shaping Partnerships

4.1 Planning and Implementation of Exchange Programs

Mutual visits by delegations are indispensable as a component of partnerships. They create living relationships. This requires shared experiences and encounters.

For reciprocal visits, a responsible rhythm must be found that considers the financial and ecological burdens. A two-year interval between visits and return visits has proven to be effective. The time in between is necessary for preparation and follow-up of the visit as well as for the implementation of jointly agreed tasks or learning projects.

The composition of delegations should be gender and age balanced and include volunteers from various fields of community service.

Participants in the visiting programs are delegates from their church. The personal contacts gained should serve the partnership of the two congregations.

A delegation should consist of three to eight people. Group size, duration and frequency should be agreed with partners to avoid excessive demands. A written invitation should be issued from the host organisations.

As a rule, visiting groups from Baden pay their own expenses. Financial support for the trip is possible through Brot für die Welt. To prepare for a trip and to apply for a grant, you can find information on the following page <https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/projekte/inlandsfoerderung/material/entwicklungspolitische-begegnungen/>.

The contribution of the visiting groups from the partner churches usually covers the preparation and travel costs in their own country. A binding written invitation by the German partners should only be issued after the financial feasibility has been clarified.

A grant from Brot für die Welt can cover the flight costs, the other costs must be covered by the inviting church district/parish.

The preparation and follow-up of a trip is necessary. This includes not only preparation for the partner country and the partner church, but also an examination of one's own cultural and religious character, one's own political and economic context and the relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the partner country. Self-critical reflection on the experience should be consciously given space in the follow-up.

One particularly sensitive area is the differences in gender relations in intercultural encounters. Respectful behaviour is expressed differently in different cultures. Assessing closeness and distance correctly, recognising power imbalances and preventing abuse of power is a challenge. Therefore, the topic "prevention of sexual assault" is a necessary topic in the preparation. For dealing with these issues in the preparation of the two groups, we recommend the "Code of Conduct", which was developed in the international EMS community and applies to all international EMS activities. (www.ekiba-partnerschaften-international.de/infos/leitlinien/material/)

It is also obligatory for partnership meetings held under the responsibility or with the financial support of the Department for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations.

4.2 Further Proposals for shaping Church Partnerships

In addition to mutual visits, the regular exchange of reports and information from the congregation, church and society is important to keep the relationship up to date. A rhythm that does not overburden is helpful (e.g., report after a district synod).

Individual groups in the congregation or church district can contact the corresponding groups at the partner.

Partnership Sundays on a mutually agreed date with the exchange of prayers, sermon thoughts and current information keep the community alive. It can be helpful to involve congregations or people from the respective partner country who are in Germany. Digital possibilities (e.g., live broadcasts) can also help.

The responsible partnership circle will develop many ideas to further anchor the partnership relationship in the life of the congregation or the church district (e.g., information booths at congregational festivals, cooperation with One World stores) and also involve young people in the partnership work.

Involving young people in partnership work is enriching and ensures the continuation of the partnership in the long term through international youth camps or volunteer services, e.g., through the Voluntary Ecumenical Peace Service of the EKiba (FöF), which offers internships in GAW partner churches. In addition, the EMS Ecumenical Volunteer Programme (ÖFP) offers internships in EMS member churches, both for young people who want to go from Germany to a member church in Asia or Africa, and for volunteers who want to come to Germany from EMS churches.

4.3 Material Assistance

In church partnerships, money and other material benefits should not be the focus. Priority is given to knowledge of each other, diverse forms of exchange, mutual intercession and common tasks. However, in view of the economic inequality between the South and the North, sometimes also within Europe, the question of material sharing cannot be ignored. With our funds we can support our partners' own initiatives and encourage them in their work.

If a partnership is about organising material help, one-sided dependencies can arise, and the visits can take on the character of "inspection trips". This requires special sensitivity.

When it comes to financial or material aid, the greatest possible transparency is required. The church leadership of the partner country, the mission agency and the responsible offices in our church (in the Department for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations, the officer for the Church Development Service or the regional officer for ecumenical relations (LMÖ)) should be informed, especially when transferring funds. This transparency reduces the risk of creating great inequalities in a partner church, creating feelings of envy and disturbing the fellowship of the church.

Properly understood, the sharing of financial resources in a partnership will be done in such a way that it does not sap money away from other fund-raising (campaigns of Brot für die Welt, collects for partner churches the Sundays of Epiphany and Rogate, etc.). Partnerships are a good way to practise the ecumenical sharing that is offered to all of us, and not only in a limited way to one's own partners.

The projects funded within the framework of the partnership should be supported by the partners proportionately through financial and material resources or their own work. As a rule, the project proposals must come from the people concerned themselves. They must have the freedom to decide on priorities. It is helpful if partner churches set up their own criteria for this (e.g., community orientation, combatting the causes of poverty). Over the years, quite some experiences about the opportunities and risks for the success of partnerships has been gathered, we therefore recommend a consultation with the

Department for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations, which will also be helpful for backing of projects.

The EMS member churches jointly adopted an anti-corruption policy which is thereby available as a basis for a convention in the partnership groups.

We recommend all partnership groups to include these papers in the discussions on the further development of their respective partnership.

Download at: <https://ems-online.org/en/about-us/our-finances/>.

4.4 Contextual References of Partnership Work

Ecumenical partnerships are situated in a wider ecumenical context (culture, tradition, history, social and economic situation). To counter the danger of narrow-mindedness on both sides, the breadth of the ecumenical movement with its local links and experiences should flow into practical work.

Credible partnership begins at home. Therefore, people from other countries of origin living among us should also be included in the togetherness of different churches, faiths, cultures and traditions.

Dealing with colonial and mission history, with old and new inter-church power structures is essential for partnership work. Equally important is knowledge of the history and political development of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The inclusion of questions of the world economy and existing trade and financial structures in the North-South context is important.

Addressing our own social and theological context will have an impact on our partnership work and should be part of our inter-church relations.

4.5 Regular Reflection and Evaluation as Part of a Successful Partnership

For the partnership process it is important to reflect on the practice after about five years. This needs to be done together with representatives of the partner church. It can also be helpful to invite people from other partnerships.

The annual partnership days offered by the Department for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations also serve to reflect on partnership work.

The questions to be answered vis-à-vis the grant donor Brot für die Welt also help in the evaluation.

An evaluation helps to qualify the mutual exchange and contributes to deepening the relationships.

5. Coordination of Partnerships: Agreements and Partnership Seminars

5.1 Partnership Agreements

For a partnership it is important that a written agreement is made at the beginning between the church governing bodies (parish council, district synod, church district council, etc.). It can describe the formal, content-related and spiritual framework, name mutually agreed goals and forms the basis of the partnership to which reference can be made and which can be reviewed. A time limit can be agreed on right away from the start.

5.2 Coordination within the Protestant Church in Baden

If there are several partnerships with the same church, it is important to organise annual partnership meetings within the Protestant Church in Baden or within the EMS. Such meetings help to exchange experiences.

The Regional Church officers for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations, the Department for Ecumenical and Global Church Relations, the regional commissioners of the EMS or, in Europe, the so-called "round tables" invite people to these meetings.

6. Project work, another Expression of global Communion

In addition to the international ecumenical partnerships, there is a need for the helping and supporting work of the EMS, "Brot für die Welt - Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung e.V.", the GAW and Hoffnung für Osteuropa and their professional long-term project work.

EMS, Brot für die Welt and GAW enable ecumenical learning, e.g. by providing information and educational materials.

The implementation of such mission or development aid projects is carried out in cooperation with the church leadership of our partners or other organisations by experts who ensure the quality of the work and the transparency of the use of funds.

Quick relief aid in the event of a disaster as well as longer-term projects are dependent on donations. The partners in Baden should always be aware of this fact when maintaining personal inter-church relations and should not refuse to support the engagement via the common structures which are the EMS, GAW and Brot für die Welt.

7. Further documents

On the homepage www.ekiba-partnerschaften-international.de/infos/leitlinien/material/ you can find the following documents:

- List of current partnerships
- Examples of partnership agreements
- Checklists for partnership visits
- Code of Conduct - EMS Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment
- Anti-Corruption Policy of the EMS

8. Addresses

as of July 2023:

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Imprint

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Ed: Department of Ecumenical and Global Church Relations of the Protestant Church in Baden