

PLANNING GUIDE FOR PARTNER CHURCHES for GBGM'S "IN MISSION TOGETHER" PROGRAM CZECH AND SLOVAK REPUBLIC UMC

NOTE: The following is meant to be an aid to your planning, but it is not meant to be inclusive of everything or every way to proceed. Always feel free to seek the assistance of GBGM's Partnership Coordinator, Dick Arnold (540/961-1265), rmarnold@adelphia.net. He has traveled to these countries many times, and is able and willing to provide considerable assistance. Please keep in communication with him as you proceed - we can all learn from each other, and sharing between partner churches in the future will be a goal of this program. Use the new web page: www.inmissiontogether.com as a resource; it is regularly updated with new items and pictures.

I. INITIAL STEPS:

- A. Put together a group/team of interested persons who will spearhead the IN MISSION TOGETHER mission program. It would be best to choose a layperson as the team/group leader. Pastors and staff should be included, but it would be best if they were not the leader, since Pastors move periodically. Perhaps this is the Mission Committee as a whole, or perhaps it's a smaller sub-committee. Make sure there are some youth involved. Are there any persons with Czech or Slovak heritage in the congregation who might become involved? Begin to meet to pray for God's guidance in this new endeavor, and to discuss future plans.
- B. Begin a program of "getting to know your partner church" and starting a new relationship. Some suggestions include; 1.) Send an initial email or letter to introduce yourselves, and to ask for a similar response from them, then continue to trade communications, 2.) Share prayer concerns between each partner, 3.) Send pictures of people, activities, your church facilities, etc., 4.) Send an information packet about the church (similar to what you might give a potential new member), 5.) Send music tapes from your choir or other church musical groups. Ask for similar information back from your UMC Partner. [NOTE: some UMCs are providing some of the above on a CD or audiotapes which are the same in these countries as the US, but videotapes have to be converted].
- C. Establish a way to share all this information with your congregation—bulletin boards, newsletters and/or web page, in worship services, UMW and UMM, Sunday school classes and youth groups, etc. Try and get the children and youth involved in some way. Include pictures of your Partner's Pastor and lay leaders in your "Church Picture Directory" if you have one.
- D. Start a program of education about the country where your Partner UMC is located, either Czech Republic or Slovakia. Include such things as: its history, geography, culture, language, music, history of the UMC there, etc. Perhaps there are nearby Czech or Slovak festivals or museums that a group could visit? Contact the appropriate Tourist Authority for the country where your Partner is located, to obtain information. See the suggested web sites and reading lists for other information.
- E. Help everyone become aware of the four stages of entering a new culture:
 - 1.) FASCINATION: We easily become fascinated with the new language, food, sights, people, etc.
 - 2.) FRUSTRATION: Next we begin to realize that everything isn't really to our taste, such as having to take off our shoes, or the food now is not to our liking.
 - 3.) ACCOMMODATION: Next we begin to realize that God has called us here so we stay and make compromises to accommodate.
 - 4.) APPRECIATION: Finally, as we stay and get to know the people, God's love permeates us and we develop a love and appreciation for those in the new culture.
There is good and bad in every culture. We should withhold our judgment, for God will be the judge of us all.
- F. Plan how to provide the financial resources that will be needed. Suggested ideas are; annual mission bazaar, annual fruit sale, auctions, bake sales, barbecues, car wash, Christmas card/trees/gift wrapping sales, congregational dinners, crafts fair, dance, father and son

banquet, fish fry, fishing tournament, garage sale, golf tournament, men's recital, mother and daughter event, pancake breakfast, special booth at county fair, and of course your annual mission budget, and faith pledges, etc. We ask Partners to gift \$3600 per year, mainly to supplement pastor's salaries and provide funds for their automobiles and other church operating expenses. If you are unable to provide all of this, we will work to assign another church to cluster with you (perhaps you know of churches near you who would do this with you?).

- G. Begin visitation plans (see "Why Partner Visits Are Important"). Perhaps initially you might want to host a visit of your UMC Partner's pastor or lay person to your church to build enthusiasm and interest. A number of Partner UMCs have already done this. Eventually, however, you should send a team to visit your UMC partner.

II. TEAM VISIT PREPARATIONS:

NOTE: It is normal for each team member to pay his or her own travel expenses. Although travel to the Czech Republic and Slovakia can be relatively inexpensive, you might need to consider how to assist any person(s), especially youth or others, who may not be able to cover all their costs. Perhaps there are members who would donate frequent flyer miles? Also, do all your planning in consultation with your Partner UMC. GBGM has a good planning handbook for VIM teams that will give you some good suggestions for any team preparation (contact your Conference VIM Director to get a copy).

- A. Once you are in agreement with your Partner UMC about a mutually agreeable date for the visit, then produce a simple flyer to publicize the mission trip among your congregation -- include purpose, dates, costs, and tentative plans. Do not make the initial visit too long, perhaps 7-9 days, including 3-5 days in the city where your Partner is located.
- B. Be sensitive about the size of the team - most of the UMCs are rather small in size, and too many people could be difficult for them to host. Once a group is put together, then plan to hold several orientation and planning meetings for them.
- C. The initial meeting should include time for team members to get to know each other better, to talk about plans for the trip, logistics, costs, any concerns anyone has, and a commitment to pray for each other.
- D. Later meetings should include more specific discussions, and perhaps a session on learning some of the language. You might want to discuss taking a gift from your church to theirs; (example-- this might be a banner).
- E. Confirm final plans with your partner UMC

III. POSSIBLE MISSION TEAM ACTIVITIES DURING A VISIT:

Upon your arrival, initially, you should have some "get to know each other" activities:

- A. Meeting between the visiting team and Partner pastor and church elders -- this is a time to share things about each other's churches, firm up the visit schedule and logistics, and to explore together what each others hopes and visions might be for the partnership in the future.
- B. Tour of church facilities, and any social outreach facilities.
- C. Large, open gathering - visiting team with congregation members of the partner church. This should be a fun type event, perhaps with music, a meal or a tea/coffee reception, and welcoming remarks by members from both partners.
- D. Tour the partner church's city and some of their tourist attractions. Make sure that you pay for all transportation costs, since gasoline is considerably more expensive there than in the US.
- E. Visits in homes just to share faith, a meal, and perhaps even some recreation. Be sensitive to food costs -- try to work through the Partner church Pastor to reimburse for the meal costs, since the people would never tell you what a burden it is on them.

In addition, and more importantly eventually, should be some spiritual related activities:

- A. Lead a bible study.
- B. Always try to participate jointly in worship. You might offer to have someone preach, sing or play music, read scripture, or serve communion - take the lead from your hosts.
- C. Help conduct a VBS for children.
- D. Participate in any programs they have for women, men, or children.

- E. Attend some of their home group meetings; this is where good opportunities exist to share individual faith stories.
- F. Participate with the partner church in their social outreach activities. Such activities might include one or more programs with: homeless, gypsies, jails, single mothers, handicapped persons, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, orphanages, hospitals, etc.
- G. Teach classes in English or computers to help them with their evangelization.
- H. Meet with their youth, perhaps teach them interpretive dance, music, bible study, discussion of similar youth problems, etc.
- I. Help with music- choirs, instruments
- J. VIM projects (see list in this guidebook)
- K. Attend summer camp or other location for a retreat together.

Before you depart to come back home, make sure to hold a final meeting between the team and pastor and elders to discuss how the visit went (what was good, what could be done better in the future), and tentative future plans. You want to develop a joint plan of how you can be "In Mission Together", with both Partners contributing to the efforts. Perhaps it will be to help a building restoration, or assist in a social outreach mission program? Pray together for Gods guidance as you do this.

Please have someone submit a brief report to the GBGM Partnership Coordinator, Dick Arnold, upon your return. This will be useful for sharing with other Partners, and will help the coordination efforts.

IV. CONTINUING THE PARTNERSHIP

- A. Congratulations, you have now developed a new relationship with your Partner church, and will want to keep the process going. Make sure to report to your congregation about what happened on the visit, and ask for anyone else who might like to become part of the group in the future. Plan to continue to periodically have meetings of the team and other interested persons to keep the interest alive. Perhaps someone could write an article for the local newspapers and your District or Conference newsletter and web page. Try and keep your District Superintendent and other nearby churches informed about what you are doing, perhaps some will want to become involved with you or be willing to become an IN MISSION TOGETHER Partner themselves. Keep the communications open and flowing between you and your Partner, and especially the prayers. You will receive a list of prayer concerns from the GBGM Partnership Coordinator each month via email also. Periodically the GBGM will be sponsoring a Consultation meeting somewhere in the USA, to allow all Partners an opportunity to share and learn more about what others are doing - plan to send one or more persons to this.
- B. Perhaps, at some point, you might want to host a visit from your Partner UMC to make it a real shared partnership and to help build enthusiasm and interest. Not everyone in your congregation can go to the country where your Partner is located, but they could become part of the program by meeting visitors from them. Perhaps it will be your Partner's pastor or a layperson, but let them chose who comes, not just the person(s) you might want or those who speak English. A number of Partner UMCs have already done this. One point is to make sure you have insurance to cover health and accidents that might occur.

God bless you for your involvement.

[IMT PLANNING GUIDE- Dick Arnold, 2/26/04]