

FIVE MARKS OF GROWING

Session 3 – Partnership

LEADER'S NOTES

The order of the Five Marks of Growing is.....

*Christ-likeness
Commitment
Partnership
Influence
Numbers*

However, in this course I have chosen to change the order to so that the course ends with Commitment session. I think it is appropriate to have as a climax to the course the opportunity for everyone to be invited to recommit themselves to Christ and to serving him. I have also put Influence before Partnership. So my revised order is.....

*Christ-likeness
Influence
Partnership
Numbers
Commitment*

However, you are clearly free to use the order your prefer.

This session took precisely 1 hour 30 minutes including serving refreshments when we broke into discussion groups for "Working in partnership with Christians in other churches".

Participants being seated around tables worked very well.

After the discussion of the three main points you might like to get some feedback but it is recommended that you restrict this to a couple of contributions so that it is kept fairly short.

On the pages that follow are.....

- The Session Notes (pages 2-8) which include the input and discussion questions.*
- The Opening & Closing Worship (page 9-10): print back to back and cut in half.*
- The Discussion Questions (pages 11-13). Three sets of each of the questions are printed on these A4 sheets. You will need to guillotine these into three. You might choose to print each set on different coloured paper.*
- Bible texts that are referred to in the notes (page 14). It would be good to draw people's attention to these when giving the input.*

Some opening and closing worship is included, or you can devise your own.

There are not many hymns and songs on the theme of working together. Verse 4 of "To him we come" fits appropriately.

You will need to make copyright arrangements when printing the songs and some hymns. Many churches will have a CCL licence.

GROUP ACTIVITY (*A strict 3 minutes!*)

Seat people around tables. Buy some “partnership” sweets, for example *Rhubarb & Custard* are available at Morrison’s. You may be able to think of other sorts. Before the session begins put the sweets in dishes on the tables so that there is at least one for each person.

Put a paper and pen on each table. Invite people around each table to think of as many examples of partnerships as they can, eg Morecambe & Wise, Torville & Dean, and Marks & Spencer. Give them two or three minutes precisely.

Tell them to stop after the allotted time and see which table has managed to come up with the longest list.

Get a few examples of the sorts of partnerships they have thought of.

Introduce the theme of tonight’s session if you have not already done so.

Ask them if they can recognise what sort of sweets are on the tables. If they cannot, give a clue that it is linked with tonight’s theme. Invite them to help themselves to the sweets on the table and at an appropriate point (after they have sampled them?) explain that even the sweets are flavoured to fit with the theme of “Partnership” because they are *Rhubarb and Custard* !

INTRODUCTION

I want to begin by asking the question, “What is partnership?”. What does the word “partnership” mean to you? How might you define it?

GROUP ACTIVITY (*3-4 minutes*)

Invite people around each table to draw up their own definition of “partnership” using not more than 25 words.

Ask someone from each table to read out the definition they have drafted.

PART ONE

I looked up the word “partnership” in an online dictionary and this is the definition it gave.....

Read out the definition twice slowly.

Partnership is.....

“A relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility, for the achievement of a specified goal.”¹

One characteristic of the **culture** in which **we live in the west** at the start of the twenty-first century is **individualism**.

By individualism I mean the inclination we all have to live life with reference to “**me as an individual**” rather than “**us as a group**”.

It’s so **ingrained in our culture** that, like the air we breathe, **we don’t usually notice it**.

However, it’s when we compare ourselves with **other cultures** in other parts of the world, and cultures from other ages in history that we realise it is true.

One writer puts it like this.....

“Individualism has become one of the cornerstones of modern culture. So much so that we barely notice it, and we find it hard to accept that it is such a recent idea in human history and would have been incomprehensible in earlier times.”²

Another writer, Bishop Lesslie Newbigin has written about the breakdown of the “ties which bound men and women to the natural communities.....to which they had belonged.”

He writes.....

“Western European civilization has witnessed a sort of atomizing process, in which we as individuals are more and more set free from our natural settings in family and neighbourhood, and we become a sort of replaceable unit in the social machine. My nearest neighbours may not even know my name. I am free to move from place to place, from job to job, from acquaintance to acquaintance, and....even from wife to wife. I am in every context more and more an anonymous and replaceable part.”

He goes on to make the point.....

“In such a situation it is natural that we should long for some sort of real community, for we cannot be human without it.”³

In contrast, the world of the Bible was one in which people saw themselves in terms of community rather than as individuals. So for them, living and **working in partnership was the norm.**

Take the word “**saint**” in the New Testament. The word is used to refer to ordinary Christians. It was **after** New Testament times that the word “saint” came to be used to refer to special people like St Peter or St Paul. So in the New Testament for “saint”, read “Christian”.

What is interesting is that in the New Testament the word “saint” never appears in the singular!

They thought it terms of togetherness - partnership.

Then there's the word “you”.

Whenever I read a passage in the New Testament that contains the word “you”, I instinctively think of it in terms of “**you singular**” and that it applies to **me as an individual.**

Take for example Jesus' words in Luke 11 when he said.....

*So I say to **you**: Ask and it will be given to **you**; seek and **you** will find; knock and the door will be opened to **you**. (11.9 NIV)*

However, all those references to “you” are **plural**. One drawback of our English language, compared with other languages like French and Greek, is that we don't have a way of differentiating between “you singular” and “you plural”.

Of course we did in **old English**: it was “thou” or “ye”.

So the world of the Bible was one of **solidarity**, of **community**, of **partnership**, of working in **fellowship** with one another.

And the point I am wanting to make is that because **we** live in an **individualistic world**, you and I can find it hard to work in partnership with others. Depending on our personalities this applies to some of us more than others.

You could give some examples from your own life and experience at this point?

Do you tend towards being individualistic or the opposite.

How does this show itself?

Do you have a friend or family member who is the opposite from you?

GROUP DISCUSSION (4-5 minutes)

Ask everyone to move onto question 3 when you have got half-way through the time allotted.

- Do you naturally tend to want to work on a task on your own or with others?
- When, earlier tonight, you were asked to draw up a definition of “partnership”, would you naturally have preferred to have retreated into a corner and done this on your own, or to have done it as a group?
- In what ways are you aware that we live in an individualistic culture?
- If this is “the air we breathe” what things could we do to raise our awareness of this? How might we prevent ourselves from being swept along by the individualistic culture of the world in which we live?

Invite brief feedback from the last two questions only.

PART TWO

As Christians it is important that we work in partnership.

In the New Testament, the church is described as **the body of Christ** and what better illustration is there of partnership than the human body with all its **different parts working together for the good of the whole**.

Partnerships lie behind many **human achievements** where individuals or organisations have come together to accomplish more than they ever could individually.

For example think of the partnership between.....

(Invite people to complete the phrases)

Charles Rolls and **Henry**.....

.....**Royce** - Rolls Royce

Bill Hewlett and **Dave**.....

.....**Packard** - Hewlett Packard

William Procter & James.....

.....**Gamble** - Procter & Gamble

Bill Gates has said of Microsoft.....

“Our success has really been based on partnerships from the very beginning.”

Mother Teresa said.....

“You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do. Together, we can do great things.”

So as we work towards becoming Generous Churches Making and Nurturing Disciples, we will need to grow in partnership.

So which groups, which organisations should we work in partnership with?

Tonight we will consider **three examples of partnership**.

(1) PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS

First, we should work in partnership with **other Christians**.

In one place in Mark's Gospel we read how Jesus **sent out the twelve disciples** on a mission, and then on another occasion in Luke's Gospel we read how he did the same with **seventy-two others**.⁴

How did he send the twelve and the seventy-two out?

The phrase that comes in both places is that he sent them out: "**two-by-two**". Jesus believed in partnership.

We need to learn to do the same. For example think of the task of **sharing our faith**. It can be **quite a frightening prospect**. And that's probably because we imagine we have to do it on our own.

But when we consider doing it in partnership **with others**, it immediately feels **less daunting**.

The picture that the New Testament presents of the church, is of **one body** with **many members** with each member doing his or her bit in partnership as we heard in the Bible reading.

And a whole series of sermons could be preached on this topic. However, I'll just focus on one key point that is highlighted in the New Testament and it is this.....

As members the body of Christ, **each one of us needs to discover which gifts God has given us to use in his service**, and we then need to **use them together** under the direction and the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we have just read in 1 Corinthians in verse 27 and verse 7.....

All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it.....the Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. (1 Cor 12.27,7 GNB)

Or in another Bible translation.....

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.....to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (1 Cor 12.27,7 NIV)

So we are to work in partnership with one another as members of the Body of Christ within our churches.

In introducing the next set of discussion questions you might like to point out with reference to question 2 that sometimes certain people can monopolise certain jobs. (eg Taking responsibility for a particular flower arrangement at Easter; serving as churchwarden for decades or not allowing one's fellow churchwarden to take responsibility for some areas; not being willing to hand over an area of ministry to someone else etc)

GROUP DISCUSSION (8-10 minutes)

Working in partnership with other Christians

- How well do the members of your Church work together in partnership?
- What is the difference between members doing their own isolated jobs (which others must not interfere with!) and members truly working together?
- How might the way that people work in partnership be enhanced in your Church?
- How can we encourage one another to discover and use the gifts that God has given us?

(2) WITH CHRISTIANS IN OTHER CHURCHES

A second way that we should work in partnership is with Christians in **other churches**.

First, we need to be much more open to working with **other Anglican churches**. This is happening much more in these days of multi-parish benefices.

In my last appointment I was Vicar of a benefice of three churches and we developed teams of people drawn from all three churches to work together in various areas of ministry.....

- A team of people who visited parents who had enquired about the baptism of their children.
- A team of people who helped to run *Alpha* courses.
- A Worship Leaders Team.
- And so on.

I think what is important is to achieve partnership in **active ministry with Christians** in other churches in a benefice, and not just having joint services.

Joint services can be a good idea – it can be encouraging to have more people coming together occasionally. However, in many cases “benefice services” are regarded by many people as a “Sunday off”. I’m not convinced that coming together for its own sake is all that profitable.

What is profitable is coming together in partnership in **active service and ministry**. Actually **doing things together**.

In Philippians, Paul speaks in positive terms of his partnership with the Philippians but he refers to it as their “partnership in the Gospel”. He writes.....

³*I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.* (Philippians 1.3-5a NIV)

And it’s when we actually **do something together** that we feel affirmed and encouraged, and relationships develop.

So we need to work in partnership with other churches **within our own denomination**.

But under this second heading of “partnership with other churches” we need to work with **churches of other denominations**: the Methodists, Pentecostals, Baptists, the New Churches, etc.

I think that in the Church of England, other denominations often don’t appear on our radar!

For example, in our Archdeaconry there are 198 Church of England congregations. I have a map of East Yorkshire on the wall at home with all the 198 congregations marked on it in such places as.....

Burstock and Bridlington, Welwick and Welton, Sproatley and Scarborough, Hedon and Hunmanby.

And when I pray for the churches I sometimes imagine God looking down on these 198 congregations as “**the church** in East Yorkshire”.

But of course God doesn’t see it like this, because **we Anglicans** are **not the Church** in East Yorkshire.

When God looks down on those who belong to Christ in East Yorkshire he doesn’t just think of the Church of England.

I don’t believe he sees his people in terms of denominations. Rather, he sees Baptists, United Reformed, Pentecostals, Methodists and so on **as one church**.

And while the Church of Jesus Christ was invented by God, denominations were not! They are a human invention!

So we need to work in partnership with our brothers and sisters in other denominations.

However, I realise that this is not possible in many villages where we Anglicans are the only church. Nevertheless, even in such situations some who attend our churches can be from another denominational backgrounds.

I am also aware that there are other reasons why it is sometimes difficult to work with Christians from other denominations.

So we need work in partnership with one another **within our church**.

And we need work in partnership with Christians **in other churches** - other **Anglican** churches and churches of **other denominations**.

GROUP DISCUSSION (12-15 minutes – including serving of refreshments)

Working in partnership with Christians in other churches

- How well does your church work in partnership with other churches in your benefice?
- What areas of ministry could be developed in which you could work together with other churches in your benefice in ministry?

If applicable.....

- What churches of other denominations are there in your parish?
- How well do you work with them?
- Are there other ways in which it would be advantageous to work with them?

(3) WITH NON-CHRISTIAN ORGANISATIONS

Then thirdly, it can sometimes be appropriate to work with groups and organisations that are **not connected to the church**.

So when is it appropriate to work with such groups?

When we turn to the teaching of Jesus, at first glance it seems that he gives **conflicting teaching** on this.

In our Gospel reading from **Mark**, Jesus appears to encourage his disciples to work with **others outside their group**.

The disciple John said to Jesus.....

“We saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” (Mark 9.38 NIV)

In reply, Jesus said.....

“Do not stop him. No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.” (Mark 9.39-40 NIV)

So that’s one principle that Jesus teaches us.....

Whoever is not against us is for us.

However, in another place Jesus appears to say the opposite.

He says.....

“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.” (Matthew 12.30 & Luke 11.23 NIV identical)

Paul said something similar in 2 Corinthians 6 when he wrote.....

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.”

So **how do we reconcile** those two statements of Jesus:

Whoever is not against us is for us.

He who is not with me is against me.

There's not time to go into detail here, but if we were to do so, we would find that **the contexts are different**.

So **for us**, we might find that a particular group or organisation in the community is actually quite anti-Christian. In which case it wouldn't be appropriate to work in partnership with them.

Another group or organisation might show **a lot of good will** towards the church, and in such a situation it **would** be appropriate to work in partnership with that group.

So which groups might it not be appropriate to work with?

In our post-modern age when "spiritual" is an in-word, there are a **plethora** of what can be termed "**new age**" **groups** that promote all sorts of spiritual experiences.

At **first sight**, because we both have a spiritual agenda, it might seem that we could work in partnership together.

However, when we **look a bit deeper at their beliefs**, more often than not, we will find that **they and we** are **as different as chalk and cheese**, and that it would not be appropriate to work together in partnership with them.

So which groups might it **be** appropriate to work in partnership with? A couple of examples.....

In the north of the diocese there is a small town called **Yarm** near Stockton on Tees. The Church there has worked in partnership with an organisation called **Homestart** that supports families with new born babies. Doing this has given the church a **new connection with the community**.

When I took up my last appointment in Shropshire, my brief was to build a new Church and Community Centre in part of Telford. It was to be a partnership between a Government organisation called the Commission for the New Towns and the Church.

The Commission for the New Towns couldn't afford to build a Community Centre, and the Church couldn't afford to build a church. **But in partnership we did it**.

It wasn't all plain sailing, but we got there in the end and the building is now under the complete control of the PCC.

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 minutes)

Working in partnership with people in non-Christian organisations

- How many non-church organisations can you think of that exist in your parish?
- What sort of links does your church have with groups and organisations that are not connected to the church?
- Are there are ways in which you think your church could work together in any way with any of these non-church groups?

CONCLUSION

We have thought about working in partnership with one another.....

- Within our churches.
- With Christians in other churches - Anglican and otherwise.
- With some non-Christian organisations: those that show good will towards the church.

God made us to live in community and to work together.

As you fulfil your ministries as God's people in the places where God has put you, may he lead you by his Spirit to work in partnership with others in your church, with Christians from other churches, and with groups from outside your church.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth:
Worship the LORD with gladness.

Come into his presence with singing:
Enter his gates with thanksgiving.

Enter and his courts with praise:
Give thanks to him and bless his name.

SONG

As the deer pants for the water,
So my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship you.

*You alone are my strength, my shield,
To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship you.*

I want you more than gold or silver,
Only you can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
And the apple of my eye.

You alone are my strength, my shield,

You're my friend and you are my brother,
Even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other,
So much more than anything.

You alone are my strength, my shield,

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BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 12

HYMN

Lord of the church, we pray for our renewing;
Christ over all, our undivided aim;
Fire of the Spirit, burn for our enduing,
Wind of the Spirit, fan the living flame!
We turn to Christ amid our fear and failing,
The will that lacks the courage to be free,
The weary labours, all but unavailing,
To bring us nearer what a church should be.

Lord of the church, we long for our uniting,
True to one calling, by one vision stirred;
One cross proclaiming and one creed reciting,
One in the truth of Jesus and his word!
So lead us on, till toil and trouble ended,
One church triumphant one new song shall sing,
To praise his glory, risen and ascended,
Christ over all, the everlasting King!

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CONCLUSION

Lord Jesus, as we gather in your name:
Inspire us and guide us by your Spirit.

May all that we think and do and say:
Bring glory to your holy name.

May blessing and honour and glory and power:
Be yours for ever and ever.
Amen.

CLOSING WORSHIP

To Him we come,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
God's own living Word,
His dear Son.
In Him there is no east and west
In Him all nations shall be blessed;
To all He offers peace and rest,
Loving Lord!

In Him we live.
Christ our strength and stay,
Life and truth and way,
Friend divine:
His power can break the chains of sin,
Still all life's storms without, within,
Help us the daily fight to win.
Living Lord!

For Him we go,
Soldiers of the cross,
Counting all things loss
Him to know;
Going to every land and race,
Preaching to all redeeming grace,
Building His church in every place,
Conquering Lord!

With Him we serve,
His the work we share
With saints everywhere,
Near and far;
One in the task which faith requires,
One in the zeal which never tires,
One in the hope His love inspires,
Coming Lord!

Onward we go,
Faithful, bold, and true,
Called His will to do
Day by day
Till, at the last, with joy we'll see
Jesus, in glorious majesty;
Live with him through eternity,
Reigning Lord!

James E Seddon © Mavis Seddon/Jubilate Hymns
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You are the body of Christ,
and each one of you is a part of it.
To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given
for the common good.

**Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank you that we are all members
of your body here on earth.
We thank you for the gifts of the Holy Spirit
that equip us to work for you.**

**As we offer ourselves to your service,
help us to value one another's gifts,
to work together effectively,
and to have a true partnership in the Gospel
as we seek to live for your praise and glory.
Amen.**

GROUP DISCUSSION

- Do you naturally tend to want to work on a task on your own or with others?
- When, earlier tonight, you were asked to draw up a definition of “partnership”, would you naturally have preferred to have retreated into a corner and done this on your own, or to have done it as a group?
- In what ways are you aware that we live in an individualistic culture?
- If this is “the air we breathe” what things could we do to raise our awareness of this? How might we prevent ourselves from being swept along by the individualistic culture of the world in which we live?

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GROUP DISCUSSION (10-15 minutes)

Working in partnership with other Christians

- How well do the members of your Church work together in partnership?
- What is the difference between members doing their own isolated jobs (which others must not interfere with!) and members truly working together?
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If applicable.....

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- How many non-church organisations can you think of that exist in your parish?
- What sort of links does your church have with groups and organisations that are not connected to the church?
- Are there are ways in which you think your church could work together in any way with any of these non-church groups?

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BIBLE TEXTS

I Corinthians 12

⁴There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. ⁵There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. ⁶There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service. ⁷The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.

¹²Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. ¹³In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts.

¹⁵If the foot were to say, "Because I am not a hand, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear were to say, "Because I am not an eye, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? ¹⁸As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. ¹⁹There would not be a body if it were all only one part! ²⁰As it is, there are many parts but one body.

²¹So then, the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Nor can the head say to the feet, "Well, I don't need you!" ²²On the contrary, we cannot do without the parts of the body that seem to be weaker; ²⁵And so there is no division in the body, but all its different parts have the same concern for one another.

²⁶If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness. ²⁷All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12.4-7,12-22,25-27 GNB

Philippians 1

³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

(Philippians 1.3-5a NIV)

Mark 9

³⁸"Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." ³⁹"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰for whoever is not against us is for us.

(Mark 9 .39-40 NIV)

Matthew 12 & Luke 11 (Parallel passages)

"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters."

(Matthew 12.30 & Luke 11.23 NIV)

2 Corinthians 6

¹⁴Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

¹⁷"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." ¹⁸"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

(2 Corinthians 6.14-18)

¹ The Free Dictionary by Farlex (on line)

² Charles Taylor, quoted in Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth* page 268

³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* pages 3-4

⁴ Mark 6.7; Luke 10.1