

The following summaries of sources present the basic principles and practices of successful partnering or collaboration in the business world and in religious communities. They do not contain a model that our Province could use in our efforts to collaborate. This is presented as a basis for discussion, using the knowledge already gained from the experience of others.

To be a Capuchin certain definite qualifications and conditions and expectations are to be recognized, accepted and lived. In a similar way to be a partner definite qualifications, conditions and expectations are to be clarified, recognized, accepted and lived out.

INTRODUCTION

What is partnering? Partnering is a planned and orchestrated effort by a group of people to commit to an organized effort of establishing an environment of mutual trust, open communication, cooperation and teamwork that causes everyone to win by achieving the mutually agreed upon goals and objectives. In the partnering process a “charter” is developed that specifies the “what’s and how’s” of the way people relate to one another and manage themselves in working together to achieve the desire mission.

There are several essential elements of partnering for it to be successful:

- 1. Commitment to partnering by the top leadership of every organization involved in the mission.**
- 2. Equity in considering all participants interests and gifts to create shared goals and commitment by all involved. Everyone has something to give or something others can learn from them. We must be willing to learn from one another. This enrichment results from being open to one another’s ideas, experiences and respecting one another’s cultural differences, a process of give and take.**
- 3. Trust among all parties through personal relationships and open communication with mutual sharing and understanding of each party’s gifts, risks and goals. Partners must see their resources as jointly owned and held in trust by each member for the common good.**
- 4. Mutuality: to be open to one another as friends on the basis of common commitment, common values or spirituality, mutual trust, confession and forgiveness, keeping one another informed of all plans and programs and submitting ourselves to mutual accountability and correction.**
- 5. In decision making mutuality means sharing power. For example, major decisions affecting partners should not be taken without their participation in the decision.**
- 6. A partnering charter developed jointly by all involved that identifies specific goals and objectives for the mission.**
- 7. Implementation of goals and mechanism for problem solving.**

8. Continuous evaluation based on the goals to ensure the plan is proceeding as intended and all partners are carrying their share of responsibilities.

9. Timely resolution of all disputes at the lowest level.

THE BENEFITS OF PARTNERING

Partnering clarifies and manages the communications involved in a mission. It can uncover problems and provides structure and skills to address them. Partnering asks participants to commit to individual tasks to realize the mission and to resolve issues. Where there are many aspects of a mission partnering tries to coordinate them to work together. It helps team members work together to control more of the overall project and to get to know enough about each other to increase trust.

Thus partnering is an agreement among the people involved in a mission or project that outlines responsibilities, lines of communication and a commitment to that mission so that it is seen as a success by all. Partnering is based upon relationships and relationships are built upon trust. We form relationships basically by the way we talk to one another. How we give feedback to one another when something goes wrong, needs change, or needs communicated, shapes how we feel about one another.

The manner in which feedback is given can help or hinder the project or the relationship. All need to think about how they give feedback. Feedback literally means to give something back to nourish. When you give feedback, does it nourish someone to understand or improve, or is it done in such a way as to tear down a person and/or his work. E.g. if some task is not done well, giving feedback means not only to show what is not done but also means beginning a discussion of ways to improve the work. Also important is not to quickly judge a person's comments or actions without taking time to seek first to understand where the person is coming from in terms of his or her perspective.

1. Stage 1 – Orientation and preplanning

The purpose of orientation is to give all members of the team an overall view of partnering and the importance of their participation in it. All must have the same understanding of what partnership is, what are its benefits, what's in it for them, what is expected so that everyone is on the same page. If people have different notions or expectations, it cannot work.

Preplanning is the time for all partners to identify and define the important issues and project concerns. This is the time to set out clearly what needs to occur for the mission to be accomplished and who is responsible for what tasks. Even the workload should be a partnering effort.

Guidelines for Giving and Receiving Feedback:

- 1) Raise the issues: What are your needs and/or concerns/expectations of this project? What would you like to see more of or less of?**
- 2) Ask for specifics: when this happens, the result is...and you feel.... How do you see the situation and what changes would you like to see?**
- 3) Agree on an action plan: So I will do... and you will do.....**
- 4) Keep lines of communication open and agree on how to communicate or how information is given such as time of meetings, special events, problems, unexpected crises, etc and follow up on results.**

Conflict resolution or problem solving procedures:

The group of partners have to set up a conflict-resolution procedure or a problem solving procedure so that they can deal with issues. The art is to resolve a conflict before it drives a wedge between you and another person or group. Unresolved conflict can lead to many problems. Problems and conflicts cannot be resolved if people tear each other down. The skills needed are the ability to listen, ask pointed questions, do your homework about an issue, be respectful and honest.

A Problem Solving Guide:

Step 1: Identify needs: mine and others.

Step 2: Define the problem

Step 3: Brainstorm causes and solutions

Step 4: Evaluate solutions: acceptable and not acceptable

Step 5: Choose Solutions and distribute tasks and responsibilities

Step 6: Plan and take action and check results.

To actually come to solutions that fulfill the mission, the people involved must know the project involved very well and become aware of unspoken conflicts. All parties shall identify and clearly define issues openly and honestly after preparing good questions and being willing to listen for understanding all sides. Focus on the issue itself and not personalities and recognize that when a problem does exist the problem should be attacked and worked on and not the person. Look at the issue from the other person's point of view in order to better understand their perspective. Avoid blame and maintain a positive attitude. Keep your cool when the discussion gets heated. Once an issue is in the process it should be resolved at the level of the project by those responsible for the project within their area of expertise. Guidelines concerning who is responsible and who has the decision making power over certain areas need to be clarified. Some issues are to be resolved at a higher level. Elevating an issue to the next level of authority should not be viewed as an individual's inability to do his/her job but as insight into the bigger picture. Also all affected parties of issues resolved and the outcome must be notified.

Communication is an essential key to successful partnering. Leaders need to keep in mind what needs to be communicated. Who should communicate to whom and about what? How frequently and what is the method of communicating. Does anything need to be documented and

how? Are there any communication problems? Are we communicating clearly? Are we responding to the needs and concerns of others?

The above is a brief summary of the main principles of successful partnering learned from the business world. The source: ODOT PARTNERING HANDBOOK, Ohio Department of transportation, Author: Donna K. Brown, Project Consultant, Oak Wood Associates Ltd. Grand Rapids, Ohio)

In summary, collaboration or partnering is a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority and accountability for achieving results. Collaboration is possible only if there is a shared vision.

COLLABORATION WITH THE LAITY

Collaboration with the laity is in the air, whether the motive is sheer panic about survival of communities or missions, or whether there is a genuine conversion, a transformation to a new way of being church which embraces a new energizing and challenging vision in which there is a new human dynamic that calls for a constant negotiation of our expectations of ourselves and each other.

Levels of collaboration:

1. Employment: Collaboration with the laity means employing laypersons in the works of the religious community such as running or staffing their schools, health centers, retreat centers. Another level is created when laypersons are employed in providing services to the members of the religious community. One way is when the laypersons' role involved movement into the private life and quarters of the community as is the case when they are employed in the community kitchen or as nursing personnel within the living quarters of the

community. Questions arise: do we eat with them? What will they see and hear? Who can enter and where? Another stressful issue is religious being accountable to laypersons, when a layperson is hired to run the accounting office or the treasurer of the community. Leadership of the community must deal with the resistance that might emerge in carrying out policy decisions.

The decision to hire laypersons for the community's mission or for services to its members contains responsibilities both for the community and for the persons hired. The community needs to ask itself about the responsibility it is assuming in terms of justice and equity for lay personnel. We take on responsibility and accountability when we hire laypersons to direct programs or work with us. The relationship of responsibility does not flow in only one direction: these are the community's expectations of you; the community assumes none toward you. Superiors cannot dismiss church or community employees in arbitrary and unaccountable fashion. Policies, procedures and behaviors must conform to gospel justice and equality.

To realize the principles of justice and equality, communities engaged in collaboration with the laity must have clear guidelines concerning personnel practices and policy areas: personnel policies, participation in decision-making, compensation systems, training and continuing education or inservice, affirmative action, recruitment and placement, performance evaluation, grievance and due process, termination and associations of employees. (A helpful document on these issues is William P. Daly, Joseph T. Graffis, Parish Personnel Administration, National Association of Church Personnel Administrators, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1992)

2. Partners as colleagues. Collaboration reaches a new and more humanizing level when it becomes collegueship. Co-laborers all too frequently work for or under; colleagues work alongside or with. Colleagues are peers. They may not all have the same function or position in the mission but beyond the respect that people deserve just for their personhood, they give each other equal respect for the

contribution each makes to the common effort. This requires a new attitude to be maintained by community or church leaders and lay persons that they are not second-class citizens. They too have gifts, skills, passions and dedication. The need to control or be controlled, competence and lack thereof, and openness to honest critique are to be faced.

3. Empowerment. An even more significant level of collaboration involves co-determination. As people begin to see themselves as peers, the next step for them is the issue of ownership of the project. They want some say, some sense that they are shaping what it is they will be asked to commit themselves to. Who determines what we are going to do or be? In other words: whose mission, church, center is this? Does the community's legal title to the facility give it the sole power to shape its program or mission?

The issue is one of empowerment. To invite people into peer relationships is to invite them into empowerment. There are two levels. The initial one, operational empowerment, concerns the power to determine how to carry out one's role in the project, that is how to do one's job. To encourage people to be self-starters within the role delegated to them is more than just good management; it involves fundamental respect for people's gifts, competence and adulthood.

The second level is to be part of the process to determine larger goals, direction, vision or mission of the enterprise and in some cases, whether to end the project or hand it over to others. E. g. when there is the possibility of a religious community's withdrawal from some institution or mission it is only right and just to bring into the conversation all who are involved in the running of the place. Some congregations, at the time of chapter, invite a broad spectrum of people related to the mission of the community, bishops, priests, other religious, lay colleagues, the clients, to gather and reflect with the members on how the community is coming across and how it might serve more effectively, or how to deal with scarcity of personnel or resources for the mission. It has to be admitted, however, that it is not an easy task to design structures that can equitably give committed lay colleagues an appropriate sense of policy empowerment. This involves a complicated balancing of many values. And as religious move into collaboration they will need to decide

whether they are ready to share those forms of power and willing to assume the consequences of sharing power?

However, if it unfolds organically, the empowering relationship between religious and their collaborators may blossom into a mutual desire for co-membership, but no matter what form these unions take, all people involved must be clear about what expectations are present on either side of the relationship. This involves the discipline of continually clarifying and negotiating expectations together. (Source: Human Development 11, 3 (Fall, 1990, 36-39)

THE SECRET OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY COLLABORATION:

The secret is a strong sense of community, a sense of belonging, influence, integration and emotional connection among the members. A step toward creating a community and a strong sense of community is to identify a need, and then bring people together, in an organized way, to develop a plan, a course of action, to fulfill that need. This course of action should integrate individual gifts and strengths in a way that everyone will have a role, everyone will have a purpose. If individual members feel that they have contributed to the achievement of the overall goal and are recognized and appreciated then the whole community benefits and the work goes on.

Selflessness and serving others is an important and common value. Participation in a community, a mission, giving to others, doing for others, and helping individuals satisfy needs, making life better for the people are significant values that can bring people together and enable them to work together. This value is far more significant than who has the authority. People become committed when they feel they are a part of something that provides for the needs of others. Everyone feels included and accepted within the group and they have a sense of pride of being a member of this group. They feel that they can influence people in a positive way, by speaking to each other, listening to each other, and helping one another in a spirit of care. Collaboration becomes a way of living the Gospel, a brotherhood/sisterhood, a discipleship of equals, whose gifts are shared with society and are a witness to the presence of God's Kingdom of justice, peace and love.

Collaboration is a time consuming process. Communication, discussions, decision making by a group take time and energy as well as require honesty. If there is unequal power in the area of responsibility, when one party has unchallenged power to influence the final outcome or when the conflict is rooted in deep-seated ideological differences, or when power is unevenly distributed collaboration tends to fail. The norms of consensus and joint decision-making require that the common good take precedence over the interests of a few. Collaboration works best in small groups and breaks down in groups that are too large. Collaboration is meaningless without the power to implement final decisions. (Source: Scott London, Collaboration and Community, <http://www.scottlondon.com/reports/ppcc.html>)