

Accompaniment in Practice

With the lens of accompaniment focusing us on relationship with the companion church, we can engage one another in global mission by striving to embody these practices of accompaniment.

- **Respecting local autonomy**

Mission is the responsibility of the local church. The ELCA is responsible for its mission in the U.S. and Caribbean. Outside the U.S. the ELCA follows the lead of its companion churches as they determine how mission should be done in their context. We listen to, advise or challenge our companions while remaining open to and respectful of their priorities, and seeking to use our resources to support them.

- **Investing in local priorities**

Accompaniment means listening carefully, understanding key local priorities, and channeling funds to support those priorities. In some companion churches, this may mean mission personnel; in others, it may mean direct grants for local ministries led by local leaders.

- **Moving from *power over* to *power with***

Accompaniment challenges us to move from “power over” to “power with and among.” It calls us to share our resources and our decision making, and to make decisions mutually, as equals.

- **Acknowledging gifts and assets**

“None are so poor that they don’t have something to give. None are so rich that they don’t have something to receive,” says Joshiah Kibera, a former bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and former president of the Lutheran World Federation. Accompaniment challenges us to see beyond needs and begin to recognize non-material gifts and talents like skills, credibility, integrity, and respect. **Money is not the only gift!**

- **Building capacity**

Our generous tendency to want to “do for” can create dependency between companions. Dependency is avoided when we invest in building up one another’s capacity to proclaim and serve by sharing knowledge, insights, personnel, resources, and experience. ELCA mission personnel and funds help build the capacity of companion churches; the ELCA’s capacity to proclaim and serve in our multicultural society is also built as we learn from our companions. The process is mutual.

- **Developing and encouraging local leadership**

Lutheran missionaries who helped start new church bodies also saw the need to work themselves out of their jobs by encouraging the development of local leaders. Through ELCA international and in-country scholarships, companion churches have educated 700 pastors, bishops, seminary professors and experts in health care, library science, development, finance and other specialized areas. Grants supporting seminaries, theological extension programs, and church-sponsored schools and universities have opened education to tens of thousands more. As a result, local leaders occupy positions once held by missionaries in most national Lutheran churches.

- **Supporting local evangelism**

“Evangelism is best done by local people who know the context very well,” says Bishop Joseph Bvumbwe of the [Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi](#). Most new believers respond to local

evangelists and church leaders who speak their language and understand their culture. The ELCA supports local evangelism efforts through grants, scholarships, and personnel. In places where there is no Christian church, the ELCA partners with neighboring churches and ecumenical partners to proclaim the good news and serve in response to human need. Where such collaboration is not possible, the ELCA engages in such mission directly.

- **Intentionally collaborating**

Many churches collaborate in global mission. In Tanzania alone, for example, the ELCA is one of 13 national Lutheran church bodies and mission agencies in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania — not to mention the 20 ELCA synods who are companions to ELCT dioceses. Collaboration among these partners is critical in order to reduce duplication of effort, maximize resources, support local priorities, and strengthen effective local ministry.

- **Seeking sustainability**

A sustainable ministry lasts a long time. It's something that the companion can fund, staff, and manage for years on its own. In one sustainable water program supported by ELCA funds, for example, the companion church trains local leaders to visit villages to assess local water quality, teach people about waterborne diseases, and train them to maintain a filtration system that ensures clean water. What's the opposite? Showing up, installing the filtration system, and leaving — without making sure that everything is in place for the ministry to continue. Sustainability also takes lots of time. It means working together to understand the context, recognize local assets, utilize outside resources to fill gaps, and build capacity for the long term. And that's ELCA Global Mission's priority: to increase the capacity of both the ELCA and its companions in other countries to participate in God's reconciling mission through proclamation and service.

- **Participating globally for local engagement**

The global and the local are no longer segregated. Global warming, immigration, and food and gas prices all point out ways that we are interconnected. Through our global engagement, we learn skills that help us be better leaders and missionaries in our own context — a significant way of receiving the gifts of the world church.