

Partnerships

As the church looks toward its future in mission and ministry, exploring partnerships with various organizations may be a way forward for the church. For partnerships to be successful the church will need to satisfy its partner's agenda without sacrificing its own. In this article, I would like to reflect on what I have learned in my work as a chaplain with respect to working in partnership.

In the work of the Mission to Seafarers, we bring an agenda of meeting the spiritual, moral and physical needs of seafarers and in doing so, demonstrate the love of Christ. Some seafarers share a Christian faith: Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, Greek Orthodox; other seafarers are Muslim, Hindu; and some have no faith. The practical things we do are: transport them into the city for shopping, talk with them, sell them SIM cards, give them Christmas gift bags, connect them with clergy from their faith group and help out in other ways as needed. Over the years, seafarers have expressed appreciation to me regarding what the Mission does for them.

In the world of shipping, there are those who support our efforts and those who may not or have little interest. This latter group may see the church as a nuisance rather than a partner; not valuing the contribution the Mission could make.

The agenda of the shipping industry is to deliver a product on time, at the least cost and with no damage to the cargo or vessel. The industry wants to avoid a ship being idle: a ship at anchor costs money as does one that is delayed because of issues with the crew. A happy ship is one where morale is good; crew work effectively; safety is promoted, and accidents are minimized; and crew retention is fostered. Crew retention minimizes costs such as training and crew exchange.

To successfully conduct its ministry and mission, the Mission ought to appreciate the agenda of the shipping industry while not compromising its own agenda. The Mission needs to be aware that cargo operations have priority; that following port and/or facility rules and safety policies are necessary. Failure to do this may deny Mission's personnel access to a port facility or a ship. The practical things the Mission does supports a happy ship and, in an unhappy ship, ministers to the crew.

Building a ministry of presence is important. It is ministry in and of itself and it lays the foundation to do further ministry. This is an idea that the Royal Canadian Chaplain Service trains its chaplains to follow. It applies nonetheless in port ministry. To have a successful ministry of presence, one needs to learn the culture and language of shipping and know the people who work in the industry. Relationships that are built become the foundation of ministry: reputation and trust mean a lot.

When the Mission supports the shipping industry, it encourages the shipping industry to enable the work of the Mission and those in the industry, who believe in what the Mission is doing, to support and fund it.

For the Mission to succeed at its agenda, it needs to know its own agenda well and follow it. Developing a clear statement of goals helps it stay on track. The whole of the Mission needs to be onboard: the chaplain, Board of Directors and volunteers. Using the knowledge of its purpose and communicating it to the community that supports it, helps the Mission stay on course because the community will keep it accountable (deny funding).

The Mission, as a part of the church, ought to be grounded in the conviction that in serving strangers, the seafarers, one is serving Christ. Maintaining religious and spiritual practises are important as the strength of the church comes from following Jesus. I say the daily office regularly and because I am a parish priest, preparing a weekly sermon encourages me to study the scriptures. At the Seafarers' Centre, a Eucharist and lunch is offered once a month to help a portion of the Mission's community remain spiritually grounded. We encourage people to pray for seafarers and those who minister to them.

So to sum up, to foster partnerships, on one hand the church ought to understand the culture of its partner and how to help its partner be successful in achieving its mission. On the other hand, the church needs to understand its own mission, clearly defining it and communicating it throughout its organization, and the church needs to stay grounded in Christ so that it is seen to be following His teaching and example.

The Mission to Seafarers works in partnership with the shipping industry and faith groups. I have written of the partnership with the shipping industry, but the principles that I have outlined apply with our other partners such as the Roman Catholic Church. These principles also apply in other chaplaincies: military, hospital, education and corrections. There may even be opportunities for parish churches to build partnerships within their local community using these principles.

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