



Episode 20: Doing Cross Cultural Partnerships Well Show Notes

Mary Lederleitner is a researcher, author, trainer and a consultant for the Wycliffe Global Alliance. One of her focuses is best practices in cross cultural ministry partnerships. She has a PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, where she lives with her husband John. She has developed many resources to train missionaries and lay people in working cross culturally. She is the author of *Cross Cultural Partnerships – Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission*.

Before we jump into today's topic, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to be passionate about missions?

- It started when I was very young. I had a great uncle who was a Franciscan priest and he was a missionary in China. He ran an orphanage where they would care for baby girls who had been abandoned. He was taken as a prisoner of war in World War II. His story pulled at that initial calling in my heart for missions.
- I became a Christian just before I left for college.
- I went to Urbana in 1981 and this helped me to better understand missions and its scope. A number of churches also fanned the flame of missions in my heart
- In my 20s I attended a ministry at my church called Ambassadors – a ministry for young adults to help them find their calling and support one another. At this point, I finally decided to go into full time ministry. Since that time I went on and got more education and have served with Wycliffe for almost 20 years.

Partnership is a rich, broad word. It can mean a lot of things. Can you define partnerships for us for this conversation?

- Ministry partnerships are people coming together who share a common passion for what they are trying to accomplish together. There is equal planning and mutuality. Everyone has a voice in what is happening and how decisions are made.

What are some of the benefits of cross cultural partnerships?

- Most people enter partnerships for pragmatic reasons. They've reached a road block in ministry – such as limited finances or staffing - and they partner in order to reach more people.



- Paul Hiebert once said that people from other cultures can see our sins easier than we can see our own sins and vice versa. Cross cultural partnerships can foster a much more profound and rich form of discipleship.
- I also think of Revelations talking about people of every tribe, tongue and nation worshipping together. Cross cultural partnerships are a chance to begin developing our eternal calling of working with people of every tribe, tongue, and nation and being about our father's business together.

What are some of the cultural components that can lend themselves to misunderstandings between partners in a cross cultural partnership?

- Social scientists talk about elements or dimensions of culture and each element has a spectrum – the spectrum between collectivism and individualism for example.
- Each group sitting on different parts of the spectrum will have different expectations of how the other partner will act and if these aren't understood by both parties, it can cause conflict in the partnership and potentially cause the partnership to end.
- With collectivism and individualism, the idea of how resources and money are shared is very different. In a collectivist culture, resources belong to everyone and they are shared broadly. In an individual culture, it is much more personal – each person keeps control of their own resources.
- Approaches to power is another issue. Many cultures are hierarchical while others are egalitarian and how you address those in leadership differs between these two perspectives. If you have a hierarchical culture and status is important, but someone comes in in an egalitarian way – calling everyone by their first names, rather than titles, and treating each person the same, you can hurt feelings and cause conflict.
- High context and low context communication can lead to misunderstandings. High context communication cultures don't place as much value on written words. True communication relies on non-verbal behaviours, expressions, patterns and cues. Low context cultures, like North America, are very focused on written contracts and agreements and communicating in writing. A low context culture can easily offend high context cultures, where you cannot speak directly about things.

What are some of the common difficulties or hurdles that a mission committee would need to be aware of as they consider cross cultural partnerships?

- When North American churches give money to projects, that money is designated and its designation follows it. The money then arrives in a collectivistic culture where there is pressure from relatives or people in the community or other church initiatives to lay claim to that funding. It is easy to be judgment and think that the collectivist church isn't trust worthy. We just assume that when we send money it will be handled the same way it is handled when money comes into our churches.



- There needs to be much more discussion and dialogue upfront to understand what the context is going to be. How do those partners on the receiving end develop a strategy before the money comes to help ensure that the money accomplishes the purposes it is being given for?
- A lot of times we, the North American church, want written reports and very possibly the funding is being given to an oral culture. If we want the report in English and English is the receiving partner's 3rd or 4th language, it may take them a very long time to write a report. There may also be shame because they realize that their written English sounds like something an elementary student would write. Then you add to it that's a collectivistic culture, it is easy to get so busy that they don't have time to write a report. It's easy for the mission committee in North America to feel like their partner church isn't accountable.
 - The mission committee might want to consider having one of their members Skype or Facetime their partner, have a conversation about what is happening and then have the mission committee person write the report instead. This helps the partner to not lose face or feel shame and makes the system more efficient.
- It is important to slow things down and talk a lot at the beginning before we send money. We are often tempted to send money right away and then, even though the intentions are good, there are misunderstandings and things go sour.

You've mentioned the importance of discussion here. Are there any other principles that you suggest mission committees consider as they move towards cross cultural partnerships?

- Choose one person to be a partnership champion. Our lives get really busy and this is just one of many things happening in a church or mission committee. If you don't have someone who has this as their primary responsibility, there won't be attention to the maintenance pieces that need to happen for it to flourish over the long haul.
- Set up times to pray together with your cross cultural partner. Spend time relating and being brothers and sisters in Christ together. Make sure your communication is not just discussing business items.

We often hear the word 'dependence' when we talk about missions. What do we mean by it and what advice do you have for the North American church in regards to unhealthy dependence?

- So many times people speak of dependence or dependency and we always assume that it's bad. If we look at Romans 12 we see that we are all part of the body of Christ and none of us are self-sufficient. I don't think it's Biblical for independence to be the cherished value.
- Unhealthy dependence is the belief that a person cannot make a difference without funding from an outside source. When this happens, it's very tragic. It mars our identity and our ability to be human beings involved in the mission of God.
- One thing that is very important to talk about in partnerships is to discuss how to avoid unhealthy dependency. What have they seen in their context? What did it look like? How can it be avoided? What negative impacts did it have?



- Sometimes we don't realize the status we bring into partnerships – often nothing in our culture has prepared us well to listen well to people with less education or financial resources. It takes a lot of intentionality to go in as a learner and a listener and to pay attention to the issue of unhealthy dependency.
- It's also foolish to decide not to give any money in order to avoid unhealthy dependency. We have resources and we are commanded to be good stewards of our resources.

Are there other resources that you recommend on this topic?

- Coalition on the Support of Indigenous Ministries (COSIM) website
- *Making Your Partnership Work* – Daniel Rickett

