

# New Roots Review

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## **Mutual Missions: Worth Considering**

by Fred Wilgenburg

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) is the denomination within which I am ordained. For many years, a guiding principle of its global missions program has been Mutual Missions. Here is a statement about it: “We believe in a purposeful and undeviating focus on mission collaboration and inter-dependency that matures into deep-rooted cooperation and significant partnership.”

I think the concept of mutual missions is ingenious. God has specially given each believer unique sets of abilities and spiritual gifts, as well as unique experiences, depending on where they have lived or how they have lived. So, churches, individuals, and ultimately the world, are blessed when they mutually share spiritual gifts, knowledge, cultural understandings, life-experiences, and resources with each other.

To me, mutual missions is as obvious as it is ingenious. But, I’m amazed at how limited its use is. Some churches practice missions in the way of offering space to a congregation of mostly immigrants and former refugees during off-hours, occasionally listening to a speaker from a different country, or offering resources to another congregation, but far fewer seem to practice mutual missions. The generosity of missions is important, and good, but mutual missions will likely bring more overall spiritual growth.

King of Glory Church in Sioux Falls partners with International Outreach Ministry, a church of new Americans who are originally from Liberia. The pastors occasionally swap pulpits, the congregations co-lead a ministry called Kids Closet, they share worship space, and they co-administer Children’s Rescue International, a Christian orphanage and school in Liberia.

Lord of Life Lutheran Church partners with Afaan Oromo Church, a congregation of new Americans who are mostly from Ethiopia. The pastors of both churches are trained and ordained as Missouri Synod Lutheran pastors. For four years, Pastor Wade of Lord of Life mentored Pastor Chera through the seminary process. They occasionally swap pulpits, and the congregations occasionally worship together. Different worship schedules, especially due to unique work schedules of the people, make it difficult to overlap worship, children’s ministries, and fellowship times, however, a newly formed joint leadership team is helping build unity among this “combined” church family. As many of the Ethiopian children and teenagers know English better than the Oromo language, they attend the English confirmation class taught by Pastor Wade.



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First Christian Reformed Church (CRC) partners with Falls Flourish Church, a congregation of new Americans who are mostly from Nepal and Bhutan. The churches worship together several times each year, the pastors occasionally swap pulpits, and their fellowship hours overlap. As the pastor of First CRC has many years of experience, each week he takes time to mentor the pastor of Falls Flourish Church, who is on a path of education.

Be aware that being mutual in missions may bring unique challenges: many churches with new Americans are used to worshipping 2+ hours, rather than the 90-minute maximum that most American

Christians are accustomed to; sometimes we have different understandings of what child-supervision looks like; start- and finish-times are often more relaxed for new Americans; there may be differences in theological understandings and practices, as well as one group perhaps being more Pentecostal than the other; different work- and life-schedules often exist. However, with some extra spiritual fruit offered (*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control--Galatians 5:22-23*), the blessings of mutual missions can override the challenges.

Here are a few practical ways to see the blessings of mutual missions blossom: before formally entering a relationship, become acquainted with what each other would offer to the relationship, then decide whether or not to go forward; develop a mutual respect, seeking to dispel superiority- and inferiority complexes within ourselves; mutual expectations should be clearly, but carefully, communicated; be focused on the positive learning and spiritual growth which can take place. AND be ready to try new foods and beverages—definitely a perk!

**Let me know if you would like to consider** the concept of mutual missions in ways I describe, with another local or regional congregation whose people are mostly immigrants and former refugees.

**If you would like to consider the concept of mutual missions with a missionary or foreign mission organization, I encourage you** to visit with global mission staff of your church's denomination. If you are not of a denomination, let me know as I would be happy to research options with you.

**What is New Roots Ministry?**  
It's "a springboard for immigrants & their churches." This is done through workplace chaplaincy (both as Fred is chaplain for 17 hours/week at Smithfield Foods & as we are training & placing bilingual chaplains on commercial farms), through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering refugee/immigrant pastors, leaders, and their churches in various ways, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in a store owned by refugees or immigrants, then hear their stories, and through helping people to navigate the American system and to strategically plan how to achieve their goals, like education.

