

STUDY GUIDE

TOGETHER WITH GOD

working with the church



Interserve is an interdenominational and international community of Christians, bringing God's love to the peoples of Asia and the Arab world through word and action. Wherever we work, we do so in partnership, serving the global church and encouraging newer mission movements. We serve in some of the hardest places in the world in obedience to Jesus' commission to "go and make disciples of all nations".

The purpose of the Vision & Practice Study Guide series is to promote and build a greater understanding of Interserve's ethos and direction through reflection, guided questions, discussion and Bible study.

Vision & Practice Series:
Study Guide for [Together With God: Working With The Church](#)
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INTRODUCTION

This study guide is intended to help give you a better understanding of how Interserve views the church, and the relationships between Partners, Interserve, the sending church and the receiving church. We recognise the vital role that each plays in the building up and sending of workers and in their cross-cultural effectiveness.

This guide can be used by individuals or groups to help them become more intentional in connecting with their sending church and in working with local churches in their country of service.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CHURCH

Interserve has been interdenominational throughout its history. We recognise that the body of Christ is diverse, and that no one denomination or manifestation of spirituality can fully capture the brilliance of the gospel.

Interserve cooperates with existing worshipping communities and other Christian agencies in our areas of service, wherever they share similar goals and a biblical foundation. We believe that working together in partnership with the church is a biblical principle and that it bears fruit in effective ministry, good stewardship and a commitment to express the unity of the Body.

We believe that partnership begins with a biblical understanding of the church. Inadequate views lead to misunderstanding, tension and crisis, and these adversely affect relationships within the church, between churches, and with other organisations like mission agencies.

- 1] Draw a chart showing how you think the following should relate to each other: you, God, your sending church, your local national church, Interserve, other mission agencies, and the people of Asia and the Arab world.

[GROUP] *Ask for some volunteers to share what they have drawn and explain it to the rest of the group.*

- 2] Read pages 3-5 in the *Together With God* booklet. What ideas from these pages do you consider to be very important? Are there any other points about the church that you consider very important, that were not covered in these pages?

[GROUP] *Ask for some volunteers to share their answers, and discuss.*

INTERSERVE AND THE CHURCH

Interserve has always had an expressed commitment to work with and within the church. This is clearly stated in our purpose:

“To make Jesus Christ known through wholistic ministry, in partnership with the global church, amongst the neediest peoples of Asia and the Arab world.”

We believe that God, in his providence, raises up specialist agencies and structures, such as Interserve, to partner with churches and to stimulate and assist them to be catalysts for mission. A commitment to the development of local churches and to the facilitation of those churches into mission is at the heart of Interserve’s mission call.

We value every opportunity to be partners in the gospel and to work with faith communities – whether well-established or consisting of only a handful of believers – in our area of service. Interserve globally is committed to working in partnership with many different churches and church networks. Its Partners regularly walk through challenging but rewarding situations in which socio-political conditions, security concerns and local issues influence the shape of the church and therefore Interserve’s partnership with it.

1] Read pages 6-7 of *Together With God*. Write down all the words or phrases that describe the relationship of Interserve and its Partners with the church (both sending and receiving). Circle the four that you consider to be most important.


2] Write down some of the challenges and/or benefits of partnership in these three real-life scenarios:

a) *The receiving church includes the very traditional government-registered church (which must register all attendees) and non-registered churches (whose regular meetings are held in homes, for example). There is limited interaction between the non-registered churches made up of people from the countryside and others made up of urban professionals.*

b) *The largest and most active receiving churches are Orthodox or Catholic, and in most neighbourhoods these historic churches comprise the only legitimate avenue of service and outreach. Some of their church leaders embrace partnerships, while others are more suspicious. Aspects of their theology differ from mainstream evangelical theology, but their wholistic ministries fit with what we can offer.*

c) *In a society where conversion from the majority religion is illegal, the receiving church is reluctant to accept converts because they are sometimes fake, sent to spy on their activities. The church has survived by keeping a low profile, largely obeying the law and minimising interaction with those from the majority religion.*

[GROUP] *Have a volunteer (or several) share what they have written for 1] and 2], and discuss. ☸*



“ LOCAL CHURCHES ARE GOD’S PRIMARY
AGENT FOR DISCIPLESHIP AND FOR THE
TRANSFORMATION OF THEIR NATIONS. ”

SENDING AND RECEIVING CHURCHES

Historically, ‘sending’ countries sent out missionaries to ‘receiving’ countries that needed the witness of the Gospel. The growth of the global church, however, means that modern mission is now ‘from everywhere to everywhere’. But the distinction between ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ still helps us to identify particular challenges that we meet when encouraging churches to achieve their mission goals.

We define a sending church as one that wants to participate in God’s mission cross-culturally; a receiving church is one that is willing to partner with the global church in growing the kingdom of God in its local community.

We recognise that the body of Christ is diverse, so we do not seek to mirror the form, pattern and culture of the churches we come from, but to demonstrate in our teams a rich diversity of biblical spirituality.

- 1] Think about a church you have been to (or have heard about) that is culturally different and geographically distant from your sending church (or the one you presently attend). Write down the similarities between the two churches, and the differences.

[GROUP] *Have some group members share what they have written.*

INTERSERVE AND THE RECEIVING CHURCH

Where there is an existing national or local church, Interserve seeks to work with it. Interserve recognises that local churches are God’s primary agent for discipleship and for the transformation of their nations and is committed to building up the church so that it can fulfill its role.

Partners are encouraged to be active in a local congregation as long as, based on local or national conditions, the church or national believers are not harmed by internationals associating openly with the church.

- 1] Read pages 9-10 of *Together With God*. Write down the guideline that stood out most to you, and why.
- 2] Are there any guidelines you would change, or any new ones you would add to the list?

[GROUP] *Have some group members share their answers.*

Where there is no existing church, Interserve works to help establish new churches, and expects all Partners to be involved in disciple-making. In the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-11), Jesus described what happened when the farmer's seed fell on different types of

ground. Often, the work that Interserve does in the hard places is to prepare the ground, so that the seed will have fertile soil to receive it. We are willing to work the hard, stony ground as well as the more fertile soils, but we leave the outcome to God, rejoicing at every person who becomes a disciple of Jesus but not judging the value of our ministry by numbers.

- 3] According to the descriptions in Luke 8, how would you describe the current state of the "ground" where you serve?
- 4] Read pages 11-13 of *Together With God*. What are some of the possible challenges you think Interserve Partners may face in putting these guidelines into practice?

[GROUP] *Have some volunteers share what they have written.*



INTERSERVE AND THE SENDING CHURCH

We believe that Interserve has a key role as an advocate for the peoples of Asia and the Arab world, and our aim is to help the sending churches gain the necessary vision, understanding and commitment to participate in mission in these challenging places. Partnerships with sending churches are not a one-size-fits-all operation. Every sending church is unique in its goals, needs and expectations.

- 1] Read pages 14-15 of *Together With God*. Out of the five guidelines on these pages, write down the one that stood out most to you, and why.

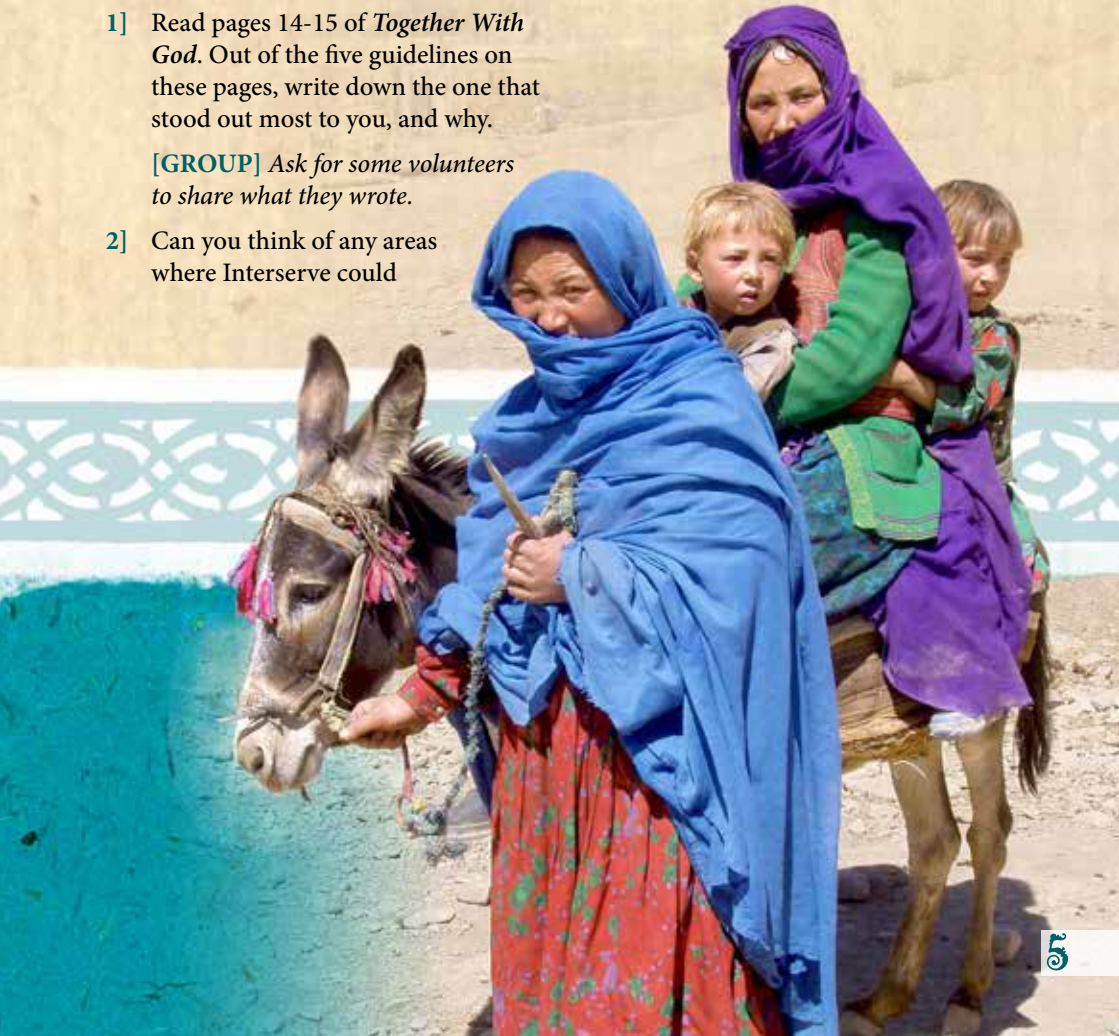
[GROUP] *Ask for some volunteers to share what they wrote.*

- 2] Can you think of any areas where Interserve could

help your sending church more effectively engage in God's mission to the world?

- 3] Are you aware of any situation where an Interserve National Office has specifically partnered with a sending church? If so, what growth did they see in future Partners and On Trackers, and in the sending church?

[GROUP] *Discuss some of the responses for 2] and 3].* ☸



TOGETHER WITH GOD

Some people choose not to get involved in partnerships; they may simply enjoy their freedom, or be afraid of the complications involved, have had a bad experience or hold negative opinions about the church or mission agencies.

We understand these barriers, but since its founding in 1852, Interserve has always chosen partnership for the discipling of the nations because we believe it is a Biblical pattern beginning with God partnering with us. From the beginning Interserve has emphasised corporate, team effort more than the work of individual ‘heroes,’ and has made service our goal, striving for the expansion of Christ’s kingdom and shunning individual recognition.

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building” (I Corinthians 3:5-9).

If we substitute *mission agency* and *church* for *Apollos* and *Paul* here, the same point applies. We are all servants, all co-workers in God’s service. It has always been our understanding that we are part of the global church. We are thus God’s fellow workers alongside the worshipping communities in our home countries and in Asia and the Arab world. Mission is not competition among Christians but is what we are called to do as one great family of faith.

- 1] What new or reinforced insights have you gained through this study?
- 2] What do you sense God desires for your involvement in his global work? How do you see your sending church, Interserve and a receiving church partnering together?

[GROUP] *Are there any specific questions/issues that have come out as a result of this training that should be discussed now as a group?*

- 3] Please take this opportunity now to pray for Interserve, your sending church and your receiving church. ☸

Interserve has always been committed to working with, and within, the church. This study guide will help give you a better understanding of how Interserve relates to the global church as, together with God, we strive for the expansion of Christ's kingdom.

This study guide is suitable for personal use or for a small group setting.

*Lives and communities
transformed through encounter
with Jesus Christ.*