

Twinning FAQs – Congregational twinning

What is twinning?

Twinning is a relationship in which congregations and presbyteries link with partner churches across the world for mutual learning, friendship and mission engagement.

Is it about fundraising to build a borehole/school/whatever?

No! Twinning is not about setting up a funding project overseas. It is about building personal relationships between those in the Church and Scotland and those in churches overseas. Congregations come together as equals, both acknowledging that they have much to learn, and much to share. We encourage you to take money 'out of the equation' altogether, so the relationship neither starts out, nor develops as, a donor/recipient one.

What does it cost?

As discussed, twinning is not about raising money to send to your partner church, nor should they be raising money to send to you.

However, costs that should be taken into account are those relating to visits. Although the Faithshare Visitor Programme can award grants to help with the cost of travel, this won't cover everything.

If you are hosting visitors from your twinned congregation, you'll need to think about costs of accommodation, food, travel etc. If you are travelling elsewhere, you need to cover costs of vaccinations, gifts for your hosts etc.

In the past, twinned congregations have found that the best way for this to work on both sides is for the host congregation to cover all costs of hosting their visitors. This continues the theme of the relationship as one of equals. You will of course need to discuss this with your twinned congregation well before any travel plans are finalised. Try and ensure that both sides are open and honest about their expectations.

You may decide that you wish to do some fundraising to cover the costs of hosting your visitors. This is something that the whole congregation can get involved in.

Who can I twin with?

The Twinning Programme helps congregations and presbyteries find twins through our relationships with partner churches around the world. We have partners in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. It's important to think carefully about the countries you would be interested in – do some research on your own, or ask us at the World Mission Council for guidance.

Europe – Hungary, Czech Republic, Italy, France

Asia – Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Burma

Africa – Ghana, Malawi, Zambia, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, South Sudan

Caribbean – Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, Jamaica

Middle East – Israel and occupied Palestinian territory, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon

Resource available! We have basic profiles of each of our partner churches that can help start you off, please do ask for these if needed.

How do I get started?

After getting the 'go-ahead' from your Session, we advise that you set up a Twinning Group (see below). This is the time to invite the Twinning Development Officer (TDO) to come and speak to you – either the whole Session or just the small twinning group. They will go through the process with you, and help you think a little more about twinning and what you can offer and what you might want to get out of it. You may decide that you wish the TDO to speak to your congregation on a Sunday too, to ensure that everyone has heard the same information.

Resource available! Introductory leaflets about twinning

How many should be in a twinning group?

This depends entirely on the size of your congregation, and how many of the constituent groups that make up the congregation want to be involved. As a general rule we would advise that you have a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 8.

Who should be in the twinning group?

The most important things in the 'job description' are commitment and enthusiasm!

Try to get a really good range of people in the group. They don't all need to be members of the Session, but it can help to have a couple of representatives from there. Spend some time early on talking to the wider congregation about twinning, and see if there is anyone who is really keen. Talk to the various groups in your congregation – Guild, youth group, music, bible study etc. and see if there are people from each of these who would be interested in joining. One of the foundations for a successful twinning is to get a wide range of the congregation interested and involved at an early stage.

This is also a good time to get other people from the community involved. You could approach the town council and see if they are keen to take part, or any local schools you may have good links with.

What is the process for starting a twinning?

Once you have decided to go ahead, and have set up a twinning group and met with the TDO, the next step is to complete a profile form. This is the main document we use to help find you a twinning partner, so it's important to spend time on it – consulting with others in the congregation if necessary. It gives details of your congregation – size, demographics etc. and also lets you describe the everyday activities of your congregation.

Resource available! Profile form, and guide to completing profile form.

How do you find us a partner?

At the early stages of the twinning process, we ask you to decide which country/countries you would like to consider twinning with. Once you have narrowed it down, we send your profile form to the head office of the partner church in this country(s) and ask them to consider which of their congregations would be a good match for your congregation. These congregations will then complete a similar profile form, and we will pass these on to you for consideration. Once you have spent time prayerfully looking at these and have decided which one you feel would be most suited for your congregation as a twin, we will send your profile form to the partner church to pass on to the congregation. They will then go through the same process with your form. If both congregations are happy to go ahead, then we exchange your contact details and leave you to start communicating with each other. We are of course still here to help you at this stage if needed.

How long does it take to get to this stage?

Anything from 1 month to 2 years! You may be fired up and ready to go with your form, and we may find the perfect twin for you straight away. This is rare though! We would encourage you to take some time to introduce the idea to the congregation, and spend some time working on your profile form. It can take a few months to find profile forms from our partner churches, but we do our best to work with them to make the process as smooth as possible. You may feel that none of the profile forms offered to you are suitable; in this case we go back to the partner churches.

How much time will the group need to devote to twinning?

This is entirely up to your group and your twinned congregation. At the start of the twinning relationship, it is likely that the bulk of the communication will be managed by a small number of people, who then have the responsibility of keeping the rest of the congregation informed and excited about the developments of the twinning.

You will probably find however that the biggest time commitments come when you are planning to host a visit from your twinned congregation.

When should we involve the wider congregation?

As soon as possible! The best twinning relationships are those in which the congregation has been involved from the beginning, and has had time to get used to and excited about the idea. However, you must emphasise that the process for twinning can take some time. Start talking with the different groups in the congregation about what they can contribute to the twinning, and ask your twinned congregation to do the same. Keep them updated on developments through the newsletter, or announcements on Sunday, but don't bombard them with information if there isn't any news!



How long should we wait before planning a visit?

Not too long!

Although modern methods of communication such as email and Skype are great, it can be difficult to get relationships and friendships developing properly through these. It is likely that your twinning relationship won't 'come to life' for the congregations until you meet face to face. We would encourage you to start talking to your twin early on about planning a visit each way. Although the first visit may not happen for a number of months, it is a great thing for both congregations to be working towards, and it can inspire your congregation to start learning more about the country you are twinned with, and to become more involved in the twinning relationship.

How do I arrange a visit?

You should plan any visits jointly with your twinned congregation, whichever way the visit is happening.

Once you have decided to plan a visit, get in touch with us at World Mission. We can help you find out about the Faithshare Visitor Programme, and help you apply. We have staff who can help you book flights, arrange visas, and get travel insurance. We also have region-specific staff who are happy to talk to you about the country you will be visiting.

The twinning groups on both sides should work together to discuss what they want from the visit, and what they feel should be included in the programme. Remember, it isn't a holiday. The visit is to show the representatives from the twinned church what everyday life is like in the host congregation.

When you are arranging a visit as a host, we encourage you to host the visitors in homes of congregation members. This can be a great way to get other people in your church involved. This arrangement will ensure that the visitors really feel part of the congregation, and we usually find that really strong relationships are developed through this method. You may wish to move them to 2 or 3 different homes. Try and plan a programme that included all the groups in your congregation, and also some events to include the wider community. Come and talk to us if you need help!

Resource available! We have produced some travel tips to help you in your planning, ask World Mission for these.

What financial support is there from World Mission?

The Faithshare Visitor Programme is an enabling tool for Scottish and overseas congregations and presbyteries to pursue the idea of a twinning, and develop and strengthen an existing twinning. It provides travel grants to enable members of twinned congregations and presbyteries to travel to each other's countries.

If you are a twinned congregation you can apply for 2 grants. If you are awarded the grant, this will cover the costs of flights, visas and travel insurance for 2 travellers. These grants can be shared out amongst a larger group to help more people travel.

The grants can also be applied for and awarded to members of your twinned congregation overseas, to enable them to visit you in Scotland.

Resource available! Ask us for application forms and application guidelines.

