

“What if we spent a few days in Grand Bassam, Côte d’Ivoire this May?” My wife, a Congo MK, was curious. “Sure . . . what’s in Bassam?” “Well, since 1998 people from across Africa have been coming to these five-day CRAF gatherings. They’re mostly from Francophone Africa, so they meet in places like Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire. But English-speaking Africans and others come too.” “So what *exactly* do they do at CRAF?” she insisted. “Uh, hold hands.” I looked sheepish. “Oh, honey, how sweet,” she replied. “Is it a marriage seminar?”

Now the point of this partially fictitious exchange is that “holding hands” can be understood many different ways. But for the organizers of CRAF (*Consultation Régionale pour l’Afrique Francophone*) “holding hands” refers to unreached peoples-focused partnerships (the CRAF logo even uses “hand holding” imagery). An initiative of Interdev, CRAF itself is a partnership venture between Interdev, MANI (Movement for African National Initiatives), World Vision and AEA (Association of Evangelicals in Africa).

Of course, spending five days talking about holding hands isn’t the point. The point is to go home and do it. As a follow-up to Bassam 2000, mission and church leaders from the Lake Chad Basin countries of Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad,

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Nigeria, and Niger met in 2001 to begin holding hands together for the unreached. And as of this year, all of the countries related to CRAF have had a national consultation.

Clearly “hand holding” can have great benefits. Eleven major partnerships currently exist for peoples like the Wolof, Tamasheq, Fulani, Malinke, Soninke, and others. Networks for mission execs, researchers, AIDS, economic development and other concerns also exist. The people and vision they represent are an enormous kingdom resource.

Yet the very idea of “hand holding” can be misunderstood. When one speaker—a no-nonsense Nigerian researcher—rebuked those who would come simply looking for Western money, she expressed what CRAF *doesn’t* mean by partnerships. Thankfully, I didn’t meet many who seemed to be out just for my financial contacts.

But even when our motives are right, “holding hands” can still be an uncomfortable experience. I offer a literal example. An African male who grabs the hand of his American brother in friend-

ship as they walk along the path does so from a completely different set of cultural assumptions than his friend has. If the American doesn’t understand this and pulls away, his brother may feel confused. Likewise our divergent world views, expectations, church and ministry preferences—and just plain humanness—can cause tension as we seek to expand the kingdom together. Yet the rewards of working through these differences and continuing to walk hand-in-hand far outweigh the uneasiness we may initially feel.

Africans relating to other Africans face similar challenges. Church and mission leaders can misread each others’ intentions. And some problems are not just imagined; they’re real. Sometimes partnerships don’t work out the way we expect. Disappointments happen. Missionaries have disagreements. That’s why CRAF’s focus on reconciliation between denominations and agencies—indeed all believers—is so vital.

Finally, learning to hold hands with those whose hands have nursed victims of AIDS or have buried relatives who’ve suffered from civil war or brutality is yet another way we can show we care.

Will you join hands and pray for these brothers? Or even join hands in person? The next CRAF will be held from August 1–6, 2004. For more details, contact Younoussa Djao at Ydjao@compuserve.com. I also hope you’ll download Djao’s official report on CRAF 2002, which was a World Inquiry venue. It’s part of Luis Bush’s compendium. You’ll be encouraged by what you read there.