



Too Little

Duane A. Ewers

This may sound strange, but I believe that local congregations, through their Annual Conferences, give too little to World Service and General Administrative Funds.

I know that this perspective goes against prevailing attitudes across the church, but I have seen what local congregations, working together through the United Methodist connection, can do. And I have seen and experienced the great needs that continue to exist and go unmet.

Image the United Methodist Church, not as an impersonal bureaucracy, but as a living, vital organism, the Body of Christ connected together, serving the spiritual and physical needs of persons in many places in our world. Jesus said to his disciples. "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these..." (John 14:12). More than helping people find new life, feeding the hungry, healing the sick? Think of the works that we are doing in the name of Christ. Through the connectional church together:

- we are building and sustaining a university in Africa where leaders are trained in "the things that make for peace"
- we are building a seminary in Moscow, Russia, to train clergy to lead a growing church
- we are providing training and resources for a new church in Cambodia
- we are undergirding a network of more than 1,000 missionaries who spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the world
- we bring together young people from local congregations to help them hear God's call to ministry in their life
- we are making it possible for young peo-

ple to pursue their education and become leaders, in the church and world by providing scholarships and loans

- we are educating clergy for leadership in our congregations
- we are providing access to quality higher education in our historically Black colleges
- we are supporting our bishops and annual conference leaders who give spiritual leadership to our local congregations
- we are reaching beyond our local congregations to make possible special ministries of support and advocacy for racial/ethnic constituencies, many of whom have been marginalized
- we are reaching beyond our local congregations to provide ministries of support and care to persons serving in the military
- we are training leaders and providing resources for the growing number of Hispanic congregations.

The list of these ministries can go on and on, accomplishing far more than our congregations can on their own.

Yes, we give too little to accomplish these ministries and more. **The fact is that while the total dollars given to the general church has increased in the past few years, the proportion going to the general church has declined.** In 1978 congregations gave 6.2% of their funds. In 2002 it was about 4%. The funding being proposed for the 2005-2008 quadrennium will continue to be about 4%. This means that local congregations keep a larger percentage of funds, from just under 80% in 1978 to more than 83% in 2002. Approximately 13% of funds from local congregations support the work of districts, annual con-

ferences, and jurisdictional conferences.

And so I suggest that the real issue congregations face is not the amount they are asked to give to support the ministries of the general church but rather it is one of financial stewardship among United Methodists. According to a study by John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, per member giving as a percentage of income is declining. The average giving among United Methodists is estimated to be about 2% of their income, down from about 2.5% ten years ago, a time in which average income rose. These figures are not very commendable for disciples of Jesus Christ.

When it comes to money, a theology of scarcity abounds! It is time to propose a theology of abundance, God's abundance. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth seeking aid for the church in Jerusalem, "I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need..." (II Corinthians 8:13-14a). The general church needs more resources, not just so we can keep a bureaucracy in place, but in order that together we can continue to do even "more than Jesus did." □

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