

Apportionments



Too Much

Dan Johnson

Are congregations required to contribute too much to the World Service and General Administrative Funds? Yes. Now, the question as stated raises an unfortunate conundrum of impossible choices: local versus global allocation of funds, and the ensuing, but unhelpful, moralistic pronouncements that lead to neither solution nor clear path forward.

The key is to develop a strategy that grows out of our theological core, one that is clearly focused on reviving the health of our church, both locally and globally.

In recent years there has been a renewed emphasis on the vitality of the local church, which is the penultimate source of all funding—God being the ultimate source. The Vital Congregations initiative and the current (in our conference) Healthy Church Initiative are but two examples. The current *Discipline* reflects our Church's theological view well: "The local church provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs" (par. 201).

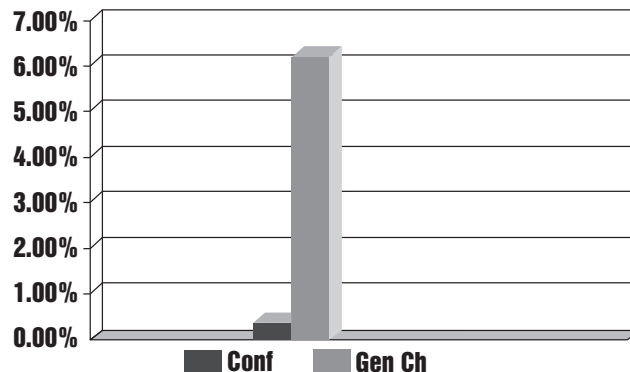
Here's my point: if the generating source of the resources that will fund the ministry of the Kingdom is the local church, then we must engage in a clear strategy that will strengthen the local church, thus strengthening the global church.

Each year, our church has to choose between adding a key staff person who could greatly enhance and expand our ministry or pay our apportionments, between increasing our local mission giving or paying apportionments. Historically, we have managed to do both in a balancing act that all churches perform. Last week, three members of our Missions Committee lobbied me strongly to increase our local mission budget; they were passionate, informed, invested and clear that these local ministries were absolutely vital. Our many mission trips and outreach programs that we fund are transforming and powerful in the lives of our members, which results in increased discipleship and therefore increased giving to the church and the general church.

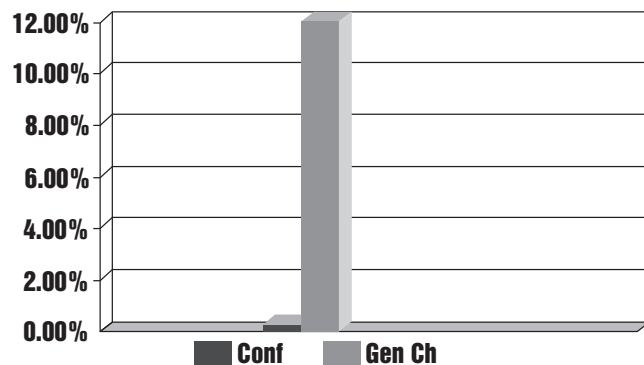
Additionally, the essential structure and vital health of the Annual Conference (certainly in Florida and, I am certain, in many other conferences) is being threatened by a financial weight that it cannot continue to bear. Each year our Conference CF&A (of which I am a part) sweats bullets trying to present a responsible budget. The hard historical data is clear that there is a certain amount of money coming to the annual conference treasury. Each year it is almost identical with last year and the year before. But, the General Church's

askings increase substantially. Because other income to the annual conference is constant and the General Church's requirements are increasing, the only way to "meet our budget" is to reduce the funding for vital annual conference pro-

Average Annual Apportionment Increases 1999-2003



Percent Change in Dollars Actually Received Via Apportionments 1999-2001



3 year total percent change in dollars actually received

grams and ministries, such as new church starts, campus ministries, ethnic missional initiatives. This we have done for the past several years. We have streamlined to the point that we are in grave danger of cannibalizing ourselves, if we haven't already. It doesn't take an Alan Greenspan to realize that this erosive trend cannot continue. The graphs on page 36, provided by our Conference treasurer demonstrate the point in dramatic fashion.

Finally, nothing clears the air like a hard dose of reality. And the reality is that the local church is not responding to the increased apportionments of the General Church. This is the current data from our Conference Treasurer's Office:

- Apportionment askings in 2003 increased 3.65% over 2002
- Apportionment giving so far in 2003 has decreased in both dollars and percent compared to 2002
- Apportionment giving so far in 2003 is the lowest in recent years

Let me rephrase the question CR is asking. Is it a worthy and biblical goal to increase the giving of our resources toward the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God? Yes! Is the current strategy and level of apportionment working? No! Will a slight modification of policy at General Conference affect the kind of change that is required to achieve the goal that is worthy of a God who "owns the cattle on a thousand hills?" No. Rather, prayerful, strategic, disciplined and courageous decision-making will provide the way forward. □

Note:

Graphs on p. 36 illustrate facts related to the Florida Annual Conference.



Dan Johnson is pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church in Gainesville, Florida.

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