

World Service Fund Budget

Robert E. Fannin

When a United Methodist in Fairbanks Alaska, St. Louis, Missouri or Birmingham, Alabama puts one dollar in their local church offering plate they know that they are supporting more than the wants and needs of their local church. They are supporting mission and ministry around the world. Four cents of every local church dollar goes beyond the boundaries of the local church and annual conference and reaches ministry in places where no single local church alone could make a difference. The connection works.

The World Service Fund is the heart of our Church's ministry together. Its allocation is half of the amounts budgeted for the seven general apportioned funds combined. Through this Fund each of us becomes a partner in mission and ministry at home and around the world. The results of World Service ministry are making a difference across the globe.

Regrettably, the places and ways that United Methodists are called to be in ministry surpass the available financial resources. Each General Conference finds delegates making difficult financial decisions about how to fund the denomination's ministry and mission during the upcoming quadrennium. To assist delegates, the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) and the General Council on Ministries (GCOM) develop quadrennial recommendations for the funding of World Service.

As a means of informing that recommendation, in November 2002 GCFA invited for the first time representatives from each of the jurisdictional annual conferences and designated leadership from all the general agencies to a meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. All representatives had the opportunity to dialogue about the financial challenges facing all levels of our connection, and the impact they were having on both funding and operating costs for denominational ministry. Those discussions began to form the basis on which the agencies' budget requests for 2005-2008 were considered.

GCOM then held a program consulta-

tion in February 2003, with GCFA members in attendance to hear the presentations. The agencies provided detailed line item budgets for their proposals, and responded to a series of requests for information sent to them before the meeting by GCOM. The information was sought to assist GCOM as it began establishing priorities for recommended World Service funding beginning in 2005 related to these points:

- Describe how the responsibilities and functions assigned to the agency will enable, resource and implement the five transformational directions approved by General Conference 2000, as stated in *Living into the Future*.
- Describe the objectives of the agencies' major units (department, division or program) for 2005-2008.
- Identify the funding elements underlying any requested additional World Service Fund dollars for 2005-2008 over the 2001-2004 funding level.

The initial total requested funding for the agencies during 2005-2008 was approximately \$265 million, representing an increase of 42% over the current quadrennium. Given the size of the askings, the agencies agreed to look jointly at possible alternatives for reducing the amounts requested. In May they presented a revised funding proposal to GCOM of \$230 million, which was then presented to GCFA.

Recognizing that the agencies have experienced the same kinds of fiscal constraints as the jurisdictional and annual conferences, GCFA members worked out a new proposal. It used the 2001-2004 allocations for each of the agencies as a base. Investment income available in the current quadrennium to partially underwrite the cost of employee benefits will be unavailable next quadrennium. They added back the equivalent of funding from reserves and that lost investment income used by the agencies over the current four-year period. A modest 1.2% increase was applied to bring the total recommended amount to \$222 million. GCFA indicated that a recommendation to fund at the \$222 million

amount would be contingent upon the agencies taking several steps before final action was taken:

- Develop proposals to streamline their operations that produce visible, measurable reduction in organizational and administrative costs, while
- Retaining the fundamental missional objectives of the program agencies, and
- Demonstrating their commitment to a four-year "first step" on a three quadrennium plan to address the priorities that GCOM and the program agencies have identified as critical to the future of the denomination

Based on the responsiveness of the World Service agencies, \$222 million was established as the funding level for next quadrennium. GCOM also presented to GCFA a recommended split of the total among the agencies, as required by The Book of Discipline. At a joint meeting of GCFA and GCOM in Los Angeles in early September 2003 both councils agreed upon the \$222 million as the recommendation to General Conference 2004, as we balanced

these unusual economic times with the Church's call to ministry.

The timing of budget development prior to General Conference is always a challenge. In 2003 we submitted a budget recommendation for 2005-2008. This

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budgeting cycle was an additional challenge this year as we sought to meet earlier deadlines in order to have financial material translated for our central conference delegates.

The real work is now before the General Conference delegates. It is their decisions that transform numbers into ministry and mission. It is their decisions that breathe life

into a budget and transforms it into a mission statement. It is their decisions that will prioritize the many requests for funding beyond this budget recommendation. They will decide how to use those four cents of every dollar, in every offering plate, in every United Methodist church that goes beyond the boundaries of a local church and annual conference. With the support of the General Conference delegates, and the subsequent efforts by all of us to meet these financial commitments, crucial ministries done in Christ's name will continue to receive adequate funding for the next four years. □



Robert E. Fannin is Resident Bishop of the Birmingham Area and Vice-President of the General Council on Finance and Administration.

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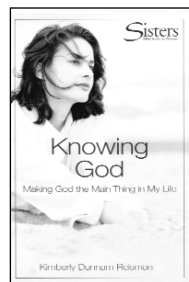
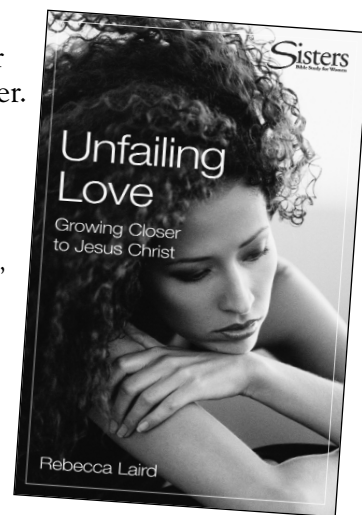
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