

LEGISLATIVE SECTION 7

COUNCIL ON FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION REPORT TO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2009

Timothy J. Riss, President

- 101.** It has been an unusual year in which to sense the grace of God. Usually we are conscious of the overflowing cup and the table set before our enemies. But the past year has been difficult. New York City is at the center of the financial world, and we are in ministry in and around New York. As the financial world has stumbled so badly from the end of 2008, we have had considerable challenges, too.
- 102.** Yet our worst fears have not been realized—at least, not yet. Everyone with investments in stocks or housing or pension plans (all of us? Yes, even the poor, as charitable institutions quake) has seen a dramatic turn in personal fortunes. Our churches are not excepted. But we are not experiencing 30% unemployment, we are not losing millions of dollars of savings from failed banks, and we do not have an ecological disaster blowing dust from formerly fertile land.
- 103.** So we have reason to thank God for what we have, for the abundance of our blessings, and for the comfort of the Holy Spirit, who gives us hope. Out of grateful (if anxious) hearts, church members continue to invest in ministry. Our Annual Conference had been developing a trend toward giving 100% to a shared ministry of clergy support, administration, area-wide programming, and worldwide mission. We had risen from meeting only 80% of our commitments to the Conference budget to meeting 92% in 2007. But last year we slipped back to 88%. And we are slightly behind last year's pace this year. In 2007, 382 local churches gave 100% or more in the covenant of shared ministry apportionments. But in 2008, only 347 churches were able to maintain their covenant. This Council is eager to reassure local churches and the Conference members that the sacrificial offerings of our people make a sweet aroma, pleasing to God, because these offerings are invested in ministries of self-giving love. We are confident that, as a beloved community of hope and a healthy body of Christ, we will unite in mission to transform the world through the ministries that are funded by apportionments.
- 104.** Perhaps we will not regain our balance until later this year. Perhaps it will not even be that soon. What we are able to do, though, is still important, still transformative, still an effective witness to the world. Through shared ministry apportionments, we have helped transform the lives of immigrant children whose parents get legal help from Justice For Our Neighbors, a project of the General Board of Global Ministries (funded by apportionments), which

has a powerful clinic (with extra funding from New York Conference apportionments) in the John Wesley UMC of Brooklyn. We have helped transform lives of people in a small church by providing support for the right pastor's salary. We transform the lives of retired clergy by underwriting some of the cost of their health insurance. We are transforming the lives of young adults by participating in the RETHINK CHURCH initiative.

- 105.** You know I am only scratching the surface. Thankfully, there are many others who are testifying about the ministries of this Annual Conference, particularly as we meet in June to consider the past year and plan for the next. I have just one more thing to say about the economy's recession and our faithful responses to it.
- 106.** "Perfect love casts out fear." (1 John 4:18 NRSV) So let us lay hold of the perfect love of God, abiding in us, and move into our future unafraid.
- 107.** The Council has yearned to provide a budget that encourages fearful Christians while engaging in transformative mission. We hope we have done this with a budget that, as of this writing, will require less apportioned funding than last year's by about half a percent. We are seeking many economies, from greater use of the internet to recalibrating our program priorities. You will note that the administrative side of the budget is down by more than 8% and our program is down more than 15%. General Church Apportionments are also down, but our medical insurance cost for retirees is up almost 25%. We believe no ministry is significantly harmed by a proposed reduction in funding, and genuine needs are being met when we have proposed an increase.
- 108.** During 2008, the Council spent most of its energy on developing the budget for 2009 and reorganizing ourselves for the new quadrennium. In reorganizing, we have tried to reconcile our responsibilities for personnel matters with a revitalized Conference Personnel Committee. The 2008 Discipline charges us (§613.13) "To establish uniform and equitable policies and practices in the employment and compensation of personnel, in consultation and cooperation with other conference agencies that employ staff, unless the annual conference has designated another agency to carry this responsibility." Our Conference has designated another agency: the Conference Personnel Committee. However, that Committee was wholly inactive until the spring of 2008, and the Council was planning to inform the Conference about that. We were going to recommend the Conference change that policy. However, several members who had been elected to the Personnel Committee appealed to us to assist them in reviving their ministry, and we have worked hard on that for the past twelve months.

- 109.** We did not have any significant stewardship programming in 2008. We had two sessions of Stewardship Academy prepared, but both were cancelled for lack of registrations: twelve for April in Bristol, Connecticut, and three for May in Lake Ronkonkoma. Perhaps God was preparing us for a significant change in context, as we have moved from a bullish atmosphere to an anxious time. We are planning new ventures in stewardship education in late 2009 and 2010.
- 110.** We celebrated the end of 2008 by determining to make up from our reserves what local churches were not able to remit for the General Church Apportionments. We used \$150,000, and Bishop Park found a few thousand dollars to bring us to 100% again. (Our reserves are basically at the target we set in 2004: 10% of the apportioned budget.) We were grateful that we had the resources to complete our covenant responsibility with the worldwide church. More than this: we are grateful to participate in the mission of the worldwide church, so that anti-malarial nets are distributed in Africa, a new seminary is established in Russia, devotional books are made available in Korean, Spanish, and English, an after-school center is funded in an American city, and bishops' salaries are paid everywhere. We have faith that God will continue to provide what we need to be in ministry.
- 111.** Finally, I continue to thank God for outstanding leaders with which we are blessed, especially Ernest Swiggett, Bishop Park, and Ann Pearson. On our Council, the Conference is blessed with the skills, energy, and insights of a team of twenty-two, including these three and some nonvoting liaisons with other agencies. Everyone gives significantly of their gifts on this Council, but we should especially name Margaret Howe, Bob Pollsen, and Margaret Robinson, who are the officers with me.
- 112. RECOMMENDATIONS:**
- 113.** District Superintendent Salaries: At the request of the Cabinet, the Council recommends the 2010 salaries of the District Superintendents, Director of Connectional Ministries, and Treasurer be set at \$72,518, the figure voted on for 2008 by the 2007 Annual Conference.
- 114.** 2010 Calendar Year Budget: The Council recommends a budget of \$8,536,602 be approved and apportioned to the churches (see the detailed, two-page schedule).
- 115.** Conference-wide Appeals: The Council recommends that appeals to all the local churches in the Annual Conference be limited to these twenty causes:
- a. Anchor House
 - b. Bethany Methodist Home, Brooklyn
 - c. Bethel Homes, Inc.

- d. Bolivia—Cochabamba Project
- e. Brooklyn United Methodist Church Home
- f. Cambodia Mission
- g. The Children's Home of Wyoming Conference
- h. Co-op City United Methodist Church
- i. Costa Rica, Siquirres
- j. Far Rockaway Mission
- k. Ghana Mission
- l. Haiti, Jean Rabel
- m. John Street United Methodist Church (in Manhattan)
- n. Methodist Church Home of New York (in Riverdale)
- o. Mozambique Mission
- p. New York Annual Conference Camping Program Capital Campaign
- q. New York Education Society
- r. United Methodist City Society (including Five Points Mission)
- s. United Methodist Homes of Connecticut
- t. Women's Advocate Ministry