

AEPS MISSION FUNDING LEARNING COMMUNITY

PURPOSE: To engage in passionate and generative discussions among a representative group of Presbytery Leaders in order to:

- Discover resources and best practices among presbyteries related to funding our mission and stewardship education as a connectional church;
- Imagine and communicate a vision of how GAC and MGB might collaborate more creatively and effectively on funding issues.

MEMBERS: Graham Hart, Betty Meadows, Dana Knapp, Joey Bishop, Peter Nord, David Dawson, Wayne Yost, Sue Krummel, Ellen Marquardt, Steve Yamaguchi, Susan Andrews (Convener)

PROCESS: As a Learning Community committed to collaborative and fluid conversations, this group has met three times by conference call – gathering historic patterns and ideas about mission funding, imagining the adaptive questions facing the church at this time, allowing the conversation to steer the group toward new approaches and purposes, and celebrating the emergence of a Working Group (Sue, Krummel, Convener) to gather stories, paradigms, and best practices for mission funding from across the presbytery spectrum. Opinions have diverged and merged and changed, as we realize that God is doing a new thing in the midst of institutional diminishment and re-creation – leading us to be both faithful and fruitful in fresh ways.

QUESTIONS: The group created a set of key questions:

- 1) Are we looking for funds to sustain the institution – or the Kingdom?
- 2) Whose mission is it? (beyond *mission Dei*)?
- 3) Who needs to be part of this conversation – both to define the problem and interpret the whole, connected mission of the church (GAC? Foundation? Synods? Presbyteries? Seminaries?)
- 4) How do we faithfully explore the issues of stewardship and funding together? What are the theological, biblical, and cultural ideas that inform this conversation?
- 5) How do we recognize the anxiety in ourselves, our presbyteries and the church at large – while holding onto the promise of God’s abundance and grace in the midst of a culture of scarcity?
- 6) How do generational issues factor into a 21st century model of mission funding?
- 7) What connectional values and functions will be lost or threatened if we move beyond old funding patterns (unified giving, per capita, etc.)?
- 8) What are new models of “doing” presbytery that are not so expensive?
- 9) What are new ways of funding the church?

- 10) How confusing is the practice of direct appeals to the same donors from various parts of the system? Does it compromise our connectionalism, or it responding to cultural reality?

INITIAL LEARNINGS

- 1) Historical record shows that unified giving has not been the norm in our 300 year history – except for the 1950's through the 1960's. How do models other than unified giving challenge the effectiveness and future of presbyteries?
- 2) The recent report of the Mission Funding Task Force lays a foundation for understanding our mission funding dilemma as a denomination, but does not adequately address the adaptive issues of the future. New staff and changing times suggest that a broad based and collaborative conversation needs to continue, with the realization that no one approach will resolve the funding conundrum.
- 3) A collaborative and inclusive understanding of mission funding – engaging all governing body levels, and churches and members from across the theological spectrum - will necessitate building strong and enduring RELATIONSHIPS. In times of discontinuous and permanent change, we need to move beyond a functional mode as a denomination – into a time of continual communal relational discernment of how we are part of an organic whole.
- 4) The metaphor of the Body of Christ gathered at the table – all “members” of our connectional body engaged and offering their unique gifts – moves us beyond bureaucratic, hierarchical and corporate understandings of our connectional system.
- 5) A Best Practices Working Group emerged out of the Learning Community– to discover and share best practices and creative paradigms for mission funding among the presbyteries - learning from each other, and hoping that what we discover and learn collaboratively will bubble up to help the whole denomination.
- 6) Positive conversations and partnerships continue with GAC staff and elected members about the need and hope for collaborative brainstorming, decision making, and implementation around mission funding efforts. There are varying opinions among MGC leaders about the appropriateness of direct fund appeals from GAC – but there is a unanimous desire for all levels of the church to be engaged in integrating GAC practices into the fabric, timing, and mission of presbyteries and congregations.
- 7) Further clarification is needed about the effectiveness and functioning of the MGB/ GAC Feedback Forums created by GAC staff. Also, it was observed that there is not a uniform or standard way that GAC staff (or areas) relates to Presbyteries. Some GAC

areas and staff are very collaborative and seek opportunities to both work with and support Presbyteries, so as to enable Presbyteries and their staffs do better in their role and work, and others operate as if GAC is relatively independent of Presbyteries.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- 1) Conversation about these leanings at the MGB/GAC Advisory Group meeting on May 12th:
 - how might the metaphor of the Body of Christ gathered at the table inform our understanding of effective and comprehensive collaboration?
 - how are the Feedback Forums encouraging collaboration?
 - who imagines and sets the agenda for the whole church - and what are the roles of the various governing bodies in that work?
 - how do we understand “adaptive change” – and how does that change the way we “do” church?
 - is it time for a new GA initiated mission funding study/task force?

- 2)The AEPS Mission Funding Working Group will gather paradigms and best practices from across the church and share their findings at the AEPS Annual Meeting in October.

- 3) The Mission Funding Learning Community will continue to meet by conference call to discern the big question:

What does a comprehensive, collaborative, theologically grounded, biblical, Spirit led, adaptive Mission Funding strategy and praxis (integrated among all four governing body levels) look like in a 21st century connectional church?

Susan Andrews
May 12, 2009