

Stewardship of Managing Report to Annual Conference

Recommendation

We recommend that the Western North Carolina Conference authorize Bishop Lawrence McCleskey to chair a Task Force on Annual Conference Reorganization.

The Task Force shall begin its work no later than August 15, 2006.

In addition to the Bishop, the Task Force shall consist of fifteen members who represent the diversity of our Annual Conference.

A Vice-Chair, a layperson, shall be named by the Bishop, no later than August 1.

Four persons shall be named by the following groups: a member of the Council on Finance and Administration; a member of the Conference Ministries Advisory Committee; a member of the Board of Pensions and Health Benefits; and a member of the Conference Staff Relations Committee; all named no later than July 15.

Two members shall be named by the Stewardship of Managing Task Force (one layperson and one clergyperson); no later than July 15.

In addition, the Conference Nominating Committee shall appoint four more members, and Bishop McCleskey shall appoint four more persons; all no later than August 1.

Conference staff and District Superintendents of the WNCC may serve as members, consultants, and resource persons as needed by the Task Force.

The Task Force shall be allocated by the Council on Finance and Administration a total working budget of \$25,000 over the eighteen months of its work for staff costs, printing, travel, and other expenses. No member of the WNCC shall be compensated for their work.

This Task Force will present to the 2007 Western North Carolina Annual Conference [hereafter "WNCC"] a report that shall:

1. Affirm and give concrete expression to the mission statement of The United Methodist Church: "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs" (2004 Discipline ¶ 120).
2. Provide a clear ecclesiological and theological understanding of our "connection" that defines the relationship particularly between the Annual Conference and local congregations. We affirm with the 2004 Discipline ¶ 601: "The purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples for Jesus Christ by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church." Ultimately, our connection is not about

money or organization but creating an effective and comprehensive model of “interactive relationships” for the task of making disciples of Jesus Christ [see also 2004 Discipline ¶ 130 for a definition of connectionalism.] As our Discipline states: “Our connectional system performs at least three essential tasks: embracing God’s mission for the church as making disciples for Jesus Christ; organizing our whole Church to enable local congregations, the primary arena for mission, faithfully and fruitfully to make disciples for Jesus Christ; and ensuring that all components in the connection carry out their appropriate responsibilities in ways that enable the whole United Methodist Church to be faithful in its mission” (2004 Discipline ¶ 701.1).

3. Offer a new organizational model for the WNCC structure that assists in “making disciples of Jesus Christ” and promotes mutual accountability between the WNCC and local congregations. The new organizational model shall be in place no later than January 1, 2008.
4. Based on the vision and new organization, propose a new staffing model for all WNCC staff and district superintendents and their staff that enables mutual accountability. This model may include realigning the locations of where WNCC staff work. The new staffing model shall be fully in place no later than July 1, 2008.
5. Ensure that the budget for the new organization and staff size of the WNCC matches anticipated receipts from local congregations.
6. Create a measurable system to evaluate relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the WNCC at every level that strengthens the relationship between the WNCC and local churches, with clear criteria that ensures accountability throughout the WNCC.
7. Encourage the 2008 WNCC delegation to General and Jurisdictional Conferences to develop proposed legislation to the 2008 General Conference to create greater accountability by the general church. This legislation shall be brought to the 2007 WNCC meeting for action.
8. Offer clear communication throughout its work to inform all parts of our WNCC family about the work undertaken. This communication may include quarterly reports, regional gatherings for dialogue, listening groups, and ultimately a final report for action to the 2007 Annual Conference at Lake Junaluska.

Rationale Summary

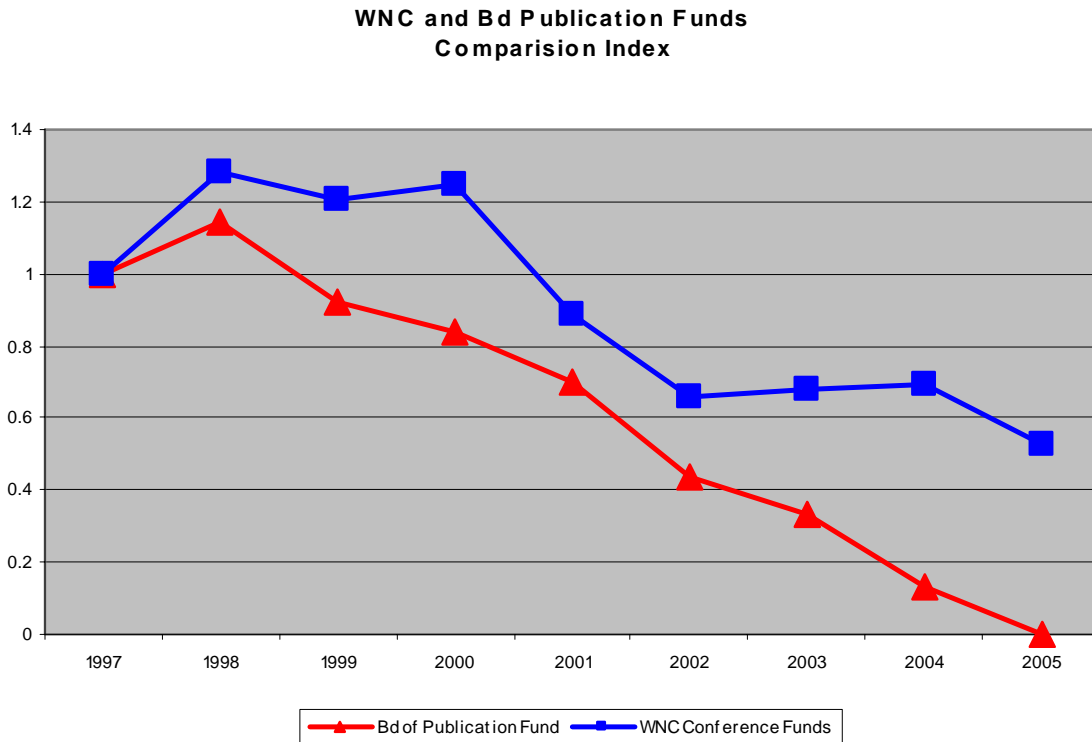
- The Stewardship of Managing Task Force had mandate to seek financial and programmatic accountability by the WNCC
- Accountability needed by WNCC and by its local congregations
- “We cannot continue a funding mechanism that will not work.”
- Numerous financial and organizational issues face the WNCC
- Need clear process and key leadership team to offer fundamental solutions
- Bishop McCleskey can lead such a process
- Our current funding model is appropriate to the task
- Our organization has the tools needed for change
- Now is the time for change

Extended Rationale

Introduction to Our Crisis

The financial collapse of the North Carolina Christian Advocate in late 2005 created a unique moment in the WNCC. People asked a number of questions: How did this happen? Who was in charge? Are there implications for other ministries of the WNCC? Underlying these questions was one even more profound: could such an event happen to the WNCC itself?

We now face a major financial crisis within WNCC. Serious financial problems are known and growing larger. Since 2002, the WNCC Council on Finance and Administration has had to use unrestricted reserve funds to make up the loss of income from unpaid WNCC apportionments, Direct Costing for health insurance and pensions of clergy, and Fair Share Askings. In the past three years, we spent \$1,502,181 from reserves to pay our WNCC bills. Our unrestricted reserves are now 40% below our conference policy for this fund. Within the next three to four years, these unrestricted reserved funds at the current rate of expenditure will be gone. The following chart illustrates the problem and how close we are to following the path of the Advocate:



At the beginning of 2006, the total proposed budget for our WNCC was set at \$29,699,966. However, only \$25,699,414 has been pledged/accepted by local congregations toward this

budget. Churches have pledged only 86.53% of the monies needed, and actual receipts, based on history, may be 83%. About one half of the congregations in the WNCC did not pay 100% of all monies requested. What will we as the WNCC do?

2006 Conference Budget	Accepted Amounts by local congregations	Expected Income from local congregations	Anticipated Short-fall over Budget
\$29,699,966	\$25,699,414	\$24,650,971	\$5,048,995

This decline of giving to apportioned funds has occurred at the very same time our denomination has seen an overall rise in giving to missions. In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina and the Southeast Asia Tsunami, United Methodists gave \$80 million directly for missions. Yet, the percentage of money given to general church apportionments declined to 83% nationwide. Only 15 of the 62 annual conferences paid out at 100% of monies requested. Some of this loss may be due to the decline of United Methodist membership in the U.S. of 66,402 in 2005. We believe that even when faced with membership decline, however, United Methodists have increased giving to disaster and other missions because of their understanding of the Gospel and their necessary response to critical missions.

Stewardship of Managing Task Force Mandate

The Stewardship of Managing Task Force was charged to achieve financial and programmatic accountability in our WNCC. Our task was not to raise more money for apportionments, but to ensure that all monies given by local congregations for apportionments be clearly used efficiently and effectively for the sake of making disciples.

Our work was begun at the 2004 Annual Conference. At that time, the WNCC affirmed a set of proposals from the Quadrennial Budget Planning Committee. [2004 WNCC Journal, pp. 229-237.] Central to its work, the Quadrennial Budget Planning Committee recognized that

“We cannot continue a funding mechanism that will not work.”

In response to that reality, the Quadrennial Budget Planning Committee [hereafter Quad Task Force Report] made three major recommendations:

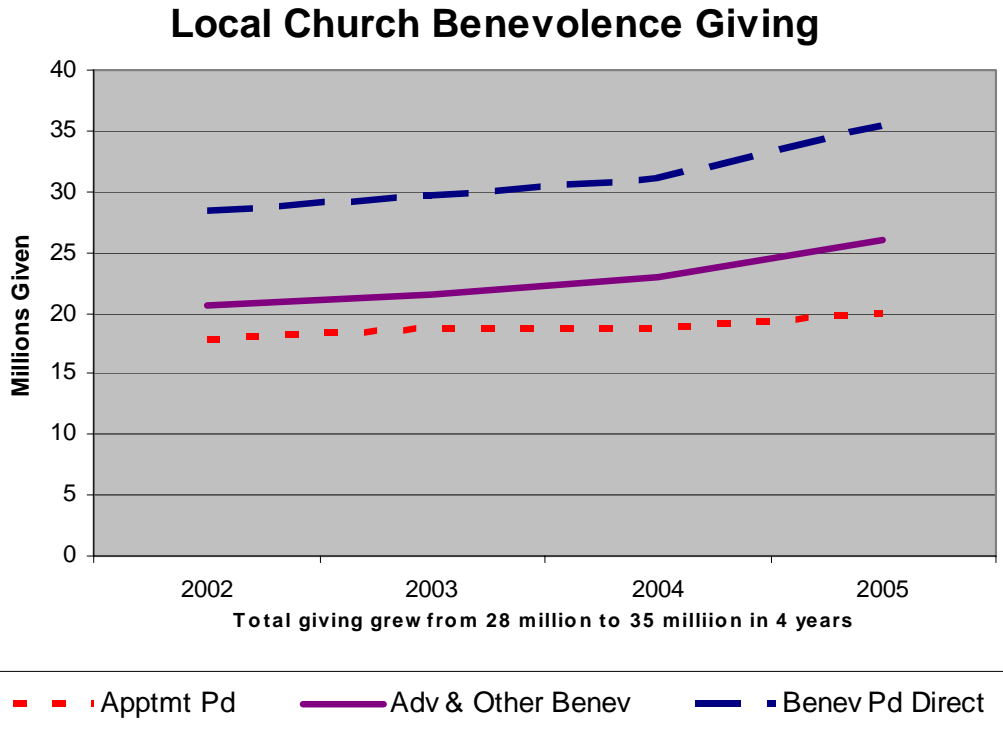
1. Direct Costing for pensions and pastors’ health insurance.
2. Choice Empowerment for local congregations in choosing how to support conference and general church apportionments.
3. Accountability by the WNCC.

We strongly affirm these three recommendations. The 2004 Annual Conference adopted all three principles. Thus far, Direct Costing and Choice Empowerment have already begun to be implemented.

Because of Direct Costing, and now direct billing to congregations in 2007, we have improved our Pension and pastors’ health insurance programs; this new funding system will

still take another two years for full implementation.

Choice Empowerment has begun to assist local congregations in prioritizing their giving. While giving for apportionments remains flat, much more money has been given through Advance Specials and local missions given directly by local congregations. We celebrate that the following chart shows how more congregations are providing more total money for missions than ever before:



The third leg of the Quad Task Force Report, accountability, however, has not yet been addressed. This was the assigned work of our Stewardship of Managing Task Force.

The 2004 Quad Task Force Report gave the following charge to the Task Force on Managing:

What actually is the ministry of the conference? What is the conference about? . . . How do items funded show their relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency in the mission of making disciples?

Accountability is the thread that holds the New Funding Paradigm together.

Accountability is a two-way street. Local churches/charges will need to be better informed to make the decisions that Choice Empowerment naturally calls for. Accountability also means that conference ministries and missions, as well as general church boards and agencies, will have to be accountable to local churches/charges in new ways. If local churches are going to be asked to support conference and general church funding, a new connection needs to be built to help churches/charges see where value is added. **In those places where such a connection cannot be established, funding sources will begin to dry up.**

Boards, agencies, and mission and ministry groups will have to account for how precious resources are used and will, by necessity, have to represent themselves more clearly to the local level.

The Quad Task Force Report continued:

Concerning Stewardship of Managing, . . . the core issue here is the responsible use of resources entrusted to the annual conference, districts, constituent ministries, and affiliate ministries. **Simply put, this is about how we organize for ministry as an annual conference and must be tied to the strategic and visional direction of the annual conference.** . . .

Thoughtful and useful measurement tools must be developed for ongoing use in the evaluation of every facet of our life together in the Western North Carolina Annual Conference to insure that our work is relevant to our vision, that sacred resources are being used effectively and efficiently.

After our review of the WNCC's financial condition, we are convinced that the only way to provide the relevant, effective, and efficient use of our WNCC resources is by the reorganization of our WNCC structure, with resulting changes to WNCC staff and budget.

We recognize, like the Quad Task Force Report, that accountability in our connectional system works both ways. Each United Methodist pastor and local congregation must be faithful stewards of their financial resources. Clergy must lead local congregations in supporting the essential structures and ministries of our United Methodist connectional system.

Accountability, however, must also be addressed by those institutions and persons receiving the funding. Our task was (1) to create a monitoring system that offers true accountability for the whole system and reestablishes trust, and (2) offer structural models that achieve accountability.

Our goal is to create a connection between the WNCC and local congregations in which the connection is affirmed and valued. By involving many of the key stakeholders on the Task Force, and providing the opportunity to oversee the whole WNCC, we may create a better system for everyone.

A Financial Crisis

Why must we act? Clearly, when local congregations accept only 86% and pay only 83% of our budget, there is an immediate financial crisis. Only approximately half of our congregations are fully supporting our connectional ministry. There are a variety of reasons why the other half do not fully support the requested funds: local economies, theological disagreement with the larger denomination, increased emphasis on local missions, and a lack of trust in the accountability of the United Methodist connection.

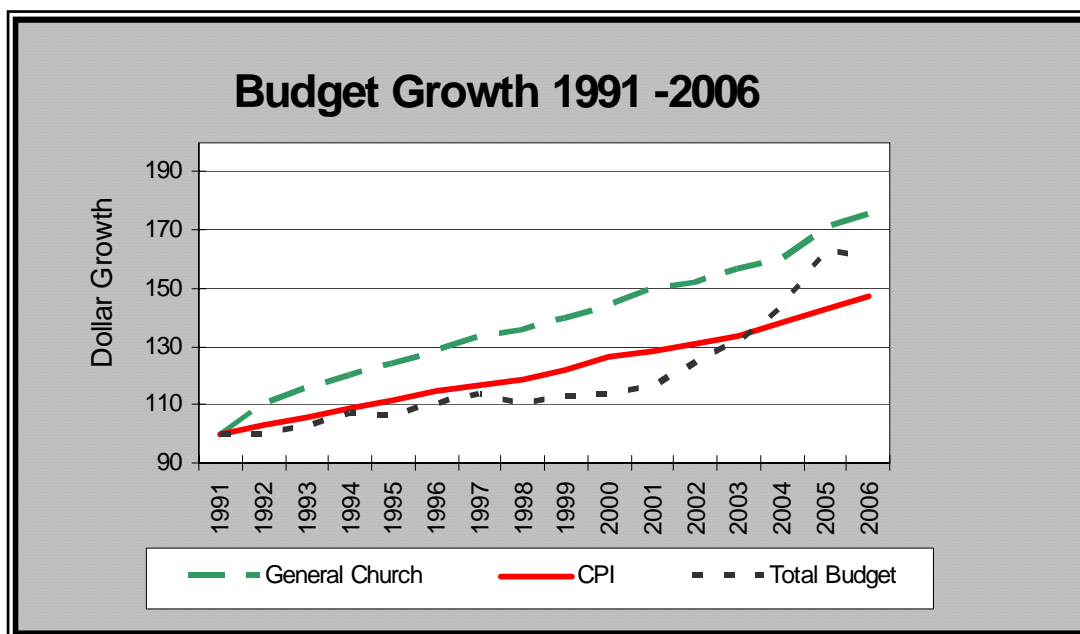
In addition, there are numerous structural/organizational challenges facing WNCC that have been revealed by our review of the WNCC finances.

The list of concerns is formidable. For example, the Stewardship of Managing Task Force has asked these questions:

- ❖ Regarding our clergy pensions and health benefits, the single largest part of the WNCC budget, what is its future? A major concern throughout the whole United Methodist Church is that without major changes in the whole denomination, within the decade Annual Conferences may simply be a pension and health benefits provider for clergy with no other program or ministries.
- ❖ Regarding our districts and District Superintendents, are there too few or too many districts? What are their primary tasks and how well are the districts and the District Superintendents achieving their tasks? In 2005, 92% of the monies requested were paid to the District Superintendent Fund.
- ❖ Regarding the size and role of WNCC administrative staff, what is their primary task and how many people and how much money should it take to fulfill this task? In 2005, 92% of the monies requested were paid to this Administration Fund.
- ❖ Regarding the size and role of WNCC program staff, how many people and at what cost are they fulfilling their primary task? In 2005, only 68% of the monies requested were paid to the WNCC Program Fund.
- ❖ Although all Conference Benevolences are good, are all the Conference Benevolences essential for accomplishing our core vision? What are our priorities? Within the WNCC and local churches, there is a lack of agreement in the order of priorities and many local congregations do not feel empowered and engaged by our current decision making process.

Underlying all these questions and many others are two fundamental questions: what are the priorities of WNCC? Are congregations willing to fund these named priorities?

We have not included items in our list of issues over which the WNCC has no control. We cannot control the administration, organization, or programs of any jurisdictional funds or any general church apportionments. Because of the changes at the 2000 General Conference, each local church now has the ability to decide how to fund these general church ministries without direct impact on the WNCC budget. The WNCC should focus on what we can control. For example, the WNCC cannot control the dramatic rise in requests for apportioned funds from the general church. The following chart illustrates the percentage rise in all apportionments as compared to the Consumer Price Index over the past decade:



We recognize that the steepest rise in apportionments for the WNCC came in 2004, the same year that we began Choice Empowerment. In 2003, the WNCC adopted the optional, "below the line," Ministries First Askings. In 2004, with Ministries First being proposed as no longer below the line, WNCC agencies and groups were requesting a 12% increase in monies needed. The WNCC Council on Finance and Administration [hereafter CF&A] believed that this increase was unacceptably high. Who would make the cuts? With the advent of Choice Empowerment, however, CF&A and the WNCC approved the larger increase. Why? With Choice Empowerment, local congregations would determine which ministries and missions would be supported. The WNCC trusted local congregations to prioritize missions within the WNCC.

Based on the responses from local congregations, we celebrate that the CF&A for 2007 is recommending only a 3% increase in Conference Operating Costs and a 15% reduction of Conference Ministry FairShare Askings. The WNCC administrative and program groups are listening to local congregations. The total increase in requested funds for 2007 for WNCC ministries is only 6% more than was actually received in 2005.

In comparison, we also note that in 2007, the general church is asking local congregations to contribute \$1,934,549 more than was received in 2005, an increase of 60%! We believe that these kinds of increases from the general church will be difficult for local congregations to respond to positively, but they must be passed on without reduction due to our Discipline.

Let us discuss just a few of the ministries over which the WNCC does have control: our pensions and health benefits, our fourteen districts, our conference staff, and conference programs.

The major drain on our WNCC unrestricted reserves comes from congregations who do not pay the full amount on pensions and health insurance. During 2002-2005, the Pension Fund had a deficit of \$1,125,000, the DS Fund had a deficit of \$283,086, and the Administration Fund had a deficit of \$260,461. These deficits are an actual cash shortfall directly reducing actual cash reserves.

For our District Superintendents, only 96.9 % of the money needed has been pledged in 2006. The finances indicate that we seem no longer able to fund 14 District Superintendents at the current level of funding. Do we simply cut one or more positions to match the money, or do we redefine the positions, or do we allocate additional conference monies?

Conference program staff manages the program ministries of our conference. Yet, the total monies pledged for staff salaries are only 74%, with anticipated giving of 71%. Should we cut one or more staff positions beyond those changes that have already been announced? In addition, only 74% (and 71% estimated payout) of the Conference Program monies have been pledged for 2006. Only 65% of Congregational Development has been pledged. And only 66% of the monies requested for Higher Education have been pledged.

In light of these pledges and lower anticipated payout of these pledges, the WNCC Finance and Administration Council recommended that in 2006 that while all staff will be paid at

100% of monies required, we can only pay out 70% of Conference Support, only 38% of Conference Programs, and only 70% of Ministerial Education. While staff levels remain relatively stable, monies for direct mission and ministry are cut. Because all staff and their benefits are funded at 100%, less of the apportionment dollars are used for direct mission and ministry.

In a local congregation, at least once every year, each Charge Conference coordinates its income with its ministries and mission. When more ministry needs are identified and more money available, congregations step forward and expand staff and extend missions. If, however, money is tight or declining, Charge Conferences make hard decisions and adjustments. Such shifts happen each year in each congregation.

We acknowledge that budgeting at the WNCC is fundamentally different from local church budgeting. In many congregations, pledges are received first and then budgets are set. In the WNCC, the budget is set months before any Charge Conference responds to the requests. Also, the WNCC must pass along all General Church apportionments without reduction to local congregations. There is, by the very nature of our system, less dialogue about priorities, staff, and budgets.

After decades of only minor shifts in the WNCC, we believe that it is time for major changes in this larger and more complex organization. If we tackle just one problem, but not the whole issue, we will fail in becoming accountable and managing our system.

What Do We Need to Do?

The Stewardship of Managing Task Force is not proposing any single or specific solution to the above problems. We do not have on our Stewardship of Managing Task Force all the needed voices at the table. At this time, we are simply naming the problem as clearly as possible and proposing a process and a group with the necessary knowledge that will offer fundamental solutions to our crisis.

We do not envision a downward, cascade failure for the WNCC. We are not calling to cut dramatically missions and staff, which lead to less support, which leads to less money, and the spiral continues. We do desire to achieve the appropriate balance between staff and ministry.

Instead, the call for accountability demands that the WNCC set its clear priorities, which leads to a more focused organization, which leads to more effectiveness, which leads to more support, which leads to an environment of abundance. We need to position ourselves for success that congregations, laity, and clergy understand and affirm. The WNCC needs to be clear about its function and mission, define its goals, and develop a strategy for accomplishing these goals with the necessary staffing and funding.

Fixes or A Solution?

Many possible solutions have been identified “to fix” one or more of the above items.

We celebrate that over the past year, many groups in the WNCC have sought to revitalize our system. The Stewardship of Giving Task Force will present a major effort to strengthen the financial stewardship of every disciple in every congregation. The WNCC Staff Relations Committee has begun to realign staff in the Conference Headquarters. The Cabinet has cut monies previously used for Equitable Compensation. The WNCC Ministries Advisory Council has presented a significantly smaller budget for 2007. The WNCC CF&A has made serious efforts to control the group of the budget. For the major item of pensions and health benefits, we recognize that the Board of Pensions and Health Benefits is looking at ways to strengthen pension and health care benefits; yet is still struggling with the issue of unfunded liability of retiree health benefits.

Many other persons have good ideas to fix other areas of concern. Yet, to make isolated changes to any one of the ministries or programs of the WNCC without understanding how that one change would affect all the others is unwise. One change in one area could lead to chaos in other parts of our system. A holistic approach is necessary.

Who Are the Stakeholders?

Who are the primary people to whom the ministries of the WNCC belong and who are asking for accountability?

Many of the particular areas of ministry in the WNCC appear to be “owned” by different groups or committees with diverse persons with different agendas with significant interests. For example, the Trustees control the Conference Building, the Conference Staff Relations Committee control the staff, the Conference Ministries Advisory Committee controls the programs, and the Cabinet controls Equitable Compensation. There currently is no one group seeing the whole with one overarching vision.

Yet, who are major stakeholders within the WNCC? The primary stakeholders are local congregations and the pastors and laity who make disciples in their various locations. If these persons and congregations do not believe in and embrace the ministries of the WNCC or trust the accountability system, they simply will not fund the ministries.

Leadership

We believe that Bishop Lawrence McCleskey alone can lead us in this reorganization around the vision of the WNCC. He knows our Annual Conference; he knows our people; he knows our history; and most of all he has vision. We believe that Bishop McCleskey in these two years can leave a significant legacy to the WNCC. He can use the financial crisis to lead us in addressing organizational structure, which in turn will stabilize our financial health and allow us to serve the kingdom of God more effectively and efficiently as good managing stewards. With a strong Task Force working with him, good changes can occur.

A Brief History of Our Current Funding Model

Is it possible to change the financial situation of our WNCC? Of course! We have faithful stewards who wish to use their resources for the sake of the kingdom of God. We are thankful for the Stewardship of Giving Task Force that will give even more guidance to developing faithful stewards and addressing personal and congregational accountability.

Choice Empowerment is working! Pensions are more stable. More money is going for missions. More congregations are having conversations about the appropriate use of their monies. Communications between the WNCC and local congregations has improved. Africa University, due to the increased attention by our Bishop, is seeing a major increase in monies.

We have the appropriate funding paradigm for the WNCC. We affirm the position of our 2004 Discipline (§ 247) that each local Charge Conference “shall be the connecting link between the local congregation and the general church.”

We note that our United Methodist Discipline at no place requests that each Charge Conference vote on which apportionments to accept. In the WNCC we have the tradition of voting on all apportionments at Charge Conferences, but this practice is tradition, not church law. By our Discipline, apportionments are presented and given but are neither affirmed nor accepted. What are the implications of this fact for our Charge Conferences, especially around the issue of Choice Empowerment?

At the Annual Conference level, until 2000 the WNCC budget and the apportionments of the larger denomination were linked together. This pattern had a serious negative impact on the financial stability of the WNCC. Led by our WNCC, the 2000 General Conference agreed to the separation of World Service from Conference funds (see §§ 806 and 808). No longer would apportionments from the general church impact the apportionments from the WNCC. Change had begun that provides greater transparency and accountability.

A Brief History of Our Organizational Model

Our foundational problem is organizational; we do not now have the most efficient and effective organization, staffing, and budget that are possible. The solution is for all stakeholders to be clear about vision and then to build a new structure to achieve that vision. The form should follow the vision. We believe that with an enhanced organization, staff, and budget, more support of every kind will be offered to the WNCC by local congregations.

Our current organizational paradigm of the WNCC is essentially what was created in 1968 at the union that created The United Methodist Church. This institutional organization of top-down leadership is giving way to new ministry models. Our difficulties did not arise because of bad leaders, but because the old system from a previous generation does not work in the new world. Through the past forty years, we have seen much tinkering and only one major effort for change (in 1988). We need a new organization that reflects vision and empowers us to make disciples.

Today, organizational change in the WNCC is much more possible. This empowerment for change began in 1996 when the General Conference allowed each Annual Conference a great deal of flexibility in its structure (see 2004 Discipline § 609). We celebrate that efforts from

our WNCC led this effort. Since that vote, many other Annual Conferences have made significant changes in their structure. It is time for the WNCC to follow suit.

Affirmations

Where do we believe that Task Force on Annual Conference Reorganization should begin? The Stewardship of Managing Task Force affirms the following and commends them for acceptance by the Task Force on Annual Conference Reorganization:

1. Making disciples of Jesus Christ is the priority of the WNCC. We affirm Christ's call of disciple making as our goal. In addition, we affirm the three principles – Follow Jesus, Make Disciples, Transform the World – and the seven key emphases.
2. The primary function of the WNCC is to empower local congregations to make disciples: see 2004 Discipline ¶ 601: "The purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples for Jesus Christ by equipping its local churches for ministry" We celebrate that five of the seven emphases of our Vision occur primarily by local congregations. When we have strong congregations, we will have a strong WNCC.
3. The primary stakeholders that the WNCC is charged to empower are the laity, clergy, and congregations within the WNCC.
4. The Annual Conference is "the fundamental body" (see 2004 Discipline ¶s 11 & 33) of our connection. At the end of this process, our WNCC should have the appropriate organization, staffing, and financial model to assist local congregations in making disciples of Jesus Christ.
5. The WNCC needs to be financially stable. The new organization and staffing will have to live within available dollars and faithfully use the available resources.
6. Continue the work of the Stewardship of Giving Task Force. We continue to encourage every disciple, starting with pastors, in being extravagantly generous with their financial resources.
7. Continue phase-in of Direct Costing and direct billing of pensions and health insurance. This model undergirds the essential link between the WNCC and its pastors under appointment. We stress that fully funding pensions and health insurance is the foundational level of financial accountability for each local church.
8. Continue Choice Empowerment. Choice Empowerment is working. We trust local churches to use their monies appropriately for the sake of making disciples. This local empowerment is the ultimate line of accountability.
9. Seek ways to measure empirically success in both the WNCC and local congregations. Once a new model is in place, we must ensure that the plan fulfills the vision. This performance measurement tool should be ready and implemented with the new organizational structure to evaluate relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency.
10. The solution will require a period of transition. It will take the WNCC at least five years to implement Direct Cost. Whatever new organizational model is proposed may well also take several years to implement fully.

With these affirmations in place we believe that the appropriate organizational changes will come.

Conclusion

The Stewardship of Managing Task Force is thankful for the opportunity to share this report to the WNCC. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak with any of our members.

Members of the Stewardship of Managing Task Force

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