

“Mission Shares Part of Our United Methodist Covenant”***

What’s in a name? Mission Shares more adequately describes the purpose of what has historically been called apportionments. Mission Shares are underwritten by our sense of covenant, a covenant that goes back to the beginnings of Christianity and are a foundational component of our United Methodist heritage. Your Mission Shares, as determined by your representatives to the Annual Conference, enable mission and ministry in our local churches, our Conference and our Denomination – locally, regionally, and throughout the world.

To understand Mission Shares as part of our United Methodist covenant there are five key points to consider. The first is our historic roots as United Methodists and how our current Mission Share system grows out those roots. The second key point describes what our mission shares do and who benefits from them. A third key point is how local church mission shares are determined. Fourth, is the importance of our covenant. Finally, a word about what is being done to address our Conference financial issues.

1. Historically, we are a covenantal and connectional church. Paragraph 112 of 1992 Book of Discipline reads:

Let us simply state the connectional principle and its essential ingredients.

The United Methodist connectional principle, born out of our historical tradition, many biblical roots, and accepted theological ideas, is the basic form of our polity, the way in which we carry out God’s mission as a people.

It is in essence a network of interdependent relationships among persons and groups throughout the life of the whole denomination.

It declares that our identity is in our wholeness together in Christ that each part is vital to the whole, that our mission is more effectively carried out by a connectional life, which incorporates Wesleyan zeal into the life of the people.

Connectionalism is the very heart of United Methodism. At the heart of our denomination is the belief that the work of individual churches in making disciples of Jesus Christ is magnified through our coming together as a connected people of faith. In particular, this principle is the cornerstone of our system of financial giving we refer to as Mission Shares.

Historically this can be seen at our founding Conference (the so-called Christmas Conference of 1784). This Conference set in motion what we now know as a system of sharing ministry through joint giving.

- The Christmas Conference participants adopted plans for a preacher’s fund and for the relief of worn out pastors and widows.
- These early Methodists also began steps to establish educational institutions. Thus Cokesbury College was born.
- The 1784 visionaries responded to a request that preachers be sent to Nova Scotia. Freeborn Garretson and James O. Cromwell answered

*** Adapted from *Mission Shares As Covenant* by Reverend David C. Myers

the call and the Methodist Church became the first denomination to send missionaries out of America.

Collections were made informally by local churches during the early years of the Methodist Episcopal Church to establish a program of mission outreach. Our ancestors in the faith were convinced that the Wesleyan message was urgent, and they joyfully banded together to "make it a powerful force to be reckoned with."

But aside from the history, our Covenant as United Methodists is as contemporary as each time we receive new members when we, along with those persons freely choosing to join the United Methodist Church, pledge, "to be Loyal to the United Methodist Church" (United Methodist Hymnal, p. 38) and to "renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service." (United Methodist Hymnal, p.43) With this covenant in mind, our mission shares are a result of our collective covenant. It is a way of enabling, with our Wesleyan ancestors, a "message that is urgent" to the world. It is also based on the reality that *alone* we will be much less effective and that *together* we can be "a powerful [saving] force with which to be reckoned."

The Discipline (2004), paragraph 801, goes on to say that the "work of the church requires the support of the people, and participation therein through services and gifts is a Christian duty and a means of grace." While we most often see only the duty, and seldom see the means of grace in our mission shares, they are a witness to our uniqueness as United Methodist Christians and an expression of our faithfulness to God's grace in our lives!

2. So, what do our our mission shares do and who benefits. When your church sends money to the Annual Conference in the form of mission shares you join with (approx.) 35,784 other local churches across our denomination to support¹:

1. In Mission - Throughout 165 countries we support 1,812 missionaries, 80,000 Volunteers in Mission placements, 102 UMC community centers and mission colleges.
2. In Health and Welfare - 225 retirement homes, 70 hospitals, 50 child-care facilities and 30 ministries for persons with disabilities.
3. In Education - 8 two-year colleges, 82 four-year colleges, 10 universities, 1 professional school and 13 theological schools.

That certainly is a means of God's grace. But that is only 4.8 cents of every dollar of your church budget. Where do the other 95 and one-half cents go? Most of your church budget dollar is spent on your local church ministry. Some is sent to the Conference Office (37 and one-half cents in total including the 4.8 cents that are for missions).

- 3.1 cents of that dollar goes to pay your local property, liability, Directors & Officers and your Worker's Compensation insurance.
- 13.75 cents of that dollar goes to pay your pastor's health insurance.
- 6.7 cents of that dollar supports your local pastor or pastors through the Ministerial Pension and Comprehensive Protection plans. It also supports

¹ 2006 Statistics

your former pastors who have now retired, and any who might be disabled. It also supports surviving spouses.

- 1.4 cents is spent even closer to home, through the educational support of your local minister through Ministerial Education (both at the seminary level and as a continuing education function) and the Board of Ordained Ministry, which recruits and employs all our ministers: past, present and future.
- 5.4 cents supports your local ministry through the connection of the District Superintendents, the bishop, and the administrative services that enable these ministries.

That means that of the 37.5 cents from your local church budget “dollar” that you send to the Conference about 30.35 cents has a very direct impact and explicit ministry in your local church, every bit as local as your heating bill or your janitor’s salary. These monies include Property and Liability Insurance, Health Insurance for your current pastor and the Medicare Supplement for any pastors that have served your church now retired, monies to train and keep current your minister’s career development, and your pastor’s pension and disability. This is especially true because in most churches mission and ministry is focused in the work of its pastor.

This is also covenantal, because “together we are a force to be reckoned with.” Together we become a church united doing more and better than we can apart. We have seen this in our collective buying power with Property Insurance and Worker’s Compensation in our own Conference²; and we have taken for granted how great our Pension system is which is only possible because of the total effort of our denomination. The same is true of our Missional, Educational, and Health and Welfare efforts.

3. The third point is how your local church mission shares are determined.

Pure and simple, it is based on your own churches spending on local church ministry as compared with the same spending of all the other churches in our Conference. Specifically, it is based on the money your church spends, excepting what you spend on Capital Repairs, renovations and/or building programs, and what you pay in mission shares. These are lines 64 - 72 of your annual Financial Report Forms (Statistical Table II – due each year on February 14). In other words, if your church has a relatively small budget, your mission shares will be lower than a church that has a large budget. After studying many other possible determinants (including membership), it has been decided that size of church budget spent on local church ministry – essentially the church’s ability to pay - is the fairest. That is the most basic component to the size of your mission shares.

There are two other smaller modifiers that will determine your mission shares. One is the amount of building usage you have for community and missional uses. To encourage missional usage of church buildings, your mission shares are reduced by your building costs for such usage (this is determined on Chart A, line 9).

The second modifier is a three-year rolling average to blunt the effect of extreme changes. For example, if your church were to add a full-time staff-person, that would

² Since the beginning of the Conference Insurance program in 1995, the annual cost of property/and liability and Workers’ Compensation insurance born by local churches is effectively 70% less than what an individual local church would have to pay for the same coverage. These savings to our local churches run to more than a million dollars annually. That is money available to do the ministry of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

make a significant change in the size of your budget, and thus your mission shares. Rather than have that take effect in one year that change will be modified over three years. In 1998 the Conference Council on Finance and Administration voted that churches that receive a reduction in size of appointment (for example – full to part-time) will have the 3-year rolling average waived and their mission shares adjusted immediately. The mission share formula is voted by our Annual Conference every year.

The Conference Budget, as it is increased or decrease by Annual Conference each year, also has an impact on what your church's Mission Shares will be.

4. The fourth point is how our mission shares are based on our collective covenant. Each year we Mission Share more than we actually expect to spend. This is where our covenant as a connectional church comes into play. Because not every church pays their mission shares in full; we have to build in funds to make-up that difference. So we include a Program Reserve Fund that ensures that we can fund the amount needed by each board and agency, camp and conferencing center. We include a Working Fund to ensure that the pension and ministerial benefits can be paid for our pastors and to our retired pastors. And we include a Contingency Fund so that our Conference Staff and General Church Apportionments can be paid.³

This means that churches that always pay their mission shares 100% are continually subsidizing those churches that do not. When you receive your mission shares in the fall of each year, there is an amount given for unpaid mission shares. For 2006 the percentage is less than 19%.⁴ Because we are a church in connectional covenant we trust that churches that are not paying their mission shares in full are doing it for very good reasons.

5. The fifth and final point is what is being done to address some of our financial issues within our Conference. Many churches are feeling the burden of high mission shares, while facing survival issues of funding basic staff or overdue building repairs. Action has been taken on the follow fronts to provide some needed relief:

- Through Annual Conference action (Conference Rule IX. C. 2.) moneys are used from the Subsidy Pool to offset conference mission share askings. And even though there has been a reduction in returns of this fund, moneys are used each year that reduce what is mission shared to local churches.
- The Council on Finance and Administration (CFandA) is using the most recent year's receipts to form the basis of the budget for subsequent years. The result is to moderate the increases/decreases in spending to levels more consistent with actual receipts.
- To encourage church growth, CFandA voted to make it easier for new churches and "Lazarus" churches to begin without bearing a heavy mission shares burden. Their full mission shares participation will be phased in over 5 years.
- CFandA has implemented a plan where churches, which are faced with pastoral leadership reductions (such as going from full to part-time), will have a quicker adjustment on their mission shares than the current three-year-rolling average.

³In 2005 the figure for unpaid mission shares was nearly 24% and in 2004 it was more than 28%.

⁴For the New England Conference about 58% of our churches pay mission shares in full.

In addition, local churches don't have to support the entire Conference Budget! The Conference Budget would be almost \$1,235,679 or 12.78% higher if that amount of money didn't come from sources other than local churches. Without the monies received from Preachers Aid Society applied to Retiree Health Benefits, various investments held by the Conference Trustees, and grants from some of our Reserve Funds, our Total Conference Apportioned budget would be \$10,902,049 (instead of the current \$9,666,370).