

Note to readers:

This paper (A Mission Funding System for the 21st Century”) was written in 2004 for the Yale-Edinburgh Group and the leadership of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The full document is 50 pages. The version which follows here is a brief summary. I will provide the full document if you contact me at David.Dawson@pcusa.org

David Dawson, 30 Willow Drive, New Wilmington, PA 16142 USA

**Yale-Edinburgh Group
on the History of the Missionary Movement
and Non-western Christianity
1 - 3 July 2004
New College, University of Edinburgh, Scotland**

Abstract

A Mission Funding System for the 21st Century

"Partnership and Money" is a critical issue for us today. It involves the question of how the financial wealth of the western church is to be engaged in authentic partnership with the churches of the Global South. I would like to address this question of "partnership and money" by considering the following questions:

- How do we in the west structure a funding system in the mainline churches that will engage our people in the use of their money with a global consciousness?
- What funding mechanisms can congregational leaders employ to challenge church members to give in a way that moves their hearts toward Christ's mission in the world?
- How can leaders be motivated to allocate significant congregational resources for use in authentic partnership with the churches of the Global South?
- What are the institutional and structural issues to be engaged through the mission funding system of a North American mainline church?

I will approach these questions through a case study of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and one of its presbyteries of which I am the executive staff. I wish to be both descriptive and prescriptive. I wish to describe how we Presbyterians have come to our present system of mission funding and then to propose how we can move to a mission funding system appropriate for the 21st century. The paper will have the following sections:

1. Historical mission funding practices in the PC(USA).
2. Theological assumptions under-lying these practices.
3. Inadequacies of the present funding system.
4. The contextual experience of Shenango Presbytery.
5. What needs to change in the PC(USA)?

I realize that this paper is provincially Presbyterian Church (USA)-specific, but I expect that mainline churches in Europe and North America will all find some commonalities.

I am convinced that unless we address the inherent systemic problems in the funding systems, we will not need to talk about "partnership and money" with the Global South because there will be no western money to consider in this partnership.

Introduction

Our theme is, “Mission, Money, and Privilege.” As my brother in Christ, Guma Kunda, elder of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, said when we visited in January,

God has given much wealth to some and less to others, and he is going to see what we do with this. How are we going to transfer our strength to each other? That will be salvation to all of us. In that way our partnership is a blessing – how we discover the strengths of each other. Some may die of too much food and some from too little. The conclusion is the same – God is not happy about it. Part of the problem and solution is here and there. (January 29, 2004 notes)

I believe that the issue of "partnership and money" is one of the most profound spiritual matters before us today. This paper will approach that subject through an historical review of mission funding followed by proposals for a way to proceed in the future. The question which I am asking is:

How do we structure a mission funding system in the mainline/oldline churches of North America that will invite church members to give and congregational leaders to allocate significant resources to realize an authentic partnership with the church of the Global South?

This paper will not be typical in that I will not only review historical developments, I will be proposing new behavior for the Presbyterian Church.

A Mission Funding System for the 21st Century

1) Review of Historic Patterns

A story from the early years of Presbyterian funding of mission

The Rev. John Holt Rice was on his death bed on March 4, 1831, when he dictated a letter to the upcoming General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. (I will normally refer to the “Presbyterian Church” generically, meaning the Presbyterian Church (USA) and its predecessor denominations: the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the United Presbyterian Church of North America, the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and the Presbyterian Church in the United States.) Knowing that he would not live for the convening of that Assembly, he asked its commissioners to admit the church's failures in mission in spite of the good efforts of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM), a voluntary society formed in 1810 and supported primarily by Congregationalists and Presbyterians.

He implored the General Assembly to commit itself to renewed efforts in mission, and to pass the following resolution:

That the Presbyterian Church in the United States is a Missionary Society; the object of which is to assist in the conversion of the world; and that every member of the Church is a member for life of said Society, and bound in maintenance of his Christian character, to do all in his power for the accomplishment of this objective.

(David Dawson, "A Recurring Issue of Mission Administration," *Missiology*, October, 1997, pp. 457)

The Presbyterian General Assembly refused to enact his death-bed plea in 1831, but finally did adopted it six years later (1837), whereupon this principle of the church as a missionary society became foundational missiology in American Presbyterian churches.

From 1837 forward the Presbyterian Church was, de facto, in the business of providing a funding system to receive the gifts of individuals and churches to support the mission boards under the purview of its General Assembly. This paper is a brief summary of the story of the Presbyterian mission funding system in five parts:

1. a review the historical patterns of mission funding (especially international mission) in the Presbyterian Church
2. a consideration of the theological assumptions that underlie these mission funding patterns
3. a discussion of some evident inadequacies of the present mission funding system
4. a description of how Shenango Presbytery has implemented the PC(USA) funding system in a modified way
5. a proposal of some elements that will be necessary in a funding system of the future

How the funding system developed

Following the 1837 General Assembly action to form the Board of Foreign Missions, a number of boards emerged throughout the remainder of the century. (David G. Dawson, "Mission Philanthropy, Selected Giving and Presbyterians," *American Presbyterians*, Summer, 1990, p. (122) These boards received direct contributions, designated and undesignated, from individuals and churches. Some churches continued to give to the voluntary boards (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, American Home Missionary Society, etc.), but most churches did not immediately give anything to these newly emerging church boards.

From these early years there were tensions between what the boards wanted, namely undesignated contributions, and how the people and churches were giving, namely designated. Board secretaries complained that contributions to "special objects" (as they were called) obligated the board to future work without guarantee of adequate support for present commitments.

Developing competition among the boards compelled the General Assembly Committee on Benevolence and Finance (1874) to propose a standard division of funds to the eight boards. This attempt to develop a unified funding approach was ignored by most

churches. These efforts continued for the next twenty years, but made little impact on how churches gave. (Dawson, 1990, 124)

The emergence of the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) at the end of the 19th century resulted in a more pressing need for funds for foreign mission. The Forward Movement (FM) and the Laymen’s Missionary Movement (LMM) were the response. These efforts encouraged the giving of money “systematically and definitely,” asking each church to support its own missionary. Mission leaders continued to make strong pleas for unified giving, such as one in 1915 which proposed that benevolent giving be distributed according to a formula as follows:

Foreign Mission	40%
Home Mission	30%
Freedman Board	10.05%
Church Extension	10%
Education	6.75%
Ministerial Relief	2%
General Assembly	.75%
Publications	0%.

(The United Presbyterian, June 24, 1915, p. 15)

But designated giving continued to prevail, especially as the highpoint in mission giving came around 1920.

The critical years of the 1920’s and reorganization

According to James E. Moorhead, (James E. Moorhead, “Presbyterians and the Mystique of Organizational Efficiency,” in *Reimagining Denominationalism*, edited by Robert Bruce Mullin and Russell E. Richey, 1994, pp. 264 – 287) the “mystique of efficiency” shaped the organizational life of the Presbyterian Church (and many other denominations) in the 1920’s reorganization and centralization. Leaders employed “scientific planning, business management, rational organization, professional expertise, and effective promotion techniques.” Samuel Haber said that

Efficient and good came closer to meaning the same thing in these years than in any other period of American history. (Moorhead, 265)

The Presbyterian system of governance was custom-made for centralization and efficiency. But Moorhead notes that this polity was “for unity in doctrine and discipline, not as a charter for centralized bureaucracy.” He contends that, “It’s meaning for organizational questions remained unclear.” (Moorhead, 268; see also *Form of Government*, G-1.0400)

In 1920 the General Assembly formed a Special Committee on the Reorganization of Boards and Agencies. Robert E. Speer, secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, employed his extraordinary organizational savvy to anticipate the new direction by proposing a consolidation of the thirteen boards into four (Foreign Missions, National Missions, Christian Education, and Ministerial Relief). The committee embraced his proposal and several autonomous agencies and two women’s boards were abolished and

merged into the four boards. The plan was adopted by the General Assembly and implemented in 1923.

The obsession with efficiency inherent in the 1923 reorganization came at a cost. The Presbyterian polity of parity between ministers and elders was forced into a pattern of “leadership by experts and managers” whose wisdom was considered superior.

This direction was also an anti-democratic development which alienated members from leaders. It manipulated the power for decision-making from the local congregation to the national level. (Richard Reifsnyder, “Managing the Mission: Church Restructuring in the Twentieth Century,” pp. 55 – 95, *The Organizational Revolution*, 1992, pp. 57, 61; Lewis Weeks, “The Incorporation of the Presbyterians,” pp. 37 – 54, *The Organizational Revolution*, 1992, p. 51) The 1923 reorganization, as appropriate as it was for that context, had weaknesses that became a harbinger of things to come. As Moorhead concludes, “Institutional reorganization would become an endemic feature of Presbyterian life.” (Moorhead, 1994, 282)

Each of the four boards created under the reorganization were responsible for their area of work, including fund raising and recruiting the expert managerial class of personnel needed. (Reifsnyder, 62) The pattern of designated/undesignated giving continued without much change. Mission boards wanted the money without strings attached, but donors (individuals and churches) continued to make restricted gifts in order to personalize their involvement in mission. In 1939 the General Assembly officially gave its blessing to unified/undesignated giving, but in reality little changed in how money flowed to support foreign mission.

Each year the percentage recommended for the four boards was adjusted so as to insure that each board received what the leadership intended. In 1944 further action was implemented to insure this parity through a plan for “equalization.” This was designed to move undesignated money between the boards to achieve the desired percentage distribution at the end of each year. The Board of Foreign Missions had the most to lose with this development and protested the manipulation of funds. (Dawson, 1990, 129 - 130)

In another branch of the Presbyterian Church (PCUS), a 1950 reorganization introduced an Equalization Fund (which was in effect from 1950 to 1965). This regulation effectively moved money from one board (mostly the Board of World Missions) to other boards through a redistribution/taxation formula. This proved very unpopular and eventually was ended. But in its place a Central Treasury was created which allocated all undesignated gifts so that each board continued to receive the total of the budget set, effectively continuing the equalization practice through another process. (Robin Klay, “Changing Priorities: Allocation of Giving in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S.,” *The Organizational Revolution*, pp. 144 – 145)

Until the middle of the 20th century designated giving was normative for churches even though the church leadership was trying to direct giving into the unrestricted category. The 1923 reorganization and subsequent developments were moving in that direction, but designated giving persisted.

The rapidity of change in the second half of the 20th century

A major development after mid-century was the emergence of presbytery and synod programmatic budgets with the commensurate growth in staff. During the 1950's General Assembly giving increased 78% while presbytery and synod budgets grew by more than 200%. An era of unified and centralized administration and funding was becoming normative. (David G. Dawson, ""Mission Philanthropy, Selected Giving, and Presbyterians, Part II," *American Presbyterians*, Fall, 1991, p. 211) Now congregations were expected to send their undesignated "General Mission" dollar to the central receiving site where it would be distributed to Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly according to a negotiated percentage (which was actually unilaterally set by the presbytery). The amount received at the General Assembly was then distributed among the four boards, again according to a formula.

Churches have always supported mission work that does not come under the direction of the Presbyterian Church on a regional, national or international level. Local church sessions send the money to the organization of their choice whether it is a food pantry in their community or a mission organization working internationally. In 1976 the statistical reports began to ask for this information and from these reports we have discovered that gifts to non-Presbyterian mission amounted to 20% in the local community and 20% beyond the local community. That percent increased slowly through the 1980's and accelerated during the 1990's to the point where in 2003 churches gave almost three times as much to local mission as they did to the General Assembly (\$150/60 million) and more to other mission beyond the local community (\$ 66/60 million than they gave to the General Assembly). (Klay, 141 - 142; Dawson, 1991, 213 – 215; 2003 *Comparative Statistics*)

A 1983 reunion of two Presbyterian denominations resulted in a strong pro-designated statement, but the parameters for implementation also limited its impact on policy (Dawson, 1991, 217 - 219). Designated giving was growing again and by 1990 more than half of General Assembly budget was restricted, partly because of bequest income.

In 1998 the "Comprehensive Mission Funding Strategy Task Force" made its report to the General Assembly. It declared that there was a mission funding crisis in the church and proposed possible responses, including a warmer embrace of designated giving. But the General Assembly Council recommended that congregations be encouraged to give 10 % of their income undesignated to Presbyterian mission at a time when they were giving less than half of that percentage, and only 30% of that was undesignated giving. (*General Assembly Minutes*, 1998, 234) By 2003 only 27 % of income received by the General Assembly was unrestricted.

In summary, we can say that in the 1940's funds were equalized to assure that budgets desired by elected and staff decision-makers were realized. However, the raising of the funds still depended on direct appeals from the boards. The designation of mission funds stood in tension with the official policy of centralization in funding. Basically, designations were normative and broadly affirmed and accepted until the 1950's. For two decades (1950 – 1970) undesignated giving could be said to be the normative pattern. The missiological concept of ONE Mission, plus a number of other factors, contributed to

the discouragement of designations in favor of the centralization of funding. But, by 1970 we saw a return to the normative pattern of highly designated patterns of giving.

2) Theological Assumptions

What are the theological assumptions behind the bias of church leaders for unified giving in the Presbyterian funding system? It is difficult to determine theology and motives for any individual, let alone a group (session, mission board staff, General Assembly, etc.). But I will suggest several possibilities which are explicitly or implicitly evident and then critique them.

Let me begin with some statements from individuals and official church policy throughout the history of Presbyterian mission funding:

- 1858 – [It is] rarely advisable to ask for special donations for the support of missionary work. (Dawson, 1990, 123)
- 1874 – [Designating is] disrupting the balance of missionary support. (Dawson, 1990, 124)
- 1959 – There has been concern that the General Mission Program should not be fragmented but unified...our Church has one General Mission which must not be fragmented promotionally. (Dawson, 1991, 211)
- 1960 – The ‘test question’ [to discern the loyalty of candidates for ordination] during the 1960’s was, ‘Will you support the unified budget?’ (Dawson, 1991, 210)
- 1970 - [since only 1/3 {940 of 2960} churches participate in designated giving, it is not valid]. Just the mechanics of the program and the endless correspondence are headaches enough. (Dawson, 1991, 210)
- 1970 - We reaffirm our conviction that the General Mission Program of the General Assembly is the central symbol of the unity of the whole Church in its collective response to mission. (*General Assembly Minutes*, 1970, 869)
- 1983 - [A]s we listened to those who oppose designated giving, we heard the conviction voiced that it is not 'Presbyterian,' perhaps not even Christian, to designate. (Dawson, 1991, p. 219)
- 1989 – A pledge without conditions demonstrates affirmation of God’s love for the world and global vision...giving with conditions can communicate superiority and authority...giving without conditions helps affirm trust in General Assembly staff. (Dawson, 1991, 220)
- 1990 – The support of Presbyterian mission through Unified Giving is a responsibility of church sessions, and should always be given priority. (Dawson, 1991, 220)
- 1990 – We really don’t want to promote selected giving, but...We promote unified giving; we administer selected giving...we believe that unified is theologically and philosophical correct.” (Dawson, 1991, 220)

There are many more examples (see Dawson, 1990 and 1991).

I will identify four theological assumptions which might be considered as operative from these and other quotes.

1) It is argued that unified/undesignated giving is required by the theological principle of Christ's prayer for the unity of the church (John 17). I would suggest that unified giving is not theologically necessary for the promotion of unity in the church. In fact, it presents theological problems.

During a highly charged and conflicted time in the early 1970's (the Angela Davis controversy) the statement listed above was made: "We reaffirm our conviction that the General Mission Program of the General Assembly is the central symbol of the unity of the whole Church in its collective response to mission." (1970 General Assembly Minutes, p. 869) That, I would contend, is really scary theology!

2) Presbyterian ecclesiology was employed to defend a centralized funding system. Advocates of unified funding would have embraced John Holt Rice's statement with which I opened this conversation...that the church is itself a missionary society. But it would be a huge stretch to presume upon Rice to mean that the General Assembly was what he meant by "church." (see Moorhead, 1994)

This issue was debated in great detail during the middle of the 19th century when Charles Hodge argued for mission boards under the General Assembly, but distinct from the governance structures. His opponent in the debate, James Thornwell, would not even allow that much authority to be lodged in the General Assembly. He argued for mission committees (not boards) within each governing body. (see David Dawson, "A Recurring Issue in Mission Administration," *Missiology*, October, 1997)

The insistence that individuals and churches direct their financial support for mission strictly through a centralized system is a presumptuous misapplication of governance principles (polity) to structures for mission. (Lewis L. Wilkins, Jr. "The American Presbytery in the Twentieth Century," *The Organizational Revolution*, pp. 102 - 104; Dawson, 1997, 463 - 464)

3) Congregations are being told that they are useful for raising funds, but from there they should leave mission to the experts. An ideological bias for unified/centralized funding fosters the assumption that mission can be done by "check-writing." It encourages donors to believe that they can pay for Christian witness without any personal involvement or cost. This not only embraces an unbiblical elitism but also a problematic understanding of vocation and apostolic witness.

Even more seriously, it does violence to the possibility that the "recipient" may be a vessel of God's witness to the "donor." In the tradition of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10), it is often the missionary who is most changed by the encounter. Shielding the missionary church from personal engagement in witness, except in its own community, misunderstands the nature of Christian witness.

Presbyterian mission leaders are saying that mission is best left to the experts. Ordinary Christians can not be trusted to make responsible decisions about mission. There is here,

of course, an insipid clericalism and/or professionalization of the apostolic call that stands in profound contrast to Reformation theology.

4) Another theological argument in favor of unified giving is the contention that it advances efficiency and planning. We might even expect that Paul's admonitions about giving in I Corinthians 16 would justify such assumptions. However, we must remember that Paul is speaking here of a "designated gift" for the poor in Jerusalem. Planned giving does not preclude personalized giving.

There is no historical, institutional or theological basis on which to reject designated giving. In fact, quite the contrary, there is good reason to embrace it. The question is not whether we allow and encourage specified giving, but whether we do it well and with the conviction that it is an important part of the ministry of nurturing stewards in their missionary vocation.

3) Inadequacies of the Present Mission Funding System

The mission funding system for the Presbyterian Church has not substantially changed since the 1920's. It is based on a commitment to a unified and centralized conviction about how money should flow through a connexional system.

Leslie Scanlon notes that, "...the trend toward donors and congregations restricting how the denomination can spend its money is clear." From 1993 – 2000 undesignated mission support declined more than 10% from \$27.4 million to \$24.5 million. During the same period designated giving has increased 239%. (Leslie Scanlon, "New Strategies for Raising Mission Dollars Considered by PC(USA) Officials," *The Presbyterian Outlook*, February 25, 2002, p. 4.) By 2003 it was down to \$ 15.3 million, a decline of more than 44% in ten years without considering inflation.

Staff leadership of the Presbyterian Church is still very much committed to the centralized/unified culture in mission funding. If there is any doubt, consider the following decision taken by the General Assembly Council (GAC) at its meeting in February, 2004.

Because the accountants were so concerned about the declining unrestricted income and the "need" to have more of it, they recommended and the elected members of the GAC approved a plan to assess a fee of 5% on the only income stream that is growing... designated giving. This proposal was first floated in late 2003, but some persons affected complained, so the modified adopted plan will only charge these "preferred customers" a 1% fee. Undesignated money is needed so that leadership can do what the donors will not support.

The seven volumes of the *Presbyterian Presence* series review the institutional behavior of the Presbyterian Church. In that series, Robin Klay provides this conclusion about the present funding system,

First, for a long time Presbyterians have gradually increased the share of their giving devoted to the local congregations' needs [largely increasing staff] at the expense of benevolences. Second, they have increasingly substituted giving to local and non-Presbyterian causes for giving to denominational causes. (Klay, p. 133)

This conclusion is confirmed with respect to Protestants generally. Consider data provided by John and Sylvia Ronsvalle of empty tomb, inc. They say that the problem goes deeper than simply a dysfunctional funding system. [added from *Christian Century*, 12/04, p. 21 support of ministry beyond the walls of local churches at 35 year low.. was .66 percent per capita in 1968; now .38 percent in 2002. However, giving to 400 largest charities up 2.3% in 2003...due to improving economy and focus on larger donors]

Even though after-tax income in the U. S. rose 91% in the last two decades of the 20th century, (Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem*, 1991, p. 34) members contributions have fallen:

1930	3.60% of income
1999	2.56% of income

("Churches Receive a Smaller Portion," *Christian Century*, 3/15/00, 297;
www.philanthropyroundtable.org 7/13/01 " in Different Denominations")

Scott Brunger concludes,

...beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s, this denomination began to lose financial support as well as clear direction in its mission and theology...massive church reorganizations resulted in smaller proportions of giving to the denomination, even when their purpose was to enhance giving. As would be expected, the ties of trust to former personnel were broken during the reorganizations. (Scott Brunger, "Global and Local Mission: Allocation of Giving in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.," *The Organizational Revolution*, p. 169)

Why is the giving of Presbyterian congregations to mission so inadequate and getting worse every year? We have focused on the problems with the operative mission funding system and how its fixation on centralized/unified norms for funding have blocked giving. But there are other factors and we will briefly consider:

1) There is no broad theological and missiological consensus in the Presbyterian Church

One could argue that Presbyterians have never had much consensus on anything, but surely the situation is significantly different than it was one hundred years ago when the denomination was poised to reach its zenith in terms of its financial and personnel

commitment to international mission.

2) The Presbyterian Church as an institution has failed to address the issues of decentralization and control that determine how people are willing to give.

This is a particularly critical issue to day, but it is not a new issue. The most significant period of growth for the foreign missionary movement in the United States came in conjunction with the Forward Movement and the Laymen's Missionary Movement of the early part of the 20th century. One of the leaders of that movement, A. J. Gordon, described the impetus for its emergence saying, "The greatest problem which confronts us for the opening century, is that of *distributing the missionary responsibility* which has become congested in official centers." Forward Movement president, Francis Wayland concurred,

The tendency will be more and more for churches to turn over their missionary obligations to societies, for societies to turn it over to Boards, for Boards to turn it over to Executive Committees, and Executive Committees to Secretaries; so that, in the last result, the chief responsibility for the great work will rest on the shoulders of a dozen men." (Dawson, 1990, 127)

3) Personal and direct involvement of individuals and congregations is not fostered by the funding system.

In the 1960s the World Council of Churches initiated a program on the congregation as the base for mission. Lesslie Newbigin promoted this effort until he, like others, was eventually disillusioned by the direction that it was taking. Consequently the program dissipated. But in 1992 James A. Bergquist wrote an article, "The Congregation in Mission – Worth a Second Look?"

This article was part of a 1990's look at the central motif for mission. Bergquist refers to several writers and what they have said about the congregation in mission. He focuses on, "...the importance of the locally gathered community of God's people worshipping, serving and witnessing at the cutting edge of the church." He contends that, "...the congregation remains critically placed for understanding and doing mission today." He continues, "We need a widespread, intentional and, indeed, even radical shift in attitudes and practices to uphold the centrality of the local congregation [which] already form the primary arenas within which apostolic substance and apostolic mission take root and bear fruit." (James A. Bergquist, "The Congregation in Mission – Worth a Second Look?" *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXXI, No. 321, January, 1992, pp. 9 – 10)

He affirms the congregations' connections with each other and the larger *oikoumene* saying, "Administrative and hierarchical offices of all kinds will need to be converted, if necessary, to supporting and enabling the ministries of local congregations." The offices are secondary, but they do help shape direction and issues and bring critical theological reflection "But it is the ministry of the local congregation that today must be seen as decisive." (pp. 9 – 10)

4) The Presbyterian Church will always learn from the business world, but it has chosen to emulate business models uncritically and does not know when to discard them.

5) The Presbyterian funding system is not an honest broker of the theological pluralism which is so prominent.

Unified budgets are an expression of control by an elitist oligarchy which assumes that all of the light of God's Spirit must shine through them. They have been elected to their positions and therefore it is assumed that they alone reflect the values of the Presbyterian Church. Representative governance is, after all, a foundational value in Presbyterian polity. But diversity is often difficult for leadership to embrace.

6) The Presbyterian mission funding system has operated without engaging in serious contextualization.

The various cultures of the Presbyterian Church have been told that they should, “give on our (staff) terms.” John Neisbitt (*Megatrends*) provides confirmation that a variety of patterns are necessary for an operative funding system. Neisbitt observes three general cultural trends that are instructive:

- 1) from centralization to decentralization
- 2) from representative democracy to participatory democracy
- 3) from hierarchies to networking.

These contrast sharply with stagnant patterns of Presbyterian funding based on cultural assumptions of the early 20th century. We must learn what cross-cultural missionaries have understood for generations. The Gospel, and how it is lived out, even in funding systems, must always be contextualized in the cultural milieu. We must take more seriously the translation task. (Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 1989)

7) The funding system of the Presbyterian Church has failed because is based on an uncritical application of Presbyterian polity to support for mission.

You might say that the Presbyterian system employs a fundamentalist understanding of polity. The issue of our theology of church governance is an important factor in matters of funding. In fact, our polity is more entrenched in our self-understanding than is our theology. But if theology is subject to constant reformation (reformed and always be reformed), how much more so polity? We must consider the reality of our system of decision-making, and not just what is intended.

4) The Shenango Presbytery Experience

Given this pessimistic view of the present funding system of the Presbyterian Church, is there any reason to think that a different approach might have validity? Is there a different system to which we can point as a model for the future and a source of promise?

I have served as a middle level bureaucrat in the Presbyterian Church for the 23 years. This includes close involvement with four presbyteries and two synods. For the past 12 years I have been the principle staff person (Presbytery Executive – an interesting title with some obvious borrowing from American business culture) for the Presbytery of Shenango.

How has Shenango Presbytery funded mission differently than the denominational norm? First, the underlying principles are different. We have assumed that congregations do mission, not governing bodies (presbytery, synod, General Assembly). Therefore we welcome money for mission on the donors' terms.

We do this by identifying several projects which we commend to our churches for their consideration.

- Partnership with the church in the Sudan
- hospital in Brazil
- a home-building ministry in northern Mexico
- Spanish language congregations in the southwestern United States
- immigrant groups in the Los Angeles area

What have been the results? Does this make any difference? Without attempting to provide scientific data, there is antidotal material which provides some indication of the viability of this effort. The story can be told as follows:

In 1992 the General Assembly received \$ 352,248 from the churches of Shenango Presbytery. 37 % was undesignated. By 1999 the total was \$ 471,536 of which 12 % was undesignated. In 2003 the General Assembly received \$ 351,232 and 11.2 % was undesignated. During this 10 year period the churches gave over \$ 1 million designated in support of the partnership with the church in the Sudan. If designated giving opportunities had not been provided, far more than that amount would have been lost to Presbyterian mission work.

Not as easily measured, but equally important we can safely assert the following:

- There is a high level of confidence in the churches that money given for a particular purpose will quickly get to that place.
- Reports, stories, visitors, etc. related to these and other mission initiatives occupy a significant amount of energy at the five meetings of the Presbytery each year and in related program initiatives.
- There is a high level of interaction between the 68 congregations with each other on mission-related activity (trips) in which they network together. (A San Gabriel trip in 2004 includes 23 people from 6 churches.)
- Mission trips at various levels and age-groupings are common. (700 persons from approximately 50 churches participated in mission trips in 2003)
- Special funding opportunities are common practice and positively received.

Has the Kingdom of Heaven arrived in mission funding in Shenango Presbytery? No, but considering a very difficult local economy and a sense of marginalization from things Presbyterian, I believe that Shenango's participation in Presbyterian mission is much more significant than it would be under the normal unified funding culture that is commonplace in the denomination. The sense of self-conscious understanding of missional behavior is present and we are able to build on these opportunities.

5) Elements Necessary for a Mission Funding System in the 21st Century

George W. Bullard, Jr. notes that some U. S. denominations are in denial about the changes necessary.

A decreasing, myopic number of denominational organizations still try to hang on to the concept of one foundational funding stream...Some denominational organizations respond by pushing their basic funding stream harder and demanding greater commitment from congregations in hopes that tomorrow will bring a return to yesterday.

(George W. Bullard, Jr. "Multiplying Denominational Funding Streams," *NETResults*, March, 2002, pp. 28 – 30. [617])

What business model will we embrace today?

The question is not whether we will use insights from business, but which insights will we use. Will we recognize an appropriate model that will translate from the for-profit to the voluntary sector? Will we be able to modify it effectively? When it no longer fits the cultural context (and some day it will not), will we be able to let go and move on?

Some very helpful historical insight has been provided for us on the matter by Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler ("The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation," *The Organizational Revolution*, pp. 307 – 331), reflecting on this in *The Organizational Revolution* volume of the *Presbyterian Presence* series.

They note that, organizationally, the Presbyterian experience in the United States can be divided into three eras:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1) Constitutional Confederacy | late 1700s – late 1800s |
| 2) Corporation | late 1800s – mid 1960s |
| 3) Regulatory Agency | mid 1960s – present |

The present "Regulatory Agency" approach is described as, "...in the face of competition over a steadily shrinking financial pie, regulation consists of the development of procedures and policies for adjudicating the distribution of dwindling resources." (p. 321) For this reason the "power to tax," as represented in the funding system, is a hotly debated and emotional issue today. Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler continue,

When regulatory powers are exercised in an economic market, especially by institutions that lack the financial power to enforce these regulations, anomalies may arise...The effectiveness of this procedure should not, however, obscure the fact that force is being applied. Regulation is being used to compel a procedure, and there seems to be a cost. The cost often takes the form of a deepening resistance not only to the procedure required but, in some cases, also to the larger justice aim for the sake of which the procedure was designed in the first place... The place of special-interest groups in the regulation-oriented denomination can be understood in part in this context. (p. 323 - 325)

So we find ourselves thinking about a funding system for the future and considering what metaphor from the business world might be appropriate. I would propose that we consider “networking.” This, I would suggest, is a more decentralized and non-regulatory image that has significant credibility in our culture. It is surely not a panacea, and there would have to be careful exploration of its implications, but it seems to be worth testing for our denominational and ecumenical purposes.

6 Essential Elements (not in priority order) for a funding system for the future

1) The future funding system will be responsive to the donor-driven preference of our context. Individuals and congregations will be encouraged to engage in direct involvement in the work and relationship of mission.

A critical footnote is very important here. There are serious risks and dangers with a donor-driven funding system. We will have to be diligent to guard against abuses. Donors are more likely to be attracted to short term projects that are quickly successful and in which we can “do” something. Mission administrators must have the courage to say “no” to support for harmful projects. They must also take the donors seriously.

2) The future funding system will embrace the congregation as the basic agent for mission.

If we do not have our ecclesiology right, we will not get the funding system right. Our failure in this respect is to think that the mission agency (board) does mission for the church. When, in fact, the church does mission with the support and encouragement of the mission board.

Under a section called the “Apostolate of the Laity” in *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch says,

For it is the *community* that is the primary bearer of mission. The project on the ‘missionary structure of the congregation’, launched by the WCC’s New Delhi Assembly in 1961 (a project which, however, to a large extent aborted), together with the rediscovery of the local church in Catholicism, are perhaps – from a missiological perspective – the most far-reaching contributions of the WCC and Vatican II. Mission does not proceed primarily from the pope, nor from a

missionary order, society, or synod, but from a community gathered around the word and the sacraments and sent into the world. (David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, p. 472)

3) The future funding system will reject a regulatory posture in order to be permission-giving for the purpose of networking commitment to mission.

As noted above, Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler critique the Presbyterian Church for adopting a regulatory agency culture. This denunciation of efforts to control will be essential to an effective system to fund mission. Mission leaders can be an important resource, but they do not always have superior wisdom. In fact, one of the curious anomalies in the Worldwide Ministries Division of the Presbyterian Church is that only one staff person has even so much as a masters degree in missiology. This suggests a need for serious partnership, not only with churches internationally, but with intramural partners.

4) The future funding system will unapologetically insist on the most stringent fiscal controls and accountability.

5) The future funding system will acknowledge that partnership is foundational to how we do mission together with sisters and brothers in the Global South.

6) The future funding system will challenge the abysmal decline in the American church, moving us to understand our context as being that of the world Christian community.

How we American Christians (individually and corporately) use the money entrusted to us is frightening. Congregations, although keeping pace with inflation in per member giving, are spending a larger percentage of it on themselves and less on mission outreach than ever before.

This too is not a new problem for the Christian Church.

In 1864, Lord Shaftesbury spoke out against the complacency of those who congratulate themselves on the liberality of the nation... Yet, given Britain's increasing prosperity, itself a focus for Protestant pride, the spirit of benevolence, if it had increased absolutely, seemed relatively to have declined. Too often, income increased, but donations remained the same." Quoting J. Harris (1836) "How very little of it results from a settled plan of benevolence or from self-denial, without which, on Christian principles, there is no benevolence. Never, perhaps, was self-denial a rarer virtue than in the present age." ("Gold and the Gospel': Systematic Beneficence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England, Jane Garnett in *The Church and Wealth*, edited by W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, Basil Blackwell Ltd., Oxford, 1987, pp. 347 - 358)

There is no comparative conversation in the Presbyterian Church today. An adequate funding system would encourage such. It should be a priority.

Conclusion

The Presbyterian mission funding system is dead. It has been so for twenty years or more. It is slowly disintegrating with occasional dramatic implosions. It really does not matter whether we Presbyterians believe that or not because it has already happened.

So why take the time to document it and dissect the corpse? Because, if we continue to live as if it is the 1950s and exert energy to cling to what has come and gone, we will simply construct more roadblocks to giving by faithful Presbyterians who could be providing funds for some of the most important and mission work being done by any western denomination. We could be using the money entrusted to us for authentic partnership with the church of the Global South. As Elder Guma has said, “God is waiting to see what we will do about this.” To my mind that is a battle worth engaging.

Yale-Edinburgh 2004-online