



The Communicator

A Service of the Communication Services Committee of the
National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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The Congregational Community

This issue of *The Communicator* is focused on strengthening the Congregational Community from within. We're bringing you useful information on several topics around the relationships of local churches with the National Association. These include the challenges and rewards of marketing the National Association within our local churches, the importance of Shared Ministries Fund, and ways local churches can support Shared Ministries by being Fair Share and Fair Share Plus congregations.

Churches are facing rising costs at an alarming rate. Utilities, travel costs and worship materials seem to be going up so fast that budgets and finance committees are spinning around their calculators. Everyone is looking for ways to cut expenses and tighten budgets. It's easy to think that dollars that aren't directly related to "in house" operating expenses can be the first to go. Sometimes, that "Fair Share" line item is an easy target.

This issue targets the shared work between the local church and the National Association, ways to support and maintain that shared ministry through a Fair Share commitment. We trust that this information will be helpful to each church.

Please share this issue with others in your church and get the dialogue going.



Together, We Can!

By Don Mayberry

The mission of *The Communicator* is to offer our congregations tips on various ways to "market our churches." That may sound insensitive, but really, marketing is simply a way of communicating God's grace and inviting people to join us in our faith journeys.

While articles in *The Communicator* normally focus on the different ways that we can "communicate" outward, this issue is dedicating a lot of attention to the prospect of building inward support for the National Association of Christian Congregationalist Churches. Doing so, I believe, is part of marketing.

A product that is in good shape is easier to promote. In order for the NACCC to be in good shape, we need to be telling our story to our local churches. If our congregations are to have a healthy desire to support the National Association, they must have a solid understanding of the relationship between the NA and the local church.

The relationship is not autocratic, with the National Association setting policy for the local church--telling us what to do, say or think. Instead, it is a fellowship of like-minded (as "like-minded" as Congregationalists get) churches that support and encourage one another in the common pursuit of faith, freedom and fellowship. The NA allows us to be autonomous churches--congregationally governed locally--and yet not feel we are alone in our journeys.

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Together we can be so much more than we can be on our own. The NA offers assistance to local churches searching for new pastors, helps pastors find churches, brings churches together for an annual meeting, and offers educational opportunities. In addition, the NA has helped many to fund their pastoral education through the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies.

Together we are able to do mission work in ways that we could not do on our own.

Most importantly to me, the Congregational Way allows us to listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit instead of the national office. I love that freedom. So many things connect us, yet none that threaten or take away our local control. It is a wonderful model.

As someone from my congregation recently said to me, "The Congregational Way puts a lot of responsibility on our shoulders." That is true. Part of that responsibility is to be constantly communicating the story of the NACCC and the local church, realizing that our "Fair Share" support is not a burden, but a response to God's work being done among us.

Rev. Don Mayberry is a member of the Communications Services Committee and pastor of First Congregational Church, South Paris, Maine.

fair (fâr)

1. Having or exhibiting a disposition that is free of favoritism or bias;
2. Impartial;
3. Just to all parties; equitable
4. Free of clouds or storms; clear and sunny

share (shâr)

1. An equitable portion
2. To divide and parcel out in shares; apportion.
3. A part or portion belonging to, distributed to, contributed by, or owed by a person or group
4. To participate in, use, enjoy, or experience jointly or in turns.
5. To accord a share in (something) to another or others

ministry (mĭn'ĭ-strĕ)

pl. min-is-tries

1. The act of serving; ministrations.
2. One that serves as a means; an instrumentality.
3. The profession, duties, and services of a minister.

Mutual Care: The Shared Ministries Fund

By Wendy Van Tassel

At the national meeting in 2007 the NACCC adopted the following mission statement:

Bringing together Congregational Christian Churches for mutual care and outreach to our world in the name of Jesus Christ.

It took a great deal of time and effort to craft, review, revise and adopt this mission statement. It takes even more to achieve our objective.

To accomplish our mission requires the time, talent and resources of our member churches. We are in a SHARED MINISTRY together, doing far more as an association of churches than we could ever do as individual, totally independent churches.

The "Shared Ministries Fund" of the NACCC is what is known in the business world as the "General Operating Fund." That term is pretty cut and dried. On the other hand, the "Shared Ministries Fund" is dynamic, fueled by the energy of God's Spirit at work among us. We are blessed to be called into ministry together.

The reality is that every ministry requires a sacrifice - it comes with a price tag. People often get excited about "mission" work – the hands-on provision to meet the needs of others – but we also must be mindful that all the other areas of mutual care and outreach by our association need our active support. That support has two primary components – a spiritual one, requiring us to constantly be diligent in seeking God's will and direction, and a financial one which requires we all reach into our pockets and sustain the NACCC through our gifts of money.



It's not glamorous. In fact, most people loath talking about money, yet without the Shared Ministries Fund we would be unable to fulfill our mission as an association. We would not be able to pay our staff, sustain the office, and provide the resources for the many ministries to which God calls us.

Having just completed four years of service on the Executive Committee, I wish I had a dollar for every minute we needed to talk about money. It saddened me that so much of our time had to be consumed with discussing our need for funds. In my gut, it seems evident that evil delights when we get distracted from true ministry. We expend energy wringing our hands rather than using our hands to touch the lives of others.

How will your church join in the Shared Ministries of the NACCC? It is absolutely critical that every member church make a contribution to the Shared Ministries Fund. Such contributions are the life-bread which sustains the daily work of the NACCC and, once again, makes the fulfillment of our mission possible.

Rev. Wendy G. Van Tassel is the Past Chair of the NA Executive Committee and Co-Pastor of First Congregational Church in Spencer, IA.

FAIR SHARE

At the 2008 Annual Meeting, the term “Shared Ministries Fund” was introduced to replace the General Operating Fund of the NACCC. As Wendy wrote in the cover story of this issue of *The Communicator*, this is more than a shift in terms. It is a new way of thinking of the shared responsibility inherent in the fellowship between local churches and the National Association office. The giving by Member Churches makes up approximately half of the overall funds available to support the work of the National Association. These funds, in conjunction with support from the NA Divisions, go to pay for the costs of the Oak Creek office – including salaries, building costs, utilities and office supplies. Additionally, funds are used to support publication of *The Congregationalist*, services to Member Churches, and funding for the Annual Meeting.

The NA heavily depends on the financial stewardship of “Fair Share” churches, those Member Churches that contribute \$10 for each member of their congregations. Some churches go above that amount and contribute \$12-\$15 per member, earning the designation “Fair Share Plus” churches. If each of the 400+ Member Churches contributed at the Fair Share level, there would be no more NA deficit budget and the resources to Member Churches would increase beyond what can be supported currently.

This is not an easy thing for some churches to include when planning their annual budget. Stewardship is never easy, but it’s important and we all know that it can be very joy-filled, whether we’re sharing our time, talents or treasures.

The Communication Services Committee has surveyed a number of folks and come up with some suggestions that might help churches either raise their Fair Share funds or replace what comes out of the annual budget. If you have additional ideas or tips, please share them and we’ll publish them in a subsequent issue.

A Different Sense of Voluntary – Finding Our True Membership

As churches ponder the prospect of becoming a Fair Share church or the move from Fair Share to Fair Share Plus, they will begin with looking at the bottom line. One of the strategies for making this move is to make a contribution based on their “true membership”. Steven Peay, Wauwatosa shares with us how their church looked at this often difficult task.

How many times do we hear, “I belong to so-and-so church”? There was a time when “belonging” carried with it the notion of being truly incorporated into the faith community that was “so-and-so church,” but those times have changed. Somewhere along the line it became okay to “join” a church with the expectation that “membership” required nothing of a member, save that they had the “right” to vote for a new minister, complain about the old one – who they may have never met – and, of course, have a place for their funeral. Some have said that churches have turned into “spiritual service clubs,” save that service clubs have minimum contribution and attendance requirements.

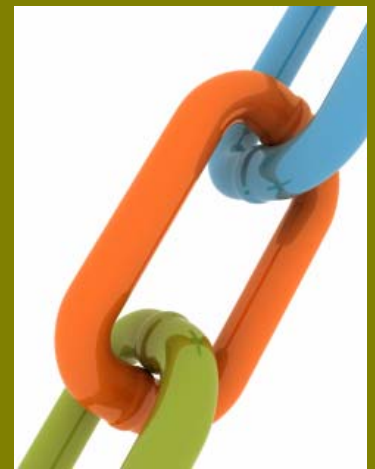
So, what should we do? Well, the Congregational tradition is pretty clear – especially in the Cambridge Platform – that a church is made up of “visible saints.” That is, the church is composed of those who have a living relationship with the Lord (and I would add those who are on the way, as well). Our church covenants normally say what it means to be a member, a living part or extension of the church. What I believe we are called to do is to take a long, hard look at our member rolls and realize that it does us no good to inflate them with folk whom we do not see or who do not support the church’s ministry.

Here at First Church – Wauwatosa, we have undertaken to see who really “belongs” to the church and, as a colleague from another faith tradition put it, get ourselves down to “fighting weight” so that we can get on with the business of being God’s people and growing together.

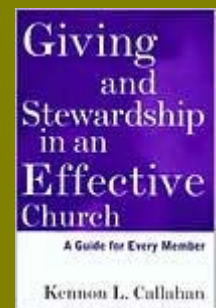
How did we do it? First, we sought to identify those who we had not seen or who had not supported the church for some time. Working with the Deacons, we developed a list and then composted a letter inquiring after folks and their intent. We gently, lovingly asked after them whether they needed pastoral care, if there was a problem or if they had simply moved on. We made it clear that if we did not hear from them they would be moved to the “inactive” rolls. After several weeks, the ministers called all those on the list. Only then was a final letter sent informing them that they had been moved to “inactive status” and if they had moved to another church, the letter served as their transfer.

We regained several families, including one who thanked me for exercising “tough love”. We’ve pared our rolls and can now realistically examine what our ministry needs to encompass and how to prepare our budget. It was a lot of work, but it was worth it. We now know who belongs.

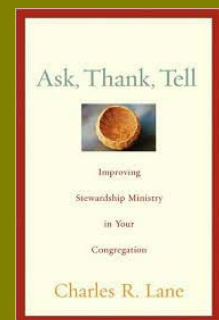
*Rev. Steven A. Peay, Ph.D., Senior Minister
First Congregational Church, Wauwatosa*



Helpful Links



http://www.amazon.com/Giving-Stewardship-Effective-Church-Member/dp/078793867X/ref=pd_bbs_sr_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1218135704&sr=8-2



http://www.amazon.com/Ask-Thank-Tell-Stewardship-Congregation/dp/0806652632/ref=pd_bbs_4?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1218135704&sr=8-4

Remember to shop on amazon.com through The Communicator's a-store. Use this link:
<http://astore.amazon.com/nacccorg-20/102-7384138-7449732>



Some churches have no difficulty adding a Fair Share contribution into their annual budget. Others struggle with the idea. Here are some thoughts on fulfilling a Fair Share commitment and making it fun in the process.

- Have “Couch Change Sunday” – Dig into the corners of your favorite furniture and bring that loose change to church. You never know how much cash you’ll find, along with that button you lost last year!
- “Fair Share” Sunday – Designate one Sunday during the year when a special offering is taken. Encourage members to give \$10 for each person in their family and an extra \$10 for someone who is unable to contribute at this time.
- “Less Latte, More Love” Week – For one week ask members to drink one less cup of expensive coffee each day. Put what you saved by drinking juice (Hey, it’s healthy!) or regular coffee in a jar and bring it to church that Sunday.
- “Loose Change Makes a Difference” – Encourage members to keep an extra jar around the house to collect loose change. Set aside one or two special Sundays a year to bring those offerings to the church.
- “Think Inside the Box” – Make offering boxes (or cans or whatever you have on hand) available to your members. Encourage a contribution of \$1 per family member each month of the year. Collect the boxes at Christmas time and you’ll have raised the funds to be a “Fair Share Plus” church.
- “Matinee Missions” – Promote one week during the church year where members watch a movie at home, with their favorite movie-time snacks. Contribute the cost of movie tickets and theater concessions instead to the Fair Share offering.

The Communicator

The Communication Services Committee encourages and assists members of local churches to communicate vibrantly and effectively with one another, with members of local churches, with participants in the work of the National Association, and with the public at large, to further the work of Christ.



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