

# Saying Yes to Love and Hope, No to Fear and Doubt

By Greg Clark, *Communications*

**I**n the end, love was stronger than fear. Hope was greater than doubt.

When the World Church Finance Board arrived for its June 3–4 meeting at the Temple in Independence, Missouri, members encountered more than 50 financial reports, numerous concerns, and multiple warnings about disturbing trends. When the board left, it had a Worldwide Mission Budget of nearly \$18.7 million for fiscal year 2018...and abundant hope.

The budget calls the church to focus on invitation, opportunity, and generosity rather than qualms, fears, and worries. The board isn't asking church members to ignore financial hardships; it's asking people to *overcome* them.

"It is my hope that our response as a worldwide church will increase as a witness of our growing love for Christ, the gospel, and the church's ministry and mission in the world," President Steve Veazey said. "Generous minds, generous hearts, generous words, generous actions are needed.

"...From my perspective, the next year will reveal the true dimensions and future prospects of our vision and responsiveness as a worldwide movement of Christian faith, spirituality, and mission in the Restoration tradition. We have no real option other than to journey ahead to see what the future offers by way of outcome or surprise with our eyes fixed on the Risen One."

The journey won't be easy. The church is striving to bounce back from an \$88 million drop in net assets from fiscal 2016. That decline, which did not affect daily operations, was caused by a projected increase in retirement expenses, a major drop in appraised real estate, and other factors.

Now the church faces two more key obstacles: a downturn in undesignated bequests and three straight months of flagging tithing in fiscal 2017. If those trends don't improve, leaders could be forced to consider cuts in programs and—as a last resort—staff.

Nothing can be done about the bequests, but members can do plenty about the tithing. Just matching their \$14.9 million effort of 2016—about \$600,000 more than budgeted in fiscal 2017—would be great.

If that doesn't happen, Presiding Bishop Stassi Cramm said, "We will have to take significant action to reduce expenses. There's no way to do that without additional downsizing of staff." She said the church is at a crossroads, adding: "This board is commissioned to tell the story."

The board showed confidence that church membership will respond with zest. It even had a chance to support an amended budget that would have been \$750,000 smaller. It said no.

Much of the board's confidence stemmed from open communications with leaders before and during the meeting. Members said—often and loudly—that they appreciate the transparency, sensitivity, and determination of the Presiding Bishopric and other leaders.

- **Kat Hnatyshyn:** "This is absolutely transparent. Vulnerability is a big theme. And by sharing vulnerability down to finances, it helps us build a community. We could have put on a public-relations front to spin it, yet we chose vulnerability and transparency. They're sharing the nitty-gritty."
- **Cindy Hatch:** "We have more information now than we have ever had. Most of us run a household budget, watching our pennies, nickels, and dimes. That's what we're doing here: watching the pennies, nickels, and dimes of the church."
- **Diana Hansen:** "I feel very good about the transparency. It truly enables us to not only look at the present, but to look at trends moving into the future. Trust goes along with the transparency. It's about tithing with everybody digging deeper in their pockets for the love of the church."
- **Amy Hoerchler:** "I feel they've done a great job in pre-

sensation, detailed information, and answering questions. I have great trust in them.”

- **Dar Shepherdson:** “The transparency affirms my confidence and trust because now I can see what they’re going to do, and it affirms their decision-making.”
- **Catherine Mambwe:** “This finance board has not been like ones I’ve attended before in the sense that the information that we received was very open...That gave us confidence in them, and it is preparing us to work extra hard when we go back into the field.”
- **Jeff Naylor:** I appreciate leadership for taking us through this process. Leadership is painfully aware of prudent management with information at your fingertips, so I support this budget motion. I have hope and trust.”
- **Gib Alberti:** “There’s been no effort to hold things back. They’re sharing from their hearts. The trust level is about a 10.”

Board members also expressed trust in the Bridge of Hope Project. It prioritizes meeting retirement obligations, paying off any other debt, and funding three endowments. But nobody expects “The Way Forward”—a name inspired by a similar program in the Great Depression—to be a rapid rewrite of the church’s ledgers.

In the meantime, the church continues to respond to the gospel. Ten “Mission Moments” during the weekend described in word, song, and video the affect the church has on lives. The moments detailed ministry with latter-day seekers; the homeless in a Carlsbad, California, park; two new congregations in Germany; efforts to establish a

church presence in New York City; the work of evangelists in Taipei, Taiwan; baptisms and faith in Haiti; and a new campground in La Buena Fe, Honduras. Others described development of church resources, programs, spirituality, staff efforts, and more.

“As we hear through the Mission Moments, there is just tremendous potential,” Cramm said. “When we can facilitate people coming together and provide a little bit of leadership and resources, miraculous things happen. But that little bit of resources and leadership requires funds.”

In his closing sermon, Scott Murphy of the First Presidency summed up the importance of generosity, love, and hope.

“We have struggled this weekend with the realities of the challenges before us. Mission is happening. The mission of the church is changing and impacting lives. ...What the Holy Spirit is able to do is always beyond our human imagination.

“...You and I are sent into the world to live with hope.”

## Who’s on the Board

The World Church Finance Board has 59 members, including an international group of 30 elected by World Conference and nine bishops elected by the Order of Bishops. The World Church Leadership Council (First Presidency, Council of Twelve Apostles, Presiding Bishopric, presiding evangelist, senior president of seventy, president of the High Priests Quorum, and World Church secretary) comprise the other seats. 

