

Community of Christ

These comments are among the closing remarks delivered June 6 by President Stephen M. Veazey to the World Church Finance Board in Independence, Missouri. They focus on the dire need to improve giving to World Ministries Mission Tithes and his hope for the church.

Into the Future

By Stephen M. Veazey, church president

You are aware—perhaps more than most—of the financial challenges we face as we move into the future. You have seen the World Ministries Mission Tithes (WMMT) and contributor trends. You have reviewed the general options before us. You also have contributed to the possible birth of other choices. I deeply appreciate the spirit of our discussions yesterday in that regard.

Frankly, I am in a dilemma. I am torn between the fundamental enduring hope and faith that is the foundation of my relationship with God, and the realities facing us in the church and the global economy.

I desperately want to believe our people will respond to the vision and case for giving that we will be presenting to them. And yet, I see trends that have not reversed for decades. This weighs heavily on me as I try to balance the prophetic task and the presidential task, both of which are devoted to the long-term health, faithfulness, and viability of the worldwide church.

So, here is what I am going to do. I say “I” not because I want to lift myself up before you, but because I can only control my own attitudes and actions. Others will have to decide how they are going to respond to the current challenges.

In the long-term, I am going to trust the Spirit to bless the church and turn our members’ hearts to increased generosity in support of our worldwide mission. I do not believe the option that calls for more immediate decreases in funding for personnel will accomplish that, although, that would be the most-prudent business decision we could make based on the current data.

At the same time, to preserve the possibilities for our longer-term strategies to work, here is also what I am going to do:

1. Cathi and I have already increased the amount we are giving to WMMT through the “Pre-Authorized Transfer” process. I am not going to ask anyone else to do what I am not already doing. However, having done it, I am asking you to respond similarly.
2. I am asking the Presiding Bishopric and Integrated Communications to reformat the FY 2011 budget you have just approved to communicate clearly the ministries supported by WMMT in contrast to those supported by other income sources. This will become an initial funding-case statement.
3. Next, I am going to hit the road, take to the air, and pick up the phone to talk to our people; people I know who are deeply devoted to this work. I also will talk to people who are deeply devoted to this work who need some extra “inspiration” for increasing their generosity to reflect their full capacity. I have a number in mind that needs to be committed to increased WMMT for the next five years that will give me greater confidence in the longer-range approach.

What I say next, comes as invitation to you to join me in responding:

1. I invite you to do what you can to increase your World Ministries Mission Tithes on a weekly or monthly basis.
2. Be a positive spokesperson for our worldwide ministries and the importance of supporting those ministries through tithing.
3. Whenever comments are made or questions asked about the World Church budget, or world ministries, step up and identify yourself as a current or former member of the World Church Finance Board. Answer the questions and offer testimony about the ministries supported by World Ministries Mission Tithes.
4. Be proactive in your public teaching and preaching ministry to bring positive witness to bear on Disciples Generous Response principles, World Church mission, and the need to support worldwide ministries that are making a real difference in the world.
5. Recruit and mentor World Church givers of all ages in your families, congregations, and mission centers to support the budget that you have just approved.

Following this meeting, you, and other members of World Church teams and boards will receive a communication from me asking three questions:

1. What resources or information do you need to respond as outlined in points 1–5 above?
2. Are you willing and able to project an increase in your World Ministries Mission Tithes for the next five years to help support the World Church budget in the short term while we implement longer-term, disciple-formation strategies that include an emphasis on generous giving? This information, with feedback from other groups, will provide data we can use in deciding about tithing income assumptions.
3. Will you provide the names and contact information for three or four people you believe would respond by increasing their tithes if information about World Church mission priorities and funding needs were shared with them?

I am receiving some correspondence and messages that state the recent action of the World Conference to approve the counsel I brought to the church is mainly what is depressing tithing. That may be so. However, I want to be clear that as long as I am in the role, I will bring to the church my clearest perceptions of the mind and will of God.

A nonnegotiable for me is that I will not compromise vision, message, and the Spirit’s clear guidance in the face of threats from individuals that they will withdraw their financial support if they do not agree with church direction or certain decisions.

Another nonnegotiable for me is priesthood support of World Ministries Mission Tithes. Soon, we will put in place an administrative policy that will state clearly that we will not approve the ordinations of people whose understanding of the gospel and ordained ministry does not include awareness and support of the worldwide ministries of the church through tithing. We’ve had way too much drift in local congregations and mission centers on this matter.

Is there hope for the future?

This last week I received two correspondences that were blessings of encouragement and hope. The first came from a woman who attended World Conference as an observer. During the consideration of the counsel to the church, she experienced the presence of the Spirit in very strong terms. Following Conference, as she continued to pray about her experience, she felt a strong urge to join the church. At 62 years old she is going to be baptized and confirmed this

week. “Why *wouldn't* I want to be part of the Community of Christ?” she asserted as she ended her e-mail to me.

In another correspondence, a young man told me about his struggles over the years that had resulted in several attempts to commit suicide. He described a long process of trying to find direction in his life, including writing letters to a friend who had been successful in his suicide attempt. Through contact with a church member the young man received a copy of Doctrine and Covenants 164. He was deeply touched by what he read and described it as “simple, pure, revealed truth (that) washed my soul in hope and life.” Then he wrote, “President Veazey, I am inviting you to my baptism and confirmation...Know that I want to invite you for I want everyone to feel welcome to come!”

Community of Christ saves lives! Community of Christ saves lives physically, relationally, and spiritually! Our ministry is essential! We need to share that vision and message more broadly with greater passion! It is all about ministry given and received.

Following our meeting yesterday I was on a conference call with 30 people in Honduras who are taking part in MEADS (Ministerial Education and Discipleship Studies), which is funded by the World Church budget. They had spent several days studying Doctrine and Covenants 164 and its vision of the church. They came to understand and appreciate its contents much better and wanted to express their support over the phone to me. How do we help people understand the important link between that kind of educational activity, church mission, and World Church budget support through tithing?

After that, I had a chance to briefly see many World Service Corps volunteers who are leaving on their summer assignments. The World Service Corps is one of our most-successful, young-adult ministries.

Do the participants and supporters of that program understand it is funded by World Ministries Mission Tithes? How do we make that connection in the minds of young adults so they will become tithing contributors! It can be done if we apply our creative efforts to the need.

Is there hope? Yes there is hope. Hope is our business and the foundation of our faith!