



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

2021 USA SURVEY RESULTS

Replies to recent surveys covered many subjects, from financial transparency to the future of tithing, and Community of Christ officials are considering the feedback as part of ongoing discernment and decision-making for the future.

APRIL SURVEY

On April 22, Community of Christ emailed a survey to more than 15,000 individuals in the United States. The distribution was focused on contributors, priesthood, and leaders. The purpose of the survey was to seek a better understanding of the attitudes and motivations of members and friends on a variety of topics related to funding local and worldwide mission.

Demographics

A total of 3,985 individuals in the United States completed the survey; participants were from 48 of 50 states, and 37 out of 38 USA Mission Centers. While the survey was targeted to the United States, the link was shared on social media and 95 surveys were completed by individuals outside of the United States.

Of those completing the survey:

- 5% were 18-34
- 18% were 35-54
- 53% were 55-74
- 24% were 75+

Additionally:

- 58% of survey participants were women
- 97% of survey participants were Community of Christ members

- 68% were priesthood members
- 50% of survey respondents were either past or current leaders in their congregations or mission centers

The church's response to the survey was fabulous. Consultants helping the church thought that a single email and social media release would not generate significant response. The consultants were amazed by the number of people that responded and the quality of their responses.

Feedback

Responses to a request for feedback were somewhat aligned with what was anticipated; however, it is always good to have assumptions verified. The results were important and helpful.

We learned there is a small contingent of people who feel the church is not communicating enough about finances and how Worldwide Mission Tithes are used. Also, a small number of people expressed a lack of trust in leadership and had concerns about the direction of the church. This somewhat negative critique of leadership was a minority of the responses, but we want people to know that the team—including the Presiding Bishopric—read every comment and are considering how we can continue to do better.

In the data, the team was not simply looking for responses that confirmed preconceived ideas. There were a few comments that were hard to read because the Presiding Bishopric takes feedback about the lack of financial transparency and lack of trust related to financial management very seriously.

The survey questions were designed to provide input on the best way to fund business and support services in the future where business and support services refer to sections identified in the Worldwide Mission Budget that is posted online. There was no single, stand-out recommendation in the results. People have a variety of perspectives and there did not appear to be a strong consensus pushing for a particular solution.

Thank you to everyone who completed this survey!

Responding to the results

The survey results are influencing planning and decision-making:

- Continued emphasis on financial transparency
- Preference for continued centralized business and support services

- Need to simplify processes and provide info on how money flows through the church and why
- Exploration of ways to connect with new contributors

Financial transparency

The Presiding Bishopric and other World Church leaders are committed to financial transparency. The Presiding Bishopric answers every question we receive, and we try to provide routine updates on critical information.

In 2016, the bishopric sponsored a World Conference Resolution that increased the scope of the World Church Finance Board. The board has always approved the annual budget but now the board also approves the income assumptions that drive the budget development, and the board approves the church's audit, which gives the board full access to the financial statements.

The Presiding Bishopric continues to provide financial information online and in the *Herald*, including:

- Financial updates in June and December
- Posting the annual audit report and budget
- Providing periodic updates on Worldwide Mission Tithes and progress toward the Bridge of Hope retirement responsibility goal

Suggestions on ways to continue to improve transparency and accountability are welcome at presidingbishopric@cofchrist.org.

Centralized business and support services

Survey feedback leaned toward continuing to provide centralized business and support services. The respondents did not want the responsibility of arranging for these services on their own. If respondents had to take over something locally, risk management—including insurance—was the area that was most selected but even that got limited support. The most-valued services by the survey respondents were fiscal services and membership records. There was also a lot of support for legal services, especially by respondents who had used those services in the past.

Based on all this feedback, the Presiding Bishopric made a change in the 2022 billing for property and liability insurance, which was announced in August. Since before 2000, the property and liability insurance invoice always included some expenses for the work of International Headquarters staff. Since 2018, the amount included has been \$500,000. This

amount was about 10% of each entity's bill and was included in the overall allocation amount. It was not itemized separately.

In 2022, this amount is being increased to \$700,000. This increase is being implemented to cover the actual expenses for the people providing services to the field in support of the insurance program and other legal matters. On average using the 2021 allocations, this change will result in a 4% increase on each bill. Starting with the 2022 invoices, this amount will be identified as a separate amount in the summary section on the last page and called Legal/Risk Services so it is identifiable separate from the expense of receiving the insurance coverage.

Simplifying Processes

The survey-planning team learned how complex many of the church's processes are as we tried to explain to our consultants how things worked. We also could tell in the survey responses that some people were unclear exactly what their Local and Worldwide Mission Tithes fund. The planning team anticipated this result but having the confirmation was important in emphasizing the need to explore and implement ways to simplify processes and help leaders understand how money flows and why.

As an example of improvements, Information Systems has released a new application, PEID Payments, as part of Remote Desktop. This application, available as of September, provides detailed information on automatic deposits and withdrawals by International Headquarters in congregation and mission center bank accounts. This provides better transparency and simplifies the reconciliation process for financial officers.

Connecting with new contributors

Based on the target group for the survey invitation, most of the respondents were people who have given to Mission Tithes in the past even if they are not currently giving. What is clear from the survey responses, as well as the demographics on current contributors as reported previously, is that we need to find ways to connect with new generations of disciples in a variety of cultural contexts.

The financial circumstances of the World Church in the next few years are hopeful as we support current levels of ministries and services and meet the retirement responsibility portion of the Bridge of Hope goal. However, the financial situation beyond 2023 presents major challenges. This is not new information. We shared several points about this at the 2019 World Conference and recently in the June 2021 Financial Update, which is on the church's website.

The Presiding Bishopric continues to explore methods for contributors to support specific ministries and services. For instance, many have suggested that as eTithing use increases perhaps mailed envelopes are no longer efficient or effective. We will be surveying Congregational Financial Officers in the USA around March/April 2022 to evaluate the continued need for mailed envelopes. We are considering alternative income sources such as charging for tours of the Temple in Independence, Missouri that are not associated with Community of Christ, or having fees for online resources.

NOVEMBER SURVEY

On November 1, Community of Christ emailed a survey to more than 15,000 individuals in the United States. The distribution was focused on contributors, priesthood, and leaders. In this survey, the Presiding Bishopric partnered with the Barna Group, seeking feedback about what people feel and think about generosity.

Demographics

A total of 716 individuals completed the survey through Community of Christ with

- 98% from the USA / 2% from other places
- 40% Male / 58% Female / 3% Preferred not to say
- 77% Priesthood / 23% Not priesthood
- 88% have tithed to the church/ 10% have not / 2% Preferred not to say

The generations of those completing the survey:

- .1% was born between 1999 – 2004 (Gen Z)
- 4% were born between 1984 – 1998 (Millennial)
- 16% were born between 1965 – 1983 (Gen X)
- 54% were born between 1946 – 1964 (Boomer)
- 25% were born between 1925 – 1945 (Elder)
- 1% preferred not to say

In the past year:

- 85% have given to Local Mission Tithes
- 76% have given to Worldwide Mission Tithes
- 49% have given to Community of Christ Affiliates
- 11% have given to none of the above

Feedback

When asked in what ways are you most generous, the top three responses were:

1. 28% said they were most generous with Emotional/Relational Support
2. 27% said they were most generous with Service/Volunteering
3. 26% said they were most generous with Monetary Support

Of the respondents, 91% identified having at least one person in their lives who modeled generosity and identified reflecting God's character by showing love to others as the most important reason Christians are generous. The second reason identified for Christian generosity was to give back in appreciation for God's generosity. And, 94% responded that true generosity is planned at least some of the time.

Of the respondents, 62% said their congregation was receiving information from the church about the impact of their giving.

While 77% of respondents felt comfortable with how the church talks about money, 54% said they did not need help with financial management through teaching and preaching by the church.

About 55% of people who took the survey said they were participating in the Generosity Cycle this year while 13% were not. And, 32% stated they were not familiar with the Generosity Cycle.

The six principles of a Disciple's Generous Response were important parts of thinking about stewardship for 69% of respondents. Another 10% did not these feel the principles were important and 20% were not familiar with the six principles.

The results showed that the financial effect of COVID-19 was not widespread. As an example, when people were asked about their financial health as compared to before the pandemic, 15% said they were more financially healthy, 72% are about the same, and 13% were less financially healthy.

Initial Reflections about the Results

The Presiding Bishopric recognizes that we need ways to connect with and receive feedback from a broader demographic of people associated with Community of Christ. We will continue to look for ways to achieve this.

The Presiding Bishopric was grateful to hear that over half of respondents felt as though they were receiving information about how their tithing supports mission. Communications and storytelling about how worldwide mission tithes support ministries and services will remain an ongoing priority.

Some have suggested the church have more programs on personal and family financial management and stewardship. This survey provided mixed feedback about that suggestion.

The motivation associated with generosity and a person's faith journey were well aligned with Community of Christ theology on whole-life stewardship. However, the results indicate that even within priesthood, the church needs to uphold the importance of whole-life stewardship as part of disciple formation.

The six principles of a Disciple's Generous Response still stand as an important way to express these concepts, and we need to collectively teach them as part of our mission to develop disciples to serve. The Presiding Bishopric will continue to uphold the annual season associated with the Generosity Cycle as a way of bringing emphasis to intentional stewardship.

Thanks for participating

Leaders learned a lot from the survey responses and those learnings are influencing decisions and plans. Once again, we are grateful for the wonderful and diverse input. Everyone's thoughts and feedback are important and are helping leaders shape thoughts about how we support Christ's mission into the future. As leaders send out other surveys in the future, we hope that the church will continue to respond by sharing important feedback.

Thank you to everyone who completed these surveys!