



METAMORPHOSIS

President Stephen M. Veazey gave these comments December 8 near the end of a budget meeting by the World Church Finance Board at the Temple in Independence, Missouri.

Thank you for your participation this weekend, which I know was informed by preparation many weeks before you come to these meetings.

Lately, I have found myself wanting to have a different kind of conversation with the World Church Finance Board and other groups. Within my time as a church leader, I can recall when we were approving budgets approaching \$29 million for the worldwide mission of the church. I understand that we were overextended at that time, and we continue to pay the price for that. So I thank you for your careful scrutiny that has brought us to the budget that we have approved today.

But I've been reflecting a lot over the last several months about the impact that we have experienced during a time

when our budget has moved from \$28 million to \$29 million to one which is now \$14.7 million, while, at the same time, trying to continue to function and provide services as much as we can according to the expectations of the church and as much as possible to how things were being done when we had budgets in the \$25 million to \$27 million range.

So I just want to point out what is probably very clear. This cannot continue.

We are already below minimal organizational operational needs in the church. Our staff are providing herculean efforts to keep us afloat and to keep things together to meet the church's expectations, which have not been adjusted along with our budget reductions. They are straining themselves beyond what can be sustained to do so.

I know the answer does not lie in simply in trying to generate more income to return to funding the organization as it was. Given the massive changes in culture and

people's perceptions of church, spirituality, faith, and their own participation in such endeavors, we are in a new time—and we have been for some time—that includes unprecedented change.

Financial constraints over the past several decades have driven us to incremental change and innovation. Incremental change driven by financial limitations is not enough to meet the challenges and opportunities of this time in the church's history and in human history. At the same time, having to manage organizational needs driven by financial constraints is almost totally consuming our time and energy, when that time and energy is needed to work on visioning the future and innovation to accelerate movement in the needed direction.

We need insight, inspiration, and courage to make some bold moves.

We have been giving quite a bit of thought and prayer to that need. During 2020 we are engaging in an extensive discernment process to explore the essential nature of the church and its mission, and then how we should organize ourselves going forward. This discernment is to the most fundamental levels of our purpose for existence in a world of great need. This will drive us quickly to questions of "What is essential to our life and mission?" "What do we need to keep, and what do we need to let go of for the journey ahead?"

If we started today with vision and a strong sense of calling about nurturing and multiplying communities of disciples and seekers throughout the world, engaged in spiritual formation in Christ-inspired, inclusive community pursuing Christ's mission, how would we do it with the resources we have available?

Our organization is too complex. It's too complicated. It takes too much time and energy just to keep the pieces together. The kind of discerning work that we're talking about is much more on the order of a metamorphosis [for the translators, a caterpillar going into the cocoon in order to emerge as a butterfly, or a larva that transitions into something that's much different than what it previously appeared]. Metamorphosis is more than just incremental change and adjustment. That kind of process, especially when you're in the experience of the change, will be anxiety-producing, painful, and ultimately, liberating in terms of the nature of the church and its mission in the world.

I continue to have regular spiritual affirmation regarding the direction of the church and those aspects of the church that are emerging as we continue to discover what it means to be Community of Christ, the embodied Spirit of

the eternal Christ continuing to share hope and ministry throughout the world.

A portion of the church, especially in the Western world, still thinks the question that people are asking in the world is, "Which church is true?" That's not been the question for a long time. The question that people are asking is, "How does your church offer me support for spiritual growth in loving community with others, especially those who may be different from me?"

That's an essential question. And we've been trying to get the church pointed toward that question, but in many places the resistance is strong because it's so hard to let go of who we've been and where we've been. One of the great struggles is that much of our structure was canonized early in our movement. And so our people believe that organizational form is the gospel. That's going to be very challenging for us going forward as we shift from understanding gospel not as a structure and a form that has to be supported, but as a spirit, a movement that's expressed in relationships and a focus of ministry that is Christ-inspired... that is Christ-inspired.

We are in that time—and have been for some time. The budget constraints have given us a sense of urgency in that regard, and so have served a purpose. But we're now at the point that simply having the budget drive us in a direction is not enough. And we are engaging in the deep discernment that's needed.

We may all have to give up something that seems very important to us. But at the same time, we together will experience a liberation—a liberation from many of the things that seem so heavy on us at times. And our experience as we move forward will give us assurance that this, indeed, is the direction God has in mind for us. And it is the direction that will bring blessing into our lives. And it will be like discovering the gospel as if for the first time, even though we have journeyed a long time with it in our movement.

There will be some people who will not continue to journey with us. There will be other people who already are coming to share in the journey with us. And still others who will join with us as we move forward.

So I just felt the need, as I was reflecting this morning, to share those reflections with you. And especially to thank you for your willingness to continue the journey with us, because the work of the World Church Finance Board, on behalf of the church throughout the whole world, will become increasingly essential in the kind metamorphosis of our very being that is needed to be faithful to God's call. 