



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

Statement to Staff Members and the Church

Shortly I will present information about staff downsizing and other necessary expense reductions. I am immensely disappointed and sad that more staff-member reductions are necessary. Also, changes in job responsibilities and locations will occur for some.

I deeply regret the impact this will have on devoted employees and their families. I am very sorry for the stress, uncertainty, and pain some will experience. On behalf of the church, I apologize that these actions must be taken.

These actions are necessary because of a combination of economic factors impacting the church. These actions do not reflect the great value we place on our employees and their church service. However, I realize that nothing said can diminish the frustration and hurt some will experience.

Through prayer I am assured of God's awareness of personal and family circumstances now and in the months ahead. God is here today, and God is in the future, ready to console, guide, and bless.

Current Realities

On May 17 the World Church Finance Board approved the fiscal year 2016 world ministries budget, which will begin July 1, 2015. The total budget is \$22,990,000. That is a reduction of \$3,325,000 from the current budget of \$26,315,000.

The fiscal year 2017 budget, which will begin July 1, 2016, will total \$20,900,000. This is a reduction of \$2,090,000 more. The total reduction by the beginning of fiscal year 2017 will be \$5,415,000. The difference between that amount and the previously announced deficit of \$6.7 million will be covered by increased income from tithing and other sources.

Employee salaries, benefits, and expenses are the largest part of the budget. Additional staff reductions must occur. Fifty-eight more full-time equivalents (FTEs) will be reduced in the fields and at International Headquarters. This is beyond what already has occurred through early retirements and unfilled open positions. The number of people affected by downsizing will be more because funding for an FTE may support several staff members in some situations.

A total of about 114 FTEs will have been reduced by the end of fiscal year 2016. This includes 23 unfilled open positions, 33 positions eliminated by not replacing staff members who retired early, and reducing 58 positions, which has yet to occur. This is a total reduction of nearly one-third of our staff.

Reductions will impact every field. Also our ability to provide vital headquarters support ministries, resources, funding for church affiliates, and support for church events will be limited. The number of World Church Leadership Council members will be reduced.

Of course, numbers represent people who are beloved colleagues. We weep with God over these losses. A verse from Hymn 199, "What Comfort Can Our Worship Bring" (Adam M.L. Tice) in the Lament section of *Community of Christ Sings*, conveys my feelings:

What sorrow can we dare to own, what anger, loss, and fears? Not just in joy is God made known, but also in our tears.

I have been shedding more tears lately.

We know the remaining employees cannot be expected simply to do more work. We are working to manage demands on staff members so workloads are more reasonable. This includes relying more on volunteers for certain responsibilities.

Some staff members have offered to accept more responsibilities because they have the desire and capacity. These adjustments will occur through mutual agreement subject to regular evaluation.

There is also important information about retirement benefits. For several years we have been studying the advantages and disadvantages of moving from a defined benefit pension plan to a defined contribution plan.

In a defined benefit plan the employer sets aside funds for the retirement pension and has all the investment risk. In a defined contribution plan, the employer provides a specified amount, and the employee has the opportunity to save and invest some of his or her salary for the pension.

For a several important reasons, we have decided to transition to a defined contribution plan in Australia, Canada, French Polynesia, Netherlands, and the USA. There are many details to be decided. However, individual pension benefits already achieved under the defined benefit program will not be lost. A design team has been formed to consider other important questions and finalize details.

The Future

Our current situation is not our destiny. Challenges often result in transformation if we allow. They cause us to ask important questions we might not consider otherwise. Such questions often lead to deeper understandings and new insights into the future.

God has told us:

Listen carefully to your own journey...for it is a sacred journey and it has taught you many things you must know for the journey yet to come.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:2a

Part of our sacred journey was the financial difficulty the church experienced in the 1930s. During that period of lower income and growing debt, church leaders made agonizing decisions to significantly reduce expenses and release many appointee families. They also developed a disciplined debt-reduction and financial-recovery plan.

The church responded with prayer, soul-searching, and courage. Awareness grew about the tendency of many members to live beyond their basic living needs and means. The large amount of church assets in properties and buildings expensive to maintain was questioned. Emphasis was focused on “keeping the financial law” of tithing. Priesthood, women’s departments, and youth groups displayed exceptional generosity. Everyone helped out as much as they could.

Financial stability recovered over time, and growth resumed. Something else happened: Spiritual growth and greater maturity in the faith became evident as a result of unified efforts to meet major challenges. According to the *History of the Church* (Volume 8, p. 291):

It is probable that in the 1930’s the church and many of its members experienced more sound spiritual growth than in either of the two preceding decades. They developed a clearer perception of the purpose of the church, a more deep-rooted awareness of responsibilities and disciplines which go with sainthood [membership], and a quickened understanding of the intimate relationship between temporal and spiritual processes...

Our history teaches us that great good can come from difficulty.

Amid all that is happening, God is shaping us to pursue Christ’s mission in a rapidly changing world. These changes include historic shifts in how Christianity is perceived and expressed. As some aspects of church life are waning, other Spirit-inspired ministries are emerging. God is at work in the church and the world. Going forward, the following counsel remains especially relevant:

As a prophetic people you are called, under the direction of the spiritual authorities and with the common consent of the people, to discern the divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve. You live in a world with new challenges, and that world will require new forms of ministry.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:2c

As we continue to discern God’s will we must have more conversation about understandings of generosity and tithing. World mission tithes remain the largest income source for our world ministries budget.

The Presiding Bishopric introduced the principles of A Disciple’s Generous Response in 2002. These principles include giving generously in equal amounts to local and world mission tithes. Through prophetic direction given in 2004 we are told:

You have been given the principles of generosity, rightly interpreted for a new time. These principles call every disciple to tithe faithfully in accordance with means and capacity.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:7c

What does it mean that we approved prophetic counsel confirming the principles of A Disciple's Generous Response (Doctrine and Covenants 162:7) but have not fully applied it as God's will for our lives? Initial assumptions aren't sufficient, given the important spiritual principles involved. We need to discuss this question in the months ahead and at the 2016 World Conference.

While managing current challenges we have been working to ensure a brighter financial future for the church through the Spirit's guidance. This includes developing a Five-year Strategic Financial Plan and starting a Mission Endowment. The Mission Endowment will provide sustainable income in the future to help fund the church's mission. This revenue will be in addition to tithing and other income sources. At the 2016 World Conference we will share exciting news about the new Mission Endowment and how everyone can participate.

Although we are currently facing challenges, I remain confident in our divine calling and mission. Listen closely to these words of counsel and promise:

The call is for workers in the cause of Zion; therefore, neither tarry, nor doubt that I am. I know your perplexities and I am aware of your uncertainties, but if you will call upon my name my Spirit will go before you into whatsoever place you are sent and I will continue to bless you as you have need.

—Doctrine and Covenants 155:8

Let it be so, is my prayer.

Stephen M. Veazey
president of the church

May 18, 2015