

# **A Practical Guide For Mission/Outreach Committees In Congregations Of The United Church Of Christ**

*by Paul C. Clayton*

This article adds some practical information that is designed to help your Mission/Outreach committee be an effective instrument of the Body of Christ. What are the tasks your committee must accomplish; what are the priorities should you establish as a committee; how do you work your way through the church year? Most committees make the mistake of thinking their main job is to spend the money that has been allocated for mission. The truth is that there are three tasks and allocation of funds is the least important of the three. Since most Mission Committee members are most anxious about the mission budget, I will deal with that first and build up to the most important task of all.

3. Allocation of the Mission Budget

2. Mission Education

1. Mission Leadership

## **3 - Allocation of the Mission Budget**

I am suggesting this should take no more than one quarter of the committee's time. That isn't to say it is not important. The congregation has charged you with responsibility of these funds and you need to be faithful in that task. But, talking endlessly about how much money should go to the seminary your pastor graduated from is not the best way to be responsible.

- **Understand there are different systems of allocation of funds**

There are two issues to understand. The first is the difference between a unified budget and a divided budget. Congregations with a unified budget ask people to pledge a single amount to the church and the Annual Meeting votes to allocate a percentage to mission and a percentage to local expenses. A divided budget asks people to pledge separately to mission and local expenses with the understanding that the annual budget will reflect the desires of those who pledge. The advantage of the divided budget is that mission giving is decided by those who pledge, not by those who manage the local expense side of the budget. The advantage of the unified budget is that it makes clear the truth of the faith:

that mission is not an option but an integral part of the faith. It really does not matter which system a congregation adopts. In either case, the Mission Committee needs to educate the congregation so that they will vote for, or pledge to mission.

The second issue is an understanding of different ways of managing the allocation of funds within the mission budget. Some congregations expect the whole church will vote the allocation of funds within the mission budget when the church budget is voted. If the Annual Meeting that elects the Mission Committee members is the same meeting that approves the budget, that means this year's committee sets the budget for next year's committee - awkward but manageable. Other congregations expect that the committee has the discretion to allocate funds as they see fit and will report back to the congregation what they have done. The Christian Education Committee budget items are not voted by the whole congregation, why should the Annual Meeting vote on the each item within the Mission Committee budget? Again, it really doesn't matter. The committee must have the will of the congregation in mind when allocations are made with either system. If the committee goes against the will of the majority they will lose the vote this year or they will lose the pledge next year.

- **Name a Strong Budget Sub-Committee**

This sub-committee is what will save the whole committee hours of work. In the smallest church with five people on the mission committee, name one or two to this sub-committee function. They can pour over all the requests, do the mathematics, and come up with recommendations. All of the budget decisions need to be discussed in this sub-committee before the whole Mission Committee considers them. The decision is with the whole committee but the homework needs to be done by the sub-committee.

In the first month after the first meeting of the elected committee, the sub-committee needs to create categories to be included in a recommended budget outline. The following is an example of categories:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Our Church's Wider Mission
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Mission
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mission to the local community
- \_\_\_\_\_ Specialized Mission that is not geographically specific
- \_\_\_\_\_ Theological Education
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hunger
- \_\_\_\_\_ Homelessness
- \_\_\_\_\_ Health
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mission Education in our own congregation

Still in that first month assign percent allocations to each budget category. The Sub-committee might want to create two or three alternatives. The Conference Guidelines for Giving suggest the following goals for giving by local churches to the wider church:

- That the total mission giving be at least 10% of local expenditures - 25% is the challenge goal;
- That the giving to Our Church's Wider Mission Basic Support be at least 50% of the total mission giving - 75% as the challenge goal.

If you were to take the 50%, minimum recommended in the Conference Guideline, the budget might look like this:

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| <u>50%</u> | Our Church's Wider Mission                               |
| <u>20%</u> | Regional Mission   |
| <u>5%</u>  | Mission to the local community                           |
|            | Specialized Mission that is not geographically specific: |
| <u>5%</u>  | Theological Education                                    |
| <u>5%</u>  | Hunger   |
| <u>5%</u>  | Homelessness   |
| <u>5%</u>  | Health   |
| <u>5%</u>  | Mission Education in our own congregation.               |

If you were to take the 75% challenge goal, the budget might look like this:

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| <u>75%</u> | Our Church's Wider Mission                 |
| <u>10%</u> | Regional Mission                           |
| <u>10%</u> | Mission to the local community             |
| <u>5%</u>  | Mission Education in our own congregation. |

In either case, that is a lot of work for the sub-committee in the first month. Now it is time for the whole committee to look at that work and make some choices, if not at the second meeting, then certainly by the third.

### **C- The Mission / Outreach Committee needs to educate itself**

While the Budget Sub-committee is doing its work, the first two meetings of the whole committee need to be spent educating itself. Better yet, an overnight retreat, or a full day spent together away from the dump run or Little League gives you a chance to get to know each other as well as the mission agenda. This education needs to include an understanding of:

- *Partnership.* At the very start of the modern missionary movement there was no partnership. Back in the 1800s, mission was designed to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the heathen, a one way trip. Soon our ancestors learned that the Holy Spirit had preceded them and that these people to whom they were sent, had something to offer us.

That principle of partnership is the starting place for every mission endeavor. On the one hand, if someone believes the people who receive mission funds from our church must be accountable to us, that is not partnership. On the other hand, if someone wants to give a block grant, no strings attached so that there is no accountability to the Mission Committee at all, that's not partnership either. To be mutually accountable, to understand that the one who sends and the one who receives mission are both about the work of Jesus Christ – that is mission.

- *Whose Mission it is.* Each of us is flooded with letters appealing for a charitable contribution. On this committee we must remember where the money for mission came from. As it was dedicated at worship, it was clearly dedicated to God. This is God's mission. We are all children of that mission. We have heard about the good news because some missionary spread the faith to Europe, the New World, to the place where our ancestors lived.

That means we spend this mission budget in the name of Jesus Christ. That might mean we want to commit funds to church-related institutions that will do mission in the name of Jesus Christ. Or that might mean we will commit mission funds to agencies that are not church-related but are the most efficient at meeting needs that God cares about. There is no rigid rule but we are required to ask this question: how does this agency or person carry out the unique mission of Christ?

- *Up-stream Mission!* The story is told of a village where bodies kept floating down the stream. The people tried to rescue them. Finally the villagers decided to paddle up-stream to find out why so many people were falling into the water. The point is to look up-stream to find out why so many people are homeless, hungry, and poor. Mission needs to provide first aid to the victims, but it also needs to look at what causes such misery. The balance between advocacy and relief is important.

Someone needs to ask this question about up-stream mission every time the committee is asked to fund a mission agency. Does this organization do anything about the cause of injustice or are they simply treating the victims?

#### **D- The Budget sequence in the committee**

You can begin to imagine how the sub-committee and the whole committee will make its way through the year. After the budget is in place, by the second month, the agencies that received funding in the past need to be evaluated and located in the budget framework. New requests for funding will come, through the sub-committee to the whole group regularly though the year. It's important that the payment schedule have some logic. The fiscal year of some agencies end in June, others in January. Some

smaller agencies are in dire need for money early in the year, the larger agencies need a steady payment schedule.

## **2- Mission Education**

The problem with spending the whole time deciding how to spend the money is this: Education is the way the committee enlarges the budget so that there is more money to spend. Everyone is concerned about how the pie is sliced. Who gets the bigger piece? That is the struggle in the Budget Sub-Committee, that is also the argument about how much should be spent on local expenses and how much on mission to others. Education is the way the people are encouraged to give more, the pie is larger and everyone's slice is bigger than it was before.

### ***Planning Education of the Congregation***

The best education starts where the congregation is. If someone speaks against your committee by saying, "Mission starts at home" don't argue. Show how they are right. Demonstrate how much of the building is mission to town-wide groups like AA and the Scouts, and from there, explain how mission exists in buildings around the world, buildings that are homes to others in the church. If someone wants to give to the training of seeing eye dogs, don't argue against it. Write a piece about "How the church is going to the dogs" and explain how mission money follows the example of Jesus by addressing the needs of the blind around the world. In every endeavor get across the principles of: A) partnership, B) whose mission it is in the first place and C) the balance between up-stream mission and down.

The committee needs to plan the education for the whole year. Some programs are needed to support those who already believe in and support the mission. But there need to be programs that address those who don't believe in mission. Balance is what is important. Let me list some of the opportunities for education starting in September:

- Join the stewardship committee in planning the fall fund-raising drive.
- Recruit someone to run a S.E.R.V.V. Table at the church fair.
- Join the church school in mission education this fall.
- Do a "Mission Moment" during worship at least once a month.
- In November start promoting alternative giving to mission agencies as Christmas gifts. Have a large number of agencies and a Christmas card to notify the recipient and donor.
- Plan a "Mission Fair" after worship in January. Invite representatives of all the agencies you fund to staff a table with information about what they do. It's a good way to encourage people to volunteer in some of these agencies.

- Plan an adult class on mission for Lent.
- Work with the youth group on a trip to a mission agency in the spring.
- Make sure an article about mission appears once a month in the newsletter.

There are three questions that the congregation will ask every year. The committee needs to have someone ready to give a brief speech that will respond to each of them in the Confirmation class, stewardship program, the fellowship groups that give money to mission and to any group that will listen. 1) *What is Our Church's Wider Mission?* That is the most important and the most complicated question. In the appendix to this article you will find a description of the way Our Church's Wider Mission works. The other questions are: 2) *How much of our mission budget goes for administration?* and 3) *What difference did our gift to Mission make this last year?*

## **B- Administrative Costs**

The Better Business Bureau recommends an appropriate administrative cost for tax-exempt agencies to be 10% to 25%. Below 7% is as bad as above 25%. If there is not enough spent on administration it means the money will not be spent well, the food will not get to the people who are hungry, the resources will be gobbled up by the few land owners instead of the poor who really are in need. If over 25% is spent on administrative costs, it is not as efficient as we have a right to expect. The National Church has budgeted a 7.2% administrative cost for this year.

## **C- Our Mission gifts last year**

This question is an opportunity to explain what gifts to mission has meant in the past year. Resist the temptation to make this an explanation of the budget. People want to know who benefited from the budget. Instead of first explaining what City Mission Society is, explain how street people, children in public schools, minorities in Roxbury and elders on welfare have benefited. Instead of explaining Our Church's Wider Mission, tell the story of people who have been blessed by it. At the end you can display the budget on newsprint or an overhead projector.

Mission education occurs as you enlarge the vision of what mission is in the church.

- Join with others in establishing a partnership with a church overseas.
- Plan an intergenerational work camp with an agency that serves the poor.
- Encourage church members to consider becoming a missionary.
- Encourage hands-on mission – for example, work camps, volunteer time in the local soup kitchen or participation in prison ministries. These opportunities to get to know the people who receive our mission can be used to explain, in a global sense, the power of God's mission through "Our Church's Wider

Mission.”

The goal of mission education is to build a congregation that works like this: When the roof of the sanctuary needs to be replaced and money is to be raised to pay for the capital expense, everyone knows that the only way to succeed is to link that effort with a roof repair of a hospital or church in India, Africa, Latin America or in the inner city.

## 1 - Mission Leadership

The most important task of the mission committee is to provide leadership. I can best describe mission leadership with the following four verbs: invent, link, critique, pester.

- **Invent** new ways of being in mission. If there is there a group of homeless people hanging around the commuter train station, if young people use too much alcohol, if you hear people saying that they were afraid to go into the rougher neighborhoods of the city – invent ways of dealing with those problems or fears? Individually and as a group, leadership in mission is an entrepreneurial task.
- **Link** current events to the mission. If there is a hurricane in Haiti, a flood in Kansas, or a famine in Africa, explain in worship the next Sunday and in the newsletter that week that what we money we gave to Our Church’s Wider Mission was there to help those people that very week.
- **Critique** the mission that occurs every week in the church. When the youth groups runs a food drive to feed the hungry, sing their praises and add the fact that we also need to address the causes of poverty. When the men’s group gives a \$1,000 check to *Save The Children*, praise them for addressing the needs of people Christ focused on, and then explain how giving through the church would save nearly half the administrative cost and the money would be given in the name of Christ rather in the name of *Save The Children*. When a women’s group in the church who has a partnership with women in a rural village of South India decides to raise money to ship washers and dryers to India, affirm the giving instinct but, before much money is given, point out the problems of washers and dryers in a labor intensive society that is short of water.
- **Pester** the church for the sake of God’s mission. Keep on the pastor’s case, reminding her or him of the up-coming mission event and the need for the pastor to personally endorse it. A great deal of promotional material is automatically sent to the pastor. You need to see and use it. Make sure you get it. The mission program of the church will not succeed without the support of the pastor. Make sure you get it. Stand up in the annual meeting and argue for a larger percentage for mission. Make the case in fellowship groups you belong to for money to go to the neediest in the world as well as the members of your own congregation. When you overhear someone say, “There she goes again, thumping the tub for

mission,” know that you have just been complimented.

## **Conclusion**

As many of you who are old timers in Massachusetts know, my wife’s mother was Lynda Goodsell Blake, a career missionary in Turkey and a former staff member of the Conference. When she was dying people who worked in the mission with her came from across the country to care for her a week or a month at a time. It wasn’t only Lynda. Still those old “Turkey hands” run across the country to care for one another.

Being a part of the mission isn’t just a job to do for a three-year term. The mission is a life that infects the very soul. In sharing in the mission, you are a participant with this unique band of people that stretches all the way back to St. Paul and all the way around the world. You will never be the same after you have become partners with the saints there in Asia, Latin America, Africa and the pockets of real need here in our own country. Your commitment to this mission will become a blessing. May it be so.

## **Appendix Our Church’s Wider Mission**

- **What Is It?**

Our Church’s Wider Mission is just that – our church’s mission. I suggest that the initials OCWM *not* be used. People on the inside find it easier to not have to spell it out. But the acronym makes people who are less familiar with the church think of the CIA, FBI and IRS. The problem with OCWM is that people think it is an agency, an organization, an institution *of* the church. It is none of these. It is the church. It is, literally, our mission. We can begin to clarify it by using the full title: Our Church’s Wider Mission.

- **How Does It Work?**

Since it is *our* mission, and since we are a unique and complicated church, Our Church’s Wider Mission is unique and complicated. The best way to understand it is to see how the church works and, thereby how our mission works.

This chart shows the structure of the United Church of Christ. The important fact about our life together is that we are congregational in our polity. We are free to shape our congregational lives while, at the same time, we are responsible to other congregations and agencies of the church. No decrees from the Synod, no dollar assessments from the national or regional church are possible. The congregation decides what it will do and



what it will contribute to Our Church's Wider Mission.

## **The United Church of Christ**

General Synod  
Executive Council

General Ministries  
Wider Church Ministries  
**National Church**  
Justice and Witness Ministries

Local Church Ministries

Pension Boards --- Affiliated Ministry  
United Church Foundation – Associated Ministry

**Regional Church**

**The Conference**

**Local Area**

**The Association**

**Local**

**Each congregation**

When a congregation makes a contribution to the wider mission of the church – the Church Treasurer sends a check to the Conference.

The Conference keeps a percentage (40 % in Massachusetts) for its mission and sends the balance (60%) to the national church. General Synod, meeting every other year, agrees on a budget and a payment schedule to the several Ministries of the national church.

The important things about this mission support system are:

- *It is our mission. People from our congregations manage all conferences, Synod and national agencies. We decide how to divide the mission money.*
- *It is driven from the local level. By their contributions, the congregations decide how much will be available to the wider church for the wider mission. Over the past decade the real dollars have shrunk dramatically, which means the ministry and mission have diminished. The size and strength of our wider mission depends on local churches.*
- *Each Ministry and agency in the system has some autonomy. In the old days, each agency promoted its own program. Realizing that the mission is supported*

*in total, the wider church has worked hard to promote the total mission. It will be important, however, for you to look at materials from separate agencies and from the whole church.*

All of that has been an explanation of *Basic Support of Our Church's Wider Mission*. It is a descriptive term. It is basically how the church works.

- **What is Special Support of Our Church's Wider Mission?**

There are four offerings and appeals in the United Church of Christ that are targeted to specified needs. The four all-church offerings are: One Great Hour Of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross.

But the important reality of the United Church of Christ is that the whole church and the whole mission are funded by Basic Support. Some Conferences and Ministries have invested funds, annual appeals or income from the sale of materials. But the truth is that the whole church and the whole mission rise and fall on the tide of Basic Support of Our Church's Wider Mission.

- **A Special Note About Fellowship Dues**

In the Massachusetts Conference, in addition to contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission, churches pay Fellowship dues. These are a per member assessment set by the delegates at the Conference Annual Meeting. In addition, each Association assesses a small amount to fund Association programs and activities. Because Fellowship Dues accounts for approximately 50% of the Conference revenues, both the recommended guideline for giving to OCWM and the amount of OCWM retained in the Conference is less than in other Conferences that do not have dues. Some churches pay this from the mission budget, and some pay this from their operating budget. Either way, Fellowship Dues in just one more way the wider mission of the local church is funded.



*Endorsed by the Commission for Stewardship of the  
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