

**\*\*\*DELEGATES: PLEASE PUT THIS PAGE IN THE HANDS OF YOUR CHURCH TREASURER OR FINANCE COMMITTEE CHAIR!\*\*\***

**Fellowship Dues - ??Time for a Change?? - Beginning a Conversation**

Presented by the Finance Committee of the Board of Directors

*“..it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.” 2 Corinthians 8: 13b-15*

**Why have this conversation?**

We are actually continuing a conversation that has already begun. At the past two Annual Meetings, at hearings on the budget and in plenary sessions, delegates have expressed concerns about the practice of raising revenue via member-based Fellowship Dues. We promised to assess the strengths and disadvantages of our Dues system, explore alternatives, and return to Annual Meeting with our ideas as to what might be a better system.

**Why might we want to move away from Fellowship Dues?**

Our system of funding shared support for our churches via per-member Fellowship Dues is over a century old. There are a number of reasons why we might want to consider a change.

- **Faith and Theology:** Biblically-based Stewardship calls for giving in proportion to our means, not on a per-member basis.
- **A Changing Society:** Sociologists tell us that the idea of “membership” is becoming ever less relevant, and younger generations of Americans are not “joiners”.<sup>1</sup>
- **Accurate Tracking of our Members:** Our churches currently have a financial incentive to keep their reported membership as low as possible.
- **Pragmatism and Compassion:** Currently, the Dues rate goes up in tandem with reported overall local church expenses. So, just when all other costs are rising, Dues go up too.

**What might we do instead?**

We would like to explore with the leaders of our congregations the possibility that Dues might be replaced by a Fair Share Contribution to be based on local church income. Specifically, rather than paying Dues based on membership, local congregations would contribute a proportional amount based on their prior year’s pledges and offerings. We expect that a 3% Fair Share Contribution, in combination with Basic Support, would raise about the same amount of money for the work of the Conference as is currently brought in by Dues and Basic Support.

**What about OCWM Basic Support?**

We envision that Basic Support would remain as an important way for churches to contribute, according to their means, to the ministries of both the Massachusetts Conference and the National setting of the church

**What would happen to Association dues?**

If the Conference decides to move to a proportional giving model, we hope each Association might consider doing so as well. However, this decision would be up to the individual Associations.

### **What needs to be explored?**

We need to hear from local church leaders about many considerations, such as:

- **Congregational finances:** How might this work in churches with ‘split’ operating and missions budgets? What about in congregations where members are asked to pay their own dues? Every church has its own financial system; what would be required to make a transition such as the one we suggest?
- **Timing:** Depending on the congregation, a Fair Share Contribution might be more or less than the amount currently paid as Fellowship Dues. For churches who would be asked to contribute more, should we plan for a transition period longer than one year? If so, how long?
- **Your concerns:** We can’t anticipate all the implications this change might have for your congregation, but we are eager to hear about them.

### **How can I be a part of the conversation?**

This idea will be discussed at Annual Meeting in the Budget Hearing and at an open lunch table. Well-publicized focus groups will follow during the fall and winter, and we will seek to attend Association meetings for further discussion.

<sup>1</sup> Most notably Putnam, Robert D., *Bowling Alone*, Simon & Schuster, 2000.