

## EXECUTIVE COUNCIL FINANCES FOR MISSION COMMITTEE REPORT ON DIOCESAN ASKING SURVEY

In July, the Finances for Mission Joint Standing Committee of Executive Council sent out a survey to all bishops and deputies, asking for input on the diocesan asking formula, by which dioceses contribute money for the operations of The Episcopal Church. The survey consisted of five questions. Some of the answers are easily quantifiable (shown below), and some required more complex essay responses.

The total number of responses to the survey was 221: 170 deputies and 51 bishops. Many responders took a great deal of time and care with their responses, and showed creativity and thoughtfulness in their approaches to the questions asked. The committee is sincerely grateful for the time the responders took to give thoughtful input and feedback.

Highlights of the responses include:

- 60.7% of responders believed that consequences or restrictions should be imposed on dioceses that do not meet the full asking request. 39.3% did not.
- 88.8% of responders believed that dioceses in financial distress should have a process by which they can seek relief from paying the full asking amount.
- 57.8% of the responders believed that the current diocesan asking formula of 19% should be reduced. 40.8% of them believed it should be kept the same. Only 1.4% believed that it should be increased.

Some of the questions called for essay responses, and those responses are not easily quantified. However, some observations can be made.

There was wide recognition that the failure of many dioceses to pay the full asking impedes the wider church's ability to accomplish its mission. However, there was also widespread sentiment that TEC should carefully define its mission and vision: what we want the churchwide body to accomplish, and what should be left to local congregations and dioceses. Several responders said that if TEC could articulate a clear, compelling mission and vision, an asking formula could be defined in accordance with that vision and more dioceses would be inspired to respond. One such response was:

Money follows vision; it never precedes it. Money is not our problem; lack of vision is our problem, and will continue to be until leadership in this church steps forward and casts an engaging, bold, realistic, hope-filled, energizing vision.

Some responders believed that no changes in the asking formula should be made until TREC has made its report and General Convention has had a chance to vote on it, but many more hoped for immediate relief from the 19% asking formula.

Many people in dioceses that have struggled to meet their full asking, often at the expense of local mission, admit to feeling resentment toward other dioceses who withhold funds for reasons other than financial hardship. There was a clear understanding that some dioceses that do not pay their full assessments are in dire financial straits, and should have a process available to them to request a reduced payment amount.

More resentment was expressed about dioceses that do not pay the full asking due to disagreements with TEC. Some responders indicated that restoring right relationship with these withholding dioceses is part of the key to receiving full commitments, while some supported restrictions and consequences. Yet some responders from such dioceses articulated great pain and personal conflict over the issue. A deputy from one such diocese said that if funding to TEC were restored, many parishes in that diocese would simply leave, and begged for patience and understanding, saying:

The main thing I'd want to ask, before you go imposing penalties, is to remember that we are the people that stayed! We've stayed while our friends and colleagues have left. I think improving our relationship to TEC is something that will take time. Rules and enforcement will make things worse for us, not better.

A number of responders felt that the 19% asking rate was too high, and asked for more accountability from TEC about how that money is being spent. Many articulated a belief that the asking rate reflects a top-down model of governance that is no longer appropriate. Several mentioned the vote at the last General Convention to move the Church Center away from New York City, and cited a favorable response to that resolution as a way to restore TEC's financial credibility. One bishop narrated his diocese's move to raise its payments to TEC over a number of years as follows:

This has necessitated staff reductions and even closing a couple of churches. The effort to get to the full assessment has been made easier by lowering the assessment. We will get there. However, as we work towards that – mainly as a commitment to the wider church – I have become less comfortable with this as a stewardship decision. In a sense, this is a separate but critical question: how well and wisely are these resources used?

A number of creative suggestions were made regarding how to structure the church-wide asking process to reflect mutual accountability and common mission. Some suggestions included:

- Establishing an “assessment” portion that is mandatory and pays for canonically required expenditures, and establishing an “asking” on top of that which is not mandatory, but goes to pay for mission expenditures;
- Lowering the asking to the amount of a tithe, or 10%;

- Basing the asking on congregational income rather than diocesan income, but making the dioceses accountable for collecting the income from congregations and passing it on to TEC;
- Allowing “mission” work to be carried out by informal groups and coalitions of dioceses, congregations, and individuals who raise their own funds, rather than the church-wide body;
- Creating a progressive asking scheme, where poorer or smaller dioceses are assessed at lower rates than richer or larger ones.

While a large number of responders believed that there should be some consequences or restrictions for dioceses that do not pay their full asking, there was a wide range of suggestions for what those consequences might be, including:

- Requesting that dioceses have a conversation with designated members of Executive Council, PB&F, or some other body, in which the representatives of TEC listen and find out how best to support the diocese;
- Asking merely for the courtesy of a written explanation, to be made public;
- Asking for a clear statement of the reason, and a commitment to work toward full payment;
- Establishing that no church-wide meetings be held in such dioceses;
- Requiring that members of such dioceses not be appointed to church-wide or provincial positions;
- Requiring that the Presiding Bishop Nominating Committee not consider candidates from such a diocese;
- Loss of voice and vote in General Convention, for some or all deputies and bishops from such dioceses;
- Loss of diocesan status with reversion to missionary jurisdiction for reorganization.

However, most responders emphasized the need for restoring and maintaining good and supportive, rather than punitive, relationships. As one responder said:

It should be, at least initially, an extremely generous process, relying on self-disclosure by dioceses.

In general, there was a great deal of concern about the diocesan asking, both its amount and the differences in compliance across dioceses. Further, there was great interest in establishing a credible, inspiring, widely accepted mission for the church-wide body.

Finances for Mission and Executive Council wish to express our profound gratitude for the time and care that was given to the responses. We ask your prayers as we work to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest your input, and to explore possibilities for responding in our budget proposal to the next General Convention.

Full Text of the Questions is Below:

1. Diocesan responses to the church-wide asking vary greatly. Some pay the full asking amount; some pay less due to financial constraints; and some decide to pay less for other reasons. How do you think the current range of diocesan payments affects our ability to be and minister as a denominational body? How does it affect life as a denomination and as individual dioceses? How does it affect our relationships with one another?
2. Do you believe that consequences or restrictions should be imposed on dioceses that do not meet the full asking request? If yes, what should be the consequences or restrictions for dioceses that fail to meet the full asking?
3. For dioceses in financial distress, should there be a process by which they can seek relief from paying the full asking amount? If yes, what process should be used to provide relief?
4. Our current asking formula is set at 19% of diocesan income. Do you believe this percentage should be increased, decreased, or kept the same? If you believe this asking formula should change, please describe an appropriate asking formula or percentage.
5. How might The Episcopal Church's church-wide asking process be structured in order to reflect mutual accountability and common mission, consistent with being the Body of Christ?

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