

General Council on Finance and Administration
The United Methodist Church
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GCFA Annual Meeting Closes on Note of Hope

Nashville, TN – The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) held its first annual business meeting of the quadrennium last week in St. Louis, Missouri. And while much of the discussion of budgets and the economy turned to the current market conditions, expressions of faith and expectation were prevalent.

The business of the council is to care for the budgets of the agencies whose funding comes from apportioned dollars. In attendance, in addition to the GCFA council members, were the General Secretaries of the General Agencies of The United Methodist Church.

During plenary sessions, there was discussion about the effect the current economic conditions in America will have on connectional giving, which might also affect the spending plans for the agencies. Meeting attendees expressed concern over the financial condition that local churches and annual conferences find themselves. However, following that discussion were expressions of continued faith.

“GCFA is constantly monitoring the volatile economic indicators”, says Bishop Lindsey Davis, president of the Council. “Indicators show us that the current connectional giving is still strong through 2008. 2009 will present significant challenges, but our boards and agencies are prepared to make any necessary adjustments. Our thanks, though, to the faithful members of The United Methodist Church who continue to give generously even during these uncertain times.”

“Hope is always a primary focus for persons of faith in times of crisis,” said A. Moses Rathan Kumar, General Secretary and Treasurer of GCFA. “Our pulpits and pews are filled every Sunday with messages to ‘maintain hope’ during a time that is seeing the greatest volatility in the US markets in recent decades.”

Staff of GCFA work constantly to gather data on the historical trends of membership and giving within The United Methodist Church. Reviewing the most recent data, Scott Brewer, GCFA staff states, "There's no question that the current economic troubles weigh on the minds of United Methodists. Amidst our challenges, however, there are tremendous opportunities for ministry. In a world filled with crisis and uncertainty, we must reach out to share the good news to those who hunger for meaning. We may not always have what we want, but God continues to provide what we need." The GCFA Economic Advisory Committee – comprised of staff and learned experts in the field of economics – will be meeting in early December to review the trends in finance and make recommendations on ways to navigate through the economic challenges facing local churches and the general Church.

"In previous economic downturns, we have not seen apportionment payout fall below 84%. During the last severe recession in the early 1980's, payout never fell below 89%. Although it's difficult to compare current economic conditions with previous downturns, the people of The United Methodist Church tend to continue to be the same compassionate, committed, and generous people they've always been", says Brewer.

General agencies said we will provide the same service to the Church, while at the same time using fewer financial resources. Officials of the general agencies in attendance commented that each is striving to deliver services they've committed to in support of the four areas of focus and of the mission and ministry of the denomination in as efficient manner as possible and will remain watchful of the financial impact and be prepared to make adjustments to spending plans as called upon to do.

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The General Council on Finance and Administration coordinates and administers finances and safeguards the legal interests and rights of The United Methodist Church.

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