

## **Report on the Continued Review of Ministry Shares Reimagined**

Synod 2023 directed the Office of General Secretary and the Council of Delegates to continue the Review of Ministry Shares Reimagined (*Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 987-88). The directives below are quoted from p. 987; items 1-3 were addressed to the Office of General Secretary, and items 4-6 were addressed to the Council of Delegates. The COD presents the following in response to synod's directives.

1. "Provide greater flexibility in the pledge process cycle, allowing churches to determine their pledge cycle based on their fiscal year."

Starting in fall 2023, the message has been communicated to classes that they can determine the timeframe for their pledge; however, some classes have decided to stay with the original process and send their pledges in by January 31. Some classes have already rescheduled their classis ministry-share pledges. There is a challenge in that some churches are repledging over part of the same timeframe that was already used for pledges, and that has caused some confusion. Once we move into the next fiscal year, that challenge will pass.

This work will continue into the next fiscal year. Information regarding the flexibility of the timeframe will be included in the Church Administration and Finance Guide that goes to classis treasurers in July/August every year.

2. "Suggest to the churches what would be a reasonable amount to cover basic/core denominational operational costs as part of their pledge."

The amount needed from churches has been identified using a sliding scale related to congregational size. Through surveys and conversations, we have noted that the churches are receptive to distinguishing between the costs of denominational governance and funds for our specific ministry/mission agencies. We have also noted that emerging and very small churches significantly resist participation in these core costs. It was clear from the research that working to engage these churches and encouraging their participation would be a better tactic than creating a requirement to pay and imposing a penalty for lack of payment.

3. "Provide to the churches and classes more information on pledges and giving results, including what comprises the basic/core denominational costs."

Quarterly reports have begun going out in the United States and are scheduled to start in April 2024 in Canada.

Reporting to the churches was implemented in fall 2023. The quarterly reports are being sent out and have been well received by the churches

in Canada and the U.S. Through these reports, some churches have realized they never shared their last pledge. They are updating their pledges for the current fiscal year and the next fiscal year.

The general recommendation outlined below includes providing churches with more specific information about what ministry shares comprise. The goal is to show transparency while not overwhelming them with minutia.

4. "Conduct a survey or make personal contacts targeted to churches that are not currently participating in the ministry-share program."

The director of advancement in Canada contacted the approximately 35 churches that have not participated in the ministry-share program. In the U.S., the 110 churches that have not participated in the ministry-share program were sent a survey. Twenty-four responded after two requests. A third attempt may be made in April. A verbal update could be shared at the May COD meeting. Eleven participants offered to meet virtually to give additional feedback (likely in late April).

5. "Conduct a study of other similar denominations (e.g., RCA, PCA, ECO, EPC, the Alliance of Reformed Churches) to compare quotas/ministry shares/requests to work toward a new vision for future ministry funding mechanisms."

Information has been gathered from the RCA, the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO), and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. We made initial contacts to other denominations (Presbyterian Church of Canada, Anglican Church of Canada) but have not received responses. The Alliance of Reformed Churches is mentioned in the directive from synod, but at the time of this writing, they are not at a stage in their development where they have determined how they will fund their alliance.

The research revealed that each of these denominations is struggling in similar ways. All have recently made adjustments. The RCA is recommending changes to its general synod. ECO is the most successful because they require a contractual agreement as churches enter the denomination; they are a very young denomination, and they have used this method from the start. Fundamentally each group struggles with providing a compelling reason for their churches to give. (ECO's compelling reason is membership in the denomination.) The most significant takeaway from this research is the essential requirement of providing a compelling message to the churches.

6. "Make recommendations for further changes to the ministry-share program based on the findings of the above."

## Recommendations

- a. Provide a clear and basic compelling message about the ministry-share program to all the churches, recognizing that ministry shares are experienced differently on each side of the U.S.-Canada border.

Synod assigned this task because while the ministry-share program is valuable, ministry-share revenue continues to decline. In our current context, the following three objectives are important considerations: (1) ministry shares are experienced differently on each side of the U.S.-Canada border, (2) maintaining the same basic messaging on both sides is important, and (3) increased complexity does not help our churches or classes.

The conversations with other denominations revealed that our struggle is not different from that of other similar denominations. The most significant takeaway from this research is the essential requirement of providing a compelling message to our churches.

Through the survey and through conversational responses from our churches, there seems to be receptivity to distinguishing between funding for the elements that make us a denomination (a community of churches) and the elements that assist the congregations in fulfilling the call to spread the gospel. It is also clear that there is no appetite for making either of these elements mandatory.

Exactly what we call these two elements is still under discussion. The message that the names send is critical. Service and ministry/mission are key values that need to be conveyed. Continued use of the overarching term *ministry shares* is expected. Some options currently being considered for the distinct pieces are as follows:

- Ministry Shares: Denominational Services and Mission Services
- Ministry Shares: Denominational Community and Denominational Ministries
- Ministry Shares: Shared Community and Shared Ministry/Mission

We must define each of these and how they serve the denomination. We must also provide compelling reasons for churches to give.

It will be easier to approach churches that have not been giving by providing a compelling reason. This approach can take any number of forms. Using our data, we can suggest to these churches how they can participate in the ministry-share program and how other churches similar to them are actively participating.

This is an interactive process. As we collect more data (from other denominations, from the marketing results we plan to do this fall, etc.), we will continue to compare the results and strive to create an engaging message for our churches.

Other options were considered but were dismissed because they did not meet the objectives of (1) acknowledging that ministry shares are experienced differently on each side of the U.S.-Canada border, (2) maintaining the same basic messaging on both sides of the border, and (3) avoiding increased complexity.

The anticipated timeline:

- April-May 2024—bring to Finance Committee and COD.
- June-July 2024—make a marketing plan that will include multiple channels:
  - the Church Administration and Finance Guide
  - information specifically for classis treasurers
  - promotional materials (various formats) for use at classes and churches for the 2024 ministry year
- Roll this out in earnest at the fall classis meetings.

b. That synod consider this plan as completing the task assigned by Synod 2023 regarding the continued Review of Ministry Shares Reimagined.

*Grounds:*

- 1) This is an iterative process. Our messaging will be evaluated at least annually, and changes will be based on data collected through future surveys, conversations, and church-giving records. Staff on all levels are aware of the importance of the ministry-share program. The results are reported to the Council of Delegates on a regular basis.
- 2) This recommendation meets the following objectives:
  - acknowledging that ministry shares are experienced differently on each side of the U.S.-Canada border
  - maintaining the same basic messaging in both countries
  - avoiding unnecessary complexity
- 3) This is a change in “presentation” rather than fundamental changes to the ministry-share program. As a result, this change can be implemented without making changes to the Church Order and therefore can begin in fall 2024 without a need to seek further approval from synod with this task.
- 4) All major tasks outlined in the synodical directives are completed.