

Report of the Treasurer/Director of Administrative Services

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I appreciate the opportunity to, again this year, share with you how our conference ended the year 2014, a brief report on the progress in our transition to becoming one conference in the administrative offices, and some words about resources we are providing to pastors, local church leaders, and conference level leaders. Because my report will contain a number of figures I will ask the Communications staff to put my report on our website soon after Annual Conference. That way you won't need to take notes along the way.

Regarding year-end 2014 – our conference raised 87.04% of **Mission Shares**, up from 86.05% in 2013 (the average that year of our three former conferences). Thanks for your assistance in moving us in a positive direction! However, Bishop Jones has challenged us to, prior to the end of his time with us, reach Mission Share payout of 95%. Is that even possible? Apparently it is as at least 4 of our sister conferences actually surpassed that goal in 2014. But is it possible in the Great Plains? Yes, it's possible even in Kansas and Nebraska! I'd like to recognize the laity and clergy of two of our own districts that have already met and surpassed that goal in 2013 and repeated in 2014. Would the laity and clergy of the Gateway District of Nebraska please stand and be recognized for paying 96.7% of their Mission Shares in 2014. Now would the laity and clergy of the Hays District of Kansas please stand and be recognized for paying 95.4% of their Mission Shares in 2014. Each actual raised their payout over 2013. And, finally, I'd like to recognize the laity and clergy of six more districts who paid between 90 and 95% – the Prairie Rivers District of Nebraska with 94.2%, the Dodge City District of Kansas with 93.1%, the Elkhorn Valley District of Nebraska with 92.5%, the Flint Hills District of Kansas with 92.3%, the Great West District of Nebraska with 92.0%, and the Hutchinson District of Kansas with 90.1% paid. If your church paid 100% last year your DS has a certificate issued by the national level of the church that they hope you will pick up from them before they leave today.

But Mission Shares are but one aspect of our financial life together. We also set as a goal to raise 1% of a church's operating income for **Mission Agency Support** to undergird financially the separately incorporated institutions that are related to our conference. Because this was considered second mile giving Bishop Jones had instructed our institutions to only budget to receive 60% of the goal. However, you surpassed that and raised 69.67%! And, beyond that, a number of churches designated additional funds for specific institutions on the list raising the equivalent of another 10% of the goal (however, that money was not spread proportionately among the institutions so not all received equivalent amounts from these gifts). But, on average, the institutions received about 80% of the goal set!

Another goal for churches in Nebraska is the funding of the **Nebraska Retiree health program**. While that has been a project of the Nebraska Conference for many years it was simply a part of the base budget of that conference and therefore, some churches were not even aware of it. Once it was broken out in the Great Plains Conference there was some concern by leaders of our conference from Nebraska that support for this might not be as strong as they hoped. However, churches in Nebraska paid this at 89.82% (even higher than the Mission Share itself)! Additional good news has come this spring regarding this program. At the end of 2012 the liability for this program was \$22,308,540. But with the vote of the Nebraska Conference at its last session in 2013 to make changes in it the liability was then estimated to be down to \$9,838,063. But that was an estimate made by the TowersWatson

firm that does actuarial valuations on such programs as these for the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits. At the end of 2013 they gathered data on how the new program actually worked in its first year as well as updating their demographics on who is eligible to receive this benefit moving into the future. Then they produced their first real valuation of the new program and lowered the liability further to \$7,549,473! During that same time the assets invested to sustain the program grew from \$5,677,733 to \$6,161,984. So Nebraskans are quickly closing the funding gap on this program! The actual unfunded portion is now down to \$1,387,489!

But now it's 2015 and in the Administrative Services department we are working hard to finish the transition from three conferences into one. It took until the arrival of our new auditors this spring for us to make final entries of even some beginning balances for our conference. But all that is now done, the auditors have finished their work, and their report should arrive soon for review by the conference's Audit Committee and CFA. While we don't have their report in hand as yet they have assured us that the books are in good order and in most respects our transition into the Great Plains Conference is now complete! I am grateful for the hardworking staff in the Administrative Services department that have helped us reach this goal.

We continue to work closely with the Communications Department to provide resources that we hope will be helpful to laity and clergy alike. If you go to the Administrative homepage of our conference's website you will find several links on the left that represent ways we have tried to sort such resources to make it easy for you to access. Added this spring are a number of things but I want to focus on only two today. The first is a video taken at a training for local church treasurers, financial secretaries, and chairs of Finance Committees. Second is a "Local Church Finance and Treasurer's Guide." We hope both are useful to persons serving in these capacities in your local church. Don't find everything you need? Don't hesitate to be in touch and let us know what else you'd hope to find and we'll work with our Communications staff to see what's possible.

Beyond the website our department has created a newsletter that came out quarterly in 2014 and early 2015. Originally it was emailed to church treasurers, financial secretaries, chairs of Finance Committees, pastors, and (if a church has one) an email address for a church secretary. But we discovered, based on the questions that we have been asked to address that other local church officers might benefit as well. So local church chairs of Board of Trustees and Staff-Parish Relations committees have been added as well to the mailing list.

As we move into the future we announced last year that we would begin to move into online bill payment for churches to the Annual Conference. Our first rollout for this allowed churches to pay their benefit bills in this fashion if you so choose. We will continue to explore other ways to use this system and will keep the conference updated as these developments occur.

Your gifts given thru the Great Plains Conference make mission and ministry happen. Our job as your staff is to facilitate this work. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve you, the conference, and God, whose work all of us are striving to do.