

cooperativeministries

Answers to frequently asked questions about Cooperative Ministries

Cooperative Ministries (CM) has been a fixture within the Brethren in Christ Church for almost 20 years, yet questions about the purpose and practicality of this method for funding our shared ministry priorities persist, including the following:

Question: *Have we considered that a unified giving program is an out-dated notion? Is it time to find a new method for funding the ministries of the General Church?*

Answer: There are some folks in our midst who feel Cooperative Ministries has run its course, and we are listening to what they have to say. However, as we talk with pastors and other church leaders, the prevailing view is that Cooperative Ministries is still working for the Brethren in Christ Church and that it's too soon to give up on it. Rumors about the decline of Cooperative Ministries are greatly exaggerated.

Question: *OK, so Cooperative Ministries isn't on the way out, but neither is it growing. How are we going to fund the ambitious vision toward which we believe God is calling our Church?*

Answer: An ambitious vision calls for ambitious plans and a whole lot of creativity. We have already introduced several new ways for congregations and households to participate in above-and-beyond CM giving. These include team-based funding for our missionaries and church growth dinners within the Regional Conferences. We also want to do more to invite individuals to contribute to the work of the General Church.

But remember, Cooperative Ministries continues to account for almost 70 percent of all anticipated funds available to support our shared ministry priorities—a percentage that has remained constant over the past five years. The challenge as we move forward is to maintain Cooperative Ministries as 70 percent of the total giving “pie,” even as we test new funding strategies.

Question: *Some people in my church refer to Cooperative Ministries as a “black hole.” How can I explain the purposes toward which Cooperative Ministries dollars are allocated in an easy-to-remember, ministry-focused way?*

Answer: Everything we do as a General Church is directed toward three ministry priority areas: encouraging leaders in ministry; multiplying sites for life change, equipping leaders for transformation, and sending workers for witness and service. The three priorities are interrelated, and all are important to our ongoing health and mission as a Church. We try to be transparent about how funds are allocated among the three ministry foci, including posting the Ministry Spending Plan on the denomination's website in both a one-page overview and a detailed, line-by-line version.

Question: *Why does the General Church spend so much on salaries and administration?*

Answer: Administrative costs do make up a big part of the General Church's Ministry Spending Plan, covering the salaries for our seven bishops and their staff, for the people working in the General Church offices, and for BIC World Missions personnel around the world. But that's to be expected, since ministry is done by people, and people need to be paid.

We believe that, to share the gospel effectively, the Brethren in Christ Church must maintain an effective denominational structure that provides vision, guidance, and support. This is true for the local congregation as well, where the spending ratio of personnel to programs is similar to that of the General Church.

One of the advantages of Cooperative Ministries is that funds are received from congregations at minimal administrative expense. To raise the same amount of money through a typical fundraising approach would come with a much higher cost. Thanks to our cooperative approach, that money goes into ministry programs instead.

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Question: *Our congregation is especially passionate about church planting. We'd give more to the General Church if we could designate it all for new church starts. Can we do so?*

Answer: We know that many Brethren in Christ congregations have a greater passion for certain ministry priorities than for others, and we want to honor those passions. However, no one of the three priority areas can function out of balance with the others. This is why Church leaders carefully consider the relative allocation of funds and then encourage congregations to invest in all three ministry priorities with a generous, annually increasing contribution to Cooperative Ministries.

That said, churches may designate a portion of their Cooperative Ministries commitment to a specific ministry priority area or program within the General Church's annual Ministry Spending Plan. Some congregations have discovered that by focusing on one aspect of the bigger picture, people become more excited about their giving.

It is important to understand, however, that a designated gift within Cooperative Ministries does not increase the overall program budget for the particular ministry beyond the approved percentage of distribution. The Brethren in Christ Church operates with a unified budget system to insure that all ministries can move forward in a coordinated way. Designated gifts do, however, buffer a ministry area from the impact of cuts in the case of a budget shortfall.

Question: *What affiliate ministry programs and/or organizations receive funding through Cooperative Ministries?*

Answer: The number of ministry organizations receiving support through Cooperative Ministries is not what it once was, as we've worked to bring the General Church's spending plan into line with contributions by the churches. The current list includes Lifeline Ministries (Upland, Calif.), the International Brethren in Christ Association, and the BIC Archives at Messiah College. We contribute to Mennonite Central Committee through the World Hunger Fund. CM also provides modest support to Bible quizzing and YouthQuest, as well as scholarships for seminary students.

Question: *Based on the allocation of Cooperative Ministries funds, it appears that the General Church's commitment to world missions is on the decline. Is my perception wrong?*

Answer: Because congregations make such a large and vital investment in Cooperative Ministries, many local church leaders are not aware of the denomination's bigger financial picture. However, it's important to keep an eye on the total dollars available in support of our shared ministry priorities, especially when seeking to determine what the allocation of those funds may tell us about the overall priorities of the Brethren in Christ Church today.

If we focus just on Cooperative Ministries, our global outreach receives a smaller piece of the distribution pie (33 percent). But when we consider the whole of the denomination's Ministry Spending Plan, 48 percent of the total budget is allocated for World Missions. And even in this bigger picture, CM plays an important role, with 52 percent of the total dollars allocated through the General Church's Ministry Spending Plan for the work of BICWM coming through Cooperative Ministries.