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# FINANCIAL PHILOSOPHY FOR THE COASTLANDS—2005

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*The following document was written to the Church Council after initial suggestions that the Coastlands would be receiving a sizeable donation—never mind that the donation was less sizeable than was hoped for.*

## INTRODUCTION

Like all resources at an organization's disposal, money ought to be utilized to accomplish that company's goals and mission. A wise spending policy involves more than just the obvious guidelines, like; *do not spend more than you take in*. In fact, a good budget begins not with amounts of money, but with purposes for whatever money the organization might end up having to spend. When there is little money to spend, or when all of it must go to basic, non-discretionary items, the need for a strategic plan for money might not be apparent.

However, in times of plenty when surpluses develop, it is easy to end up spending (or not spending) without much cohesive thought to how that spending fits in with the basic purposes the company is pursuing. Unfortunately, few church-leaders have an answer to the simple question, *"If you suddenly had a million dollars, how would you spend it to better accomplish your church's mission—providing you could not spend it on a building or on property?"*

This simple paper attempts to formulate the beginnings of an answer to that question.

## PAST PATTERNS

Throughout the history of The Coastlands, we have experienced several rises and falls in our average monthly income. The *Quarterly Budget*, designed to be flexible and able to adapt to such fluctuations, has been an effective tool for handling regular and necessary costs. Its line items, and corresponding percent allocations, have been carefully laid out in a manner that best suits our ongoing operations as a church with the particular assignment we have. The staff costs may seem high, but they are based on our understanding that staff should act primarily as mobilizers and coordinators of multi-person, volunteer ministries.

A primary component of our regular operating budget is that we only spend what is given. Except in rare cases, we do not ask people to give, nor do we set a goal and then pressure the church to meet it. As they give more, we spend (or save) more; if they give less, we will adjust our spending downward. The “*Buffer*” account allows us to smooth out the inevitable, monthly ups and downs that merely reflect calendar and paydays rather than actual drops or rises in giving. All in all, we have a well-formulated philosophy and budget for normal income and expenses.

Some aspects of our budget have a unique story behind them. Several years ago, the Council decided to fund the benevolence program with the interest earned on our various accounts. These have included the \$20,000 *CD security deposit*, the \$17,500 *Sanctuary Purchase* fund and other, smaller amounts of money. All together, our average monthly interest income has been approximately \$350. At the time of Phil O’s “*home going*”, the Council decided to establish the *James 1* account to provide significant funds to assist the families of church members who die. Since then, people in the congregation have given an average of \$250 per month to these two benevolence accounts. The average monthly benevolence given by our church to individuals has been less than \$250.

## CURRENT SITUATION

For the first time in our local church history, God seems to be signaling that He will be supplying us with a large capital base—one that will generate considerable interest. As the Lord has been directing us to a new season of radically rethinking

our use of resources (i.e., the campus, the residence facilities), I believe He is also asking us to steward our financial resources with a fresh “take” on what He wants.

The Council has through the years expressed a desire to do more with our tithes and offerings than merely fund the general operating budget. The *James 1* account—along with the *Benevolence* account, have been part of that outward focus. But I think there is more we can and should do to extend blessing and good outwardly: “...to whom much is given, much is required....” (*Luke 12:48*). Putting it another way, toward what does the Lord want us to direct additional resources of time, money, people, etc.?

Everything that we currently have in place, in terms of staff and internal program, is designed to fulfill our mandate from the Lord:

1. To mobilize and send disciples away from here as a way of ministering to the world around us; and,
2. To extend our people and resources to church leaders in other communities.

It would be a mistake to view what we have done with our budget these last 17 years as a self-perpetuating, inward-looking exercise. Through very intentional and focused activity, we have had the privilege of significantly impacting whole countries in Europe (most notably Holland and Switzerland) and numerous local churches in the US (through church plants, leadership seminars, and CTW resources).

In every venture, we have offered what little we have had at the least possible cost to others. Our determination to make CTW resources cheaper and more accessible through the Internet, and our dream of offering a low-cost nursery school to our community are two such examples of this. I strongly believe that the Lord is making us “master of more” because we have been faithful with little.

I do not hear Him saying that we should rethink our philosophy of ministry, or launch into new, unrelated ministry ventures just because we have a measure of financial ability to do so. In fact, the order of the day for us might be called *creative restraint*—keeping focused on the sorts of things we have been assigned to do, but finding new expressions and avenues for achieving those prevailing goals.

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Possibly having at our disposal a large sum of money that will generate significant interest, it behooves us to develop a renewed philosophy/strategy for our finances that will best enable us to do what God has called us to do. His provision is intended to be just that—**pro** (in favor of, going before to make a way) **vision** (what we want to be like and accomplish “*at the end of the day*”).

### **OUR BASE CODE**

Our genetic code is unalterably shaped by the primary assignment The Coastlands has—to develop and disciple men and women to be more effective ministers—wherever they move, and whatever role they assume in church; from pioneer pastor to CM volunteer.

### **WE LOVE, MEND, TRAIN AND SEND**

Consequently, our staff must always serve to mobilize and train people to do the work of the ministry, rather than to slip into the trap of doing the work themselves. This has two significant implications: first, there will always be lots of administrative hassle; coordinating information among departments, overseeing people who do not know the system, keeping track of disparate activities, etc. And second, there will always need to be more people than would be the case if the staff were just doing things among themselves.

In other words, the kind of church we are necessitates the sort and size of staff we need. We will always need lots of staff personnel, and we will always feel that we need more—simply because we are doing so much, and we will be tempted to hire reliable doers, rather than go through all the hassle of mobilizing volunteers. Extra money should not, therefore, necessarily be translated into more staff. When staff has truly been needed, I have urged the Council to hire them—regardless of our financial condition. We have usually had to hire in faith, believing that the Lord would supply the finances.

Because of a spiritual or organizational need, we have hired whether or not we had the money. I am not interested in throwing out that appropriate mentality by always hiring more staff just because we have the money. Having or not having the

resources is not a good reason for doing anything—precisely because having it means we *could* do *anything*—regardless of how it fits with our assignment.

There are hundreds of good things to do with resources, but good ideas/ventures can be a trap to the unwary. Without a significant word from the Lord to either take on new mandates or to drop old ones, we ought to keep directing our people and cash in the same direction(s) we have been going all along.

### VISION COMPONENTS

In simplest terms, The Coastlands is supposed to resource others; we are at our best when we give ourselves away, rather than when we try to increase ourselves, draw attention to ourselves, or make ourselves “*bigger*”. That is one reason why we have never been very good at traditional local ministry, and why we have had such God-given success in Europe and elsewhere. In this regard, we are very unlike most local churches. (*I have begun to think that we will see our soon-to-be-planted daughter churches [in Santa Cruz and over the hill] focus in almost the opposite direction—doing mostly local ministry.*)

***So, what are some of the building blocks of our philosophy of church ministry?***

- We prepare people for more ministry than they imagined likely for themselves, thereby training future leaders of our own and other churches.
- We develop resources and structures to serve pastors and leaders from other congregations.
- We model another kind of local church ministry for visiting pastors and other guests.
- We pioneer churches and ministries.
- We welcome and send international, inter-church guests.
- We release Daniel (and others) to take what we have learned to people and churches that have been overlooked, neglected or disadvantaged.

- Bottom line, we resource and develop leaders; and, we pioneer ministries designed to work in the local church.

### **PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR THE 12/00 MONEY**

In the last several weeks, we have received a large sum of stock and a large tithe. As tithes to us, they are titheable to Foursquare. While maintaining the same financial and spiritual principles used in our decisions about what to do with our monthly income, we should allocate this extraordinary money a bit differently, making use of the following guidelines:

- The monthly operating budget will be funded by general tithes and offerings, and not be *regularly* supplemented either by the principle or the interest on these unusual tithes.
- The bulk of principle should remain essentially untouched until we receive a word from the Lord regarding how to use it (either in part or in whole). Future Church Councils may, of course, make their own decisions about the principle, but except in cases of extreme need or profoundly clear direction, we recommend strongly against frittering it away a little at a time.
- *Benevolence* and *James 1* accounts will have a minimum level (like the *Buffer* and *CD Savings* accounts) that will continue to be the first priority for the interest on all our funds. Once the accounts are full (\$5,000 for *Benevolence* and \$10,000 for *James 1*), interest money will be directed to other projects/activities agreed upon by the Council and the Senior Pastor as need or opportunity arise.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the months and years ahead, we will face some significant costs (new carpet, campus refurbishing, etc.). I believe we should stay balanced in our approach to addressing those costs: on the one hand, we want to accept God's miraculous pre-provision, but we do not want to miss the chance to engage the church members in each giving toward our common goals. We want to exercise faith in the midst of bounty, as well as during times of more obvious need.

On the other hand, we do not want to become worried that we might end up spending this huge resource. The whole point we must remember is that God will keep providing us with future funds for future assignments. This is not “*the last of it.*”