

Framing the Factors:

In preparation for the meeting a number of people in ABCUSA provide brief assessments of their sense of the challenges that UM presents. These assessments are descriptive and perspectival intended to offer general insight into issues. The compilation is not in any order of importance and was used at the meeting to orient our discussions in seeking to name what are the critical underlying issues that will inform the work of an ACT.

1. Concern over funding of denominational life been present for decades.

- The ink of the signatures on the Budget Covenant was not yet dry before entities began debating the equity of the distribution of UM dollars.
- Contention rose to such a pitch in mid-80s that the General Secretary, Daniel Weiss, called a summit in San Diego to address funding issues.
- There followed the formation of four task groups to address mission and funding issues. The group tasked with addressing financial issues became the focus of denominational activity over the next decade and a half.
- There was no resolution until another San Diego meeting in 2002 (?) when a new Budget Covenant, just as imperfect, was adopted. It was put together under high stress and mistrust by a committee of the whole after successive proposals from established committees were all turned down. The document was never easy to understand or read. The underlying narratives of competition for mission dollars and lack of cooperation amongst agencies was never addressed and so became a part of the underlying operational realities.
- At this same time IM was going through its own process of redesigning the ways it raised mission dollars.
- As part of this UM Covenant agreement OGS had to cut its staff by approximately 60%.
- Structure and the actual, underlying ethos/spirit where never congruent. The formal structure did not reflect the functional realities on the ground.
- UM agreements were created at a time when there still existed in people's minds a level of national staff capable of running funding raising programs. Severe reductions in all national staffing meant the capacities to fund raise within UM are now severely limited.
- Leon Thorne's 2010 study paper was a helpful engagement but its promise was not engaged.

2. Overall cooperative attempts to raise dollars through UM have decreased while fund-raising by unique entities has increased.

- Funding challenges across all levels of the denomination play a larger and larger role in the way decisions are being made about the distribution of fewer dollars, – in this situation, now the norm for most denominations, the primary losers are national bodies.
- Other national boards are also dealing with their own scarcity of dollars. The reality it that for them to focus energies on supporting UM would have such a small return on their investment that it probably isn't worth their time and resources.
- The fundamental issue is not giving formulas but the end of the existing model of denominational life – this reality is not being understood or addressed.

- National boards and some regions have stepped up fund-raising through direct appeals. There is a clear and determined effort in national bodies to counteract funding decline within existing agreements with their own fundraising programs. This means there will be winners and losers.
- Designations and specifics appeals are increasing.
- The Budget Covenant has been stressed to the breaking point where some entities have sought forgiveness rather than permission for breaking covenant.
- As a result, concern over the division of the United Mission dollar has risen once again.
- UM is perpetuating an old paradigm rather than coming face-to-face with the new realities of the national situation, regional life and the crisis of local congregations.

3. ABCUSA/OGS need an adequate revenue stream to support its functions.

- OGS has been orphaned when it comes to funding.
- Though it receives its money from the top of the national pool, it has never had adequate resources to provide all of the "general" functions of ABCUSA, finding it necessary to frequently solicit money from its other partners.
- Within the current national organization design, OGS has fewer means of showing its reason for existence in terms of fund raising – in this existing narrative it will always be the loser in the race dollars.
- The dominant perception that OGS functions largely for the operation, maintenance, administration and management of an old denominational paradigm does not help its cause or sense of identity. It can come to be viewed as “overhead” in a system getting fewer and fewer dollars.
- OGS has been put in the position of promoting UM and, therefore, left ‘holding the UM bag’ at a time when other national, regional and local organizations are increasingly creating their own means of funding their programs and needs. This places OGS in an untenable, lose-lose, situation
- A way must be found to provide a steady, adequate stream of income for its functions. But, this is not the time for the following reasons:
 1. Inadequate resources are only symptomatic of larger issues that must be addressed as part of a larger strategy.
 2. The structural reorganization of the ABC has strained the connections between various ABC entities. UM is a common thread which, though tenuous, provides some measure of unity.
 3. Conversation around money is a default, diverting attention from missional issues.
- Numbers of regional executives express irritation that they raise money for BGM but have little impact on what it decides to do (or not do). This perception is exacerbated by a new non-representative federation model. There is a desire for BGM to engage in greater regional executive input and buy-in for BGM activities before they can expect more than causal support.

4. The New Structure affects the understanding of ‘National’, UM and OGS

- This is the more basic adaptive challenge that must be addressed by OGS.
- UM relates to the previous structure so by addressing UM as it currently functions BGM is not addressing the real problem.
- Covenants of relationship no longer reflect the realities of the situation on the ground. These covenants were designed for a national organizational structure (hub-spoke) that worked in a particular period of time.

- Pastors, regions and local congregations increasingly view national organizations as ‘non-essential’, unnecessary burdens in the fight to make limited dollars work. Without a fundamental reframing for the rationale of a national organization, such as OGS, this devolution and loss of support will continue. The issue here is fundamentally one of connectedness (identity).
- Some national bodies are returning to and reclaiming the rights of ‘Societies’. Is this a symptom of the devolution of the existing form of national covenants and relationships?

5. OGS must re-focus on reframing its identity.

- OGS must ask the adaptive question of its role, within the realities described above, in engaging local congregations in the re-formation of ABC life.
- Regions get the largest percentage of UM. They will, therefore, have a high investment in any reframing processes. This is a key connect point for OGS in framing of the UM conversation within a larger vision. TbyS provides a key opportunity in working with Regions to form itself as distributive, mission-agency in ABC.

6. Prioritize Making TbyS Successful.

- TbyS has become successful beyond our imagining.
- It is still in a fledgling state. For it to truly "fly" it must be the primary focus of resources and energy.
- Without our full attention, TbyS will quickly be viewed as another ABC program like Grow by Caring. Our thinking and acting will not be transformed and we will live in a position of default, squabbling over money.
- Adequate funding will follow. People invest in value.

7. There is Donor Fatigue while ample evidence of people willing to give

Donor fatigue was expressed in a number of areas:

- The perception of failed initiatives
1. Loss of faith that national offices and programs make any real difference to local congregations.
 2. Asking for donations to make up budget deficits.
 3. Lack of specificity with communication of measured results
 4. Asking for numerous projects which communicates there is no focus in a time of denominational crisis.