

## Al Hammer - Apportionment Reduction

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Dear Fellow Disciples of Jesus Christ,

We pray that God's blessings are upon you as you live out your discipleship in your congregation and the world.

In 2006, we, the Baltimore-Washington Conference, made a commitment to be like Jesus Christ in all we do by focusing on making and engaging disciples for the transformation of the world. We also agreed that the congregation is the primary vehicle to carry out ministry and mission within the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Since that time, we have been working to align our ministry, staff, and finances to make this commitment a reality. While there have been challenges along the way, with God's help we have made significant progress together. We attribute our successes to the unique gifts and collaboration of our pastors, lay leadership and the dedication of the Baltimore-Washington Conference staff. Thank you for all you have done to share in the Discipleship Adventure.

In December, we wrote to you and said that in 2006 we committed to reduce the benevolence factor (the percentage we apportion congregations) to 19.5% by 2012. In 2005, the benevolence factor was 24.8% and in 2009 it was projected to be 22%. However, we felt that we could not wait until 2012. As a result, we are pleased to report that through the cooperation of the Council on Finance and Administration, the Discipleship Council, the leaders of the various boards and agencies and the Conference staff, we have unanimously approved reducing the benevolence factor to 19.5% in 2009.

It is important to note this action is being taken within the authority granted through enabling legislation that is passed each Annual Conference, which specifically states: "The Baltimore-Washington Conference grants authority to the Council on Finance and Administration, in consultation with the Bishop, to act on financial matters between sessions of the annual conference."

Your next apportionment billing statement will reflect a 19.5% benevolence factor which will reduce most apportionments by more than 10%. Over the last three years, the benevolence factor has been reduced by more than 20%. This is a significant accomplishment and a demonstration of the conference's commitment to the local church.

While every ministry and administrative budget was reduced, the Conference leadership was able to achieve this reduction without eliminating any of our current ministry programs, as we continue our progress toward achieving our 2012 goal of creating at least 600 Acts 2 churches.

We recognize that some congregations are struggling with how to be faithful during these tough economic times, while also being faced with increased food, shelter and utility needs by people in their community. Our faith has taught us that it is during times of great challenge that disciples can grow deeper in their commitment to follow Christ and that congregations can grow deeper, wider and further in their ministry. We encourage you to use these savings to glorify God and carry out and grow the

ministry of Jesus Christ. As in the parable of the talents, what will you do with the apportionment savings? How will you use it to grow deeper, wider and further as disciples?

Your congregation's Guide is ready to work with you on these questions. Please do not hesitate to contact him or her.

We are also establishing conference Advance Specials to assist ministries of the Baltimore-Washington Conference by providing second-mile giving. You may decide that you want to help one of these ministries to flourish. Among the new conference Advance Specials will be mission projects, congregations engaged in mission with the poor and new church starts. You will hear more about this in the future.

In addition, we are identifying ways we can resource your congregation with stewardship, by offering to you proven practical and biblical ideas that bear fruit.

We are in ministry together. Approximately 500 congregations (75%) over the years have been faithful in paying their full apportionments. We thank you on behalf of all of the mission projects and ministries that have benefited from your giving. We also commit to be good stewards of the money BWC congregations entrust to us and to keep the focus on congregations who are making disciples and transforming their community and world.

We urge every congregation to pay 100% of its apportionments. Our ministry and mission depend on every church paying its fair share of 100%. Congregations that have not paid 100% for two or more years are now being reviewed to assess the health of their ministry and their financial viability. We want to work with you to meet your apportionment responsibility. Together we will find the healthy path for every congregation.

Thank you for being a part of The United Methodist Church. May God continue to bless your efforts as you seek to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

In Christ,

Robert Slade, Chairperson of the Discipleship Council  
Mr. Charles Moore, Chairperson of the Council on Finance and Administration  
Bishop John Schol, Resident Bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference