

# What's On Your Mind?

## Can the congregation's budget be amended at the annual meeting?

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Each year Presbyterian congregations all across Canada meet in sanctuaries, church halls and basements to examine, debate and approve congregational budgets. By the time you read this page your calculators should have cooled down and the serious work of trying to live up to the expectations expressed by the budget will be under way.

The budget is an expression of a congregation's vision for ministry described in columns of numbers. Some budgets are relatively small, barely covering the essentials of stipend and heating bills. Other budgets enjoy the luxury of meeting these expenses as well as supporting a variety of local, national and international missions. Regardless of the size of the budget, arriving at a consensus on how to divvy up the congregation's resources is often a challenge. It is hoped that the prayer, thought and discussion dedicated to the budget-setting process will lead every congregation to a happy consensus.

If there are 940 Canadian Presbyterian budgets prepared for 2010, there may well be nearly 940 different methods of cobbling them together. Nevertheless, most methods will probably include an invitation for individuals and groups to submit dollar requests associated with their particular ministry. Once these figures are plugged into a budget format some playing around with the numbers usually follows in order to arrive at a palatable total. Then someone will give the budget a stamp of approval. In some instances the stamp comes from the treasurer, or the board of managers, or a finance committee, or the session. Sometimes the board of managers and the session meet together, go over the budget line by line, and then declare it Annual-General-Meeting-ready.

You can understand that after so much prayer and energy is spent imagining the shape of ministry for the next year and finding the right balance of dollars and cents to breathe life into that ministry, some people become rather protective of the budget. They don't want it altered in any way.

So the question arises: Can the congregation's budget be amended at the annual meeting?

*Book of Forms* section 153 simply states that "Every congregation should hold an annual meeting for receiving the report of the board of managers or the deacons' court, and transacting any other business regularly brought before it."

This seems to be one of those sections of our constitution that is deliberately vague and leaves room for interpretation.

A person could interpret this section to mean the congregation should passively receive whatever the board delivers. However, since the congregation's budget is supported by the members and adherents in terms of money, skills and time, it is reasonable that the whole congregation should take ownership of the budget and be free to make adjustments as, together, they further discern God's purpose for the congregation and the best stewardship of its resources. Once the budget is adopted by the congregation, it is not necessary for the original framers of the budget to approve it again.

The congregation's approval is sufficient.

Blessings,  
Don Muir

## What's on your mind?

Do you have a question about the polity of our church? Are you confused by something that happened at session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly? Puzzling over a section of the *Book of Forms*?

Send your questions to The Rev. Don Muir and he will strive to answer them in future issues of *Equipping for . . . Elders* in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

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