

# Examining the ECUSA Budget

By Kevin Jones

**M**OST BUDGETS have two dimensions, and make sense when viewed in a spreadsheet. The budget that the 800-plus deputies and couple hundred bishops will vote on at General Convention is not that kind of budget.

The \$47 million annual budget for the Episcopal Church's operations from 2004–2006 cannot be understood as a series of line items that add up to a series of clearly stated institutional priorities.

There's one clear reason for that: "20/20" — the evangelism effort that challenges the church to grow exponentially in mission and numbers — doesn't show up as a line item. The topic has become the subject of great attention in the church ever since a resolution at the 73rd General Convention in Denver called on the Executive Council to make 20/20 a priority. Yet despite many national meetings addressing this theme over the past triennium and growing discussion about 20/20 in local church settings, it is still merely a proposal, not a program. Hence, despite being the underlying criteria against which every funding request will be weighed — the standard against which money will be allocated — 20/20 does not announce itself, John the Baptist fashion, in the budget. It instead shows up in a kind of "Where's Waldo" way as the hard-to-see but ubiquitous figure.

With the picture inside the picture being the true picture, the best way to envision the

budget might be as a Fabergé egg puzzle. You only get the picture when you open it up and see three dimensions; one that shows where the money comes in, one that shows where the money goes out, and the last piece — what people believe the world ought to look like because of that transaction.

The picture appears to be in flux because, say both 20/20 strategists and budget committee leaders, it represents a movement that's still taking shape. Underlying budgetary deliberations will be a different way of doing church, they say. That approach will be a renewed and more vigorous enabling of local initiatives, rather than — as some perceive it — the establishment of programs at the national level to filter down to parishes.

Sarah Lawton leads the strategy team behind 20/20. The task they were delegated by the Executive Council's 20/20 Task Force was to find a path to growth for a church whose membership has been in steady decline. This became grounds for a sweeping rethink, and even in some ways a reversal, of the way money and power flow in the church.

"What we're asking for in 20/20 is much less a budgetary appeal than calling for a different way of looking at funding, with the energy and money coming from the local church. And then when something gets established, it would be getting matching money and support at the diocese and

**"The push for local control is a 'State's Rights' thing — which we ought to resist."**

then from the national church, in the form of matching grants, support for programs,” said the laywoman from San Francisco, Calif.

“We’re not relying on the national church; we’re asking the national church to match local efforts.”

### Social justice vs. evangelism

Despite the attempt to more vigorously enable local initiatives, 20/20’s grants will still depend on money from the national church for the projects to reach their potential. And the talk of a shift to a local emphasis has echoes, for those with institutional memories, of claims made a decade ago when hundreds of thousands of dollars were slashed from the national budget to be “used at home by dioceses.” National justice and advocacy granting programs like the Jubilee Grants and the Coalition for Social Witness & Justice (formerly the Coalition for Human Needs) were eliminated in the mid-1990s, along with offices that addressed HIV/AIDS, hunger and housing issues, in a shift to greater local control of financial resources.

“We’ve been down this road before,” said Mary Miller, coordinator of The Consultation, a coalition of progressive Episcopal organizations. The Baltimore resident, who was on the staff of the national Department of Christian Social Relations in the late 1960s when the justice-oriented General Convention Special Program was formed, reflected, “I’ve seen this several times in my lifetime. The push for local control is a ‘State’s Rights’ thing — which we ought to resist — and an effort toward congregationalism, which is not how we live as an Episcopal Church.”

The traditional way to look at why a particular program should get a larger share of a shrinking pile of dollars is a budget battle; departments fight for their line items and their turf. Some have cast the 20/20 growth effort in those simplistic, black-and-white terms; as social justice vs. evangelism, with social justice looking to some peace and justice activists like it’s set up to come out on the short end of the stick.

That may be wrong, but it’s not as wrong as some people think, says aerospace executive Ted Mollegen, a member of the Standing Commission on Domestic Mission and Evangelism who leads the budget committee of the 20/20 Strategy Group that Lawton chairs. For him, the issue of gain and loss in the upcoming budget vote is much more like a clear piece of financial engineering riding the

momentum of what he sees as a sweeping change in church culture. It’s a change that will ripple from the pew in the smallest mission up to the denominational headquarters at 815 Second Avenue.

“The [church’s] budget is being squeezed; it’s smaller than last triennium. Because giving is down, the economy is down and personal economies are down,” said Mollegen, of Glastonbury, Conn. Out of those reduced resources, Mollegen wants to be sure that “a higher value is placed on evangelism. Some people say it’s social justice vs. 20/20. I think that’s a false opposition. But some funding has been eliminated at the [Episcopal Church Center] in advocacy work. One can ask the question what the effectiveness is of those [national church] efforts in creating change in the world.” In addition, Mollegen charged, “quite a lot of social justice work is done without any corresponding effort to convey the Gospel.”

While saying that he “wants to avoid a competitive feeling,” Mollegen sees the issue in an either/or survival framework that can be compressed onto a balance sheet. “In no state is the Episcopal Church growing as fast as the population of the state. Our share of population is shrinking. We are not keeping pace. If we have limited resources, we have to decide what priority best fits the organization at this time.

“Organizational viability is the issue; it’s at the heart of the dynamics of budgeting. Until we raise enough money and grow enough, we need to divert 10 percent of the budget to church growth. That’s our goal with 20/20.”

Focusing on growth, like consuming a needed gulp of Echinacea when you feel a cold coming on, will allow the church to then get back into shape so that it can again focus on justice issues, Mollegen speculated. “We may be talking about taking a significant bite out of the budget [for 20/20] in 2003, but the bite out of future triennia will be smaller,” Mollegen predicted. That necessary and temporary diversion will enable the church to grow and “will allow us to give more to social justice in the future,” Mollegen said hopefully.

“To not spend the money on evangelism (but spend it instead) on social justice now is like eating the seed corn” and using it to bake a cake to eat today, rather than planting a crop to feed the family tomorrow, Mollegen suggested.

People who differ with Mollegen’s perspective take two tacks: First, doing justice is just as much a biblical man-

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date and part of the good news as is evangelism. Second, acting for justice draws people to the church. “What appeals to people about the Episcopal Church, many times, is our commitment to social justice,” said Brian Grieves, director of the national church’s Peace and Justice Ministries office. “The church grows through our witness of working for reconciliation in the world.”

Louie Crew, a member of Executive Council, disagreed with the position that evangelism should be the driving force in the church’s ministry and budget. “I am very unhappy with the suggestion that every justice expense must be somehow connected with explicit evangelism. Doing justice is God’s requirement quite apart from telling people about Jesus. Justice work itself is good news, quite apart from any growth in ECUSA that might derive from it.” Crew, of East Orange, N.J., acknowledged that church growth efforts may suffer as a result of taking a prophetic stance. “Occasionally a parish or a diocese may have to shrink for a season as the price of doing justice. Doing justice sometimes makes you very unpopular, as when you stand up against racism, sexism, classism or homophobia.”

The either/or choice of church growth or social justice is not one that Lawton is comfortable with. She’s been deeply involved for nearly 20 years in faith-based work linking American churches with SHARE Foundation, an El Salvador justice-based group.

Acting out the Gospel’s call to stand by the oppressed and telling believers and unbelievers her own faith story (and expecting bishops to do the same) are both essential parts of her faith, she said. “Spirituality and working for justice are just two sides of the same coin. We are called to be interconnected to the rest of the world. Every parish should have, besides the things that go on within its own walls — the personal spiritual growth and authentic spirituality — ought to have some outreach.”

Lawton says she supports the positions of the church’s advocacy groups, but thinks the leadership on those issues should bubble up from the parish to the diocese and then be supported by the national church. But even Lawton shares with Mollegen a belief that “the advocacy efforts of the national church have lost touch with the parish; there’s been a divorce between those efforts and what most people go to church for.”

Others wonder why, if there’s such a split between national advocacy and the parish, more than 10,000 Episcopalians subscribe to the frequent email alerts on public

policy issues from the denomination’s Washington office.

20/20, as both Mollegen and Lawton see it, may be the barely perceptible agenda behind every line item, the sea change that makes the cash flow in another direction, with the impetus from the parish up to the national church. And if that sounds like it’s in flux, and the outlines are maybe a little fuzzy, then that’s an accurate picture, says Lawton, who with her background in community organizing is at home when new movements take shape over time.

“I think the hardest thing for people to figure out about 20/20 is that we are still working on it, on what it means,” said Lawton. “It’s not a program, but has a more iterative aspect. It involves becoming a more diverse church, funding cultural literacy, language training, giving young people cross-cultural experiences. It’s much less a budgetary appeal than a different way of looking at funding, with the energy bubbling up from the parish and the diocese and the national church being supportive.”

This argument will be welcome news to the community of justice activists. Miller indicated that all too often the “latest, greatest idea” has been an effort for the white establishment to maintain control and “get rid of stuff that rocks the boat.”

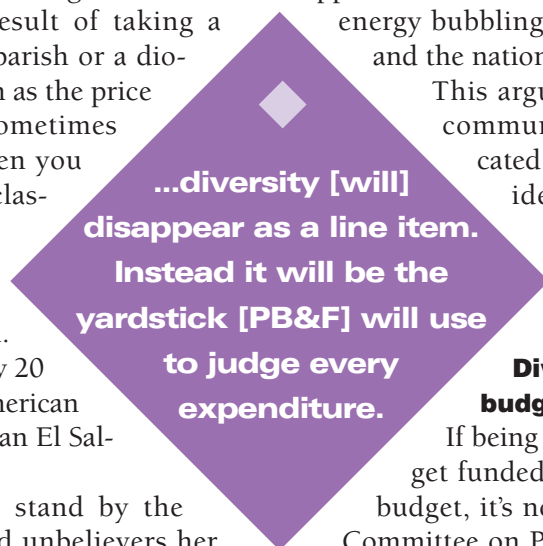
### **Diversity underlies all budget items**

If being hidden is the best way to be seen and get funded at every reflexive turn in this year’s budget, it’s not surprising that the Joint Standing Committee on Program Budget and Finance (PB&F) decreed that diversity was so important that it would disappear as a line item. Instead it will be the yardstick they will use to judge every expenditure.

The committee, which draws up the budget for General Convention, plays the role of the Appropriations Committee in the U.S. Congress, deciding how much to allocate to each budget request that comes before it.

“We’ve said that the priority of diversity underlies all the others,” said Bonnie Anderson of Bingham Farms, Mich., chair of PB&F. “It’s so important that we’ve taken it out of the priority list because diversity and inclusion is the most important thing to embrace.”

Richard Miller of Miami, Fla. (no relation to Mary Miller), chair of the Administration & Finance Committee of Executive Council that drafted the budget that was sent to PB&F, says social justice is no less a priority than it has been in past years. “Few people are happy in a budgetary process,” said Miller, one of the only African Americans on



Executive Council. Mostly retired as a business consultant, he is a nearly full-time volunteer with a drug program in his Miami community.

“It’s easy to talk about diversity and inclusiveness, but a lot of it is just talk,” Miller said. “If you look out at General Convention’s 800 deputies you have a maximum of 40 to 50 African Americans. And it’s the same 40 to 50 from [previous conventions]. We’re not very inclusive.”

Crew, a renowned church statistician, offered more precise data. Crew reported figures that 69 of the deputies to this summer’s General Convention have identified as African Americans (8.3 percent of the total registered deputies), and 29 percent of that number are first-time deputies. However, Crew agreed there are tensions around how diversity and inclusion get addressed. “The institutional racism in our church has to be a top priority,” he

said. “It’s important that we have seen an increased representation of people of color on General Convention deputations, but that does not change the fact that the budget needs to reflect the concerns of communities of color and other underrepresented populations in our church.”

The five priorities Richard Miller’s Executive Council committee established for the budget are clear — youth and young adults; proclaiming the gospel and reconciling those who do not know Christ; transforming congregations; enhancing diversity and promoting justice and peace; and partnering with the Anglican Communion — but where they show up in the budget itself are not.

That’s because what this budget really represents, Miller says, is “a culture shift. 20/20 is simply a name but it claims a movement and the movement should be so pervasive that it covers every avenue of the church.” ●

## about the author

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