

Dear Friends,

Once again it is that time of the year when churches and the presbytery begin to think about operating budgets for the next year, in this case for 2017.

In August 2003, the Presbytery of South Alabama unanimously approved a new way of asking our Churches for financial support for the work of the Presbytery, the Synod of Living Waters and the General Assembly. (see attached)

This "**Fair Share Asking**" was initiated because the Presbytery had at that point seen no increase in total giving over the previous 15 years. Due to inflation, that meant we were working with much less money than we had 15 years previously.

The "Fair Share Asking" invites and encourages our Churches to begin where they are and move eventually to giving 10 percent of their undesignated benevolent giving to the work of the Presbytery, the Synod and General Assembly. Of your undesignated benevolent giving to the Presbytery, we use approximately 90% here for the mission and ministry of the Presbytery. The other 10% is divided, with the Synod receiving 2.5%, the General Assembly 6.5% and Alabama Presbyterian Campus Ministry 1%. Previous to 2013, these percentages were 80% here in the Presbytery and the other 20% = 5% for the Synod, 13% for GA and 2% for Campus Ministry. These were cut in half because of our budget constraints that year.

I am proud of the way you and your congregations have responded to this appeal. We have seen real growth in giving that has enabled us to better do what God has called the Presbytery of South Alabama to do. The growth in giving has been modest at times because while some churches have significantly increased their giving, others have not been able to do so, and some churches have had to reduce their giving because of their own financial struggles. We understand those struggles and **we are grateful** for those who could increase their giving, **we are grateful** for those who could "hold the line in their giving," **and we are grateful** for those who had to reduce their giving.

The last few years have been quite a challenge in our churches and in the Presbytery. The general economic conditions in our country and world have had an impact on your members and their ability to give. The wonder in this Presbytery is that you have so many very generous members and leaders in your congregations. In the last couple of years, some Churches had to decrease their giving to Presbytery. We understand why this has happened and we hope you have felt supported by this Presbytery in doing what you have had to do to maintain and when possible increase your ministry and mission. Always remember that the Churches of this

Presbytery do not exist for the sake of the Presbytery. Rather, this Presbytery exists for the sake of its Churches.

As we look toward 2017 and beyond, we know that there will be great challenges and also great opportunities for us as a Presbytery. We also know that we cannot move forward into the future that even now God is creating for us without either receiving funds that will allow us to seize those opportunities or drastically cutting our budget and therefore how we function as a Presbytery. Know that we will do whatever we need to do to be financially responsible and solvent. We have always done this. We will do what we have to do to continue to serve our Churches and their leaders. If giving to Presbytery does not increase significantly in the next year or so, we may have to do that in new and imaginative ways, but we will do it to the very best of our abilities while living within our means.

Each year, we ask each Church to prayerfully consider increasing their undesignated benevolent giving (or their restricted giving) to the Presbytery by 1.5% of their undesignated receipts of the previous year. Once again, we are prayerfully asking you and your congregation to consider such an increase. The past year and the present year have had their challenges. You may be able to hold the line on your giving for 2017, or consider a 1% or a 1.5% increase. You may be in a position to raise your level of giving by even more. Even if you have to cut your giving to Presbytery for 2017, know that we understand and want to help you with your needs.

I know that you will soon be putting your 2017 operating budget together, and we would like you to consider this request as you do so. We have been at work putting together a Preliminary Presbytery budget as well. That was shared at the Presbytery meeting in August so that you can see what our divisions and committees are proposing for 2017. That final Presbytery Budget for 2017 has not yet have been approved by Presbytery, since that will be done at the February 2017 Presbytery meeting after hearing from you what your congregation will be giving.

Attached you will find the "Fair Share Asking" for your Church and for all of our Churches.

Thank you for your faithfulness to God and your generosity to the Presbytery of South Alabama.

May God continue to bless and keep you and your congregation, so that you may continue to be the blessings God has called you to be.

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