

Our Biggest Need is Advocacy **By Jim Newman**

There may be no other issue as significant to the Anglican Church as its financial viability. Organizations that were encouraged to build up endowments in the past decade now find those funds aren't going to pay out any income in 2009. Most are not expecting any income from investments before 2011. Examples include the National Ballet of Canada's endowments which generated as much as \$900,000 in income used to help cover its \$24-million operating budget. Canadian universities could be forced to cut student aid, scholarships and funding for various programs as early as next spring because of multimillion-dollar losses in their investment holdings. The Salvation Army of Canada says the economic situation has already shown an increase in demand for services and a decrease in total donations.

Here in the Diocese of Niagara, discussion and approval of its 2009 budget was deferred until the 2nd Session of the 134th Synod on March 28, 2009; in anticipation of a balanced, vision-driven and achievable budget. That's a positive approach, but overall the picture is rather bleak. The Council of General Synod (CoGS) approved the 2009 General Synod budget that "although pruned by \$1.3 million, still projects a deficit of \$745,639, with revenues anticipated at \$8.6 million, and expenditures at \$9.4 million." CoGS also approved a motion recommending to General Synod in 2010 "that there be no deficit budgets for the work of General Synod after the year 2012."

Opportunities for the Church

In tough times, people are drawn to churches, and clearly churches can't sit idly by waiting for the economy to recover. "People are looking for community, compassion and hope." So says Dr. Kennon Callahan, Presbyterian pastor, researcher, professor, and church consultant. The author of 15 books, Callahan stresses that "people are motivated by a theology of service, not a theology of survival."

His message seems simple enough: We're places of compassion, community and hope; and we focus on mission and service. Callahan says "the churches that do best in church finances have a rich, full, abiding passion for mission. Strange, I thought Anglican churches were beacons of community, compassion, hope and mission. And they are, once people get to know them. But churches are declining, so perhaps this message is not getting through.

Learning from the experts

Hospitals and universities are certainly not in decline. They have their own version of compassion, community and hope, and they're especially aware of their mission and service. The results are evident – they are highly respected, and hardly a week goes without an announcement of a major gift of a million dollars or more to McMaster, the University of Toronto, Sick Kids' Hospital, or some other educational or health care institution. They may or may not know about Callahan, but they use a Callahan-like approach mixed with expertise in Public Relations, Marketing, and Advocacy.

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There's a role for public relations in a parish – *this is who we are, and what we do*. It's about getting your parish's message across and it's where your narrative budget pays off big time. There's a big role for marketing in a parish too: *how can we change (CHANGE?) to be aligned better with what people want and need*. We sometimes lump these together and call it Evangelism.

But we must go further. Our biggest need is Advocacy. Advocates create conditions that enable others to act for us. Advocates tell stories, such as their own early childhood memories of church school that encourages new families to get involved. They create displays of parish history along side posters of current outreach ministry to confirm and promote identity. They enhance awareness, appreciation, and support through relationships, partnerships, and coalitions in their wider communities. They respect the views and priorities of others. They are willing and able to make a difference. Advocacy is the responsibility of all leaders. We need at least a dozen advocates in every parish and hundreds across the diocese.

There are barriers to advocacy, of course. Some will say – that's someone else's job; or it shouldn't be necessary. Others will think it's too commercial, too flashy, and just not acceptable for a church. And we're much too busy, too powerless, and unskilled. But none of these statements are accurate. Anyone can learn to be a better advocate, and the fact is, the elimination of these statements alone would do much to enhance the future of the church.