

Missionary recall for American Baptists? Financial troubles: Financial troubles

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To overcome a pressing financial deficit, American Baptists Churches USA may reduce up to a fifth of its missionary force unless its mission agency can raise new money.

The head of International Ministries, the ABC's mission sending agency, said in a July 13 memo to missionaries that the agency may eliminate up to 36 of its 150 missionary positions—28 by recall and eight by attrition—unless it can raise \$1.5 million quickly to erase a projected 2004 shortfall.

In another memo to missionaries July 8, Charles Jones, acting executive director of International Ministries, asked for volunteers for the layoffs. "As you evaluate your sense of the Lord's call and guiding in your life, it is important for us to know if any of you feel led to volunteer to be part of an early recall," Jones wrote.

Recalling missionaries from the field is a last resort, Jones said in an interview last month. "It is one of the last options available to us. We're trying to do many things to bring our budget into balance. . . . It's a difficult time for us all."

International Ministries has an annual budget of about \$14 million. Earlier this year, the agency cut a \$3 million deficit in half by trimming mission programs, operations and Stateside staff.

"Despite this significant progress, preliminary budget projections indicate a \$1.5 million deficit in 2005 growing to \$1.9 million in 2007," Jones wrote July 13. "These deficits occur despite fairly aggressive projected increases in [the World Mission Offering] and major gift revenue. Clearly, additional changes must be made to achieve long-term financial sustainability."

The agency already plans to spend \$400,000 from reserves this year to partially offset the 2004 shortfall. The budget proposal for 2005 will be finalized by mid-September, Jones said. But selecting missionaries for recall will take longer. - *Associated Baptist Press*