

Designating Mission Support for the Synod Only And/or Designating Offerings for Specific ELCA Ministries

Questions: How can our congregation continue to support the Northwestern Minnesota Synod financially without also supporting the church-wide expression of the ELCA? How might our congregation support the synod financially along with designating some of our offerings to specific ELCA mission causes (e.g. the Hunger Appeal)?

Response: First of all this synod strongly encourages congregations to share generous mission support offerings with both the synodical and churchwide expressions of our interwoven church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Currently the Northwestern Minnesota Synod shares 51% of all the mission support dollars with the ELCA churchwide organization. The ELCA isn't someone else, or a national staff. The ELCA is us--a community of disciples of Jesus and congregations in mutual relationship spread all across our country who support one another and do mission together in a whole array of interlocking ways.

Virtually all of the mission support offerings that our synod shares with the ELCA churchwide organization supports ministry and mission we do together. For example, Pr. Keith Zeh is our Director for Evangelical Mission, serving 50% of his time in the Eastern North Dakota Synod and 50% in our Northwestern Minnesota Synod. His entire compensation is paid by the churchwide expression of the ELCA, returning, in essence, a sizable chunk of the mission support dollars our synod share with the ELCA churchwide. This enables Pr. Keith to encourage and support mission development and renewal in our synod, most often working directly with our congregations.

We also enjoy the benefits of pastors and other rostered leaders who come to us through the eight seminaries of the ELCA. The ELCA churchwide organization pays the salaries of many long-term and short-term global missionaries. We are in mission together starting new congregations and helping established congregations that are showing a fire for growing and spreading the gospel among the unchurched. The list of interwoven mission initiatives we support together as the congregations of the ELCA could go on and on.

All of these interwoven mission and support activities require the financial support of all of our congregations to continue to function faithfully and effectively. Our congregations benefit from this mission support whether they are “paying for it” or not. **So, as a synod we do encourage mission support for all parts of our church; the benefits of this support flow in many directions (much of it back into our synod) as we give ourselves to God’s mission through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.**

Having said that, it is true that our synod has for several years had a special Northwestern Minnesota Synod Fund for Mission that was established primarily to receive special or “second mile” offerings from individuals and congregations--over and above regular congregationally budgeted mission support (sometimes called “benevolence”). **One hundred percent of the monies collected in this fund support directly the work and mission of our synod only.**

While the Synod Fund for Mission was not created for the purpose of allowing congregations to avoid sharing their offerings with the ELCA churchwide organization, it is possible for individuals and congregations to give gifts directly to this fund. If a congregation decides for a period of time that it wishes to express its disapproval of certain actions of an ELCA Churchwide Assembly by not sharing financial offerings with the ELCA churchwide organization, this fund is available to receive contributions “for the synod only.”

However, before taking such an action, the elected leaders and staff of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod encourage congregations to do the following:

- We believe congregation councils should not take this action unilaterally. Rather, they should invite discussion among all voting members of the congregation. Because mission support giving is normally part of a congregation’s budget, approved at the annual meeting, it is appropriate if not necessary to have such an action approved at a special congregational meeting.
- Synodical leaders also request that any such decisions for distributions of congregational funds in be viewed as temporary—that such decisions be reviewed by the congregation at least once a year.
- The synod also strongly encourages congregation councils not to pursue this course of action without first consulting with the bishop or one of the assistants to the bishop.

In terms of designating some offerings toward specific ELCA mission causes, such as the ELCA Hunger Appeal, the ELCA website (which, by the way, is funded by general mission support dollars) is a good resource for discovering how to make contributions to direct mission activity. Go directly to the ELCA Good Gifts webpage at <http://archive.elca.org/scriptlib/DS/giving/default.asp>

In short, the leaders of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod ask that any decisions about redirecting mission support offerings away from the ELCA churchwide organization be made only after carefully considering the overall interdependence of our relationships in the ELCA.

Written by Pastor Steve Peterson and Bishop Larry Wohlrabe
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