

Redirecting Benevolences Can Be a Time for Growth in Mission

A Process for Making Decisions on Congregational Benevolence Giving

Many congregations are choosing to redirect their benevolence giving away from the ELCA churchwide organization in response to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly's decision to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex relationships in spite of the Bible's teaching on marriage and on homosexual behavior.

Finding places to send benevolence giving can be an exciting opportunity for a congregation to renew its focus on the mission of the Christian Church in the world and to find the best ways to participate in that mission.

Redirecting benevolence giving away from the ELCA churchwide organization is focusing benevolence giving to accomplish that work in ways that are faithful to Christ and through institutions that are faithful. It is not ending support for the work of Christ in the world, as some ELCA leaders have claimed.

Many congregations give based on a percentage of regular offerings. Some choose to budget a specific amount for mission support. Here is a process that might help congregations think about the most faithful ways to provide support for the work of Christ beyond their congregations:

Determine Total Mission Support

Start by deciding on the total percentage or total amount that your congregation will give to the work of Christ beyond itself.

There are many ways to think about mission support. A great place to start is to consider the Great Commission of Matthew 28 and the ministries of Matthew 25. Consider ways to support the Church's mission "to make disciples of all nations" and to serve Jesus in "the least of these."

Consider the ministries that are near and dear to the hearts of your members. Consider both local ministries and global ministries.

One helpful way of thinking about mission support is to divide it into three categories and to designate a percentage for each: Church Body Support, Global Mission, and Local Mission.

Church Body Support

This giving supports the organization of a church body and ministries directly related to it. Synodical or churchwide mission support would fall into this category. In faithful synods, a congregation may want to continue to provide support for its synod's budget. A congregation could designate gifts for missionary support or other specific programs through the ELCA or synod.

Gifts to Lutheran CORE also belong in this category. Lutheran CORE's work as a freestanding synod and its work toward the reconfiguration of Lutheranism in North America will require significant support from congregations and individuals.

Global Mission

This giving goes directly to ministries that carry out the work of Christ around the world. This could be designated giving supporting a specific missionary or missionary organization. This giving could be for special projects through your companion synod. This giving could be for organizations like Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response, or similar ministries.

Local Mission

This giving goes directly to organizations doing the work of Christ in your community, state or region. There are many faithful ministries in communities and synods including food pantries, church camps, nursing homes, and social service agencies. These are the ministries your congregation knows well and loves to support.

The process of choosing what missions and ministries to support can be an exciting opportunity for your congregation and its leadership. Choosing to give directly to the ministries that are making a difference can create ties that keep a congregation focused on mission and ministry. Take time to learn about each ministry — both its faithfulness and its financial stewardship.

Here is an example of what a congregation that gives 15 percent of its income as benevolence might do:

Church Body Support - 5%

- 2% - Lutheran CORE.
- 2% - Synod (not churchwide).
- 1% - Project in Companion Synod.

Global Mission - 5%

- 1% - Global Health Ministries.
- 1% - Lutheran Disaster Response.
- 1% - Lutheran World Relief.
- 1% - Missionary Sponsorship.
- 1% - World Mission Prayer League.

Local Mission - 5%

- 1% - Local Food Pantry.
- 1% - Lutheran Church Camp.
- 1% - Lutheran Prison Ministry.
- 1% - Lutheran Social Services.
- 1% - Lutheran CORE's Hispanic and African immigrant congregations.