

## **Educate, Equip, Enact**

*A program of the Rocky Mountain Synod—ELCA  
promoting the fiscal wellness of rostered leaders*

### 1) **Executive Summary**

*Educate, Equip, Enact (3E)* is the Rocky Mountain Synod's response to the Lilly Endowment's National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. Research that we have undertaken during the Planning Phase of the Initiative reveals that pastors and other ministers on the rosters of the Rocky Mountain Synod experience diminished capacity for vital ministry due to fiscal hurdles they encounter. These economic challenges are sometimes chronic, sometimes unanticipated, and often systemic within the structures of church life. Our studies reinforce and corroborate other research already developed in the Initiative. **3E** will use direct assistance given to economically-challenged rostered leaders as a way to create incentives for those leaders to build Fiscal Wellness Teams in partnership with congregation leaders. These teams will empower rostered and congregation leaders to work together to discuss specific challenges, and to move congregation systems from anxiety to proactive planning on ways to address these challenges. We are structuring our Ministerial Excellence Fund to link direct assistance with a required commitment for education that will deepen and develop fiscal management skills and healthy fiscal behaviors for both rostered leaders and their congregations or ministry agencies. Two important realities are framing the way in which we are structuring **3E**. First, this program is being planned and integrated in tandem with a current strategic planning effort of the Synod begun last spring; this integration will help insure that the fruits of **3E** will be tightly woven into the character of the Synod beyond the three-year grant period. Second, the far-flung geography of the Synod requires distinctive approaches that address the immense distances and the elements of isolation that are part of our Synod's realities. (See *Appendix A* in the supporting documents for more specific information on the Synod's demographics.)

## 2) Results of the planning process

Our planning process gathered original qualitative and quantitative data on issues surrounding rostered leaders' economic challenges. Qualitative data was gathered during April 2016 as part of the process for strategic planning. Eleven different conversations were held in the ten Conferences of the Synod. A total of 100 rostered leaders and 19 congregational leaders participated in these conversations; these discussions included specific queries about personal and congregational finances. Some consistent themes and concerns emerged from these conversations. Major points that surfaced most often were these:

- There is a widespread concern about *debt incurred from seminary education*. Many first-call rostered leaders find themselves in calls that do not provide adequate salaries to pay off these debt loads. Some rostered leaders have additional debt loads from undergraduate education. The impact of this debt is especially severe for second-career rostered leaders, who have less career time to pay off the loans; some of these leaders anticipate delaying or foregoing retirement to address this issue.
- Rostered leaders are concerned about *salaries* and, more specifically, about the capacity of their congregations to pay a fair and adequate salary today and in the future. This concern is deepened by the realities of rising costs for housing and health care for rostered leaders. A significant number of rostered leaders stated that salary increases must frequently be sacrificed in order to make it possible for the congregation to meet the rising costs of the denomination's health insurance plan.
- Another major theme was a feeling of anxiety about the *economic viability of congregations in the future*. Rostered leaders understood that their own economic well-being is threatened when congregations feel challenged to pay a full-time salary. The economic well-being of rostered leaders requires fiscally healthy congregations.
- Rostered leaders are also concerned about *their congregations' capacity to manage finances*. There is disparity in the skill sets of congregational fiscal leaders.
- A final theme that was often voiced was an acknowledgment that many of the economic challenges our rostered leaders face are “*systemic*” in nature. The structuring of theological education, candidacy processes currently required, and the configuration of the call process all create economic challenges for many rostered leaders. There was deep

emotion around some of these issues, together with a mistrust of “top-down” solutions that imagined these issues can be solved simply by giving small amounts of money in a grant; the needs are bigger than that. “The system needs to be fixed where it is broken,” is one way to characterize these comments.

Two parallel but different online surveys were subsequently used in June to gather quantitative data. One survey targeted all rostered leaders in the Synod as well as persons currently entranced into our Candidacy process and preparing for ministry. A second survey was designed for congregation treasurers and leaders. Both surveys were anonymous. Completed surveys were returned by 37% of RMS rostered leaders and 38% of RMS congregations. The data samples in both surveys were representative of synodical populations and give us a 95% reliability on each survey with a 6% margin of error. The quantitative data reinforces the insights gleaned from the qualitative conversations:

- Education debt, salaries, and congregation finances were the top three concerns of rostered leaders.
- While 80% of rostered leaders report that they consider themselves as “very” or “somewhat” economically secure, one out of five rostered leaders is at risk.
- One-fourth of all rostered leaders are concerned about retirement.
- One out of four congregation leaders consider their congregations to be fiscally at risk.
- One-third of RMS congregations consider themselves as underpaying their rostered leaders.
- Women appear to be more economically strapped by student debt and salary than men.

In general, both the qualitative and quantitative data matched what we expected to see. It was especially helpful, however, to test these assumptions, and we believe we are in a more credible position to address issues because of the research we have undertaken.

There were a few surprises in the data. Rostered leaders were asked to use a set of options to evaluate their own economic security, and then were asked to evaluate the economic security of their peers with the same set of options. Cumulatively, rostered leaders evaluated themselves to be more economically secure than their peers. We do not have confidence in interpreting this result; however, it could suggest that a culture of anxiety shapes conversations about money within the social fabric of rostered leaders, perhaps making rostered leaders’ sense of the larger

church's economic wellbeing appear to be somewhat worse than it may actually be. Another surprise had to do with the tenure of treasurers: half of all congregation treasurers have served four years or less; however, 23% of our sample indicated that treasurers had served more than ten years in that office. A summary of our data can be found in *Appendices B through D* in the supporting documents.

### 3) Statement of purpose and goals

The overall goal for *3E* is to deepen rostered leaders' capacity for ministry by 1) addressing economic challenges that they face and by 2) encouraging deeper engagement with the fiscal management tools that are available to them. Our research indicates that in many cases economic challenges of rostered leaders are shaped by the economic challenges of their congregations. Therefore, throughout this proposal, we are trying to link capacity building for both rostered leaders and their congregations. We know that \$500,000 cannot solve all our rostered leaders' fiscal problems, but we believe it can be a powerful catalyst to encourage rostered leaders and congregations to work together to change the fiscal systems that contribute to these challenges. This symbiosis rests upon a foundational conviction: Strong rostered leaders nurture congregations and ministries to fulfill their calling as part of God's church; strong congregations and ministries nurture rostered leaders to fulfill their calling as part of God's church.

Research done by Lilly Endowment and other grant recipients demonstrates that fiscal anxiety diminishes the capacity for ministry. Stewardship is deeply connected to faith; both faith and stewardship are modeled by rostered leaders for the spiritual and fiscal health of the communities they serve. Fiscal health is part of the necessary foundation that rostered leaders must have in order to be good witnesses to God's good news. Meeting and addressing fiscal challenges becomes an important place for deepening discipleship. By encouraging rostered leaders and their congregations to address fiscal challenges together we accomplish several objectives simultaneously:

- We interrupt the cycle of anxiety that perpetuates itself and diminishes ministerial excellence, and we replace it with more *proactive problem-solving* that can also address other fiscal and ecclesial challenges for both the rostered leader and congregation.
- We engage environments where anxiousness weakens ministry and replace them with new landscapes shaped by *collaborative partnership* open to spiritual and ministerial growth for both rostered leaders and congregations.
- We *raise the capacity* of both the rostered leaders and congregations to be more conscious and intentional disciples for the sake of the world.

The components of *3E* are intentionally designed to be a catalyst for rostered leaders and congregations to deepen their skill sets to address economic, congregational, and other ministerial challenges in new ways. Our research indicates several explicit issues that are economic pressure points for some, and we attempt to address the top major issues with specific tools. However, we also want to create a system where rostered leaders, together with congregational and agency leaders, can identify their own specific economic challenges and use them as a gateway into deeper capacity building.

By coordinating and linking this program with the Synod’s strategic planning, we are placing the *3E* program into a much larger enterprise. These coordinated efforts will define and develop the character and the capacity of the entire Rocky Mountain Synod in order to deepen its effectiveness as a witness to the Gospel. In this way, *3E* becomes leaven for the identity, character, and culture of the Synod far beyond the three years of the grant. See *Appendix F* in the supporting documents for a more detailed description of project goals and objectives that are woven into the Synod’s strategic plan.

Finally, our qualitative research shows that many rostered leaders perceive a direct link between their economic challenges and systemic realities that are part of their life within the RMS and ELCA. These systemic issues lie outside the scope of the grant. However, our proposal calls for the creation of a Task Force on Systemic Economic Issues. We believe the creation of this task force is essential and required to make our *3E* projects credible to rostered leaders. More details about this Task Force can be found in section 7 of this proposal.

#### 4) Description of educational programs and services

Educational programs and the *Ministerial Excellence Fund (MEF)* are intentionally linked; the specific features described in this section should be read in tandem with the next section. We are using *MEF* to incentivize leaders to participate in education, and we are using a suite of educational programs and opportunities to create incentives for leaders to seek the resources of the Fund. All educational programs and services will be overseen by the Project Director and Project Steering Team.

The resources of the grant will be used to provide workshops and speakers for Synod Assemblies and Theological Conferences during the 2017-2019 grant period. The *Synod Assembly* held each spring is our only opportunity to gather a large number of rostered and congregation leaders at one time. We intend to highlight economic challenges and the resources for addressing them as central features of these Assemblies over the next three years. In part, this will be capacity building for rostered leaders, congregations, and the Synod as a whole. It will also be a major venue where the objectives of *3E* can be enunciated and the programs of *3E* promoted. *Theological Conferences* gather a large majority of our rostered leaders each fall. Here, also, the same capacity building and program promotion will educate and equip a larger number of rostered leaders and encourage them to invest in the other features of *3E*. The grant will fund six focused opportunities with special speakers and programs during 2017-2019 (resources for both the Synod Assembly and Theological Conference each of the three years) to enunciate the goals of economic capacity for rostered and congregational leaders.

The grant will fund an *expanded web portal for fiscal wellness and capacity-building tools*. This web portal will integrate all our available resources and make them more easily accessible. We will promote this resource through all our education events and regular communication with rostered leaders and congregations.

**Portico** Benefit Services serves the ELCA with pension and other benefits programs that provide health, flexible spending, retirement, disability, and survivor benefits presented as one comprehensive program to members. The vast majority of rostered leaders and congregations participate in Portico and are therefore eligible for these many services. Personal financial and

retirement counseling and access to financial counselors through Ernst and Young are some of the available resources. Portico has worked with the ELCA to create a model that integrates fiscal health into total personal wellness as a “holistic ecology” (see *Appendix G* in the support documents). In addition, Portico offers its resources for group presentations and workshops. By requiring rostered leaders who receive *MEF* grants to engage in a year of coaching and education, and by making these services more easily accessible through the web portal, we will increase the effectiveness of these excellent programs throughout the Synod. We plan to continue to integrate and deepen Portico resources and involvement in synod events, Candidacy, and First Call Theological Education throughout the grant period. In addition, Portico coordinates an additional suite of *services and resources through Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota*. These will also be included in the options available to leaders. See *Appendix H* in the support documents for a more complete listing of all these programs.

Lilly Endowment is supporting development of parallel resources for the ELCA as part of the Initiative. The RMS will serve as a test synod to help use and test these resources that are coordinated together as *Resourceful Servants*. “Financial Counseling for Candidates” will work with our Candidacy Committee to integrate fiscal wellness into our accompaniment of those preparing for ministry. “Congregational Certification” will offer a suite of online resources that rostered and congregational leaders will be able to access as part of their year-long commitment to capacity-building as *MEF* grant recipients. *Appendix I* contains a more complete description of this program.

The RMS is part of Region 2 of the ELCA and is therefore yoked to California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, CA, also in Region 2. The university has developed an excellent course called *Executive Management Skills for Pastors*. It brings pastors together for a week-long “mini-MBA” on campus. This program has proven to be immensely successful in deepening rostered leaders’ fiscal and organizational management skills. With the resources of the *3E* grant, RMS will select ten rostered leaders—one from each of the Synod’s ten Conferences—to be *Conference Fiscal Management Coaches*. In return for receiving full tuition and transportation to the course, the coaches will offer their services to their Conference,

along with deepening their own skill set for ministry in their congregation. California Lutheran University will work with the RMS to provide additional training for the coaches after they have taken the Level I course. (See *Appendix J* in the supporting documents for a more complete listing of course objectives.) Our grant will also include provisions to convene two ***Fiscal Wellness Consultations*** during the grant period. We plan to include the Conference Fiscal Management Coaches together with the Deans of the Conferences for this first Consultation. This will bring Deans and Coaches to the Lutheran Center in Denver for two days. A second Consultation later during the three-year grant period will work with coaches to help the Synod evaluate the effectiveness of the coaching program and make adjustments.

***Stewardship for All Seasons*** is an excellent capacity-building program developed by Gronland-Sayther-Brunkow, the firm RMS has employed to lead our strategic planning. This program includes integrated modules for organizational and management skill building, deepened capacity for congregational strategic planning and fiscal management, and year-round stewardship awareness that not only increases congregational income but reorients congregation members to understand generosity as a spiritual practice. Increases in congregational giving from congregations who have used this program often range from 10 to 40%. We will use the resources of our grant to recruit and provide scholarship support for sixty congregations and rostered leaders (over one-third of our congregations) to participate in this program. The program will include face-to-face sessions held immediately prior to our Synod Assembly, together with clusters of Conference congregations, to encourage a network of congregations and rostered leaders who are growing in fiscal awareness and management capacity. Because this course is integrated with our strategic planning through GSB, there will be a more symbiotic benefit to the entire Synod. Our Lilly Grant partner, North Carolina Synod, is also including a similar module of this program in their grant, and we intend to use our joint experience to support each other throughout the grant period. Our use of *Stewardship for All Seasons* needs to be viewed within the context of all the other components of our educational program. By increasing fiscal resources, we hope to build the capacity of congregations to provide adequate salaries that will address many of the economic challenges of rostered leaders long after the grant period is over.



## 5) Description of Ministerial Excellence Fund

The *Ministerial Excellence Fund (MEF)* will leverage \$290,000 as a resource to create and encourage networks of rostered, congregation, and ministry leaders to address economic challenges facing rostered leaders throughout the three-year grant period. It is created upon these convictions:

- The church is “Better Together.” We are the Body of Christ—a community of interrelated persons who have gifts to share for each other and for the world.
- God gives the church the gifts for sharing God’s good news with the world. Together, we have what we need.
- Strong rostered leaders nurture congregations and ministries to fulfill their calling as part of God’s church. Strong congregations and ministries nurture rostered leaders to fulfill their calling as part of God’s church. We are given to each other as gracious gifts of God.

The Fund will encourage rostered leaders together with their congregations or ministries (through Fiscal Wellness Teams) to work together in order to:

- a) identify and define a specific current fiscal challenge that a rostered leader faces;
- b) envision ways in which, by working together, this specific challenge can be addressed;
- c) generate money to address this challenge; this money will be matched by the resources of the Fund to double the impact; and
- d) create a pattern of collaboration between the rostered leader(s) and congregation/ministry to deepen the capacity for future economic wellness and a more vital ministry.

While the Fund is structured for rostered leaders under call, it will also provide flexibility so that rostered leaders without call can take advantage of the Fund’s resources.

The Project Director will work with the Executive Committee to manage the Fund. The Synod Council will also appoint a Fiscal Wellness Grants Board; a description of the Board is in section 7 below.

Educational programs that are a part of *3E*, together with the resources of the web portal and other communication, will invite rostered leaders to use the resources of the Fund to address economic challenges. As part of the application process, rostered leaders will form a Fiscal

Wellness Team (FWT) with at least two other congregation/agency leaders involved in fiscal management. The parameters of the granting process, together with potential tax implications for the rostered leader, will be thoroughly explained as the Team begins its work. The Team will analyze a specific fiscal challenge and develop a plan for raising new money to address the issue. Rostered and congregation leaders will be encouraged to invest in this effort. The proposed project will be approved by the Fiscal Wellness Grants Board. When the Team's seed money is raised it will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the resources of the *MEF* up to a \$1,000 match. As part of the application process, FWTs will also lay out a program of education, financial counseling, and capacity building for the rostered leader(s) and congregation, using the educational components that are part of *3E* (see section 4 above). Fiscal Wellness Teams will covenant to participate in regular reporting, and these reports will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Fund.

Because debt from theological education was raised so often in our research as a critical concern, we are making provision for a specific means to address outstanding Seminary Loan Debts as a part of *MEF*. This specific program, along with a more complete description of how the Fund will operate, is available as *Appendix K* in the supporting documents.

## 6) Matching seed funding for the Ministerial Excellence Fund

The *Ministerial Excellence Fund* has three coordinated parts:

- **Part A—Start-up Funds:** The Rocky Mountain Synod will invest \$35,000 for start-up funds for the *MEF*. This money will be committed by the Synod Council and already has the backing of the Council's Executive Committee
- **Part B—Contributions:** \$37,500 will be raised by congregations, foundations and endowments during the 2017-2019 grant period. This money will be matched by \$37,500 from the Lilly Endowment Grant. A contribution of \$5,000 has already been pledged in 2016 and will be credited toward the match. Contributions of \$1,000 made by a congregation may entitle it and its rostered leader(s) to qualify for scholarships for educational programs that are part of *3E* whether or not they are seeking a grant; this should serve as an incentive to receive these funds.
- **Part C—Fiscal Wellness Teams:** An additional \$90,000 will come from the Fiscal Wellness Teams that make application for Financial Wellness Grants. These funds will also be matched by the Lilly Endowment Grant and distributed to the Financial Wellness

Teams to support their projects. By connecting the work of Fiscal Wellness Teams with scholarship for educational programs offered through *3E*, the *MEF* will not only address economic challenges but will also raise capacity of rostered leaders and congregations to address future economic issues.

The \$110,000 from Parts A and B will be used in three ways.

- Forty percent of the \$110,000 will be used for grants which target seminary loan debts.
- Of the remaining \$66,000, a portion will be used to address emergency situations encountered by rostered leaders, such as unanticipated medical expenses.
- The remaining money will be available to assist a small number of situations where the Fiscal Wellness Grants Board determines that additional funds above and beyond a Fiscal Wellness Grant will raise the capacity of a Fiscal Wellness Team to address its challenge.

The Fiscal Wellness Grants Board is charged with the responsibility to steward all three parts of the Fund throughout the three years of the grant.

By connecting the *MEF* grants to the educational programs of *3E*, we intend to generate a natural mechanism for pairing grants with educational resources. Our emphasis on stewardship development as a critical component of *3E* will also anchor this growth as a part of the rhythms and on-going programs of congregations. By having a trained Fiscal Wellness Coach in each Conference, we also will have a network of people who can promote and educate their neighboring congregations and rostered leaders about *MEF* as well as the coordinated educational programs of *3E*.

Additional fund raising to extend the life of the *3E* beyond the grant period will be addressed as part of the strategic planning project of the Rocky Mountain Synod currently underway.

## 7) Program leadership

The grant makes provision for a part-time *Project Director* for the three years of the grant period. The Project Director will serve as staff of the Office of the Bishop and will coordinate *3E* programs and projects with other assistants to the bishop, synodical support staff, and the Synod Council. The Project Director will report directly to the Bishop.

The Synod Council will appoint five persons to serve as the *Educate, Equip, Enact Steering Team*. The Team will serve for the three years of the project. One of the members will be a member of the Synod Council. At least one member of the Team will be non-rostered. At least three members will be rostered. The Team will be charged with these responsibilities:

- a) work with the Project Director for management and supervision of *3E*;
- b) with the Project Director, develop, oversee, and evaluate the programmatic and educational aspects of *3E*;
- c) with the Project Director, coordinate stewardship programs and stewardship education in collaboration with the Rocky Mountain Synod Director for Evangelical Mission and the Synod's Generosity Table;
- d) monitor the work of the Fiscal Wellness Grants Board to insure that the resources of *MEF* are being used within the guidelines of the program and constraints of the Lilly Endowment Grant; and
- e) evaluate and monitor the outcomes of *3E* and, with the Project Director, develop regular reports to Lilly Endowment and the Synod Council.

The Bishop and Synod Vice-President will be ex officio members of the Team.

The *Fiscal Wellness Grants Board* will provide oversight and management of the grants awarded by the *Ministerial Excellence Fund*. The Board will be appointed by Synod Council and will have five members: three rostered and two non-rostered. They will review grant applications and determine grant amounts, within the structure and plans of the *3E*. Board members will serve for three years and may be re-appointed to a second term. The initial membership of the Board will include terms of one, two, and three years to create staggered terms so that in the future one or two appointments or reappointments will be made each year.

Finally, the Synod Council will be asked to convene a *Task Force on Systemic Economic Issues* that will be charged with the following tasks:

- a) identify systemic issues shaping the economic challenges faced by rostered leaders;
- b) frame recommendations for needed change in our synodical and churchwide culture and life that could alleviate economic stressors;
- c) work with the needed committees, boards, and structures of the Synod to attempt to effect systemic change where possible; and

- d) work with the synodical Bishop to encourage advocacy for churchwide policy and program modification that could lessen economic stressors on rostered leaders and congregations.

## 8) Expected outcomes and evaluation

The expected outcomes we want to accomplish by the end of the three-year period include these:

WHAT WILL HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED...	...AND THE RESULT
Sixty to ninety rostered leaders who were facing economic challenges will have formed Fiscal Wellness Teams, designed a response to their challenge, and received a grant to address the challenge.	Economic challenges will be tackled; rostered and congregation leaders will be working together and will gain greater confidence in their ability to address further economic challenges.
These same sixty to ninety rostered leaders will have engaged in fiscal counseling and/or one of the education programs supported by <b>3E</b> .	The benefits of these education and counseling programs will raise skill levels for rostered and congregation leaders.
Synod Assemblies and Theological Conferences during 2017-2019 will include fiscal management and wellness components, as well as enhanced stewardship education, as a result of special speakers and programs funded by <b>3E</b> .	Fiscal wellness will become a theme woven into the life and character of the Synod, and a large percentage of rostered and lay members will become aware of the objectives and programs of <b>3E</b> .
Each Conference of the Rocky Mountain Synod will have a trained Fiscal Wellness Coach.	These coaches will help <b>3E</b> program participants share their learning and concerns with other Conference members, and deepen the impact of education through a network of fiscally aware rostered and congregation leaders in each Conference. Conference gatherings will become better incubators of fiscal wellness and expertise.
Sixty or more congregations and rostered leaders will be involved in <i>Stewardship for All Seasons</i> through <b>3E</b> scholarships and the incentivizing structures of the <b>MEF</b> .	There will be a cadre of rostered leaders trained for more effective stewardship; they will act as leaven for encouraging fiscal wellness among their peers.

<p>The rich resources of Portico and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, together with new programs being developed through Resourceful Servants, will be more thoroughly used by rostered leaders and congregations as a result of incentivizing, the development of the web portal, and consistent and deepened education and publicity through Synod Assemblies, Theological Conferences, the Candidacy process, and other <b>3E</b> educational projects.</p>	<p>Rostered leaders trained and sensitized to using resources already available will help alleviate the cycle of anxiety that accompanies economic challenge. Knowing that resources and tools are easily available should help to create a new culture where already existing resources will be applied to future economic challenges.</p>
<p>Persons entranced in Candidacy with the RMS will receive additional support on fiscal management through the programs of Portico and “Financial Counseling for Candidates” (<i>Resourceful Servants</i>) which will be woven into the RMS Candidacy process.</p>	<p>Candidates for rostered ministry and first call rostered leaders will expand their fiscal knowledge and skill sets. They will be better equipped to handle current economic challenges and be better positioned to plan for the future.</p>
<p>Participants in First Call Theological Education will benefit from targeted fiscal management programs offered by Portico.</p>	

Evaluation will happen for all participants who use the resources of **3E**. This will be a part of every event associated with all aspects of the program. The Project Director and **3E** Steering Team are charged with making regular reports to the Bishop, Synod Council, and Lilly Endowment. It is anticipated that the Board will design new surveys similar to those used this past June to measure whether there is a significant shift in the economic wellbeing of the Synod and its leaders.

## 9) Long-term program development

The most significant catalyst for long-range program development of **3E** is the fact that this program’s objectives are woven into the strategic planning that the Synod is currently pursuing. We would anticipate that positive results from the various dimensions of **3E** will create a natural desire to see these resources extended into the future. The Synod needs to develop the capacity for doing a capital fund drive; this has not been done in any concerted way in the past. It is our hope that such capital funding will also extend the life of the **MEF**. Since these programs

for fiscal wellness are being coordinated with and built into strategic planning, it is a conscious goal of **3E** that these themes will become part of the character of the Synod well beyond the three years of the grant.

## 10) Anticipated challenges

The two greatest challenges facing **3E** are linked; they are the same two challenges that shape a great part of the reality for the Rocky Mountain Synod. The *vast geographic territory* embraced by this synod has created a culture where a *sense of isolation* often shapes the Synod's character. This, in turn, leads to a tendency for some rostered leaders and congregations to feel distanced from synodical programs and wary about synodical "top-down" programs and solutions. **Educate, Equip, Enact** has intentionally championed local congregational and Conference solutions to economic challenges. As much as possible, we are leveraging the resources of the Synod and the greater church to create a sense of "we can do this" from the bottom up. In this way we hope to not only alleviate fiscal hardship, but also to build greater trust and a conviction that our Synod tagline is true: we are "Christ's Church, Better Together."