

## **Why Give ELCA Mission Support: Building the Case**

Many congregations ask “Why give mission support?” For congregations that remember their early days and the role of the larger church in providing guidance and financial support, the answer to this question may be very clear. However, for older congregations the reasons may not be as clear. Actually, the reasons go beyond the age of a congregation. Building the case begins with who we are.

### **Our Lutheran Identity**

As Lutherans we understand ourselves to have first received from God, and then to respond by giving a portion to God. This faith practice of giving is based on recognizing God’s grace, accepting freely and appreciating gratefully God’s generosity. As a faith practice, giving is lived out in three ways – in proportion to what we have received, in priority from what was received first, in progressive amounts as one has been blessed. These reflect a core practice that is taught, learned and live out through the ministries of this church.

### **Our Historical Practice**

Individuals are taught, invited and encouraged to practice first fruits giving. Congregations are encouraged to give the first 10% or more of offerings to mission support as a way to make ministries and outreach possible beyond the walls of the congregation. Some congregations have adopted this practice more fervently and give a third or more of their offerings beyond their walls. This practice has inspired more than 200 ELCA congregations to pass on 20% or more of their offerings in mission support. It is this historical practice that has created a model for – it is just what we do!

### **Our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategy**

As the ELCA enters the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two clear priorities have emerged – building capacity for evangelical witness and alleviating poverty by working for justice and peace. The pursuit of these priorities is directly connected to congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission. As we strengthen our partnership, we do together many things that we could not do alone. One significant way this is made possible is through mission support income from individuals, congregations and synods. This income is the lifeblood of the work God does through the ELCA.

### **Our Competency as Stewards**

In bringing forth and supporting faithful, wise and courageous leaders, we engage and shape well-formed stewards. This recognizes the holistic nature of a competent steward – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, financially. These stewards embrace financial health as an expression of faith in this interdependent church. Understanding the perspectives of abundance, grace, gratitude and generosity, faithful stewards express their response through regular offerings, special gifts and planned gifts. These

gifts support local ministries and through mission support fund God's work through the ELCA.

**Our Constitutional Polity**

Financial stewardship within the ELCA recognizes congregations, synods and the churchwide organization as interdependent partners who share responsibility for mission. In this relationship all share responsibility for ministries and services to develop, implement and strengthen the financial support of the whole church. This partnership is reflected in our mutual ministries of community service, education, discipleship and leadership development.