

Thoughts On Re-directing Mission Support: Unintended Consequences:

Several clergy have reported congregational members who have suggested re-directing mission support as one way to protest the actions taken at the churchwide assembly. I acknowledge that these are faithful members of congregations, who love their church very much. I would assume that they are making the suggestion as a way of making their voices heard. This would be one way for a congregation to make a statement, to be heard.

What I also want people to know is that such an action may lead to unintended consequences. I want to share with people of Western North Dakota some of those consequences. First, constitutionally (§15.12) the Western North Dakota Synod is not allowed to withhold mission support from churchwide. This church understands itself and operates as three interdependent expressions.

What are the unintended consequences of redirecting mission support:

At the Synod Level, less mission support would impact:

- the ability for staff to be out visiting congregations. This is one of our priorities – building relationships within the synod. Your mission support helps fund salaries and covers expenses of travel so staff can be present in helping congregations dream about mission and ministry, work on calling pastors, check in on clergy, and much more.
- funding to campus ministry. Over \$80,000 from the Western ND Synod budget goes to campus ministry of North Dakota. These funds pay the salaries of campus pastors at Minot State, UND and NDSU. These ministries are already being hurt by tight budgets, I am not sure how they would survive if funding was decreased.
- funding seminaries. \$35,000 of the Western ND Synod budget goes toward Luther Seminary. We are sending them about half of what is expected of us because of the level of mission support the synod currently receives. Cutting mission support will affect seminary education, the ability to train up new leaders. Remember it also our seminaries that are providing training opportunities for lay ministers.

At the churchwide level:

- the current economic situation has led to a decrease in mission funds. Already this has led to the elimination of 23.5 positions within the ELCA. It has meant that the “Grace Matters” radio program was eliminated. It led to an across the board cut in financial support to new mission starts.
- it could hurt missionaries. It is a blessing that many congregations sponsor a missionary. This is a great gift. However, mission support helps provide the infrastructure that supports the work of missionaries in the field. Without the infrastructure missionaries would be brought home.

-it could hurt Lutheran Disaster Response. One of the reasons that 100% of special offerings for disasters (like a tornado or hurricane) goes directly to the disaster is because the infrastructure that runs LDR is covered through mission support. Salaries, computers, travel expenses are paid for by mission support. If the infrastructure is not funded disaster response will be affected.

-it could affect our evangelism efforts. One of the priorities of the churchwide expression is Evangelical Outreach, developing new congregations and helping to redevelop others. Our synod received \$55,000 in grant funds through this effort. A portion of it funds Bishop Mark's salary. Another portion is being used to fund outreach efforts. These grant funds are helping to under-write the "Dry Bones" event in the synod.

-it could affect seminary education. Not only does churchwide provide grants to our seminaries, they also provide the system of tracking candidates as they go through seminary, are approved for ordination and the process of assigning students to synods.

-it could affect campus ministry. Churchwide provides grants to help with salaries at campus ministry sites just as our synod budget does. Churchwide has already cut 5 campus ministry positions because of the economic downturn of this past year. These were people who lead the reviews of local campus ministry, worked in the process of calling new campus pastors, and did trouble shooting when there were problems at a ministry site.

This is not an exhaustive list. It is a list of ministries that may be affected by a decrease in giving.