



## SOUTH DAKOTA SYNOD, ELCA

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November 24, 2009

To: Partners in Ministry  
From: Bishop Dave  
Re: Planning Resources

Enclosed is a small packet of resources designed to assist you in planning for your annual meeting and to help answer questions that you or members of your congregation may have. The resources are:

1. Information for Annual Meeting Planning
2. Consequences of Withholding or Redirecting Mission Support from the ELCA  
Churchwide Expression and Consequences of Leaving the ELCA
3. Deciding on the Withholding or Redirecting of Mission Support
4. Some Questions and Answers Regarding the Human Sexuality decisions of the ELCA

We hope that you will find these resources helpful in your deliberations and discernment. Thank you for your partnership in ministry!

## Information for Annual Meeting Planning

As congregations prepare for their annual meetings, a number of pastors and lay leaders have asked about some procedural matters. We have checked with the ELCA Churchwide organization and can report this:

First, a resolution to leave the ELCA is not in order at an annual meeting. The ELCA Constitution states: "A resolution indicating desire to terminate its relationship must be adopted at a legally called and conducted special meeting of the congregation by a two-thirds majority of the voting members present." Note that it must be a special meeting, not the annual meeting. [9.62.a.]

Second, a motion to terminate a pastor's call may not be made from the floor at an annual meeting. According to the Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "The call of a congregation, when accepted by a pastor, shall constitute a continuing mutual relationship and commitment, which, except in the case of the death of the pastor, shall be terminated only following consultation with the synodical bishop" and for specific stipulated reasons. [C9.05.f.]

Third, absentee voting or voting by proxy is not permitted at congregational meetings, according to the Model Constitution for Congregations. [C10.05.]

Finally, "open-ended" meetings—for instance, a meeting that is convened on a Saturday and allowed to continue through Sunday-morning services—are prohibited according to Robert's Rules of Order: "A meeting of an assembly is a single official gathering of its members in one room or area to transact business for a length of time during which there is no cessation of proceedings and the members do not separate, unless for a short recess, as defined below." [10th edition, page 79.] Robert's Rules govern meetings except where the constitution specifies otherwise [C10.07.].

We hope you find these clarifications helpful as you plan your annual meeting.

## **Consequences of Withholding or Redirecting Mission Support from the ELCA Churchwide Expression and Consequences of Leaving the ELCA**

When we formed our ELCA, the predecessor churches wanted to craft a denomination whose different parts were strongly linked to one another. In our constitution the congregation, the synod, and the churchwide organization are envisioned as “interdependent” expressions of this church. For twenty years these three expressions have worked together to carry out God’s mission, and over time have become deeply joined in ways both tangible and intangible.

Deeper still, the Holy Spirit has been working within, around, and above us in our efforts to live and declare the gospel. The Holy Spirit breathes life into and blows through this human-crafted institution. The Spirit gathers a church—the ELCA—with word and sacrament, with hands united in mission and service. The Spirit’s work is always a gathering work, and we have been so gathered over these many years that we have become one body. We are one body, even if at times such as now, we are a body in which some parts have become ill at ease with other parts.

Our interdependence means that what affects one expression of the church affects all. What affects a congregation in Mitchell, South Dakota, affects the whole ELCA. Decisions made in Rapid City impact the ministry in Pine Ridge, in Cameroon, in Chicago, in Detroit, and all the way back again to Rapid City. While this interdependent relationship may not be apparent to the average member of an ELCA congregation, a short step back brings into perspective how deeply we are interconnected.

Our deep and interdependent relationship means that the withholding or redirecting of mission support from the synod or from the churchwide organization will have immediate unintended consequences in every other part of our ELCA, including the part that we worship in every Sunday—our home congregation. As Bishop Zellmer has put it, “You can’t hurt the church without hurting yourself.” Or as St. Paul wrote, “The foot can not say to the hand, I have no need of you.” This document is intended to bring into focus some of those unintended consequences that occur when one part of the body attempts to redirect or withhold financial support from another part of the body.

### **Unintended Effects of Redirecting or Withholding Mission Support**

- You risk leading some of your members to stop supporting your congregation because they do not want to cease their financial support for the ELCA or synod.
- You risk encouraging **by example** individual members to stop giving offerings to the congregation when they differ with some action by the congregation.
- You risk hurting **missionaries**. It is a blessing that the South Dakota Synod is a leader in **Global Mission** through Companion Synod relationships and direct support of

- missionaries. However, this direct support is made possible by the administrative support of the Global Missions Unit of the ELCA. Mission support from congregations provides the infrastructure that supports the work of missionaries in the field. Without the infrastructure, missionaries will be brought home.
- You will seriously undermine the effort to prepare future pastors and lay ministers through the eight **seminaries** of the ELCA. Of the South Dakota Synod budget, \$90,000 a year goes toward Luther Seminary. Cutting mission support will affect seminary education and the ability to train up new leaders.
  - You will diminish the capacity of the ELCA to start **new congregations** and/or help renew existing congregations. There are currently 4 congregations in South Dakota that receive direct support from the ELCA for redevelopment or renewal.
  - You will undermine the exciting new **ministries in the South Dakota Synod** such as the two new congregations for African immigrants, the two ministries for American Indian people, the new Latino congregation, the new congregations in Sioux Falls, and those being planned at our mission strategy tables held around the synod. Many of these ministries saw a 7.5% cut due to last year's economic downturn, and will surely see deeper cuts if congregations like yours choose to withhold or redirect funds.
  - You will no longer contribute to a **whole web of ministries and relationships** supported through ELCA/synod "benevolence"—ELCA colleges (e.g. Augustana College), Lutheran campus ministries, administrative support for Lutheran Disaster Response and the ELCA Hunger Appeal, etc.
  - You will threaten the **pastoral care of students**, which is made possible by synod and ELCA funding of Campus Ministry. Over \$160,000 from the South Dakota Synod budget goes to South Dakota campus ministries. We are not sure how they will survive if funding is decreased.

### Unintended Consequences of Leaving the ELCA

We've outlined just a few of the unintended consequences of withholding or redirecting your mission support. Of course, the decision to leave the ELCA altogether would have even more serious unintended consequences, such as:

- You will be disconnected from the worldwide ministries of the ELCA such as Lutheran World Relief, the World Hunger program, Luther Disaster Response, Global Missions carried out on every continent, and advocacy for the poor and oppressed in the US and around the world.
- You will cut yourself off from the leadership development resources of the ELCA including eight seminaries and 28 colleges and universities.
- You will distance yourself from your heritage in the great and historic predecessor bodies of the ELCA.
- You will **sever your local and regional connections** through the ELCA and the South Dakota Synod—conferences, clusters for the synod women's organizations, synod theological conferences, the annual synod assembly, etc.
- You no longer benefit from the capacity **of the South Dakota Synod staff to offer your congregation their partnership** in synodical mission and ministry, support in the call process, assistance in dealing with parish conflicts, encouragement for pastors and lay ministers, background checks for rostered leaders, advice on administrative and

organizational matters, participation in things like the ELCA Group Tax Exemption program, etc.

- You will sever your connection to these vital ministries around the world:
  - Approximately **204 congregations** [under development](#)
  - **49 new starts** under way in 2008, including **33 new congregations** under development
  - **159 existing congregations** intentionally focused on [renewal](#)
  - **260 missionaries** in **50** countries
  - Support of ministry and projects in [over 90 countries](#)
  - **8 seminaries**
  - **187 campus ministries**
  - **1,530** Lutheran early childhood [education centers](#), including birth to age five
  - **267** Lutheran [elementary schools](#), K-8
  - **147 outdoor ministries**
  - **Health and pension benefits** for retired clergy, missionaries, and lay church workers
  - **Long-term community development**
  - [Advocacy](#) with the United Nations, federal and state governments, and corporate development
  - **Partnerships** with [Lutheran World Federation](#), [World Council of Churches](#), and [National Council of the Churches of Christ](#)

As a member of the ELCA, you are part of a vast and interdependent body of Christians who are reaching out across the wide world with the good news of Jesus Christ in word and action. You are an essential and vital part of that vast body. Please consider your response to the recent decisions of the Churchwide Assembly carefully and prayerfully.

## Deciding on the Withholding or Redirecting of Mission Support

**Question:** We are so opposed to the ministry policy changes taken by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly that we feel like withholding our Mission Support (“benevolence”). What should we consider?

**Responses:**

1. First, an anecdote to help you in your discernment.

*Many of us have had the experience of driving down a highway and suddenly hitting a bank of fog—going from “clear sailing” to a situation of very low visibility. How do you respond when you are suddenly driving through a foggy stretch of highway? Chances are you do two things: First, you don’t stop abruptly, because another driver could run into your car from the rear; and second, you don’t keep traveling at the same speed, because you could “rear-end” a driver ahead of you. So your first reaction, wisely, is to slow down—to keep moving, but to reduce your speed.*

When the thought of withholding or redirecting mission support first hits you, imagine yourself entering a bank of fog. Don’t stop. But please slow down. Take a deep breath. Give yourself—and your fellow church members—time to respond thoughtfully and carefully.

2. Second, reflect deeply and discuss intentionally the question: “**Exactly why do we feel like withholding or redirecting our mission support?**” Be brutally honest and jot down all the reasons that come to mind—do a little personal (or congregational) brainstorming. Complete the sentence: “**I/we think it’s time to withhold or redirect our Mission Support giving because \_\_\_\_\_.**” You and other members of your congregation may generate a number of responses as you “fill in the blank.

3. Reflect upon and pray about all of your responses generated in step #2. Which responses sound like quick, *emotion-laden reactions*? Which responses are deeper, more *thoughtful responses*? Then try again to complete this sentence: “**I/we think it’s time to withhold or redirect our Mission Support giving because \_\_\_\_\_.**”

4. Think about and discuss another question: What do you hope to accomplish by withholding or redirecting your Mission Support? How will doing that change things?  
**What would be the intended consequences of taking this action?**

5. Now consider those **unintended consequences** of withholding or redirecting your ELCA/synod Mission Support. (See “Consequences of Withholding or Redirecting Mission Support from the ELCA Churchwide Expression”)

- **What other “unintended consequences” can you think of?**

6. *Reflect on, pray about, and discuss together this question: “Do the intended consequences of withholding or redirecting our Mission Support outweigh the unintended consequences?”*

7. Invite, if you have not yet done so, **all** members of your congregation into a time of discussion, prayer, and reflection on steps 1-6 above. This might happen best in a series of open forum opportunities over the course of several weeks or even months.

8. At all points along the way please consult with your bishop, synod staff, and elected leaders of the synod. Please also seek out accurate information about the ELCA and the South Dakota Synod, making full use of the rich resources available at [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) and [www.southdakotasynd.org](http://www.southdakotasynd.org).

This material was adapted, with permission, from a document prepared by the Southwest Minnesota Synod, ELCA.

## **Some Questions and Answers Regarding the Human Sexuality decisions of the ELCA**

### **What happened at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly?**

Among many other actions (Full Communion with the United Methodist Church; funding of the HIV and AIDS Strategy; Lutheran Malaria Initiative; proposed Social Statement on Justice for Women; etc.), the voting members to the Churchwide Assembly also

Adopted the Social Statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust."

Adopted [resolutions](#), proposed by the Church Council, which make it possible for people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders in the ELCA. The assembly adopted the resolutions in the following order:

Resolution 3: Adopted by a vote of 771-230 as amended: "Resolved, that in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commit itself to bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all."

Resolution 1: Adopted by a vote of 619-402: "Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships."

Resolution 2: Adopted by a vote of 559-451: "Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church."

Resolution 4: Adopted by a vote of 667-307 as amended: This resolution called upon members to respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree; declared the intent to allow structured flexibility in decision-making about candidacy and the call process; eliminated the prohibition of rostered service by members in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships; recognized and committed to respect the conviction of members who believe that the ELCA should not call or roster people in committed same-gender relationships; called for development of accountability guidelines; directed that appropriate amendments to ministry policy documents be drafted and approved by the Church Council; and urged that this church continue to trust congregations, bishops, synods and others responsible for determining who should be called into public ministry.

**Was this a sudden occurrence?**

No. The actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly culminated a process that began in 2001, when, in response to a resolution that emerged from a synod assembly, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly authorized a study on matters related to homosexuality and ministry, which brought a report and recommendations to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, and authorized the development of a social statement on human sexuality. In response, the ELCA Church Council established the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality to implement both actions. That task force worked for the next eight years, conducting numerous hearings and listening posts and producing several draft documents before arriving at the documents and recommendations that Voting Members considered in 2009.

**Who selects the voting members?**

The congregations of the ELCA put forward nominees to the Churchwide Assembly, who are voted on by the respective synod assemblies. In addition, ELCA bishops and churchwide organization officers are voting members. Sixty percent of the voting members are laypeople; forty percent are clergy.

**What if we disagree with the Churchwide Assembly actions?**

As indicated above, Resolution 4 calls upon members to “respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree regarding decisions on the call and rostering of individuals in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, in this church and with churches ecumenically and globally”; and commits to “recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people” in such relationships.”

**Will our congregation be required to call a pastor who is or may someday be in a same-gender relationship?**

No. The final authority on extending a call will continue to reside with the congregation, as has been the case since the creation of the ELCA more than 20 years ago. Nothing the 2009 Churchwide Assembly voted on will change that.

**Will the ELCA now perform gay weddings?**

No. The Social Statement clearly indicates that “marriage” refers to one man and one woman; no rite or blessing was discussed or approved. Congregations that choose to do so may “recognize” same-gender relationships, but as yet that term is undefined.

**I was taught that homosexual behavior is a sin. Has that changed?**

With the passage of “Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” we have not, in fact, stated that homosexuality is not a sin. What we have done is to state that in our ELCA, after years of careful conversation, study and prayer, we have arrived at a place in which there seem to be four faithful positions on this issue, where “faithful” means positions that are defensible by scripture and our Lutheran confessions. Those four positions, none of which is lifted up as the preferred position, range from the traditional understanding that homosexuality is a sin to the understanding that homosexuality is just another expression of God’s creative goodness. What we are in fact now saying is that there are four quite contradictory ways of viewing this issue in our church and that we officially declare all of them to be valid. This means that different congregations will teach different things on this issue, and it means that in the ELCA that’s acceptable. And so our next

step is to find a way to live together in this state of disagreement. This means that we will have congregations whose governing documents prohibit the calling of homosexual pastors as well as congregations that are being served by homosexual pastors. And the key point here is that in the ELCA both kinds of congregations will be considered to be faithful.

**What will happen next?**

Churchwide Assembly actions direct that changes be made to ELCA policy documents, in order that people in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships be allowed to serve as rostered leaders in the ELCA. The churchwide organization, with advice and input from the Conference of Bishops, is working on proposed changes. The proposed changes will then go to the ELCA Church Council for approval at its November meeting. If approved, the changes will go into effect.

**What if our congregation decides to withhold support from the ELCA in protest of the Churchwide Assembly vote?**

To do so would jeopardize the mission and ministry of this church and may well be self-defeating. See the documents “Consequences of Withholding or Redirecting Mission Support from the ELCA Churchwide Expression” and “Deciding on the Withholding or Redirecting of Mission Support.”

**What if our congregation decides to leave the ELCA?**

Naturally, we hope that a measured and compassionate approach will lead a congregation to stay a part of the body of this church. “Unintended Consequences of Leaving the ELCA” discusses some of the issues associated with the decision to leave. Your congregation’s constitution and the ELCA constitution cover the process for leaving. Your congregation will need to consult with the bishop.

**Remember**—God’s work requires many hands. Your hands are vitally important to the mission and ministry of this church, through which we together accomplish so much more than would be possible otherwise. We encourage you to proceed carefully in discerning what the Holy Spirit has in mind for you, for your congregation, and for the entire church.

You are an essential and vital part of our shared mission! Please keep that uppermost in your thoughts and prayers as you reflect on the Human Sexuality decisions of the ELCA.