

## Reflections on Withholding or Redirecting Mission Support

**Question:** We are so opposed to the ministry policy changes taken by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly that we feel like withholding our “benevolence” (mission support) giving. How should we ponder this possibility?

### 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: (1) you don’t stop abruptly, because another driver could run into your car from the rear; and (2) 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 rather than to react instinctively.

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 corporate) brainstorming. Complete the sentence: **“I/we think it’s time to withhold or redirect our “benevolence” giving because \_\_\_\_\_.”** You and other members of your church 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 above. Which responses sound like quick, *emotion-laden reactions*? Which responses are deeper, more *thoughtful responses*? Then try again to complete this sentence: **“We believe it may be time to withhold or redirect our mission support to the ELCA/synod 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 ponder some **possible unintended consequences** of withholding or redirecting your ELCA/synod mission support. Here are some examples of “unintended consequences:”
  - You could lead some members of your congregation who do not want to cease their financial support for the ELCA or synod to stop supporting your congregation.

- You could, by example, encourage individual members who in the future might differ with some action by the congregation that it is appropriate, when disappointed, to stop giving offerings to the congregation.
  - You would cease supporting **missionaries of the ELCA** who share the gospel across the globe.
  - You would no longer help prepare future pastors and lay ministers through the eight **seminaries** of the ELCA.
  - You would diminish the capacity of the ELCA to start **new congregations** and/or help renew existing congregations.
  - You would no longer contribute to **a whole web of ministries and relationships** supported through ELCA/synod “benevolence”—ELCA colleges (e.g. Concordia, Moorhead), Lutheran campus ministries, administrative support for Lutheran Disaster Response and the ELCA Hunger Appeal, etc.
  - You would **threaten some of your local and regional connections** through the ELCA and the Northwestern Minnesota Synod—conferences, clusters for the Synod Women’s Organizations, junior high and senior high youth gatherings, synod theological conferences, the annual synod assembly, etc.
  - You could diminish the capacity of the Northwestern Minnesota 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, 148A background checks for rostered leaders, advice on administrative and organizational matters, participation in things like the ELCA Group Tax Exemption program, etc.
  - *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 “benevolence” outweigh the **unintended** consequences?”*
  7. Invite, if you have not yet done so, **all members of your congregation** into a time of discussing, praying about and reflecting 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. If after following these steps you still believe you need to consider withholding or redirecting your congregation’s ELCA/synod mission support, please study FAQ entitled, “**Designating Mission Support for the Synod Only And/or Designating Offerings for Specific ELCA Ministries.**”
  9. At all points along the way, please consult with the synodical bishop/staff and elected leaders of the synod. Please also seek out accurate information about the ELCA and the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, making full use of the rich resources available at [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) and [www.nwmnsynod.org](http://www.nwmnsynod.org).