



MISSION SHARE 2010

Frequently Asked Questions following the 2009 Churchwide Assembly Regarding Mission Share

We have received questions regarding mission share and appropriate responses to the decisions made by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly regarding human sexuality and rostering of clergy who are engaged in publicly accountable, monogamous same gender relationships.

The questions and answers below are intended to bring clarity to the mission share process, explain the role of mission share in the ELCA and suggest constructive ways in which mission centers and congregations who wish can demonstrate their disappointment with the Churchwide Assembly's decisions.

Q: What percentage of our mission share is used to support the Churchwide Assembly's decisions on human sexuality?

A: No money is being expended on any further study or implementation of the decisions made by the Churchwide Assembly regarding human sexuality.

Q: If I am opposed to the Churchwide Assembly's decisions, can I make a statement by withholding mission share?

A: The short answer is, not effectively.

Some believe that by withholding mission share, they can "send a message" or "punish" Churchwide or the Synod for the decisions made at Churchwide Assembly. It is important to remember, however, that the decisions made at Churchwide Assembly were made by voting members from mission centers and congregations much like your own. The issue was studied and debated because some of our members asked that it be studied and debated. It moved from congregations to synods, and then to a churchwide vote.

Withholding mission share doesn't "punish" Churchwide or the Synod. Instead, it punishes innocent people who are helped by the vital ministries that are carried out by Churchwide and the Nebraska Synod. These are ministries that no one mission center or congregation could ever do on its own.

For example:

- In 2010, *Lutheran World Hunger relief* will receive \$18.7 million from the Churchwide budget, nearly 80 percent of which goes toward direct relief and development. This is truly one of the ELCA's most vital and successful ministries. Reducing mission share will deprive this ministry of the funds it needs to show God's love by reaching hungry people around the globe.



- The 2010 Churchwide budget anticipates *supporting new and renewing mission starts by allocating \$11.2 million* to help develop new mission centers and strengthen existing ones. Reducing mission share will deprive this ministry of the funds it needs to bring God's word to people who might not otherwise hear it, and to ensure that we can continue to do ministry in areas where encouragement and assistance are needed.
- Approximately *\$3 million of the 2010 Churchwide budget is dedicated to ministries aimed at reaching youth and young people* with God's word. Programs such as the Youth Gathering, campus ministry and outdoor ministries are supported through these funds. Reducing mission share will deprive these ministries of the funds they need to grow the faith of our young people.



- On the synod level, *your mission share dollars are used to provide support for Mission Field Nebraska*, including prison ministry, multicultural ministries, and new mission starts. These important ministries are being carried out right here in our backyard and aim to help us live out the mission of spreading God's love to those around us. Mission share dollars support *our continued relationship with our Christian brothers and sisters in Tanzania and Argentina*. These funds also enable the Synod to *provide support and assistance to ensure that our mission centers and congregations are healthy and equipped to carry out effective ministry*.

While the notion of withholding and/or reducing mission share may seem on the surface to be an effective tool in protesting the Churchwide Assembly decisions, it in fact hurts our ability to be the church and carry out God's mission, a consequence that no one in good conscience could support.

Q: Is there a way in which we can designate our mission share only for local and Synod use? In other words, can we withhold our mission share dollars only from Churchwide as a way to express our disappointment with the Churchwide Assembly's decisions?

A: There is no appropriate mechanism in place to allow for such a change in funding distribution.

This is true not only for policy and logistical reasons, but also because it simply is not an appropriate response for a church that is one body in Christ.

We walk together on this journey of faith. We are a church that disagrees on this issue, just as we have on other issues in the past. But those disagreements do not and should not overshadow the fact that we are connected to Christ through our baptism, and connected to each other because we are connected to Christ.

Together, we are one body in Christ.

Q: What about the portion of mission share dollars that flow to seminaries? How does that funding relate to the new policies and is there a way to withhold or reduce the level of those funds?

A: Some have suggested that reducing funding to seminaries would be a way in which mission centers and synods could actively oppose the policies adopted by the Churchwide Assembly. In reality, only 6.1 percent of mission share dollars are used to directly support our seminaries, and the portion of those funds that could be used to help support any one individual's theological preparation is indeterminable.

The problem with reducing mission share based on funding to seminaries is that it would not effectively target any program or ministry that directly implements the new rostering policies. Rather, such an action would simply reduce the amount of funding available for all ministries, including world hunger relief, new congregations starts, youth ministry, and our vital missions and ministries being carried out right here in Nebraska.



Q: We have families threatening to leave our mission center/congregation in protest of the Churchwide Assembly decision. How do we address this problem?

A: A sad reality is that some individuals will not be able to see how they can remain part of a church that has enacted a policy with which they disagree. We would hope that a passion for Christ and thirst to do God's work among others would be the main focus. But some simply will not be able to overcome their disappointment following the Churchwide Assembly's decisions. Their decision must be respected and we must care for them.

There will be those who, in their grief over the Assembly decision and their own decision to leave, will disrupt the ministry work being done at the mission center/congregation on their way out. They may go so far as to impose their view on everyone at the mission center under the assumption that everyone will want to leave the ELCA. While it is important to understand the grief that is driving their actions and behaviors, it is equally important to prevent such behaviors from damaging the mission center/congregation and its ability to effectively minister to others. In such situations, bold leadership will be needed to make it known that regardless of how one feels about the Churchwide Assembly's decisions, there are those who choose to continue their relationship with the ELCA and must be allowed to do so.

There are so many disciples in our local mission centers and congregations who are doing God's work in their communities and the world and simply disagree with each other regarding the human sexuality issue. What needs to be clearly understood is that the ELCA and the Nebraska Synod stand ready to assist our mission centers and congregations through this difficult time, and that no one need fear losing their ability to be the church.

Q: How can I effectively protest the decisions made by the Churchwide Assembly?

A: This has been a difficult issue for the church to work through. There are well-meaning people with Biblical understanding on all sides of this issue. Even though the Churchwide Assembly voted to chart a course for how we will deal with issues of human sexuality going forward, it is important to recognize the magnitude of the changes contained in the new policies, the difficulty those changes may cause for some and the need to care for and embrace all in our church who have struggled with this issue, regardless of their personal conviction.

If your mission center/congregation would like to respond in some manner to the decisions made by the Churchwide Assembly, here are three suggestions that we believe would be productive options.



1. The policies adopted by the Churchwide Assembly allow local mission centers/congregations to call whomever they believe best serve the needs of their local ministry. Mission centers and congregations who disagree with this option can *adopt a continuing resolution and include it as part of their Bylaws stating their intention to adhere to the 1990 "Visions and Expectations Statement."* That statement served as policy of the ELCA prior to this summer's Churchwide Assembly decisions and required abstinence of those in the clergy who, in their understanding, identify themselves as homosexual. Adopting such a resolution is legal, both within the church body and in society at large. If such a formal action is taken by a mission center or congregation, it will be honored in the call process.
2. Mission centers and congregations who do not agree with the Churchwide Assembly's decisions may choose to *formally register their protest with the ELCA Church Council.* The council is the ELCA's chief policymaking body between Churchwide Assemblies and would be the most appropriate body to direct communications expressing disappointment with the Assembly's decision. The Nebraska Synod asks that you provide a copy of this formal correspondence with them as well.
3. Mission centers and congregations, especially those who have not previously discussed the human sexuality issue among themselves, should *consider holding heartfelt and intentional discussions among their members on the policies and what they really mean for the church.* Specific questions that should be considered during the course of discussion are: (a) What specific impact, if any, does the recent Churchwide Assembly decisions have for our local and shared ministries? (b) What does it mean for us to be the church?

Q: Who do we contact if we have more questions?

A: Your participation in mission share is a mark of our partnership in the ministry together, and we want that partnership to continue, grow and flourish for the sake of the world. Please feel free to contact the Nebraska Synod office with any questions you may have regarding mission share.



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