



# YOUR MISSION SUPPORT GIFTS AT WORK

MARCH 2023 Mission Support Memo

## STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

### We Matter to the Whole Church

A story from our Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod

*As you read this story, what is inspiring?*

*How do you lift up the gifts of lay leaders?*

Being a member of a congregation council is significant in the life of a disciple. Serving as a leader in a congregation is rewarding, terrifying, awe-inspiring and messy. You are among friends, family and your community of believers, and are chosen to lead in your congregation. It's just a few times a month, but as Barbara Nugent, a synod vice president, shares, "Then life happens, and you find out the reporting required. Situations occur; personalities clash; decisions need to be made. Who do you go to for direction?"

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod provided that direction in February when it offered training to 70 congregational lay leaders that strengthened each person's skills and faith. From evangelism to the ELCA constitution and bylaws, they gathered to meet the passions and needs, offering workshops with special breakouts for presidents, vice presidents, secretaries and treasurers that covered such topics as worship and music, communications, advocacy, stewardship and social justice/anti-racism. The day started with Bishop Kurt Kusserow encouraging these valued leaders to keep the focus on our purpose: "Your leadership in the life of your congregation ought always to bear in mind that your congregation finds its fulfillment in the universal church, and that the universal church exists in and through congregations such as yours. I think this means addressing local questions and concerns in the life of your congregation as if they matter to the whole church (because they do)."

Everyone was hungry to gather ideas, consider future steps but also have an opportunity to connect, be empowered, feel valued and cared for and remember the excitement of being church. Rev. Melissa Stoller, director for evangelical mission, said it this way: "The day was a very visible yet not necessarily quantifiable force that we are church together. Wandering but not alone. Feeling worry, power, uncertainty, and joy as one." Central to this gathering was living into the mission of this synod "to serve, connect and equip congregations of the SWPA synod to tell the story of Jesus." Everyone knew that the synod was there for the congregations with staff,

volunteers and greater church support, not only this day but in the days to come, and synod staff are supported through the generous mission support of congregations allowing them to be there for our leaders. One leading Scripture for the day reminded each leader of their value: “Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word” (Acts 6:3-4). Hoping each of our synods are seeking ways that work for them to encourage and empower congregational leaders. Knowing that we are church together, church that supports each other across the whole church prayerfully, financially, emotionally and with a hope for renewal.

## ENGAGE WITH US

Join us Tuesday, April 18, for a **MISSION SUPPORT STORYTELLING** gathering, with sessions on Zoom at 12:30 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. Central time. We are offering the session twice, so choose the time that works best for you.

Come ready to engage in our Mission Support stories and share your own as we consider how our stories allow each person to see themselves engaged in mission!

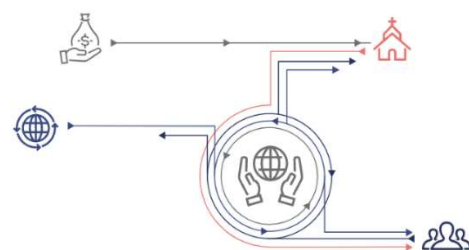
Join Zoom meeting: [elcafoundation.zoom.us/j/9949451297](https://elcafoundation.zoom.us/j/9949451297)

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## GRATEFUL

As we review and give thanks for the Mission Support given in 2022, we acknowledge that our church continues to adapt after the height of the pandemic. We have heard from you that member engagement looks different, families are just beginning to trickle back, some folks left, and though new members and new church models are emerging, often financial giving and stewardship takes some time to catch up to the ways you are engaging people spiritually. We are truly grateful for the \$38,727,566 shared in Mission Support by our synods, who received it from congregations, who received it from generous members through their offerings. During a year with a variety of financial challenges, it is amazing that 17 synods actually gave an increase from 2021. We are church together in the glorious times, in the tough times and in between. This Mission Support makes us all part of the ministry we do in our congregations and communities, across every synod and around the world. We are grateful for your steadfast generosity.

Blessings from your Churchwide Mission Support Team,  
Victoria Flood, Senior Director for Mission Support  
Nick Kiger, Director for Mission Support  
Karen Kretschmann, Coordinator for Storytelling Engagement

