

Think Tank Mission Support Proposal

Prepared for: Bishops Mission Support Think Tank (MSTT) and participating synods

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Background

In November 2013, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton asked nine synodical bishops to form a think tank on the subject of mission support. In her invitation she said, “the current method of mission funding is not as effective as it could be. I think it is our (bishops) turn to take a crack at this.” I was one of the nine bishops representing a broad spectrum of the life of the ELCA. Our initial meetings were mostly information gathering sessions which yielded two specific points of information: First, mission support from congregations has been in a 25 years decline since the formation of the ELCA, as well as in the predecessor bodies. (Congregational shared giving was 17.7% in 1988, and is less than 5% in 2013) This has occurred during a time when giving to congregations has actually increased, as the costs of operating a local parish have increased during that same 25 year period. Second, The resulting decrease in mission funding to synods and churchwide has reduced the effectiveness of the wider mission of this church. In New England, this has meant the elimination or reduction of staff positions, ministry funding and program support in such areas as evangelism and outreach, youth ministry, campus ministry and congregational support services. Third, there have been numerous attempts on the part of the ELCA to address this decline in mission support, but each group has not been successful due to various factors that include: widespread anxiety about money in our church and society, considering changes to a system we are all part of, the challenge of building consensus among key stakeholders, a history among Lutherans to be overly cautious in our articulation of principles of stewardship and generosity. Fourth, the realization that instituting wholesale system wide change would not be embraced by this church at this time.

“Rather than producing a grand, overarching plan or program, the Think Tank believes now is the time to venture out with some imaginative experiments spearheaded by synods that are ready, willing and able to take risks on behalf of the whole church for the sake of the mission of the gospel.” (MSTT Report to the ELCA Conference of Bishops and Church Council October 2013)

What follows is one such proposal that is being pursued by five synods, including New England, who have agreed to form a learning community as we enter into these experiments.

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Objective

The main objective of this proposal is to implement a three-year test of an alternative approach to the funding of church wide and synod mission support for the purpose of increasing the funding and effectiveness of evangelical outreach.

Goals

This one to three year pilot seeks to test two hypotheses:

1. That the allocation of mission support dollars for new starts and renewals would be more easily and effectively managed and administered through local oversight of synods.
2. That moving the funding of new mission starts and renewals to the synod's responsibility, would have an overall net gain in mission support from both congregations and individuals.

Proposal in brief

In the 2016 fiscal year, several synods, including the New England Synod, would enter into an experiment for the purposes of learning alternative approaches to both mission support funding and mission development of new starts. This experiment asks select synods to reduce their Mission Support to the churchwide expression in the amount equivalent to the portion currently allocated for DEM's, grants new starts and renewals, etc. These selected synods would participate in an evaluation process to test the two hypotheses listed above.

FULL PROPOSAL

FINDINGS

1. Mission Support from congregations to synods and from synods to churchwide has experienced a 25-year history of decline.
2. To address this decline, over the years multiple task forces and study groups have been enlisted to make proposals. No significant change has been made in the funding of the ELCA. In 2013, Bishop Eaton established a "Think Tank" to explore ways to address mission support.
3. The ELCA's Evangelism and Outreach strategy is in need of review, and thus calls for testing alternative approaches as sited in a Nov. 2013 Report to the ELCA Church Council:

There is no evidence we are aware of which shows other denominations or religious groups to be consistently more successful than the ELCA in starting new ministries. At the same time, the failure rate is substantial and of concern. The rate demands a new and wider discussion about the future direction of evangelism and outreach in this church. This church cannot rely on new ministries as its primary evangelism strategy. This is true despite the fact there is ample opportunity for new ministry development and, as noted

earlier in this review, ELCA Lutherans have a theological point of view with considerable potential in the wider culture. (Exhibit G Nov 2013 Report to Church Council Page 19)

4. As the 2011 LIFT report indicated, there is a need to address both the missional needs of this church as well as the mission support needs of this church, we note among its recommendations:
The churchwide organization, synods and congregations prioritize their spending to emphasize congregational outreach, leadership development, global mission and new communication strategies, while discerning how to constructively withdraw from other tasks. (LIFT REPORT Section V, Page 29, #5)

CONCLUSIONS

There is a consistent pattern in the ELCA when addressing the declining funding of mission. The pattern has been to identify problems, request research, conduct study groups that propose changes, receive reports with appreciation, make subtle changes mostly in terms of language, but not act. This pattern is well established, and most likely will continue. Offering a bold new direction in the areas of congregational development and mission support will most likely be met with resistance. This is especially true, if the new direction requires a system-wide change, such as action by the church council or the churchwide assembly. There are many reasons for this resistance to change on a system-wide basis. As an alternative, a small scale pilot project designed to test new approaches may reveal learnings that the wider system would be more willing to explore.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In May 2014 the Mission Support Think Tank (MSTT) received a paper titled “Three Models of Mission Funding”, which described the history of mission support in the ELCA and the challenges faced by various groups in addressing the long-term trend of decline. This proposal seeks to build on one of those models, and conduct a pilot test of the impact of this model in several synods.

The proposal before you now invites several synods to experiment with a new model of mission support funding by having those synods retain the funds designated for the DEM compensation package, the funding for new and renewal projects within the synod. This pilot project would enlist several synods for a period of one to three years. In effect, pilot synods would reduce their funding to the churchwide expression in the amount equal to what they receive in grant funding.

What synods should participate in the pilot project?

The synods volunteering to participate should be prepared to take full responsibility for the funding, leadership, design and implementation of the pilot according to the following:

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- Prepare a modified synod budget for FY 2016 for presentation to their Spring 2015 Synod Assembly.
 - Participating Synods will be able to develop plans and be ready to implement on Feb 1, 2016.
 - They should develop measurable tests to determine effectiveness
 - Pilot synods should provide quarterly reports of successes, failures, and learnings to the Mission Support Think Tank.
 - These synods should make this the sole focus of their energies for the time period of 2015 and 2016. If a synod has other emphases planned, they should not participate, as this project will require focus and attention for implementation

Synods volunteering to participate

The following synods have expressed an interest in participating in this experiment. They are Lower Susquehanna, Metropolitan Washington DC, New England, Nebraska and Texas Gulf Coast Synod.

How much funding is each synod taking responsibility? (The figures below are based on end of year 2013 - actual figures would be adjusted prior to implementation of the experiment for FY 2016) These figures represent the 2013 total of funding new start grants, renewal grants and compensation package & expenses for the Director of Evangelical Mission)

	<u>Total</u>
New England	\$349,553
Nebraska	\$199,391
Texas-Louisiana	\$180,671
Lower Susquehanna	\$161,143
Metro Washington DC	\$294,807

What responsibilities will these synods assume?

The following are key areas for each synod, additional responsibilities may be added to particular synods:
Salary & Benefit Package for the DEM as well as Grant Funding for New and Renewing Congregations

In addition, each synod will develop a plan, in consultation with one another, Churchwide staff and their own synod leadership to implement changes and form criteria for measuring the effectiveness as we test the two hypotheses. These may include plans for seeking local financial support for the New or Renewing ministries, designs for increasing the missional effectiveness of such ministries, benchmarks for evaluating the impact of the pilot.

What would not change under this experiment?

The participating synods would continue to be engaged as full partners in mission and ministry with the Churchwide expression of the ELCA. Because this proposal does not reduce actual giving to the ELCA, there is no reduction in financial support to the ELCA. Therefore, the participating synods would continue to be eligible to apply for new start and renewal grants, engage in the consultative partnership of the CSM department, participate in churchwide expression mission tables, and be eligible for the training services for developers. These and numerous other ways in which the partnership between congregations, synods and churchwide would continue. In addition, current developers would continue to be full partners with their colleagues across the ELCA, especially those developers who have ethnic-specific or context specific ministries.

CLOSING SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This proposal acknowledges the deep challenges experienced across the ELCA in terms of Mission Support as well as the need to both develop new ministries and renew others. Due to the ongoing struggles in this transitional time of all forms of structured Christianity in North America, it is unlikely that any efforts to continuing a 'more of the same approach' will yield any positive results. Experimenting with new ways forward does not provide easy or quick answers, but this proposal submits that a thoughtful pilot program for one to three years is worthy of consideration. There are legitimate questions, which need to be explored. Most likely all of these questions will not be answered or fully explored without testing the hypotheses. We will not be able to plan for all the contingencies, problems and setbacks. Nor will we be able to anticipate all possible benefits/consequences, without moving into a pilot experiment.

This pilot would afford us the opportunity to:

- experiment with a localized approach to mission funding and mission development
- learn whether additional financial support can be raised for mission development when leadership and management are localized to synods.
- discuss unanticipated benefits/consequences of an alternative approach to funding

Next Steps: Implementation Plans for the New England Synod

Spring 2015 - The selected pilot synods would vote on their 2016 budgets. Included in their budget would be a line under the expenditure column for ELCA Church wide support. That line would indicate the amount of funds the synod would retain in order to activate the pilot project. The amount would include the DEM's compensation package, the grants scheduled for receipt during the year and an administrative operations amount. Example (Note this is an example based on 2013 figures, dollar amounts will be adjusted to reflect 2016 estimates):

ELCA church wide support 51%	\$980,000
Synod Pilot Experiment	(349,000)
Total amount to ELCA	\$651,000

The actual amount of the "Synod Pilot Experiment" would be negotiated based on a formula that included the previously scheduled grants for new and renewal ministry. The formula would include the DEM's package as currently awarded with any 2016 increases planned in the CSM budget. In addition, because synod's will be absorbing some of the administrative tasks in this experiment an amount for those costs would also be included. That amount would also be negotiated, but an estimate of \$7,000 can be used at this time. Example (Note this is an example based on 2013 figures, dollar amounts will be adjusted to reflect 2016 estimates):

DEM package, travel, benefits, etc	\$137,353
New & Renewal Grants	\$212,200
Administrative Operations	\$ 7,000
Total	\$356,553

Summer & Fall 2015 - Planning begins in the following areas. The intent is to use the summer and fall of 2015 to prepare for the change over to the new model beginning at Fiscal year start up February 1, 2016

Mission Support Funding Hypothesis

This hypothesis seeks to test the idea that moving the funding of new mission starts and renewals to the synod's responsibility, would have an overall net gain in mission support from both congregations and individuals. In order to appropriately test the hypothesis, several adjustments and new initiatives need to be put into place.

Evaluative criteria and measurable outcomes - In partnership with the Office of Research and Evaluation, the participating synods will develop a set of criteria for measurement. What are specific proposals that will be implemented in order to test this one? What are specific measurable outcomes that could be analyzed to determine the effectiveness?

In New England, preliminary planning for this area may include the development or further development of these specific tools.

Mission Partners - Planning and development of a new version of the Mission Partners, where congregations adopt a mission partner in the form of one of the new or renewing starts. Example: Faith Lutheran Church becomes a mission partner with a new Latino congregation. They agree to a series of mutual accountability, draft a covenant that includes prayers, occasional pulpit exchange, shared services. Faith agrees to provide financial support to the ministry through either a designated dollar amount in its budget or a series of individual supporters from the congregation or both. Another example: A conference or a group of congregations and individuals choose to support a new start ministry by providing similar support as described above.

Bishop's Crazy Stewardship Consults - Bishop Hazelwood has developed a one night primer on the best practices of cultivating generosity and thanksgiving in congregations. This presentation to church council's is based on the book Ask, Thank, Tell by Charles Lane. The 103 minute session drafts a customized year round plan for cultivating generosity in a congregation. As of the writing of this report, 17 congregations have expressed interest in this consultation. This resource could be expanded over the period of this pilot.

Macedonia Team - This team is currently training lay and clergy leaders to articulate a focus on biblical generosity. They are also engaged in generating resources to help all of us gain a broader understanding of generosity and thanksgiving. Among the resources the team is producing include worksheets for calculating a congregations giving potential, videos that include reflections of generosity as well as speakers who are able to lead Consecration Sunday events.

NES Mission Development Fund - This fund was established in the early 2000's as a vehicle to support the financial investment in new congregational starts and mission. The bulk of the funds have been raised through the sale of church properties as well as individual contributions. The fund balance currently stands at 1.6 million dollars, and produces approximately \$160,000 per year for the funding of new missions. In light of several factors, including the longer time required to move a new start to self-sustaining status, the desire on the part of this synod to continuing the long history of being an immigrant church and start churches in contexts where new immigrants are growing, the increased operational costs of new ministries, and the fact that we are currently using some of the principle to fund new missions - we need to grow this fund to 3.2 million, so that it can annually produce funding to support our plans for new starts.

New Church Mission Development Hypothesis

The second hypothesis to be tested reads as follows: That the allocation of mission support dollars for new starts and renewals would be more effective if it was under the oversight of synods.

Evaluative criteria and measurable outcomes Efficiency, ownership, timeliness, knowledge of on the ground ministries, etc. are all better done in the domain of synod. There will be a need to set up the strategies, goals, and measurements to test this hypothesis. Can we streamline the red tape and prove that synods are more efficient? Can we provide funding in a timely manner while excitement and momentum are strong, – can the shortened time be measured? If area congregations become engaged in local mission strategies, can increased involvement and additional dollars be measured as compared with the current system/process? What strategies and tools that are particularly unique to the New England context need to be employed.

Mission Tables - Mission Tables serve as the primary steering team for the new starts and renewal projects of the synod. These tables will review their expectations during the summer and fall, and evaluate what additional components of the tables responsibility. In cases where additional responsibilities are defined, the tables will consider added persons to provide such support. Mission Tables should reflect the goals of broad lay participation, as well as an inclusive dimension of persons of color.

Ecumenical Learning Communities - Church planting and renewals are being practiced on multiple levels in all denominational structures. While engaging with our current full communion partners (Episcopal, Methodist & UCC), what learnings might we gain from other traditions? Especially those with a stronger track record in the area of turnarounds and church planting? There may be opportunities for us to engage in various forms of evangelical outreach, while retaining our Lutheran substance.

Intentional Multicultural contextualization - We have already begun to move in the direction of starting new ministries in multicultural communities, particularly in the Latino community. Our Latino Task Force has begun intentional work in this area, and this is already resulting in new church starts, as well as a Spanish language School of Lay Ministry. What additional learnings need to take place in this area. There are different gifts in the non euro-centric community, different approaches to worship, different leadership styles from our historic northern european expression of Lutheranism. An intentional focus on this area of mission development has already begun, and requires further development.

Forward Leadership Community - The Forward Leadership Community began as a 2013 experiment in assisting congregations in the renewal of their ministries. The program continues in 2014 & 15, with additional learnings and adjustments from the first year. This emphasis on renewing congregations is a tool for assisting congregations in the development of effective outreach.

Administrative Functions

In order to implement this proposal, the New England Synod will have to plan for several administrative changes. These would include:

Financial Distribution System - The New England Synod currently distributes funds from the Mission Development Fund for renewals and new starts via the internal accounting system at the New England Synod office. The ELCA church wide sends supporting dollars to the local fiscal agent operating the new mission starts. (Each new start has a fiscal agent which manages funds and compensation while the new start is forming its legal structure) Under this proposal, additional funds normally sent to the ELCA and then sent from the ELCA to the fiscal agents in New England, would now be distributed direct from the Operating Fund of the Synod. Staff resources would need to be dedicated to this change in the form of time and attention to establishing a system for distribution. In some cases, particularly where an international developer is forming a new ministry among the new immigrant community, compliance with federal laws may dictate the advantages of compensation remaining with churchwide.

Synod Council Roles and Responsibilities - Additional responsibility would be placed on the synod council for oversight of this proposal. Due to this increased responsibility, it is recommended that the synod council use this as a time to enhance the role of the Synod Mission Table. The further development of the mission table would include: a) an increased evaluative role for the Mission Table b) an increased role in the planning of new starts c) a movement toward responsibility and oversight d) an emphasis on a regional approach to the mission table. While many of these factors have been in place, this proposal calls for an intentional time of further development of these factors, especially letter d. The Synod council would remain in its governing capacity, it would shift its management activities to the mission table.

Bishop and staff - This proposal will increase the supervisory role of the synod bishop. DEM supervision which has been shared with church wide will become the sole responsibility of the synod bishop. The Call to the DEM is currently issued from Chicago, however under this proposal the call would now be issued from the New England Synod.