

Benevolence and Mission Support



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

What do “benevolence” and Mission Support mean?

A reflection by Virgil Gibson, an ELCA member from Gettysburg, Pa.

I've been thinking about this lately, and it caused me to look back at my orientation and education as an adult convert to Christianity and Lutheranism. I had an intuitive sense that someone paid to get that Navy chaplain in that place to meet me at the right time. I knew that all the really remarkable work that went on in Jesus' name in the world required money to make it happen, but nobody seemed interested in telling me about it. When I first experienced a stewardship campaign, most of the talk was about the congregation's needs, so I still didn't make a full connection that we had partners “out there” in the world. I wondered about the budget line that said “District Fair Share,” which later became “Benevolence Apportionment,” but it didn't ring any bell for me.

So let's look at what Webster says:

Webster's Dictionary: benevolence

1. benevolence (noun): the disposition to do good; good will; charitableness; love of mankind, accompanied with a desire to promote their happiness
2. benevolence (noun): an act of kindness; a good deed done; charity given
3. benevolence (noun): a species of compulsory contribution or tax, which has sometimes been exacted by arbitrary kings of England and falsely represented as a gratuity

So that's it! Compulsory contribution – if you want to play in the game, you have to bring some of the chips! Didn't have much appeal did it? If that's how we speak of the wonderful opportunity to participate in Jesus' mission in the world, I'm afraid it will leave many folks flat. So what's in a name you may ask? I'd say it is everything.

So, let's hear how the ELCA describes it:

Mission Support frequently asked questions

Q: What is Mission Support? I've heard this term used, but I'm not sure what it means.

A: As members of the ELCA, we do mission together through our financial giving. We do God's work in ways that no individual, congregation or synod can do alone. Mission Support is the portion of your weekly financial offering that your congregation shares with your synod and the churchwide organization, the other two expressions of this church.

"Mission" is a broad term used to describe all the ministries of this church, not just those involving ELCA missionaries who work with our Lutheran partners around the world. "Support" is the portion of members' offerings that makes all ELCA ministries possible, here at home and abroad.

Mission Support is the way that Lutherans experience sharing Jesus' message of love around the world; it is the lifeblood of the work that God does through the ELCA, providing almost 80 percent of budgeted support for our ministries.

Now that sounds more like it!

Maybe we need to be telling our friends how they can be part of Jesus' undying message to the world. From my viewpoint, it is part of the great, good news that Jesus has come into the world and that it needs to be boldly proclaimed at every congregational budget meeting, every new-member class, and every confirmation class. This is how we are making known the marvelous news that God is among us.