

EFFECTIVE MISSION ENDOWMENT MINISTRY

By: Chuck Thomas, NGLS Vice President

According to the ELCA Guide for Congregations “How to Create a Mission Endowment Fund”, [ELCA MEF Guidance](#), the purpose of a mission endowment fund (MEF) is to fund mission work at home and around the world, above and beyond what is funded by regular offerings. Typically viewed as a “perpetual” fund, a MEF is designed to sustain ongoing and future ministry efforts for generations to come.

Is your congregation considering a MEF and are you looking for assistance or need an example to follow? While the ELCA MEF Guidance document contains useful information, you may also find it helpful to model your MEF from one of the congregations within the Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS) that have well-established MEFs. A well-managed MEF provides a way for people to make planned gifts to your congregation that continue to fund ministry in your local area and throughout the world.

When my congregation, First Lutheran in Gladstone, decided to create a MEF in the mid-1990s, a task force was formed to explore the options and set the necessary guidelines. First Lutheran’s MEF was initiated at the January 1998 annual congregation meeting with a comprehensive Continuing Resolution. The MEF started with \$42,700. This seed money came from 50% of the proceeds from the sale of the parsonage. The MEF was also fortunate to receive within the first year an estate gift that tripled its initial value. With bequests, small donations, and investment gains, First Lutheran’s MEF has grown since its inception from \$42,700 to \$521,000.

Mission Endowment Funds that encourage prospective donors will have good governance documents. Governance documents should be in your congregation’s constitution either as bylaws or continuing resolutions, and should at a minimum include:

- The process for accepting gifts and donor acknowledgement.
- How the MEF is maintained and by whom and how they are chosen.
- The operation and purpose of the MEF.
- The investment strategy.
- How investments are managed and reviewed.
- Distribution decisions; how much, at what frequency, and the approval process.
- Oversight: by a board, the council, or the treasurer.
- An audit process.

First Lutheran’s Continuing Resolution addresses these points and includes language specific to the congregation’s wishes and needs. Each year, First Lutheran distributes 6% of the fund’s October 31 value. Grant requests must be received by September 30 each year and must be submitted by a congregation member. Over the years, First Lutheran’s MEF has provided grants to 84 worthy recipients, including annual undesignated grants to both Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp (FLLC) and the NGLS, as well as designated grants to specific ELCA, NGLS, and FLLC funding needs, campus

ministries, Lutheran college scholarships, a large variety of local and regional social welfare endeavors, food pantries, Christian Radio support, and support of specific ministries in Tanzania. Through the foresight of establishing a MEF, First Lutheran has been blessed to provide over \$499,000 in the last 26 years to ministries and social needs outside the church building.

If your congregation is interested in starting a Mission Endowment Fund, learning more about First Lutheran's experience, or if you'd like a copy of the governance documents, please contact me at nglsynodvp@nglsynod.org.