



# Supporting the work of the wider Church

I am writing today at the request of the Resource Development Committee of the Eastern Synod. The mandate of the Committee is to encourage support for the mission and ministry of the wider church particularly as it relates to congregational and individual giving to benevolence.

Benevolence offerings for 2002 declined by 3.8% (approximately \$66,000) over the total benevolence offerings remitted by congregations in 2001. This, combined with a shortfall in investment income, and in spite of under-spending in many of our administrative budget lines, meant that the Eastern Synod ended the 2002 fiscal year with a deficit of \$80,000. As of the end of March 2003, this trend has continued and benevolence offerings are tracking at 8% less than what was received to the same point in 2002.

Fortunately, the synod's operating reserve is such that we are able to cover a one-time deficit of this size. Should we, however, be faced with a similar situation in fiscal year 2003, the synod would have no choice but to enact drastic cost-cutting measures that would result in a significant reduction to our present ministry program both synodically and nationally.

That program includes a great deal of important and significant work that can only be done by pooling our resources together—support of new mission developments; the youth ministry program; church camps and campus ministries; the work of missionary personnel serving in other countries; ecumenical programs; social ministry and advocacy efforts as well as the provision of financial and program support for congregational and conference based ministries; extended health benefits for retired clergy and support for the work of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary.

Through this communication the Resource Development Committee is asking the congregations and members of synod to review their particular situation with regard to benevolence offerings.

Specifically we ask that you:

- √ make a significant benevolence commitment if you have not made one;
- √ implement strategies aimed at ensuring that the commitment is met;
- √ review and evaluate the ways in which the work of the wider church is promoted within your congregation; and
- √ review and evaluate the per capita levels of benevolence offerings remitted by your congregation over the last three years with a view to increasing those offerings.

In 2002, the per capita benevolence offering of almost half of our synod's 206 congregations was less than \$25 per confirmed member. In 35 of our congregations that amount was less than \$10. Conversely, some of our congregations were able to provide over \$100 per confirmed member!

We fully understand that there are all manner of circumstances that have, and will, impact each individual situation. At the same time, we would be less than faithful if we did not challenge one another to do the very best we can to support the

many ministry opportunities that God is calling us to embrace at this time, through the work of the wider church. Collectively, we can and need to do much better than we are!

Thank you for taking the time to prayerfully and carefully consider these words of concern. We are a people who have been richly and abundantly blessed and I have every confidence that we will meet—and exceed—the challenges of this present moment. Let's all do our part!



+ Michael

Bishop Michael Pryse