



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

MINISTERIAL EXCELLENCE FUND



Photos taken at 2016 Fall Theological Conference



Equipping and supporting our pastors to
lead flourishing and thriving congregations

What is the Ministerial Excellence Fund?

This new fund is already making a difference in the lives of our pastors and the congregations they serve. The majority of the fund is designated to help reduce the educational debt of those who are called to the ordained ministry. The fund will also assist with pastors in our synod who face medical emergencies and will encourage pension equity as pastors save for their retirement.

Why is this needed?

When someone is called to serve as a pastor, the Lutheran church requires them to obtain both a college and Master of Divinity degree. For most this involves eight years of school. Through the decades, the cost of seminary shifted from being a denomination's responsibility to being a student's responsibility. Even with great financial care and restraint, most students at seminary accumulate debt. Of the 2015 ELCA seminary graduates, two-thirds have an average level of education debt of \$49,497, giving them a monthly payment of \$570.¹ One-third of the students through scholarships, family resources and other means have no debt. The MEF is one way the church is returning to share in the cost of education we ask of our leaders.



How can I help pastors?

Congregations and individuals may give gifts or make pledges to the MEF which will be matched dollar for dollar by the grant our synod has received from the Lilly Endowment Foundation. The Lilly grant will match \$250,000, giving the fund \$500,000! The total money raised will be given out over three years, most of it going to pastors who apply for educational cost reimbursement. Imagine the impact! Our first distribution from this fund happened in January 2017. Other distributions for pastors' pension equity and medical emergencies will also take place later in 2017.

What happens after the initial three years?

The MEF will continue to be in place for us to continue to equip and support future pastors who come to serve in our synod.

What difference could this make for congregations?

We are in the early start-up years of what will be an ongoing fund to attract pastors to our synod by easing some of the financial strain in their lives and helping them to become equipped leaders for their parish. With financial strain being a major point of anxiety in people's lives, we believe that reducing that strain will make it possible for pastors to be more able to serve in rural areas and stay there longer. A healthier pastor will also be better equipped to help a parish thrive.

1 ELCA Research and Evaluation (9-21-16)

GIVE.

The synod invites you to think about, pray about, and consider contributing to the Ministerial Excellence Fund financially in a way that fits your capacity and passion.

To **give online**, go to www.swmnelca.org.

The Online Giving link is located under the Quick Links on the homepage.

To **give by mail**, make check(s) payable to the SW MN Synod / MEF and mail to:

Southwestern Minnesota Synod
PO Box 499
Redwood Falls, MN 56283

To **make a pledge**, go to www.swmnelca.org/funding-initiative/

The pledge/response form is located on the *Embrace God's Mission + Equip God's People* page.

You can print a pledge/response card or fill out the online form.



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