



Congregational Giving to Synod and District



Working Together for Christ

Discussions of Stewardship often center upon financial giving by church members to their congregations. However, Stewardship also applies to congregations corporately. As with individual Christians, for congregations, Stewardship is first a matter of receiving, then of giving.

Congregations are both Receivers and Givers

God's people in local churches receive forgiveness and life that the crucified and risen Christ gives through His Gospel and Sacraments. Congregations also receive various other gifts given by the Lord through His people, among which are monetary offerings.

After receiving, congregations find themselves in a position to turn around and give. The present focus is on congregations in this latter role, as givers.

Congregations as Receivers

Let's start at the beginning, though, with congregations as receivers. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. Reconciliation with God is His most precious gift of all, and sinners cannot give it to themselves. God saves people by bringing them forgiveness through His Word.

“... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. . . . For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

Through His Word He also grants them faith that believes His Good News. When they trust that He *has* reconciled them to Himself, they receive peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. With this God-given faith, people are Christians — members of the Lord's body.

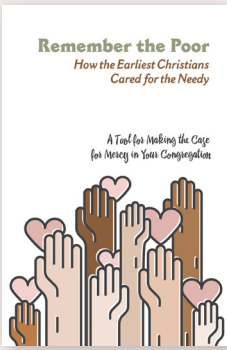
Also the monetary offerings given to congregations come ultimately from the Lord. The church members who give them are new creations in Christ. Their offerings are truly *thank-offerings*, given in gratitude to the Lord by Christians who present them as tokens of the larger offering of their entire lives to the One Who gave Himself for them.

As thank-offerings, these gifts from church members are given regardless of any needs of the moment. God's redeemed people give as the Lord has prospered them. They want to support the proclamation of His saving Word through the church no less when the church building's roof is watertight than when it springs a leak. Of course, emergencies arise sometimes. And members may discover certain causes within the church's work that especially catch their eye to support. Yet basically and overall, the offerings of the faithful are not given as a result of circumstances. Instead, we give out of love for the One Who first loved us. We give *from* the abundance we have from the Lord more than to anything we have in mind.

Congregations as Givers

Having received, a congregation gives. This too forms an aspect of its Stewardship, which is to be carried out responsibly and with wisdom. So a particular church takes prayerful stock of the respective resources the Lord has granted it, and carefully allocates these resources. Such resources include the time and talents that church members contribute and the money they give.

In the area of finances, congregations arrive at many decisions and follow through on them. They pay their



See Matthew C. Harrison, *Remember the Poor: How the Earliest Christians Cared for the Needy* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018).

pastors. They set aside funds for books and other materials so they can teach the faith to the young. Too, they maintain their buildings. This list goes on and on.

An item for inclusion on the list is to give money for church work elsewhere. The mission of the church is being carried out beyond our congregations' own localities, and they have the duty and delight to support it. Local churches agreed in the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments — that is to say,

congregations in church fellowship — have been assisting one another financially ever since the first century, as seen in part already on the pages of the New Testament.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

In our setting, local churches in fellowship with one another have taken the additional step of joining in a “synod.” (Loosely translated, this word means “walking together.”) The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod exists for the conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith. Through the Synod, member congregations do things that none of them could do so well separately.

In our seminaries and colleges, we train men to be pastors and both men and women to be church workers assisting pastors. Together we provide supervision and advice for such workers, and processes for providing these workers to churches. We carry out far-flung mission programs in other countries, sending not only missionaries but these days also short-term and long-range “theological educators” to provide instruction in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions for our sister Lutheran church bodies throughout the world. These, and more, are services that the Synod provides on behalf of its member congregations. No single congregation could accomplish all these things.

“The Synod functions in support of its member congregations by providing assistance as congregations conduct their ministries locally, as well as their ministries at large. . . . The Synod on behalf of its member congregations administers those ministries that can be accomplished more effectively in association with other members congregations through the Synod” (LCMS Bylaw 1.1).

The Synod also provides services to its congregations. In its earliest days, this mainly took the form of praying

for one another and offering advice, but other ways have since emerged for the Synod to help congregations, their pastors, and other church workers. It provides support for congregations with Lutheran schools. At the national level, the Synod makes available resources and personnel to help in a variety of other areas, too, including Evangelism, Stewardship, Human Care, Youth, Church Revitalization, and more.

The Central Illinois District

Over the years the Synod has divided itself into Districts, now 35 in number. Each of them is “the Synod in that place.” Our Central Illinois District (CID) consists of 148 congregations, their pastors, and other rostered church workers spread out over a territory consisting of half the counties in the state.



See *Partnership in the Gospel: The Work of the Lord in the Central Illinois District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* at https://www.cidlcms.org/resources/PartnershipInTheGospel_Dec2023.pdf

Also at the District level there are services on behalf of congregations. Here are some of them. Like the Synod's other District Presidents, ours is responsible for doctrinal supervision within the District he serves. In this work he is assisted by 17 Circuit Visitors. Also in behalf of congregations, CID operates a mission program that includes new church starts, ministry in Spanish in two locations, campus ministry on four state university campuses, a multi-point deaf ministry, and prison ministries. More than a third of the District's annual expenditures go to directly support these missions in Illinois. In recent years, CID has also provided summer Evangelism internships for church workers in training. Your congregation probably could not maintain all this activity, but CID does it on your behalf.

There are services in support of congregations at the District level too. The District President provides call lists to churches in need of pastors. CID has commissions and committees to help its congregations with Evangelism, Stewardship, and Human Care and Church Worker Wellness. They do so with the assistance of a District executive staff member. Our other District executive, working in Christian Education and Congregational Life (including Youth), provides counsel and support for 23 Lutheran elementary schools,

Resources Available on the CID Website

Mission Videos

- Ministry in Spanish <https://www.cidlcms.org/outreach-missions-spanish.html>
- Deaf Ministry <https://www.cidlcms.org/outreach-missions-deaf.html>
- Prison Ministry <https://www.cidlcms.org/outreach-missions-prison.html>
- Campus Ministry <https://www.cidlcms.org/outreach-missions-campus.html>

CID Schools <https://www.cidlcms.org/education-schools.html>

A Dollar for Missions <https://www.cidlcms.org/ministry-a-dollar-for-missions.html>

Stewardship <https://www.cidlcms.org/ministry-stewardship.html>



4 Lutheran high schools, and 26 Lutheran preschools and daycare centers. This, again, amounts to only a partial list.

CID also plays an important role in funding the Synod at the national level. It sends on to the Synod almost a third of all the money it receives from congregational offerings.

Congregations as Givers to Synod and District

The great bulk of CID's financial resources come in the form of these monetary remissions from its member congregations. Simply put, the District cannot do all it does without this support.

This support has been dwindling. Giving by congregations to the Synod and District has fallen quite a bit every year since the turn of the century. In the year 2000, congregations sent on to the District some \$2,322,909. By 2019, the annual sum remitted by congregations had fallen to roughly \$1.65 million. It more or less plateaued there through COVID years, as far as 2022.

In 2023, this number fell again, to \$1.55 million. Due to inflation, these dollars no longer have nearly the purchasing power they had so very long ago.

To offset a shortfall in anticipated income compared with expected expenses during 2024 the CID budget envisions drawing upon savings for as much as \$224,000. The District does not have deep enough pockets to keep doing likewise year after year.



“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

(2 Corinthians 8:9)

What to Do?

Over the years, CID has tried to maintain strong support for the national Synod and for its various missions in central Illinois. Instead of inordinate cuts in these areas, we have increased the workload on each individual District staff member by making personnel reductions. We have gone from a staff consisting of a District President, three executive assistants, a business manager, and three clerical staff members (8 Full Time Equivalents) to a President, two executive assistants, a bookkeeper, and a part-time deployed clerical assistant (4.5 FTEs). Still, expenses keep outpacing income.

Christian Stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing life and all of life's resources for God's purposes. (LCMS definition)

In 2019 CID's Board of Directors determined to continue to “Make sacrifices in District administration instead of missions.” Accordingly, starting late in 2023 a beginning was made on conversations that contemplate cutbacks in District administrative personnel. Yet even if the salary, benefits, supplies, mileage, and incidental expenses for one of the District's two executives (called “Administrative Assistants to the President”) were to be completely eliminated, this step would not save \$224,000.

Unless District income rises, the Board of Directors may not find itself in a position to sacrifice only administration instead of missions. At least to some extent, it will have to sacrifice both. The likely question will be: Which mission(s) either to cut back significantly or to drop entirely from the District budget?

Imagine yourself as a Board of Directors member. Which would you decide to cut or drop? This question is not far off for the entire District. Congregations may soon be asked to

give direction on how CID should steward the gifts we have received from the Lord.

Furthermore, as Mission Commission reported to the 2022 District convention, maintenance and upgrades at CID mission sites are expected to cost more than two-thirds of a million dollars over the next decade or so. Of course, with inflation these costs will rise still more. Obviously, it would be better to lay out about a tenth of the total each year instead of facing a huge amount all at once. Yet in 2024 money is tight enough that the District Board of Directors is encouraging CID missions to try not to spend all of the relatively small allotments that have been made for maintenance in the present budget.

One of the ways possibly to pay for such major expenses, and others, is a *Dollar for Missions* (DFM), as adopted by the District at its 2022 convention. In DFM, individual church members contribute one extra dollar each week for mission efforts, over and above their regular offerings. DFM funding is for (in priority order:) new church starts, mission-focused augmentations to existing CID ministries (e.g., adding an ethnic outreach within a congregation), and present CID

missions. During 2023, only about one out of every six CID congregations sent in DFM contributions. There is plenty of room to increase participation in this effort!



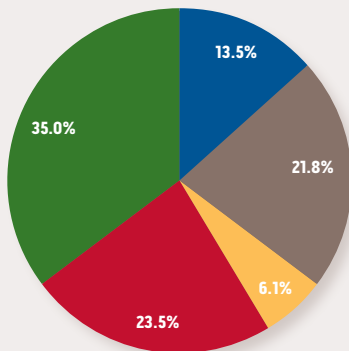
Your Congregation as Giver to Synod and District

Each CID congregation will be faced with a major decision as it wears its “giver” hat and formulates its budget — that is, allocates its resources — for 2025 and beyond: How much financial support will it provide to the Synod and District? This decision has always been important, but it has particularly weighty consequences now.

What if the District’s member congregations remitted to CID 10% of the offerings they receive? This practice would resemble individual church members giving 10% of their income to the work of the Lord’s church.

Why should your congregation not contribute 10% to the Synod and District? How might it start making real movement toward this as a goal?

CID 2024 Budgeted Expenditures vs. Typical Average Income

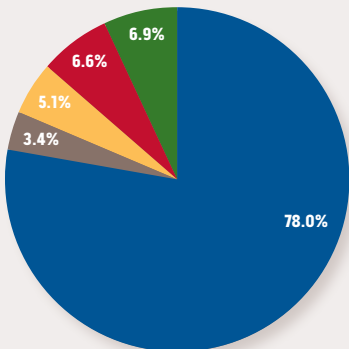


EXPENDITURES - 2024 BUDGET

TOTAL \$2,102,276.09

● Administration	— \$284,111.41	13.5%
● Congregational Services	— \$459,182.21	21.8%
● Scholarships (2023)	— \$128,475.00	6.1%
● Synod Contribution	— \$495,000.00	23.5%
● Mission	— \$735,507.47	35.0%
Campus Ministry	— \$393,874.86	
Deaf Ministry	— \$152,313.38	
Hispanic Ministry	— \$138,379.23	
Prison Ministry	— \$10,500.00	
New Missions	— \$16,440.00	
Camp CILCA	— \$24,000.00	

The expenditures graph (top) summarizes the 2024 CID budget. The contribution to the national Synod shown amounts to 30% of anticipated remissions from congregations in 2024.



TYPICAL AVERAGE INCOME (2020-2023)

TOTAL \$2,102,276.09

● Congregational Contributions	— \$1,640,321.56	78.0%
● Rent, Fees, Interest	— \$71,465.17	3.4%
● Other Unrestricted Gifts/Grants	— \$107,064.51	5.1%
● Restricted Gifts/Grants	— \$139,024.96	6.6%
● Reserves (shortfall)	— \$144,399.89	6.9%

The income graph (bottom) shows an average for one year, taking into account data from the last four years. On average, to meet expenses CID has drawn upon its reserves for “income” almost 7% per year.