



Lutheran Education Association

linking, equipping, and affirming educators in Lutheran ministries

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Dear Congregational Leaders:

Realities of the present economy cause many of us to evaluate financial priorities. As employers of pastors, teachers, DCEs, administrators, DCOs, and deaconesses, LCMS congregations must decide financial issues that affect real lives. Soon, you may be faced with another decision, one that has already had serious impact on church workers in an Illinois pilot study.

You can save money on health insurance for those who minister in your congregation. Perhaps you have already realized savings by selecting health insurance with lower premiums for the congregation. Soon participation in the LCMS Worker Benefit Plans will have a cheaper health plan alternative from which to choose.

The new plan will cost congregations less; the new plan can cost your dedicated workers more. Your workers will have to meet higher deductibles and copayments. In other words, your workers will have less disposable income.

Businesses are making similar decisions for their workers, and many congregations want to run like a business—with one exception. That exception is the salary they establish for their workers. Educators in Lutheran ministries often work for wages well under community averages for others doing similar work. Health benefits are especially important to your workers, who pay the same as everyone else for food, shelter, and medical expenses.

We know you care about your professional staff. And *care* is at the heart of decisions about insurance. Worker Benefit Plans and other carriers can't be blamed for offering competitive programs. A poor economy can't be a scapegoat either. We all need medical insurance. The choice to move to a cheaper plan is yours, despite external influences.

You can save money. But please consider the following as you evaluate potential savings:

- Ask some hard questions: How does your pay scale relate to LCMS District salary guidelines? How does it relate to community standards? Does the stewardship of congregation members reflect gratitude for God's gifts—including the gift of dedicated church work professionals? If you expect your workers to accept less, can you compromise by asking members to give more? Is your pay scale ethical? Moral? How do these questions relate to your financial decisions?
- Talk with your church workers. While governing boards have a right to make decisions, include some face-to-face meetings with those affected by your decisions. Find out more about their needs. Invite them to help find solutions for budgetary needs or stewardship shortcomings.
- Establish a strategy to help your workers meet additional personal costs associated with congregational savings. One way to do this is to assign whatever the amount saved to a contingency fund. Allow workers reimbursement for additional copayment charges and deductibles. Of course, this system will provide unequal distribution of benefits, with those needing medical care receiving greater benefits than those not needing health care.

We at Lutheran Education Association pray for you and those who work in ministries operated by your congregation. May God lead you to decisions pleasing to Him.

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