

Resourceful **SERVANTS**



Background, Preparation and Support

(for Lutheran Social Service (LSS) Financial Counseling)



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

July 2018

Introduction to the Resourceful Servants Initiative

In the church, we often speak of the many dimensions of wellness in our lives – spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social and physical, for instance. Financial wellness is another vital component in our endeavor to live well. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) will focus on this concept in the months and years ahead as it takes the next steps in assisting those exploring call, rostered ministers and congregations in enhancing their financial acumen and preparedness.

The ELCA has embarked on Resourceful Servants, an initiative to encourage habits that strengthen and sustain individual and congregational financial wellness and growth. Each of the four Resourceful Servants programs focus on financial well-being.

- **Fund for Leaders** – Through the grant from the Lilly Endowment, the ELCA churchwide organization hired an Associate Director of the ELCA Fund for Leaders to increase its fundraising capacity, so it can more rapidly expand the number of full- and partial-tuition scholarships it distributes to ELCA seminarians.
- **Financial Counseling** – The emphasis of this program is to open the conversation of financial wellness and literacy early in the career of those exploring call, including candidates for ministry, seminarians not in candidacy, applicants and inquirers. Students and inquirers are encouraged to participate in financial counseling with Lutheran Social Service (LSS) Financial Counseling. This organization is part of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota and serves the entire nation through counseling by phone.
- **Financial Wellness** – This program focuses on improving the financial wellness of rostered ministers in the ELCA. Resources around managing debt and increasing financial literacy are available at no cost. The program also includes Savings Matching programs to address two immediate financial needs of rostered ministers, namely lack of emergency savings and lack of retirement savings, and include matching dollars for increased contributions.
- **Congregational Certificate** – This program focuses on the financial health of congregations by providing a website-based program targeting five financial areas: Accounting, Finance, Human Resources, Risk Management and Stewardship. Congregations will receive a certificate by implementing and maintaining a set of financially healthy behaviors, and reporting them through the Resourceful Servants website (resourcefulservants.org).

Supporting us financially in these efforts are our partners, the Mission Investment Fund and the employees and trustees of Portico Benefit Services. The ELCA Federal Credit Union and Lutheran Social Service Financial Counseling are implementation partners. A generous grant from the Lilly Endowment also makes this initiative possible.

Program Deep Dive

The Financial Counseling and Financial Wellness programs have the greatest implications for LSS Financial Counseling.

Financial Counseling

Ministers should be free to serve well anywhere, without undue concern for their financial wellness and their long-term financial security. This means those exploring call should be equipped early in their careers with the skills needed to manage household finances, to assist a congregation in the management of its finances, to teach stewardship and promote faithful giving, and to engage in all these activities in a direct, positive and forthright manner.

Financial counseling is an effective way to improve personal financial wellness. Those who have participated in financial counseling have incurred less educational debt, decreased their already-incurred educational debt more rapidly, increased their credit scores, paid off their consumer debt more rapidly, lessened their financial anxiety and achieved overall greater financial health.

Research has shown that those who experience greater personal financial wellness are more satisfied and healthy as leaders than those who have poor financial health. Those in good financial health are more satisfied with their household financial situation, more satisfied in their ministry, and indicate that they are in better spiritual and physical health than those who are in poor financial health.

It is for these reasons that, through the Financial Counseling program, those exploring call are strongly encouraged to participate in financial counseling with LSS Financial Counseling. The primary channel to encourage financial counseling is a group of candidacy partners, made up of seminary faculty and staff, bishops, synod staff for candidacy, candidacy committee members, and Candidacy and Leadership Managers. These partners are the ones who have the greatest initial influence on the career of someone exploring call.

Financial Wellness

Financial wellness is a vital part of a healthy life. Ministers who are financially well experience greater satisfaction in their work and their relationships and are more able to freely serve the church and its mission without being encumbered by financial anxiety.

The Financial Wellness program brings together a variety of financial wellness resources which are available at no cost to rostered ministers in the ELCA. Engaging with these resources can provide rostered ministers the information they need to make well-informed financial decisions and the confidence to share their perspective. This competence and confidence not only affects a minister's personal financial wellness but also that of the congregations and organizations they serve.

Through this program, the church also seeks to address specific needs rostered ministers raised about their personal financial and stewardship health. Two Savings Matching programs share financial resources generously provided to the ELCA with rostered ministers on the road to improved financial wellness.

- ELCA rostered ministers who have less than 6 months' income in emergency savings are eligible to apply for the Emergency Savings program. The program will match selected rostered ministers' contributions to a dedicated emergency savings account with the ELCA Federal Credit Union of up to \$50 per month (that is, up to \$1,200 over two years).
- ELCA rostered ministers serving a call who have less than 15 percent of their compensation contributed to their ELCA retirement plan account with Portico (when combining employer and employee contributions) are eligible to apply for the Readiness for Retirement program. For a period of one year, the program will match selected rostered ministers' **increased** contributions of \$600 in plan year 2019 (an average increase of \$50 per month) over their current contributions (defined as contributions made between September 2017 and August 2018).

To qualify for either of the Savings Matching programs, rostered ministers must complete the Financial Wellness Assessment—accessed through resourcefulservants.org—which asks about several aspects of a rostered minister's financial life, including behaviors and attitudes, level of emergency savings, level of retirement savings and credit score.

Qualifying rostered ministers will be directed to the appropriate program application(s) as part of the Financial Wellness Assessment. The date to complete the Financial Wellness Assessment and the program applications is October 14, 2018. Applicants will be informed if they have been selected into both, either or neither Savings Matching program by November 1, 2018.

It is at this point that selected recipients need to complete the requirements for participation in the Savings Matching programs.

For the Emergency Savings program, these requirements are to:

- Complete the membership process for a Resourceful Servants savings account with the ELCA Federal Credit Union by December 15, 2018. If a rostered minister already has a savings account with the ELCA Federal Credit Union, he or she will work with Credit Union staff to open a dedicated account for the Emergency Savings program.
- Contribute to their Resourceful Servants savings account monthly using an automatic transfer. The first transfer must be completed by January 15, 2019.

For the Readiness for Retirement program, the requirement is to:

- Increase one's individual ELCA retirement plan contributions by \$600 in plan year 2019 (an average increase of \$50 per month) over their current contributions (defined as contributions made between September 2017 and August 2018). Recipients will receive a letter from Portico, informing them of their current contribution amount and their increased contribution amount for plan year 2019.

For both programs, selected recipients need to:

- Schedule an appointment with LSS Financial Counseling by February 15, 2019. Up to six financial counseling sessions are provided per calendar year at no cost to rostered ministers and their spouses, as a benefit from Portico Benefit Services. At least one session must be held with a financial counselor at LSS Financial Counseling before the recipient receives any matching funding. If a recipient completed a financial counseling session at any point in 2018, they do not need another session to receive matching funding.

On a monthly basis, beginning in February 2019, the ELCA Federal Credit Union will deposit matching funding into the Resourceful Servants savings accounts of the selected recipients if the recipients have made their monthly contribution. This process will continue for up to two years, provided recipients continue to make monthly contributions.

By February 28, 2020, Portico will deposit matching funding into the ELCA retirement plan accounts of the selected recipients if they have followed through on their one-year commitment to increased contributions.

Implications and Expectations for LSS Financial Counseling

Uptick in the number of those seeking financial counseling

The Financial Counseling program strongly encourages those exploring call in the ELCA to participate in financial counseling with LSS. As a result, we project that there will be an uptick in the number of those exploring call who are seeking to participate in financial counseling with LSS.

The Financial Wellness program uses a two-pronged approach to increase participation in financial counseling with LSS:

1. All rostered ministers in the ELCA are informed through the Resourceful Servants email campaign and resourcefulservants.org of the benefit of financial counseling with LSS Financial Counseling. They are encouraged to take advantage of the benefit. We believe, due to this promotion, there will be an increase in the number of rostered ministers who choose to participate in financial counseling.

2. For those rostered ministers receiving matching funding through either of the Savings Matching programs, financial counseling with LSS Financial Counseling is required. In 2018-19, the Emergency Savings program is projected to have a cohort of approximately 100 rostered ministers, and the Readiness for Retirement program is projected to have a cohort of approximately 100 rostered ministers. It is also possible that even before rostered ministers are selected for the program, during the qualification and application period of the program, they would reach out to LSS Financial Counseling to help them determine if—through effective budgeting and debt reduction—it would be wise and worthwhile for them to apply for the programs.

Data collection

The ELCA churchwide organization has worked with the staff of LSS Financial Counseling on a data collection plan, including a post-session questionnaire to be distributed as part of the post-session summary by financial counselors to all clients who access LSS Financial Counseling through the Financial Choice Portico telephone line.

The link to the post-session questionnaire is included here:

https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=post_sess_fc_ques_2018

Financial counselors should use the following instructions on how to complete the questionnaire in their post-session summary:

LSS Financial Counseling and Resourceful Servants need your feedback. Click [this link](#) to tell us about your experience with LSS Financial Counseling.

The information collected here will help determine the effectiveness of financial counseling and impact future offerings from LSS Financial Counseling.

This questionnaire should take no more than 2-3 minutes to complete.

If the link above does not work, you can copy and paste this link into your browser. (https://surveys.elca.org/scripts/rws5.pl?FORM=post_sess_fc_ques_2018)

Thank you so much for your feedback!

The data from this post-session questionnaire will be collected by ELCA Research and Evaluation. This data will be shared in raw and summary forms with LSS Financial Counseling on a periodic basis.

Timeline/Due dates

Program Launch, Qualification and Application

Resourceful Servants has an official public launch date of August 14, 2018, when an email initiative featuring ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton will be sent out to ELCA rostered ministers. This email will include a link to the Resourceful Servants website (resourcefulservants.org), which contains information about the programs, services, and resources available to people across the ELCA.

If LSS financial counselors have rostered minister clients who they believe would benefit from the program, they can direct them to the Resourceful Servants website (resourcefulservants.org), to the Savings Matching programs for Rostered Ministers section, and encourage them to take the

Financial Wellness Assessment to determine if they qualify for one or both programs.

The due date to complete the Financial Wellness Assessment and the Savings Matching program applications is October 14, 2018.

Notification

On November 1, 2018, the ELCA churchwide organization will notify applicants if they have been selected into both, either or neither Savings Matching programs. At the same time, recipients in the Readiness for Retirement program will also receive a letter from Portico informing them of their current contribution amount and their increased contribution amount for plan year 2019.

Implementation

Selected applicants must schedule at least one financial counseling session with LSS Financial Counseling by February 15, 2019. At least one session must be held with a financial counselor from LSS Financial Counseling before recipients will receive matching funding.

Data Transfer: Participant Verification

LSS Financial Counseling will provide a certificate of completion to all participants. Recipients will submit this certificate to Resourceful Servants at **resourceful.servants@elca.org**.

If a recipient completed a financial counseling session in 2018, they do not need to complete another session. They will be instructed to contact their financial counselor to receive a certificate of completion.

Contact Resourceful Servants

If there are questions not answered here, please contact Resourceful Servants by email at **resourceful.servants@elca.org**.