

Strengthening Mission Support: An Invitation to Move Your Giving Online

Dear partners in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from our shared ministry in the synod office. We hold you and your congregations in prayer, especially as you lead God's people in generosity and faithful stewardship. Our new synod stewardship team and the Financial Sustainability Task Force have been working since Synod Assembly to strengthen our synod's financial health and to support congregations in this work as well. From time to time, we plan to share best practices with congregation presidents, treasurers, and other leaders for stewarding the funds entrusted to them. Today, I am sharing with you a best practice for Mission Support (benevolence).

At present, only 11 of our 107 congregations send Mission Support through online giving. While we gratefully receive payments in any form, encouraging more congregations to give online, preferably through ACH direct bank transfer, will help us steward our shared ministry of Mission Support more securely, efficiently, and consistently.

Why shift to online Mission Support?

- **More secure:** Physical checks are increasingly vulnerable to being lost or delayed in the mail, and check fraud through mail theft has risen significantly since the pandemic. Online giving (whether by card or ACH) reduces these risks because funds are transferred electronically and can be tracked more reliably.fbi+2
- **Easier once set up:** After the initial setup, online giving allows treasurers and councils to send Mission Support without printing checks, obtaining signatures, or mailing envelopes. Gifts can be made from anywhere with internet access, on a schedule that fits your congregation's practice.
- **Consistent support for ministry:** During COVID, many congregations discovered that online giving helped sustain offerings and Mission Support even when in-person worship or office routines were disrupted. That same consistency continues to strengthen our shared ministries today.

Recurring and non-recurring options

Some congregations calculate benevolence as a percentage of actual (rather than budgeted) income and may be hesitant about automatic, recurring gifts. Please be assured: online giving for Mission Support can be set up either as

- recurring gifts, for congregations that prefer a regular, predictable amount; or
- one-time (non-recurring) gifts, for congregations that adjust Mission Support each month or quarter based on actual income.

You remain fully in control of both the timing and the amount. Recurring amounts can be changed whenever circumstances change, and one-time gifts can be entered whenever your treasurer has updated figures.

Online giving in your own congregation

I also know that many of our congregations are asking very real questions about their own financial sustainability: How will we receive the offerings we need to carry out our ministries? How do we make giving easier and more accessible for our people? Moving Mission Support online is one part of that picture, and so is considering how your own congregation receives and processes gifts. If you have not yet set up online giving for your members' offerings, this can be a helpful tool for nurturing generosity, making giving easier for households, and providing more consistent support for your local ministry. Our synod stewardship team is available to consult with congregations who would like guidance in exploring or strengthening online giving options for their own people.

As you review this with your council and treasurer, I encourage you to consider completing your transition to online Mission Support by Reformation Sunday this year. **Practical tips and step-by-step guidance for making this transition follow below for your treasurers and leaders.** Thank you for your faithful partnership in God's mission and for considering this important shift in how Mission Support is shared. Together, through your generosity and our common work, God's promise in the gospel continues to be proclaimed in our communities in word and deed.

In Christ,

Bishop Sue Briner

How to give Mission Support online

To make online Mission Support (benevolence) contributions, congregations can use this link:

Give Now: <https://www.swtsynod.org/give-now>

When you use this link, there is no separate account or password to manage. The system uses the email address and information you enter to match your congregation's profile in our records. A receipt is emailed after each online gift. While there is no online portal to view your full giving history, a statement of your congregation's Mission Support can be requested from the synod office at any time. Giving statements are also emailed or mailed regularly to congregations.

Online giving, whether by card or ACH, is processed securely by Vanco Online Giving, which uses PCI Level 1 data security, the highest standard in the payment card industry. No card or bank information is seen by or stored at the synod; all sensitive data is handled directly and securely by the processor.

A note about other payments and bills

As you consider moving Mission Support online, you may also find it helpful to review how your congregation handles other regular payments and bills. Many treasurers have found that shifting more of their payments and remittances to online options reduces paper, saves time, and lowers the risk of checks being lost or stolen in the mail.

Accountability and internal controls

As your congregation shifts more payments to online methods, you may also need to review your internal controls. Many congregations have found ways to maintain strong accountability—such as requiring dual review or approval of online payments, regular reconciliation reports, and clear documentation—even when fewer paper checks are being signed. The synod has made similar adjustments in recent years as we have increased our own use of ACH and online payments, and we encourage you to explore practices that fit your context while continuing to safeguard the funds entrusted to you.

Tutorials and support

If your treasurer or financial secretary is unsure how to begin, the synod office is glad to arrange a tutorial—by phone or other online means—to walk through how to set up ACH or other online payment methods for Mission Support.

Pass-through checks

The synod office does not process pass-through checks to other organizations or ministries. If your congregation is supporting another organization (for example, a local social ministry or national nonprofit), those checks should be sent directly to that organization. Mission Support intended for the Southwestern Texas Synod should come to us either by your new online method or, until you transition, by check mailed directly to the synod.