

Sexuality Discussion

St. Luke's Lutheran Church
Lima, Ohio

January 10 & 17, 2010

Introduction

- What changes were made in ELCA policy?
 - New Social Statement “Gift and Trust”
 - Ministry Recommendations
- How did it used to be?
 - Vision and Expectations
- We don't really have the option to ignore the statement

Where are we now?

- Conducted survey to gain insight on the congregation
- Ongoing discussions in Council meetings
- Letter has been sent from St. Luke's Council to NWO Synod and to ECLA Headquarters
- Formulating a response plan of action for our congregation



St. Luke's Lutheran Church
Telling people of Jesus Christ

December 10, 2009

To whoever will listen:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from this present evil age (Galatians 1:3-4).

We, the council of St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Lima, OH, are frustrated and dismayed by the mess in which we find ourselves. The August actions of the Churchwide Assembly regarding human sexuality have created a major problem for our congregation. Some members say they must leave the ELCA with or without this congregation. Others say they must stay in the ELCA whether at St. Luke's or somewhere else. If this impasse continues, we will splinter. Our family of faith is being stretched, pulled, and bent out of shape, and we are struggling to find a way to remain intact as a congregation.

What kind of outcome did you expect? An issue that has divided the national church for decades has now been passed off to congregations. The attempt to broker a compromise for the national church is now threatening to split congregations. The inability of the Churchwide Assembly to provide clear teaching and direction on a divisive topic has just moved the pressure from the national office to the local congregation. We are angered by your indecisive actions!

The ELCA has been talking about sexuality for years, and has not been able to come to a consensus. That is why we are especially disturbed at how quickly you have changed traditional biblical and confessional understandings of sexuality. Without a clear directive and a solid case for change based on Holy Scripture, these changes leave our congregation dangling on two sides of a razor. How did we come to this point? How could you, whoever "you" are—that's another problem—let this happen?

Furthermore, we find that word of our struggle falls on deaf ears. Letters from members are answered with form letters. Town hall meetings are little more than places to vent and be told "remember, it's OK to disagree." These responses don't provide any real help for a congregation that is strongly opposed to these changes, and yet wants to keep the members in support of the changes in our family.

Our distress is very real and extremely painful. We need a reason to believe that an answer can be found within the ELCA.

With deep concern,

St. Luke's Lutheran Church Council

Beth Arbeit, Paul Assenheimer, Elizabeth Eley, , Jeff Howard, Jennifer Hughes, Dale Lankhuf, Perry Luhn, Keith Mulder, Marcy Reeves, Mila Schwabero, Phil Trueblood, Alison Williams, James Williams, John Williams, and Pastor Lars Olson

419-227-1961

209 West North Street, Lima, Ohio 45801

www.StLukesLima.org

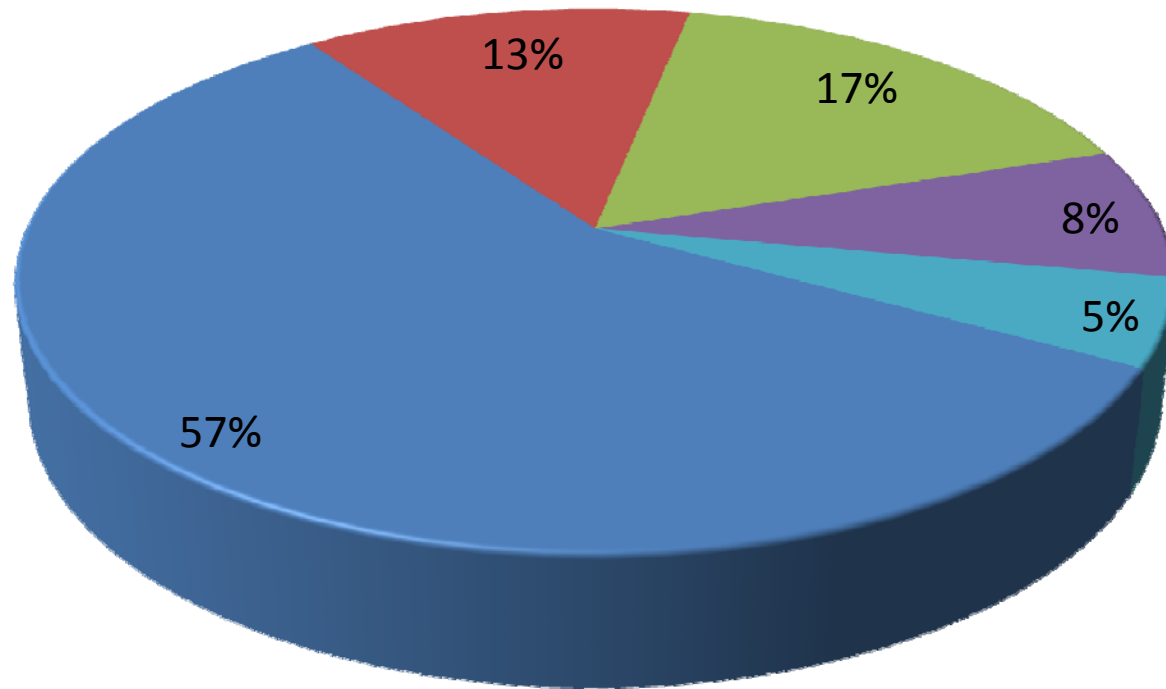
Letter of Opposition from Council

- Letter was sent in mid-December
- Tone is of anger, distress and disappointment

Survey Results

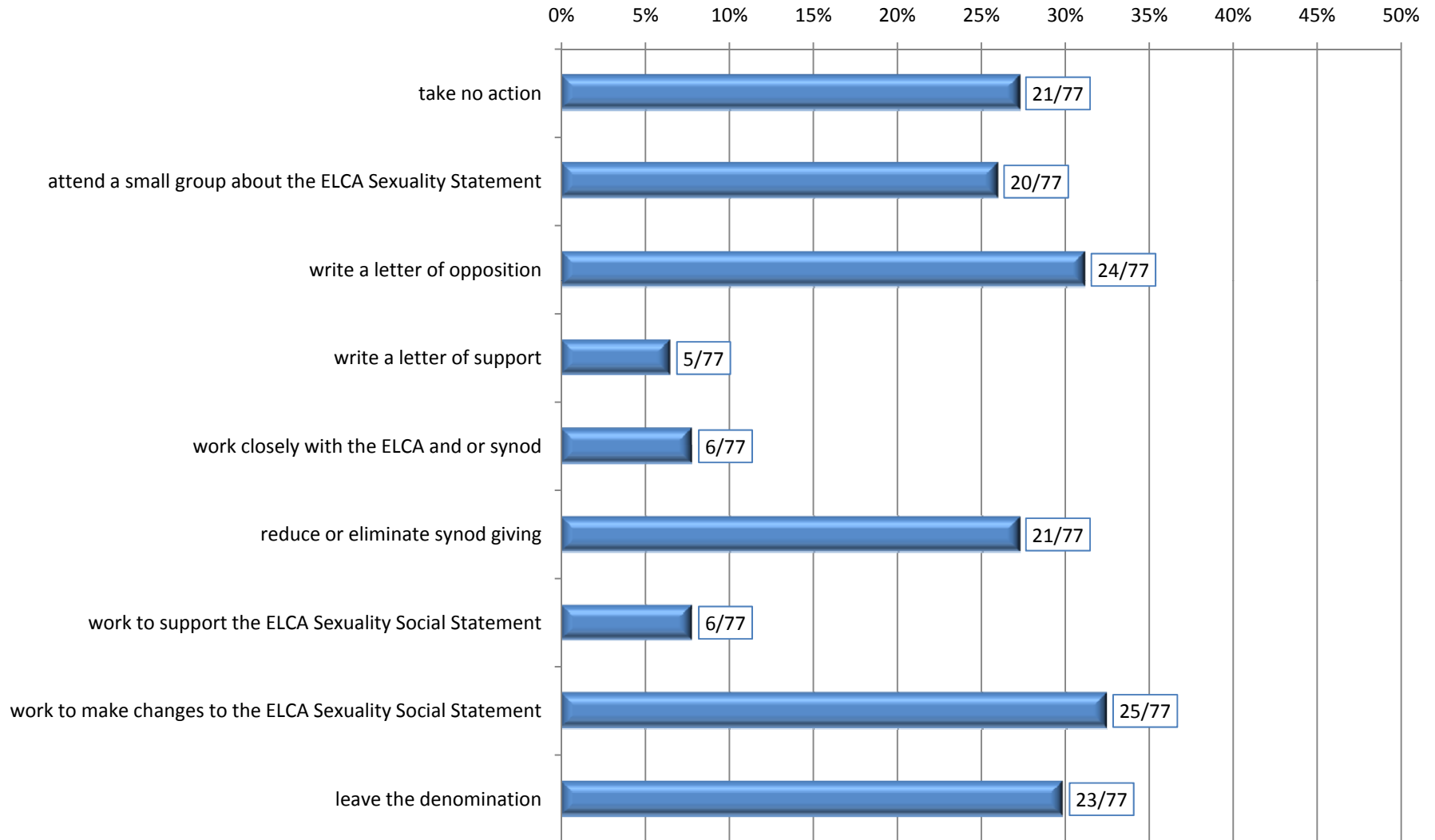
- Not a controlled survey
 - Results offer anecdotal evidence
 - Caveat that the percentages given represent a measure of those taking the survey. We can't directly draw statistical conclusions about the entire congregation
- 77 members took the survey
 - About half left comments

How do you feel about the Social Statement and Ministry Recommendations?

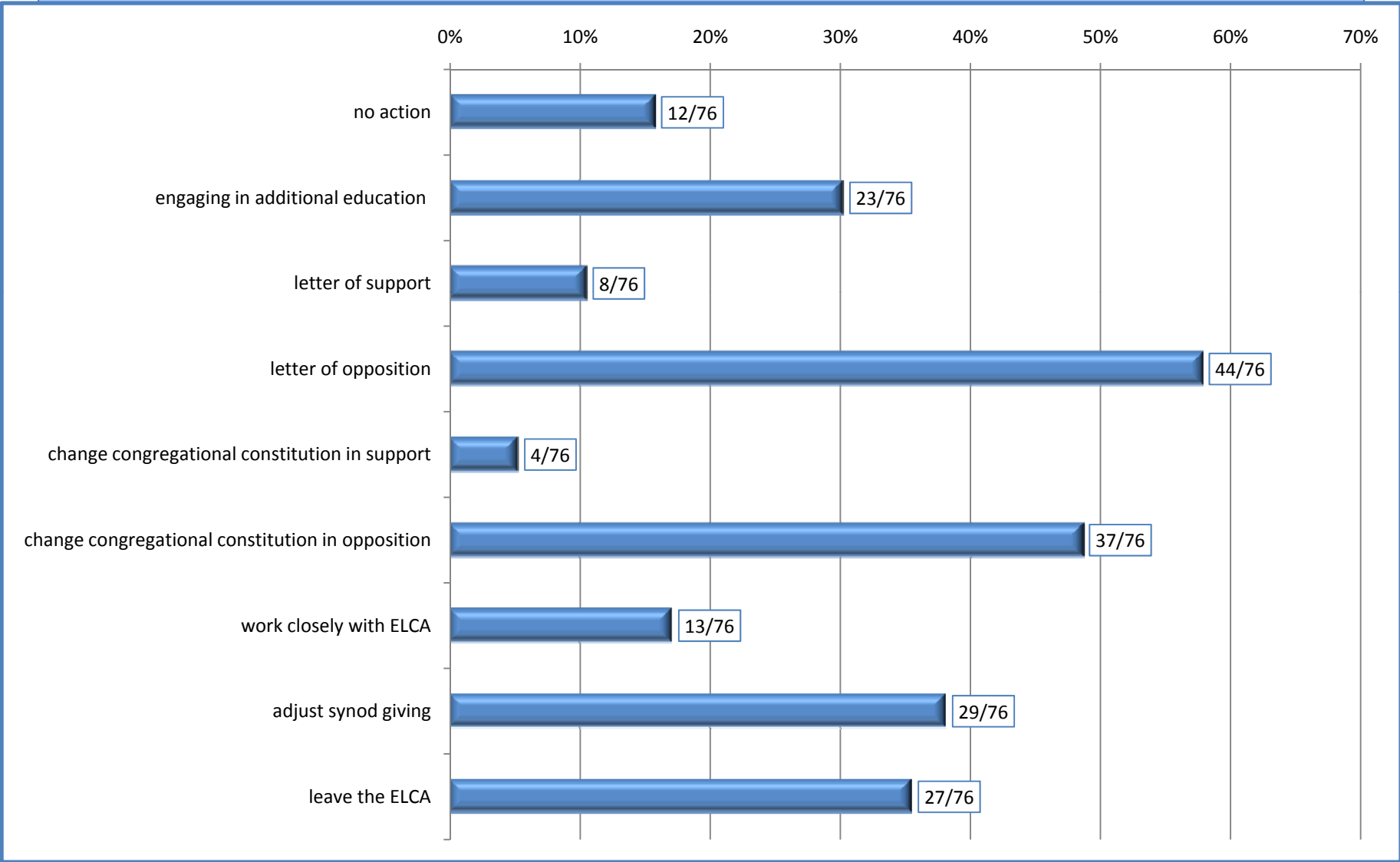


■ Strongly Disagree 44/77 ■ Disagree 10/77 ■ Neutral 13/77 ■ Agree 6/77 ■ Strongly Agree 4/77

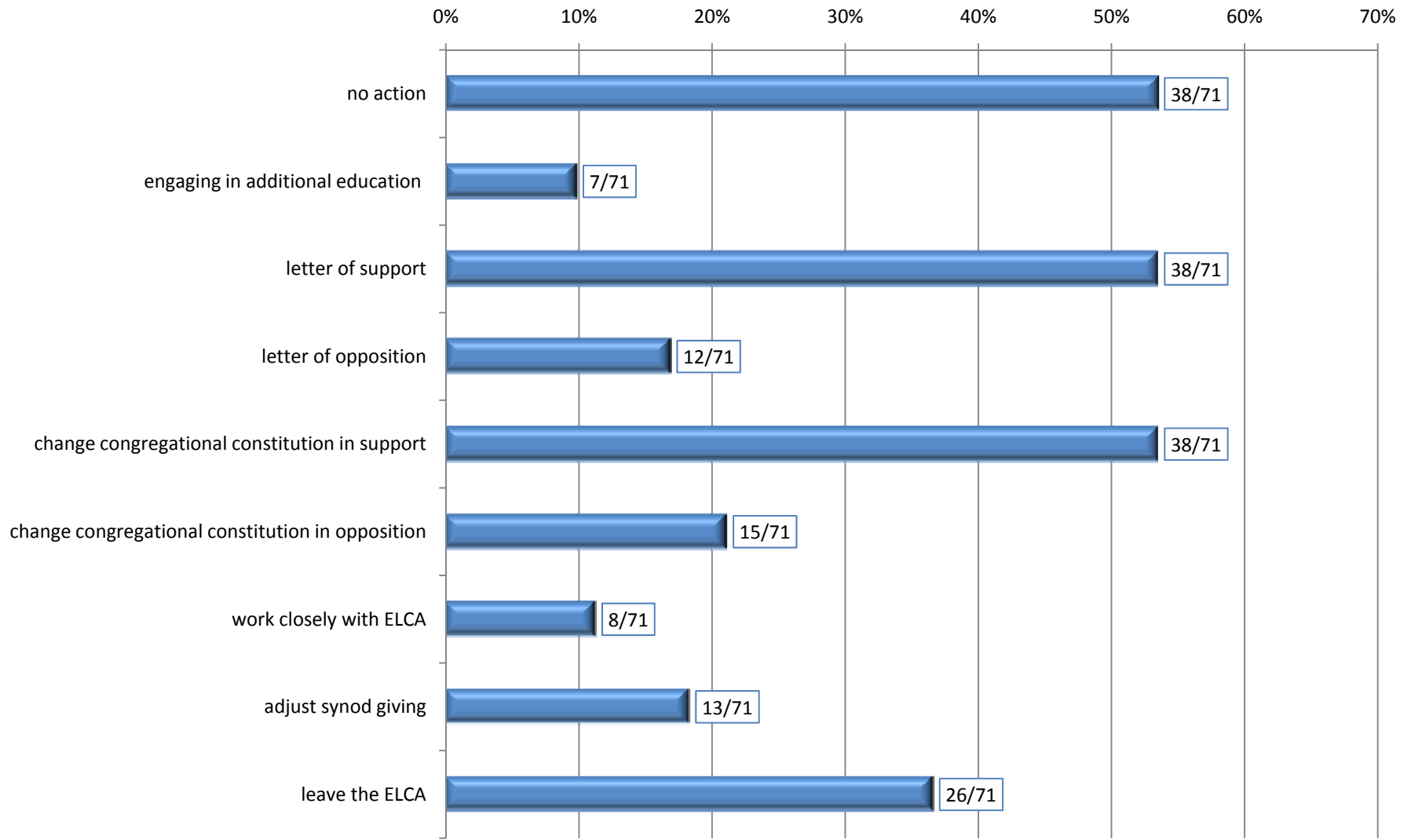
What personal actions are you considering?



What actions should St. Luke's consider?



What actions should St. Luke's not consider?



Council's Plan for St. Luke's

We hope:

- is consistent with our mission as a church of Jesus Christ
- is a way to move ahead together peacefully, knowing some will disagree with parts
- will protect the congregation from disruptions caused by uncertainty
- will let the Synod offices, other local congregations and individuals know where we stand

Council's Plan for St. Luke's

1. Letter of opposition to Synod and ELCA
 2. Propose change to constitution
 3. Respect individual wishes to direct benevolent giving away from ELCA
 4. Remain in ELCA, gather information
 - Identify our mission and identity, What are we called to be?
 - Identify mission of ELCA, and other choices
 - Form committee/taskforce
- Items 1-3 to be individually voted upon at next congregational meeting



St. Luke's Lutheran Church
Telling people of Jesus Christ

DRAFT

Pending Congregation Vote

[Meeting Date]

To Bishop Hanson, Bishop Lohrmann, and those who care for the work of the ELCA and its synods:

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father. May his power, wisdom and love continue to guide your steps. We commend you for your lives of service to our Lord and to the many souls to whom you have ministered.

As a church council and as a congregation we find it imperative that we share with you our feelings and concerns over the recent Human Sexuality Statement.

In the past several decades our church body has struggled with many social issues, advancing such causes as civil rights, equality for women and other human justice issues. It has always been a source of commitment and pride for local congregations to participate in social advances.

The challenge of human sexuality, though, has been a divisive one, having been addressed almost continuously since the 'seventies. We believe the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, which addressed human sexuality most recently has found the issue more challenging than it could undertake, and has been unable to take clear and decisive steps. Instead it has chosen the path of least resistance—a weakly presented statement which, in its essence, passes the responsibility for this divisive issue to each congregation. The Assembly's action signals to local congregations that the ELCA does not know what the larger body believes, or is afraid to say so. Either way, the effect is to force congregations to decide in a relatively short time what the larger church could not decide in thirty years.

Our council and our congregation are now struggling with this issue and attempting to understand how the ELCA could have strayed so far from its core beliefs. The common pillar in our Lutheran faith has always been our belief in God, as revealed in the Holy Bible. What congregation would even consider ignoring this basic understanding? Yet the Assembly's action challenges biblically-based tenets. The Old Testament forbids and condemns homosexual acts and teaches that marriage is the union of a man and a woman.

Many Lutherans are receptive to new societal and legal changes to the official status of gays and lesbians. We accept and even welcome societal and legal mandates which will show our respect and protection for the dignity and welfare of others. However, many believe that our Church, its traditions and teachings, and its leaders, should be held to a higher standard.

Please accept our expression of deep concern, disappointment and disagreement for what it is: the admonishment of one loving family member to another. It is not our desire to be in opposition to our church at large, but we are frightened that our congregation will splinter over this divisive issue.

It is our urgent request, Bishops, that you use your influence and authority to re-convene the Assembly for the purpose of officially rescinding this dangerous statement.

In the name of Jesus, our Savior, we thank you.

St. Luke's Lutheran Church Council and Congregation
Lima, Ohio

Letter of Opposition from Congregation

- States the will of the congregation
- Not a tool to stir up more anger

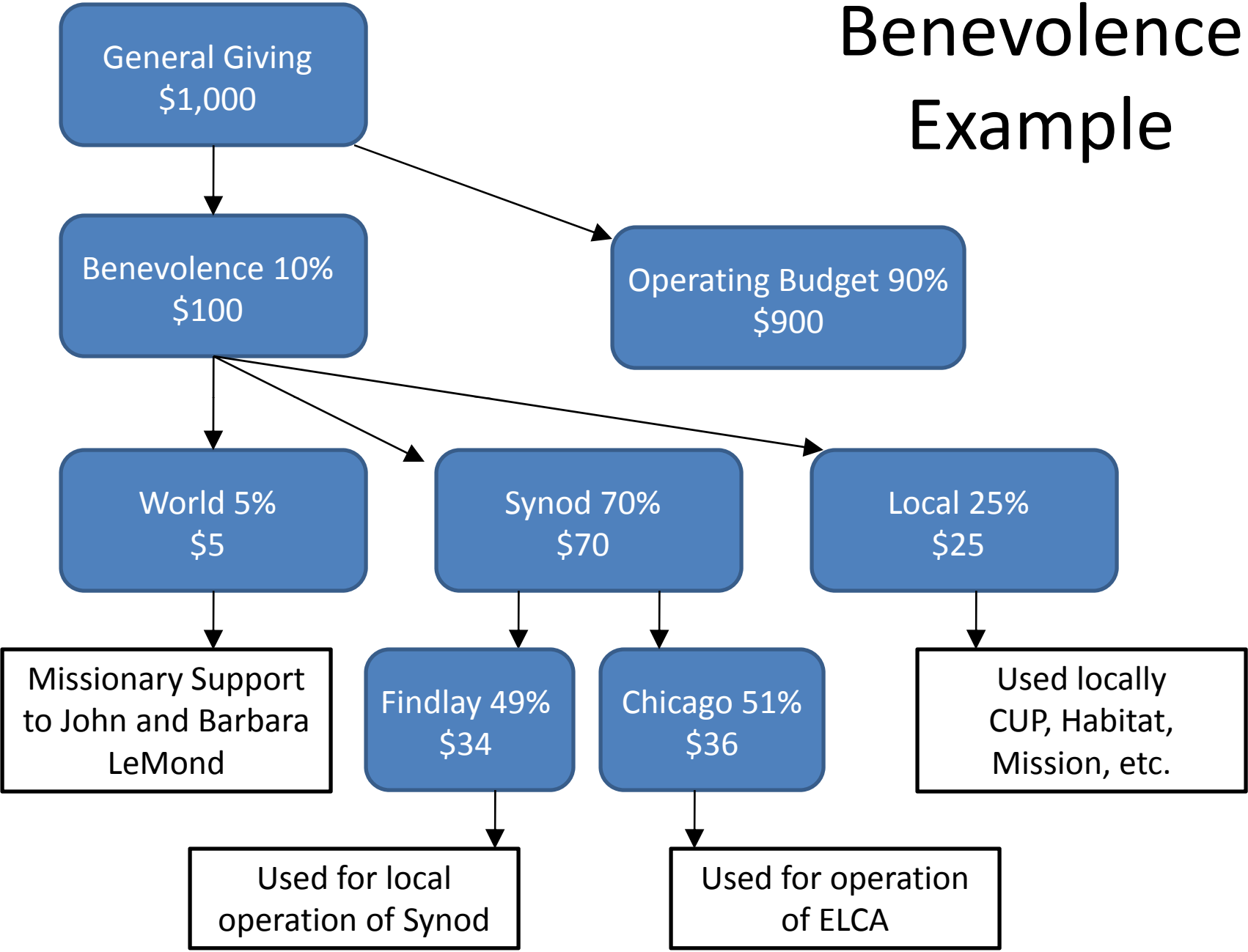
Change to Constitution

- Requires 2/3 of congregation to approve at a special congregational meeting and synod approval
- C4.035 (REVISED)
While being committed to bearing one another's burdens, loving the neighbor and respecting the bound consciences of all, this congregation will not give official recognition to same-gender relationships.
- C9.025 (REVISED)
While being committed to bearing one another's burdens, loving the neighbor and respecting the bound consciences of all, this congregation will not call a pastor that is in, or contemplates being in, a same-gender relationship.

Benevolent Giving to Synod

- When we give money to Synod benevolence, 49% stays in our Northwest Ohio Synod and 51% goes to Chicago
- Our normal target for benevolent giving is 10% of our total giving. Benevolence is then broken down further down to 25% local, 70% Synod, 5% world.
- At the request of a member, St. Luke's will deduct the member's portion from the amount normally sent to the Synod. This will happen on an annual basis and be reconciled at the end of the year prior to sending the year end payment to the Synod.

Benevolence Example



Benefits to affiliation with ELCA

- Help in calling a pastor
- Pastoral oversight and accountability
- Legal protections and advice
- National church means you can find one easily if you move or are on vacation
- Lots of good universities, camps, specialized ministries, and social services
- Partnerships with other local Lutheran congregations

Gathering Information

- Council and congregation are starting to get informed about the issues
- Some suggest leaving ELCA, but that is a hasty decision today
- What is the identity and mission of St. Luke's?
- What are the identities and missions of other church bodies? (LCMC, LC-MS, Lutheran Core)
- Change needs to come as we determine what God is calling us to be.
- Form a committee or taskforce to inform our congregation about partner options inside and outside of the ELCA.

Discussion

- If revisions are made after today's discussion, they will be presented at next week's meeting.
- Congregational meeting will be rescheduled for **February 21st** to allow the prescribed time to publish the change to the constitution.
- The format for the vote will be secret ballot.
- Call Committee will be approved at the same meeting.