



Spring 2016

Dear Partners in Ministry,

It's an interesting — and challenging — time to be the church. Ministry leaders are learning to navigate the changing culture by holding on to the best of the past while finding ways to be creative, nimble, and resilient. This is just as true for Portico.

As we navigate the changing landscape, we are guided by two core values: stewardship and collaboration. For us, that means caring wisely for all we are entrusted to manage — time, money, our employees, and the well-being of those we serve — so leaders can access important benefits and resources, today and in retirement. Here are a few ways we're putting those values into practice:

We spend and invest with care. In these times of rising health care costs and tight church budgets, we work hard to follow a lean, carefully managed spending plan with a goal of keeping costs low. As 2015 investment markets dramatically rose and fell, our active investment management strategy and strategic asset allocations helped improve retirement fund returns in an otherwise disappointing year.

We seek opportunities to provide the best health care value. The past two years brought, in some instances, double-digit percentage increases for those employers sponsoring members in the ELCA Health Plan. Although this was in line with nationwide averages, we realize for congregations this is an unsustainable trend. We are committed to keeping administrative expenses below 12% of our health care budget, and are aggressively working with our vendor partners to find new savings opportunities.

We tap technology to reach our leaders more efficiently. By converting our popular pre-retirement seminar into a series of three webinars, we were able to complement the rich educational experience of our in-person seminars with the convenience and cost-effectiveness of online learning. We are also developing new webinars designed to help younger leaders establish a strong financial foundation.

We've raised the bar on top-notch customer service. Our members receive more than just a friendly voice when they call Portico's Customer Care Center. As a BenchmarkPortal-certified 2015 "Center of Excellence," we were recognized as one of the top call centers in the nation in both cost- and quality-related metrics.

We invest in our leaders. Because the future health of our church depends on the health of its leaders, we are leading the ELCA in calling for a wellness reformation — a renewed commitment to well-being that comes from healthy lifestyle choices, reduced health risks, and lower health care costs — for members, congregations, and the ELCA Health Plan. We are encouraging our congregations and church organizations to put the 'we' in wellness by joining in conversation with their pastors and professional staff about creating a culture that supports healthy lifestyles.

Portico is committed to providing a cost-effective, comprehensive benefit program that helps our church's leaders stay nimble, resilient, and confident in these interesting, challenging times.

In Christ,

The Rev. Jeffrey D. Thiemann
President and CEO