



What's going on with Thrivent?

I'm sorry, those of you who were waiting for my answer to the question "What's your favorite New Testament book?" will have to wait another month. The third Sunday of January is traditionally "Life Sunday" - the day we celebrate the Sanctity (holiness) of Life. With that in mind it seemed timely to deal with the question above which cropped up just before Christmas.

Here's some background about Thrivent: Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is the financial services organization that provides things like mutual funds and life insurance for Lutheran Christians. Its Thrivent Choice Dollars® are profits that must be given back to those its members each year. Once a year the members get a chance to tell Thrivent where they would like those dollars given. Many Thrivent Choice Dollars get channeled back to individual Lutheran congregations. Around \$500 Thrivent Choice Dollars® were directed to Living Word this past year.

About a week before Christmas an email with this title caught my eye:

LCMS issues statement about Thrivent Choice Dollars®

That email subject-line prompted me to ask the question listed at the beginning of this article. Of course I read the email which stated:

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is deeply concerned by the news that Thrivent Financial has recognized Planned Parenthood of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota as a potential recipient of funding through its Thrivent Choice Dollars grant program. The LCMS always has been, and will continue to be, clear and faithful in its proclamation of the sanctity of all human life from conception until natural death. We are currently in conversation with Thrivent Financial and pray for a God-pleasing resolution to this matter so that the pro-life witness of individual Lutherans and the LCMS will not be compromised.

*Maggie Karner, Director
LCMS Life and Health Ministries*

*Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*

The very next day I received an email with this subject line:

LCMS Responds to Thrivent's Choice Dollars® Statement

The body of that email reads:

With the recent Thrivent announcement to reconsider their Choice Dollars® Program, the LCMS is encouraged to learn that Thrivent is beginning to recognize the serious concern its members have when their choice dollars are stewarded toward organizations such as Planned Parenthood that directly support the abortion industry and the killing of unborn children.

"We are very happy that Thrivent was willing to reconsider this issue. However, the LCMS and every one of its entities and congregations are both pro-life and nonprofit, so we certainly hope that Thrivent will continue to support such pro-life, nonprofit organizations," said the Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

LCMS members are urged to express their concerns directly to Thrivent Financial during this time of re-evaluation of the Choice Dollars® Program.

The above email included a link to the Thrivent Statement which included this paragraph:

*After input, discussion and a review of the concerns from Thrivent members, the leadership of this local chapter voted Thursday to remove it [the Planned Parenthood affiliate] from the Thrivent Choice program effective immediately. Given the deeply held views on this issue across our membership, we also are taking action to address the concerns of our membership. These steps include temporarily suspending all pro-choice **and pro-life organizations** from the Thrivent Choice program, placing a temporary hold on the addition and removal of nonprofit organizations from the program, and conducting a comprehensive program review.*

Please notice the words I highlighted in bold. Not only did they remove Planned Parenthood from the list of those who can receive money, Thrivent also removed all pro-life organizations from that list. As the second email from our synod indicated, that could technically include all Missouri Synod congregations. That email encouraged us to give Thrivent our feedback. I thought it may be helpful to share the feedback I gave:

When I first learned that Thrivent was considering channeling Thrivent Choice Dollars to a Planned Parenthood affiliate my initial reaction was, "You're kidding, right?" And after finding out that this was no joke, I said, "Unbelievable," and wondered where we should go to replace the financial products we currently get from Thrivent.

The next day upon hearing that Thrivent had reconsidered and removed the Planned Parenthood affiliate from the list of possibilities, my response was "Thrivent made a good choice." But then I read the fine print and discovered that Thrivent had also removed all pro-life organizations from the rolls of possible recipients, and I was back to, "You've got to be kidding me." And we are back to trying to find alternative providers for our Thrivent products.

Working to save the lives of those yet to be born is biblically defensible. Taking those same lives is not - no matter how you slice-and-dice and spin it. There are "grey" areas where Christians can in good conscience agree to disagree. Abortion is not one of those areas. It is categorically contrary to the Word of God in the Scriptures. Just to be clear: That does not mean that a person who's had an abortion cannot be considered a Christian. Everyone of us sins and needs God's forgiveness daily. But what it does mean is that it is unconscionable for an organization that identifies itself as "Christian" to support abortion.

Thrivent's real "Choice" as I see it is this: If you want to be a politically correct organization, then you must choose to remove the "Christian" facade. If you truly want to be a "Christian" organization, then you must choose to get rid of any pretense about being politically correct. (If Jesus had been "politically correct" He never would have gone to the cross.)

Sincerely, Rev. David Dauk

In my sermon last Sunday I talked about things we could say "Amen" to about this past year and the coming year - things that are "most certainly true." One of those truths is this: "It has been / will be difficult to be a Christian." Every day we face choices. Sometimes we listen to the wrong voices and make

the wrong choices. The challenge is to repent of those wrong choices and listen to God's voice and seek His power to make better ones the next day.

One of the choices we will increasingly need to make is the choice to either stand up for what God's Word clearly says or stick our heads in the sand and pretend everything is ok (when it really isn't). We live in a time when everyone has an opinion - and we all, it seems, love to make our opinions known. But if God has spoken on an issue, it really doesn't matter what my or your or anyone else's opinion is. The Sanctity of all human life is one of those issues that is not a matter of opinion. It is one of those black and white areas where "God has spoken." God tells us, for example, in the 5th Commandment (not His "fifth suggestion") "You will not murder (take an innocent life)". Please pray that more people will be emboldened to point out what God has declared about life fact as a result of Thrivent's action.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net