

How ELCA Modernized AP Operations to Move Funds Faster

The challenge

Like any organization with a global reach, ELCA processes payments to external vendors and grants to communities and organizations worldwide. But ELCA's financial operations face unique challenges. When disaster strikes or urgent needs arise — whether it's hunger relief, crisis response, or emergency support for international partners — the finance team must pivot quickly to move funds across the globe.

"We have major efforts on the hunger side and disaster side with extensive granting," says Stephanie Ulba, Controller at ELCA. "If there is a disaster or something that comes up very last minute, we need to get funds out quickly to organizations all throughout the world."

Adding to the complexity, ELCA's finance team previously operated with a decentralized structure. Mission developers and staff across the organization create invoices and supplier records, many without deep accounting expertise. This means the finance team often handled last-minute requests and past-due invoices while providing guidance to colleagues who needed support on processes.

With a small, dedicated finance team managing these competing demands, ELCA needed a payment solution that could simplify operations without sacrificing control or visibility.



Overview



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with 2.8 million members in more than 8,500 worshipping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region.



Headquarters
Chicago, IL



Industry
Religious organization



Employees
1,000+



OSV customer since
2020

Taking baby steps forward

ELCA began its relationship with OneSource Virtual (OSV) five years ago during its Workday implementation, initially leveraging OSV's services for 1099 reporting. The partnership worked seamlessly, setting the foundation for deeper collaboration.

When OSV offered an opportunity to further modernize ELCA's accounts payable processes, the finance team saw potential but approached the decision carefully. Although ELCA's team was initially interested in a comprehensive AP solution, they ultimately decided to begin with Invoice Pay. This enabled them to offload payment processing while keeping internal control over invoice entries and approvals.

"Being a nonprofit organization, we like to take small steps," Stephanie explains. "We kind of baby-stepped in and decided to outsource the payment portion of our solution and then see how that relationship works out."

This measured approach made sense for ELCA. The Invoice Pay implementation required minimal change management since it only affected the finance team directly. And because OSV operated within Workday, ELCA didn't need to invest heavily in IT resources or navigate complex integrations.

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Cleaning up data and gaining confidence

The implementation process revealed opportunities for improvement that ELCA hadn't fully anticipated. As OSV validated supplier banking information, the team uncovered outdated records and inaccurate data that could have caused payment failures.

"We had a lot of data cleanup that was needed," Stephanie recognizes. "My AP team has been busier than we probably would have expected from the start. But it's leading to a much cleaner supplier file and payment file in our solution."

"It's making us proactive," Stephanie says. "If we have bad banking data or old data that doesn't match the vendor record, we're going back to get that before we make a payment and have it rejected."

This proactive approach is especially valuable for ELCA's mission. When disaster strikes and funds need to move immediately, validated banking data means payments reach their destination without delays.



New payment options, better relationships

Invoice Pay also introduced payment methods ELCA hadn't previously offered. Vendors can now receive payments via virtual card, providing faster access to funds and a more streamlined experience.

"Now vendors can get virtual cards, so it's a quicker opportunity and easier processing on their side," Stephanie says. "That's not something we've ever offered in-house. We're giving more opportunities for vendors to receive different types of payments."

This virtual card program also generates rebates for ELCA based on spend, reframing the payment process from a cost center to a revenue opportunity. Before going live, OSV analyzed ELCA's vendor file to project potential rebates. Once the solution launched, OSV conducted a campaign to enroll additional suppliers.

"We work with hotels, convention centers, major suppliers that have contracts with us, and many take virtual cards," Stephanie explains. "In the next quarter we'll see a rebate come through for that."

But the true value goes beyond just cost savings. ELCA's vendors now receive consistent, professional communication about their payments through OSV's service center. This ensures clear instructions and multiple contact options if they have questions.

"It's a professional way to look at it, and it's consistent," Stephanie says. "The emails that come out from OSV are very clear with a help phone number and email address."

Maintaining control while gaining efficiency

Despite outsourcing payment processing, ELCA's finance team retains full visibility and control. Supplier invoices go through the same Workday approval process. The team still reviews and approves settlement runs before any payments are issued. The only difference? After approval, OSV manages the actual payment execution and vendor communications.

"We still have complete financial control before any payment goes out the door," Stephanie says. "We still very much feel the control there."

And when vendors contact ELCA with payment questions, its team can quickly access all the necessary information directly in Workday. OSV acts as an extension of ELCA's operations, managing inquiries and providing detailed payment details — but the finance team never loses sight about what's happening.

"We still have all of that information available so we can still give really great customer service," Stephanie explains. "We're just lowering our costs in how we're making payments."



Looking ahead

As ELCA continues to settle into its Invoice Pay partnership, Stephanie sees opportunities for ongoing development. The organization is looking into more automation in invoice processing, including OCR technology and AI that could reduce manual entry and identify invoices before they become overdue.

"The more automation we can bring in to take out that middleman process and really just ingest that invoice instantly can really be a positive shift," she reflects.

For now, ELCA's finance team is focused on leaning into the solution. They're continuing to clean data, optimize processes, and build on the foundation they've created. And when the next disaster strikes and funds need to move quickly, they'll have the agility and confidence to respond.

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