
Thrivent Financial to consider non-Lutheran customers

By Editor Test *Thu, Jun 7, 2012*

CEO Brad Hewitt said the company hasn't decided whether it would need to change its name if it changed its customer base. "We haven't figured that out yet," he said. "The reality is, the practical thing is, people call us 'Thrivent,' " he said.

What would Martin Luther say? What would *Garrison Keillor* say?

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is considering expanding its flock beyond the nation's 18 million Lutherans and allowing more non-Lutherans into the fold, according to a report in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

The Appleton, Wis., provider of life insurance, annuities and mutual funds has catered almost entirely to Lutherans and affiliated institutions. But a vote of the 2.5 million-membership of the nation's largest fraternal benefit society could change that. An internal poll showed that about two-thirds of Thrivent members favor expansion, which would require changes in Thrivent's articles of incorporation.

CEO Brad Hewitt said Thrivent, whose current organization was formed by the 2002 merger of Aid Association for Lutherans in Appleton and Lutheran Brotherhood of Minneapolis, must be careful not to tamper with its faith-based brand. The most likely targets for expansion would be other churches, schools and perhaps certain nonprofit groups that provide social services, he said.

At the end of 2011, Thrivent had \$170.2 billion of life insurance protection in force, and paid out \$310 million in dividends. Its adjusted surplus stood at \$5.4 billion. The organization has reported three consecutive years of growth in sales, revenue, assets under management and total adjusted surplus, which is a measure of an insurer's financial strength.

Thrivent distributes exclusively through a career force and selects agents who believe in the faith-and-finance theme of the organization. That makes it more difficult to find people and limits growth, Hewitt said.

Hewitt said the company hasn't decided whether it would need to change its name if it changed its customer base. "We haven't figured that out yet," he said. "The reality is, the practical thing is, people call us 'Thrivent,' " he said.

© 2012 RIJ Publishing LLC. All rights reserved.