



## Innovation

Formed on Feb. 1, 2021, the Innovation home area's purpose is to promote, coordinate, and facilitate organizational collaboration, culture, and development, including innovation processes and leadership development, for churchwide organization staff, members of this church, and others. This unit:

- a. Provides, manages, and designs experiments and processes (including related goals, metrics, and measurement) to assist this church in developing and evaluating new and existing programs and initiatives.
- b. Is responsible for leadership development through teaching and promoting innovation culture, skills, and tools within the churchwide organization and throughout this church.
- c. Equips the churchwide organization and this church to conduct relevant research, data collection, analysis, and evaluation to make data-informed decisions.

### Report of work: 2021–2022

1. Open Doors Initiative.
2. Congregations Lead Initiative.
3. Research: Gen Z study.
4. Other work.

### Open Doors Initiative

The Open Doors Initiative ([elca.org/opendoors](https://elca.org/opendoors)) was launched to support ELCA congregations interested in meeting new people during a time of regathering in physical spaces after the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. ELCA congregations were invited to share their concrete, actionable ideas for meeting new people during this critical time.

More than 1,000 ELCA congregations—nearly 12%—responded with their ideas. These ranged from responding to the immediate needs of communities to sparking moments of joy and maintaining online communities. In total, 134 grant applicants from across the ELCA were chosen through a random selection process and received a \$1,500 grant to fund their idea. This was the first time the churchwide organization had experimented with a randomized granting process. To learn more about the effectiveness of this experiment, the Innovation unit will invite all congregations that applied for or received an Open Doors grant to answer brief surveys over the next two to three years. This will help the team to understand the difference a grant from the churchwide organization makes in a congregation's ability to implement a new idea.

### Congregations Lead Initiative

The Congregations Lead Initiative ([www.elca.org/congregationslead](https://www.elca.org/congregationslead)) is a new two-year program that gathers a cohort of congregations from across the ELCA to unleash their collective genius and develop new and useful ministry innovations. This initiative is funded and supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment's Thriving Congregations Initiative.

In 2021, 50 congregations were selected through an application process that prioritized the congregation's existing connection to its wider geographic community as well as its willingness to embrace change. Together with the Innovation home area, these congregations will:

- Learn how to innovate for the future through semiannual learning events.
- Conduct multiple ministry experiments.
- Train with world-renowned innovation and ministry thought leaders.
- Receive personalized group coaching for support and guidance.
- Network with a cohort of other congregations doing similar innovation work.
- Be eligible for a Spark grant to launch a ministry experiment at the end of the initiative.

### **Research: Gen Z study**

In fall 2021, the Innovation home area conducted a study to explore the question “How do Generation Z people who do not know the ELCA experience and understand meaning, purpose, and belonging?” A total of 295 survey responses were collected, indicating that respondents:

- Found meaning by exploring their inner life alone and with close friends and family and found creative ways of expressing those self-discoveries with the outer world.
- Found purpose by creating stability in their personal lives while making meaningful change in the world.
- Found belonging by participating in a group that shares their lived experience but embraces their unique identities and perspectives.

Insights from the study will inform the work of the Innovation home area throughout 2022.

### **Other work**

In addition, this unit has:

- Hosted and facilitated a churchwide organization “Idea Week” allowing colleagues the opportunity to utilize new tools and participate in collaborative dialogue to develop their new ideas.
- Facilitated, in collaboration with other units, a cohort-based learning journey on leadership and management for staff, particularly those serving as supervisors, within the churchwide organization.
- Provided project management and support for more than 15 projects within the churchwide organization since Feb. 1, 2021.
- Through the leadership of the executive director for innovation, facilitated the meetings of the Innovation Leadership team, whose purpose is to “assess, implement, and evaluate experimental ideas and initiatives to further this church’s shared mission.”