

ELCA Congregation Pulse Survey – Creation Care July 2024

ELCA Research and Evaluation
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Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America



ELCA Congregation Pulse Survey Overview

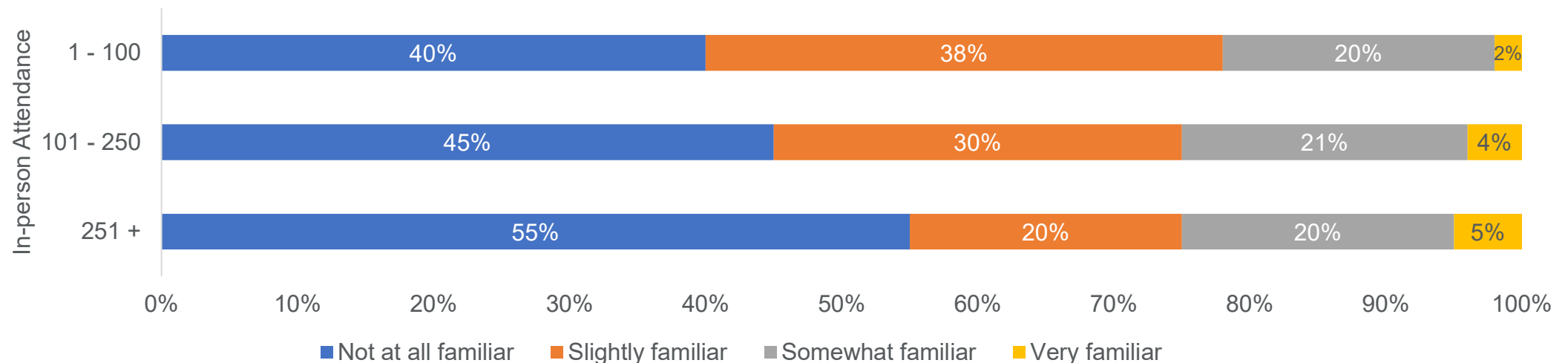
- The ELCA Congregation Pulse Surveys are an experimental effort to allow ELCA congregations and worshiping communities to communicate their perspectives, strengths, and development needs to synods and the churchwide organization.
- The July 2024 Pulse Survey was distributed to 1,835 congregations and worshiping communities. Key informants from 601 of these communities responded to the survey, for a response rate of 33%. Responses came from congregations and worshiping communities in 62 of 65 synods.
- Responding congregations and worshiping communities were largely representative of the ELCA in terms of average in-person worship attendance, community context, and racial diversity, though several small differences were observed. Responses were more likely to come from medium-sized congregations and from congregations slightly less diverse than the ELCA overall.



	Avg Worship Attendance (in-person)			Community Context			% Active Participants (BIPOC)
	1-100	101-250	251+	% Urban	% Suburban	% Rural	
Respondents	76%	20%	4%	40%	23%	38%	4.0%
ELCA overall	85%	13%	3%	37%	18%	45%	6.4%

Familiarity with ELCA messaging on climate care

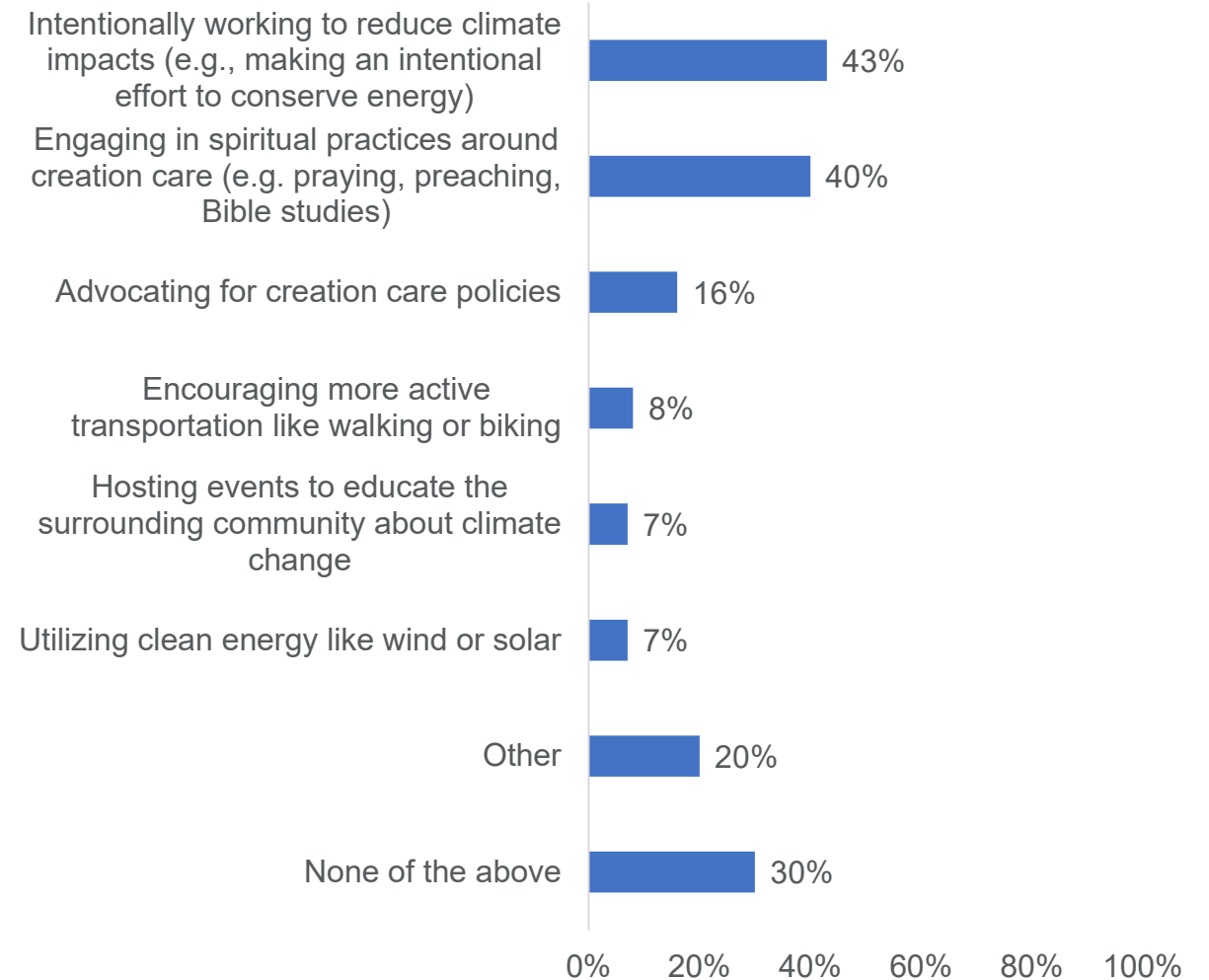
- Of the respondents to the July 2024 Congregation Pulse Survey, nearly half (42%) indicated most of their members were *not at all familiar* with the ELCA's social statement on creation care and the more recent social message on climate care. Only 2% of congregations reported that most members were *very familiar* with these documents.
- Familiarity differed somewhat by congregation size. Congregations with higher in-person attendance were most likely to report that their members were *not at all familiar* with these documents (55% of congregations with an average in-person worship attendance over 250).



*Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

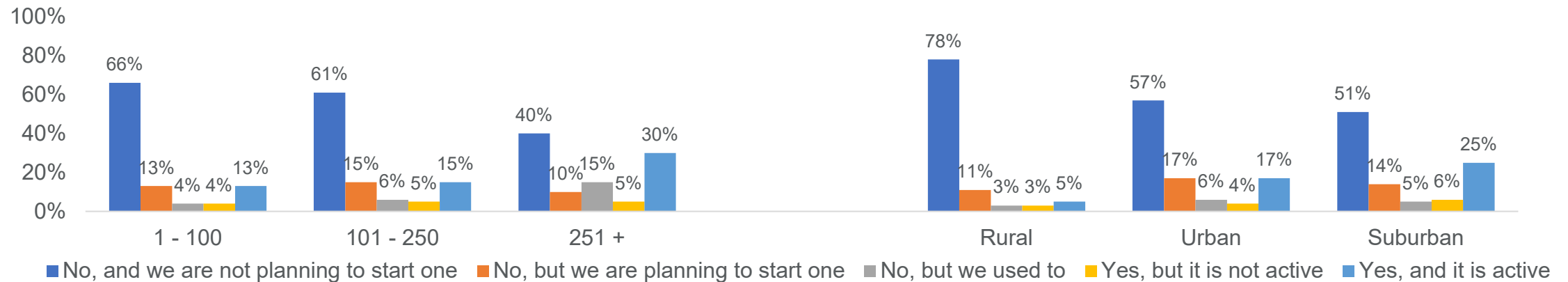
Creation Care Actions Taken by Congregations

- Over two thirds of responding congregations (68%) reported taking some action to address creation care.
- When it came to intentionally working to reduce climate impacts, larger congregations (those with in-person attendance of more than 250 people) were nearly twice as likely (80%) as smaller and medium-sized congregations to intentionally work to reduce climate impacts (1-100 = 44%; 101-250 = 50%).
- Of the 117 congregations who specified other types of action, 41% noted some type of recycling and/or composting.



Presence of a creation care team

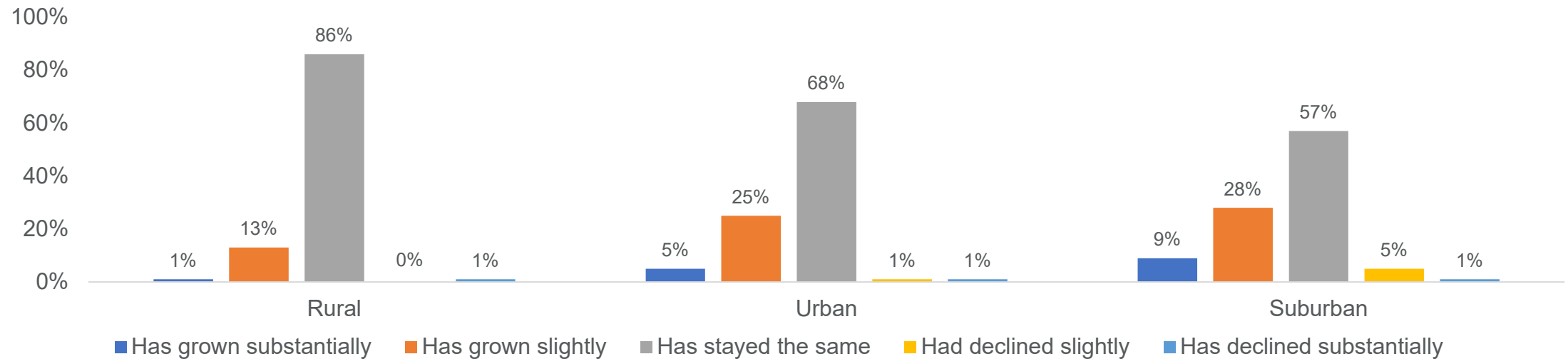
- Just over 1 in 10 respondents to the July 2024 Congregation Pulse Survey (13%) reported having an active team leading efforts for creation care. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) do not currently have a team and are not planning to start one.
- Larger congregations (those with more than 250 in average in-person worship attendance) were twice as likely to have an active creation care team in place than smaller congregations (those with 100 or fewer).
- Rural congregations were less likely than urban or suburban congregations to have an active team leading creation care efforts, and less likely to be planning to start one.



*Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Engagement with Creation Care

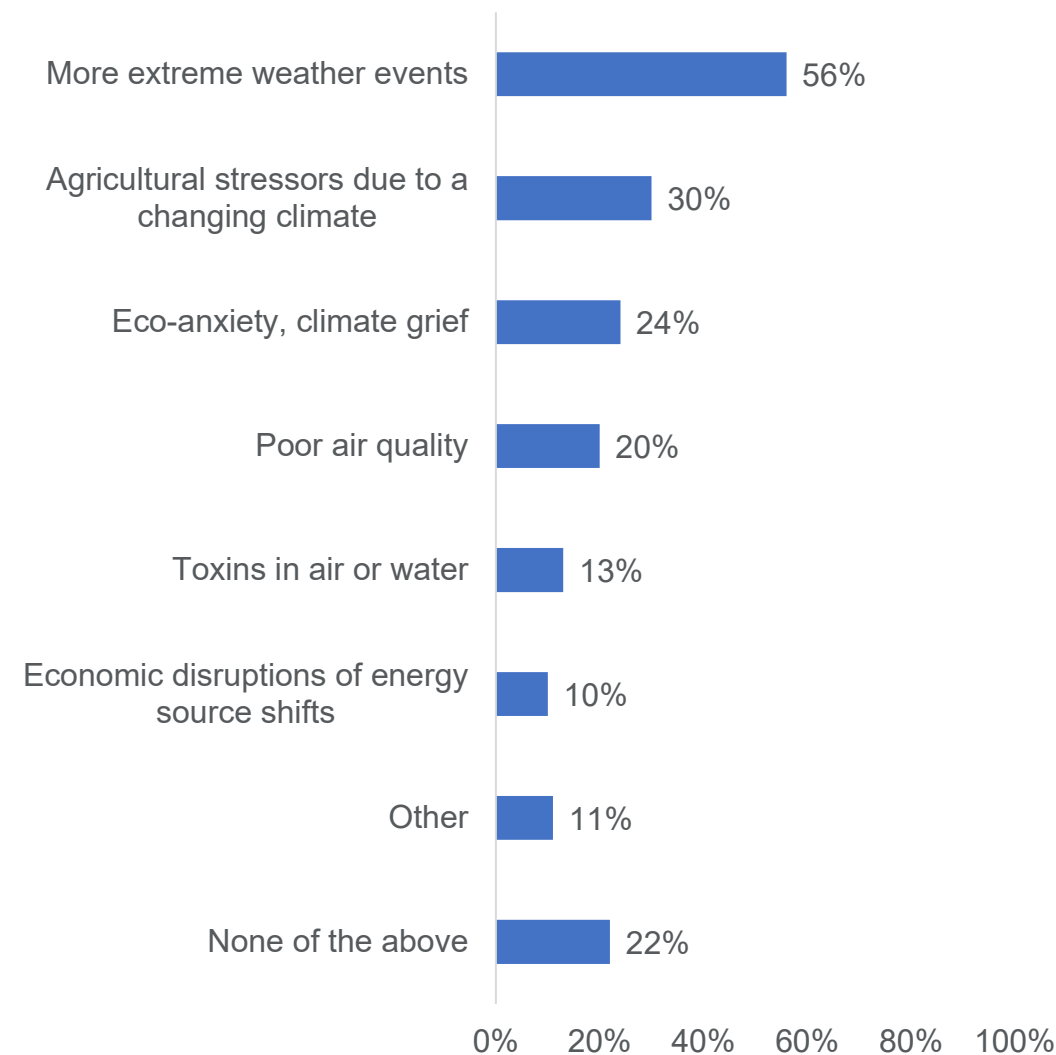
- Nearly one-quarter (23%) of responding congregations indicated their congregation's engagement with creation care has grown when compared to last year. Most (73%) indicated it had stayed the same.
- Respondents in suburban and urban congregations were more likely to report that their congregation's engagement with creation care had grown (either slightly or substantially) over the past year (37% and 30%, respectively), compared to rural congregations (14%).



**Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.*

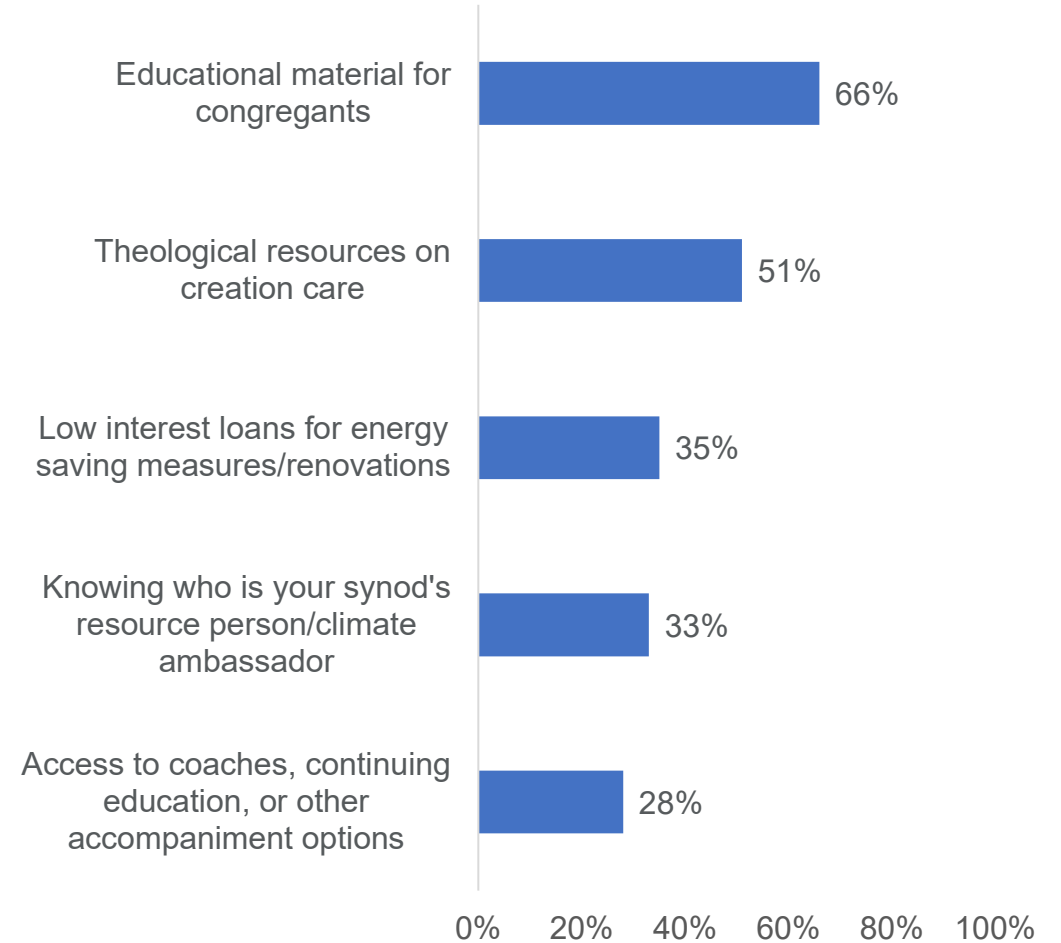
Issues Impacting the Congregation's Community

- Half of responding congregations (56%) said more extreme weather events have impacted their community.
- Responses differed by the community context of the congregation.
 - Urban (74%) and suburban (63%) congregations more frequently reported being impacted by extreme weather events than rural (49%) congregations.
 - More than half (53%) of rural congregations reported their community was impacted by agricultural stressors, while urban and suburban reported being impacted at a far lower rate (20% and 15%, respectively).
- Approximately 1/3 of smaller congregations reported being impacted by agricultural stressors (1-100 = 33%; 101-250 = 30%). Larger congregations were unlikely to be impacted (5%).



What do congregations say they need?

- When asked to select what would assist their congregation in taking more action on creation care, two-thirds (66%) of respondents said *educational materials for congregants*.
- Respondents from larger congregations (over 250 in-person attendance) were considerably less likely to indicate need for resources.
 - Larger congregations were less likely to indicate they needed access to coaches, etc. (1-100 = 27%; 100-250 = 33%; Over 250 = 7%).
 - They were also less likely to indicate that knowing who the synod's resource person was would help them (1-100 = 33%; 100-250 = 38%; Over 250 = 14%).



Frequency Tables

To what extent are most members of your congregation/worshiping community familiar with the ELCA's social statement on creation care and the more recent social message on climate care?

		Not at all familiar	Slightly familiar	Moderately familiar	Very familiar
Overall (n = 583)		42% (246)	37% (213)	19% (110)	2% (14)
In-person Worship Attendance*	1-100 (n = 338)	40% (136)	38% (129)	20% (67)	2% (6)
	101-250 (n = 91)	45% (41)	30% (27)	21% (19)	4% (4)
	251+ (n = 20)	55% (11)	20% (4)	20% (4)	5% (1)
Community Context*	Rural (n = 151)	44% (67)	37% (56)	18% (27)	1% (1)
	Urban (n = 158)	38% (60)	32% (51)	27% (43)	3% (4)
	Suburban (n = 91)	42% (38)	37% (34)	17% (15)	4% (4)

**Not all respondents provided their congregation ID. As a result, we do not know the average worship attendance or community context of all respondents.*

Which of the following actions is your congregation/worshiping community taking on creation care?

Intentionally working to reduce climate impacts (e.g., making an intentional effort to conserve energy)	43% (253)
Engaging in spiritual practices around creation care (e.g. praying, preaching, Bible studies)	40% (232)
Advocating for creation care policies	16% (91)
Encouraging more active transportation like walking or biking	8% (49)
Hosting events to educate the surrounding community about climate change	7% (39)
Utilizing clean energy like wind or solar	7% (38)
Other (see pp. 13-16 for verbatim responses)	20% (117)
None of the above	30% (177)

**Number of respondents was 583.*

Which of the following actions is your congregation/worshiping community taking on creation care?

	In-person Worship Attendance		
	1-100	101-250	250+
Intentionally working to reduce climate impacts (e.g., making an intentional effort to conserve energy)	44% (150)	50% (45)	80% (16)
Engaging in spiritual practices around creation care (e.g. praying, preaching, Bible studies)	42% (141)	39% (35)	45% (9)
Advocating for creation care policies	16% (53)	22% (22)	15% (3)
Encouraging more active transportation like walking or biking	9% (30)	9% (8)	5% (1)
Hosting events to educate the surrounding community about climate change	7% (22)	6% (5)	30% (6)
Utilizing clean energy like wind or solar	8% (26)	7% (6)	5% (1)
Other (see pp. 13-16 for verbatim responses)	20% (68)	22% (20)	45% (9)
None of the above	29% (99)	24% (22)	10% (2)
Total respondents within category*	340	91	20

	Community Context		
	Rural	Urban	Suburban
Intentionally working to reduce climate impacts (e.g., making an intentional effort to conserve energy)	38% (57)	55% (88)	56% (51)
Engaging in spiritual practices around creation care (e.g. praying, preaching, Bible studies)	30% (45)	46% (73)	52% (47)
Advocating for creation care policies	11% (17)	16% (26)	28% (25)
Encouraging more active transportation like walking or biking	6% (9)	8% (13)	8% (7)
Hosting events to educate the surrounding community about climate change	1% (2)	9% (14)	12% (11)
Utilizing clean energy like wind or solar	4% (6)	9% (14)	12% (11)
Other (see pp. 13-16 for verbatim responses)	17% (26)	20% (31)	29% (26)
None of the above	36% (54)	25% (40)	15% (14)
Total respondents within category*	151	159	91

*Not all respondents provided their congregation ID. As a result, we do not know the average worship attendance or community context of all respondents.

Which of the following actions is your congregation/worshiping community taking on creation care? (Verbatim responses to Other)

- A green, pollinator Sunday
- Active Environmental Stewardship Team providing Caring for Creation Events and Activities
- Actively encouraging recycling
- Addressing water runoff and impact on bay restoration, Creation of pollinator gardens and reforestation efforts.
- Always including creation care in our weekly worship prayers
- As farmers and ranchers, they have been actively engaged in caring for creation for many generations
- As we are preparing for a capital campaign to replace our boiler, we are consulting with an environmental engineer to help us design a system that is more environmentally friendly. We are also committed to recycling as much of our waste as possible.
- Beginning the process of xeriscaping
- Care for God's children recycling clothing for those in need.
- Commitment to composting and recycling
- Community garden, pollinator garden
- Compost and recycling
- Compostable products
- Composting
- Congregation to Compost community partner and collection hub
- Creation care sermon series, creation care-focused Lenten calendar earlier this year, raising monarchs
- Developing a Go Green initiative in our church
- Educating our congregation and implementing the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle program.
- Educating our congregation and the community through our garden practices (organic, native, pollinator friendly), implementing compostables in our fellowship and soup kitchen ministries), educating the congregation in composting/recycling practices
- Educating the congregation about creation care issues. Recycling everything we can.
- Emphasis on energy consumption and recycling
- Encourage all to be good stewards of the Lord land
- Encouraging partner agencies and neighbors to consider actions for climate justice
- Energy efficient windows, insulation; participating in local recycling & composting programs
- Energy management
- Farmer and Rancher stewardship practices of care for land, water and livestock.
- Finding ways to reduce paper usage and primarily utilize electronic forms of communication

Which of the following actions is your congregation/worshiping community taking on creation care? (Verbatim responses to Other)

- For almost 2 years there is conversation around getting solar
- For largely financial reasons, we made the switch to LED's throughout the building. We updated the old boiler system to a smart boiler. Energy costs were roughly cut in half.
- Fundraising to go Solar!
- Getting annoyed when it shows up in the weekly prayers. That and racism are the two that get the pastor the most complaints.
- In all communities the farm areas are aware that we all depend on agriculture which also includes being responsible to all the factors that enhance our very existence as a people of God who for the most part want to leave a better place for children.
- In our rural churches, many have done more than utilize clean energy sources, they have provided places for solar farms and wind farms to exist and be maintained, sometimes at great inconvenience. To me, that is sacrificial giving for the sake of the world.
- Including care creation in worship prayers
- It is very difficult to engage with these topics in this area. There are no recycling programs within 70 miles and Emmanuel is located in rural, farm and ranch country. Some of our farmers do participate in no-till operations
- Just planted an onsite pollinator garden
- Keeping creation care as one of our regular decision filters
- Learning about how to plan for and install solar panels and EV charging stations onsite
- Learning about our Watershed & hosting events, Pollinator Gardens
- Making changes within our building to better care for creation.
- Our Plastic Fast during Lent and switching to ceramic coffee mugs during Coffee Hour and glass communion cups.
- Overall care and respect for creation is high; everyone walks and because people sleep outside, there is a deep care for the earth that holds them
- Pollinator gardens, bee hives, community gardens, storm water projects
- Prairie learning
- Rain garden, native plantings, recycling, composting
- Reciclamos y hacemos uso de tv para la adoración reduciendo significativamente el uso de papel
- Recycle / reuse
- Recycle/reuse/reduce efforts, native plants in garden areas
- Recycling
- Recycling

Which of the following actions is your congregation/worshiping community taking on creation care? (Verbatim responses to Other)

- Recycling
- Recycling
- Recycling
- Recycling
- Recycling
- Recycling
- Recycling (in this locale, requires extra commitment of effort and money)
- Recycling at church and at home
- Recycling is the only thing we do
- Recycling Ministry
- Recycling of trash
- Recycling program
- Recycling program
- Recycling program, reducing the amount of waste
- Recycling program. Bottle fillers. Automatic lights in restrooms.
- Recycling what we can, including communion cups.
- The congregation's Green Team is considering additional initiatives including planting a pollinator garden and advanced education about recycling options and opportunities.
- This agricultural congregation has community garden providing fresh vegetables to three county foodshelves. Congregation also partners w/urban ministry in sharing farmland acreage w/harvest and eggs going into inner city. In addition to collecting recycling we are collecting 1,000 lbs of plastic which will become a park bench at our Lutheran Bible Camp.
- This just gave me some great ideas!
- This summer we just planted a pollinator garden. We have a very active Care of Creation team that also leads us in worship every Spring.
- Updating equipment to be more energy efficient—ie: HVAC.
- Use of eco-friendly products, recycling, single bulletin use and some bike or walk to work.
- Use of organics, limiting salt use on parking lot, community garden
- Using biodegradable containers, sharing vegetables, living by example
- Using it as a preaching example
- Using Season of Creation Liturgy
- Utilizing a \$100,000 energy efficiency grant to upgrade heating/cooling, lighting, and other energy usage items

Which of the following actions is your congregation/worshiping community taking on creation care? (Verbatim responses to Other)

- We are providing opportunities for our congregation members to recycle plastics, including soft plastics. We are using less disposable paper products in our church kitchen.
- We are working on various projects to use less throw away materials and recycle more items. We are currently collecting plastics that are being made into building material to make shelters for the unhoused.
- We encourage car pooling. Bulletins provided via email also, so we print less.
- We have improved insulation in our buildings to lower energy use.
- We have a community garden to help community grow their own food and share it with others.
- We have several recycling programs within our church.
- We have stopped using disposable anything. We will also begin attending community events to educate others on creation care in the very near future.
- We have stopped using non recycable materials and are recycling all plastic coming into the building
- We have two larger rain barrels which catch water for the community garden that grows seedlings for the neighborhood
- We have upgraded lighting to LED, introduced recycling and composting in all our practices, planted two sustainable vegetable gardens on our property.
- We host a community garden and worship in the Stone Garden seasonally.
- We no longer use Styrofoam products; we recycle all paper and cardboard items
- We recycle
- We've hosted several conversations about climate change for our congregants
- We've partnered with neighbors to be better stewards of the nearly 9 acres of land that our building is located on, removing invasive species and planting a 2 acre prairie
- When I host gatherings in the church, we do not use disposable tableware. Baby steps around here...
- Working to decrease single use consumption including communion cups/plates/cups
- Working to make our building more climate resilient
- Working very hard on recycling
- Working with Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership to apply for a grant to incorporate stormwater treatment facilities into our parking lot
- Working with soil and water conservation district

Does your congregation/worshiping community have a team leading efforts for creation care?

		Yes, and it is active	Yes, but it is not active	No, but we used to	No, but we are planning to start one	No, and we are not planning to start one
Overall (n = 573)		13% (72)	4% (20)	4% (25)	16% (90)	64% (366)
In-person Worship Attendance*	1-100 (n = 336)	13% (44)	4% (12)	4% (12)	13% (45)	66% (223)
	101-250 (n = 89)	15% (13)	5% (4)	6% (5)	15% (13)	61% (54)
	251+ (n = 20)	30% (6)	5% (1)	15% (3)	10% (2)	40% (8)
Community Context*	Rural (n = 150)	5% (8)	3% (5)	3% (4)	11% (16)	78% (117)
	Urban (n = 158)	17% (26)	4% (6)	6% (9)	17% (27)	57% (90)
	Suburban (n = 87)	25% (22)	6% (5)	5% (4)	14% (12)	51% (44)

**Not all respondents provided their congregation ID. As a result, we do not know the average worship attendance or community context of all respondents.*

Compared to last year, would you say that your congregation/worshipping community's engagement with creation care has grown, has declined, or has stayed the same?

		Has grown substantially	Has grown slightly	Has stayed the same	Has declined slightly	Has declined substantially
Overall (n = 572)		4% (23)	19% (111)	73% (418)	2% (12)	1% (8)
In-person Worship Attendance*	1-100 (n = 337)	4% (14)	19% (63)	74% (248)	2% (7)	2% (5)
	101-250 (n = 87)	6% (5)	25% (22)	68% (59)	0% (0)	1% (1)
	251+ (n = 20)	10% (2)	15% (3)	70% (14)	5% (1)	0% (0)
Community Context*	Rural (n = 150)	1% (1)	13% (19)	86% (129)	0% (0)	1% (1)
	Urban (n = 156)	5% (8)	25% (39)	68% (106)	1% (2)	1% (1)
	Suburban (n = 89)	9% (8)	28% (25)	57% (51)	5% (4)	1% (1)

**Not all respondents provided their congregation ID. As a result, we do not know the average worship attendance or community context of all respondents.*

Which of the following issues are impacting your congregation's community?

Economic disruptions of energy source shifts	10% (54)
Toxins in air or water	13% (74)
Poor air quality	20% (115)
Eco-anxiety, climate grief	24% (134)
Agricultural stressors due to a changing climate	30% (170)
More extreme weather events	56% (319)
Other (See pp. 21-22 for verbatim responses)	11% (61)
None of the above	22% (126)

**Number of respondents was 568.*

Which of the following issues are impacting your congregation's community?

In-person Worship Attendance

	1-100	101-250	251+
Economic disruptions of energy source shifts	11% (36)	6% (5)	0% (0)
Toxins in air or water	13% (42)	13% (11)	25% (5)
Poor air quality	18% (61)	26% (23)	50% (10)
Eco-anxiety, climate grief	23% (77)	28% (24)	50% (10)
Agricultural stressors due to a changing climate	33% (109)	30% (26)	5% (1)
More extreme weather events	55% (185)	63% (55)	70% (14)
Other (See pp. 21-22 for verbatim responses)	13% (41)	9% (8)	15% (3)
None of the above	22% (72)	20% (17)	15% (3)
Total respondents within category*	334	87	20

Community Context

	Rural	Urban	Suburban
Economic disruptions of energy source shifts	9% (13)	10% (16)	11% (10)
Toxins in air or water	12% (18)	14% (22)	14% (12)
Poor air quality	14% (21)	24% (37)	34% (30)
Eco-anxiety, climate grief	15% (22)	27% (41)	37% (33)
Agricultural stressors due to a changing climate	53% (78)	20% (31)	15% (13)
More extreme weather events	49% (72)	63% (98)	74% (66)
Other (See pp. 21-22 for verbatim responses)	13% (19)	10% (15)	11% (10)
None of the above	25% (36)	19% (30)	16% (14)
Total respondents within category*	147	155	89

Which of the following issues are impacting your congregation's community? (Verbatim responses to Other)

- A food desert community.
- Adequate food sources
- Affordable housing crisis
- Algae blooms in swimming lakes
- All of the above - especially because our people live on the streets and rely on locally sourced produce from small farmers affected by climate change.
- Anxiety over changing policies and new technology
- Clean water. Lake run-off
- Concern about the impacts on future generations
- Concerns about water availability
- Concerns about water shortages
- Constantly power outreach
- Corporate agriculture leaders
- Declining population and lack of available clergy willing to serve in highly rural areas.
- Disagreements on how to best care for GOD'S creation...
- Economic anxiety not specifically climate related
- Extreme heat in the Phoenix area
- Extreme poverty
- Few ways to recycle, landfills are often unused
- Fire danger
- Flooding
- Flooding making travel difficult
- Food desert in the community.
- Housing shortage and Childcare
- Increased homelessness
- Invasive species degrading native ecosystems
- Knowledge for repairing & maintaining existing solar panels
- La erosión de las costas por el aumento del nivel del mar
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of attendance at worship
- Lack of water
- Living expenses are so high people can't afford to help with creation care
- Local forest fires
- Mental health and addiction issues

Which of the following issues are impacting your congregation's community? (Verbatim responses to Other)

- Not having a pastor..
- Occasional Canadian wildfire smoke
- Our local glaciers are melting
- Our small community was hit directly by a December tornado, taking out the downtown area and important small community buildings like the post office and community center/government office.
- Power Outages.
- Prolonged and more dangerous wildfire season resulting in the loss and or rise of insurance costs
- Prolonged hot weather
- Proposals for farm land being taken over with long-term solar leases.
- Recent flooding.
- Rising sea levels, flooding
- Skyrocketing housing costs and rampant housing insecurity
- Some resistance to climate change due to the rural/small town area we live in and their mining activity which has been a major employer in the area.
- The agricultural stressors affect just a few who continue to farm for a living but not the whole congregation or community.
- The high costs of energy
- The inland hurricane ("derecho") of 2020 brought the reality of climate change to our front door.
- These are inappropriately leading questions
- Toxic waste sites (and plans to clean them up) in neighboring Black communities has engaged our communities.
- Viable, low impact, community transportation
- Water scarcity in the desert southwest
- Water supply concerns
- We are a congregation of commuters, so we mostly drive to church. I think we are beginning to be aware of the impact this has on the environment.
- We are inner city. Food insecurity is more of an immediate issue for many. We do try to address these needs in climate conscious ways as we are able.
- We don't necessarily experience the checked above but we are aware of how climate change is affecting our world. We have had periodic experiences of the checked above.
- Wild fires
- Wildfires
- Wildfires due to dry climate
- Wildlife displacement due to development

Which of the following would assist your congregation in taking more action in creation care?

Low interest loans for energy saving measures/renovations	35% (173)
Knowing who is your synod's resource person/climate ambassador	33% (163)
Educational material for congregants (e.g., bible study devotional materials, advocacy training, films to share)	66% (323)
Theological resources on creation care (e.g., worship materials, lectionary commentaries)	51% (249)
Access to coaches, continuing education, or other accompaniment options	28% (137)

**Number of respondents was 491.*

Which of the following would assist your congregation in taking more action in creation care?

	In-person Worship Attendance		
	1-100	101-250	251+
Low interest loans for energy saving measures/renovations	36% (106)	43% (35)	36% (5)
Knowing who is your synod's resource person/climate ambassador	33% (98)	38% (31)	14% (2)
Educational material for congregants (e.g., bible study devotional materials, advocacy training, films to share)	68% (199)	60% (49)	64% (9)
Theological resources on creation care (e.g., worship materials, lectionary commentaries)	51% (151)	52% (43)	43% (6)
Access to coaches, continuing education, or other accompaniment options	27% (80)	33% (27)	7% (1)
Total respondents within category*	295	82	14

	Community Context		
	Rural	Urban	Suburban
Low interest loans for energy saving measures/renovations	33% (39)	40% (56)	37% (30)
Knowing who is your synod's resource person/climate ambassador	27% (32)	33% (46)	45% (37)
Educational material for congregants (e.g., bible study devotional materials, advocacy training, films to share)	64% (75)	69% (97)	67% (55)
Theological resources on creation care (e.g., worship materials, lectionary commentaries)	50% (58)	51% (71)	56% (46)
Access to coaches, continuing education, or other accompaniment options	24% (28)	22% (31)	35% (29)
Total respondents within category*	117	140	82

*Not all respondents provided their congregation ID. As a result, we do not know the average worship attendance or community context of all respondents.