

The Context for Mission and Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Department for Research and Evaluation

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Over the course of the strategic planning process, a host of contextual information has been collected and reviewed. This is a summary and elaboration of that material.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The ELCA has a difficult time negotiating demographic change. Congregations may grow in Minnesota, but they struggle in states that are more diverse (in every way) like California and Florida. These states, however, are among the fastest growing states in the U.S.
- Since 1990, the ELCA has not fared well in the industrial states of the Northeast (New York, Pennsylvania) or the Midwest (Ohio, Illinois, Michigan). This appears to be the case particularly in the medium and large cities of these states. In these medium and large cities the membership of the ELCA is older, less well educated, on fixed incomes, and much less likely to have children at home. This membership is also predominantly white despite the racial and ethnic diversity of the population in these places.
- The ELCA is considerably more successful in the distant suburbs of large cities particularly in states like Minnesota. In these distant suburbs, the population is predominantly white and a high number of households consist of two adults with children. The population of these distant suburbs also tends to be well educated with higher incomes.
- In general, no matter what the congregational setting, if the population is predominantly nonwhite, the ELCA does not do well in terms of membership growth.
- The first golden era of membership growth in the ELCA (and its predecessor bodies) occurred at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Growth during this time period was primarily due to immigration from Germany and the Scandinavian countries. The second golden era was during the “traditional family” baby boom that followed the Second World War. This time of growth ended in the middle of the 1960s. In the ELCA, membership growth depends on married-couple households with children. In 1950, married-couple households with children accounted for 78 percent of all households in the U.S. In 2000, married-couple households with children accounted for 52 percent of all households in the U.S.
- In the late 1960s and early 1970s, large numbers of young people who were baptized in the church began to defect. This large scale defection has had serious implications for all mainline denominations. This generation, particularly those born in the later years of the baby boom, is much more likely to think of participating in organized religion as optional, something to be purchased (or not purchased) as it is needed, or when it is appealing. In turn, religion as a commodity casts congregations into the realm of

religious vendors where more and more “firms” are competing for fewer and fewer “customers.” Some congregations have readily adjusted to these new circumstances and others have not.

- Understanding who is most (or least) likely to go to church is a complex proposition because the decision is based in the interaction of a host of factors. These factors include age, income, education, household status, religious upbringing and finally, a judgment about the value of a “return” on “investment.” In short, younger people are much less likely to go to church especially if they are unmarried and childless, but they are more likely to attend if they have a strong religious role model. People with older children, people with too little or too much money, and people with too little education or too much education are less likely to attend church. People with an education in the humanities and social sciences are less likely to go than people with training in business or the natural sciences. People who do not believe in heaven or hell or who believe all people will go to heaven are less likely to attend church.
- In 2001, the vast majority of Lutherans were as loyal to the Lutheran church in one form or another as they were in 1991, but a majority (53%) do not believe it matters what kind of church one attends. On the one hand, this may be evidence of a strong and positive ecumenism, or on the other, it may simply point to a weak Lutheran identity.
- Only 3 percent of the clergy agreed that “the Bible is the word of God, to be taken literally word for word.” This compares to 29 percent of the lay people.
- The majority of ELCA congregations (5,738) have less than 350 baptized members. These congregations account for about one-fifth of the total membership. Another fifth of the membership is in the largest 476 congregations (those with more than 1,500 members). The number of very small congregations (1 to 175 baptized members) has increased by 2 percent since 1990. The number of very large congregations (more than 1,500 members) has increased by 6.7 percent.
- Some synods, particularly those with small congregations in rural or very urban areas, are facing a critical shortage of pastors.
- Between 1990 and 2000, there were two clear financial developments among congregations. First, giving to special causes (designated) has increased. Second, there has been a decline in the percent of total giving that goes toward mission support. This decline is offset by an increase in capital improvement expenditures.
- Mission support as a percent of total giving has declined dramatically over the years. Also, a larger percentage of that mission support is going to synodical rather than churchwide work.
- ELCA clergy are most satisfied with their housing arrangements, their current ministry positions and their relations with lay leaders. They are least satisfied with their support from denominational officials, opportunities for continuing education, and their own spiritual lives.

- Clergy in their first calls felt most prepared to preach, plan worship services and visit members. They felt least prepared to plan a church budget, design stewardship programs, or to manage a church office. These first call clergy were also asked about the needs of the church. They felt the greatest needs were for reaching out to unchurched persons, helping congregations work toward a vision, and helping people to grow spiritually. In terms of preparedness they rated themselves lowest on reaching out to unchurched persons, involving congregations in community issues of justice, and helping congregations revitalize their ministry.
- Voting members at synod assemblies believe that secularization, changes in the family, and the values (or lack of values) of the media have had the greatest impact on the ELCA as a whole in the last three decades. They believe the church needs to do more evangelism and better teaching about Lutheranism. They believe the ELCA also needs to put more emphasis on Bible study, prayer and discipleship.

THE CONTEXT FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

WHAT ARE THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND MEMBERSHIP TRENDS?

Population Growth and Membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

In the fastest growing states (based on the increase in the number of persons), membership in ELCA congregations has not kept pace with the U.S. population.

Between 1990 and 2000, eight states increased their population by more than one million people.¹ All of these states are in the South and West. They include California, Texas, Florida, Georgia, Arizona, North Carolina, Washington, and Colorado. These states accounted for 36 percent of the total U.S. population in 2000, compared to 34 percent of the population in 1990. The baptized membership of ELCA congregations in these states is reported in Table 1. ELCA membership, as a percent of the population in these states, was already low in 1990, especially in the fastest growing states, and it dropped even lower by 2000. ELCA membership decreased in five of the eight fastest growing states over the decade.

Table 1: Population and ELCA Baptized Membership Change Between 1990 and 2000 in Selected States

State	U.S. Population Change	ELCA Baptized Membership Change	ELCA Membership as a Percent of the Population	
			1990	2000
			1990 to 2000	
California	4,111,627	-22,985	0.65%	0.50%
Texas	3,865,310	-1,131	0.92%	0.74%
Florida	3,044,452	2,453	0.72%	0.56%
Georgia	1,708,237	4,649	0.50%	0.45%
Arizona	1,465,404	660	0.14%	0.11%
North Carolina	1,420,676	750	1.33%	1.10%
Washington	1,027,429	-4,946	2.72%	2.17%
Colorado	1,006,867	5,143	1.87%	1.55%

Nearly 80 percent of the baptized membership of the ELCA is concentrated in fifteen states. All of these states are growing modestly but there is no apparent (or significant statistical) relationship between population growth in these states and membership change in the ELCA. (See Table 2.) The state of

¹ The demographic data presented here is from the U.S. Census Bureau. The membership statistics are from the Congregational Annual Reports, 1990 and 2000, ELCA.

California grew by more than four million persons between 1990 and 2000, but ELCA congregations lost 22,985 members. On the other hand, Minnesota is ranked 17th among the states in population growth over this same period, but ELCA congregations in Minnesota gained 29,345 members. This makes the 17th fastest growing state number one for the ELCA. The population of the state of Pennsylvania grew very modestly (by 399,361 persons) between 1990 and 2000, but ELCA congregations in the state lost 70,012 members. Of the 15 states with the most ELCA members, 11 declined in ELCA membership.

Table 2: ELCA Baptized Membership in the States Accounting for 80 Percent of the Total ELCA Membership

State	ELCA Membership	Percent of ELCA Membership	Cumulative Percent	Change in Membership 1990 to 2000	Change in U.S. Population 1990 to 2000
Minnesota	852,994	16.69%	16.69%	29,345	544,380
Pennsylvania	612,660	11.99%	28.68%	-70,012	399,361
Wisconsin	463,357	9.07%	37.75%	3,189	471,906
Ohio	301,752	5.91%	43.66%	-18,583	506,025
Illinois	279,510	5.47%	49.13%	-18,099	988,691
Iowa	267,445	5.23%	54.36%	2,147	149,569
North Dakota	174,494	3.42%	57.78%	-5,426	3,400
California	171,030	3.35%	61.13%	-22,985	4,111,627
New York	169,448	3.32%	64.45%	-18,192	986,052
Michigan	160,805	3.15%	67.60%	-6,990	643,147
Texas	154,792	3.03%	70.63%	-1,131	3,865,310
Nebraska	128,570	2.52%	73.15%	-97	132,878
Washington	127,665	2.50%	75.65%	-4,946	1,027,429
South Dakota	121,690	2.38%	78.03%	7,285	58,840
Maryland	103,032	2.02%	80.05%	-3,008	515,025

Membership Gains and Congregational Size

There are growing ELCA congregations of every size, but only the largest congregations (more than 1,500 baptized members) are growing no matter how growth is measured.

Membership gains in the ELCA vary by congregational size, but only the very large congregation size category (more than 1,500 members) is growing no matter how growth is measured. (See Table 3.) There are more members in 2000 than in 1990, for example, in the smallest size category of 1 to 175 baptized

members, but this is because a large number of congregations (more than 600) over the decade fell into the very small congregation size category from size categories above it. The **average size** of a congregation in the smallest size category has actually decreased from 108 to 104.

In terms of the average size of a congregation, every size category other than the largest has declined with the congregations in the 701 to 950 size category being the hardest hit both in terms of actual numbers and as a percent of total membership. On the other hand, the congregations in the largest size category (more than 1,500 members) increased by an average of 82 members and the number of congregations in the category increased by 30.

Table 3: Baptized Membership Change in the ELCA Between 1990 and 2000 by Congregation Size

Congregation Size	1990			2000			1990 to 2000		
	Members	Congregations		Members	Congregations		Change		
	Number	Average Size	Number	Number	Average Size	Number	Members	Congregations	Average Size
1 to 175	296,605	108	2,752	300,047	104	2,876	3,442	124	-4.0
176 to 350	790,631	258	3,059	731,752	256	2,862	-58,879	-197	-2.0
351 to 500	713,882	419	1,705	676,101	418	1,616	-37,781	-89	-1.0
501 to 700	763,823	590	1,295	726,213	586	1,240	-37,610	-55	-4.0
701 to 950	755,495	812	930	675,365	806	838	-80,130	-92	-6.0
951 to 1,500	914,323	1,178	776	879,542	1,174	749	-34,781	-27	-4.0
1,501 or more	1,003,840	2,251	446	1,110,546	2,333	476	106,706	30	82.0
Total	5,238,599	478	10,963	5,099,566	479	10,657	-139,033	-306	1.0

Membership Gains and Congregational Setting

Just as with size, there are congregations that grow no matter what their setting, but overall, ELCA congregations in the medium and large cities have been particularly hard hit with membership losses. Only the congregations in the distant suburbs of large cities are showing significant growth.

Membership gains also vary by the setting of a congregation with the most significant percentage and numerical losses occurring in medium size and large cities. Table 4 shows the differences for California, Minnesota and Pennsylvania. Rural non farming congregations and small town and city congregations in California and Minnesota have not been particularly hard hit by membership losses. In California the biggest numerical losses have been in the medium and larger cities, including their suburbs. In Minnesota, the membership losses have been most significant in large cities. In Pennsylvania, the membership losses

are across the board with the single exception of the distant suburbs of large cities. Small towns, small cities, and medium size cities have been very hard-hit.

Table 4: ELCA Baptized Membership Change by Setting in California, Minnesota and Pennsylvania

Setting of Congregation	California		Minnesota		Pennsylvania	
	Change	Percent	Change	Percent	Change	Percent
rural farming	-100	-7.62%	-2,843	-2.42%	-2,897	-3.52%
rural non farming	417	21.55%	4,813	16.92%	-354	-0.76%
small town less than 10,000	85	1.88%	9,559	5.06%	-11,224	-7.19%
small city: 10,000 to 50,000	1,292	6.76%	6,637	5.15%	-12,633	-10.38%
medium city: 50,000 to 250,000	-5,321	-9.44%	1,121	3.14%	-10,910	-16.84%
suburb of medium city	-638	-17.52%	1,068	10.67%	-3,421	-4.92%
large city: 250,000 or more	-2,643	-6.49%	-18,413	-22.04%	-6,330	-22.77%
suburb of large city within 10 miles	-3,558	-16.83%	22,569	15.62%	-8,327	-18.36%
suburb of large city over 10 miles away	-1,592	-6.99%	17,200	30.25%	627	2.39%
missing	-1,761	-13.21%	2,396	16.79%	-331	-1.19%
Total	-22,985	-11.85%	29,345	3.56%	-70,012	-10.26%

For the ELCA as a whole, the large and medium cities have been hit hardest followed by the rural areas, while the distant suburbs of very large cities show double-digit growth. (See Table 5.)

Table 5: Baptized Membership Change Between 1990 and 2000 for the ELCA by Congregational Setting

Setting of Congregation	1990	2000	Change	Percent Change
rural farming	608,691	593,172	-15,519	-2.55%
rural non farming	169,181	179,491	10,310	6.09%
small town less than 10,000	978,423	991,014	12,591	1.29%
small city: 10,000 to 50,000	881,335	872,446	-8,889	-1.01%
medium city: 50,000 to 250,000	755,588	711,110	-44,478	-5.89%
suburb of medium city	215,374	230,387	15,013	6.97%
large city: 250,000 or more	472,991	410,299	-62,692	-13.25%
suburb of large city within 10 miles	553,144	573,063	19,919	3.60%
suburb of large city over 10 miles away	294,361	328,439	34,078	11.58%
Total	4,929,088	4,889,421	-39,667	-0.80%

Population Diversity

The ELCA is disproportionately represented in states that are predominantly white. The white population is projected to grow by less than two percent between 2002 and 2007, while the growth rate for Latinos will be much higher.

Not only is the population growing fastest in the South and the West, but these areas are also the most diverse in terms of race/ethnicity. In Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia and South Carolina, 28 percent or more of the population is African American/Black. In California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, 25 percent of the population or more is Latino. The Latino population is the fastest growing racial/ethnic segment in the United States. On the other hand, states with much slower growth rates are predominantly white. The percent of whites in the wider population is 75.1 percent, but states like Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin and Indiana are 88 percent or more white.

Money

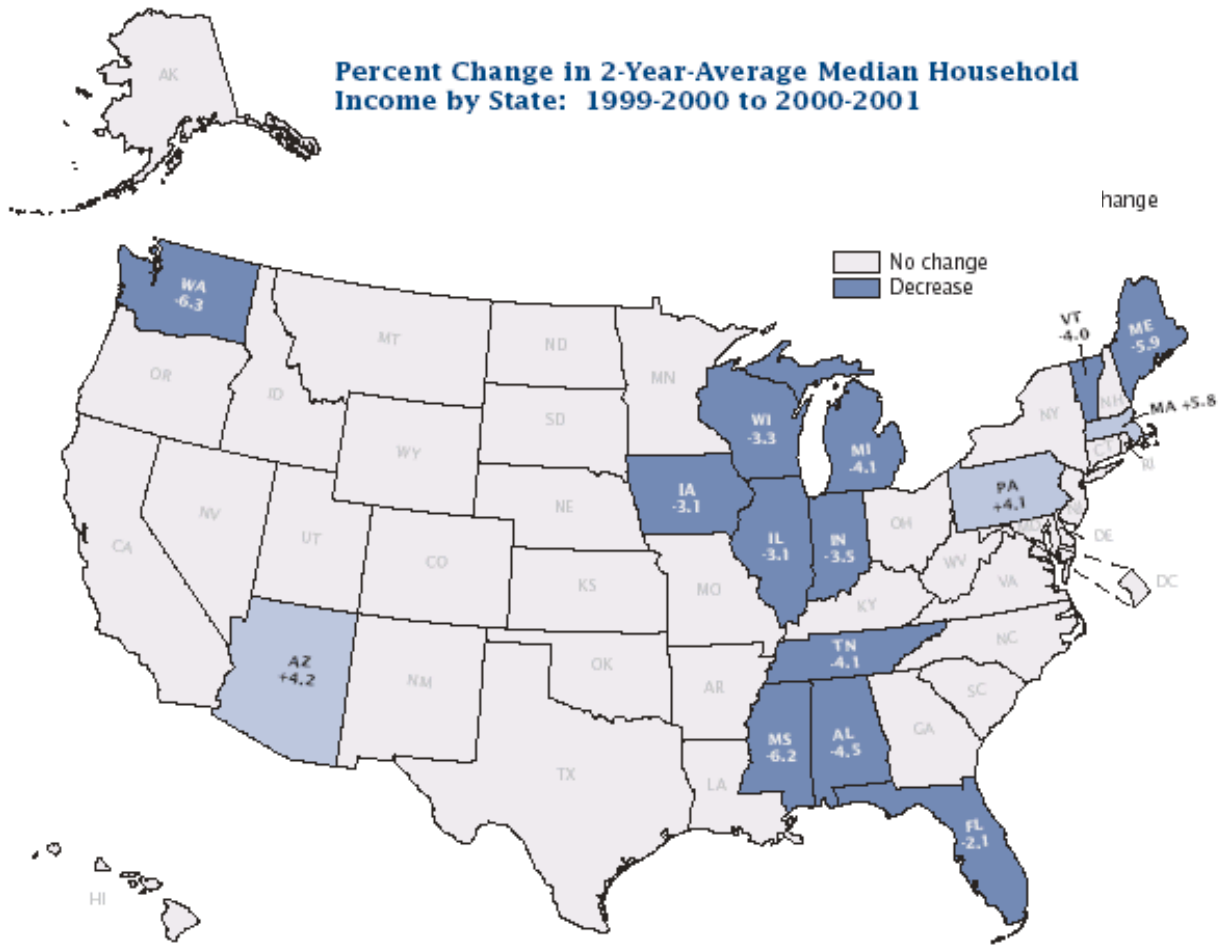
The measures of income inequality show that inequality increased substantially between 1967 and the early 1990s, but then was unchanged through the late 1990s. In 2001, however, the measures of inequality began to climb again.

The measures of income inequality show that inequality increased substantially between 1967 and the early 1990s, but then was unchanged through the late 1990s.² In 2001, however, the measures of inequality began to climb again. High income households tend to be family households with two or more earners who live in the suburbs of large cities. Low income households tend to be in cities with an elderly householder who lives alone and does not work. On the other hand, 13.5 percent of the low income households have a householder who works full time, year round. In 2001, the top 20 percent of households received at least \$83,500 in income while the bottom 20 percent of households received \$17,970.

Real median household income rose between 1999 and 2001 in only three states, including Arizona, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. (See Figure 1.) Real median household income declined in twelve states including: Washington, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, Maine, Vermont. Incomes are the highest in Maryland, Connecticut and Minnesota and lowest in West Virginia and Arkansas.

² The income statistics are from DeNavas-Walt, Carmen and Robert Cleveland, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-218, *Money Income in the United States: 2001*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 2002.

Figure 1: Percent Change in Two-Year-Average Median Household Income by State



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2000, 2001, and 2002 Annual Demographic Supplements.

Households

In 1950, married-couple households accounted for 78 percent of all households. In 2000, married-couple households accounted for 52 percent of all households.

In 2000, there were 105.5 million households in the United States.³ Married couples accounted for 54.5 million (52%) of these households, but 5.5 million (5%) were couples who were living together who were not married. This is up from 3.2 million in 1990. In 1950, married-couple households accounted for 78 percent of all households.

³ The data presented on family structure are either from Simmons, Tavia and Martin O’Connell, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, *Married-Couple and Unmarried Partner Households: 2000*, February, 2003 or Hobbs, Frank and Nicole Stoops, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, Series CENSR-4, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2002.

The vast majority (89%, 4.9 million) of the households where couples were living together but not married included partners who were of the opposite sex, but 11 percent (590,000) had partners of the same sex. Same-sex partner households make up less than 1 percent of all households in the U.S.

In 1960, 59 percent of married-couple households included at least one child under the age of 18. By 2000, 46 percent of married-couple households included at least one child under age 18. In 1950, one-person households represented 10 percent of all households, but in 2000, they represented 26 percent of all households.

Married-couple households are most likely to be found in rapidly growing suburban communities like Gilbert, Arizona near Phoenix; Naperville, Illinois outside of Chicago; and Plano, Texas which is close to Dallas. Opposite-sex unmarried partners were most likely to be in the older industrial areas of the Northeast like Paterson, New Jersey; Manchester, New Hampshire; and Rochester, New York. Same-sex unmarried partners are most likely to be found in coastal cities such as San Francisco, California; Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; and Seattle, Washington.

WHAT ARE THE BROAD CULTURAL TRENDS IMPACTING MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS ?

Rising levels of education, changing cultural values and the rise of religious consumerism have had a significant impact on the mainline denominations.

The Struggles of Mainline Denominations

Leaders of the mainline denominations had every reason to believe that America was embarking on a new religious era in the 1950s. All the work toward Christian unity in the preceding decades came to fruition. Denominations merged. Hundreds of new churches were built. Social ministry networks were expanded. Religious colleges and other educational institutions grew, as did the national and middle judicatory offices of the denominations themselves. This period of optimism and expansion, however, was short-lived. By the middle of the 1960s, the influence of the mainline denominations began to ebb and they began to see their members slip away, particularly the younger people. A variety of diverse commentators have attempted to explain what happened. In short, the consensus of this body of research holds the following:

- a. After World War II, there was a significant increase in the education levels of all Americans. More and more young people went to college and this rise in educational level brought with it more and more geographic mobility. This mobility, in turn, eroded the traditional, parochial communities that supported religious participation and younger people defected in large numbers as they moved away from home.
- b. Rising educational levels also had a second, related impact. College educations combined with the social and political events of the 1950s and 1960s (from the Korean and the Cold War to the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, and the Women's Movement) to create a widespread suspicion of all large social institutions including the church.

- c. Mainline denominations, like all of society, became more overtly “politicized.” Different and disparate factions vied for control over the resources of national denominational offices, or at least, their positive sanction and support. Some people felt “pushed out” while others felt newly empowered. Over time, both groups grew disenchanted. Those who felt pushed ignored or even resented the institutions of the wider church, while those who felt newly empowered found their access to resources (and the scope of these resources) much more limited than they had anticipated.
- d. As the mainline denominations tried to re-find their place in the society, more individualistically-oriented types of religious expression took center stage. Conservative evangelicals and Pentecostal churches grew by focusing on individuals and their emotional/religious needs as opposed to the social conditions in the wider society. Over time, people increasingly came to think of themselves as religious consumers. Buying, or not buying, religion became an option. And, congregations found themselves, like it or not, in the midst of a very complicated and competitive religious marketplace.

Membership Trends for Selected Denominations

Overall, church membership is declining as a percent of the total population. “Strict” churches appear to be doing better than churches that are less strict. These churches are growing but their rates of growth have slowed. Mainline denominations are still showing membership losses, but their rate of loss has also slowed.

Table 6 shows church membership as a percent of the U.S. population and Table 7 shows the trends for selected mainline denominations.

Table 6: Church Membership as a Percent of the U.S. Population between 1990 and 2000

	1990	2000	Change
U.S. population	249,000,000	281,000,000	12.9%
inclusive church membership	145,000,000	152,000,000	4.8%
inclusive membership as a percent of the population	58.2%	54.1%	

All the mainline churches lost members between 1990 and 2000.

Table 7: Church Membership for Selected Denominations between 1990 and 2000

	1990	2000	Change
ELCA	5,240,739	5,125,919	-2.2%
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	2,847,437	2,525,330	-11.3%
United Church of Christ	1,599,212	1,377,320	-13.9%
United Methodist Church	8,785,135	8,340,954	-5.1%

	1990	2000	Change
Episcopal Church	2,446,050	2,333,327	-4.6%
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod	2,602,849	2,554,088	-1.9%

Other churches grew over the same time period. (See Table 8.)

Table 8: Church Membership for Selected Denominations between 1990 and 2000

	1990	2000	Change
Assemblies of God	2,181,502	2,577,560	18.2%
Church of the Latter-day Saints	4,267,000	5,208,827	22.1%
Roman Catholic	58,568,015	63,683,030	8.7%
Southern Baptists	15,038,409	15,960,308	6.1%

Between 1980 and 1990, the Assemblies of God increased by 105 percent. Between 1990 and 2000, their rate of increase dropped to 18 percent. The Assemblies ended the decade (1999-2000) with a 0.12 percent increase for the year. Between 1980 and 1990, the Southern Baptists increased by 9 percent. Between 1990 and 2000, their rate of increase was 6.1 percent. They ended the decade (1999-2000) with a 0.68 percent increase. Both the Roman Catholics and the Church of the Latter-day Saints, however, grew by 2 percent or more between 1999 and 2000.

Mainline denominations continue to lose members but at a much slower rate than in the 1980s or the 1990s. Between 1999 and 2000, the ELCA declined by 0.46 percent; the Presbyterians (U.S.A.) by 1.35 percent; and the United Church of Christ by 1.74 percent. The rate for the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod was down by 1.10 percent.

Authors like Roger Finke and Rodney Stark argue that the data presented above have to do with “strictness.”⁴ In short, denominations (and congregations) that are in a position (or have developed the position) to make demands on their members are the denominations (and congregations) that are growing. From this point of view, Lutherans make too few demands because their expectations are so low. Lutherans are not characteristically a “demanding” group and their emphasis on a “theology of grace” may further undermine their ability to “expect” sacrifice on the part of their members. As a result, there is neither the desire nor the means for growth. Lutherans, for example, give the lowest percent of their income among all Protestant groups to the church, and as a group they live a lifestyle that is indistinguishable from the vast majority of individuals in the mainstream of American society.

⁴ See “How the Upstart Sects Won America: 1776-1850,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28:27-44, 1989; or, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1992.

When pushed, however, the idea of making demands or being “strict” is complex. Is it possible to demand too much? Only a few people will give all. The theory, however, is based on the idea that people rationally calculate a return on their investment. If people want larger returns, they will make larger investments. But, what is an “investment” in religion and what is a “return?” Some people are very likely to believe being good or working to save souls is a reasonable investment for the return of an eternal life in heaven. Others, however, are more worldly, which is precisely the territory of mainline denominations. For these people, monetary contributions (offerings) might be a reasonable cost for the values education of a child. But, other non religious groups like the Boy Scouts offer values education. A religious group has to focus on offering distinctly “religious” rewards and, according to the theory, mainline denominations have lost sight of this. They have failed to convince their own members, much less the wider population, that what they offer is unique or special. The mainline denominations are in a very weak competitive position because they can offer, and as a result, demand so little of their members.

WHO IS MOST (OR LEAST) LIKELY TO GO TO CHURCH?

Persons who are younger, less educated, and more likely to be divorced or separated or to have never been married are more infrequent church attenders (hardly ever or a few times a year) than those who are older, have more education and are married or widowed. Persons with no one in their household between the ages of 6 and 12 are less likely to attend church. Widowers are very frequent attenders and a majority of families with children between the ages of 6 and 12 attend church services frequently.

Understanding who is most (or least) likely to go to church is a complex proposition because the decision is based in the interaction of a host of factors. These factors include age, income and education, household status, religious upbringing and finally a judgment about the return. In short, younger people are much less likely to go to church, especially if they are unmarried and childless. Young people are most likely to attend church if they have a strong religious role model. People with older children, people with too little or too much money, people with too little education or too much education are less likely to attend church. People with an education in the humanities and social sciences are less likely to go than people with training in business or the natural sciences. People who do not believe in heaven or hell or who believe all people will go to heaven are less likely to attend church.

There are a variety of other factors associated with infrequent church attendance.⁵

- a. Persons who tend to watch a lot of TV are infrequent attenders. Persons who tend to read a newspaper every day are more frequent attenders.

⁵ The following are findings from an analysis of the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. The data file included surveys dating from 1988 to 1996.

- b. Those persons who attend an auto race or go camping are more likely infrequent church attenders, while those who attend a performance of opera or classical music are more likely frequent attenders. Those persons who are more likely to go hunting and fishing are infrequent attenders, as opposed to those who play an instrument or go to a dance performance who tend to be frequent church attenders.
- c. Less active persons (at least in the ways noted in this analysis) are more infrequent church attenders. A majority of those who attended a classical/opera performance, performed music, attended a dance performance, grew vegetables/flowers, played a musical instrument, attended a sporting event, played sports, made an art/craft object and went to a movie were frequent church attenders. Infrequent church attenders are also more likely than frequent church attenders to say that life is dull.
- d. Those persons like new age music or heavy metal are more likely to be infrequent church attenders. Those who prefer classical music or easy listening are more likely to be frequent attenders.
- e. Those who are politically liberal or who take more liberal views on issues like premarital sex are also much more likely to be infrequent church attenders
- f. Infrequent church attenders are not significantly more or less likely to say they were very successful in life than those who are frequent church attenders, and the majority in all church attendance groups indicated that they were very happy or at least pretty happy.
- g. Infrequent church attenders are only slightly more likely to report feelings of loneliness than those who attend church frequently.
- h. Infrequent church attenders are less likely to say they feel close to God (though almost a quarter say they feel extremely close to God) and they are much less likely to pray frequently.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

As noted above, the overall membership of the ELCA continues to slowly decline. In 1990, the baptized membership of the ELCA was 5,240,739 or 2.1 percent of the United States population. In 2000, the baptized membership of the ELCA was 5,125,919 or 1.8 percent of the population. African Americans/Blacks, Asians, Latinos, Native Americans and other nonwhites make up about 2.5 percent of the total membership. This percentage of nonwhite members has increased from 2.0 percent in 1990, due largely to an increase in Latino membership.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT GROUPINGS OF ELCA MEMBERS?⁶

Five different types of Lutherans were identified as part of a major study of the *Faith Practices* of ELCA Lutherans. The types include those who take a literal view of the Bible, those who put an emphasis on religious experience, those who believe the church is a major help to them in their daily lives, those who take a more corporate view of the church and finally, those who attend infrequently.

The Literalists (19 percent)

These Lutherans take a literal view of the Bible, angels, the devil, the virgin birth and Jesus' physical return to earth. While they take the most traditional views, they are no more likely than several of the other groups to attend worship, pray or read the Bible on their own, attend a Bible study, or to report religious experiences. Although Biblical literalists, they were also no more likely than several other groups to know who preached the Sermon on the Mount or who is credited with writing Acts.

The Religious Experience Group (22 percent)

This group of Lutherans reports an experience of angels, guiding spirits or a miraculous event. They are not literalists when it comes to the Bible, but they believe Jesus died and rose again and that people need to be saved. Nearly all of them believe in the virgin birth, but they are less likely than the literalists to believe that Jesus will physically return to earth someday. These people are defined by their atypical religious experiences.

The Church Helps Group (17 percent)

These Lutherans believe the church is important in helping members keep in touch with a greater power, in living a good life, in feeling good about themselves and in making friends with good people. They also believe that the church helps children learn good values. Although not literalists with regard to the Bible, they believe Jesus died and rose again and that people need to be saved. Fewer of them than the literalists are sure about the virgin birth or that Jesus will physically return to earth someday. In faith practices such as attending worship and praying privately, this is the most active among the five groups.

⁶ The source of this information is the *Faith Practices Survey*. The Faith Practices Survey was conducted, by telephone in January of 2001. Six hundred interviews were completed. Calls were made randomly from a list of over 16,000 members provided by 40 representative congregations.

The Corporate Group (25 percent)

This largest group of Lutherans is less traditional than the church helps group and considerably less traditional than the literalists. For example, only 50 percent believe angels exist and intervene to assist human beings, and 68 percent believe Jesus will physically return to earth someday. Fewer than 50 percent read the Bible or read other devotional materials. Corporate Lutherans are defined by a high level of overall church involvement, not by their private practices or beliefs.

The Infrequent Attenders (17 percent)

As the name suggests, these Lutherans are the infrequent attenders. They are the least traditionally orthodox and much less likely than any of the other groups to practice the faith or to have religious experiences.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL WORSHIP ATTENDER LIKE?

People attending worship in an ELCA congregation are typically older and predominantly female. The majority are in their first marriage. Most live in households with no children present. Less than one-quarter are involved in Sunday school or Bible studies. The vast majority are long-time members of their congregations and they say they did not come to their faith at some “decisive” moment.

Despite the differences described above, worship attenders of the ELCA share a remarkable number of similar characteristics.⁷ Where possible, comparisons are presented for Southern Baptists and Presbyterians (U.S.A.). All respondents were 15 years of age or older.

- a. Ninety-eight percent of ELCA worship attenders were born in the United States and 98 percent say English is their first language.
- b. Forty-one percent of ELCA worship attenders have been attending the same congregation for more than 20 years. Seven percent have attended for less than one year.
- c. Sixty-two percent of worship attenders are female. (Compared to 60 percent of Southern Baptists and 61 percent for Presbyterians.)

⁷ The *U.S. Congregational Life Survey* is the source of this information. The survey was funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment and carried out under the auspices of U.S. Congregations. The principal researchers were Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce. The survey involved 422 ELCA congregations and 43,363 questionnaire were completed by those in attendance at worship in these congregations during the week of April 29, 2001. The analysis of the ELCA data set was conducted by Martin Smith and Kenneth Inskeep.

- d. Seven percent of the worship attenders are between the ages of 15 and 24 and 33 percent are 65 or older. (Eleven percent of Southern Baptists are between the ages of 15 and 24, while 24 percent of Southern Baptists are 65 and older. Forty percent of the Presbyterians are 65 or older.)
- e. Forty-seven percent of the worship attenders have a high school diploma or less. On the other hand, 36 percent of the worship attenders have completed college. (For Southern Baptists, 53 percent have a high school diploma or less and 30 percent have completed college. Among Presbyterians, 49 percent report a college degree.)
- f. Fifty-nine percent of ELCA worship attenders are in their first marriage, and another 12 percent are remarried after a divorce or the death of a spouse. Eleven percent have never married. Eleven percent are widowed. Two percent are living in a committed relationship. (Seventy percent of Southern Baptists are married compared to 71 percent for the ELCA.)
- g. Forty-two percent of the worship attenders are adults living together in a household without children. Fifteen percent live alone. Four percent are in households with one adult and at least one child. Thirty-nine percent are in households with two adults and at least one child. (Fifty percent of Southern Baptist say they live in households where adults and children are present compared to 43 percent of ELCA worship attenders.)
- h. Fourteen percent of worship attenders say they give 10 percent or more of their income to the congregation they attend. Thirty-eight percent say they give from 5 to 10 percent; 47 percent say they give less than 5 percent. (Fifty-two percent of Southern Baptists say they give 10 percent or more of their income to their congregations. For Presbyterians, 16 percent report they give 10 percent or more; 38 percent give from 5 to 10 percent; and 46 percent give less than 5 percent.)
- i. Less than a quarter (23%) of ELCA worship attenders are regularly involved in Sunday school or in prayer, discussion or Bible study groups (22%). (Sixty-nine percent of Southern Baptist say they are regularly involved in Sunday school and 41 percent are involved in prayer, discussion or Bible study groups. Among Presbyterians, 32 percent report they are regularly involved in Sunday school and 27 percent say they are involved in prayer, discussion or Bible study groups.)
- j. Seventy-eight percent of ELCA worship attenders say they have never experienced “a moment of decisive faith commitment or conversion,” but instead, have had faith for as long as they can remember or they came to it through a gradual process. (For Presbyterians, 72 percent say they have never experienced such a moment.)
- k. Eighty percent of worship attenders indicated that they voted in the last presidential election. (Eighty-six percent of Presbyterians say they voted in the last presidential election.)
- l. Seventy-five percent of worship attenders report donating money to a charitable organization in the past 12 months other than their congregation. (The figure is 82 percent for Presbyterians.)

ARE MEMBERS LOYAL?

In 2001, the vast majority of Lutherans were as loyal to the Lutheran church in one form or another as they were in 1991, but a majority (53%) do not believe it matters what kind of church one attends. On the one hand, this may be evidence of a strong and positive ecumenism, or on the other, it may simply point to a weak Lutheran identity.

The attachment or loyalty to local congregations in 2001 is actually higher than it was in 1991.⁸ (See Table 9.) In 1991, 71 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would feel “a great sense of loss” if they had to change their membership to another congregation, but in 2001, it was 82 percent. This percentage difference is largely due to the fact that more people strongly agreed with the statement in 2001 than in 1991.

Eighty percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that it was important for them to be a member of a Lutheran church in 1991 compared to 81 percent in 2001. Once again, more people strongly agreed with the statement in 2001 than in 1991.

Table 9: Views of Congregations and the Wider Church in 1991 and 2001

	Year	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
a. If I had to change my membership to another congregation I would feel a great sense of loss.	1991	31.3%	39.6%	16.2%	2.3%	10.6%
	2001	40.7%	41.0%	6.7%	1.6%	10.0%
b. The congregation I am a member of has helped me grow as a Christian.	1991	27.3%	60.1%	5.4%	1.8%	5.4%
	2001	34.6%	54.8%	3.2%	0.9%	6.5%
c. It is important for me to be a member of a Lutheran church.	1991	36.9%	43.0%	11.0%	1.9%	7.1%
	2001	41.6%	39.2%	10.1%	1.7%	7.3%
d. It is important for me to be a member of a congregation that is associated with the ELCA.	1991	17.9%	42.7%	19.1%	2.8%	17.5%
	2001	26.3%	43.1%	14.0%	2.5%	14.2%
e. For the most part I don't think it matters what kind of church one attends	1991	6.8%	31.6%	37.8%	17.2%	6.6%
	2001	8.2%	45.4%	30.2%	8.9%	7.2%
f. I think a person should do what they think is right for them, even if it means going against the teachings of their church.	1991	4.6%	27.4%	39.7%	16.3%	12.1%
	2001	6.7%	26.0%	42.6%	13.3%	11.5%

⁸ The source of this data is *Lutherans Say...* 5, 1991, which was a panel of randomly selected ELCA members and the *U.S. Congregational Life Survey*, 2001.

	Year	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
g. I don't think any church is much help when it comes to dealing with daily life.	1991	1.2%	6.6%	54.4%	34.2%	3.6%
	2001	1.7%	4.4%	52.5%	38.0%	3.3%
h. I can worship God as well on my own as with others in a worship service.	1991	7.2%	28.9%	42.7%	15.8%	5.4%
	2001	6.5%	34.8%	39.9%	13.8%	4.9%

In 1991, 69 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that it is important for them to be a member of a congregation that is associated with the ELCA. In 2001, 81 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Fewer people responded they were not sure about how to respond to the statement in 2001.

While the vast majority of these respondents indicated they were more loyal to the Lutheran church in one form or another in 2001 than in 1991, the percentage that agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “for the most part I don't think it matters what kind of church one attends” actually increased from 38 percent in 1991 to 53 percent in 2001. Also, more people (41% strongly agreed in 2001 compared to 36% strongly agreeing in 1991) said that it is as possible to worship God on their own as it is with others in a worship service.

WHAT ABOUT EVANGELISM?

There is a sense among some in the ELCA that the emphasis on mission and evangelism is having an impact. The *Congregational Life Survey* offers some support for this contention. (See Table 10.) In 1991 and in 2001, respondents were asked the following question:

“If your pastor gave you the names of three persons or families in your neighborhood who were not church members, offered to train you in visitation, and asked you and your group to visit them to share the meaning of the gospel in your lives, how would you respond?”

Table 10: Accepting an Invitation to Visit Neighborhood Persons or Families Who Don't Attend Church

	1991	2001
I would gladly accept.	7.5%	14.5%
I would accept, but I would be anxious about it.	21.7%	35.5%
I would probably say no.	37.6%	30.0%
I'm not sure how I would respond.	28.3%	20.0%
No response.	4.9%	0.0%

The number of persons who said they would gladly accept increased by 7 percentage points between 1991 and 2001, and the number who said they would accept increased by 14 percentage points.

WHAT ABOUT CONGREGATIONS?⁹

Congregations and Size

Well over half of ELCA congregations (5,738) have less than 350 baptized members. These congregations account for about one-fifth of the total membership. Another fifth of the membership is in the 476 congregations with over 1,500 members. The number of very small congregations (1 to 175 baptized members) has increased by 2 percent since 1990.

In 2000, 54 percent of ELCA congregations have 350 members or less which is up from 53 percent in 1990. (See Table 11.) The number of congregations with 1 to 175 members is up 2 percent. The number of congregations with more than 1,500 members is up by 0.4 percent. In every other size category, there are fewer congregations in 2000 than in 1990 with the congregations in the 701 to 950 category hit the hardest (-9.9%).

Table 11: Number of Congregations and the Distribution of Membership by Size in 1990 and 2000

Congregation Size	Number and Percent of Congregations				Number and Percent of Members			
	1990		2000		1990		2000	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1 to 175	2,752	25.1%	2,876	27.0%	296,605	5.7%	303,958	5.9%
176 to 350	3,059	27.9%	2,862	26.9%	790,631	15.1%	734,645	14.4%
351 to 500	1,705	15.6%	1,616	15.2%	713,882	13.6%	680,101	13.3%
501 to 700	1,295	11.8%	1,240	11.6%	763,823	14.6%	729,713	14.3%
701 to 950	930	8.5%	838	7.9%	755,495	14.4%	675,424	13.2%
951 to 1,500	776	7.1%	749	7.0%	914,323	17.5%	878,274	17.2%
1,501 or more	446	4.1%	476	4.5%	1,003,840	19.2%	1,108,696	21.7%
Total	10,963	100.0%	10,657	100.0%	5,238,599	100.0%	5,110,811	100.0%

⁹ The data in this section come from the Congregational Annual Reports, 1990 and 2000, ELCA.

Even though there are 5,738 congregations in the ELCA with 350 members or less, these congregations account for only 20.3 percent of the total membership. There are 476 congregations with more than 1,500 members and these congregations account for 22 percent of the membership of the ELCA.

Congregations and Finances

Between 1990 and 2000 there were two clear developments with regard to congregational finances. First, there has been a shift to more special (designated) giving. Second, there has been a continued decline in the percent of total giving that goes toward mission support. This decline is offset by an increase in capital improvement expenditures.

In 2000, the typical ELCA congregation received \$223,526 in income and spent \$215,165 in expenses. (See Table 12.) Larger congregations have a larger surplus of income over expenses and the average income for the smallest congregations (1 to 175 members) at \$57,898, appears to provide these congregations with very limited resources if they pay the salary and benefits of a full-time pastor. The median salary for a pastor in the ELCA in 2001 was \$45,715.

Table 12: Sum of Income and Expenses for all ELCA Congregations in 2000 by Congregation Size Category

Congregation Size	Income		Expenses		Difference, Income to Expense	As a Percent of Income
	Total	Average	Total	Average		
1 to 175	\$166,513,579	\$57,898	\$164,193,037	\$57,091	\$807	1.39%
176 to 350	\$357,270,771	\$124,833	\$348,559,036	\$121,789	\$3,044	2.44%
351 to 500	\$323,985,348	\$200,486	\$321,451,989	\$198,918	\$1,568	0.78%
501 to 700	\$347,401,461	\$280,162	\$328,609,639	\$265,008	\$15,154	5.41%
701 to 950	\$303,405,909	\$362,060	\$290,755,796	\$346,964	\$15,096	4.17%
951 to 1,500	\$395,322,193	\$527,800	\$373,411,932	\$498,547	\$29,253	5.54%
1,501 or more	\$488,222,329	\$1,025,677	\$466,028,584	\$979,052	\$46,625	4.55%
Total	\$2,382,121,590	\$223,526	\$2,293,010,013	\$215,165	\$8,361	3.74%

The smallest congregations are also more dependent on income from other sources than giving. As a percentage of all income, they receive 74.2 percent in regular giving and special giving, compared to 81.4 percent for the largest congregations. (See Table 13.) As a result, the smallest congregations are much more likely to rely on earned and grant income to make ends meet.

The largest congregations (951 and larger) are much more likely than the smaller congregations (950 or under) to report borrowed income.

Two developments are perhaps most striking in the comparison of the financial data between 1990 and 2000. First, there is a distinct shift to special giving no matter what the size of the congregations. In 1990,

the largest congregations (more than 1,500) reported 10.5 percent of their income was in special giving but in 2000 it was 14.1 percent. (See Tables 13 and 14.) Among the congregations with 501 to 700 members, special giving was 9.8 percent of their total income in 1990, but by 2000 it was 15.6 percent.

Table 13: Congregational Income as a Percent of All Income by Congregation Size in 2000

Congregation Size	Regular Giving	Special Giving (Designated)	Earned Income (Unrestricted)	Earned Income (Restricted)	Grant Income	Borrowed Income	Other Income
1 to 175	65.4%	8.8%	6.5%	2.0%	3.5%	3.5%	10.3%
176 to 350	68.0%	12.1%	4.0%	2.1%	1.1%	4.5%	8.1%
351 to 500	66.6%	14.1%	3.0%	3.4%	0.5%	5.5%	6.8%
501 to 700	68.0%	15.6%	2.6%	2.0%	0.4%	6.0%	5.4%
701 to 950	68.6%	14.5%	2.4%	2.2%	0.3%	5.7%	6.2%
951 to 1,500	66.0%	14.3%	2.6%	1.9%	0.1%	9.8%	5.3%
1,501 or more	67.3%	14.1%	1.7%	1.7%	0.1%	9.0%	6.0%
Total	67.2%	13.7%	2.9%	2.2%	0.6%	6.7%	6.6%

Table 14: Congregational Income as a Percent of All Income by Congregation Size in 1990

Congregation Size	Regular Giving	Special Giving (Designated)	Earned Income (Unrestricted)	Earned Income (Restricted)	Grant Income	Borrowed Income	Other Income
1 to 175	66.9%	7.3%	5.7%	1.5%	6.4%	3.3%	8.9%
176 to 350	71.0%	8.9%	4.0%	2.0%	1.5%	6.2%	6.4%
351 to 500	71.7%	10.7%	3.3%	2.0%	1.5%	5.1%	5.7%
501 to 700	70.5%	9.8%	3.0%	1.6%	0.4%	6.1%	8.6%
701 to 950	73.4%	10.9%	3.1%	1.5%	0.6%	5.4%	5.2%
951 to 1,500	72.7%	10.3%	3.4%	1.9%	0.1%	7.8%	3.8%
1,501 or more	71.6%	10.5%	2.1%	1.2%	0.1%	9.2%	5.3%
Total	71.5%	10.0%	3.3%	1.7%	1.1%	6.5%	6.0%

Second, there is the decline in mission support. In 1990, the typical ELCA congregation spent 7.9 percent of its total expenditures for mission support, but in 2000 it was 5.8 percent. (See Tables 15 and 16.) This is true, despite the fact that operating expenses have not increased. Instead, it appears that congregations are generally spending more money on capital improvements.

Table 15: Congregational Expenditures as a Percent of All Income by Congregation Size in 1990

Congregation Size	Current Operating Expenses	Capital Improvements	Debt Payments	Mission Support	Benevolences		Other Expenses
					Local	Other	
1 to 175	76.4%	8.0%	4.0%	6.0%	0.9%	2.3%	2.4%
176 to 350	69.5%	12.0%	6.1%	6.9%	1.0%	2.3%	2.2%
351 to 500	66.7%	10.4%	7.4%	7.8%	1.4%	2.7%	3.6%
501 to 700	62.8%	10.7%	8.3%	8.1%	1.2%	2.7%	6.2%
701 to 950	63.5%	11.6%	8.7%	8.8%	1.4%	3.1%	2.9%
951 to 1,500	63.8%	11.9%	7.3%	9.1%	1.6%	3.3%	3.0%
1,501 or more	60.8%	12.3%	10.6%	7.8%	1.7%	3.9%	2.9%
Total	65.3%	11.3%	7.8%	7.9%	1.4%	2.9%	3.4%

Table 16: Congregational Expenditures as a Percent of All Income by Congregation Size in 2000

Congregation Size	Current Operating Expenses	Capital Improvements	Debt Payments	Mission Support	Benevolences		Other Expenses
					Local	Other	
1 to 175	75.9%	9.5%	3.6%	4.9%	1.0%	2.2%	2.9%
176 to 350	70.8%	11.6%	6.1%	5.4%	1.1%	2.1%	2.9%
351 to 500	65.1%	14.7%	7.4%	5.6%	1.1%	2.6%	3.5%
501 to 700	65.1%	12.5%	7.7%	6.5%	1.3%	2.7%	4.2%
701 to 950	63.7%	12.6%	8.3%	6.6%	1.4%	3.1%	4.3%
951 to 1,500	61.7%	14.3%	8.8%	6.3%	1.4%	3.0%	4.5%
1,501 or more	60.9%	12.4%	11.2%	5.2%	1.5%	3.8%	5.0%
Total	65.2%	12.7%	8.1%	5.8%	1.3%	2.9%	4.0%

WHAT ABOUT THE TRENDS IN MISSION SUPPORT?¹⁰

Mission support as a percent of total giving has declined dramatically over the years. Also, a larger percentage of that mission support is going to synodical rather than churchwide work.

¹⁰ The data reported here are from the annual Yearbooks and Assembly documents of the ELCA and its predecessor bodies. No mention is made here of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) because no comparable figures are available.

Before the creation of the ELCA, the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) had developed their own distinct systems for financially supporting their national work (mission support). Both systems, however, were based on the gifts of members. These gifts then moved through congregations to the wider expressions of the church. Because of differences between the systems and because of the vast number of ways support could be provided, tracking the actual amount of money given is complex. At the same time, it is possible to consistently group together different types of support that were clearly intended for the districts or synods and the national expressions of the ALC and the LCA. These amounts can then be compared to the total amount given by congregations. (See Table 17.)

Table 17: Total Contributions and Mission Support Between 1965 and 2000

Year	Total Contributions	Mission Support	Mission Support as a Percent of Total Contributions
1965	\$308,307,558	\$52,815,469	17.10%
1970	\$376,109,972	\$57,073,956	15.20%
1975	\$490,054,272	\$66,384,152	13.50%
1980	\$725,097,104	\$86,079,202	11.90%
1985	\$1,005,017,788	\$108,447,177	10.80%
1990	\$1,330,103,474	\$118,787,914	8.90%
1995	\$1,600,974,034	\$120,299,945	7.50%
2000	\$2,088,371,238	\$133,306,390	6.40% ¹¹

For example, total contributions to the ALC and the LCA in 1965 were slightly over \$308 million while nearly \$53 million was remitted to the ALC budget and to the districts and conferences of the ALC and to the LCA as regular benevolence. This means that 17 percent (\$53 million) of total contributions (\$308 million) were given to support mission at the district or synod or the national levels in 1965. In 2000, total contributions by the congregations of the ELCA were \$2.1 billion while total mission support—the portion remitted to the synods and churchwide offices of the ELCA—was \$133 million, or 6 percent of all contributions. This downward trend in mission support is consistent over the years.

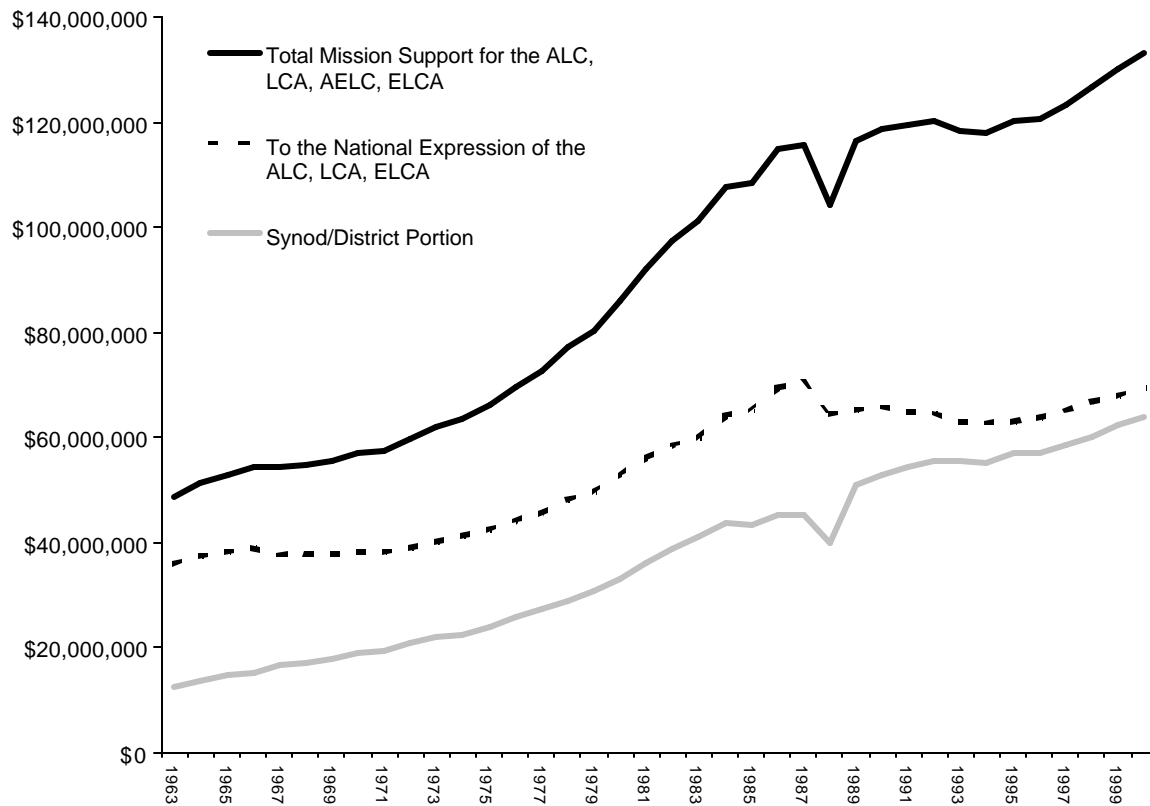
THE DISTRIBUTION OF MISSION SUPPORT

Administratively, the ALC districts were smaller and therefore required fewer resources than the synods of the LCA. ALC activity at the middle judicatory level was also more spread out than in the LCA. In 1965, of the totals that were remitted for mission support, nearly 90 percent of it was used by the divisions of the ALC with 10 percent going to the districts. During the same year for the LCA, 60 percent of the money

¹¹ This number is slightly higher than the average number reported in Table 16 due to different calculation procedures. The number reported in Table 16 is an average. The number reported here is based on the sum for all congregations.

remitted for mission support was used by the boards and commissions of the LCA with 40 percent going for synodical work. At the time of the merger in 1988, the synods of the ELCA took on the organizational characteristics of the LCA. In 1990, \$118 million was given for mission support of which \$66 million was used by the units of the churchwide organization and \$52 million was used synodically (a 55/45 split). By 2000, \$133 million was given in total and \$69 million was use by the churchwide organization with \$64 million used synodically (a 52/48 split). In other words, not only has mission support declined as a percent of total giving, but the proportional distribution has shifted toward synodical work as well. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: The Distribution of Mission Support Between 1963 and 2000



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE CLERGY?

*Is There an Adequate Number of Ordained Ministers in the ELCA?*¹²

Some synods, particularly those with small congregations in rural or very urban areas, are facing a critical shortage of pastors.

¹² The text in this section is adapted from *Ministry Needs and Resources in the 21st Century*, by A. Craig Settlage, Division for Ministry, ELCA, 2000.

- a. The number of pastors in the ELCA has declined slowly over the past decade so that some synods now experience a near critical shortage, while other synods have sufficient or greater numbers than needed.
- b. The critical shortage in some synods is related to one or more of the following factors:
 - a rising need for first-call pastors as the result of an increase in the number of smaller congregations with very limited financial resources;
 - the difficulty of finding ordained ministers willing to serve for extended periods of time in smaller congregations in very rural and very urban settings;
 - the loss of pastors due to reasons other than retirement, such as resignations and removals.
- c. The critical shortage experienced in some synods is not primarily due to:
 - fewer first-call candidates being assigned;
 - fewer candidates being ordained;
 - a dramatic increase in the number or retirements (or a decrease in the age of retirement);
- d. The critical shortage in some synods may become worse given:
 - the likely continued increase in the number of smaller congregations with limited financial resources;
 - the number of pastors leaving ordained ministry;
 - a continued decline in M.Div. enrollments at ELCA seminaries;
 - an underutilization of strategies for providing leadership other than ordained ministers to serve in congregations.

How satisfied are the clergy?

ELCA clergy are most satisfied with their housing arrangements, their current ministry positions and their relationships with lay leaders. They are least satisfied with their support for denominational officials, opportunities for continuing education and their own spiritual lives.

In general, levels of dissatisfaction are low, but there is also room for improvement.¹³ (See Table 18.) Overall, ELCA clergy are most satisfied with their housing arrangements, their current ministry positions and their relationships with lay leaders. They are least satisfied with their support for denominational officials, opportunities for continuing education and their own spiritual lives.

¹³ This data is from the *U.S. Congregational Life Survey*. Pastors from 410 of the 420 randomly selected ELCA congregations completed a questionnaire about themselves. The data for the Presbyterians comes from the *Presbyterian Panel*.

Table 18: Levels of Satisfaction with Various Aspects of Ministry for ELCA and Presbyterian (U.S.A.) Clergy

“At present, what is your level of satisfaction with the following?”	Very Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Somewhat Dissatisfied		Very Dissatisfied	
	ELCA	PCUSA	ELCA	PCUSA	ELCA	PCUSA	ELCA	PCUSA
housing or living arrangements	67%	74%	25%	21%	7%	4%	1%	2%
current ministry position	61%	54%	30%	33%	8%	10%	1%	3%
relations with lay leaders in congregation	58%	61%	38%	34%	4%	4%	0%	1%
family life	56%	63%	31%	28%	12%	7%	2%	2%
salary and benefits	46%	47%	43%	40%	10%	12%	2%	2%
relations with other clergy	44%	40%	41%	46%	13%	13%	1%	2%
overall effectiveness as a pastoral leader	43%	48%	51%	45%	5%	6%	1%	2%
support from denominational officials	42%	33%	39%	41%	14%	19%	6%	7%
opportunities for continuing education	39%	47%	48%	43%	12%	9%	1%	1%
spiritual life	24%	31%	59%	56%	16%	13%	1%	0%

Dissatisfaction among ELCA clergy is highest (10 percent of the clergy or more indicating that they are somewhat or very dissatisfied) in the following areas: support from denominational officials (20%); their own spiritual lives (17%); their family lives (14%); their relationships with other clergy (14%); their opportunities for continuing education (13%); and their salary and benefits (12%).

When compared to Presbyterian (U.S.A.) clergy, differences in levels of satisfaction are small. ELCA clergy are slightly more satisfied than their Presbyterian counterparts with their current positions. ELCA clergy are also more satisfied with their relationships with other clergy and their support from denominational officials. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) clergy are more satisfied with their housing/living arrangements, their family lives, their overall effectiveness as pastoral leaders, their opportunities for continuing theological education, and their spiritual lives. Levels of satisfaction are roughly the same with regard to salary and benefits.

*How Prepared Are the Clergy?*¹⁴

Clergy in their first three years of call feel most prepared to preach and least prepared to plan a church budget, plan a stewardship program or to manage a church office. They feel the church needs to reach out to unchurched people but they also feel ill prepared to do so.

Clergy in their first three years of call were asked about how prepared they were for ministry. Overall, respondents felt they were most prepared to preach, followed by planning worship services and visiting members. (See Table 19.) In contrast, they felt least prepared to plan a church budget, plan a stewardship program or to manage a church budget.

Table 19: Self-Ratings of Level of Preparedness by First Call Clergy

<u>Area of Preparation</u> 5 - very well prepared 1 - not at all prepared	Average Overall Rating	<u>Area of Preparation</u> 5 - very well prepared 1 - not at all prepared	Average Overall Rating
preaching	4.28	doing pastoral counseling	3.50
planning a worship service	4.27	working collaboratively with ecumenical partners	3.49
visiting members	4.19	giving guidance/support to committees	3.47
establish trust with members	4.09	providing a ministry of healing	3.40
teaching adults	4.08	training/equipping others for their ministry	3.40
helping people deal with grief	3.93	visiting prospective members	3.26
teaching youth	3.78	addressing social and ethical issues facing communities	3.17
preparing Sunday bulletins	3.73	managing disputes and conflict situations	3.09
teaching children	3.70	managing a church office	2.99
teaching confirmands	3.63	planning a stewardship program	2.46
providing spiritual direction for members	3.61	planning a church budget	2.34
working effectively with congregational leaders	3.56		

¹⁴ The data used here are from a survey of 824 clergy who were in their first three years of call. The survey was conducted in the fall of 2002. The response rate was 75 percent. The report—*The First Call Theological Education Survey*—was written by Rebecca Sims in December, 2002.

These first call clergy were also asked to rate the level of needs of the church and their level of preparedness in meeting those needs. (See Table 20.) The highest ranking for need was for reaching out to unchurched persons, followed by helping congregations work toward a vision and helping people grow spiritually. The lowest ranking for preparedness was on reaching out to unchurched persons, involving congregations in community issues of justice and helping congregations revitalize their ministry.

Table 20: Self-Ratings of the Needs of the Church and Their Level of Preparedness to Address Those Needs by First Call Clergy

Area of Need/Preparation	<u>Level of Need</u> 5 - high, 1 - low	<u>Level of Preparedness</u> 5 - high, 1 - low
reaching out to unchurched persons	4.70	2.86
helping congregations work toward a vision	4.65	3.20
helping people grow spiritually	4.61	3.62
helping congregations revitalize their ministry	4.55	3.12
listening to people’s questions and concerns	4.36	4.15
leading worship that is sensitive to the congregational context	4.16	3.84
being a teaching theologian	4.00	3.84
helping members deal with tough moral issues	3.94	3.34
involving congregations in community issues of justice	3.93	3.11

What is the Relationship of Clergy to Lay Views of the Bible?

Only three percent of the clergy agreed that “the Bible is the word of God, to be taken literally word for word.” This compares to 29 percent of the lay people.

On the *Congregational Life Survey*, 29 percent of the lay members of the 420 participating ELCA congregations chose the response that “the Bible is the word of God, to be taken literally word for word,” only 3 percent of the clergy agreed.

Fifty-five percent of the clergy chose the response that “the Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical and cultural context” (compared to 27 percent of the lay members). Thirty-nine percent of the clergy chose the response that “the Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical context **and** the Church’s teaching” (compared to 43 percent of the lay members).

What is the Relationship of Clergy to Lay Views of the Value of Different Religions?

When asked “Do you agree or disagree with the statement: All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth,” 83 percent of the clergy “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.” This compares to 25 percent of the lay members. (Forty-two percent of the lay members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement.)

WHAT DID THE VOTING MEMBERS OF SYNOD ASSEMBLIES HAVE TO SAY ABOUT SOCIAL TRENDS IMPACTING THE ELCA?

Voting members at synod assemblies believe that secularization, changes in the family, and the values of the media have had the greatest impact on the ELCA as a whole in the last three decades. They believe the church needs to do more evangelism and more teaching about Lutheranism. It also needs to put more emphasis on Bible study, prayer and discipleship.

In 2002, the voting members of synod assemblies were asked to discuss two questions about the larger social trends impacting the ELCA. The first question was:

What are the three most important factors in the larger society in the last three decades that continue to have the greatest impact on the mission and ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a whole—including congregations, synods, churchwide ministries, and related institutions and agencies?

Secularization was by far the most common category of response. The category included all those comments that mentioned a “turning away” from the Christian faith that once gave guidance to individuals, groups and the society as a whole. It includes any response that mentioned relativism, humanism, post-Christian society, or individualistic values such as materialism, consumerism, “me-ism,” etc. The category also included comments on religious diversity or the growth of other religions that compete with or undermine more traditional Christian views including fundamentalism of all sorts. As a category, secularization was mentioned most in the Southwest California Synod (31%), the Delaware-Maryland Synod (31%), the Central/Southern Illinois Synod (31%), the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod (30%), the Greater Milwaukee Synod (29%), and the Indiana-Kentucky Synod (29%).

Family Matters was the next most common category of responses. This category of response included all those responses that addressed family issues. The comments focused on the loss of traditional families; the changing role of women in the society; divorce; the problems of children associated with single parent households or dual career parent households; the overall stress of balancing family and a job or career; and the overall disintegration of community life. As a category of responses, family matters was mentioned most in the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod (29%), the Delaware-Maryland Synod (27%), the Northern Great Lakes Synod (26%), and the Lower Susquehanna Synod (26%).

Technology/Communication was the next most common category of responses. This category of responses included any comments related to computers, mass media, the Internet, information overload, and the corruption of values related to the mass media. As a category of responses, technology/communication was mentioned most often in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin (22%), the Slovak Zion Synod (22%), the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod (20%), the Southeastern Synod (18%), and the Pacifica Synod (17%).

Social/Economic Issues followed next. This category of responses included issues such as the gap between the rich and the poor, urbanization, poverty, homelessness, health care, and rural social and economic issues. As a category of responses, social/economic issues were mentioned most often in the Central States Synod (20%), the Western Iowa Synod (20%), the Northeastern Iowa Synod (19%), and the New England Synod (18%).

Multicultural/Diversity Issues were the next most frequent category of responses. The category included any reference to multicultural or diversity issues including any comments about race, language differences, the changing racial/ethnic makeup of the society, immigration, and so on. It did not include any reference to globalization, sexual diversity or religious diversity. The high percentages in this category were from the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod (23%), the Minneapolis Area Synod (17%), and the Metropolitan Chicago Synod (16%).

Globalization was the last category of responses to receive 10 percent or more of the total response. Globalization included any reference to global conflict, terrorism, September 11, Islam, world citizenship, the increasing awareness of the events/peoples of the world, global economies including the expanding divide between rich and poor, or global impact/effects in any other area. The highest percentages in this category were from the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod (12%), the Sierra Pacific Synod (12%), the Grand Canyon Synod (11%), the Virginia Synod (11%), and the South Carolina Synod (11%).

The second question was:

In the context of these factors, what are the three most essential things that we need to do as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as a whole to move effectively into the future.

The most frequent category of responses included issues of **Outreach/Witness/Evangelism**. The category included any comments related to outreach, witnessing or evangelism. It also included references to mission or mission-mindedness, openness to diversity and being inclusive, a willingness to change and start new congregations. The synods with the most responses in this category were the Florida-Bahamas Synod (61%), the Southwestern California Synod (57%), the Virginia Synod (57%), the Delaware-Maryland Synod (55%), and the Saint Paul Area Synod (53%).

Lutheran/Denominational Issues followed behind evangelism. The category included any mention of comments related to strengthening Lutheran identity, maintaining Lutheran theology, teaching the confessions, being faithful to Word and Sacrament ministry or comments related to the organization of the

ELCA as a whole. The highest percentages in this category came from the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin (33%), the Southwestern Texas Synod (29%), the South Carolina Synod (29%), the Southwestern Washington Synod (28%), and the Northwestern Minnesota Synod (28%).

The next most frequent category was **Bible Study/Prayer/Discipleship**. This category included anything related to Bible study, prayer and discipleship that does not specifically mention Lutheran identity, theology, or the denomination. The synods with the most responses in the category include the Western Iowa Synod (30%), the Minneapolis Area Synod (17%), and the Southern Ohio Synod (17%).

The **Youth** category of comments included anything that mentioned youth or young people or conversely, the aging of the church. The synods with the most responses in the youth category included the Allegheny Synod (18%), the La Crosse Area Synod (16%), the Alaska Synod (16%), the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod (15%), the Western North Dakota Synod (14%), and the Northern Great Lakes Synod (14%).

The **Communication** category included any mention of using communication or technology to improve communication or understanding within the church. The synods that most often mentioned communication included the Western North Dakota Synod (13%), the Central States Synod (13%), the Pacifica Synod (12%), and the Southeast Michigan Synod (11%).

Leadership, as a category of responses, included any mention of leadership, leadership development, lay leadership, or a shortage of pastors. The synods most likely to mention leadership were the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod (15%), the Western Iowa Synod (14%), and the Saint Paul Area Synod (13%).

Finally, **Family**, was mentioned a significant number of times. The category included anything related to strengthening family life or mentions support for the family. It did not include any references to youth or young adults. The synods most likely to mention the family were the Rocky Mountain Synod (12%), the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod (11%), and the Northeastern Ohio Synod (11%).