

Northern Great Lakes Synod Ministry Review – Executive Summary

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

March 2017

A ministry review of the Northern Great Lakes Synod (NGLS) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was conducted from February 17-19, 2017. The ministry review was requested by Bishop Thomas Skrenes. The goals of the review were the following:

- to identify and enhance the strengths of the congregations and synod;
- to identify the goals of the congregations and the synod and hear possible recommendations to address them;
- to understand how ELCA Lutherans are perceived in the area; and
- to gather information and get advice for the incoming bishop.

The ministry review included a meeting with the synod council and bishop transition team members as well as listening posts in two different congregations: Messiah, Marquette and United, Crystal Falls. The congregational meetings were attended by clergy and lay members from 29 congregations throughout the synod. In addition, four congregations submitted written responses to the survey questions.

The strengths, challenges, recommendations and advice from both the synod council/Bishop transition team and the congregational participants, both lay and clergy, were quite similar.

Strengths

- Stewardship
- Endowment¹
- Lutheran Campus Ministry and Outdoor Ministry
- Openness/Inclusivity
- Positive/Alternative/Intellectual voice
- Natural beauty/Appreciation for nature

Challenges

- Declining Membership/Finances
- Geographic Isolation
- Pastoral Vacancies

¹ The endowment funds the following ministries: seminary tuition, clergy student debt, lay school of ministry, companion synod in Tanzania, Lutheran Campus Ministry and outreach projects.

Recommendations to Address Challenges

- *Be Innovative*
 - The Lay School of Ministry is an example of this innovation to address the leadership shortage.
- *Communicate more/Communicate Our Connectedness*
 - Even though many congregations are isolated geographically, it is important to continue to communicate through the synod newsletter, both online and in paper form. Mission interpreters in congregations are also crucial to maintain relationships and communicate the work we are doing together.
- *Continue Outreach*
 - Both locally (food pantries, community meals, back-to-school backpacks, etc.) and through ELCA World Hunger and with relationships with their companion synod in Tanzania.
- *Continue to promote a theologically sound, welcoming interpretation of the Gospel*
 - The ELCA can be a place of welcome for those who have been turned away by the church. Also, ELCA churches can provide an alternative to more socially conservative and fundamentalist churches in the area.

Advice for the New Bishop

- Be prepared to travel/spend substantial amounts of time in the car.
- Support your pastors. Encourage them when they feel like they are failing, and let them know they are connected to the synod.
- Utilize pastors. Currently, the synod office is the bishop and the Director for Evangelical Mission. Since the synodical staff is limited, utilize and empower pastors and lay leaders when possible for synodical work.
- Be communicative. Continue to keep the lines of communication open. Make sure that the good work happening in the synod, nationally and internationally is communicated.
- Make sure stewardship and administration are handled well. Bishop Skrenes is a very talented administrator with a focus on stewardship. If these are not strong points for the new bishop, s/he needs to find someone who can complement his/her strengths.

Following are a qualitative report based on the February 2017 interviews, a quantitative report focusing on membership, attendance, giving and mission support, and a report on the religious landscape of the NGLS.

Northern Great Lakes Synod Ministry Review – Qualitative Report
John Hessian
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Synod Council/Bishop Transition Team Summary

Strengths of the Northern Great Lakes Synod

- *Worship and Grounding in the Word* – There is prayer every time a synod group gets together.
- *Lay School for Ministry* - This has a long history in the synod. Some graduates have pursued ordination while others have become licensed lay ministers. These lay ministers help to lead small congregations.
- *Financial Support of Seminarians/Pastors* - There is an endowment fund, which among other ministries, provides for seminarian scholarships as well as student debt reduction for clergy.
- *Stewardship* – Bishop Skrenes has emphasized stewardship. NGLS, on average, shares 51 percent of its mission support with the churchwide expression. This is three percentage points higher than the ELCA synodical average.
- *Mission/Outreach* – There is strong support across the synod for ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran World Relief and the companion synod in Tanzania. There also are food pantries, community meals, back-to-school backpacks, LWF Quilters, etc.
- *Denominational Loyalty* - There seems to be more denominational loyalty in this synod than in other parts of the ELCA (comments by those who had served or lived in other synods).
- *Lutheran Campus Ministry*¹ – University of Northern Michigan, Marquette; Michigan Tech, Houghton; Bay College, Escanaba
- *Outdoor Ministry* - Fortune Lake Bible Camp is a treasure of the synod.

¹ Finlandia University, one of the 26 ELCA colleges and universities and the only private college in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, is located in the Northern Great Lakes Synod.

Goals for the Northern Great Lakes Synod

- *Improve Clergy Retention Rate* – Decrease the high turnover of congregational clergy. It is difficult for congregations to accomplish their goals when clergy do not stay long.
- *Fill Pastoral Vacancies* – This will require creativity, especially considering the financial constraints of small congregations.
- *Create a Resource Clearinghouse* – Some felt the resources are there (theological or practical) for congregations but that congregations do not know how to access them. The new bishop could promote these resources.
- *Continue Workshops* – These are on stewardship, congregational renewal, enhancing worship and mission interpretation.
- *Provide Mission Opportunities* – The synod office needs to both promote and provide opportunities for congregations to come together around mission.
- *Provide Education* – This education could be further explanation of the 2009 decisions on human sexuality as well as an explanation of the many roles of the synod office (other than facilitating the call process and collecting mission support).
- *Host Leaders Summit* – Host a gathering of religious and community leaders to brainstorm ways churches can work with their communities to address the challenges facing the area.

Challenges in the Synod

- *Multi-point Parishes* – Even though there are many two- and three-point parishes in the synod, many congregations find it difficult to give up their church building/identity in order to merge with another congregation.
- *Pastor Salaries* – Minimum salary guidelines for clergy are difficult for small congregations to meet; clergy defined compensation (i.e., including benefits and a social security offset) is very difficult to meet. The fixed expenses of calling a pastor do not decrease even though revenue does, meaning less money for other line items. One person even referred to the minimum compensation guidelines as a “guilt trip”.
- *Inward Focus/Isolation* – Many small congregations are inwardly focused and often isolated geographically. Also, many question why money is sent to Tanzania while their pastors’ salaries suffer, and repairs to their church buildings are delayed.
- *Conservative Context* – The NGLS tends to be conservative. Because of this, social justice issues can be poorly received.

What do you want ELCA Lutherans to be known for in this area?

- *Church is Good.* – This is the advertisement campaign/public service announcement on television in the NGLS. The message is that everyone is welcome in ELCA congregations. They are pleased that the ELCA is an alternative to many of the more conservative voices in American Christianity.
- *God’s Work. Our Hands. Sunday* – This day of service in September is known as a day that ELCA Lutherans are involved in their communities.

- *Ecumenism* – ELCA Lutherans are known as having good relationships with other denominations, and this should be continued.
- *Sexuality* – There still is a perception that the ELCA is concerned with issues related to human sexuality, and specifically the decision to ordain people in same-sex relationships. Whether this is what we want to be known for, it is for many in the area and is what differentiates the ELCA from the Apostolic and Missouri Synod Lutherans.

Connections to the ecology of the ELCA

Areas of Connection

- *ELCA Youth Gathering*
- *ELCA World Hunger*
- *Mission Interpreters*
- *Gather and Living Lutheran* magazines
- *Director for Evangelical Mission* – Very positive comments about Pastor Finegan’s work and communication though it is possible that more could be done in the area of congregational renewal.

Areas Lacking Connection

- *Social Justice Issues* – There is a lack of diversity (e.g., racial/ethnic, language other than English) in the NGLS compared to other areas of the country. Because of this, issues like immigration, racism and accepting of refugees are not as central as they are to the national church.

Advice for the Bishop

- *Travel* – Be aware of the considerable amount of time spent driving around the synod.
- *Word and Prayer* – S/he must be grounded in Scripture and centered in prayer.
- *Outreach, Evangelism* – S/he must display a passion for these areas.
- *Stewardship* – Bishop Skrenes has been very strong with stewardship and general fiscal responsibility. If the new bishop is not strong with administration and finances, s/he must find a way to complement this.
- *Social Justice* – The next bishop should bring a strong sense of social justice to the synod, yet do this with diplomacy and sensitivity. The youth of the synod have a broader world view and are expecting the synod to work on this. If not, there is the possibility that many young people will turn away from the church.

Congregational Listening Post Summary

Strengths of the NGLS

Congregational strengths

- Hospitality, openness to all
- Fellowship, close-knit family atmosphere of the congregation
- Music, choir
- ELCA World Hunger connection
- Social justice activities – food pantry, community meals, back-to-school kits, free lunches for children in the summer
- Connection with companion synod in Tanzania

Other specific strengths

- Keryx Prison Ministry
- Campus Ministry (NMU, Michigan Tech)
- Outdoor Ministry/Camping Ministry, specifically Fortune Lake Bible Camp
- Room at the Inn (rotating homeless shelter ministry)

Goals for Congregations in NGLS

- Increase membership, specifically young people and young families
- Become more outwardly focused (e.g., open the church building more to community groups, get church members more involved at functions outside of the church building)
- Other goals were specific to congregations. A few examples would be hiring a full-time pastor, installing a wheelchair ramp, purchasing a smart TV for the sanctuary, providing better housing for their pastor, initiating a contemporary worship service, etc.

Challenges in the Synod

- Aging/declining population - Also, many retirees are snowbirds and are gone several months a year.
- Lack of men in church
- Cultural change/church not central part of people's lives - Many young parents never went to church themselves so they cannot imbue their children with the value of going to church.
- Competing pressures of other activities - sports, snow machining, sleeping in on Sunday, etc.
- Inward focus of churches - Trying to find a balance between maintaining/nurturing a healthy church family while also focusing on being church outside the church walls
- Economy of the area/church finances - Mines have closed. Fewer people in church equals less giving to the church.
- Pastoral vacancies

What do you want ELCA Lutherans to be known for in this area?

The first responses were about recognizing the ELCA as a Christian denomination. Here are the themes that emerged.

- Many people are not aware of the ELCA as a specific denomination.²
- Many lump all Christians into one category (often negative—judgmental or unwelcoming).
- If there is an awareness of the Christian church, Christians are divided into Catholic and “other”.

Inclusiveness/Openness

For those who are aware of the ELCA, the ELCA congregations are seen as more inclusive and open. The sentence, “All are welcome,” was heard in practically every group we spoke with. Also, congregational members would like the ELCA *to continue* to be known as inclusive. This helps to distinguish the ELCA from more conservative Christian bodies. In fact, members of one congregation referred to the ELCA congregation in their town as the “good guys” and the LCMS congregation as the “bad guys”. This refers to the LCMS stance on open communion, female ordination and allowing “outsiders” into their congregation. In addition, there is the perception that there are comparatively more non-heritage Lutherans in the NGLS congregations. This contrasts with the Apostolic Lutherans, who are seen as both conservative and ethnically Finnish. Not only were some attendees raised in traditions other than the ELCA or its predecessor bodies, there also were statements that members of their congregations are from Catholic and LCMS backgrounds.

Cooperative/Ecumenical

Some mentioned collegial relationships about working with other Lutheran bodies in the area (ELCA, LCMS, WELS, and Apostolic Lutherans) while others talked about the lack of cooperation. One female pastor co-leads a combined VBS program with the LCMS congregation in her town. Others mentioned the practical need for all congregations (Catholic, Methodist, Episcopal, etc.) to work together because of the nature of small town life and the large amount of churches. (There are 13 churches in Newberry, MI, approximate population 1500.) Yet others mentioned the closed communion of LCMS and the Apostolic Lutherans and general lack of cooperation.

Intellectual/Theological

The intellectual nature of the ELCA was mentioned. Questions are welcome and “You don’t have to leave your intellect at the door.” The ELCA has an educated, theologically-centered clergy, and intellectual inquiry is welcome. One pastor even strongly urged clergy to combat literalist interpretations of the Bible.

Outreach-oriented

Again, many groups focused on the outreach nature of the ELCA. ELCA Lutherans have a message that is both “*in and of the world.*” The ELCA does work in the community and around the world.

² Even though the feeling was that most people in the area were unaware of the ELCA, many groups mentioned the television public service advertisements that introduced the ELCA and NGLS. The comments about these PSAs were very positive.

Connections to the Ecology of the ELCA

Table 1 breaks down responses from participants by congregation and how they perceive their connectedness to other expressions of the ELCA.

Table 1: How connected is your congregation to other congregations in the synod, the synod office and the churchwide organization? (N=33 congregations)

	With Other Congregations	With the Synod Office	With the Churchwide Organization
Connected, Work Together	9	5	5
Isolated, Don't Work Together	9	12	5
Yes and No, Depends on the situation or activity	7	3	1

Of the congregations that feel connected with other congregations, it often is at the conference level. The most common reasons for being isolated are because of geography or because of a mentality that their church building is their home and they are afraid of losing it. Some felt that the pastors had collegial relationships with other pastors but that the laity were not that involved with other congregations.

As for connections with the synod, some said the communication with the synod is very good (e.g., synod newsletter, quick response from synod office to questions, etc.). Those who felt isolated said it was because of geography or that they only dealt with the synod office for the call process. One congregation even felt they were being punished for reducing their mission support to the synod office. Another congregation said that relationships could improve if the synod's role were better understood.

The connections, or lack thereof, to the churchwide organization were not as apparent.³ For those who identified connections, they were primarily through the Youth Gathering, Women of the ELCA and giving to ELCA Disaster Response and World Hunger.

Goals for the Synod Office

Stewardship

- In general, this has been done well with Bishop Skrenes. He is seen as a good fiscal administrator.
- Do not focus on finances *only*. Synod staff must maintain non-financial relationships/connections with congregations. The synod staff should not be seen as people who use the word "stewardship" only to ask for money. Make sure congregations understand that stewardship is about time, talents and treasure.

³ Only 11 of the 33 congregations commented on the relationship with the churchwide expression. This could be because of a lack of time during the listening posts.

- Reinforce the reasons congregations give money to the synod office. Many congregations are not aware why they send money to the synod.

Supporting Congregations

- Be a “cheerleader” for congregations.
- Set up an exchange program between/among congregations and pastors.
- Curate/provide a clearinghouse of resources that congregations can utilize.
- Help congregations consolidate while also understanding the tension that exists with congregants that are very attached to their church building. This will involve “out of the box” imagination.
- Understand the burden of minimum compensation guidelines and the costs of defined compensation on small congregations

Continuing Work (These are areas that are currently happening and working well.)

- Endowment – Provides funds for the following: seminarian tuition, clergy debt, global companion synod, campus ministry, lay school
- Lay school
- Companion synod - Tanzania
- Fiscal responsibility in general - The synod received more last year than it had expected.

Knowledge for the Bishop

Environment/Geography

- Beautiful, natural surroundings - Many in the area have an appreciation for the environment.
- Geographically large synod - Long distances are a hindrance to cooperation between/among congregations. The bishop and his/her staff will need to spend substantial amounts of time in their cars.
- Weather – Winters are long, and there is heavy snowfall.

Economy

- Boom and bust economy based on logging and mining
- High poverty and unemployment

Cultural Changes

- Competing interests for people’s/families’ time
- Not a strong commitment to church for many young families
- Increasing numbers of unchurched people

Congregational Decline

- Less people at church
- Older people (and/or older women only) at church
- Many small, financially tenuous congregations

Other

- Nostalgia – Many yearn to go back to a previous time but recognize that it is not possible.
- Friendliness/Insulation – Many spoke of the friendliness and welcoming nature of the people in the area while simultaneously expressing the sentiment that the area is quite insulated.
- Upper Peninsula Identity – There is a strong identification as being part of the UP. Part of this identity is that it is a unique and out-of-the-way place. One person even said that they are an “appendage of the state of Michigan and of the US itself.”
- Bishop’s spouse – If the bishop is from somewhere other than the UP/Northeastern Wisconsin counties, it’s possible that his/her spouse would be unable to find employment and could find the winter weather to be challenging. This is also true for any clergy accepting a call in the NGLS.

Advice for the Bishop

The synodical bishop should be the following:

- *Biblically grounded*
- *Administratively strong*
- *Communicative* - Most said the synod office has been communicative, approachable and quick to respond to any questions. Please keep this up.
- *Innovative* – This is crucial, especially considering declining attendance and finances.
- *Pastor to the pastors* – Fostering relationships among clergy and regular encouragement and support of clergy are necessary. Connect with them and make sure they (young pastors in particular) know that you will support them if needed. Many pastors feel as if they are failing when they are not. Many pastors are isolated in small towns and need the bishop to encourage/support them. The bishop also needs to understand that s/he does ultimately hold power over the pastors in the synod and that his/her encouragement, communication, support, etc. is there even though there is a power differential. Since it is difficult for the bishop to be a completely adequate “pastor to the pastors”, having a retired or older pastor in each conference visit the other pastors in his/her conference/geographic area would serve to reduce this issue.
- *Utilize Clergy/Lay Leaders* - Much of the potential in the synod is untapped by the synod leadership. Too much needs to be done by the bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission. It is possible for the bishop to ask clergy and lay leaders in the synod to help with synodical work/initiatives.

The bishop also needs to reach out to all congregations in the synod. This is with the understanding that the synod consists of 80 congregations spread out over 22,000 square miles, and there are 52 weeks in a year. There are limits to how many congregations s/he can visit but it is important to try.

Other Comments/Notes of Interest

- Some on synod council/Bishop Transition Team talked about the valuable resources for the 500th Observance of the Reformation while others knew nothing about them.
- Both Bethany, Norway and Calvary, Quinnesec have grown after the 2009 decisions on Human Sexuality because members of two other congregations in their area that left the ELCA wanted to be in a more welcoming environment.
- One pastor mentioned the \$8,000 a year available to seminary students from the Northern Great Lakes Synod, yet working clergy in the synod are provided \$600 annually to offset any student debt. This pastor was very grateful for the \$600 he received annually but questioned the return on investment for the \$8,000 a year to seminarians. He questioned whether these pastors return to the synod to lead a congregation or if they go to a different synod.
- Another suggestion for the new bishop to consider is for the synod office to provide “welcome kits” to rostered leaders new the area. This welcome kit would include practical information such as the following: a list of trusted and reputable CPAs in their area, contacts for a spiritual director or spiritual care options, Michigan law on mandatory reporting, opportunities to get involved in synod ministries, etc.

Northern Great Lakes Synod Ministry Review – Quantitative Report
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The Northern Great Lakes Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America covers 22,078 square miles. Geographically, it is 32nd in size of the 65 synods. The smallest area covered by a synod is the Saint Paul Area, 1,535 square miles; the largest area covered is Alaska, 571,951 square miles. The median territory covered is 22,000 miles. Twenty synods in the ELCA cover 10,000 square miles or less. Figure 1 shows the territory covered for the Northern Great Lakes, the two bordering synods in Region 5 and the two Michigan synods in Region 6.

Figure 1: Territory of the Synods in Square Miles

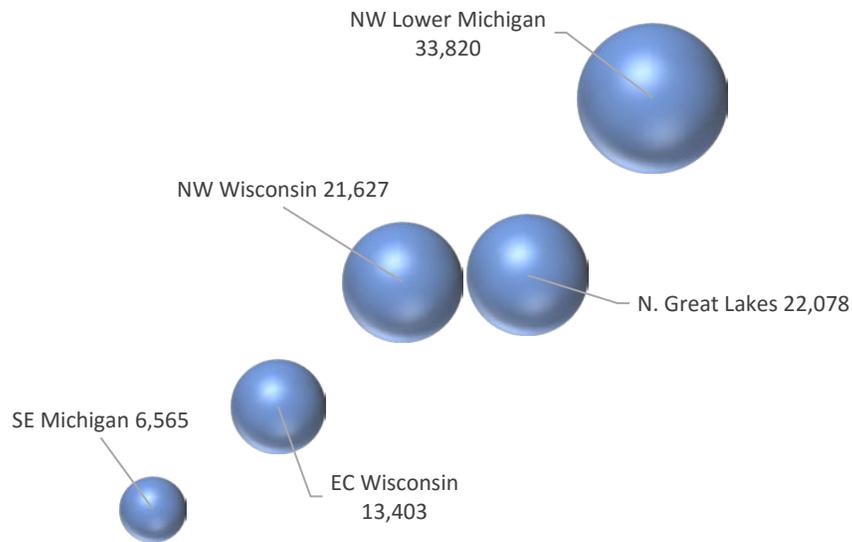
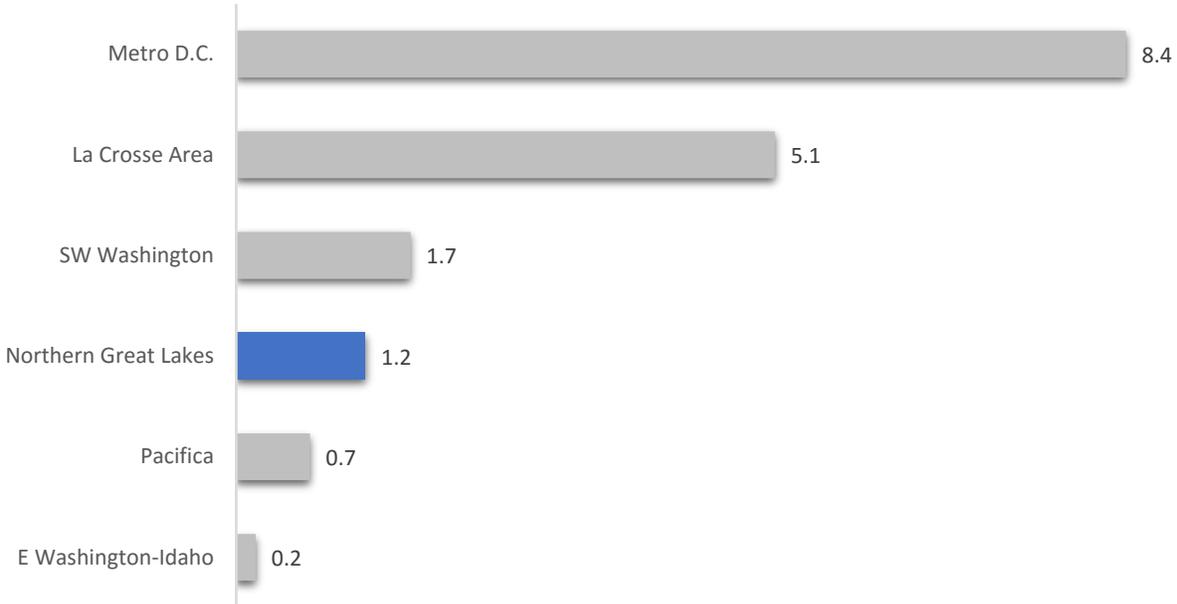


Figure 2 shows the number of Lutherans per square mile in five other synods from various regions with approximately the same amount of baptized members (23,000 to 33,000 baptized members). There were 27,022 baptized ELCA Lutherans in the Northern Great Lakes Synod in 2015, which is 1.2 baptized members per square mile. This compares to slightly over five ELCA Lutherans per square mile in the

La Crosse Area Synod or more than eight in the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod. Both Pacifica and Eastern Washington-Idaho have fewer than one ELCA Lutheran per square mile.

Figure 2: Baptized ELCA Lutherans per Square Mile



Baptized Membership and Worship Attendance

At the end of 2015, the Northern Great Lakes Synod had 82 congregations.¹ In 2005, there were 94.

In 2015, the baptized membership of the synod was 27,022 or an average of 330 per congregation. The average number of baptized members in a congregation in the ELCA is 394. Also in 2015, the congregations of the Northern Great Lakes Synod baptized 258 children and 15 adults while also affirming the faith of 172 adults.

In 2015, the aggregate worship attendance on a typical Sunday in the synod was 6,088 (23% of the baptized members) with an average of 74 in worship per congregation. The average for the ELCA in 2015 was 105 or 27 percent of the baptized. To compare, Table 1 shows average weekly attendance for the neighboring Region 5 synods, the two other Michigan synods and five other synods of comparable baptized membership to Northern Great Lakes. The Northern Great Lakes Synod has both a lower average weekly attendance figure and a lower percentage of baptized members attending worship than all but two of these synods.²

¹ St. Mark, Marquette and Bethany, Rapid River disbanded in 2016. At the end of 2016, there were 80 active congregations in the Northern Great Lakes Synod.

² It also should be noted that the climate in the Northern Great Lakes Synod is challenging. The cold, high snowfalls and the age of many congregants could be contributing factors to the lower church attendance.

Table 1: Average Weekly Attendance and Percentage of Baptized Members Attending Worship

Synod	Average Weekly Attendance	Percentage of Baptized Members Attending Worship
Pacifica	106	40%
SW Washington	119	37%
E Washington-Idaho	81	32%
Metro D.C.	116	30%
North/West Lower Michigan	92	30%
SE Michigan	103	28%
ELCA Average	105	27%
East Central Wisconsin	153	24%
Northern Great Lakes	74	23%
La Crosse Area	95	21%
Northwest Wisconsin	92	21%

Eighty-one percent of the congregations in the Northern Great Lakes Synod had 100 people or fewer in worship in 2015 (see Figure 3) while these same congregations accounted for 56 percent of all worshipers in the synod. Thirty percent of the people in the pews are in congregations worshipping more than 150 people, yet these eight congregations account for ten percent of all the congregations in the synod. The three congregations worshipping more than 200 people per week are the following: Ascension, Minocqua; Messiah, Marquette; Trinity, Rhinelander. Since 2005, the proportion of congregations with 100 or fewer in worship has increased from 62 percent to 81 percent. The proportion of congregations worshipping over 200 per week has decreased from eleven percent to four percent (10 congregations in 2005 to 3 congregations in 2015).

Figure 3: Proportion of Congregations and Worshipers by Typical Worship Attendance for the Congregations of the Northern Great Lakes Synod in 2015

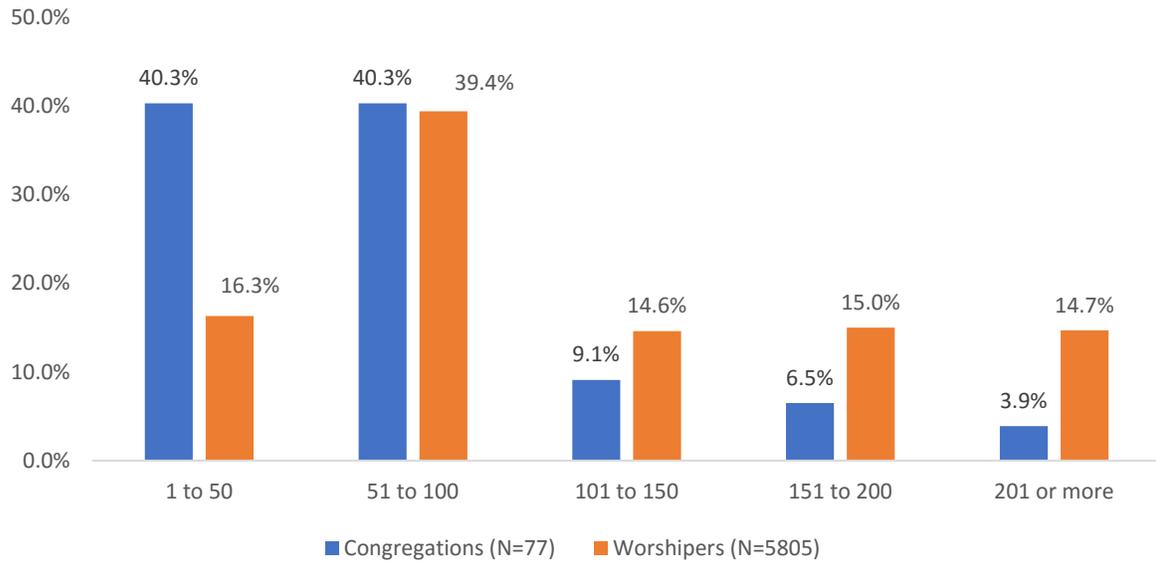
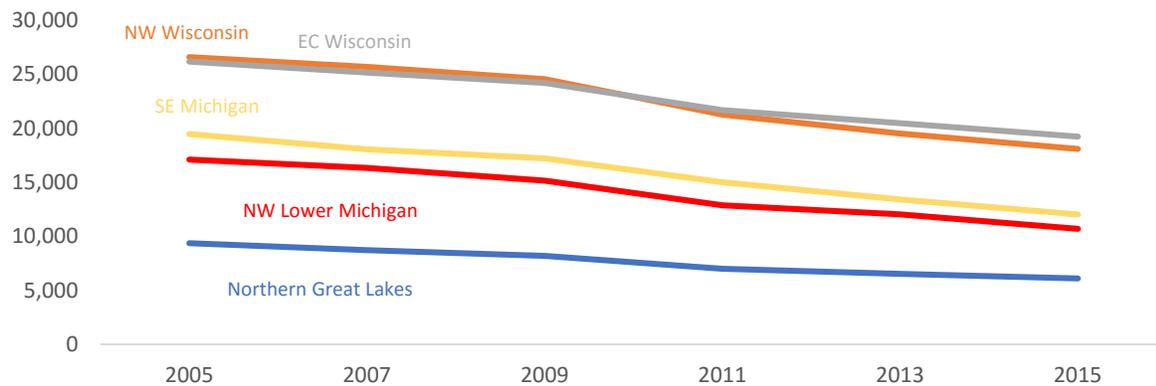


Figure 4 presents the trend in worship attendance for the Region 5 synods that border the Northern Great Lakes and the two other Michigan synods from 2005 to 2015. All synods have seen declines in the past ten years: Southeast Michigan and North/West Lower Michigan -38%, Northern Great Lakes -35%, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin -32%, East-Central Synod of Wisconsin -27%.

Figure 4: Change in Worship Attendance from 2005 to 2015



Giving

Total giving (undesignated and designated giving) from the members of the Northern Great Lakes Synod in 2015 was \$10,926,159; the average amount given per attendee was \$1,795. In 2005, total giving to the congregations in the synod was \$14,729,453. The average amount given per worship attendee in 2005 was \$1,575 (in 2015 dollars). Despite giving more, these attendees have been unable to offset losses due to the overall decline in worship attendance (see Table 2).

Table 2: Total Giving per Worship Attendee

Synod	Total Giving per Worship Attendee – 2005³	Total Giving per Worship Attendee - 2015
Metro D.C.	\$3,515	\$3,378
Pacifica	\$2,400	\$2,436
SW Washington	\$2,076	\$2,414
North/West Lower Michigan	\$1,897	\$2,162
Southeast Michigan	\$2,118	\$2,127
E Washington-Idaho	\$1,914	\$2,119
ELCA Average	\$1,836	\$2,103
La Crosse Area	\$1,324	\$1,818
Northern Great Lakes	\$1,575	\$1,795
East-Central Synod of Wisconsin	\$1,567	\$1,785
Northwest Synod of Wisconsin	\$1,474	\$1,762

Operating expenses have increased as a percent of total giving from 79 percent in 2005 to 82 percent in 2015.⁴

Mission support is the amount of money shared through congregations for the ministry of synods and the ELCA churchwide expression. Table 3 presents mission support both as a percentage of undesignated giving from congregations and per average attendee. Of all the synods compared in this report, the Northern Great Lakes Synod passes on the highest percentage (8.5%) of its undesignated giving in the form of mission support to the synod office. In addition, only the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod passes on more mission support per average attendee (Metro D.C. \$188, NGLS \$136).

³ These figures are adjusted for inflation to reflect 2015 dollars. The cumulative rate of inflation from 2005 to 2015 was 21.4%.

⁴ Operating expenses in 2005 were \$9,631,752 and total giving was \$12,136,945; operating expenses in 2015 were \$8,957,234 and total giving was \$10,926,159.

Table 3: Giving to Mission Support per Congregation and Worship Attendee - 2015

Synod	Percentage of Congregational Undesignated Giving for Mission Support	Mission Support per Worship Attendee
Northern Great Lakes	8.5%	\$136
La Crosse Area	7.3%	\$106
North/West Lower Michigan	6.9%	\$128
Metro D.C.	6.0%	\$188
Eastern Washington-Idaho	5.7%	\$125
ELCA Average	5.6%	\$101
Pacifica	5.4%	\$121
Southeast Michigan	4.9%	\$92
East-Central Synod of Wisconsin	4.9%	\$77
Southwestern Washington	4.4%	\$85
Northwest Synod of Wisconsin	4.2%	\$63

The Synod Office and Its Financial Resources

Section 10.21. of the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* outlines the primary purposes of synod offices.

10.21. Each synod, in partnership with the churchwide organization, shall bear primary responsibility for the oversight of the life and mission of this church in its territory. In fulfillment of this role and consistent with policies and procedures of this church, the synod shall:

- a. Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered leaders in the synod;
- b. Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations;
- c. Strengthen interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and foster relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as ecumenical partners.
- d. Interpret the work of this church to congregations and to the public on the territory of the synod.

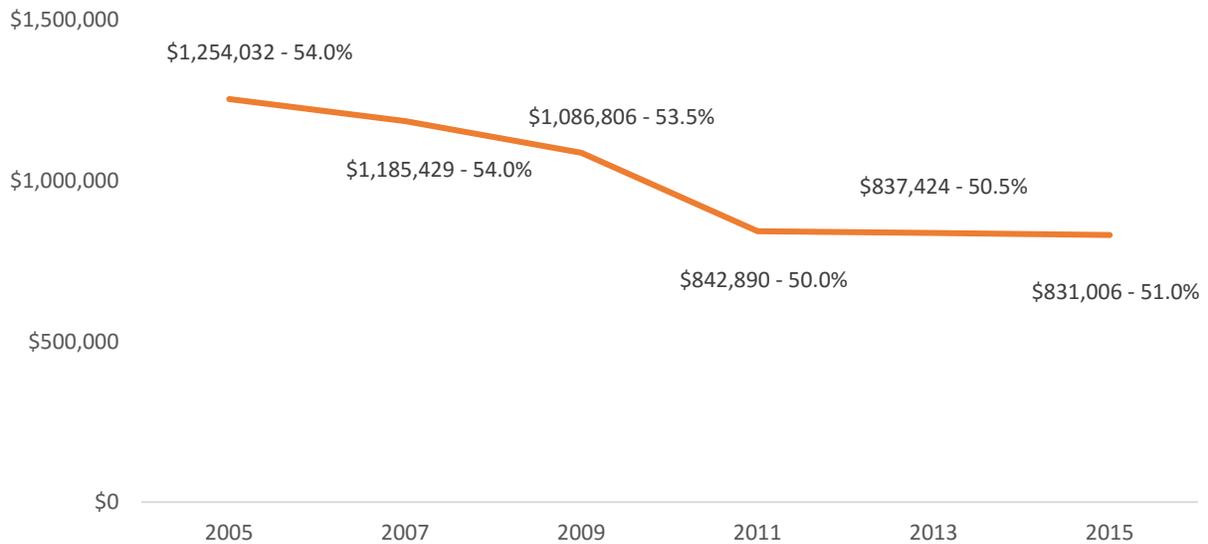
Despite the consistency of responsibilities, the amount of money available to synod offices to carry out these responsibilities varies widely. Table 4 shows mission support figures for the neighboring Region 5 synods, the two other Michigan synods and five other synods of comparable baptized membership to Northern Great Lakes.

Table 4: Mission Support 2015⁵

	From Congregations	Amount to Churchwide	Percent to Churchwide	Amount Remaining in the Synod
Metro D.C.	\$1,616,335	\$808,559	50.0%	\$807,776
East-Central Synod of Wisconsin	\$1,474,539	\$810,997	55.0%	\$663,542
Pacifica	\$1,453,248	\$741,156	51.0%	\$712,092
North/West Lower Michigan	\$1,370,987	\$685,493	50.0%	\$685,494
Southeast Michigan	\$1,100,380	\$455,100	41.4%	\$645,280
Northwest Synod of Wisconsin	\$975,144	\$487,572	50.0%	\$487,572
E Washington-Idaho	\$910,830	\$274,308	30.1%	\$636,522
SW Washington	\$880,108	\$381,734	43.4%	\$498,374
Northern Great Lakes	\$831,006	\$423,813	51.0%	\$407,193
La Crosse Area	\$749,467	\$412,426	55.0%	\$337,041
ELCA Total	\$97,942,700	\$47,141,999	48.1%	\$50,800,701

Figure 5 presents the amount of mission support income passed on from the congregations of the Northern Great Lakes Synod to the synod office.⁶

Figure 5: Congregational Giving to Mission Support and Percentage Shared with the Churchwide Expression for the Northern Great Lakes Synod from 2005 to 2015 (in 2015 dollars)



⁵ Using synodical audited financial statement figures when possible.

⁶ These figures have been adjusted for inflation to reflect 2015 dollars.

Northern Great Lakes Synod Ministry Review –Population and Religious Landscape

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Research and Evaluation

Office of the Presiding Bishop

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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According to the 2010 US Census, the population of the territory of the Northern Great Lakes Synod was 430,181. The 2016 estimate is 423,524, and the population is predicted to be 420,072 by 2021. Baptized ELCA Lutherans account for 6.4 percent of the population currently. In 2000, ELCA Lutherans accounted for 7.0 percent of the population (30,923 baptized members out of 440,781 people).

Several attendees of the congregational listening posts mentioned the distinctions between the ELCA and other Lutheran bodies. To better understand the ELCA’s place among Lutheran denominations, Table 1 presents the number of congregations and baptized membership figures for the different Lutheran bodies in the NGLS.¹

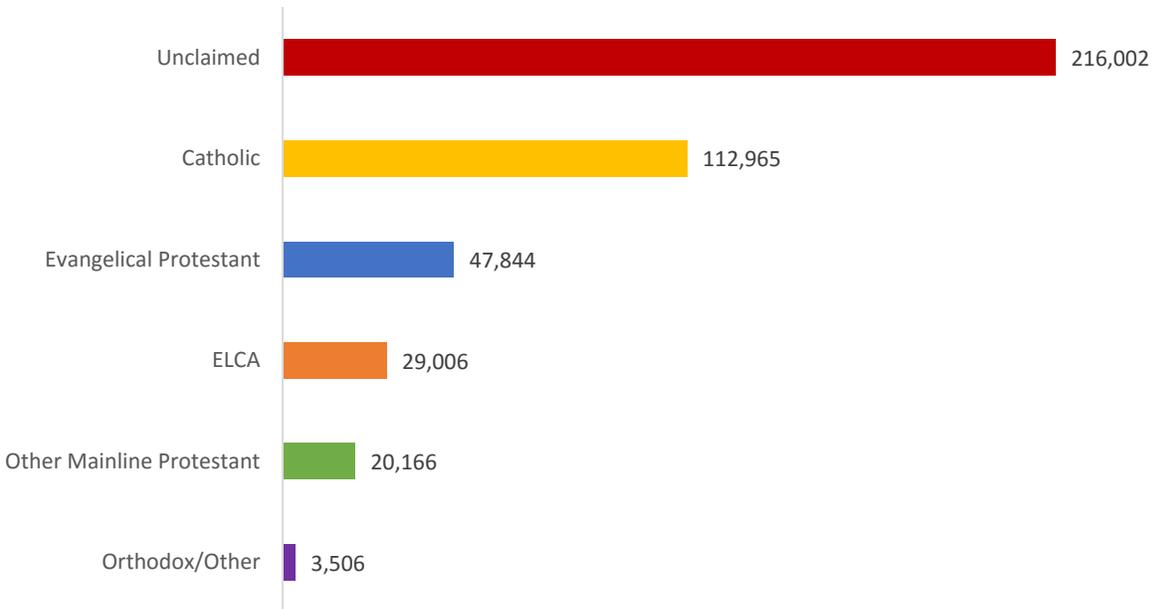
Table 1: Lutheran Churches in the Northern Great Lakes Synod in 2010

Denomination	Number of Congregations	Baptized Membership
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	90	30,923
Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod	40	9,228
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	35	8,464
Apostolic Lutheran Church of America	14	Unknown
Association of Free Lutheran Congregations	8	Unknown
Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ	6	3,346
North American Lutheran Church	2	Unknown
Church of the Lutheran Confession	2	Unknown
American Association of Lutheran Churches	1	Unknown

¹ This information comes from The Association of Religion Data Archives, www.thearda.com. This is the most recent data from 2010.

Table 2 presents the number of claimed adherents of the different faith traditions in the NGLS.

Table 2: Population by Faith Tradition in the Northern Great Lakes Synod



Catholics outnumber Protestants in the NGLS by 13 percentage points. But people unclaimed by a faith tradition are roughly equal to those belonging to a faith tradition (unclaimed = 216,002 and claimed = 214,179). The average weekly worship attendance at ELCA congregations in 2015 was 6,088, which is 23 percent of the baptized/claimed figure (27,022 in 2015). If we assume three-quarters of the Mainline Protestants do not attend church weekly, as well as half of the Catholics and Evangelical Protestants, that would mean roughly 334,000 people are not regularly involved in a community of faith.

Since several attendees of the listening posts said the ELCA’s inclusivity is one of its strengths and that this inclusivity is what often distinguishes ELCA congregations from other more closed traditions, it would follow that some unclaimed or non-attending folks who want to see God at work not only in their lives, but also the lives of their loved ones and their communities would be attracted to the ELCA. So if just two percent of the unclaimed or non-attending population (over 300,000 people) could be attracted to the ELCA—could see they do not need to check their intellects at the door and that church does not have to be a narrow, judgmental club of insiders—then the attendance of the NGLS congregations would double.

Synod Self-Study Schedule

Saturday – February 18, 2017

United, Crystal Falls		Messiah, Marquette	
9:00 a.m.	Zion, Marinette	9:00 a.m.	Immanuel, Negaunee
9:00 a.m.	Holy Cross, Baraga	9:00 a.m.	Christ the King, Escanaba
10:00 a.m.	Christ Lutheran Parish, Ironwood	10:00 a.m.	Community, Palmer
10:00 a.m.	Calvary, Minocqua	10:00 a.m.	Bethany, Ishpeming
11:00 a.m.	Prince of Peace, Eagle River	11:00 a.m.	Faith, Sault Ste. Marie
11:00 a.m.	Pioneer Lake, Conover	11:00 a.m.	Bethany, Escanaba
1:00 p.m.	Bethel, Menominee	1:00 p.m.	Messiah, Marquette
1:00 p.m.	Ascension, Minocqua	1:00 p.m.	United, L'Anse
2:00 p.m.	Bethany, Norway/Calvary, Quinnesec	2:00 p.m.	Good Shepherd, Houghton
2:00 p.m.	Gloria Dei, Hancock	2:00 p.m.	Our Redeemer, Newberry (phone)
3:00 p.m.	St. Stephen's, Stephenson	3:00 p.m.	Faith, Rock & First, Trenary
3:00 p.m.	Grace, Pembine	3:00 p.m.	Grace, South Range

The following congregations submitted written responses to the survey questions.

1. Sharon, Bessemer
2. Bethel, Cedarville
3. Emmanuel, Menominee
4. United, Crystal Falls

The following congregations expressed interest but were unable to come.

1. First, Gladstone
2. Bethany, Amasa
3. Trinity, Rhinelander
4. Shepherd of the Lakes, Sayner