

Priorities in Context: Sustainability and Membership Growth

A Background Paper for the Future Directions Table

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In this report, I have taken a more thematic approach rather than provide a summary of the actions of the various groups called, over the past 10 years, to discuss the future of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The issues addressed by these groups, however, provide the basis for this report and I believe I have covered the most important themes. The groups include the Blue Ribbon Committee (2006-2007), the Living into the Future Task Force (LIFT I, 2009-2011 and Lift II, 2011-2014), the Group of Nine (2011-2012), the Mission Funding Task Force (2012), the Three Leadership Tables (2012-2013), The Church Council Retreat (2014), and the Conference of Bishop's Think Tank on Mission Support (2014-2015).¹ Each of these groups, in one way or another, addressed the sustainability of the mission and ministry of the three expressions of the ELCA—congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization.²

Sustainability

Focusing on sustainability is an effective means for assessing church goals and planning for the future. Sustainability is an important measure of any organization's ability to effectively interact with its environment and, ultimately, to carry out its mission. Sustainability is not only a question of existence, but of capacity and impact. What does an organization intend to do and at what level? What are the resources it needs to accomplish its goals? How much is enough? What do the trends suggest?

Financial Resources

Over the last 10 years, undesignated giving to congregations in the ELCA has declined from 1.85 billion to 1.75 billion (-5%). Adjusted for inflation, the decline is 22 percent. Mission support, which is the money given for the support of synods and the churchwide organization, has declined from \$130 million in 2005 to \$99 million (-24%). Adjusted for inflation, the decline is 37 percent.

The financial resources available to congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization of the ELCA are dependent upon a series of decisions. First, members make a decision to give undesignated contributions to their congregations. In 2014, the average contribution per baptized member was \$465. In 2005, the average contribution per baptized member was \$460 (adjusted for inflation).

¹ The Church Council Retreat focused most of its attention on governance issues.

² The LIFT Task Force was asked to address the whole "ecology" of the ELCA and, as a result, was the most wide-ranging of these groups. It focused on the societal and economic changes in American society and attempted to assess the organization, governance, and interrelationships among the church's expressions in light of the changes. Among its recommendations were proposals to change the frequency of the Churchwide Assembly, to review of how the church addresses social concerns, to review of the constitutional responsibilities of synods, and for an expanded role for the Conference of Bishops in its relationship to the Church Council. At its most basic level, however, LIFT made two recommendations its priority. These recommendations were: 1. support for the work of congregations and, 2. the strengthening of synods so they can be more effective catalysts for mission planning. Both of these recommendations came from a deep concern for the long-term sustainability of congregations and the implications of struggling congregations for the whole church.

Second, congregational councils determine if, how, and when some proportion of their undesignated gifts will be shared with their synod (mission support). In 2014, congregations passed on an average of just over \$10,000 (or about \$26 per baptized member). The median gift was \$5,000. In 2014, 28 percent of congregations gave \$1,500 or less. (See Table 1.) In 2005, 20 percent of congregations gave \$1,500 or less (undadjusted for inflation).

Table 1: Number of Congregations by Their Level of Mission Support for 2005 and 2014 (unadjusted for inflation)

Mission Support	2005		2014	
\$0	609	5.8%	1,198	12.8%
\$1 to \$1,500	1,488	14.1%	1,466	15.6%
\$1,501 to \$5,000	2,613	24.7%	2,390	25.5%
\$5,001 to \$10,000	1,983	18.7%	1,658	17.7%
\$10,001 to \$20,000	1,967	18.6%	1,520	16.2%
\$20,001 or more	1,923	18.2%	1,400	14.9%
Total	10,583	100.0%	9,377	100.0%

Third, after receiving these gifts from congregations, synod councils decide if, how, and when some proportion of this mission support will be shared with the churchwide organization. Since the beginning of the ELCA, the guideline for synods was 55 percent of the unrestricted giving received from congregations. This guideline was suggested by the Commission for a New Lutheran Church (1986-1987), but was never formally approved as a constitutional provision of the ELCA.³ In 1991, the average sharing rate was 54 percent. In 2005, it was 50 percent. In 2014, it was 49 percent. The recent Conference of Bishop's Think Tank on Mission Support (2014-2015) proposed individual consultations with synods rather than continuing to pursue a common percentage goal. In response to the full set of recommendations from the Think Tank, the ELCA Church Council took the following action.

To replace the present reporting form of synodical mission support with a format that expresses thanksgiving for all gifts when reporting to the Church Council; To acknowledge that uniform percentage guidelines (i.e., 55/45) for mission support are no longer appropriate across all synods; To approve the development, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Office of the Presiding Bishop, of a contextually sensitive, substantive and collaborative process which will result in synod-specific percentage goals for each of the 65 synods by no later than the April 2018 meeting of the Church Council; To request that the Budget and Finance Committee monitor the consultation process with a goal of recommending benchmarks and guidelines to be used in establishing the synod-specific goals no later than the April 2018 meeting of the Church Council. (CC15.04.11)

The Church Council actions lend support, perhaps unintentionally, to the premise that local needs legitimately take priority. This view of mission support is certainly relevant to many ELCA congregations, given their financial circumstances. Many ELCA congregations are finding it difficult to meet their local needs, much less provide for their synod and the churchwide organization. Members, the majority of whom are well educated and relatively

³ It was clear in 1987 that there was not enough funding for the proposed churchwide organization and synods. In February of 1987, there was an estimated \$9 million shortfall. The bishops of the three church bodies organized a consultation between budget developers for both the churchwide organization and synods. According to CNLC documents (*Transition Team Report*, Exhibit B, 1987), as a result of this consultation, a consensus was reached "that, in regard to the present shortfall between projected income and expenditures . . . efforts be made by churchwide organization budget developers and synodical budget developers to share, more or less equally, the challenge."

well off, are giving more per member, but their rate of giving as a proportion of income (about 2%) has not changed appreciably since the beginning of the ELCA. This is true despite years of emphases on stewardship education and proportionate giving. To keep pace with declines in membership and increased operating costs, members need to increase their rate of giving each year and the vast majority do not do so.

As a result, the ELCA, as a system, shows signs of being zero-sum. A fixed amount is available and when it is gone, it is gone. Adjustments are made by moving funds from one place to another, so more in one place means less in another. The annual reports of congregations consistently show that when money is needed to cover increased costs, the funds move out of a single line—mission support. When congregational operating expenses go up, mission support goes down. When more is expended in local benevolences, mission support goes down. When more is given by congregations directly to global companions, mission support goes down. And, because the financial support system for the whole ELCA is fundamentally rooted in the financial circumstances of congregations, the only way for the system to change is for congregations/members to change. Either the number of members has to increase or giving as a percent of income has to go up, or both. This may not be the only reason, but it is certainly one of the reasons, there is so much concern for congregational sustainability/vitality among the groups tasked with addressing the future of the ELCA.

Membership and Support

In the 1950s, ELCA congregations experienced phenomenal membership growth. In the predecessor bodies of the ELCA, baptized membership climbed 28 percent from 3.1 million in 1940 to 4.0 million in 1950. Between 1950 and 1960, membership increased another 33 percent from 4.0 million to 5.3 million. Membership peaked in 1965 at 5.9 million. (See Table 2.)

**Table 2: Baptized Membership in the ELCA
(and its predecessor bodies)**

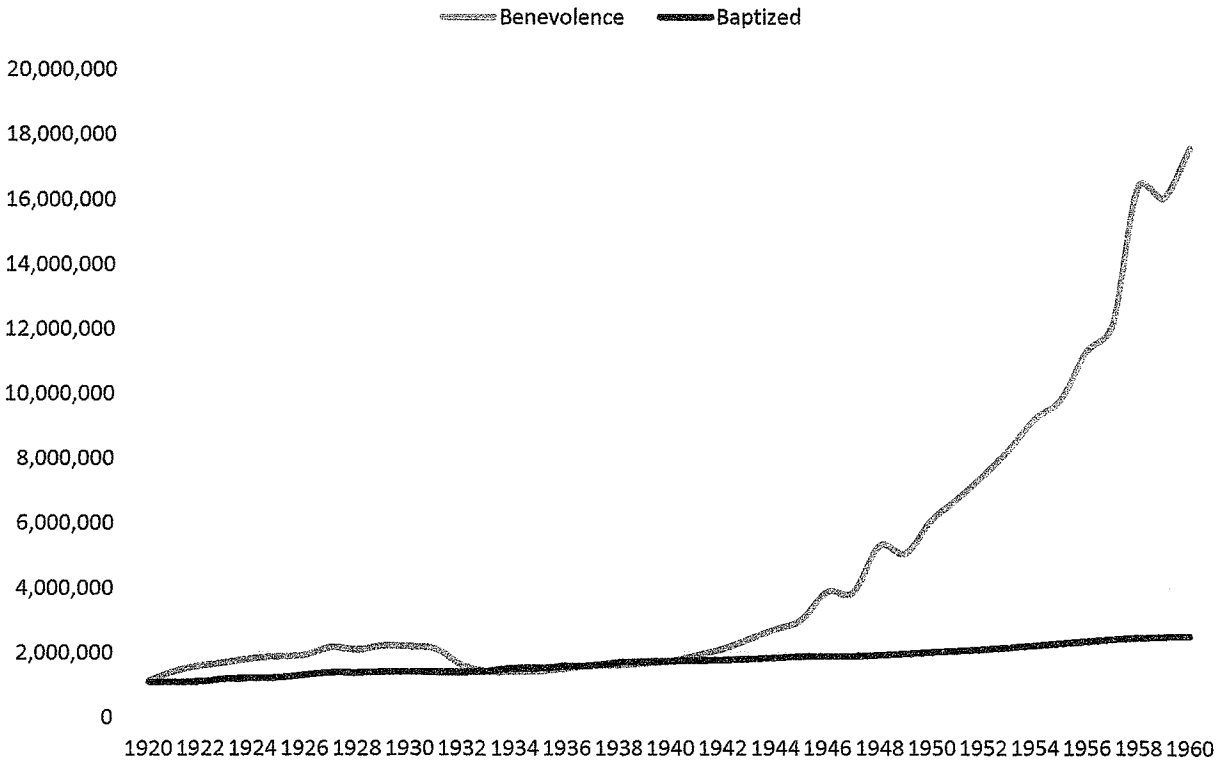
Year	Baptized Membership	Percent Change
1940	3,117,626	
1950	3,982,508	27.7%
1960	5,295,502	33.0%
1965	5,887,093	11.2%
1970	5,640,137	-4.2%
1980	5,384,271	-4.5%
1990	5,240,739	-2.7%
2000	5,125,919	-2.2%
2010	4,274,855	-16.6%
2014	3,765,362	-11.9%

Data from the United Lutheran Church in American (ULCA)⁴ suggests, however, that membership growth was only one component of the financial growth in the church at the time. Starting as early as 1942, benevolences contributed by congregations for the work done through synods and the wider church began to grow significantly and disproportionately to membership growth. (See Figure 1.) In short, congregations were

⁴ The ULCA (1918-1962) was one of the predecessor bodies of the Lutheran Church in America, which in turn was a predecessor of the ELCA.

sending a high proportion of the gifts they were receiving to support the activities of the wider church. In the ULCA, the rate was consistently around 18 percent during the 1950s.⁵

Figure 1: Membership in the United Lutheran Church and the Benevolence Contributed by Congregations for Work Done Through Synods and the ULCA



This high level of support was the product of several factors.

1. There was a real increase in expendable income in the U.S. during the 1950s. This means households had more money to contribute, and they were contributing at a relatively high rate for Lutherans (3 to 4 percent of household income).
2. Within the ULCA, there was a strong and widely shared Lutheran identity with two components. First, there was a strong Lutheran theological identity. Theology was primarily the domain of clergy but many lay members knew the basics and could recite from Luther's *Small Catechism*. Second, there was a strong Lutheran institutional identity. Among the laity there was an appreciation for, and loyalty to, local Lutheran congregations, social ministry organizations, colleges, and seminaries. In addition, there was support for local synods and their oversight of the church (particularly the ministerium) and, there was support for a national church to which members ceded responsibility for ecumenical and interchurch relationships, as well as national and global missions.
3. Local clergy not only held the system together, they promoted it. When necessary, they spent their cultural capital in behalf of the system, and they had considerable capital. There was high regard for the office of pastor among members and in local communities (schools, hospitals, governments and businesses), and in the wider church, clergy exerted a dominant influence in assemblies and in other legislative and deliberative

⁵ To this point, I have not been able to clearly establish what the rate would have been for the predecessor bodies of the American Lutheran Church. It appears it would have been lower. At the beginning of the ALC in 1960, it was about 10 percent of undesignated giving.

church forums. All clergy, active and retired, could vote in synod assemblies, and the national assembly was 50 percent clergy and 50 percent lay (compared to 40 percent clergy and 60 percent lay in the ELCA, *ELCA Constitution*, 5.01.f.).

4. There was a good fit between the sensibilities of the society and the church. Lutherans may have had a strong Lutheran identity, but their leaders also viewed themselves as mainline. The clergy in particular believed that society was progressing and Christianity (or more specifically Protestant Christianity in its mainline form) could and would produce a bright future. Clergy were convinced they were playing a significant role. The spread of faith in God, mediated by the church, was the path to realizing the Kingdom of God on earth and with the guidance of the church, Americans were on that road together.

But, by the mid-1960s, the social, cultural, and economic conditions supporting this system started to unravel.

1. Roman Catholic immigrants from Europe gained a substantial presence in many major metropolitan areas across the U.S., and their growing strength put the Protestant mainline hegemony in question.
2. Conservative evangelicals began to re-emerge in a "new" evangelical movement headed by Billy Graham (and the editors of *Christianity Today*) which was intent on competing with the mainline for social dominance.
3. The baby boom and the suburban expansion it produced, which fueled both membership growth and new congregation development, began to slow.
4. The cultural ideal of a household began to waver. Married couples began to have fewer children and their commitment to raising children as the primary focus of their lives began to give way to more personal and individualistic ambitions.
5. There were protest movements demanding gender and racial equality. These stood alongside a volatile anti-war movement. Each, in its own way, with different constituencies, produced a deep suspicion of institutional authority.
6. Economic competition from Europe and Japan re-emerged to challenge the supremacy and dominance of American engineering and manufacturing.

By the 1980s and into the 1990s,

1. The personal computer was on the rise—named the machine of the year in 1982. Personal computers began to change how people managed information and it eventually provided access to the Internet.
2. By the mid-1990s the Internet was in place. The leading institutions, which controlled the news and set and managed cultural trends, including the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life*, and the network television companies (CBS, ABC, NBC), found themselves in competition with new, up-start alternatives that could segment the market and appeal directly to niche constituencies.

In mainline religious circles, the collective impact of these developments posed a serious challenge to mainline Protestant hopes. The member churches of the National Council of Churches of Christ (including the predecessors of the ELCA) found their efforts increasingly muted. No longer were they "the" religious voice Americans heard and listened to, but they were "a" voice. Martin Marty (1984), assessing the views of the editors of *The Christian Century* (the magazine title itself a symbol of 1950s mainline confidence), wrote:

A nostalgia similar in ways to that of today's religious New Right was evident in the magazine. In the good old days, the editors believed, Americans spoke 'the same language' and had 'the same cultural backgrounds,' as well as many other important 'sames . . .'. This was not quite the old nativism; the editors had no heart for that. Yet, they could not swallow the changes easily.

By the 1970s, after the founding of the American Lutheran Church (ALC-1960) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA-1962), the tide had clearly turned. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say, the exceptional times for Lutherans of the 1940s to the 1960s were coming to an end. Echoing the comments of Martin Marty, Clifford Nelson (1972) quotes Franklin Clark Fry, president of ULCA and then the LCA, as saying the following in 1964.⁶

The chief factor that accounts for the pitifully slow net growth is the high percentage of our membership that lives in the cities. Ours is among the most urban denominations; conspicuously more so than our fellow American Lutherans. Here [in the urban church] the summons is, renew or die. Let no one be deceived. The new-style "urban work" is going to be expensive, discouraging, and slow. What is at stake is not merely the organization of a few flourishing congregations; it is no less than the future character of our national life. The texture and color of every culture are determined in its cities and ours will be no exception. It must not be allowed to become totally secular and pagan.

As membership peaked, so did both the amount and rate of money passed on to the wider church. By the time of the merger that formed the ELCA (1988), baptized membership had slipped by 11 percent from its peak of 5.9 million to 5.2 million. But more significantly, the benevolences (mission support) passed on to the wider church dropped by a stunning 46 percent from \$52.8 million in 1965 (ALC and LCA) to \$27.8 million in 1988 (adjusted for inflation).

Beginning with the ALC and the LCA, and through the life of the ELCA, the institutional resources of congregations and the wider church have contracted. (See Table 3.) In 1965 dollars, total giving to congregations has declined 22 percent, but mission support to synods and the churchwide organization (or the predecessor body equivalents) has declined by 75 percent.

Table 3: Baptized Membership and Giving in Selected Years (with adjustments for inflation)

	Baptized Membership	Total Giving	Mission Support	In 1965 Dollars				Pct. Mission Support
				Total Giving	Mission Support	Total Giving per Baptized	Mission Support per Baptized	
1965	5,887,093	\$299,217,323	\$52,815,469	\$299,217,323	\$52,815,469	\$50.83	\$8.97	17.7%
1970	5,640,137	\$371,009,632	\$58,990,076	\$300,964,989	\$47,853,063	\$53.36	\$8.48	15.9%
1980	5,384,271	\$725,097,104	\$89,956,467	\$277,163,444	\$34,385,248	\$51.48	\$6.39	12.4%
1990	5,240,739	\$1,238,424,569	\$118,787,914	\$298,537,564	\$28,635,296	\$56.96	\$5.46	9.6%
2000	5,125,919	\$1,931,688,679	\$133,306,390	\$353,025,369	\$24,362,382	\$68.87	\$4.75	6.9%
2010	4,274,855	\$2,112,573,819	\$108,458,062	\$305,354,289	\$15,676,676	\$71.43	\$3.67	5.1%
2014	3,765,362	\$1,752,677,614	\$99,364,601	\$233,146,543	\$13,217,783	\$61.92	\$3.51	5.7%

Excess Capacity

Table 4 contrasts the baptized membership of the ELCA in 1990 with 2014 by ELCA region. Membership declines were substantial but increased much more quickly after 2000. Region 3 (MN, ND, SD) and Region 5 (IA, IL, MI-

⁶ E. Clifford Nelson, *Lutheranism in North America: 1914-1970*, pg. 199. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972.

part, WI) fared best (losses in the 15% to 20%). The other Regions, however, were a third smaller in 2014 than they were in 1990. Overall, there are 28 percent fewer members in the ELCA in 2014 than there were in 1990.⁷

Table 4: Baptized Membership in 1990 and 2014

Region	Baptized Membership 1990	Baptized Membership 2014	Percent Change 1990 to 2014
One (AK, ID, MT, OR, WA)	254,085	167,357	-34.1%
Two (AZ, CA, CO, HI, NM, NV, TX-pt, UT, WY)	348,917	213,592	-38.8%
Three (MN, SD, ND)	1,118,306	950,161	-15.0%
Four (AR, KS, LA, MO, NE, OK, TX-pt)	378,475	261,387	-30.9%
Five (IA, IL, MI-pt, WI)	1,057,784	823,598	-22.1%
Six (IN, KY, MI-pt, OH)	541,789	330,751	-39.0%
Seven (CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA-pt, RI, VT)	656,840	427,759	-34.9%
Eight (DE, DC, MD, PA-pt, WV)	534,229	346,548	-35.1%
Nine (AL, BM, FL, GA, MS, NC, PR, SC, TN, VI, VA)	350,314	244,209	-30.3%
Totals	5,240,739	3,765,233	-28.2%

Because there are fewer members, one would expect costs to go down, and there has been an 11 percent decrease in congregational disbursements (adjusted for inflation). But, because there are so many fewer members, the costs per member have increased substantially (23%) between 1990 and 2014 (adjusted for inflation). The direct operating expenses for congregations (not including benevolences) have increase by 10 percent, from 65 percent of all disbursements to 75 percent. This means members are paying more to keep their congregations open and to pay clergy salary and benefit costs. Because giving has not kept pace, congregations have offset these increased operating expenses by reducing capital improvements from 11 percent of disbursements to 6 percent of disbursements (which means deferred maintenance) and by reducing mission support from 8 percent of disbursements to 4 percent. Local benevolences are flat at about 2 percent of disbursements. On the other hand, endowments and memorial funds in 2014 stood at \$1.4 billion.

Congregational members have clearly shown through their financial decision-making that their primary goal with regard to the institutions of the ELCA is to keep their local congregations open. This is why, despite 28 percent fewer baptized members between 1990 and 2014, and 30 percent fewer congregational clergy, there are only 15 percent fewer congregations.

Keeping a building open is one thing, but providing worship is another. In 2014, there were 6,927 congregational clergy (30% less than in 1990) available for 9,204 congregation. This does not mean, however, there is a shortage, but instead, it is a reflection of the financial means of congregations. At any one time, 2,500 or about a quarter of ELCA congregations, have no called pastor. The vast majority of these congregations are without a pastor because they cannot afford to pay a pastor.

This is true despite the fact that compensation for clergy has remained remarkably flat. In 1990, the average defined compensation (salary and housing) of a pastor in the ELCA was \$56,114 (adjusted for inflation) and in

⁷ 1990 is a better baseline than 1988 since it took several years for congregations to become accustomed to new report forms in the ELCA. I also have not attempted to factor out the impact of congregations leaving the ELCA after the 2009 Churchwide Assembly Decision to ordain gay/lesbian pastors in committed, long-term relationships.

2014 in was \$59,196.⁸ The problem for congregations is the distribution of baptized members. (See Table 5.) There are 1,767 congregations (19%) in the ELCA with 100 or fewer baptized members. These congregations account for 3 percent of the ELCA's baptized membership. Average worship attendance in these congregations is 29. In 2014, average income was \$54,420 for these congregations, which is not enough to pay the salary of a first-call pastor. The only option for these congregations is to find a bi-vocational, a part-time pastor, a supply pastor, or to share a pastor.

Table 5: Congregations in the ELCA by Baptized Membership in 1990 and 2014

Baptized Membership	Number of Congregations 1990	Number of Congregations 2014	Percent Change 1990 to 2014	Total Baptized 2014	Percent of All Baptized Members	Total Income
1 to 100	1,163	1,767	51.9%	109,560	2.9	\$54,420
101 to 200	2,046	2,103	2.8%	310,933	8.3	\$109,470
201 to 350	2,577	2,000	-22.4%	537,346	14.3	\$174,655
351 to 600	2,439	1,719	-29.5%	790,117	21.0	\$277,972
601 or more	2,699	1,705	-36.8%	2,016,217	53.5	\$619,837
Total	10,924	9,294	-14.9%	3,765,233	100.0	\$238,081

It is not unreasonable, given this data, to suggest that the ELCA has too many congregations. Assume congregational buildings still have the capacity they had in 1990. In Region 1, the average size of a congregation in 1990 was 411 baptized members, and there were 618 congregations. (See Table 6.) If the average size of a congregation was the same in 2014, only 407 congregations would be needed. However, 548 exist. Based on this criteria, the ELCA has 1,500 too many congregations for its current membership. The average asset value of a typical congregation in the ELCA is \$2.2 million. The combined asset valuation of these 1,500 congregations would be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$3.4 billion.

Table 6: Number of Congregations Needed in 2014 Based on Size in 1990

Region	Congregations in 1990	Congregations in 2014	Percent Difference	Average Size in 1990	Needed in 2014	Difference
One (AK, ID, MT, OR, WA)	618	548	-11.3%	411	407	-141
Two (AZ, CA, CO, HI, NM, NV, TX-pt, UT, WY)	768	662	-13.8%	454	470	-192
Three (MN, SD, ND)	1,968	1,635	-16.9%	567	1,676	41
Four (AR, KS, LA, MO, NE, OK, TX-pt)	974	805	-17.4%	389	672	-133
Five (IA, IL, MI-pt, WI)	1,906	1,626	-14.7%	555	1,484	-142
Six (IN, KY, MI-pt, OH)	1,191	955	-19.8%	455	727	-228
Seven (CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA-pt, RI, VT)	1,312	1,167	-11.1%	501	854	-313
Eight (DE, DC, MD, PA-pt, WV)	1,217	1,033	-15.1%	439	789	-244
Nine (AL, BM, FL, GA, MS, NC, PR, SC, TN, VI, VA)	970	863	-11.0%	361	676	-187
Totals	10,924	9,294	-14.9%	480	7,755	-1,539

⁸ We have not kept systematic track of actual benefits, which may have climbed substantially.

The Capacity of Synods and the Churchwide Organization

Table 7 shows the mission support sent by congregations to the synods and the churchwide organization from 1990 to 2014. These figures are not adjusted for inflation. Clearly, as noted earlier, congregations are passing on less and less. In 1990, congregations passed on 10.9 percent of their undesignated giving in mission support, compared to 5.7 percent in 2014. The impact of this reduction has affected both synods and the churchwide organization, slowly and deliberately, but not proportionately. In 1990, the churchwide organization received \$61.8 million in mission support. In 2014, \$48.4 million was received, which is a reduction of 22.7 percent. In 1990, synods received \$57.0 million in mission support and in 2014, it was \$51.2 million or a reduction of 10.2 percent. Between 2010 and 2014, the portion of mission support going to synods declined by 4.7 percent compared to 7.8 percent for the churchwide organization.

Table 7: Mission Support from Congregations to Synods and the Churchwide Organization by Year

Year	From Congregations	To Synods	To Churchwide	Percent Synod	Percent Churchwide
1990	\$118,787,914	\$56,997,045	\$61,790,869	48.0%	52.0%
1991	\$119,442,903	\$54,641,033	\$64,801,870	45.7%	54.3%
1992	\$120,235,352	\$55,439,239	\$64,796,113	46.1%	53.9%
1993	\$118,626,847	\$55,501,846	\$63,125,001	46.8%	53.2%
1994	\$118,085,199	\$54,271,156	\$63,814,043	46.0%	54.0%
1995	\$120,303,360	\$57,212,075	\$63,091,285	47.6%	52.4%
1996	\$120,927,310	\$57,190,229	\$63,737,081	47.3%	52.7%
1997	\$123,410,074	\$58,292,257	\$65,117,817	47.2%	52.8%
1998	\$126,852,281	\$60,111,026	\$66,741,255	47.4%	52.6%
1999	\$130,114,880	\$62,100,874	\$68,014,006	47.7%	52.3%
2000	\$133,306,390	\$63,895,167	\$69,411,223	47.9%	52.1%
2001	\$135,520,471	\$66,033,765	\$69,486,706	48.7%	51.3%
2002	\$133,204,219	\$64,453,171	\$68,751,048	48.4%	51.6%
2003	\$131,538,299	\$65,089,592	\$66,448,707	49.5%	50.5%
2004	\$130,490,038	\$64,868,870	\$65,621,168	49.7%	50.3%
2005	\$130,323,202	\$64,855,172	\$65,468,030	49.8%	50.2%
2006	\$131,568,011	\$65,903,980	\$65,664,031	50.1%	49.9%
2007	\$132,905,973	\$66,776,856	\$66,129,117	50.2%	49.8%
2008	\$131,498,498	\$66,211,572	\$65,286,926	50.4%	49.6%
2009	\$121,902,925	\$62,202,298	\$59,700,627	51.0%	49.0%
2010	\$108,458,062	\$55,812,147	\$52,645,915	51.5%	48.5%
2011	\$103,464,702	\$53,041,537	\$50,423,165	51.3%	48.7%
2012	\$102,619,378	\$52,747,559	\$49,871,819	51.4%	48.6%
2013	\$100,517,920	\$51,536,885	\$48,981,035	51.3%	48.7%
2014	\$99,364,601	\$50,956,091	\$48,408,510	51.3%	48.7%

These change rates, however, underestimate the shift toward synods because of the deployment to synods of the Directors for Evangelical Mission (DEMs). The DEMs work in synods to address congregational renewal, stewardship, and new ministry development, and they do this work locally. The DEM program clearly redistributes resources to synods making it possible for synods with fewer resources (about half the synods) to give attention to this important local work. In 2014, the churchwide support of DEMs was \$5.7 million or about 12 percent of the mission support shared with the churchwide organization.

The question of excess capacity at both the synodical and churchwide level is difficult to assess. What are the appropriate expectations for synods and the churchwide organization? Setting these expectations goes beyond the current *ELCA Constitutional* description of purposes. The purposes of the churchwide organization include, for example, “undergirding the worship life of this church as the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered” (11.21.a.). Does this require one churchwide staff person or two? Can it be done by the Presiding Bishop without additional staff? The churchwide organization is to “support and establish policy for this church’s mission and coordinate planning and evaluation for that mission throughout the world, including participation with other churches” (11.21.c.). Does this require a churchwide unit? What is the scope of work this church expects from the churchwide organization and its synods? When these expectations are considerably more explicit, then it will be possible to assess capacity and make appropriate adjustments.

The resources available to synods vary significantly. All have the same constitutional responsibilities but nearly everything else varies. Many synods now operate with minimal staffing while others have larger staffs. Territories vary greatly as do the number of baptized members, the number of congregations, and the relative wealth of those congregations. There are no consistent or reliable means of assessing synod staffing levels. Should there be a number of staff per baptized member, per congregation, or per square mile? In terms of reporting staffing costs, some synods report by position while others pool compensation figures. Our best estimate, based on an analysis of synod audit reports, is the number of synod staff decreased by about 7 percent from 1990 to 2014 and the amount of mission support devoted to compensation and benefits declined by about 9 percent (adjusted for inflation). Over the same time period, however, baptized membership decreased by 28 percent and the number of congregations decreased by 15 percent.

As for the churchwide organization, the amount of its budget devoted to staff compensation and benefits is down about 30 percent (adjusted for inflation) from 1990 to 2014. As to the number of staff, however, there are only reliable records for executive positions. In 1990, the churchwide organization had 297 executive positions.⁹ In 2014, there are 250 executive positions including the approximately 62 positions deployed to synods as DEMs. This is a 16 percent reduction. Finally, with regard to staffing, compensation at the synodical level accounts for about 61 percent of mission support. At the churchwide level, compensation accounts for 69 percent of mission support.

The question of scope of the churchwide organization remains. Is the churchwide organization trying to do too much? What should it no longer do? These are significant questions but clearly, the churchwide organization no longer engages many functions believed important by the Commission for a New Lutheran Church. The ELCA publishing house is a separately incorporated entity and the churchwide organization no longer produces congregational resources at the scale of the LCA’s Division for Parish Services, for example.¹⁰ Social ministries are now represented by Lutheran Services in America rather than a churchwide unit. Lutheran schools, outdoor ministry, and campus ministry receive modest grants and very limited staffing attention. The Youth Gathering is financially independent (with the exception of modest staffing costs). The colleges and universities also receive very modest staffing support. The churchwide organization continues to provide grants and staffing support to new ministry development, but funding is provided by a coalition which includes local and synodical sources. There are no longer separate commissions for financial support, women, or multicultural ministries. Nearly as much money is raised locally and contributed directly to other countries than is now spent through the global mission unit of the churchwide organization (not including World Hunger). In a negative, self-reinforcing

⁹ The source delimiting “executive” positions is *Exhibit E in the Church Council Report: Budget Proposal* in the minutes of the respective Churchwide Assemblies.

¹⁰ The churchwide worship staff were involved in development of the worship hymnal, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

feedback loop, as mission support declines and whole units were downsized/eliminated, the case for mission support becomes more difficult to make.

Another way look at these changes, as financially necessary as they might have been, is to compare the budget of the churchwide organization in 2014 to the budgets of the ALC and LCA in 1984. (See Table 8.) The total cost of the ELCA's churchwide units in 2014 are less than the costs for the units of either the ALC or the LCA alone in 1984.

Table 8: A Comparison of the Churchwide Budgets for the ALC and the LCA in 1984 to the ELCA's Churchwide Units in 2014

American Lutheran Church	Lutheran Church in America	ALC	LCA	Total for ALC and LCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	
Unit		1984		1984	2014	Unit
Service and Mission in America / Church in Society / Life and Mission in the Congregation / Theological Education / Higher Education and Schools / Support to Ministries	Mission in North America / Parish Services / Professional Leadership	\$23,852,649	\$22,457,941	\$46,310,590	\$27,289,740	Congregational and Synodical Mission
World Mission and Inter-Church Cooperation	World Mission and Ecumenism	8,190,007	\$10,532,545	\$18,722,552	\$13,973,965	Global Mission
Bishop/Secretary / Legislative	Bishop/Secretary	\$1,732,969	\$1,339,725	\$3,072,694	\$5,573,425	Office of the Bishop
					\$3,977,920	Office of the Secretary
Board of Trustees/Pension/Foundation	Office for Administration and Finance	\$3,180,497	\$4,718,815	\$7,899,312	\$8,146,135	Office of the Treasurer / Information Technology (no Pensions /Foundation)
Communication and Mission Support	Communication	\$1,907,867	\$3,802,612	\$5,710,479	\$5,543,870	Mission Advancement / Foundation
Other Expenses	-	\$1,623,754			\$3,543,350	
Total for Churchwide Units		\$40,487,743	\$42,851,638	\$83,339,381	\$68,048,405	
World Hunger		\$4,705,342	\$4,000,000	\$8,705,342	\$19,000,000	
Total		\$45,193,085	\$46,851,638	\$92,044,723	\$87,048,405	
adjusted to 1984 Dollars		\$45,193,085	\$46,851,638	\$92,044,723	\$38,195,484	

The largest reductions have occurred in support of congregational and synodical mission work (including leadership support). The cost of the related work in the ALC in 1984 was \$23.8 million and in the LCA it was \$22.5 million. In 2014, the ELCA spent just over \$27 million on this work (down 74% after adjusting for inflation).

The Global Mission unit of the ELCA receives 67 percent less funding than it did in the comparable units in the ALC and LCA. The ELCA's offices of the Bishop and Secretary have grown larger, but in the ELCA, the Office of the Presiding Bishop includes Ecumenical Relation, Human Resources, Research, Worship, and Theological Discernment. The Office of the Secretary now includes planning for large events (e.g., ELCA Churchwide Assembly), meeting planning (e.g., ELCA Church Council, Conference of Bishops, Synod Vice Presidents, etc.) and, perhaps most significantly, legal. Without World Hunger, which is the only national program to have grown significantly in the ELCA, the churchwide units are 64 percent smaller than they were in the ALC and LCA.

While the members of this church may no longer be willing/able to fully support these churchwide activities, they were once legitimately understood, at least by many, to be work in support of, and in behalf of, congregations. What may be understood as considerably less legitimate by congregations is the churchwide attention to congregational renewal most fully evident in the deployment of DEMs and called for by LIFT.¹¹ For better or worse, the vast majority of ELCA congregations do not believe they need renewal. In a recent *Faith Communities Today* survey of ELCA congregations, 78 percent of congregations said they were thriving (19%) or doing okay (59%). Seven percent said they were struggling but the future looks better, 12 percent said they were struggling and it is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, and only 3 percent said they were not sure their congregations will survive much longer.¹² Second, despite the LIFT Task Force, the Three Tables narrative and the Blue Ribbon Committee, many ELCA congregations believe they are already doing exactly what they should be doing, no more and no less, when they provide worship; attend to members who are sick and needy; contribute to charity in the local community; and teach people the basics of the Christian faith. So when the conclusion is drawn, as it was in the first section of this paper, that there are 1,500 too many congregations, or that congregationation need to have a community impact or be an important part of their local neighborhoods, it is at best confusing to congregations and at worse, antagonistic.

The Sustainability of Congregations

If anything is shared by all of the groups focusing on the future of the ELCA, it is a concern for the sustainability/vitality of congregations. The question of how well congregations are negotiating changes in the wider society and how well they are doing financially persists, at least in part, because of falling mission support. Many congregations, however, have already decided about the future of mission. Thirteen percent of ELCA congregations contributed nothing to their synod (and therefore the churchwide organization) in 2014 and another 16 percent contributed \$1,500 or less.

The congregations of this church have managed fairly well the changing role of women in society. A third of the clergy in the ELCA are women, and about half of the pastors ordained in the past 5 years have been women. The whole church, through its Churchwide Assembly (2009), also embraced the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy in committed relationships, but in response, at least 300,000 baptized members in 678 congregations left the ELCA. With regard to the racial and ethnic make-up of the church, the U.S. population is 63 percent non-Hispanic white, compared to 94 percent of the active participants in the ELCA. A goal set by the new church in 1988 to achieve a membership of 10 percent people of color or language other than English has largely been ignored by congregations. When it comes to age, nearly 35 percent of ELCA members are over the age of 65 compared to about 15 percent of the U.S. population. In a recent survey for *The Lutheran* magazine using their subscriber list and a social media invitation to respond to the survey, 77 percent of the subscribers and 62 percent of the social media respondents were 55 or older.

Most basically, a minority of ELCA congregations are attracting new members. Between 2000 and 2014, 66 percent of congregations reported a loss in baptized membership of 5 percent or more, 13 percent reported a loss/gain of less than 5 percent, and 21 percent reported a gain of 5 percent or more. Over the last 10 years, 2,678 congregations or 29 percent reported an increase of at least 1 baptized member. When it comes to membership growth, a significant indicator of congregational sustainability, the problem seems intractable. The church has undertaken a host of efforts to address membership growth, none of which have shown measurable

¹¹ A shift I personally believed was necessary and would be productive. Given a lack of alternatives, I continue to support it.

¹² Fifteen percent (12% struggling and 3% about to close) would be more than enough congregations to keep a DEM employed full-time.

success. Long before the Living into the Future Task Force (2009-2011), there were at least two significant outreach strategies. At the 1991 Churchwide Assembly, the ELCA adopted a major evangelism strategy.¹³ The ten-year review of that strategy notes:

Has the church made progress that it can celebrate? We began this review with reference to the enormous amount of work that has taken place under complex and difficult circumstances. At the same time, we maintain that the preponderance of the evidence suggests that the ELCA has not yet made significant progress in changing the culture of the church with regard to evangelism and, as a result, the evangelism strategy has not achieved its intended purpose. We believe that achieving significant progress will take renewed vision and commitment in addition to the discovery of new methods and approaches.

In the midst of this decade-long strategy, H. George Anderson was elected Presiding Bishop. He was convinced that major programmatic efforts led by the churchwide organization were likely to be ineffective. Instead, after considerable consultation with congregations and synods, he proposed a set of “initiatives.” The Initiatives were intended to be areas of work which could be embraced by interested groups and adapted to local contexts as congregations and synods saw fit. The Initiatives were one of the first systematic attempts in the ELCA to use networks. In fact, the Initiatives were designed to promote networking with seed funding available from the churchwide organization. The final resolved of the action passed by the 1997 Churchwide Assembly read:

RESOLVED, that the 1997 Churchwide Assembly encourage the individuals, congregations, synods, churchwide organization, colleges, universities, seminaries, agencies, and institutions of this church to bring these initiatives to life.

One of the initiatives, *Witness to God’s Action in the World* said this: “We will strengthen those skills that help congregations 'turn inside out' in witness and service.” Its components included the following:

1. *We will link congregations that have specific gifts and experiences with those that want to deepen their commitment to effective witness and service.*
2. *We will use creatively the tools of the new technology. By the end of 1998 our church will have a strong Internet presence in evangelism that will complement and support the work of congregations, campus ministries, and other worshiping communities.*
3. *By 1999 we will pilot a model that can be used in all nine regions of the ELCA to help congregations that are ready for transformation to mission/outreach to make that change.*

Despite these hopes, the evaluation report (2001) of the Initiatives concluded the following:

*In general, much more may have been accomplished, but it is difficult to see how, given the scope of the Initiatives and the current means for getting things done in the church. **The adoption and success of any emphases or programs in the church is largely dependent upon goodwill.** The pastors, staff, and volunteers of congregations work within a demanding context and they often report being inundated with programs and resources for congregations. Each resource provider promotes its resource as the answer, and congregational folk are faced with difficult choices. At the synodical level, bishops are also faced with a host of competing demands. Staff-time for programs is at a premium. At the churchwide level, the vision of a presiding bishop is set alongside of the ongoing church work. The influence of a presiding bishop is substantial, but from the point of view of a churchwide unit, there is the long run of unit plans with boards to*

¹³ Available from Research and Evaluation, ELCA.

satisfy and constitutional provisions to fulfill. Presiding Bishop Anderson spent considerable time listening and talking about the Initiatives in an attempt to build support and goodwill. The topic areas of the Initiatives were selected only after considerable discussion throughout the ELCA—with pastors, lay persons, synod bishops, the Church Council and at the Churchwide Assembly. Even with this effort, the call to participate in the Initiatives was taken up by about one-fourth of the congregations. This shows how difficult it is to lead a church as large and as diverse as the ELCA in any particular direction.

The Living into the Future Task Force was formed in 2009 by Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson. After two years of study, the task force continued the tradition of focusing on congregational renewal. The Task Force report to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly begins with these words:

The task force believes God is a missionary God who sends this church to participate in God's mission in new ways precisely in this challenging environment and in these changing times. To be a Lutheran means to be in mission. God has given the ELCA the present moment as an opportunity, unparalleled in our history, to confess the center of our faith to the world.

Reflecting the task force's desire to be concrete, it recommended that congregations, in concert with their synods, develop mission plans. The task force, in its understanding of the role of synods, said: "In order to be this church's chief catalysts for mission and outreach, synods need to be organized and supported. For the sake of congregations, synods should be centers of encouragement and facilitators of planning and partnership."

Synods as Catalysts for Outreach

Only the Southeastern Iowa Synod has shown an increase in baptized membership in the past 10 years, and that increase is based on the very rapid growth of a single congregation.¹⁴ The idea of a synod as a catalyst for change, however, had been anticipated by at least two synod bishops. Ron Warren was bishop of the Southeastern Synod (Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee) for 12 years (1995-2007). He declared the Southeastern Synod the "Great Commission Synod" and strongly encouraged congregational pastors and members to act on Jesus' words in Matthew 8:19, "therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Everywhere the bishop went, in nearly every forum, he asked members to recite the synod mission statement cast in the form of the Great Commission, and the Great Commission Fund, which was intended to support congregational growth through financial grants, was begun under Warren's leadership. In 1990, the baptized membership of the synod was 56,261. In 2007, the baptized membership was 54,842 (-2.5%). Were his efforts successful? Despite this aggregate loss in baptized membership, the decline in baptized membership in the Southeastern Synod between 1990 and 2007 was less than any other synod in Region 9: Virginia, -4.5%; North Carolina, -5.6%; South Carolina, -4.4%; Florida, -16.4%; Caribbean, -35.1%. Still, there was no remarkable growth spurt in the Southeastern Synod during Warren's time.

Bishop Kanouse in the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod was also intent on reshaping the culture of a synod. Under his leadership [2000 to the present], the synod became the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Mission District. Synod conferences are "Mission Conferences." The synod assembly is the "Mission Assembly," and on the synod website the synod describes itself as follows:

¹⁴ Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines, Iowa.

We envision ourselves to be one of the most mission-oriented, dynamic, innovative and fast-growing mission areas in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

We are Disciples passionate about the Gospel and dedicated to Claiming the Great Mission Commission. Our best energies and resources are focused on missional ministry that makes disciples of Jesus and transforms lives through the life-giving power of the Gospel. We will pursue this vision through training and education, growth and transformation, and peace and justice in our congregations, communities and world.

We believe our first and greatest calling is to fulfill the Great Commission to go, teach, baptize, and make disciples of all peoples. This mission grows out of our experience of the love of God in Christ and out of the Great Commandment to share that love with others. We believe that mission is defined at the intersection of identity, purpose, and context.

Baptized membership of the synod in 2000 was 33,977. In 2014, the baptized membership of the synod was 25,685 (-24.4%).¹⁵ In this case, there were 3 other synods in Region 4 with slower rates of decline. The rates were: Nebraska, -18.1%; Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast, -23.0%; Central States, -23.9%; Southwestern Texas, -30.1%; Arkansas-Oklahoma, -40.7%.

Most recently, five synods have begun pilot projects intended to increased membership and grow mission support. The primary premise of these pilots is that direct local responsibility for new ministries and renewals and systematic relationship building with congregations will increase the rate of growth in the synod, along with mission support. But, at this point, there is little evidence that synods, even with the deployment of DEMs, are effective catalysts for growth.

The Churchwide Organization as a Catalyst for Outreach

As for the churchwide organization, the LIFT Task Force recommended that one of its primary functions be the support and capacity building of synods in planning and carrying out mission, and in this regard, the Task Force voiced support for the deployment of DEMs. As noted earlier, the DEMs were asked to focus in three areas including congregational renewal, new ministry starts, and stewardship. Both congregational renewals and new ministry starts are now collaborative efforts between synods and the churchwide organization. They are supported by churchwide grants, but new ministry developments rely on a funding coalition that includes local congregations, the synod, and the churchwide organization.

The intent is for half the new ministries starts to be among people living in poverty and/or among people of color or primary language other than English. The effort invested in new ministries has been substantial, but it takes approximately seven years for a ministries to become self-sufficient and not all sites make it. Some close and others receive ongoing support for many years. The number of new members that the new ministries contribute to the ELCA (about 2,500 per year) is a small percentage of the annual decline in existing congregations. As for renewals, no systematic studies have been completed. As for stewardship, the churchwide Macedonia project shown some impact in slowing the rate of decline in mission support and in a few synods there have been increases. As with synods and their support for congregations, there is little evidence, even with the deployment of DEMs, that the churchwide organization has improved the ability of synods to be catalysts for outreach.

¹⁵ In calculating the 2000 figure, I have excluded the 10 congregations in the synod that left the ELCA after the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

Growth, Mission Support, the Wider Church, and Connections

Perhaps the cultural forces inhibiting growth are too entrenched to be dislodged. One predisposition is to head back, to aim for the sensibilities of the past. One could easily come to the conclusion that modernity (post-modernity) is the problem. It seems there are too many different interests or too many competing interests to sustain any institution (without systemic change) over time. More specifically, no major religious group in the U.S. is experiencing membership growth. It is very unlikely, however, there is a way back (and much in the 1950s should have been left behind). At its best, the U.S. has always been a place that, to one extent or another, tolerates and even promotes diversity (in the broadest sense of the word). Despite the Tea Party, it is quite likely that there will be more diversity in the future, rather than less. One could construe the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod is intent on a rejection of modernity in its commitment to a literal interpretation of the Bible, but the denomination has not experienced membership growth as a result. In 1990, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod had 2.61 million members. In 2014, the Missouri Synod has 2.16 million members. While the baptized membership of the ELCA has declined by 28 percent, the Missouri Synod has declined by 17 percent. Certainly this 11 point difference is significant, but trying to limit diverse thinking and diverse interests does not insulate a church body from decline.¹⁶

Another strategy is simply to accept a smaller church with fewer resources and to decide that it is a good thing. But this strategy assumes the ELCA has little vision, especially for a future filled with “nones” who continue to think of themselves as spiritual people. It may be the “nones,” or other religious discontents, would be impressed with Lutheran theology (those who read the books of Nadia Bolz-Weber, for example)¹⁷ even if they lack the commitment, patience, or persistence to successfully navigate the often homogeneous and dated cultural waters of the closest ELCA congregation. If this is true, it pushes the ball back into the church’s court. The problem, which has always been the church’s problem, is how best to present its theology so that it is recognizable and appealing to outsiders. Luther never shied away from this challenge.

As for its existing constituency, the issue for the ELCA is how best to honor different perspectives while still being something—something unique, something that many people value and want to be part of. What is it about being the church, being Lutheran, being church together, and being for the sake of the world that brings people together to participate in God’s mission and ministry? What is it about being church, being Lutheran, being church together, and being church for the sake of the world that attracts people?

Sustainability is dependent upon a **shared set of sensibilities** between members, clergy and the leadership of the wider church. What can be shared that opens doors rather than closes them? Going forward, these sensibilities need to be more theological and less cultural (based in ethnicity and social class). The emphasis should be on the values of this church (expressed in its history and theology) and members who have learned and are expressing those values. There should be more clarity about what it means to be church, to be Lutheran, to be church together, and for the sake of the world. But this will not, in and of itself, strengthen ties

¹⁶ From the Religion News Service, June 16, 2015 by Trevin Wax. “The largest Protestant denomination in the United States is meeting this week, but it’s not as large as it was last year, or the year before. Southern Baptists now number just under 15.5 million members, down from a peak of 16.3 million in 2003. And many people in the Southern Baptist Convention sense a corresponding loss of clout and credibility when speaking to the wider culture. What’s going on? The number of Southern Baptist churches is higher than ever—46,449 churches are in some way affiliated with the SBC. Meanwhile, church planting continues to pick up steam, and a common concern among established churches is the need to be ‘revitalized.’ So, why did the SBC’s growth begin to slow in the 1950s, stall in subsequent decades, and then begin to decline several years ago? And what does all this mean for the SBC’s engagement on political and social issues?”

¹⁷ With two books having made the New York Time’s Best Seller List.

to the institutional church. These values have to be presented in such a way that they relevant and connect with the interests of the whole church—young people, young adults, their parents, new members, old members, people in urban areas, people in rural areas, people of color and language other than English, people all along the theological, political, and social class spectrum. This is a tall order, perhaps only possible in a church. What is valued together by all these different interests? In a highly educated and mobile society, people have a wide range of choices. Being an ELCA member is a choice. Why make that choice? It has something to do with Luther's view of God and the hopeful, future-oriented, community reconciling power of the death and resurrection of Jesus—some Lutheran's call the Gospel.

At the institutional level, maybe it is better to avoid asking a significant number of congregations to do something they neither want to do nor believe they can do. The image of what should be versus what actually is, is sometimes too stark. The Future Directions Group should generate images of this new church—of what can be—that the all ELCA congregations from the smallest to the largest can see itself part of in a productive way. Contrast this with the images developed by the Three Leadership Tables. Their new church was diverse, fluid and flexible; it was about the community rather than the building; it was about new forms; it engaged risks; it challenged assumptions; it was adaptive; it was radically hospitable, and it released its assets rather than expending its energy on holding on to them. As right as all this may be, it seems impossible to too many? Perhaps the best national strategy is to help every congregation feel it is fully part of a denomination that is renewing. In some ways, this is what "God's Work, Our Hands, Sunday" makes possible. In 2014, 2,997 or 32 percent of ELCA congregations said they participated and another 4,069 (43%) indicated they would participate if it was an annual event.

The point is that proposals of the various groups which have focused on sustainability have lacked an underlying theory or rationale that has been broadly persuasive. This is not intended as a criticism of these groups, but instead, a comment on the complexity and the intractability of the problem.

These are the factors that will contribute to increased sustainability.

1. An increase in the real income of members, though the church has no control over this.
2. A clearer sense of how being Lutheran shapes the way this church thinks about God and God's action in the world. What is God up to? How do we answer this question as Lutherans? What difference does it make in the way we are church, Lutheran, church together, for the sake of the world?
3. A widely shared sense that the interests of congregations are furthered by our cooperative work.¹⁸ The specific nature of these interests and how they are shared or enhanced can and will shift.

Much of the research suggests that members know very little about their synods or the churchwide organization. They experience their synod primarily during times of conflict and/or pastoral transition. Under both these circumstances, the synod can easily be perceived as an adversary.

The churchwide organization is further away. The 2014 annual report asked congregations to what extent congregants understand themselves to be part of the ELCA. Twenty-one percent of ELCA congregations answered "to a great extent" and 37 percent indicated "to some extent." Forty-two percent of the congregations said either "to a small extent" or "not at all" or they did not complete the report form.

4. Attention to position and status of clergy in the church.

Nothing is a substitute for pastoral leadership in every congregation, teaching and providing interpretation of the work of the whole church. Pastors need to feel appreciated and supported. They need to know that their synod and the churchwide organization are truly working on behalf of their congregations and with the pastors of this church.

¹⁸ The Southern Baptist call their work as the denomination "The Cooperative Program".

5. A commitment to cooperating for the sake of doing good.

Members need to be convinced their wider church is doing the following:

- a. It is addressing the most critical issues.**
- b. It is doing so in concert with its understanding of the mission of God.**
- c. It is doing so in a distinctively Lutheran way.**
- d. It has a well thought out and appealing methodology.**
- e. It is attractive to young adults.**