The Supply of and Demand for Clergy in the ELCA

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One of the important issues facing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is the future supply of and demand for ordained clergy. The matter is complex because of the many factors in play. These factors include the number, size, location and financial capacity of congregations; the mobility of pastors and their geographic distribution; the number of Master of Divinity (M.Div.) graduates and Theological Education for Emerging Ministry (TEEM)[1] certificate program graduates; the retention of pastors before retirement age; and the number of pastors who are retiring. For our conclusions, see page 16.

Factors Related to Demand

What are the number, size, location and income of ELCA congregations?

The Number of Congregations

Between 2005 and 2014, the number of congregations in the ELCA decreased 11 percent, from 10,549 to 9,392 (-1,157). Nearly 60 percent of this net decline was the result of 678 congregations leaving the ELCA in response to the decision of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to ordain gay and lesbian pastors in committed relationships. In addition to these congregations, however, another 788 congregations have closed and 218 have consolidated, merged or been asked to leave the ELCA. These losses were offset somewhat by the 433 new congregations that were developed and organized.

Table 1. Changes in the statuses of congregations in the ELCA from 2005 to 2014

Status	Number	Net Change	Final Year's Worship Attendance (Median)
Closed	788	-788	25
Withdrew	678	-678	84
Consolidated (two congregations became a new congregation)	124	-62	52
Merged (one congregation became part of another congregation)	64	-32	41
Removed (congregation was asked to leave the ELCA)	30	-30	30
Total no longer ELCA congregations		-1,590	50
Newly developed ELCA congregations	433	433	
Net		-1,157	

[1] TEEM is a contextual-education program that prepares students for ordained ministry in the ELCA. Students typically study in their ministry context with a pastor(s) while doing ministry in a congregation they intend to eventually serve. The curriculum consists of courses taught by seminary faculty. Students typically meet several times a year on campus with their professors. They also complete an internship and Clinical Pastor Education (CPE).

Size

In 2005, the baptized membership of the ELCA was 4.85 million and the median size of a congregation, based on baptized membership, was 296. On a typical Sunday in the ELCA, 1.44 million people were in worship and the median number of worship attendees was 91. In 2014, baptized membership was 3.78 million and the median size of a congregation, based on baptized membership, was 247. On a typical Sunday, worship attendance was 1.02 million and the median number of worship attendees was 70. This represents a 22 percent decline in baptized membership and a 29 percent drop in worship attendance. Over the same time period, the proportion of ELCA congregations with less than 50 people in weekly worship increased from 23 percent to 33 percent while the number of congregations with 350 or more in worship declined from 676 to 376.

Location

In 2005, half of ELCA congregations were in rural areas or in small towns with a population of fewer than 10,000. In 2014, the proportion of congregations in rural areas or small towns was similar (48%). These rural and small town congregations account for about 31 percent of the worship attendees in the ELCA. (According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 20 percent of the U.S. population resides in rural areas.) In 16 ELCA synods, three out of every four congregations are located in a rural area or a small town. In an additional 13 synods, the proportion of congregations located in rural areas or small towns is between 50 and 75 percent.

Table 2. Distribution of ELCA congregations by community setting in 2005 and 2014

	2005			2014			2005-2014
Setting	**Percent of Congre-gations**	**Percent of Worship Attendees**	**Average Worship Attendance**	**Percent of Congre-gations**	**Percent of Worship Attendees**	**Average Worship Attendance**	**Percent Change in Attendees**
Rural farming	23.6%	10.9%	54	23.3%	11.3%	42	-22.2%
Rural non-farming, open country	6.1%	3.8%	65	5.2%	3.0%	50	-23.1%
Small town under 10,000	20.0%	16.9%	95	19.7%	16.5%	67	-27.4%
Small city of 10,000 to 50,000	13.3%	16.6%	132	14.3%	17.4%	95	-28.0%
Small city of 50,000 to 250,000	11.2%	15.4%	135	11.0%	14.9%	99	-26.7%
Suburb near city of 50,000 to 250,000	3.7%	5.5%	130	4.3%	6.2%	106	-18.5%
Large city of 250,000 or more	9.2%	9.7%	85	9.7%	11.6%	74	-12.9%
Suburb of large city within 10 miles	8.1%	12.7%	143	7.9%	11.5%	105	-26.6%
Suburb of large city outside of 10 miles	4.9%	8.6%	174	4.8%	7.7%	122	-25.9%
Total	100%	100%	91	100%	100%	70	-23.1%

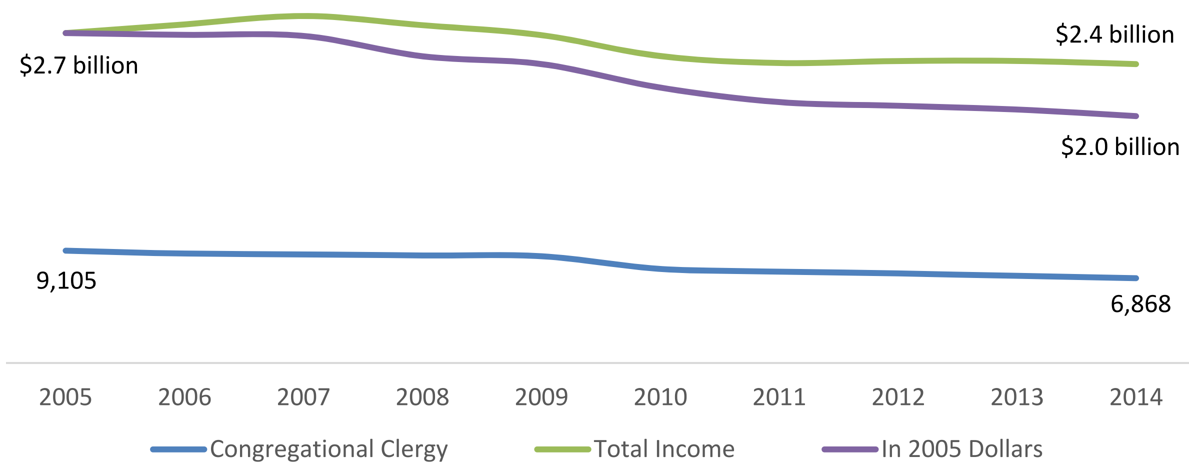
Income

It is significant that baptized membership and worship attendance have both declined at a faster rate than the number of congregations. As noted above, from 2005 to 2014, the number of congregations declined 11 percent while the number of baptized members declined by 22 percent, and the number of worship attendees declined by 29 percent. This drop in membership and participation has negatively impacted the financial capacity of many congregations. The median total income for an ELCA congregation in 2005 was $151,000. In 2014, the median total income was $117,000 (adjusted for inflation), representing a 23 percent decline in financial resources.

What are the implications of these trends on the demand for a pastor?

In 2005, there were 9,105 clergy serving congregations. In 2014, there were 6,868. As noted above, between 2005 and 2014, the income of a typical congregation in the ELCA declined by 23 percent. Over the same period, the number of pastors serving congregations declined by 25 percent. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Congregational income and the number of clergy (with calls to congregations) in the ELCA from 2005 to 2014



With congregational income decreasing, more and more congregations are pressed to afford a pastor. Most congregations prefer to call a full-time pastor who can devote his/her time solely to that congregation. We can illustrate the costs of this option by using the 2014 compensation guidelines for Northeastern Iowa—a synod in the middle of the ELCA with modest living costs. Based on the compensation guidelines for Northeastern Iowa, the income requirements for a congregation would be as follows:

Northeastern Iowa Synod Compensation Guidelines for a First-Call Pastors in 2014

Defined Compensation	**Cost**
Base Salary	$35,951
Housing (30% of base salary)	$10,786
Social Security Offset (7.65% of salary and housing)	$3,575
Sub-Total Defined	*$50,312*
Other Compensation *Costs*	
Health Insurance (Portico Gold+) and Retirement Contribution	$12,800
Continuing Education	$900
Books, Periodicals, Other Professional Expenses	$700
Sub-Total Other Compensation Costs	*$14,400*
Total Compensation	**$64,712**

In addition to these compensation costs, a very conservative estimate of the costs for basic operating expenses would be 20 percent, or about $12,924. This means the minimum a congregation needed in 2014 to call a first-call, full-time pastor was just under $78,000.

Base Congregational Income Needed to Call a First-Call Pastor

	Cost
Total Compensation	$64,712
Operating Expenses	$12,924
Total Income Requirement	**$77,636**

In the ELCA, in 2014, 6,192 single-point congregations could afford to issue such a call. Of the 1,941 single-point congregations that do not reach this income level, the median level of defined compensation currently provided to their pastors is around $26,000, suggesting the vast majority are using supply or part-time pastors.

For some congregations, an alternative is to share a pastor. Based on the relationships we can identify, we know there are at least 1,256 congregations in the ELCA (13%) involved in 532 pastor-sharing relationships. Of these sharing relationships, 499 (consisting of 1,189 individual congregations) can afford to issue a full-time call to a first-call pastor.[2] There are 33 relationships (consisting of 67 individual congregations) that, despite sharing, continue to be short of the baseline income needed to issue a full-time call to a first-call pastor. Table 3 presents the distribution of congregations in the ELCA in terms of their ability to afford a full-time, first-call pastor.

Table 3. Number of congregations/parishes (units) able to afford a full-time, first-call pastor based on a total congregational income of $78,000

	Have Adequate Income to Issue a Full-time Call		**Do Not Have Adequate Income to Issue a Full-time Call**	
	Units	Total Number of Congregations	Units	Total Number of Congregations
single-point congregations	6,194 ($214,000)	6,194	1,941 ($42,000)	1,941
multiple-point parishes	499 ($157,000)	1,189	33 ($63,000)	67
Total	6,691	7,383	1,974	2,008

Seventy-seven percent of the pastors serving under a congregational call in the ELCA are solo pastors serving a single congregation. Nine percent serve a single congregation as part of a team. Eleven percent are solo pastors serving two or more congregations, and three percent serve more than one congregation as part of a team. Again, given the financial circumstances of congregations, we expect the number of sharing relationships to increase so there will be more pastors serving two or more congregations either solo or as part of teams. Over 90 percent of the sharing relationships are currently between congregations in rural areas or in small towns with under 10,000 in population. However, there are approximately 450 congregations in medium and larger cities (50,000 or more in population or the suburbs of these cities) without the means to compensate a full-time, first-call pastor at guidelines.

[2] It is likely we are under-counting the number of sharing relationships. We are calculating the ability to afford a full-time, first-call pastor based on the combined total income of the congregations in the sharing relationship.

None of these congregations is in a sharing relationship though it would seem a very reasonable alternative.

What has the demand been over time?

One way to assess the demand for ELCA clergy over time is to examine the *ratio* of members to pastors. This is more complicated than it might seem, but critical to a realistic assessment of the future.

The best way to calculate a ratio would be to establish the number of people who could create demands on the time of a pastor and divide that number by the number of pastors serving congregations. This number would include the congregation's active participants, those who are part of the congregation's wider circle (such as former members or the extended family members of active participants), and those in the wider community where the pastor may be proactively involved. Because no such number is readily available, we need the best possible alternative. This number is undoubtedly higher than the number of worship attendees. If, however, the baptized membership rolls typically include people who have not been involved with the congregation for years (young adults, people who have moved away, people who are simply no longer accounted for), this should roughly offset a count of those in the wider circle of the congregation or in the local community. Since we believe the baptized membership rolls of most congregations are not regularly cleaned, we believe baptized membership is an adequate proxy for the number of people, inside and outside of the congregation, who could create demands on the time of a pastor.

Table 4 presents the number of baptized members per pastor in 2005 and 2014 by synod.

Table 4. Baptized members per pastor in 2005 and 2014 by synod

		Baptized Membership		Baptized Members per Congregational Clergy		2005-2014
		2005	2014	2005	2014	Change
Alaska	1A	10,475	9,352	317	407	89
Northwest Washington	1B	52,125	37,410	404	382	-22
Southwestern Washington	1C	40,177	28,806	369	335	-34
Eastern Washington-Idaho	1D	35,121	23,603	382	369	-13
Oregon	1E	44,036	32,562	344	336	-8
Montana	1F	49,788	35,985	493	467	-26
Sierra Pacific	2A	63,878	43,068	319	289	-30
Southwest California	2B	41,080	30,129	329	331	2
Pacifica	2C	55,234	31,297	389	401	12
Grand Canyon	2D	73,823	46,014	581	506	-76
Rocky Mountain	2E	82,409	60,742	491	419	-72
Western North Dakota	3A	67,016	60,309	698	670	-28
Eastern North Dakota	3B	102,595	92,708	834	858	24
South Dakota	3C	122,302	104,238	637	709	72
Northwestern Minnesota	3D	109,316	90,346	632	684	53
Northeastern Minnesota	3E	75,285	61,822	598	672	74
Southwestern Minnesota	3F	134,873	116,138	610	695	85

		Baptized Membership		Baptized Members per Congregational Clergy		2005-2014
		2005	2014	2005	2014	Change
Minneapolis Area	3G	221,432	181,822	774	870	96
Saint Paul Area	3H	158,767	121,711	836	857	22
Southeastern Minnesota	3I	131,578	120,310	693	933	240
Nebraska	4A	120,933	100,964	636	594	-43
Central States	4B	64,526	50,734	436	483	47
Arkansas-Oklahoma	4C	13,564	9,308	308	332	24
N. Texas-N. Louisiana	4D	34,915	25,685	411	334	-77
Southwestern Texas	4E	67,902	37,689	462	397	-65
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast	4F	47,658	36,539	429	425	-4
Metropolitan Chicago	5A	113,316	86,091	545	535	-10
Northern Illinois	5B	95,354	71,634	631	607	-24
Central/Southern Illinois	5C	57,532	41,152	449	490	40
Southeastern Iowa	5D	97,020	96,545	610	737	127
Western Iowa	5E	69,246	51,173	624	692	68
Northeastern Iowa	5F	92,271	71,796	664	740	76
Northern Great Lakes	5G	38,531	27,441	584	549	-35
Northwest Synod of Wisconsin	5H	106,463	91,500	630	709	79
East-Central Synod of Wisconsin	5I	97,571	80,061	673	715	42
Greater Milwaukee	5J	93,289	75,227	562	549	-13
South-Central Synod of Wisconsin	5K	110,668	97,171	723	709	-14
La Crosse Area	5L	43,131	33,319	634	653	19
Southeast Michigan	6A	62,748	43,082	490	513	23
North/West Lower Michigan	6B	52,456	37,281	423	429	5
Indiana-Kentucky	6C	76,292	52,934	419	417	-2
Northwestern Ohio	6D	96,444	73,266	585	660	76
Northeastern Ohio	6E	83,213	56,838	467	466	-2
Southern Ohio	6F	96,177	67,108	512	460	-52
New Jersey	7A	74,630	56,058	434	403	-31
New England	7B	69,737	54,065	383	373	-10
Metropolitan New York	7C	75,788	63,370	405	456	51
Upstate New York	7D	77,105	54,991	528	534	6
Northeastern Pennsylvania	7E	154,682	123,547	730	744	15
Southeastern Pennsylvania	7F	94,334	75,685	524	591	67
Slovak Zion	7G	5,079	3,685	299	263	-36
Northwestern Pennsylvania	8A	28,648	20,276	562	483	-79
Southwestern Pennsylvania	8B	86,079	64,385	582	637	56
Allegheny	8C	41,711	34,378	623	649	26
Lower Susquehanna	8D	122,617	92,542	576	526	-50
Upper Susquehanna	8E	41,807	32,720	523	584	62

		Baptized Membership		Baptized Members per Congregational Clergy		2005-2014
		2005	**2014**	**2005**	**2014**	**Change**
Delaware-Maryland	8F	89,967	62,098	511	493	-18
Metropolitan Washington, D.C.	8G	36,121	29,267	410	412	2
West Virginia-Western Maryland	8H	15,876	12,214	429	382	-47
Virginia	9A	43,516	34,721	357	344	-13
North Carolina	9B	86,449	57,955	416	394	-21
South Carolina	9C	60,238	46,632	433	395	-38
Southeastern	9D	56,203	42,360	372	368	-4
Florida-Bahamas	9E	81,519	57,135	420	420	0
Caribbean	9F	6,140	4,368	198	168	-30
ELCA		4,850,776	3,765,362	533	548	15

Overall, the ratio of baptized members to pastors under call from congregations has increased about three percent from 533 in 2005 to 548 in 2014. Over this period, the number of clergy has decreased by 25 percent compared to a 22 percent decrease in baptized membership. This would suggest, the supply and demand for clergy regulates itself, at least to some extent. In most synods, when comparing the ratio of baptized members to the number of pastors serving congregations between 2005 and 2014, there is little evidence of a significant shortage through 2014. On the other hand, there are several synods where the ratio of baptized members to pastors is considerably below or above the average.[3]

The nine synods in Table 5 have a lower number of baptized members per pastor than what is typical in the ELCA. This happens when the congregations are relatively small and when there are few pastor sharing relationships. In short, it is reasonable to suggest, at least when examining the entire ELCA, there are too many clergy in these synods.

Table 5. Synods where the ratio of baptized members to congregational clergy is low

		Baptized per Congregational Clergy	Average Size (Baptized)	Congre-gations	Can Afford First-Call	Sharing Relation-ships	Percent Sharing
Southwestern Washington	1C	335	351	86	91.9%	2	2.3%
Oregon	1E	336	291	115	71.3%	0	0.0%
Sierra Pacific	2A	289	237	185	84.3%	6	3.2%
Southwest California	2B	331	260	122	82.8%	6	4.9%
Arkansas-Oklahoma	4C	332	179	53	64.2%	3	5.7%
Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana	4D	334	259	102	76.5%	2	2.0%
Slovak Zion	7G	263	160	23	43.5%	0	0.0%
Virginia	9A	344	228	154	64.9%	16	10.4%
Caribbean	9F	168	132	33	18.2%	0	0.0%
ELCA		548	407	9,390	78.6%	1,189	12.7%

[3] More than one standard deviation unit from the mean.

There are 12 synods where the ratio of baptized members to congregational clergy is considerably above the average. (See Table 6.) These synods have relatively large congregations or a high percent of sharing relationships. Given the high ratio of baptized members to congregational clergy, it is reasonable to suggest that there are too few clergy in these synods.

Table 6. Synods where the ratio of baptized members to congregational clergy is high

		Baptized Membership per Congregational Clergy	Average Congregation Size (Baptized)	Congre-gations	Percent Can Afford First-Call	Sharing Relation-ships	Percent Sharing
Eastern North Dakota	3B	858	444	210	67.1%	83	39.5%
South Dakota	3C	709	504	210	69.5%	50	23.8%
Southwestern Minnesota	3F	695	474	247	83.3%	97	39.3%
Minneapolis	3G	870	1,245	147	95.2%	0	0.0%
Saint Paul	3H	857	1,148	111	91.9%	0	0.0%
Southeastern Iowa	5D	737	695	139	82.7%	11	7.9%
Western Iowa	5E	692	391	131	78.6%	35	27.5%
Northeastern Iowa	5F	740	469	152	80.9%	48	31.6%
Northwest Synod of Wisconsin	5H	709	464	197	81.7%	57	28.9%
East-Central Synod of Wisconsin	5I	715	640	125	93.6%	19	15.2%
South-Central Synod of Wisconsin	5K	709	699	141	84.4%	10	7.1%
Northeastern Pennsylvania	7E	744	454	274	74.8%	18	6.7%
ELCA		548	407	9,390	78.6%	1,189	12.7%

Comparing the Number of Clergy to the Number of Congregations

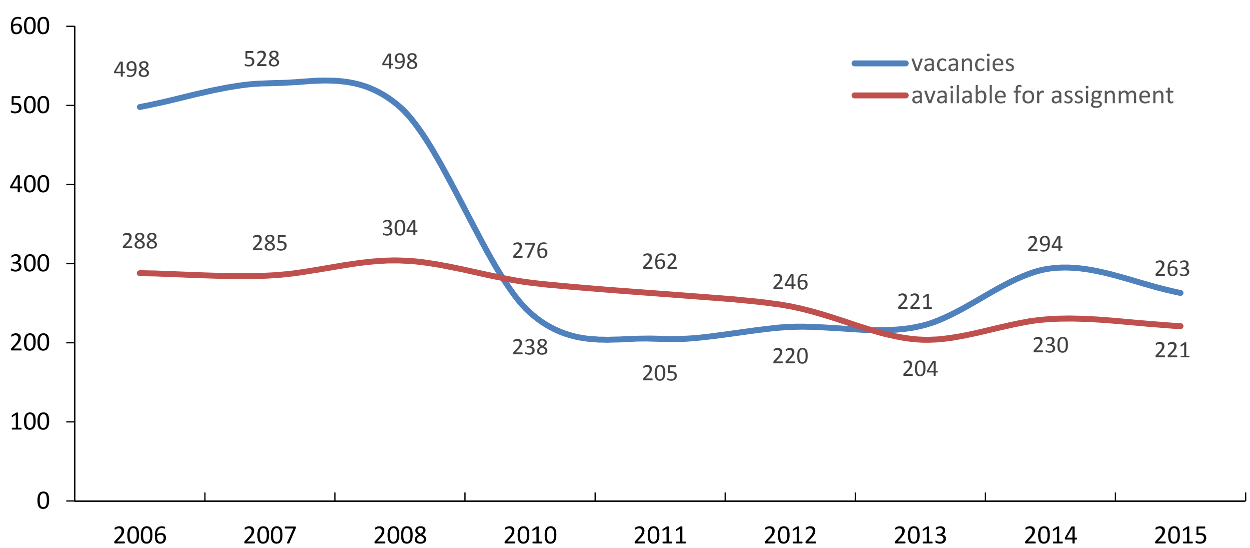
An additional way to assess the distribution of clergy is by comparing the number of clergy in a synod to the number of congregations. Do synods have enough clergy to serve their congregations? When the proportion of clergy called to serve congregations is compared to the proportion of congregations in the ELCA as a whole, the largest deficits are in Eastern and Western North Dakota, Northwestern Minnesota, Allegheny, and Northeastern Pennsylvania. In North Dakota, Northwestern Minnesota, and the Allegheny, the deficit is offset by the number of congregation in sharing relationships. In Western North Dakota and in Eastern North Dakota over a third of congregations are in sharing relationships. In Northwestern Minnesota and Allegheny, it is just under a third. Only in the Northeastern Pennsylvania synod, where about seven percent of the clergy serve more than one congregation, is there a noticeable shortage of pastors to serve congregations and this shortage could potentially be addressed through additional sharing relationships.

The Assignment Process

The ELCA's assignment process has received considerable attention as a barometer for the supply and demand for clergy in the ELCA. Candidates for ordination, in their final semester of seminary, participate in the assignment process. This is a process where each synod identifies its vacancies and attempts to match candidates to fill those vacancies. Assignments are typically made in February (when the vast majority of vacancies are identified and two-thirds of the candidates are assigned) and in September/October (when up to a third of the year's candidates may be available for assignment).

A "vacancy" is an open position for a full-time, first-call pastor. In February 2005, there were 508 reported vacancies for first-call candidates. (See Figure 2.) In February 2015, the number was 263. A major portion of this decline occurred between 2008 and 2010 when the number of vacancies dropped by more than half, from 498 to 238. In 2009, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly took action to ordain gay and lesbian clergy in committed relationships. As it became clear this change in church policy would be seriously considered, synod bishops and staff began spending more and more time addressing the concerns of some congregations. As a result, assessing vacancies and examining candidate profiles became less important. (Figure 2 does not include figures for 2009.) In addition, there was a significant economic downturn which impacted congregations. Between 2009 and 2011, 44 percent of ELCA congregations experienced a decline in their income (about 12% on average), and the number of retiring pastors dropped from 340 in 2008 to 276 in 2009. Since 2009, the number of reported vacancies has recovered somewhat, and most recently the number of assignments has once again dropped below the number available for assignment.

Figure 2. Vacancies and assignments from 2006 to 2015 (not including 2009)



Candidates and the Demand

At the same time, it is not clear that simply increasing the number of candidates available for assignment will fully address the shortages that do, or more importantly, will exist. Certainly more candidates would help, but there are three remaining issues. First, there will simply be too many congregations looking for first-call pastors because their limited financial resources restrict the possibility of calling a pastor with more experience. Second, since 2005, during the February assignment consultations, the proportion of candidates who have a geographical "preference" has ranged between 75 and 80 percent. These preferences, however, only become restrictions when granted by a synod bishop. About 20 percent of the candidates are granted restrictions. It is clear that, for a variety of reasons, a significant number of candidates are more and more reluctant to serve across the church. Third, it is important to have candidates who will be acceptable to the bishops. There are a notable number of candidates who, despite having completed all the necessary requirements, are not requested by any synod and, as a result, are returned to their synod of candidacy.

FACTORS RELATED TO THE SUPPLY

What are the Seminary Enrollment Trends?

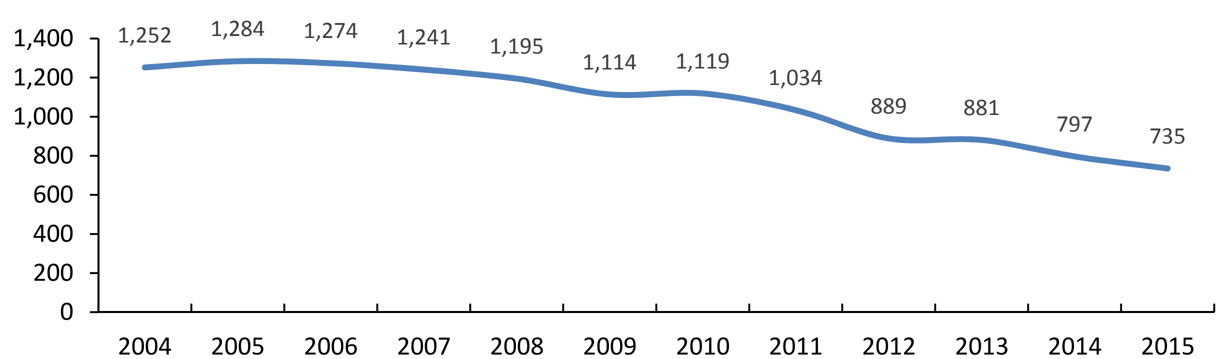
Wheeler, Ruger and Miller, in *Theological Student Enrollment* (2013)[4], note that enrollment in theological schools in the United States and Canada experienced two different trends between 1992 and 2011. The first was upward from 1992 to 2004, as enrollments increased approximately one percent per year. After peaking in 2004, the trend started downward at roughly the same rate from 2004 to 2011. The economic downturn in 2008-2009 played a significant role in perpetuating the downward trend, but the trend was apparent even before these years.

Specifically, for M.Div. programs, enrollments decreased 7.5 percent from 2006 to 2011 (Wheeler, et al., 2013). Wheeler and her colleagues suggest the decline in theological school enrollment was related to the larger issue of the decline of organized religion in North America.

ELCA Seminary Enrollment Trends

Enrollment declines in the ELCA have been steeper than the general trend. (See Figure 3.) Enrollments in ELCA M.Div. programs have decreased from 1,252 in the 2004-2005 academic year to 735 in the 2015-2016 academic year. This represents a 41 percent decline.

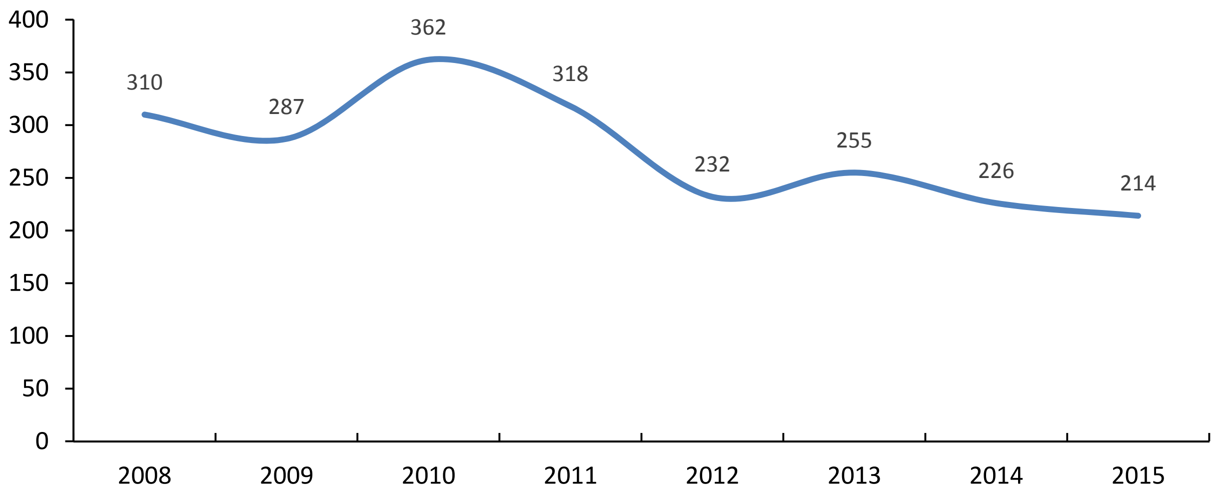
Figure 3. Number of ELCA M.Div. enrollments in ELCA seminaries from 2004 to 2015



[4] http://www.auburnseminary.org/sites/default/files/Theological%20Student%20Enrollment-%20Final.pdf

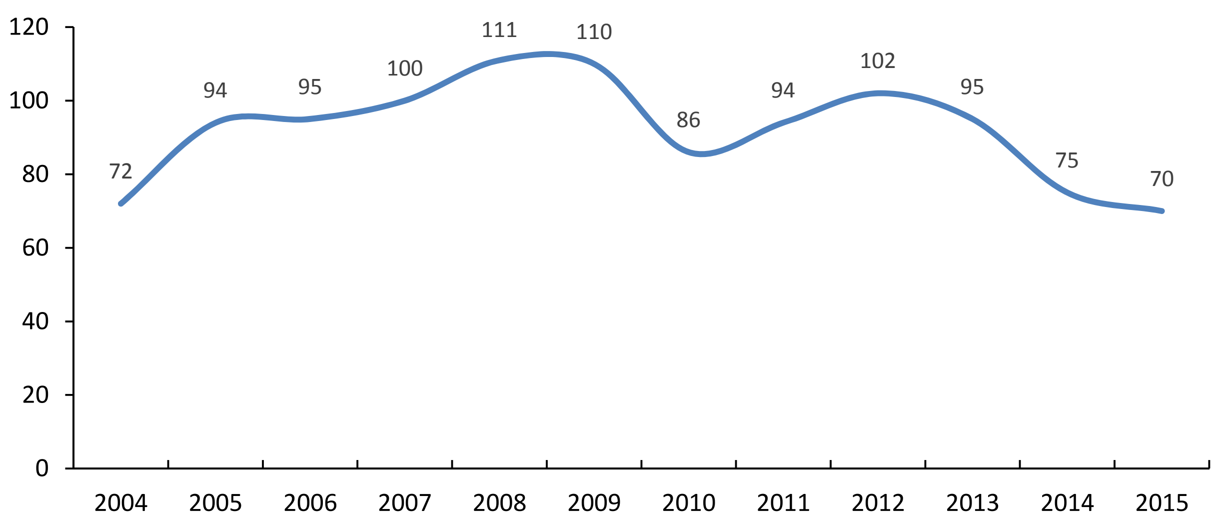
Also declining is the number of first-year students enrolled in M.Div. programs. (See Figure 4.) In the 2008-09 academic year, 310 students enrolled as first-year students. Although this number increased to 362 in the 2010-2011 academic year, by the 2015-16 academic year, the number of first-year student enrollments had declined to 214. Between 2008 and 2015, this represented a 31 percent decline.

Figure 4. ELCA M.Div. first-year student enrollments from 2008 to 2015



During the same period, enrollments in the TEEM certificate program increased, but by 2015 had fallen back to 2004 levels. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5. Enrollments in the TEEM program from 2004 to 2015



Enrollments of People of Color

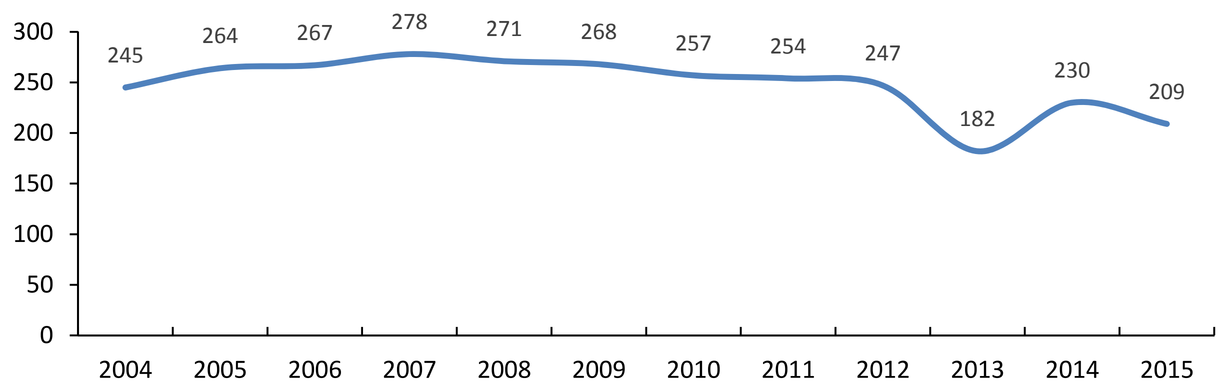
Throughout theological education in the U.S., there have been gains in the number of people of color enrolling in M.Div. programs. Wheeler and her colleagues (2013) found, among theological schools in the U.S. and Canada, at the same time enrollments of white students were declining, enrollments among African American and Hispanic students were growing. Looking specifically at the seminaries of mainline Protestant churches, “the white student decline was precipitous from 1992 to 2011 (28 percent). At the same time, African American enrollment increased 82 percent and Hispanic [enrollment] . . . increased 72 percent” (Wheeler, et al., 2013, p. 15).

Unfortunately, there is not complete data on the race/ethnicity of students enrolled in ELCA M.Div. programs. Before the 2012-2013 academic year, large numbers of students were categorized as “ethnicity unknown.” Since the 2012-2013 academic year, the number of persons of color or language other than English enrolled as M.Div. students in ELCA seminaries has been about 7 percent of all M.Div. enrollees.

Graduation Rates

Clearly, lower enrollment rates have led to lower graduate rates. (See Figure 6.)

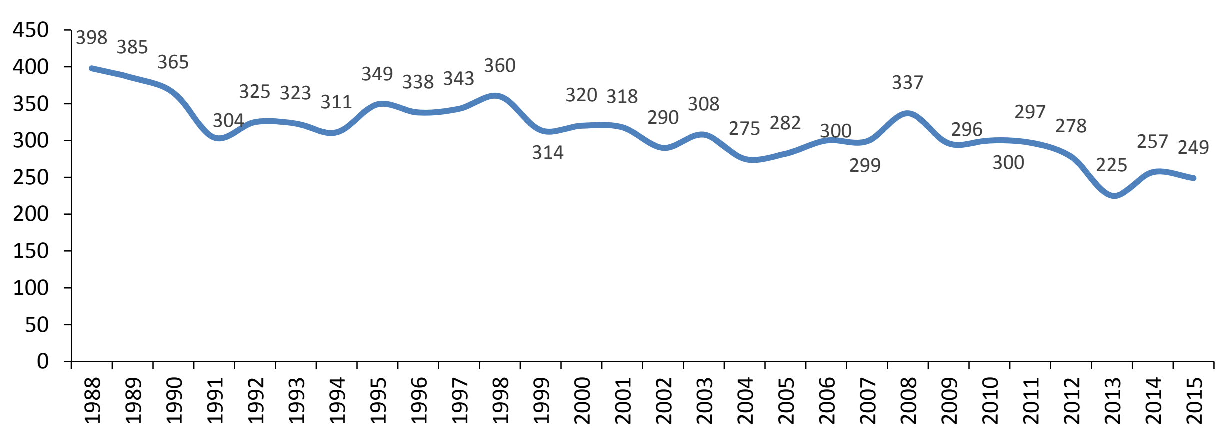
Figure 6. ELCA M.Div. graduates at ELCA seminaries from 2004 to 2015



Ordinations

The annual number of ordinations is also an indicator of the supply of first-call pastors. It shows how many candidates actually received their first call. (See Figure 7.) Between 1988 and 2013, there was a 43 percent decrease in the number of ordinations. This represents an annual average decrease of 1.7 percent. The largest decrease was between 2012 and 2013, from 278 to 225 (19%).

Figure 7. Number of ordinations from 1988 to 2015



How many are leaving the ordained ministry?

As some are becoming new pastors, others are leaving the active roster as a result of resignation, removal or retirement. Annually, between 40 and 70 ordained pastors resign from the active roster and between 30 and 60 ordained pastors are removed. Although these numbers were considerably higher in 2010 and 2011, following the decision by the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to ordain gay and lesbian clergy in committed relationships, the numbers in 2012 and 2013 reflect pre-2009 levels.

Increasing age of ELCA clergy

Although resignations and removals decrease the number of ordained pastors, it is the number of clergy retiring that can most significantly and sustainably impact the number of ordained pastors on the active roster in the ELCA.

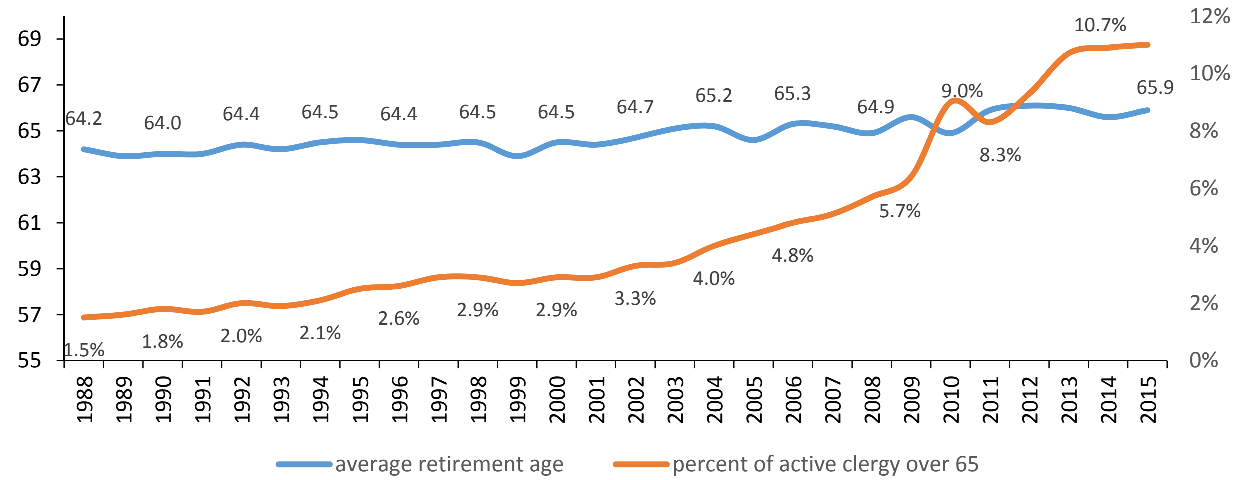
One indicator of a potential increase in the number of retirements is an increase in the average age among ordained clergy in the ELCA. In 1988, the average age on the active clergy roster was just above 46 years old. At that time, just over 9 percent of active clergy were above 60 years old. By 2013, the average age of clergy had increased to 54 years old, with 32 percent of active clergy above 60.

These trends are similar to those of other mainline Protestant churches (Briggs, 2011)[5]. The increasing age of clergy points to an increase in the number of retirements in the coming years. Some have suggested that as pastors who are part of the Baby Boom generation retire, there will not be enough new pastors to replace them. This conclusion assumes pastors of this age will retire and that the congregations they leave will have the resources to call a new pastor. If these conditions are met, then the number of retiring pastors will very likely outpace the number of graduating candidates. However, there is evidence that clergy are remaining in calls past the customary retirement age of 65. Speaking about general trends among clergy, Briggs (2011) states, "Like their secular counterparts, many clergy who devoted their attention to less temporal matters than financial planning now find themselves amid shrinking church budgets and a poor economy being forced to work beyond traditional retirement ages."

Supporting the trend referenced by Briggs, an increased proportion of ordained clergy in the ELCA is staying on the active roster past age 65. (See Figure 8.) In 1988, the average age at retirement for ELCA clergy was 64 years old, with 1.5 percent of active clergy above 65 years old. By 2015, the average age at retirement had increased to 66 years old; 10.7 percent of active clergy were above 65 years old.

[5] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-briggs/aging-clergy-and-retirement_b_996659.html

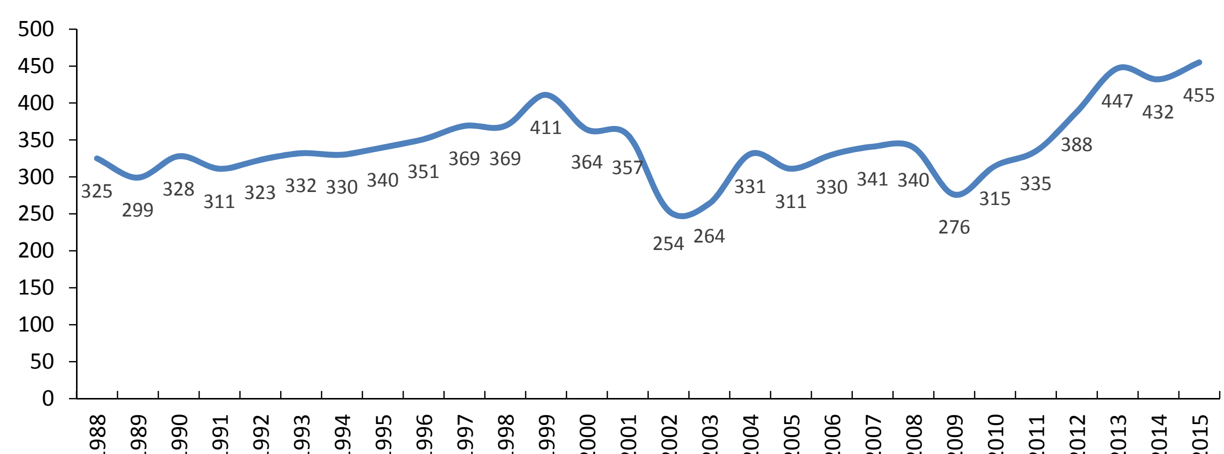
Figure 8. Average retirement age and percent of active clergy above 65 years old in the ELCA from 1988 to 2013



Trends in ELCA Retirements

The average number of clergy retirements per year in the life of the ELCA has been about 345. The number of retirements has been increasing, however. (See Figure 9.) In the first 10 years, about 330 per year retired. In the second ten years, the number increased slightly to 333 per year. Over the last six years, the number retiring per year has increased to about 375 per year. In 2002 and in 2009, there were economic downturns that clearly impacted the number of retirements, but over the last three years, the increase is very apparent. There have been three straight years when over 430 pastors have retired.

Figure 9. Number of ELCA ordained pastor retirements per year from 1988 to 2015



Retirement Estimates and Projections

It is impossible to predict exactly how many pastors will retire in the coming years, but we can make informed estimates and projections based on previous years. Specifically, using the proportion of pastors who have retired at each age in the recent past years and the number of active pastors at each age, we can estimate, and then project, the number who will retire in future years.

For example, there were a total of 6,782 active pastors who turned 60 between 1998 and 2013. Over the same time period, 196 of these pastors retired at 60 years old for a retirement rate of 2.9 percent. Table 7 shows the rates of retirement at each age between 60 and 70 for the years 1998 to 2013.

Table 7. Percentage of active pastors between 60 and 70 who retired at each age from 1998 to 2013

Age	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
Percent who retired	2.9%	3.2%	7.7%	9.3%	9.6%	25.3%	29.4%	23.0%	20.0%	18.2%	24.6%

In order to make the projections, we began by estimating the number of active pastors at each age in 2014 and then multiplied that number by the previous retirement proportions. The estimated number of retirements for 2014 was 467. We know that 432 actually retired so our estimate was close, but a bit too high.

Table 8. Estimating the number of retirements for clergy in 2014

Age	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	Total
2014 Actives	446	475	480	424	381	376	346	237	179	108	79	3,531
Percent who retired	2.9%	3.2%	7.7%	9.3%	9.6%	25.3%	29.4%	23.0%	20.0%	18.2%	24.6%	100%
2014 Projected Retirements	13	15	37	39	37	95	101	55	36	20	19	467

We then estimated the number of active clergy for 2015. (See Table 9.)

Table 9. Calculating the number of projected actives for clergy in 2015

Age	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
2015 Projected Actives	389	433	460	443	385	344	281	245	182	143	88

We followed the same pattern described above to estimate the number retirees for 2015. In 2015, the estimated number of retirements was 449. We know that 455 actually retired, so in 2015 our estimate was closer than for 2014. We were confident enough in the procedure to continue using the strategy through 2019. (See Table 10.)

We believe retirements will peak in 2015 and they will begin a gradual decline through 2019. Between 2015 and 2019, we project more than 2,000 ordained pastors will retire from the active roster.

Table 10: Retirement projections based on percentages of active pastors at each age who retired

Age	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	Total
2015 projection	11	14	36	41	37	87	83	56	36	26	22	449
2016 projection	11	12	32	40	39	88	76	46	38	27	29	436
2017 projection	12	12	28	36	37	92	76	42	30	27	29	422
2018 projection	9	13	27	31	34	88	80	42	28	22	30	404
2019 projection	10	10	29	30	29	80	76	44	28	20	25	382

Conclusions

Is there a Shortage?

There is a shortage of pastors in the ELCA which began to develop in 2012, and it is quite probable the shortage will intensify. While pastors can leave the roster of the ELCA by death, resigning, and being removed, among active clergy serving congregations the most significant component of loss is the number of retirements. Pastors can come on to the roster of the ELCA by being received from another church, or by being reinstated to the roster of the ELCA, but the most significant component of gain is new ordinations. Table 11 compares the number of retirements to ordinations from 2010 through 2015 with projections for 2015 to 2019. In each of these years, the number of retirements exceeds the number of ordinations, and after 2012 the difference is significant. Table 11 also estimates the number of congregations that will be able to afford a first-call, full time pastor (either alone or as part of a sharing relationship).

Table 11: Retirements, ordinations, and the number of congregations that can afford a full-time, first-call pastor with the number of congregational clergy available to serve those congregations (actual figures through 2015, with projections for 2016 through 2019)

	Retirements	Ordinations	Difference	Congregations	Can Afford a Pastor	Number of Pastors Serving Congregations
2010	315	300	15	10,008	7,638	7,625
2011	335	297	38	9,638	7,411	7,408
2012	388	278	110	9,533	7,385	7,255
2013	447	225	222	9,464	7,365	7,062
2014	432	257	175	9,392	7,383	6,868
2015	455	249	206	9,326	7,278	6,713
2016	449	213	236	9,260	7,173	6,477
2017	436	212	224	9,194	7,069	6,253
2018	422	210	212	9,128	6,966	6,041
2019	404	207	197	9,062	6,864	5,844

What can be done?

In 2019, we believe that about three-fourths of ELCA congregations will be able to afford a first-call, full-time pastor and of these congregations, nearly 20 percent will be in pastor sharing relationships. There will be just over 2,000 congregations that will not be able to do so and since the vast majority of these congregations will remain open, their alternatives for pastoral leadership are fairly straightforward. Either these congregations will become part of sharing relationships or they will find supply, part-time or lay licensed pastors. In places where there is ready access to a significant number of retired pastors, an alternative is to use this pool of clergy. If not, another alternative is to find local people who are willing to become authorized/licensed lay ministers or who are willing to complete a certificate process such as TEEM.

The church needs more persons who will consider ordained ministry and become ordained pastors. Clearly, those concerned about the future of the church should seek out and encourage people they believe might be good pastors and open to the call. Programs to do so should be encouraged and supported by the church.

Finally, it is also possible that the supply of pastors could be increased by making the process of becoming a pastor more flexible, less time intensive and less expensive.

Appendix 1: Number of congregations that can afford a pastor by synod

	Synod	Congregations	Alone	Sharing	Can Afford	Percent that Can Afford	Cannot Afford
Alaska	1A	32	21	0	21	65.6%	11
Northwest Washington	1B	107	93	0	93	86.9%	14
Southwestern Washington	1C	86	77	2	79	91.9%	7
Eastern Washington-Idaho	1D	90	62	12	74	82.2%	16
Oregon	1E	115	82	0	82	71.3%	33
Montana	1F	128	60	24	84	65.6%	44
Sierra Pacific	2A	185	150	6	156	84.3%	29
Southwest California	2B	122	95	6	101	82.8%	21
Pacifica	2C	115	92	0	92	80.0%	23
Grand Canyon	2D	90	80	0	80	88.9%	10
Rocky Mountain	2E	160	139	0	139	86.9%	21
Western North Dakota	3A	177	40	82	122	68.9%	55
Eastern North Dakota	3B	210	58	83	141	67.1%	69
South Dakota	3C	210	96	50	146	69.5%	64
Northwestern Minnesota	3D	232	91	76	167	72.0%	65
Northeastern Minnesota	3E	137	84	31	115	83.9%	22
Southwestern Minnesota	3F	247	110	97	207	83.8%	40
Minneapolis Area	3G	147	140	0	140	95.2%	7
Saint Paul Area	3H	111	102	0	102	91.9%	9
Southeastern Minnesota	3I	175	99	44	143	81.7%	32
Nebraska	4A	241	128	63	191	79.3%	50
Central States	4B	179	93	36	129	72.1%	50
Arkansas-Oklahoma	4C	53	31	3	34	64.2%	19
Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana	4D	102	76	2	78	76.5%	24
Southwestern Texas	4E	131	90	11	101	77.1%	30
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast	4F	111	86	2	88	79.3%	23
Metropolitan Chicago	5A	184	157	0	157	85.3%	27
Northern Illinois	5B	149	121	12	133	89.3%	16
Central/Southern Illinois	5C	130	80	16	96	73.8%	34
Southeastern Iowa	5D	139	104	11	115	82.7%	24
Western Iowa	5E	131	68	35	103	78.6%	28
Northeastern Iowa	5F	152	75	48	123	80.9%	29
Northern Great Lakes	5G	82	45	23	68	82.9%	14
Northwest Synod of Wisconsin	5H	197	104	57	161	81.7%	36
East-Central Synod of Wisconsin	5I	125	98	19	117	93.6%	8
Greater Milwaukee	5J	130	115	6	121	93.1%	9
South-Central Synod of Wisconsin	5K	141	109	10	119	84.4%	22
La Crosse Area	5L	74	33	32	65	87.8%	9
Southeast Michigan	6A	120	93	4	97	80.8%	23
North/West Lower Michigan	6B	118	94	4	98	83.1%	20
Indiana-Kentucky	6C	188	132	6	138	73.4%	50
Northwestern Ohio	6D	164	119	13	132	80.5%	32
Northeastern Ohio	6E	177	126	10	136	76.8%	41
Southern Ohio	6F	200	125	12	137	68.5%	63
New Jersey	7A	173	140	2	142	82.1%	31

	Synod	Congregations	Alone	Sharing	Can Afford	Percent that Can Afford	Cannot Afford
New England	7B	186	154	0	154	82.8%	32
Metropolitan New York	7C	195	149	6	155	79.5%	40
Upstate New York	7D	172	106	19	125	72.7%	47
Northeastern Pennsylvania	7E	274	187	18	205	74.8%	69
Southeastern Pennsylvania	7F	157	130	0	130	82.8%	27
Slovak Zion	7G	23	10	0	10	43.5%	13
Northwestern Pennsylvania	8A	85	31	22	53	62.4%	32
Southwestern Pennsylvania	8B	172	97	27	124	72.1%	48
Allegheny	8C	118	42	32	74	62.7%	44
Lower Susquehanna	8D	235	175	22	197	83.8%	38
Upper Susquehanna	8E	126	47	26	73	57.9%	53
Delaware-Maryland	8F	173	124	11	135	78.0%	38
Metropolitan Washington, D.C.	8G	76	68	2	70	92.1%	6
West Virginia-Western Maryland	8H	61	23	24	47	77.0%	14
Virginia	9A	154	84	16	100	64.9%	54
North Carolina	9B	193	153	2	155	80.3%	38
South Carolina	9C	156	117	8	125	80.1%	31
Southeastern	9D	153	117	2	119	77.8%	34
Florida-Bahamas	9E	181	159	2	161	89.0%	20
Caribbean	9F	33	6	0	6	18.2%	27
ELCA		9,390	6,192	1,189	7,381	78.6%	2,009