

DELAWARE-MARYLAND SYNOD REVIEW
Research and Evaluation, Office of the Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
February, 2014

Introduction

This report includes two major sections. The first section is a review of statistical data on the Delaware-Maryland Synod which compares key aspects of the synod to other synods in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The section is intended to give a broader context to the second section. The second section of the report is a summary of interviews with pastors and congregational members in the synod which took place in December of 2013. The synod bishop and staff were also interviewed.

The Territory of the Synod

The Delaware-Maryland Synod of the ELCA covers 9,724 square miles. Figure 1 shows the territory covered for several synods. These six synods (Delaware-Maryland, Grand Canyon, Minneapolis Area, Northeastern Pennsylvania, Southeastern, and Western Iowa) were selected as comparison synods because they provide a good overview of the various contexts of synods within the ELCA.

Figure 1: Square Miles of the Territories of Selected Synods

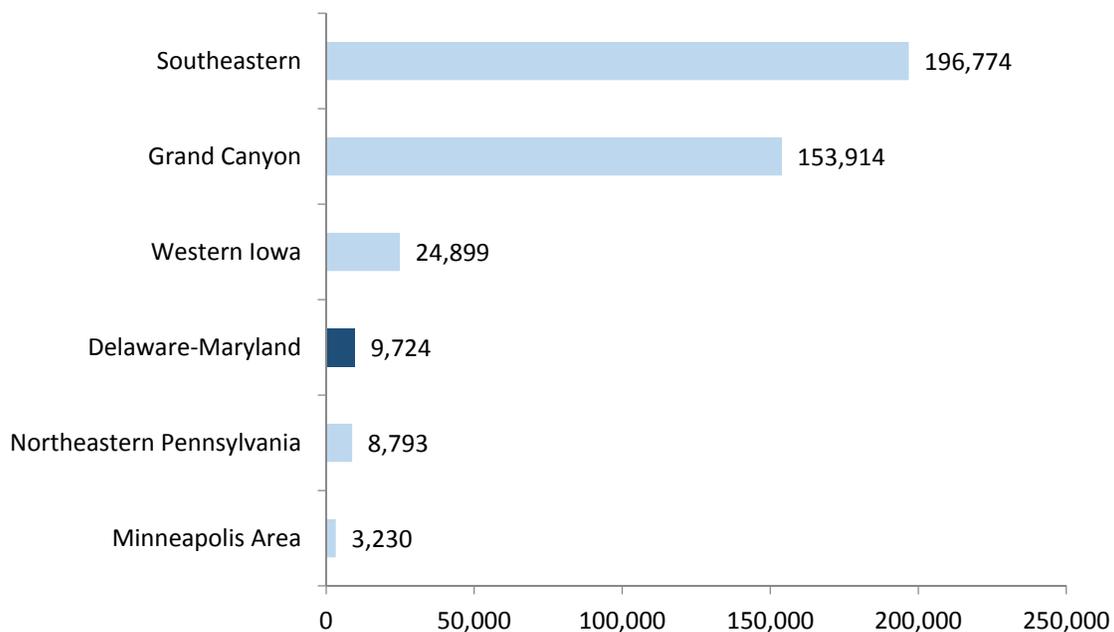
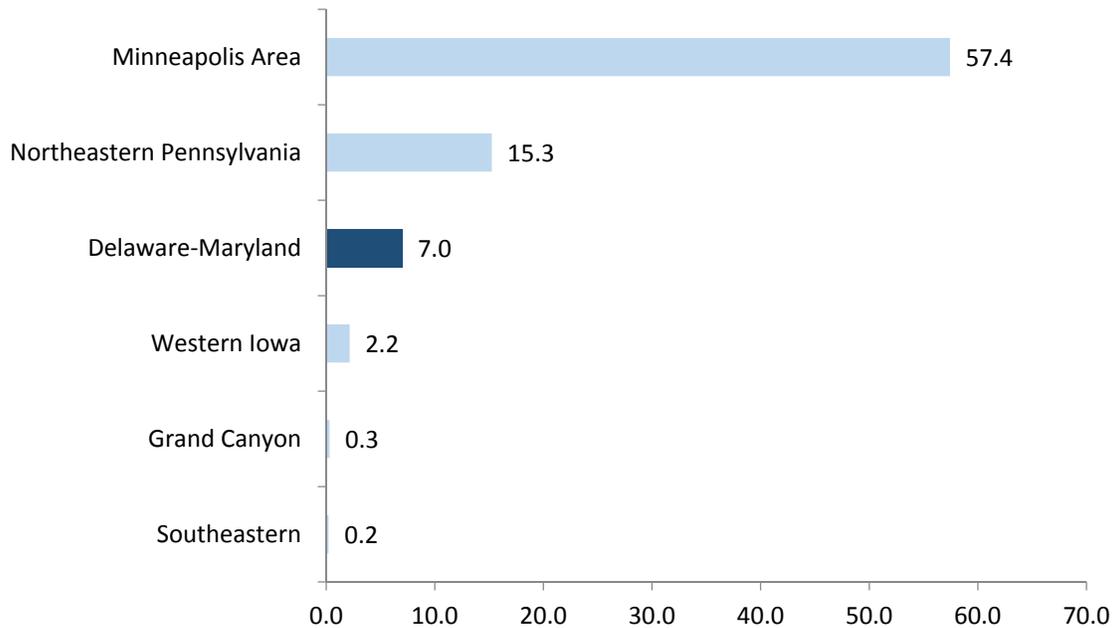


Figure 2 shows the number of Lutherans per square mile in these synods.¹ The Delaware-Maryland Synod has about 7.0 ELCA Lutherans per square mile compared to 57.4 ELCA Lutherans per square mile in the Minneapolis Area Synod. The Grand Canyon Synod has 0.3 ELCA Lutherans per square mile.

¹ The data used in this report come from two primary sources. The demographic data are based on Claritas (Nielsen) estimates and projections (which are based initially on figures from the U.S. Census). The data for congregations in the

Figure 2: ELCA Lutherans per Square Mile in Selected Synods



The population of the territory of the Delaware-Maryland Synod included about 4.5 million people in 2010 and is projected to increase to 4.6 million in 2015 which is an increase of 2.6 percent. About 33 percent of the population of the Delaware-Maryland Synod is non-White. About 24 percent of the population is Black/African American, 4 percent is Latino, 3 percent is Asian, and 2 percent is two or more races.

Baptized ELCA Lutherans account for about 1.5 percent of the population of the synod. About 7 percent of the active participants in congregations in the synod are non-white. Over half the non-white active participants in the congregations of the synod are African American/Black (58%).

Baptized Membership and Worship Attendance

In 2012, the Delaware-Maryland Synod included 175 congregations (172 congregations and 2 synodically authorized ministries and 1 congregation under development). The baptized membership of these congregations was 67,755 or an average of 394 per congregation. In 2012, the congregations of the synod baptized 720 children and 77 adults and affirmed the faith of 945 adults.

In 2007, the Delaware-Maryland Synod included 182 congregations. The baptized membership of these congregations was 87,451 or an average of 480 per congregation. In 2007, the congregations of the synod baptized 1066 children and 112 adults and affirmed the faith of 996 adults.

synod are based on the annual reports of congregations. These figures are only as reliable as those reports. In the Delaware-Maryland Synod, 117 (68%) of 172 congregations reported figures for 2012. If congregations did not report for 2012, figures from their last report are used.

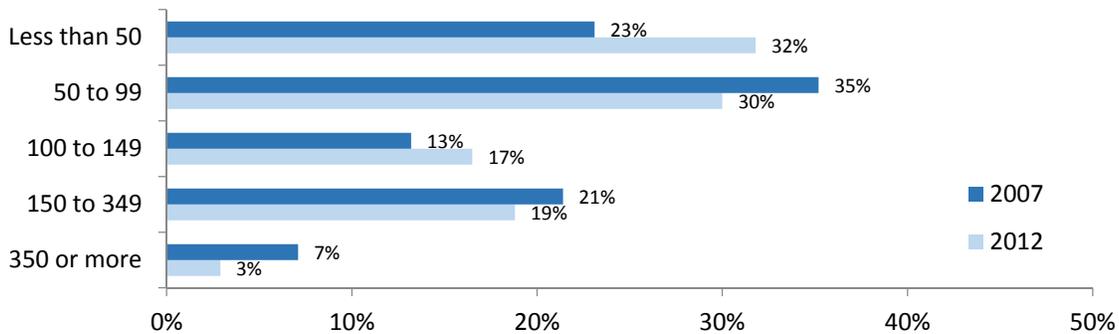
As a result of the actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to allow gay and lesbian persons in committed relationships to be called into the ordained ministry of the ELCA, some congregations left the ELCA. In the Delaware-Maryland Synod, six congregations left.

In 2007, the aggregate worship attendance of congregations in the synod was 23,375. The average number attending worship per congregation in 2007 was 128. Fifty-eight percent of congregations had fewer than 100 average worshippers per week, while 7 percent averaged 350 or more.

In 2012, the aggregate worship attendance on a typical Sunday in the synod was 17,767 (26% of the baptized membership) with an average of 101 in worship per congregation. (The average for the ELCA in 2012 was 114.) The percentage of congregations with fewer than 100 in worship increased slightly to 62 percent, while the percentage of congregations averaging 350 or more attendees per week decreased to 3 percent (5 congregations) (See Figure 3).

Additionally, since 2007, the percent of congregations with less than 50 in worship has increased from 23 percent to 32 percent. Of the 5,608 fewer persons in worship between 2007 and 2012, 2,011 (36%) left with the 6 congregations leaving the ELCA.

Figure 3: Percent of Congregations by Typical Worship Attendance for the Congregation



In 2007, 25 percent of those who typically attended worship did so in congregations which average less than 100 attendees in a typical worship service (See Figure 4). In 2012, that percentage had increased to 30 percent. Further, in 2007, 47 percent attended congregations who averaged between 100 and 349 attendees per week. That figure increased to 57 percent in 2012. A large decrease was seen in the percent of attendees who regularly worshipped in a congregation averaging 350 or more attendees per week; this percentage dropped from 28 percent to 12 percent.

Figure 4: Percent of Worshipers by Typical Worship Attendance for the Congregation

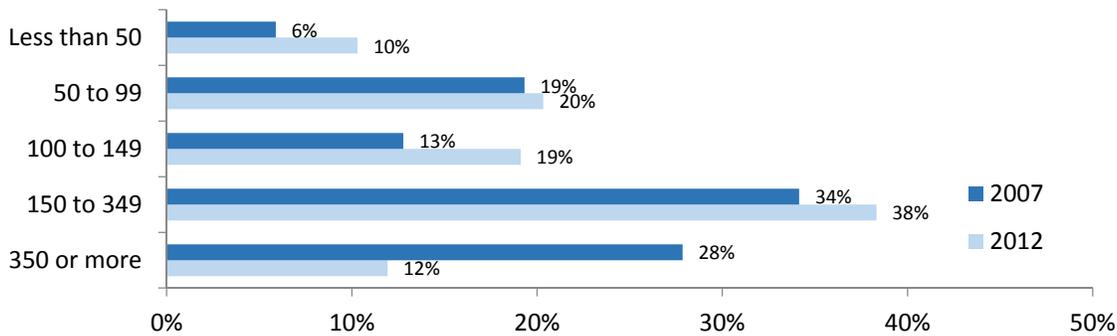
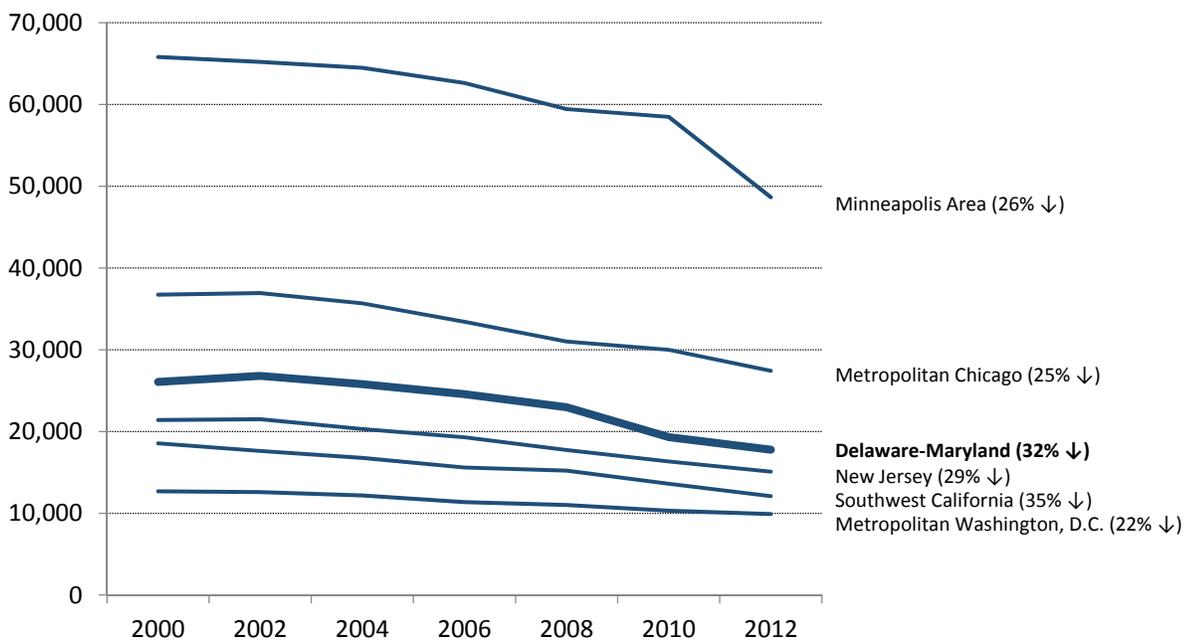


Figure 5 presents the change in worship attendance in selected synods from 2000 to 2012. In the ELCA as a whole, worship attendance declined by 31 percent from 2000 to 2012. In the Delaware-Maryland Synod, it declined by 32 percent. All of the selected synods presented in Figure 5 experienced a decline in worship attendance of 22 percent or more. In terms of total numbers, the largest synods, the Minneapolis Area Synod, the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, and the Delaware-Maryland Synod, experienced the greatest losses.

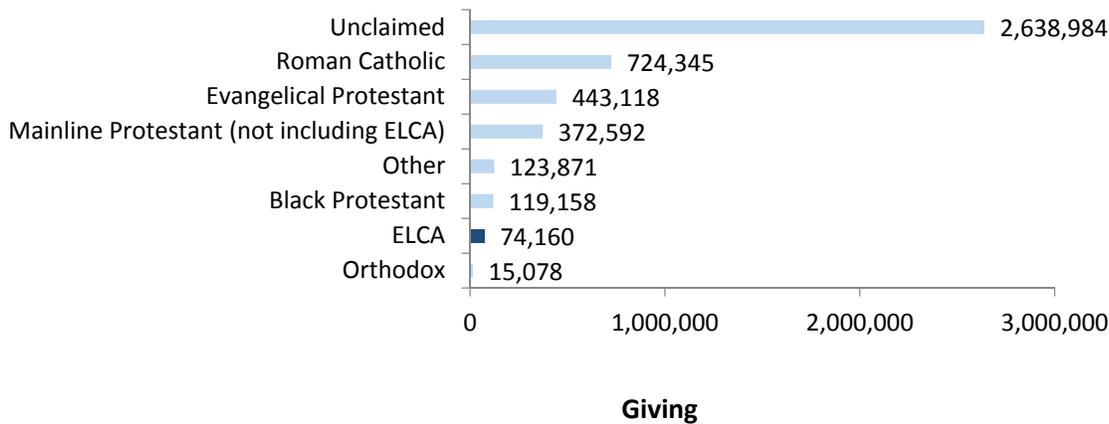
Figure 5: Worship Attendance from 2000 to 2012



While the population of the Delaware-Maryland Synod’s territory is growing slowly, figures for the synod from 2010 show a significant number of persons “unclaimed” by any church in the territory of the synod (See Figure 6).² Those who are unclaimed by a church included 58 percent of the population of the synod. Assuming only 1 percent (26,000) of those who are unclaimed would be open to worshipping in an ELCA congregation, this number would more than double the existing worship attendance of ELCA congregations in the synod.

² Source: Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB).

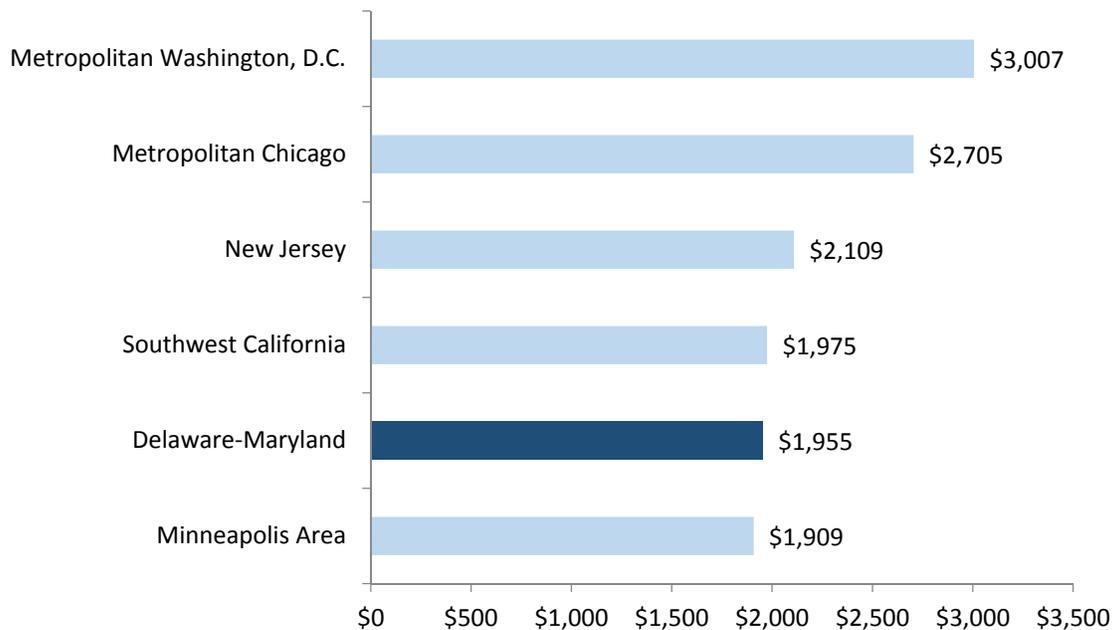
Figure 6: ELCA Baptized Membership and the Number of Unclaimed in 2010 for the Delaware-Maryland Synod



Total giving (undesignated and designated giving) from the members of the Delaware-Maryland Synod in 2012 was \$34.7 million. The average amount given per worship attendee was \$1,995 (See Figure 7).

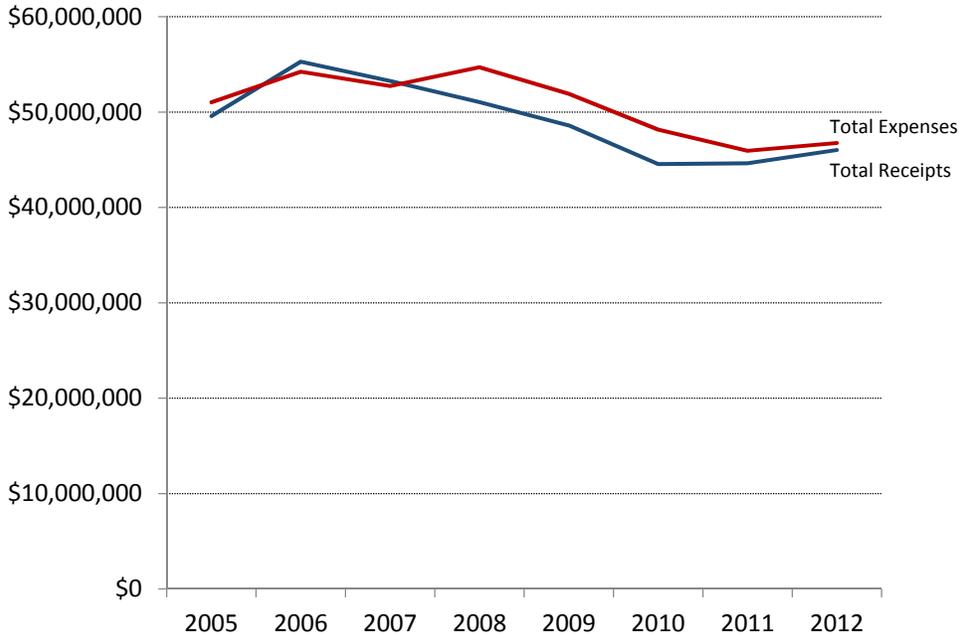
In 2007, total giving to the congregations in the synod was \$40.6 million. When adjusted for inflation, the total giving to congregations in the Delaware-Maryland Synod was down by 22.4 percent between 2007 and 2012. In 2007, the average amount given per worship attendee was \$1,737. After adjusting for inflation, the average amount of total giving per attendee increased by 3.8 percent between 2007 and 2012. Despite giving more, those who remain as members of congregations in the synod were unable to offset losses due to the overall decline in membership.

Figure 7: Total Giving (designated and undesignated) per Worship Attendee



In 2006 and 2007 the aggregate total income of the congregations in the synod exceeded total expenses (see Figure 8). Since 2008, expenses were above income. For 2012, expenses were reduced considerably to end nearly even with income.

Figure 8: Total Receipts to Expense by Year for Congregations in the Delaware-Maryland Synod



Mission support is the amount of money given through congregations for the ministry of synods and the ELCA churchwide organization. In the Delaware-Maryland Synod the amount of mission support given per worship attendee in 2012 was approximately \$110. This amount was in the middle of the comparable synods. In the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod, mission support per worship attendee was \$177. On the other hand, in the Minneapolis Area Synod it was \$59. The average for the ELCA in 2012 was \$94.

Figure 9 shows the percentage of congregations in the synod by the percent of their total giving contributed for mission support. Eight percent of congregations in the synod give no mission support while 11 percent give 10 percent or more. Figure 10 also shows the percent of all mission support given to the synod by the congregations in each category. This figure focuses on the percentage of total mission support given by the congregations in these categories. For example, the 52 percent of congregations giving more than 0 but less than 6 percent of their regular giving for mission support account for 31 percent of the total mission support given to the synod. On the other hand, the 11 percent of the congregations that give 10 percent or more in mission support contribute 23 percent of the total mission support given to the synod.

Figure 9: Percent of Congregations by the Percent of Their Regular Giving Contributed for Mission Support

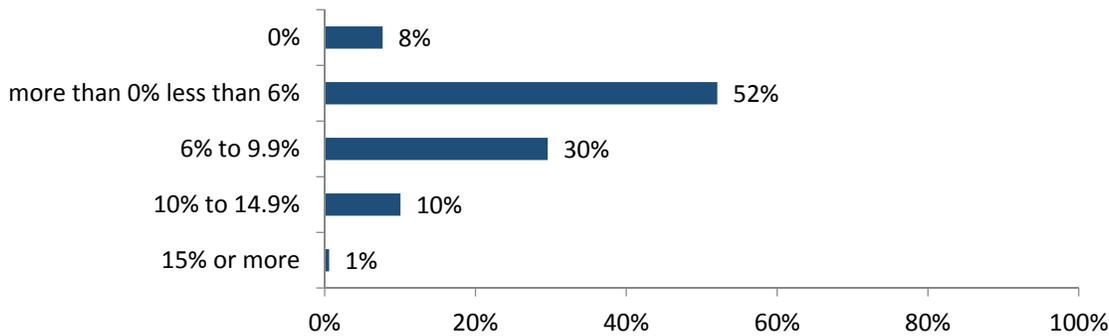
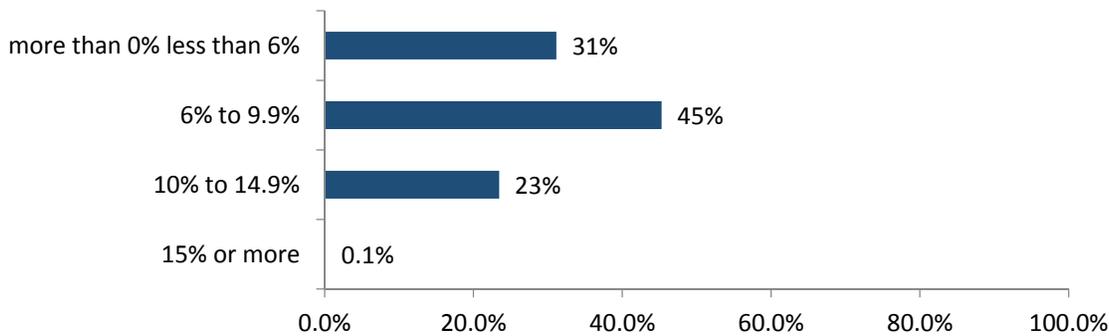


Figure 10: Percent of Total Mission Support Accounted for by Giving Percentage Categories



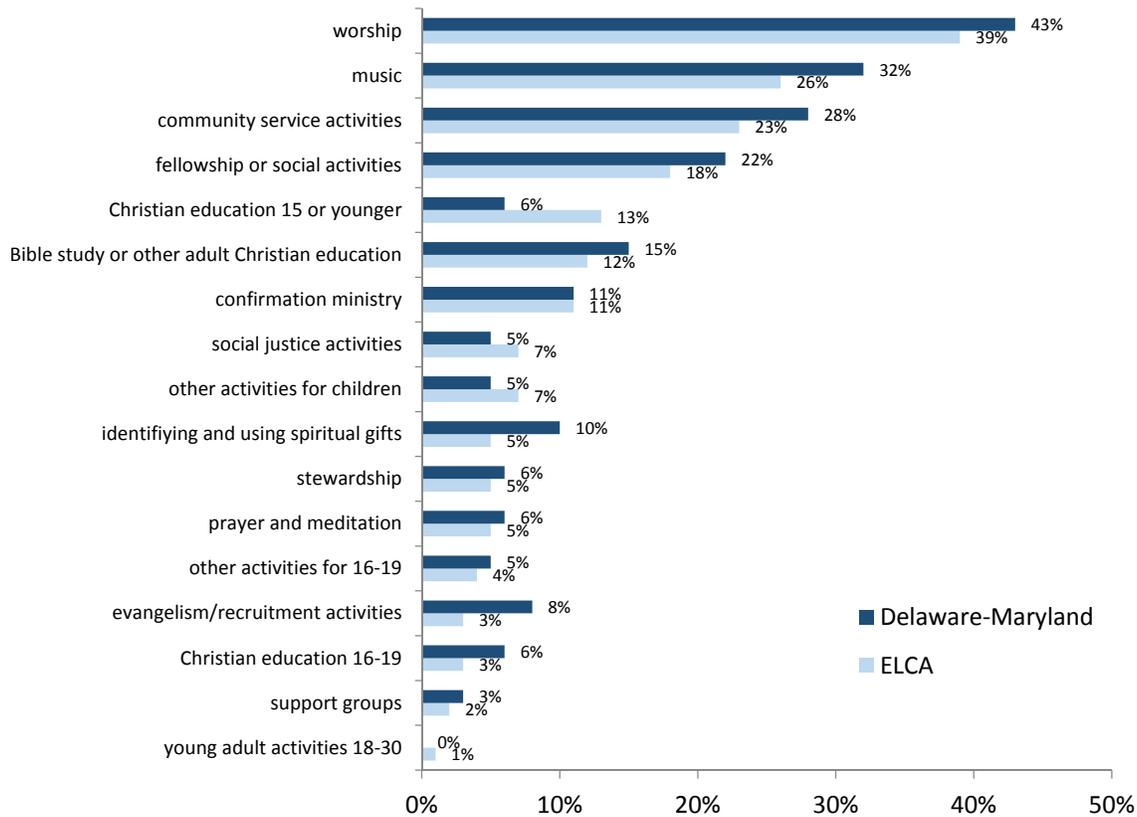
The total amount given to the Delaware-Maryland Synod and the churchwide organization of the ELCA has declined from \$1.5 million in 2007 to \$1.1 million in 2012. Between 2007 and 2012, total giving was down by 15 percent while mission support declined by 29 percent. In 2007, the synod passed 53.5 percent of what it received to the churchwide organization. In 2012, it also passed along 53.5 percent.

Congregational Emphases

In 2012, as a part of the annual report (completed most often by a pastor), congregations in the ELCA were asked how much emphasis they give to a variety of congregational programs/activities, including whether they consider the activity a specialty of the congregation. Figure 11 shows the responses of congregations in the Delaware-Maryland Synod compared to congregations in the ELCA as a whole. In general, the percent of Delaware-Maryland Synod congregations that indicate these activities are a specialty of their congregation was consistently higher than the percent in the ELCA as a whole. Typically, the congregations in this synod feel they are strongest in worship, music, and community service activities and weakest in evangelism/recruitment activities, in providing or supporting support groups, and in providing Christian education for teenagers or activities for young adults. Congregations in the Delaware-Maryland Synod scored themselves higher on evangelism than congregations in any other synod of the ELCA³.

³ About 17 percent of the congregations in the synod grew by 5 percent or more between 2007 and 2012.

Figure 11: Congregational Emphases



The Synod Office

Most synod offices in the ELCA focus on the following:

1. providing pastoral support for the pastors of the synod.
2. providing support for congregations (resources, consultation, mediating conflict).
3. supporting and managing the mobility of clergy (candidacy and call processes).
4. providing stewardship education.
5. relating to agencies and institutions (outdoor ministry, campus ministry, social ministry, Lutheran social ministry agencies, colleges, universities, seminaries).
6. supporting and managing global mission and ecumenical relationships.
7. supporting and managing (with the churchwide offices of the ELCA) new congregations.
8. communicating about the wider activities of the church in the synod, nationally, and globally.
9. supporting and managing the administration of the synod office including synod assemblies.

(A full list of the responsibilities of a synod is available on-line at www.elca.org/secretary. See section 10.20. of the Constitution of the ELCA.)

Despite the consistency of responsibilities, the amount of money available to synod offices to carry out these responsibilities can vary widely. Some of the variance is due to the number of congregations in a synod or due to differences in the size of the territory. As noted above, mission support giving to the Delaware-Maryland

Synod in 2012 was about \$1,950,000 in 2012. Fifty-three percent was passed on to the churchwide organization. The average percent passed on by synods in the ELCA in 2012 was 49 percent. The expectation of the Church Council of the ELCA is 55 percent.

Table 1 presents the distribution of mission support in 2012 for selected synods.

Table 1: The Distribution of Mission Support for Selected Synods in 2012

synod	from congregations	percent to churchwide*	amount to churchwide	amount remaining in the synod
Southwest California	\$1,151,575	49	\$564,272	\$587,303
Minneapolis Area	\$2,883,921	55	\$1,586,156	\$1,297,765
Metropolitan Chicago	\$3,143,346	53	\$1,681,873	\$1,461,473
New Jersey	\$2,210,382	50	\$1,105,191	\$1,105,191
Metropolitan Washington, D.C.	\$1,749,191	50	\$874,596	\$874,595
Delaware-Maryland	\$1,947,770	53	\$1,032,318	\$915,452

* based on total undesignated giving to the synod

Synod Interviews

Interviews with pastors and congregation members of the Delaware-Maryland Synod were conducted in December of 2013. About 16 congregations were represented with varying numbers of participants. Also participating was a campus ministry office. The synod staff was interviewed as well. Those who attended the interviews were asked about their ministries and the synod office.

On Congregations

Congregational members highlighted the strengths of their congregations by pointing to their resiliency of the commitment of members to one another. They also pointed to the programs of their congregations as strengths including worship and music, Bible study, and the support of social ministry or a community orientation. Some congregations also pointed to the importance of a specific program such as a pre-school ministry or youth ministries.

Many noted their facilities as a resource, often large, beautiful buildings; on the other hand, some congregations have found these facilities to be a significant challenge to maintain.

Many congregations have experienced regular declines in membership and participation over many years and are trying new approaches including shifting to a more outreach, community-oriented, missional focus. Some pointed out this is a challenge for congregations with deeply rooted family traditions going back many generations.

Financially, as noted above, most congregations are steady but some are on the edge or even running deficits and looking for sources of revenue other than giving.

Many noted their congregations need to get better at discipleship, stewardship, leadership development, Christian education, evangelism, and dealing with the 21st Century.

On the Synod Office

The suggestions on how to strengthen the synod are also typically varied. There is a strong sense the congregations of the synod could do more, or would be more vital if they worked more closely together, but they are often at a loss about how to do so, much less on how to do so effectively. Some pointed out that both difficult circumstances and even success can often turn congregations inward. When this happens an "us" versus "them" mentality can easily develop. Even when congregations feel more of a connection to one another and to the synod or the synod office as a whole, the connection is typically between a few individuals and not whole congregations. Many synods come together only once a year (for lay persons) at the synod assembly and those few who attend may feel a connection, but they are not very adept, trained, or strongly encouraged to bring a sense of connectedness back home.

To further develop a sense of connection some hoped the synod office would promote specific themes or emphases which congregations would embrace such as an emphasis on spirituality (something the whole synod would do together). Many noted the bishop's emphasis on outreach and evangelism has had an impact at least among the clergy.

As with nearly all these reviews, people call for a more visible bishop and staff. They want the bishop and staff out in the synod—meeting with congregational councils and preaching on Sunday mornings. But, with a bishop and small synod staff, it can take years to be in every congregation. Those interviewed said they want the bishop to get to know congregations and their context. They want the bishop to help pastors set priorities and to take care of themselves. They want the bishop and staff to be mentors. They want inspiration. They want the synod to be really good at helping congregations through call processes and in matching the right pastor to the right congregations. Some worry that a bishop who is the synod's chief "personnel" officer cannot also be a pastor to the pastors. Finally, some are concerned about compensation issues for clergy, both for new pastors and those who have served in the same congregation for a long while.

Many point to the value of a website and e-mail in improving communication and a few believe communication has improved—clearer, more consistent. Many of the congregation members who were interviewed also call for the synod to be a clearing house which would promote good congregational resources.

Concluding Common Themes

1. Most who were interviewed agreed that unless a person serves in a congregational leadership role which includes participating in a synodical committee or unless a person attends a synod assembly, there will be a low sense of connectedness with the synod, the bishop or staff. When a congregation is in a call process, the level of connection increases because the staff assist congregations through the process. Most congregations appreciate the work of the synod staff during a call process. However, other than a call process, there is an impression that the synod staff or bishop arrive only when there is trouble and/or the synod is asking for increased mission support. Many understand the synod staff is stretched too thin, but still would like them to check in more regularly, especially when there is no major issue or trouble.

The synod office should do whatever possible to build connections directly between members of the congregations in the synod and the synod office. This might involve wider distribution of the "e-letter" (see 2. below) and building e-mail distribution lists. The synod should also take every opportunity to connect with congregations in times not related to call or crisis.

2. There is an overall appreciation of the changes the Bishop has made in the synod office. Most spoke of his election as an exciting time for the synod and with a promise of change most agreed needs to happen. He thinks “outside the box” with a focus on mission. He has changed the way synod staff work geographically and developed a weekly “e-letter”. Communication is better and it is largely appreciated. It appears the staff is responding to phone calls and e-mails and is regularly assessable. A minority view is the Bishop is only interested in new mission developments and in new approaches to ministry and neglects established congregations. A few established pastors appear to feel the synod staff is inexperienced and regularly in crisis mode.

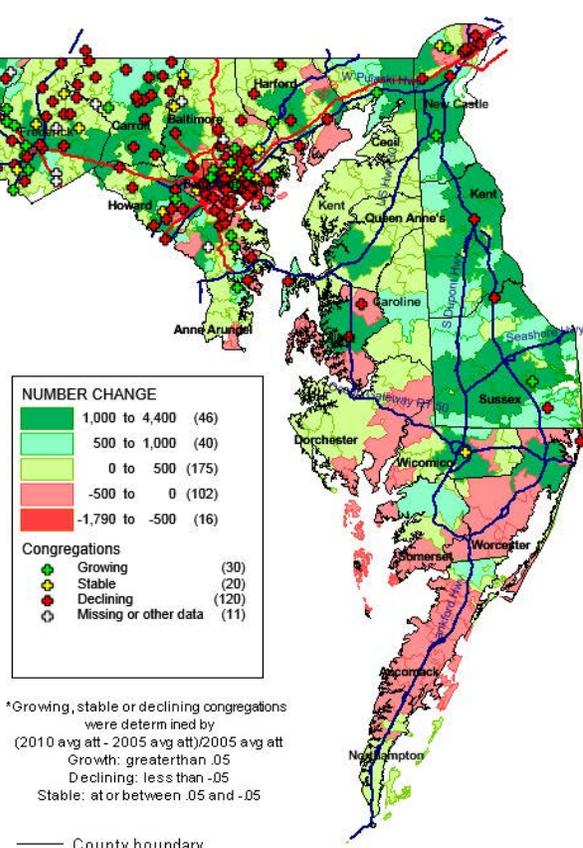
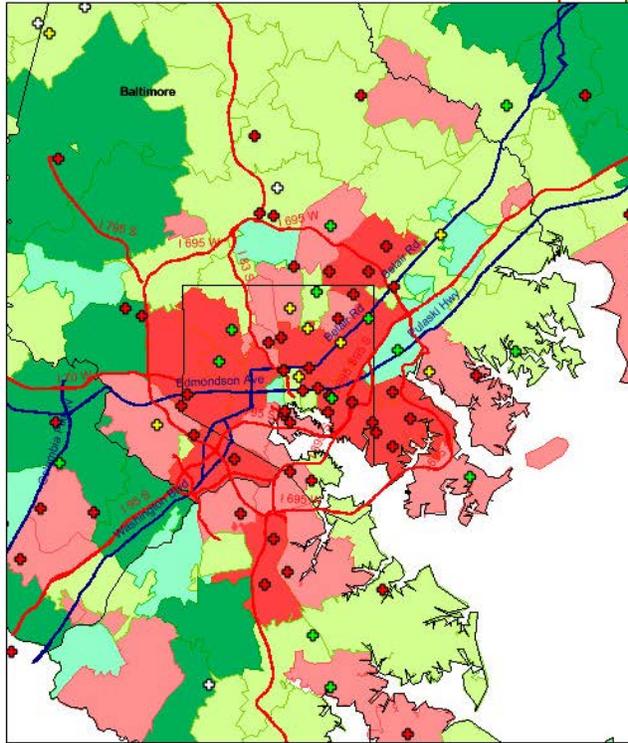
One approach might be to enlist the help of the more established pastors in the synods. How can these pastors be better used and what commitments are they willing to make for the sake of the whole synod?

3. A few spoke of the mistakes they believe the Bishop made in his first year in office. They typically note he changed the way ordinations happen in the synod; away from ordinations in congregational settings toward synod assembly ordinations. The Bishop also supposedly referred to a congregation as a “sinking ship”—an assessment which traveled. These “missteps” have been addressed.
4. In each of these conversations there was an understanding “the synod” cannot make everything happen and cannot be everywhere. There is too much to do and the staff is small. When confronted with this reality, however, people try to suggest alternatives. The problem is these alternatives actually give the synod staff even more to do. One such suggestion is to bring together lay leaders to learn from one another. The hope is as they get to know each other they will find ways to do ministry together. The goal is to hear and tell stories which will build an environment of trust and energy. While some who were interviewed hold on to an earlier pattern of seeing the synod primarily as a source of congregational resources, many others are now convinced that all good or effective ideas originate locally and the primary role of the wider church (including the synod) is to facilitate the exchange from congregation to congregation of local ideas. The synod should become a convener—lay leaders, pastors, conference deans, council presidents, treasurers, teachers, youth. What is not clear is why these local initiatives need any more than an initial and brief involvement of the synod staff. Certainly synod staff and the bishop can and should encourage congregational collaboration and partnerships of all sorts but given the general availability of on-line information about congregations (locations, programs, etc.) and the availability of group discussion platforms as simple to use as Facebook, it would seem possible for any congregation or any group of congregations to sponsor, on their own, any collaborative or sharing work they might find useful. (There are many possible strategies for doing this. For example, The ELCA website tool “Find a Congregation” allows anyone to find other ELCA congregations within a specified mile radius based on a Zip Code. E-mail addresses for these congregations are readily available and invitation lists for topic discussion could be developed simply.)

The synod should strongly encourage local initiatives which seek to development partnerships and share resources, emphases, strategies, etc. The synod should help identify and make available members of congregations who are both skilled and willing to make their expertise available in using and/or moderating social media. The synod “e-letter” could highlight any and all networking efforts and congregations should be encouraged to build upon them with their own interested and talented members.

**Projected Change in Population from 2010 to 2015
by ZIP Codes and
Change in Congregation Average Attendance
from 2005 to 2010
for the Delaware-Maryland Synod**

Baltimore, MD Area



NUMBER CHANGE	
1,000 to 4,400	(46)
500 to 1,000	(40)
0 to 500	(175)
-500 to 0	(102)
-1,790 to -500	(16)

Congregations	
Growing	(30)
Stable	(20)
Declining	(120)
Missing or other data	(11)

*Growing, stable or declining congregations were determined by $(2010 \text{ avg att} - 2005 \text{ avg att}) / 2005 \text{ avg att}$
 Growth: greater than .05
 Declining: less than -.05
 Stable: at or between .05 and -.05

— County boundary



Prepared by ELCA Research and Evaluation, 9/12, Office of the Presiding Bishop, Source: The Nelsen Company