

# **Vision 2018 Survey: Discerning God's Plan for the Delaware-Maryland Synod**

## **Administration**

The Vision 2018 Survey was distributed electronically via SurveyMonkey on June 18, 2013 to over 2,500 lay and rostered leaders' email addresses provided by the Delaware-Maryland Synod staff. It was open for over one month, with a series of weekly reminders, and closed July 29, 2013. The final count was 2,513 viable email addresses receiving a message with an imbedded survey link. While 694 individuals clicked on the survey link, the greatest number of actual responses to any one question was 687. The approximate overall response rate was 27%. Of special note is the fact that over 180 rostered leaders responded, yielding an approximate 50%+ response rate for this sub-population.

## **Respondent Composition**

Of those responding, nearly three in four (72%) self-reported as laity. In terms of the location of their church, the top 5 locations were: 19% Baltimore County; 16% Baltimore City; 11% Frederick County; 10% New Castle County; and 8% Carroll County. As for demographics, 53% were female, 92% White, 6% Black, 34% between the ages of 60-69, 27% between the ages of 50-59, and 83% report having been a Lutheran for more than 20 years.

## **Responses-Quantitative**

The top three most important items relating to congregations' ministries were: the increase in numbers of unchurched people (average 4.46 on a scale of 1-5 with 5=most important); the increase in numbers of inactive church people (average of 4.27); and the competition between church and secular activities such as sports (average of 3.88). The top three least important items relating to congregations' ministries were: changes in farming in rural areas (average of 2.88); the church's abandoning core values to be popular (average of 3.03); and increase in numbers of people speaking languages other than English (average of 3.08).

The top three most important activities for the Delaware-Maryland Synod in the years ahead were: enrich the spiritual lives of practitioners (average of 4.50); uphold traditional Lutheran teachings and values, i.e., sacraments and grace (average of 4.41); and help congregations increase their membership (average of 4.14).

## **Notable Sub-Group Differences**

Statistical comparisons were made of the ratings questions by gender, age, race/ethnicity, geographic area of the synod, and years being Lutheran. While there are a few statistical differences with regard to gender and race/ethnicity, the greatest number of statistically significant sub-group differences are found in comparing the responses of rostered leaders to those of lay respondents, and those by age group. There were also interesting geographic results, clustering the counties of church location.

Rostered respondents had statistically higher averages than lay respondents on the following most important items relating to congregations' ministries: increase in numbers of people of color; increase in numbers of people speaking languages other than English; greater awareness of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people; unequal distribution of wealth; increase in areas of concentrated poverty; changes in farming in rural areas; 24/7 work schedules; transience and change in local neighborhoods; and the fast pace of technological change. Conversely, lay respondents were higher on: increase in numbers of inactive church people; focus on individual spirituality than corporate worship; and the church's abandoning core values to be popular.

Rostered respondents had statistically higher averages than lay respondents on the following most important activities for the Delaware-Maryland Synod in the years ahead: greater outreach to communities of color; greater outreach to non-English speaking people; and greater outreach to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Conversely, lay respondents were higher on: help congregations increase their membership; increase the means for financial solvency; happiness of church members; strengthen the appeal of individual congregations; greater marketing of the synod; focus on inreach to bring back lost members from each congregation; and maintain traditional worship forms.

The original age groupings were aggregated into three groups to have a sufficient number of cases for comparison: less than 40; 40-60; and 60 and older. Averages increased in a linear fashion, from lowest in the less than 40 group, to higher for the 40-60 group, to highest in the 60 and older group for the following most important activities for the Delaware-Maryland Synod in the years ahead: help congregations increase their membership; increase means for financial solvency; uphold traditional Lutheran teachings and values, i.e., sacraments and grace; happiness of church members; enrich the spiritual lives of parishioners; and, greater marketing of the synod.

The original church locations by county were aggregated into three regions of the synod. The "Eastern" grouping was: Cecil County, all of Delaware and all of the Maryland Eastern Shore. The "Central" grouping was: Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Harford County, and Howard County. The "Western" grouping was Carroll County, Frederick County and all counties westward. In terms of most important items relating to congregations' ministries, respondents from the "Western" grouping had significantly lower averages than "Eastern" and "Central" on: increase in numbers of people of color; increase in numbers of people speaking languages other than English; greater awareness of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people; broader definitions of what constitutes family; and, transience and change in local neighborhoods. The "Western" grouping had significantly higher averages on changes in farming in rural areas and competition between church and secular activities.

## **Armchair analysis**

The notable sub-group differences point up a reality where age matters when conceiving/orienting to what God's work is to be, and congregations'/synod's role in that work. The rostered/lay divide may well be at the root of so much of the conflict found within congregations and between the congregations and the synod. Many lay leaders appear inward looking, perhaps oblivious to, or not concerned with, greater societal changes that impact the church. Many rostered leaders, by nature of their education, training, and movement within and without synods are probably more keenly aware of these impacts compared with many (but certainly not all) lay leaders, who are comparatively more rooted in a locale that can often foster parochial thinking. There may also be substantial differences in political orientations rostered versus lay. This may be most keenly felt in the western part of the synod, where the importance placed on societal issues of race, nationality, and sexual orientation, is significantly less than in the other parts. In sum, there may be a significant political divide correlated with age and geographic location within the synod that cannot be ignored in strategic planning.

## **Responses-Qualitative**

The hundreds of individual responses to the open-ended questions of top 3 ministries in which the synod should engage in the next 5-10 years, along with the single best step forward to make the synod more supportive, will be content-analyzed by the synod's strategic planning committee. Each member/small group will be asked to take "x" number of open-ended responses to interpret and quantify. Gathering these up across all members/small groups should yield the top most reported themes for each open-ended question.