



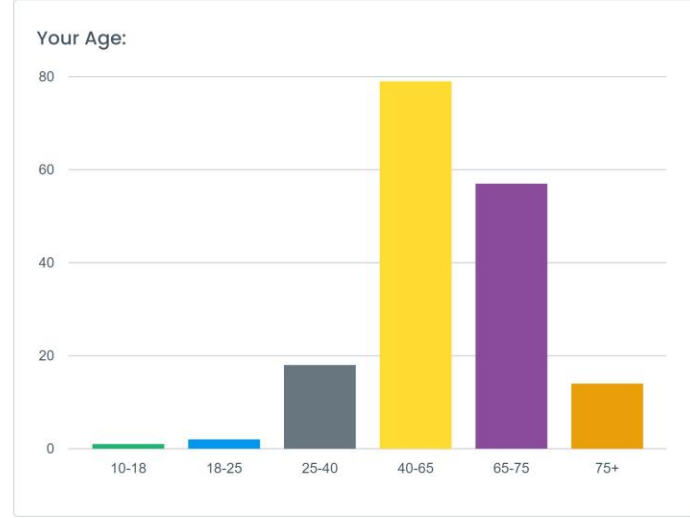
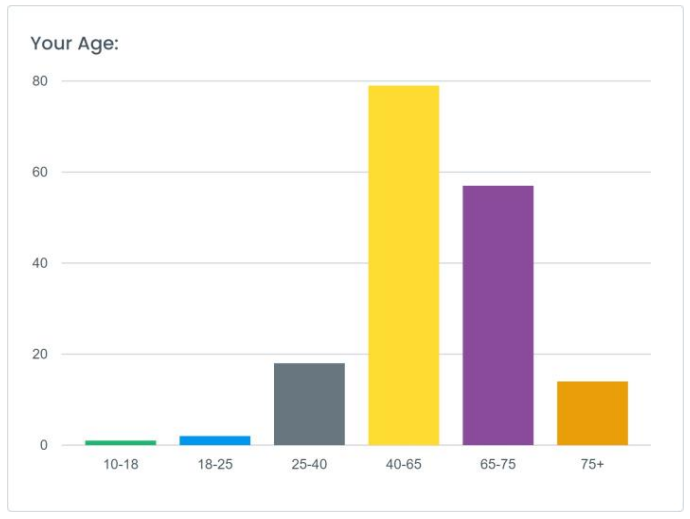
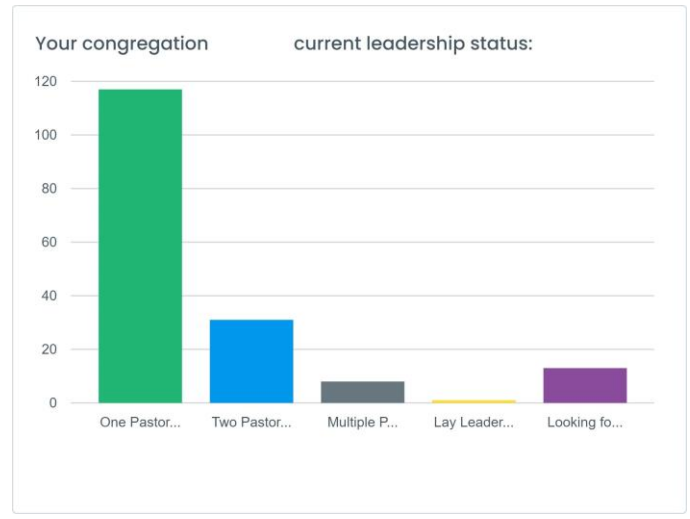
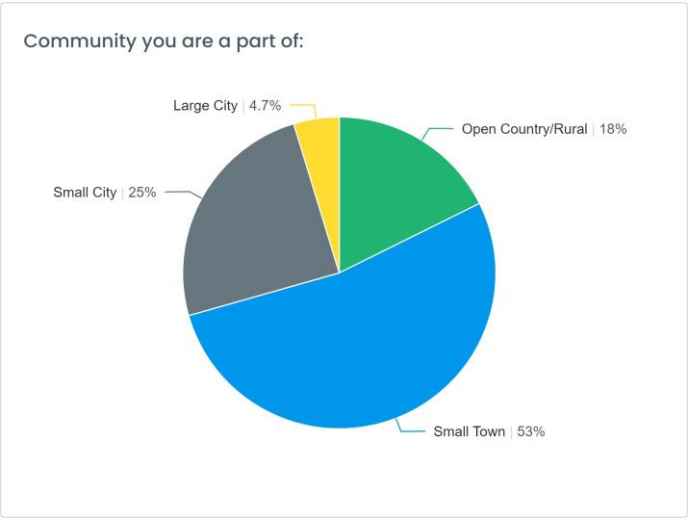
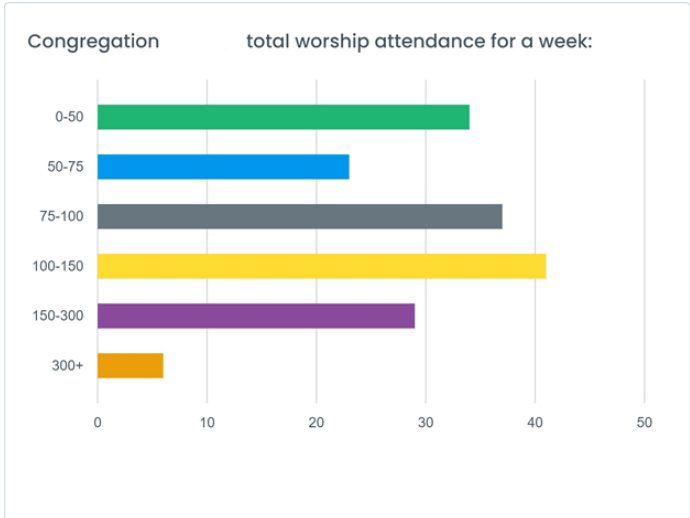
Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Understanding our Church in a Changing World Survey (2024)

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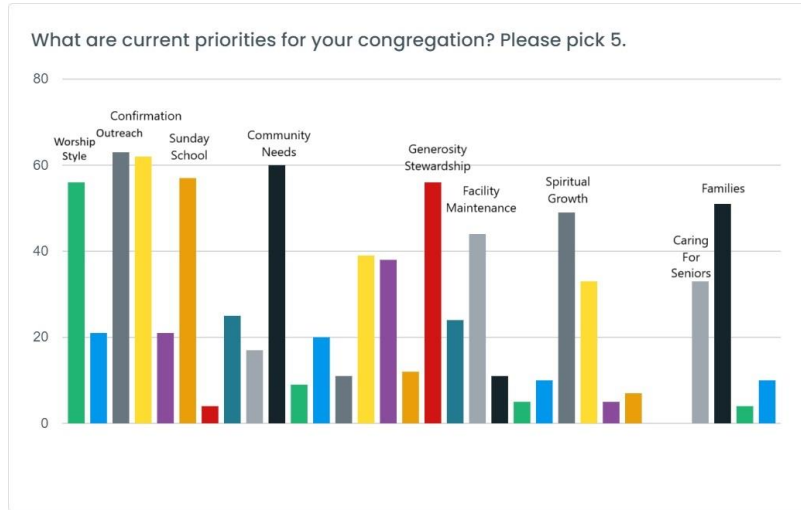
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+ Engaging Leaders + Equipping Congregations + Serving in God's World +
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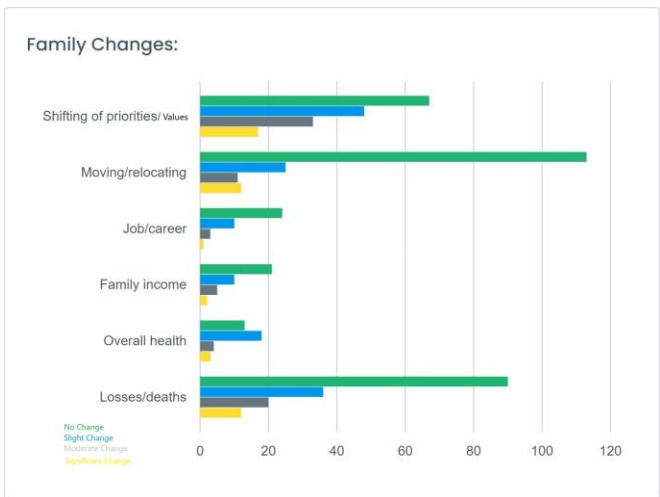


Who took the survey?

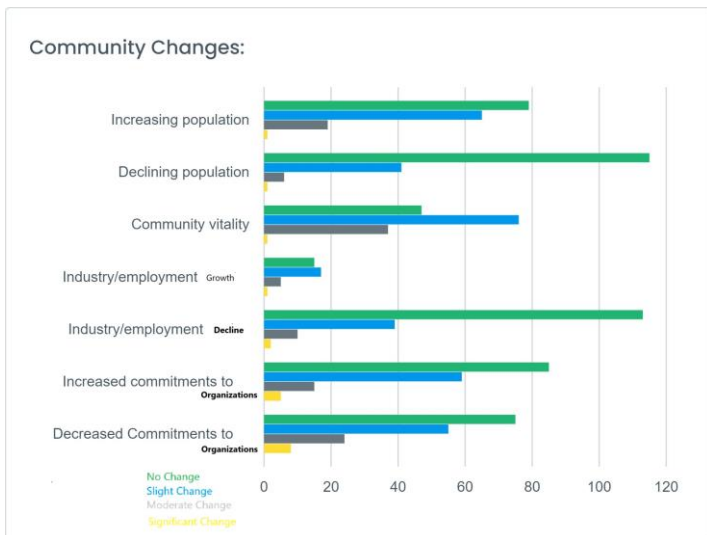
Congregational Priorities



What has changed?



What is your congregation doing



well?

1. Worship and Spiritual Growth

- Strong worship services, including Sunday worship, worship during Lent, and offering Zoom options.
- Musical ministry, varied worship styles, and engaging youth through religious programs.
- Ecumenical Bible study, Sunday school, and confirmation programs are innovative and growing.
- Efforts to call people back to worship and maintain consistent attendance.

2. Youth and Family Engagement

- Active ministry with young families, children's education, and youth programs (e.g., Vacation Bible School).
- Growing Sunday School and confirmation programs for teens and youth.
- Welcoming and involving young families, inter-generational ministry, and engaging college students.

3. Community Outreach and Service

- Serving the community through food pantries, nursing home visits, and outreach to those in need.
- Strong involvement in community activities and collaboration with sister congregations.
- Providing family meals, outreach ministry, and supporting members unable to attend worship.

4. Hospitality and Fellowship

- Focus on hospitality, welcoming new members, and creating a warm, united community.
- Coffee fellowship, quilting groups, and supporting seniors.
- Encouraging relationships and offering care to those in need within the congregation.

5. Stability and Growth

- Adding new members and families, maintaining financial stability despite challenges.
- Major building refreshes and renovations, increasing involvement and excitement.
- Stability through a committed core leadership, strong Synod benevolence, and consistent giving.

6. Innovation and Adaptability

- Embracing new methods, technologies, and outreach opportunities.
- Progressive Church Council and trying new outreach models for youth and inter-generational ministry.
- Accepting new ideas, changes, and finding ways to adapt post-interim periods.

What is going OK in your congregation?

1. Worship and Spiritual Growth

- Steady attendance at worship services.
- New worship styles and approaches, especially during summer.
- Bible study, confirmation, and Christian education programs for youth are active.
- Positive impact from a new pastor leading spiritual growth.
- Adaptation to changes in worship formats and keeping worship functional.

2. Youth and Family Engagement

- Youth programs, music, and family activities are going well.
- Sunday School and Wednesday youth programming are organized and effective for those who attend.
- Strong youth and family ministry, with a shared youth director between churches.

3. Community Outreach and Service

- Community involvement and outreach efforts continue, such as hosting church suppers, potluck meals, and hunger programs.
- Efforts to serve the community are consistent, with outreach extending to new members and shared spaces with other congregations.

4. Volunteerism and Leadership

- Small but committed leadership taking initiative on important decisions.
- Volunteers help with regular activities, such as maintaining the building and cemetery.
- Some congregational functions rely on the same group of people, which can limit involvement.

5. Financial Stability and Stewardship

- Finances and stewardship are stable, and online giving is functioning well.
- Despite smaller attendance, giving remains consistent.
- Volunteer-driven efforts help maintain financial and operational aspects of the congregation.

6. Reengagement and Social Connections

- There is a reemergence of committees and increased lay ownership of ministry.
- Post-COVID reengagement is progressing, with informal social gatherings and small group opportunities.
- Fellowship events, such as Sr. Lites and WELCA gatherings, are ongoing and building social connections.

Where does your congregation struggle?

1. Membership and Attendance

- Shrinking worship attendance across churches.
- Struggling to retain and attract younger families and young adults.
- Difficulty getting members and families to stay engaged beyond Sunday School.
- Retention of current members and outreach to inactive ones.

2. Volunteerism and Engagement

- Lack of participation from members, with the same few people doing the work.
- Struggles with finding enough people to volunteer for projects, and burnout among current volunteers.
- Difficulty getting more people involved in church life and activities.
- Volunteer shortages for key functions such as worship assistance and fellowship events.

3. Finances and Stewardship

- Financial difficulties, especially post-pandemic, with giving not keeping up with attendance.
- Challenges in meeting the budget and ensuring stewardship.
- Difficulty growing a sense of stewardship and generosity among members.
- Concerns about how financial resources are allocated, with a lack of support for ministry programming.

4. Leadership and Staffing

- Issues with finding and keeping a pastor, and struggles during staff transitions.
- Internal conflicts and cliques within the congregation affecting decision-making and relationships.
- Leadership and conflict resolution challenges, with some members resistant to change.
- Struggles with defining vision and mission clearly.

5. Reaching Younger Generations

- Struggles with engaging and retaining younger members and young families.
- Difficulty in attracting young single adults and keeping them active in church.
- Sunday School and youth programs face challenges in re-engaging students after confirmation.

6. Outreach and Connection

- Difficulty in welcoming new members, especially those from different nationalities and backgrounds.
- Limited outreach efforts and struggles to connect with the broader community.
- Inward focus, with a need to reimagine ministry outside the church walls.
- Limited social activities, with fellowship events often poorly attended.

Where does your congregation need help?

1. Stewardship and Financial Sustainability

- Growing stewardship and shifting from a scarcity mindset to one of generosity.
- Struggles with meeting financial goals, budget shortfalls, and funding for building maintenance.
- Increasing donations and giving, potentially through estate gifts or other forms of financial support.
- Need for long-term financial planning, especially in declining rural areas.

2. Staffing and Leadership

- Help with staffing, including finding a pastor, writing job descriptions, and planning for future leadership transitions.
- Supporting part-time staffing positions and addressing volunteer burnout.
- Encouraging more lay leadership and volunteer development.
- Need for strategic planning and vision development for the next 5 years.

3. Youth and Family Engagement

- Engaging youth, particularly junior and senior high students, and keeping them involved.
- Need for a youth minister who aligns with the congregation's values.
- Attracting and retaining young families while balancing the needs of older members.
- Developing programs for confirmation, Sunday school, and small group ministry.

4. Outreach and Community Connection

- Strengthening outreach efforts to engage the local community beyond church walls.
- Finding ways to invite and welcome the community into worship and faith activities.
- Connecting the congregation with the larger church in positive and meaningful ways.
- Bringing the church's mission outside of the building and into the wider community.

5. Worship and Spiritual Growth

- Developing contemporary worship services and fostering a deeper sense of worship and awe.
- Encouraging spiritual growth and adult education through regular Bible studies and faith development opportunities.
- Increasing congregational participation and aligning worship with the church's mission.
- Balancing traditional worship with the need for innovative approaches that engage younger generations.

6. Constitution and Structural Updates

- Updating the church's constitution and streamlining administrative tasks across multiple congregations.

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- Navigating the challenges of maintaining church buildings and property with declining participation.
 - Encouraging strategic discussions about letting go of buildings/endowments to focus on helping people.
 - Addressing internal dynamics and boundaries within the congregation.