

Summary
Listening Sessions
Southwestern Minnesota Synod
10/31/24

What excites you the most about your congregation?

Youth and Family Engagement

- Appreciation for children and youth by all ages.
- Strong youth programs with involvement in outreach, ministry, and activities.
- Youth establishing relationships across age levels.
- Youth involved in all activities with increasing numbers.

Community and Partnerships

- Active partnerships with other congregations and local organizations (e.g., police department, LSS meals).
- Community outreach and involvement in local projects.

Congregational Growth

- Increased attendance and steady growth.
- New leadership and positive energy for future changes.

New Ideas

- Willingness to try new things and adapt

Worship

- Enthusiasm for worship
- A mix of modern services and traditional ones.
- Opportunities for worship and fellowship, including food, singing, and weekly services.

Fellowship

- Support for each other in times of need, such as during deaths.

In what area does your congregation excel the most?

Community Engagement and Outreach

- Strong involvement in community service, including food pantries, clothing for foster children, and support for family needs.
- Various programs for engaging and inviting the community, such as children's programming, after-school programs, and VBS.

Hospitality and Welcoming Atmosphere

- Welcoming and nonjudgmental environment with a focus on accepting each other across differences.
- Consistent hospitality efforts, from welcoming at the door to hosting funerals and community meals.
- Emphasis on making everyone feel included, with a "come as you are" approach.

Support and Care for Members

- Family support, end-of-life care, and grief care.
- Strong faith formation programs across age groups, along with youth camps and mission trips.
- Members support each other, work well together, and readily offer help when needed.

Leadership and Volunteerism

- Council and members show willingness to take on leadership roles and contribute to visioning and planning.
- Volunteers are active and willing to step up for various projects, often without much prompting.
- Leadership excels at managing multiple congregations and adapting to transitions smoothly.

Children/Youth Ministry

- Children's programming
- Youth Ministry

Where does your congregation feel stuck?

Generational and Cultural Shifts

- Struggles with traditional leadership models and older members reluctant to pass the torch.
- Difficulty adapting to changes in church attendance habits, especially post-COVID.

Engaging Younger Generations

- Challenges engaging youth and younger families, who often have busy schedules and don't consistently attend worship.

Staffing and Volunteer Engagement

- Difficulty finding and retaining staff, including youth leaders and Christian Education Coordinators.
- Reduced volunteerism and challenges balancing staff and volunteer duties.
- Congregation relies heavily on pastors for responsibilities that could be shared by lay members.

Financial and Structural Challenges

- Issues with balancing the budget and effectively using available funds.
- Church funding structures are often controlled by specific groups, limiting broader participation in decision-making.

Inclusion and Outreach

- Difficulty connecting with diverse community members.
- Reluctance to support external programs financially or engage in non-traditional forms of ministry.

What is your greatest hope for your congregation? How could support from outside the congregation (whether the synod or another congregation) make that hope a reality?

Grounded in Faith

- People will know they are loved
- Jesus
- Real grace
- People excited about their faith

Connect with Younger Generations

- Bridging gaps between different age groups and engaging the periphery of the congregation.
- Genuine connection and community with kids under 20

Developing Leadership and Lay Involvement

- Building a robust lay leadership program, encouraging lay people to step up and lead where possible.
- Involving younger parents and empowering lay ministers, facilitated by external support from the synod.
- Seeking guidance on strategic planning and developing new ways for lay leadership to contribute effectively.

Ensuring Sustainability and Adaptability

- Hope for survival and growth through adaptive models, partnerships, and a creative approach to staffing.
- Support from larger congregations and the synod to help small rural churches and collaborative programs.
- Willingness to experiment with new approaches, embracing learning from both successes and failures