

Southwestern Minnesota Synod Bishop Election Report

Research, Analysis and Data

ELCA Churchwide Organization

February 2021

Territory, Population and Baptized Membership

The Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America covers 18,944 square miles. Geographically, it ranks 37th out of ELCA synods. The smallest area covered by a synod is the Saint Paul Area, 1,535 square miles; the largest area covered is Alaska, 571,951 square miles. The median territory covered is 22,000 miles. Twenty synods in the ELCA cover 10,000 square miles or less. Figure 1 shows the territory covered for the synods in Minnesota.

Figure 1: Territory of the Minnesota Synods in Square Miles

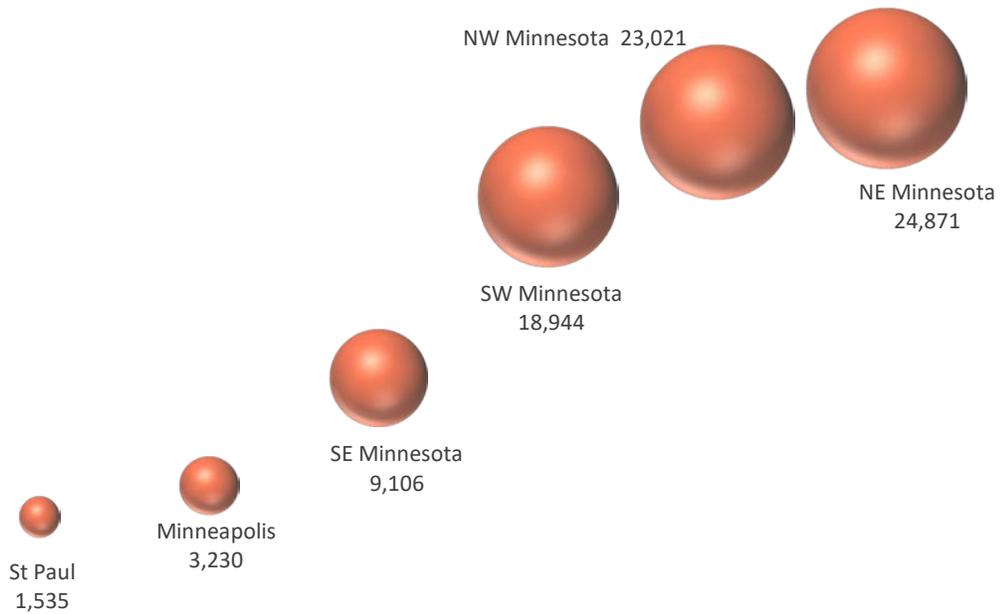
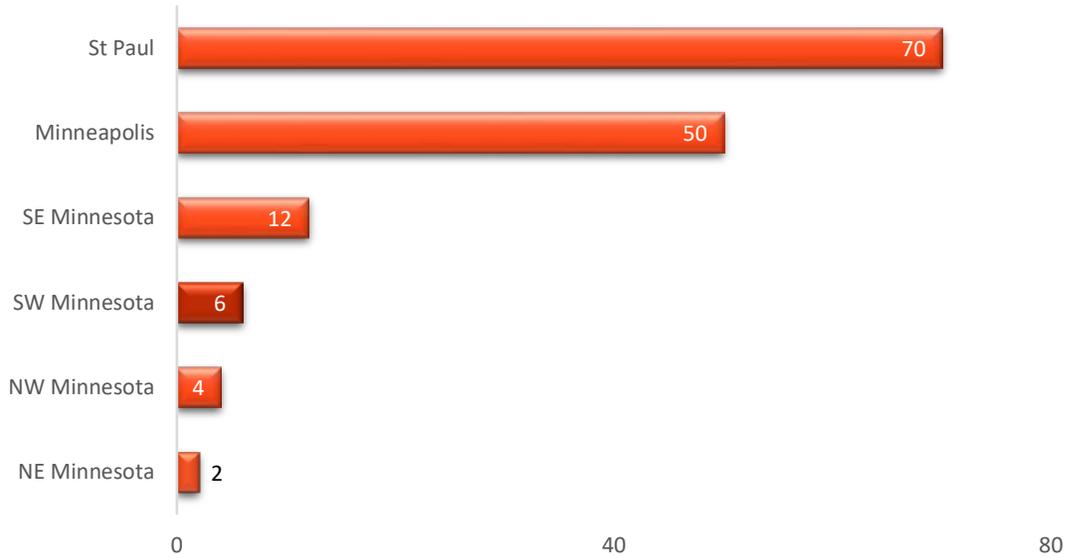


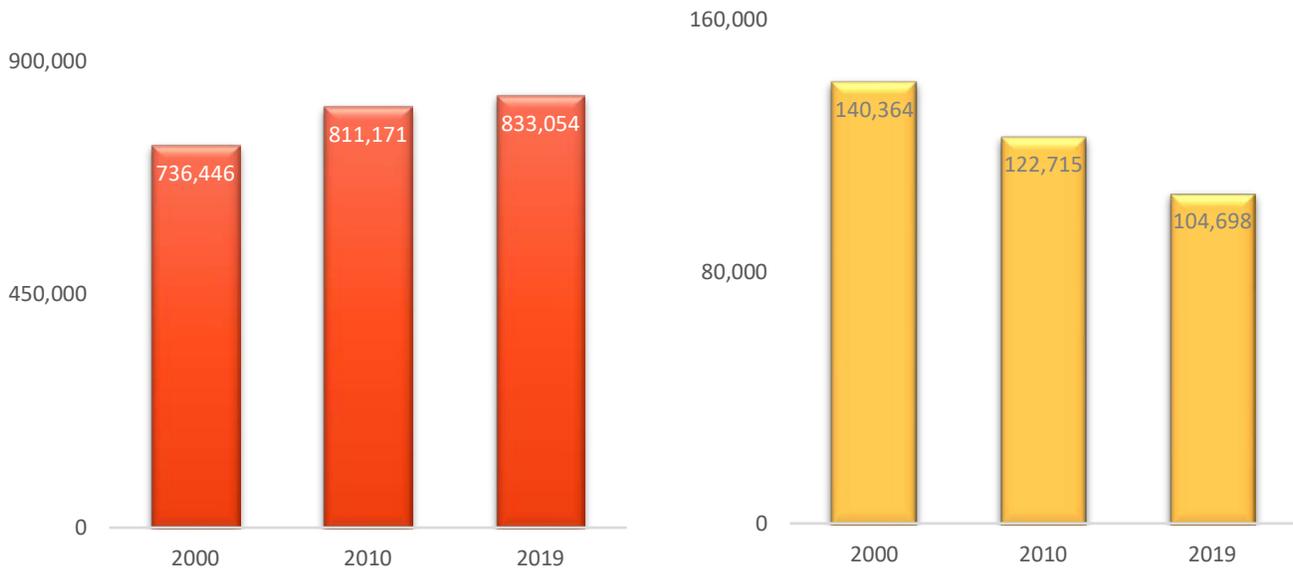
Figure 2 shows the number of ELCA Lutherans per square mile in the synods compared in this report. There were 104,698 baptized ELCA Lutherans in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod in 2019, which is 5.5 baptized members per square mile. Saint Paul Area and Minneapolis Area are densely populated with baptized Lutherans.

Figure 2: Baptized ELCA Lutherans per Square Mile



According to the 2000 US Census, the population of the territory of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod was 736,446. The 2010 population was 811,171; the population was estimated to be 833,054 in 2019. The baptized membership has declined from 140,364 in 2000 to 104,698 in 2019. Baptized membership has declined by 25 percent while the overall population has increased 13 percent. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3: Southwestern Minnesota Population and ELCA Baptized Members



Worship Attendance and Congregations

At the end of 2019, the Southwestern Minnesota Synod had 237 congregations. In 2009, there were 264.

In 2019, the baptized membership of the synod was 104,698 or an average of 442 per congregation. The average number of baptized members in a congregation in the ELCA was 364. Also, in 2019, the congregations of the synod baptized 1,042 children and 21 adults while also affirming the faith of 383 adults.

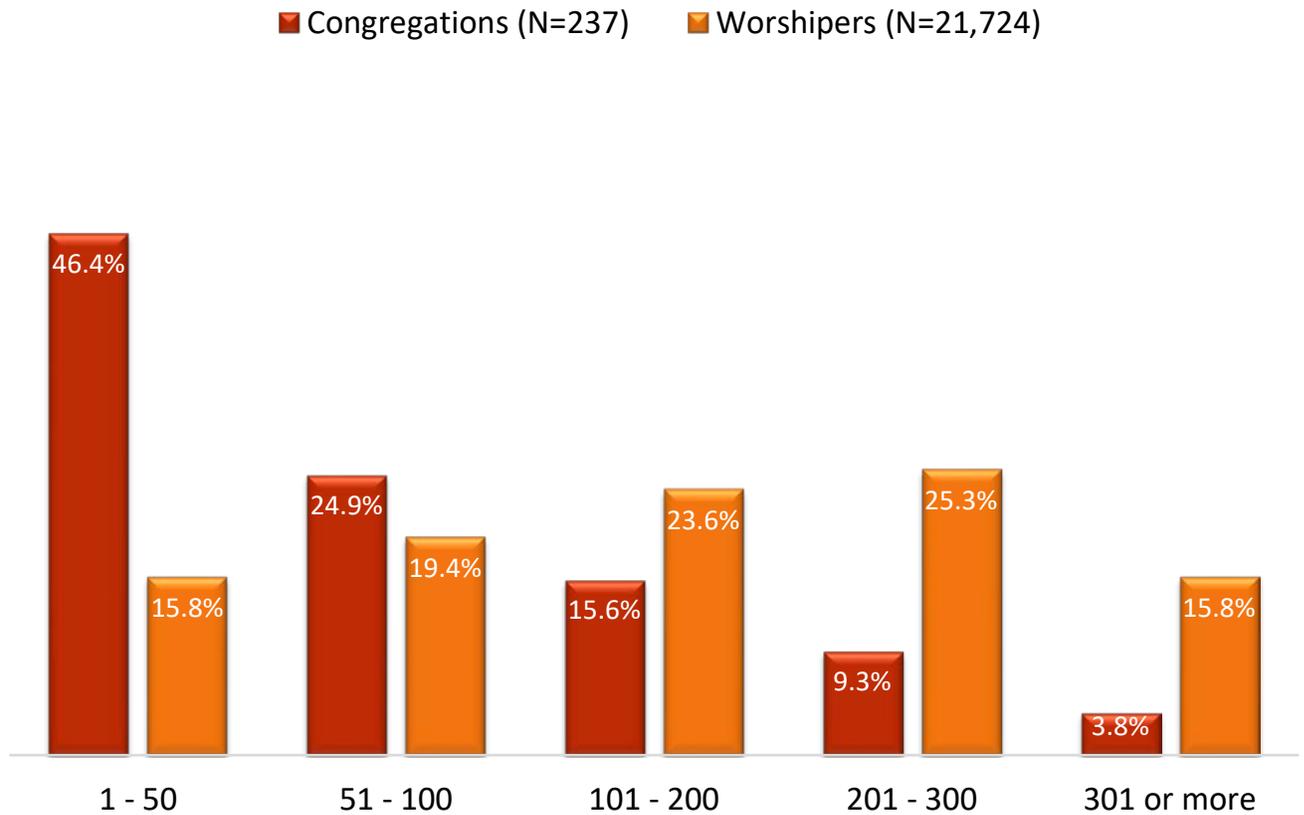
In 2019, the aggregate weekly worship attendance in the synod was 21,724 (21% of the baptized members) with an average of 91 in worship per congregation. The average weekly attendance for a typical congregation in the ELCA in 2019 was 92 or 26 percent of the baptized. Table 1 shows average weekly attendance for the synods of Minnesota and the ELCA.

Table 1: Average Weekly Attendance 2019

Synod	Average Weekly Attendance	Percentage of Baptized Members Attending Worship
Saint Paul Area	24,925	23.4%
Minneapolis Area	35,501	22.0%
NW Minnesota	17,738	21.2%
NE Minnesota	11,261	20.7%
SW Minnesota	21,724	20.7%
SE Minnesota	20,237	18.1%
ELCA	831,520	25.5%

Seventy-one percent of the congregations in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod had 100 people or fewer attending worship during an average week in 2019 (see Figure 4) while these same congregations accounted for 35 percent of all worshipers in the synod. Forty-one percent of the people in the pews are in congregations worshipping more than 200 people per week. Basically, a high percentage of the congregations in the synod are small, but a high percentage of people worship in larger churches. The three congregations with the highest attendance are Celebration in Sartell, Glenwood in Glenwood and Bethlehem in Saint Cloud. In 2009, the aggregate weekly worship attendance in the synod was 32,590. The average number attending worship per congregation during an average week in 2009 was 123. Since 2009, the percentage of congregations with 50 or fewer in worship has increased from 32 percent to 46 percent. The number of congregations worshipping over 200 per week has decreased from 20 percent to 13 percent in the same time frame.

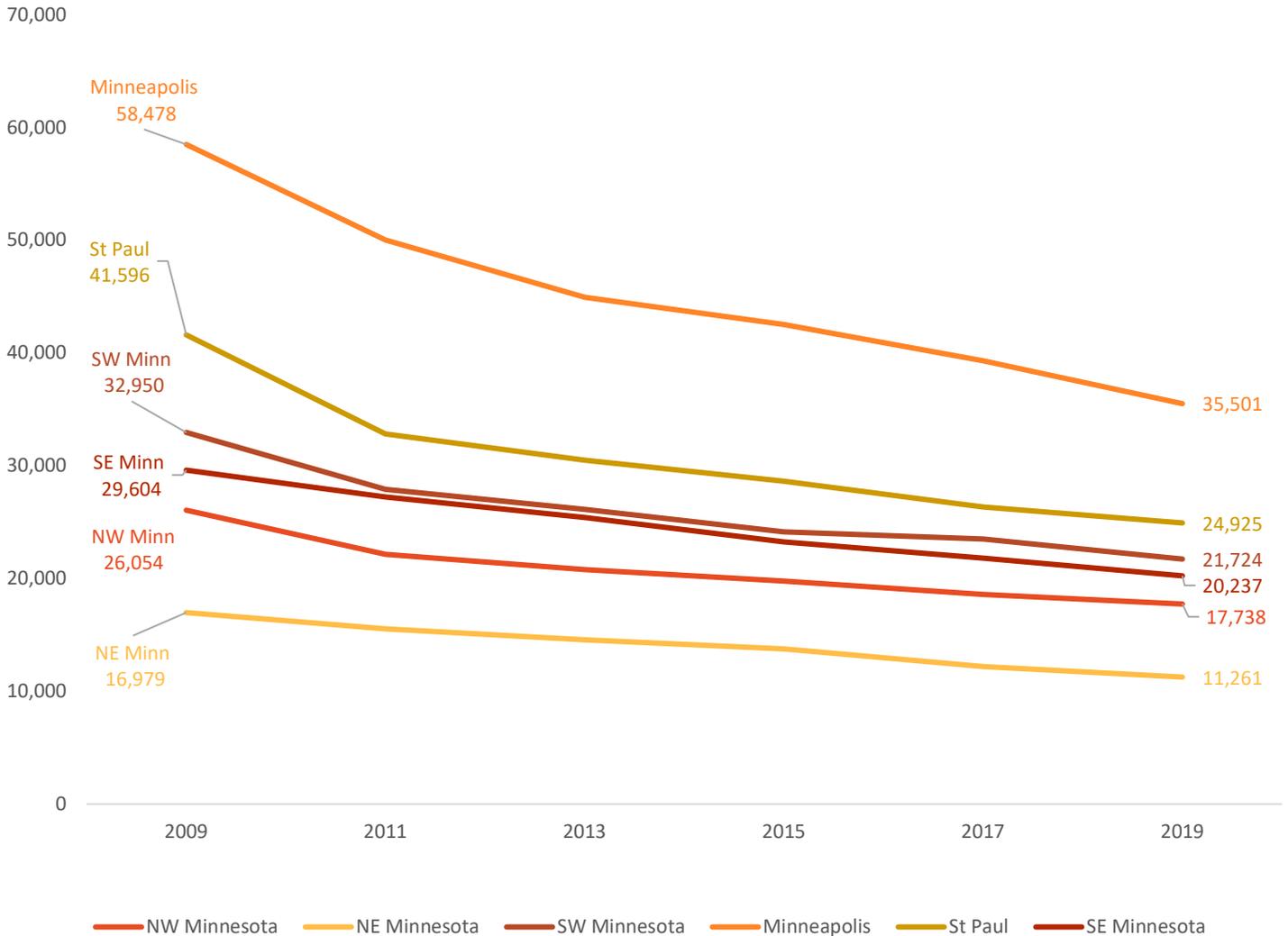
Figure 4: Percent of Congregations and Worshipers by Typical Worship Attendance for the Congregations of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod in 2019*



*Of the 237 congregations in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod, 46.4% (red bars) have 50 or fewer people in worship in a typical week. Of the 21,724 people in worship each week (orange bars), 25.3% are in congregations with 201-300 people attending worship.

Figure 5 presents the trend in worship attendance for the Minnesota synods for 2009 to 2019. All synods have seen declines in the past ten years: Saint Paul Area -40 percent, Minneapolis Area -39 percent, SW Minnesota and NE Minnesota -34 percent, NW Minnesota and SE Minnesota -32 percent. The decline in average attendance for the ELCA from 2009 to 2019 was -36 percent.

Figure 5: Change in Worship Attendance from 2009 to 2019



Giving and Mission Support

Total giving (undesignated and designated giving) from the members of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod in 2019 was \$42,346,240; the average amount given per attendee was \$1,949 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Total Giving per Worship Attendee

Synod	Total Giving Per Worship - 2009*	Total Giving Per Worship Attendee - 2019
Saint Paul Area	\$2,221	\$2,955
Minneapolis Area	\$2,102	\$2,673
NE Minnesota	\$1,872	\$2,190
SE Minnesota	\$1,801	\$2,189
NW Minnesota	\$1,618	\$2,023
SW Minnesota	\$1,625	\$1,949
ELCA	\$2,062	\$2,470

*2009 dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. The actual amount in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod in 2009 was \$1,349.

In 2009, total giving to the congregations in the synod was \$44,457,718 (\$52,969,157 in 2019 dollars). The average amount given per worship attendee in 2009 was \$1,364 (\$1,625 in 2019 dollars). Despite giving \$342 more per year on average, these attendees have been unable to offset losses due to the overall decline in worship attendance.

Operating expenses in the synod have increased as a percentage of total giving from 85 percent in 2009 to 88 percent in 2019. This mirrors the trend throughout the ELCA. Operating expenses for all ELCA congregations have increased from 86 percent of total giving in 2009 to 89 percent in 2019.

Mission support is the amount of undesignated money shared through congregations for the ministry of synods and the ELCA churchwide expression. Table 3 presents mission support both as a percentage of undesignated giving from congregations and per congregation.

Table 3: Mission Support as a Percentage of Congregational Undesignated Giving and per Congregation – 2019¹

Synod	% Congregational Undesignated Giving for Mission Support	Mission Support per Congregation
NE Minnesota	4.89%	\$7,652
NW Minnesota	4.42%	\$6,042
SW Minnesota	4.33%	\$6,896
SE Minnesota	4.22%	\$9,722
Minneapolis Area	3.63%	\$20,624
Saint Paul Area	3.18%	\$18,105
ELCA	5.37%	\$10,467

The Synod Office and Its Financial Resources

Section 10.21. of the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* outlines the primary purposes of synod offices.

10.21. Each synod, in partnership with the churchwide organization, shall bear primary responsibility for the oversight of the life and mission of this church in its territory. In fulfillment of this role and consistent with policies and procedures of this church, the synod shall:

- a. Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered leaders in the synod;
- b. Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations;
- c. Strengthen interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and foster relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as ecumenical partners.
- d. Interpret the work of this church to congregations and to the public on the territory of the synod.

Despite the consistency of responsibilities, the amount of money available to synod offices to carry out these responsibilities varies widely. Table 4 shows mission support figures for the synods in Minnesota.

Table 4: Mission Support in 2019*

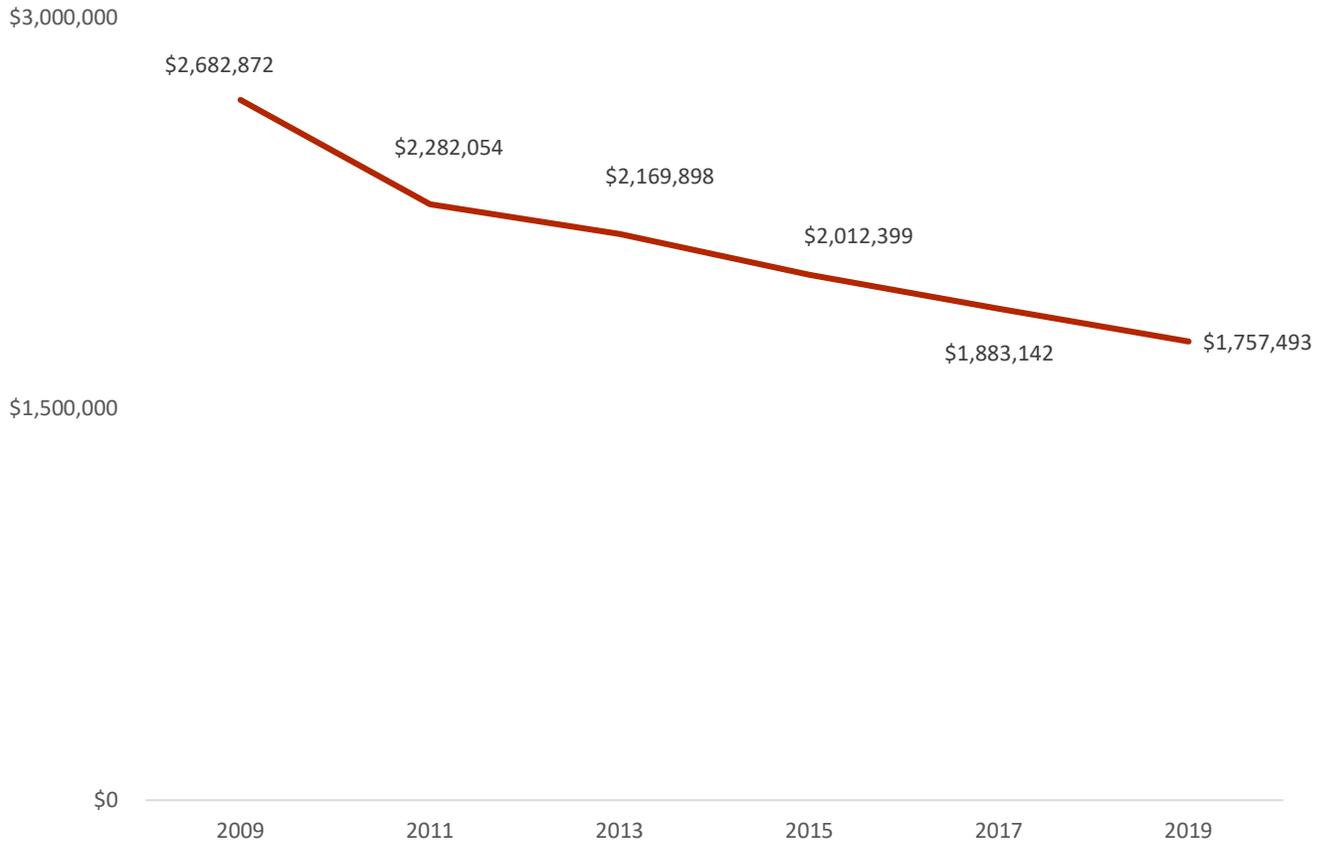
Synod	From Congregations	% to CWO	Amount to CWO	Amount Remaining in Synod
Minneapolis Area	\$2,972,102	50.00%	\$1,486,051	\$1,486,051
Saint Paul Area	\$1,865,216	45.00%	\$839,347	\$1,025,869
SE Minnesota	\$1,649,602	48.00%	\$791,809	\$857,793
SW Minnesota	\$1,757,493	51.50%	\$905,109	\$852,384
NW Minnesota	\$1,375,828	47.00%	\$646,639	\$729,189
NE Minnesota	\$1,018,698	49.00%	\$499,162	\$519,536

* It is impossible to calculate an exact percentage share for the ELCA as a whole. Some synods share a dollar amount instead of a percentage of mission support. Also, five synods are part of the Mission Support Experiment and are sharing at a reduced percentage in order to fund the DEM salary and congregational vitality grants. According to the Churchwide audited financial statements, the 65 synods shared \$42,589,112 in mission support with the Churchwide Organization in 2019. According to the summary of Form A congregational reports, the congregations shared \$93,907,971 with the 65 synods.

¹ Table 4 is calculated with Form A data supplied by the congregations. Tables 5 and 6 are calculated with the audited financial statements provided to the ELCA Church Council.

Figure 6 presents the amount of mission support income shared with the Southwestern Minnesota Synod office from the congregations of the synod from 2009 to 2019.

Figure 6: Congregational Giving to Mission Support for the Southwestern Minnesota Synod from 2009 to 2019²



² These figures have been adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. The actual dollar amount in 2009 was \$2,251,770.