



Oregon Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

OREGON SYNOD TREND ANALYSIS 2018

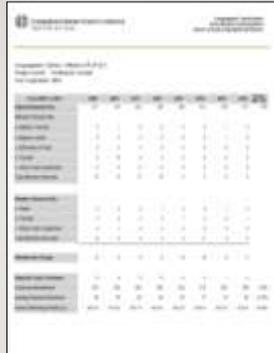
ASSESSMENT AND VISITATION PROCESS

“Oregon Synod Trend Analysis 2018” has been prepared by the Oregon Synod, ELCA, staff and DEM Mission Table for use with a series of Oregon Synod Regional Gatherings held in April and May of 2018. The presentation shares data, trends and conclusions gathered by Oregon Synod congregations. Data of this type has a useful life of no more than three years.

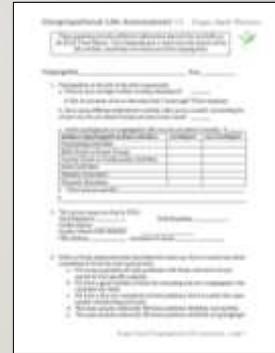
ASSESSMENT TOOLS

1. ELCA Trend Report
2. Oregon Synod Congregational Life Assessment

<https://vimeo.com/260782023>



	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Members	100	100	100	100	100	100
Worship Attendance	100	100	100	100	100	100
Financial Health	100	100	100	100	100	100
Leadership	100	100	100	100	100	100
Community Outreach	100	100	100	100	100	100
Facilities	100	100	100	100	100	100
Technology	100	100	100	100	100	100
Communication	100	100	100	100	100	100
Partnerships	100	100	100	100	100	100
Overall Score	100	100	100	100	100	100



Oregon Synod Congregational Life Assessment - Form A & C

1. Complete the following information:

2. Complete the following information:

3. Complete the following information:

4. Complete the following information:

5. Complete the following information:

6. Complete the following information:

7. Complete the following information:

8. Complete the following information:

9. Complete the following information:

10. Complete the following information:

11. Complete the following information:

12. Complete the following information:

13. Complete the following information:

14. Complete the following information:

15. Complete the following information:

16. Complete the following information:

17. Complete the following information:

18. Complete the following information:

19. Complete the following information:

20. Complete the following information:

21. Complete the following information:

22. Complete the following information:

23. Complete the following information:

24. Complete the following information:

25. Complete the following information:

26. Complete the following information:

27. Complete the following information:

28. Complete the following information:

29. Complete the following information:

30. Complete the following information:

31. Complete the following information:

32. Complete the following information:

33. Complete the following information:

34. Complete the following information:

35. Complete the following information:

36. Complete the following information:

37. Complete the following information:

38. Complete the following information:

39. Complete the following information:

40. Complete the following information:

41. Complete the following information:

42. Complete the following information:

43. Complete the following information:

44. Complete the following information:

45. Complete the following information:

46. Complete the following information:

47. Complete the following information:

48. Complete the following information:

49. Complete the following information:

50. Complete the following information:

51. Complete the following information:

52. Complete the following information:

53. Complete the following information:

54. Complete the following information:

55. Complete the following information:

56. Complete the following information:

57. Complete the following information:

58. Complete the following information:

59. Complete the following information:

60. Complete the following information:

61. Complete the following information:

62. Complete the following information:

63. Complete the following information:

64. Complete the following information:

65. Complete the following information:

66. Complete the following information:

67. Complete the following information:

68. Complete the following information:

69. Complete the following information:

70. Complete the following information:

71. Complete the following information:

72. Complete the following information:

73. Complete the following information:

74. Complete the following information:

75. Complete the following information:

76. Complete the following information:

77. Complete the following information:

78. Complete the following information:

79. Complete the following information:

80. Complete the following information:

81. Complete the following information:

82. Complete the following information:

83. Complete the following information:

84. Complete the following information:

85. Complete the following information:

86. Complete the following information:

87. Complete the following information:

88. Complete the following information:

89. Complete the following information:

90. Complete the following information:

91. Complete the following information:

92. Complete the following information:

93. Complete the following information:

94. Complete the following information:

95. Complete the following information:

96. Complete the following information:

97. Complete the following information:

98. Complete the following information:

99. Complete the following information:

100. Complete the following information:

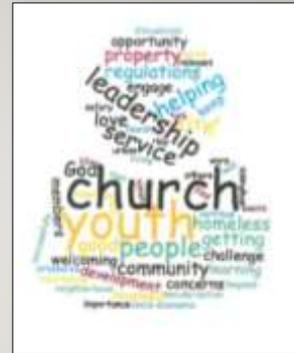
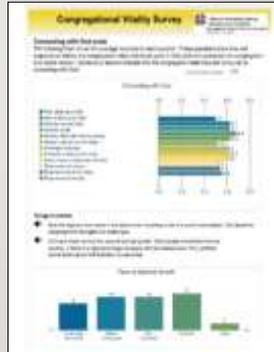
An ELCA “Trend Report” is available for each congregation of the Oregon Synod at www.elca.org. This data is collected and updated annually based on a congregation’s ELCA Parochial Report, forms A & C.

The “Oregon Synod Congregational Life Assessment” is a tool unique to the Oregon Synod. It can easily be filled out by the church council or a small work group of members. Both of these forms report “hard data” – that is concrete information about finances, worship attendance numbers, etc. These reports are as accurate as the information given to the church by a congregation.

ASSESSMENT TOOLS

3. Congregational Vitality Survey (CVS)
4. Oregon Synod Visitation

<https://vimeo.com/260782023>



The “Congregational Vitality Survey” is an ELCA tool that the Oregon Synod has been helpful in developing. This survey is based on questions asked of church members about their impressions and experience of their own congregation. For example, “Do you find Sunday morning worship meaningful?” The goal of the survey is to reflect a congregation’s own sense of vitality and sustainability. The more members who take the survey the stronger the results.

During the fall of 2017 the Oregon Synod invited congregations into a Visitation process. Volunteers engaged 10-12 members of participating congregations in one to one conversations around select questions. Notes and data from these visits were collated for us by the University of Colorado, and several summary pieces from these conversations were shared with those congregations that took part. Like the Vitality Surveys the Visitation process gives us “soft data” – that is a sense of how members think or feel about their congregation. These tools are best used in conversation with members of those congregations that participated. “Members said . . . Does that seem right to you? How do you understand these perspectives?”

A fuller explanation of these tools and thoughts on how to interpret them is available through a video found at <https://vimeo.com/260782023>

WHERE DID THE DATA COME FROM?



Congregational Vitality Survey (CVS)

- New Fall 2017= 37
2016 or older= 38

Total = 75

Congregation Life Assessment 29



Assessment and Visitation Responses

- Visitation/Interviews
58 congregations - 568 interviews



Congregations/ministries not participating 25%



This slide shows how many Oregon Synod congregations worked with each of these four tools (understanding that every congregation has a Trend Report.) 75% of Oregon Synod congregations have been involved with some – or several – aspects of this overall effort. This is amazing!!

ALL DATA is about congregations, not the synod as a whole. NO QUESTIONS about “the synod” were asked in these surveys or processes. However, it has been interesting and useful to collate this data and look at trends for the synod as a whole. This presentation is about such trends.

CONSISTENT STRENGTHS IDENTIFIED FROM CVS

- Very positive view of their congregation and leaders.
- Worship life ... Nurtures Faith, is Joyful, and full of God's Presence.
- Doing God's Work in congregation and community.
- Visitors are welcomed and accepted.
- Strong Sense of Belonging and Commitment.
- Most congregations believe they are vital communities.



This slide lists a few consistent strengths reported by congregations that did the Congregational Vitality Survey. Again, these strengths reflect congregations' own understanding of themselves.

GENERAL CONGREGATION CHARACTERISTICS FROM VISITATION INTERVIEWS

About the Congregation:

- Strong Relationships, help each other
- Welcoming and Friendly
- Engaged in the community, engage others beyond members, being a good neighbor
- Helping others through community service
- Financial pressures around sustainability
- Pressure caused by national political situation, incivility and hate actions

(some congregations)



Personal conversations and interviews with some 568 congregation members around the state reflect similar sentiments about congregations as were evident in the Congregational Vitality Surveys.

WHAT GOD WANTS FOR AND FROM YOUR CONGREGATION

- Deepening spiritual life and relationship with God
- Courage to serve others; love and serve
- Relationships with neighbors
- Listen to one another



The question, “What does God want FOR and FROM your congregation?” was asked of church members in the Visitation process. This seems to have been one of the most difficult questions of people to answer.

THREE GROUPINGS/TRENDS ARE EVIDENT...

- A. 65% Congregations report trying to **maintain ministry and community life.**
- B. 20% Congregations ranked themselves **highest in Vitality** *(according to CVS)*
- C. 15% Congregations show us they are **in crisis** ... or have had to right size their structure/staff



From the large number of interviews, Congregational Vitality Surveys, and Congregational Life Assessments three groupings of congregations can be seen. We have defined these as follows.

- A. 65% Congregations report trying to **maintain ministry and community life.**
- B. 20% Congregations ranked themselves **highest in Vitality** *(according to CVS)*
- C. 15% Congregations show us they are **in crisis** ... or have had to right size their structure/staff

GROUP A - (65% FOCUS ON MAINTENANCE)

- Being a good neighbor
- Aging Community with few or no young families & kids
- Find divisive issues—past and present—hard to discuss
- Facility challenges...aging buildings; low upkeep investment

- Primary outreach in providing or funding community social services; worship and music a distant second
- Focus on homelessness (vs. affordable housing)
- See themselves as perseverant and scrappy
- Desire to be more accepting; may be considering RIC

Two thirds of Oregon Synod congregations report working to **maintain ministry and community life** in a rapidly changing world. They are challenged with financial viability and aging membership, and are often not able to offer the breadth of programming and ministry they once did. Most of these congregations, however, continue to invest heavily in local needs such as hunger and homelessness. They are doing the best they can to continue doing what they have always done – provide worship, pastoral care for their members, and minister to their community.

The characteristics listed here are shared by most of the congregations in this group.

“RIC” refers to “Reconciled in Christ” and is a process of congregational conversation around understanding, respecting and including people who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender. This demographic has a long history of exclusion and prejudice by the church and congregations find it helpful in our day and age to look at this all together. An “RIC” congregation is one that has worked through this process and adopted a statement of welcome which they put in their bulletin, on the church sign and website, newsletter, etc.

GROUP B - (20% HIGHEST VITALITY SCORES)

- Strong relationships with non-members and community
- Political-social spectrum; able to talk about anything
- Lack of hatred, hypocrisy or judgment; RIC is long past
- Lived out spirituality vs being religious

- Empowered laity
- Focus on affordable housing (vs. just homelessness)
- Advocate for justice, peace, immigration & environment
- 1 to 1s in worship/listening seasons; community organizing
- Time is a pressure especially for families with children

The Congregational Vitality Survey offers congregations a numerical “vitality” score and a numerical “sustainability” score. Some 20% of Oregon Synod congregations scored in the top percentiles of these two scales. Interestingly, these congregations display some different characteristics than those congregations working to maintain ministry and community life. In general, this second group of congregations reports strong relationships, both personally and as an institution, with other community institutions and individuals. They are able to talk about difficult issues in a productive manner, whether they be social or internal issues. They look ‘upstream’ at issues, not only helping the homeless or hungry individuals, but working on issues such as affordable housing and causes of hunger. RIC processes for these congregation are generally a part of their history, and inclusion and respect for diversity is an essential dimension of their current self-understanding.

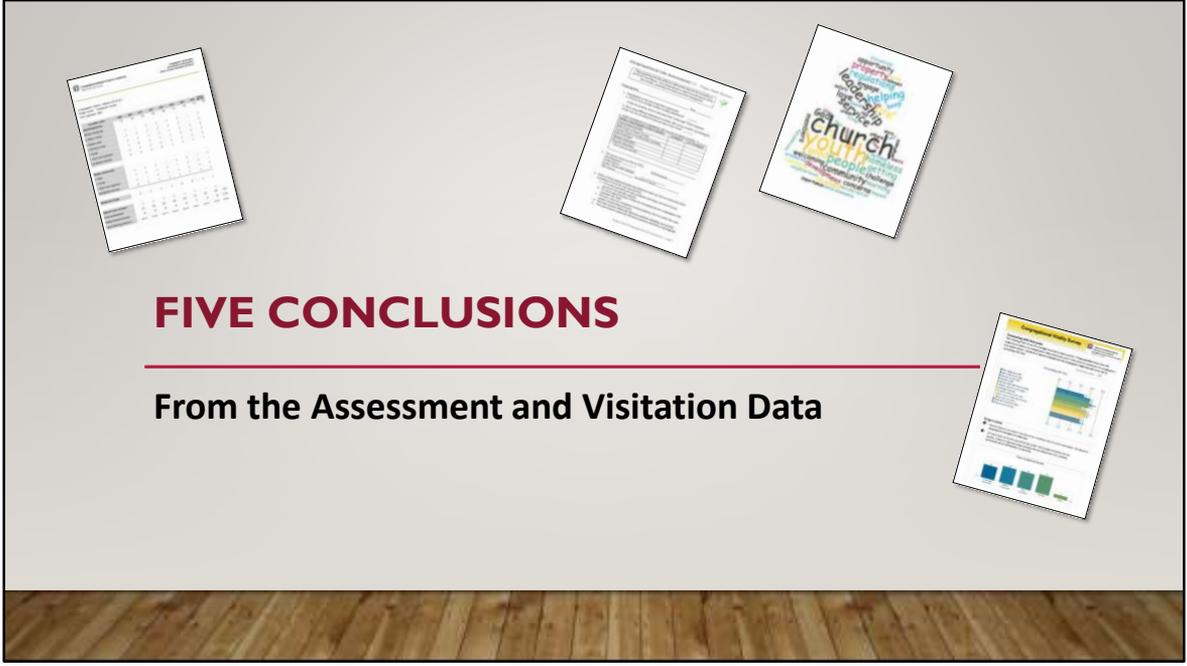
GROUP C - (15% IN CRISIS)

Many of the trends identified with Group 'A' also apply here.

- **Aging community**
- **Service/charity ministries**
- **Desire for growth with no clear idea of how to make that happen.**

- **PLUS** ... Not enough people or resources to take next steps
- Limited or no pastoral leadership for the congregation
- Poor communication, especially on divisive issues
- In some congregations—destructive behaviors related to congregation conflicts e.g. secret meetings

A number of congregations in the Oregon Synod are in various forms of crisis. This may be financial and/or communal, but their current status seems unsustainable. The left hand panel of this slide shares characteristics they have in common with congregations seeking to maintain ministry and community life. The right hand panel shares other characteristics these congregations have in common among themselves.



The trends and ministry insights we have shared with each other in the Oregon Synod suggest some overall conclusions, directions, possibilities and road bumps for synod and congregational leaders to be aware of. **Five conclusions** are listed on the slides which follow.

I. LEADERSHIP, BOTH CLERGY AND LAY



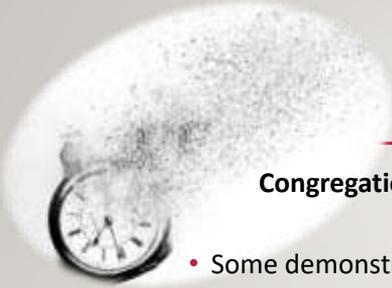
Leadership—clergy and lay—is THE critical component to vitality, positive tone and potential sustainability (or the lack thereof).

- Concern with risk avoidant leaders that refuse to act for the sake of “harmony”.
- Community is not willing to try new things and, therefore, less hopeful about the future.
- Strong sense of belonging and commitment with trusted leaders, has capacity to experiment, talk about hard issues and doing things differently.

Leadership, both clergy and lay, is absolutely key to the future of vital ministry in the Oregon Synod. The dilemma is this: vital ministry in a rapidly changing world requires risk, experimentation and “glorious failures.” Yet, risk, experimentation and failure challenges the internal harmony of a congregation.

- Risk avoidant leadership keeps congregations in old patterns where maintenance concerns increasingly eclipse mission opportunities, exacerbating a downward spiral in capacity and vitality.
- Communities which experience this downward spiral, and yet do not engage in new ventures and experiments, are less hopeful about their future.
- Conversely, data shows that congregations committed to each other, and trusted leaders, do have the capacity to experiment, talk about difficult issues and find the needed capacity to adapt to changing times.

2. SUSTAINABILITY GROUPING



Congregations are full of extraordinary people and gifts.

- Some demonstrate strengths in many areas, but no place is perfect. ***Most face critical decisions about their future.***
- By the time most congregations are willing to make the necessary changes, they no longer have the capacity - people and financial resources - to do so.

The three “Sustainability Groupings” discussed in prior slides may mask the fact that every congregation is full of **extraordinary people and gifts**. However, it is often the case that congregations wait too long, or are too risk averse, to make the necessary changes required to stay vital and alive in a changing world. Often, by the time congregations realize they need to take some risks and experiment in ministry, they no longer have the capacity to do so. We wait too long to address new challenges and opportunities.



GROUP B - (20% HIGHEST VITALITY SCORES)

These congregations had strong combined scores in vitality and sustainability. They came in **every size and configuration**.

- Large congregations with multiple staff,
- Pastoral sized e.g. 50-100 members,
- Places receiving limited pastoral coverage.

It should be noted that these issues are not issues of size, location or the part of the state a congregation is in. Group B, those congregations which scored highest in their sense of vitality and sustainability, are large and small, rural and urban, and ministering in any and all parts of the state. It is not “external” factors, or common characteristic like these that determine viability. It is the factors noted earlier for this group – trusted leadership, the ability for the congregation to talk about any and every issue, knowledge of their gifts and limitations, openness to their larger community, vital ministry addressing the real concerns of people around them, and meaningful partnerships, that seem to be associated with success.



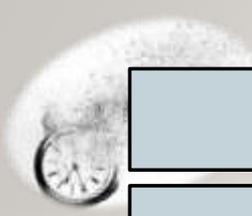
GROUP A (65% FOCUS ON MAINTENANCE)

Congregations in this group sit right on the lip of “*vital and currently viable but not sustainable*” and “*currently viable but not sustainable or vital*”.

- **Leadership is critical at this stage because decisions have to be made and this surfaces resistance.**
- The **Denial-Blaming-Shaming-Bullying cycle** is a trap for congregations who think they it will turn around without recognizing this pattern in themselves. This pattern has to change.

The 2/3 of Oregon Synod congregations that struggle to **maintain ministry and community life** are varied in size and capacity as well, but the challenges they face are surprising similar. NOW IS THE TIME for these congregations. Leadership is critical because decisions need to be made sooner rather than later to boldly address ministry opportunities and challenges – while the congregation still has capacity, both financially and in terms of leadership, to make such changes. We know, however, that such actions often surface resistance. So, the securing of a **relational culture** in which members can talk openly about any of a variety of issues is vital.

Some congregations have been observed to lapse into a **Denial-Blaming-Shaming-Bullying cycle** while trying to address change. This is wholly destructive to the ministry of any community. We are the Body of Christ, and individually members of it. The ear cannot say to the hand “we have no use for you.” Nor does it serve the body to blame the liver (or the eyes!) for failing eyesight.



GROUP C (15% IN CRISIS)

Congregations scoring below 3.8 on the CVS identified themselves as in some kind of crisis. **Intentional intervention**—internal or external—needs to be done in key areas:

- **Clear Sense of Purpose** ... focus on God's Mission,
- **Building Healthy Relationship** ... talk about hard issues
- **Right Sizing the Congregation** ... structure, staffing and facilities; what kind of intervention is required.

Those congregations that are currently in crisis seem unable to pull themselves out of decline. **Intentional intervention** is needed in such cases in one or more (often all) of the areas listed here.

- Sometimes “right sizing” the congregation is possible – which is to say that they are able to identify a ministry that is appropriate to their size, capacity and calling. They can sometimes make the changes necessary to live within new parameters of limited capacity.
- Sometimes such congregations choose to celebrate the ministry they have been privileged to participate in and realize that it is time to close their doors.



**IN OREGON OVER THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS,
CONGREGATIONS IN “CRISIS” MAY BE AS MANY
AS 40 FAITH COMMUNITIES IN THE SYNOD.**

Current Trends tell us:



25% of Oregon Synod congregations chose not to participate in any of the assessment tools used in this report, and sometimes their trend analysis data is not current. It is possible that many of these congregations fall into the “Congregations in Crisis” Group C category, and/or are Group B “Focus on Maintenance” congregations.

This suspicion, and the trends we see for successful transformation of ‘maintenance’ congregations in Group B, suggests that as many as 40 Oregon Synod congregations – over a third – will find themselves in “crisis” mode in the next 3-5 years. This is not meant as a judgement of any kind. This is simply the direction our data suggests some congregations are moving.

3. STRONG, HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS ARE PIVOTAL

- Making the transition to more vitality and sustainability, is often preceded by developing a ***culture of ever deepening relationships***. When present, managing difficult or polarizing conversations becomes much easier and even life giving.
- ***Conflict happens***; it is just handled in an open, respectful way.
- ***Listening is critical***; to God, Each Other and Neighbors.



A third conclusion drawn from synod congregational data is that **strong, healthy relationships are pivotal** to congregation transition and vitality. Those congregations that currently rate themselves high in vitality and sustainability have deeply relational, respectful ways of being, both among members and between members and the community as a whole. This is so evident that **strong, healthy relationships** should be understood both as a “best practice” and a “prerequisite” to experimentation, risk and adaptation of a congregational ministry to the needs of the world around them.

4. EQUIPPED TO SHARE FAITH



- ***Many congregations scored significantly lower when asked two questions:*** “*Congregation equips members to share their faith*” and “*I feel equipped to share my faith with others.*” When tied to “*Congregation helps people live out their faith,*” learning to share our faith becomes a synod wide priority.
- This can be caused by: (1) lack of understanding about how one shares faith, (2) communication from leaders, and/or (3) uncomfortable talking about faith and life.

Interestingly, congregations in the Oregon Synod displayed their lowest vitality scores around whether members feel equipped and able, or whether the congregation is equipping members, to **share their faith with others.**

The consistency of this feedback suggests that teaching ourselves to share our faith with care and efficacy needs to be a synod-wide priority.



5. OREGON IS TRULY UNIQUE

The reality is many rural, “conservative” communities have the same or a lower percentage of religious affiliation than Portland (the most unchurched metropolitan area in the United States). *Multnomah 35.9% - Jackson County 28.4%*

- The Oregon Synod faces even harder challenges with growing or maintaining current participation and financial support.
- Declines will be steeper and more dramatic in the next five years with more and more congregations failing to be sustainable.

Portland was in the news a few years back as being the most ‘unchurched’ city in the United States. Many of us in the Oregon Synod (including staff) have assumed that Oregon otherwise reflected what is believed to be the trend in the rest of the country – that is the formal, religious affiliation is higher in rural areas of the state – often parts of a state which are also more conservative both socially and politically. This has proven to be a mistaken assumption.

According to U.S. census data Multnomah County, which contains a large portion of Portland residents, 35.9% of its residents claim a formal, religious affiliation. Rural counties in Oregon – from the same statistical sources – generally show that residents of their counties claim a formal, religious, affiliation at a lower rate, often in the mid to high 20s. Check <http://www.city-data.com/county/religion/Multnomah-County-OR.html> (Replacing “Multnomah” with the name of your county) if you are curious about your area.

There are many wonderful ways in which Oregon is truly unique, and each and every one of them invites us into vital ministry in different ways than other parts of the country. Some aspects of Oregon’s uniqueness are deeply challenging. Others are wonderfully inviting.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT FOR YOU?

WHAT DOES GOD WANT FROM YOU

- FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?
- FOR YOUR FAMILY?
- FOR THE GOSPEL?

