



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
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*ALWAYS BEING MADE NEW:  
THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE ELCA*

# ***SYNODICAL RENEWING CONGREGATIONS STRATEGIES***

## **Interim Evaluation**

For  
Oregon Synod  
Transformational Leadership  
in an Area Ministry Strategy  
**12/9/2016**

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## Executive Summary

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This is a retrospective study investigating the longer term impacts of a congregational renewal intervention. In 2013, seven congregations participated for two years in an area ministry strategy coordinated by the Oregon Synod. The object of this strategy was to renew and transform participating congregations and leaders while engaging their context to have a positive impact. A 2015 comprehensive ministry review documented the overall project's impact. This report focuses on renewal and transformation within individual congregations. In addition to re-taking the Congregational Vitality Survey, leaders from congregations were interviewed in 2016 using a new reflection tool designed to measure the outcomes associated with renewal efforts.

All but one congregation showed multiple signs of renewal three years after the intervention began. The degree of renewal appeared to be related to the initial vitality of the congregation and how deeply they engaged core practices of spiritual discernment (biblical work and prayer), listening, experimenting and reflecting. While there were signs of renewal in congregation's relationships with God, each other and the world, there was no evidence of systematic increases in worship attendance, mission support or financial sustainability in response to that renewal.

If the primary goal of these interventions is to help congregations become more missional (improved connections with God, each other and the world), then this appears to be a promising approach. However, if another goal is to help congregations become more sustainable both now and into the future, an additional intervention appears to be needed.

Presently the ELCA is supporting 11 other synods in renewal strategies similar to the Oregon model. Findings from this study suggest:

1. Finding ways to maximize congregation-wide participation in core practices is critical.
2. Synods may want to adapt interventions and/or expectations based on the initial vitality of the congregations. Those that are less vital appear to move more slowly and may need more focus on internal relationships and trust building. However, it is not necessarily recommended that congregations be grouped by vitality. This study found that more vital congregations were able to support less vital congregations and that experience seemed to help both grow in new ways.
3. Issues of sustainability may need to be addressed more intentionally and directly.

# Oregon Synod Strategy Interim Evaluation

## Background

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America awarded funds to this synod for a congregational renewal project. These funds came from the Always Being Made New campaign. The purpose of the funds is to allow synods and congregations to experiment with contextually relevant renewal practices. Lessons learned from these experiments will inform future renewal efforts throughout the church.

## Objective

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The objective of this evaluation is to help congregations, synods and churchwide organization understand the impact of synod interventions on the renewal of participating congregations. This interim report is being conducted during of Oregon's grant, rather than at the end, so that we can learn from the first cohort and make adjustments before the next cohort begins. It will also be shared with other synods doing similar trainings.

## Oregon Intervention

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Area ministry strategies engage multiple congregations together with people from the local context to identify and work on common concerns. The stated goals of area ministry strategies are that they strengthen congregational ministry, contribute to the spiritual transformation of the members and have a positive, collective community impact.

The first Oregon intervention was a 2013 pilot that included seven congregations in a metro area. Over two years, congregation leaders were trained together in the following core practices:

- Prayer (Communal and individual prayer as discernment)
- Biblical work (Bible study as a form of active discernment)
- Relational work (focused on one to one listening seasons involving people both inside and outside the congregation)
- Adaptive work (educating and building capacity to make adaptive changes)
- Organizing work (Experimenting and Reflecting.) Congregations are taught a particular adaptive process for change which involves: researching, planning, mobilizing people and experimenting as an organization, followed by reflecting on what they have learned so they can design and take next steps.
- Accountability: Oregon is looking for very specific shifts in both the organizational culture and the leadership's approach.

In addition to the training, each congregation contributes members to a collaborative team that works with community leaders to address local concerns.

Lessons from the pilot have informed modifications to Oregon's curriculum. Please email Michael Keys (DEM) at [mission@oregonsynod.org](mailto:mission@oregonsynod.org) for more information about their approach.

## Study Methodology

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### Outcome Evaluation

In the fall of 2016, Linda Bobbitt worked with Michael Keys to develop an evaluation plan to measure the strength of each congregation and the degree of transformation. That plan includes a logic model explaining the rationale for the stated outcomes. It also includes a survey and interview questions, score sheets and rubrics used to rate the responses to the interviews and surveys. Normally, data collection is scheduled with each congregation at the beginning and end of the intervention. Since the congregations completed their intervention over a year ago, the measurement was applied retroactively.

### Sources of data for this study

#### 1. Congregational Vitality Survey

Before participating in the project, all seven participating congregations took the every-member Congregational Vitality Survey. (Every member = everyone who attends worship the week the survey is administered.) In 2015-2016 the congregations took the same every-member Congregational Vitality Survey again.

#### 2. Pre-work and Comprehensive Ministry Review

In 2015, Amy Walter-Peterson and David Daubert did a Comprehensive Ministry Review which looked at the impact of the overall strategy, not individual congregations. However, in 2014, each congregation was asked to describe their experiences of the project and how it had impacted their congregations. This report primarily references the pre-work because it pertains to specific congregations, but also references relevant conclusions from the ministry review.

#### 3. Interviews

Michael Keys interviewed pastors and lay leaders (if pastor was not available) using the questions in Attachment 1. He also consulted with Terry Moe, Katy Rustvold, and Bonnie Bohling the organizing leaders who worked with congregations. Notes taken by Michael during each interview were rated according to the rubric below by Michael and Linda Bobbitt. After rating each congregation independently, they compared results and came to consensus about each congregation's outcome rating.

Because there are not enough congregations for a quantitative analysis, this report will focus on identifying obvious patterns for future exploration. These initial findings will be used to study additional data as it comes from each participating synods and congregations.

**Logic Model applied to Oregon Strategy.**

It is expected that the activities listed will lead to short term and ultimately long term differences listed.

It was expected that the process, which taught congregations to participate in activities of Biblical work, intentional one to one listening, experimenting and reflection, would see the establishment of the practices in each congregation in the short term. It was further expected that congregations that thoroughly engaged these practices would show more evidence of long term outcomes stated in the logic model below.

Inputs/Resources	Activities/Programs	Outputs	Short-term Difference	Long-term Difference
Congregation leaders Community leaders Paid Organizers Synod Staff Materials and training	<b>Cohorts</b> Training for congregation and community leaders Steering committee	7 congregations initially participated. One dropped out after the first year.	Spiritual practices established Listening Work (internal/external) leads to learning Experimenting leads to learning Reflection leads to learning	Theological imagination expanded – able to articulate what God is up to and how they join God. Clarified sense of purpose within God’s mission – articulate mission and next steps Increased mutual engagement with neighbors Deeper cong. member connections with God, each other and world New lay leaders identified and engaged Increased mission support Increased worship attendance

**Rubric used to rate change**

Key Categories of Focus	Measurement tool	Evidence that the Difference is occurring in a MAJOR way	Evidence that the Difference is occurring, but in a MINOR way	Evidence that the Difference has yet to happen
<b>Spiritual practices</b>	Reflection Interview	Leaders describe that spiritual practices have become part of congregational life and are now informing their continued work.	Spiritual practices happen but it does not appear to be informing their work.	No regular spiritual practice yet
<b>Listening</b>	Reflection Interview	Leaders describe listening activities they've done that are now informing their continued work.	Listening activities have happened but are not yet being used to inform work.	No listening activities have taken place yet.
<b>Experimenting</b>	Reflection Interview	Leaders describe experiments they've done that are now informing their continued work.	Experiments have happened but are not yet used to inform work.	No experimentation has taken place yet.
<b>Reflecting</b>	Reflection Interview	Leaders describe reflections they've done that are now informing their continued work.	Reflections have happened but are not yet used to inform work.	No reflections has taken place yet.
<b>Clear Purpose within God's mission &amp; path forward</b>	Reflection Interview	Congregation can articulate their mission/purpose and has clear next steps.	Vague mission/purpose and/or vague next steps.	Congregation cannot articulate a sense of mission/purpose.
<b>Expanded Missional Imagination</b>	Reflection Interview & missional imagination score sheet	Leaders describe shifts in missional imagination. (score of 6-7)	Progress but transformation incomplete. (score of 4-5)	No shift in imagination, little or no God language. (score of 1-3)
<b>Increased mutual engagement in local context</b>	Reflection Interview	Leaders describe concrete ways they now engage with their context in a subject to subject manner.	Some local connections but still subject/object, transactional or purely attractational.	No new activities.
<b>Deeper cong. connections with God, each other, world</b>	Congregational Vitality Survey at beginning of process and the end. <i>(Measures people in pews)</i>	Vitality scores all over 4 or improved from pre-test. Increases in specific practices or specific scores. (TBD)	Ending score under 4. Some improvements, but not significant from time 1 to time 2	Do change or decrease
<b>New Leadership</b>	Reflection Interview	New lay leaders are named and specific roles they've played are identified	Lay leaders are named but haven't played leadership role yet	No new leaders identified
<b>Worship attendance</b>	Annual report confirmed by Michael: Average worship attendance	Worship attendance increases more than 5% and congregations have enough people to participate in ministry.	Congregations are holding steady in attendance.	Worship attendance decreases more than 5%
<b>Generous Giving</b>	Annual Report: % reg inc. shared with synod, per member giving	Congregations experience increases in each area	Levels stay the same or mixed results	Decrease in each number

## Summary of Outcomes

Congregation name: Seven congregations City: OR Date: Interviewed in October 2016

The number in each box represents the number of congregations rated in this category. Short term outcomes are highlighted in blue.

Key Categories of Focus	Measurement tool	Evidence that the Difference is occurring in a MAJOR way	Evidence that the Difference is occurring, but in a MINOR way	Evidence that the Difference has yet to happen
Spiritual practices	Final Reflection	4	2	1
Listening	Final Reflection	4	3	
Experimenting	Final Reflection	4	2	1
Reflecting	Final Reflection	2	4	1
<b>Clear Purpose within God's mission &amp; path forward</b>	Final Reflection	3	3	1
<b>Expanded Missional Imagination</b>	Final Reflection	3	3	1
<b>Increased mutual engagement in local context</b>	Final Reflection	5	2	
<b>Deeper cong. connections with God, each other, world</b>	Congregational Vitality Survey- Every member survey (one congregation did not do the survey)	6		1
<b>New Leadership</b>	Final Reflection	4		3
<b>Worship attendance</b>	Annual report: Average worship attendance	2	1	2
<b>Generous Giving</b>	Annual Report: 2012-2015 % Mission support Per member giving	3	1	1

# Findings

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As the Summary of Outcomes indicates, most congregations showed evidence of at least partial adoption of the four practices named as short term outcomes. Many congregations also showed evidence of some long term changes. This leads to the initial conclusion that the strategy appears to have had a positive impact for most congregations.

## **How participation in short term outcomes (practices) related to long term outcomes:**

The report from the comprehensive ministry review found those who had been more involved in the process experienced the greatest transformation. This report confirmed that finding.

### *Most engaged:*

Four of the seven congregations effectively engaged the core practices of spiritual discernment and listening. *Those congregations are marked under the “Major Difference” or green category in the Summary of Outcomes chart above.* These four congregations also described major changes in the long term outcomes of mutually engaging their local communities and the emergence of new lay leaders.

Three of the four also embraced the practices of experimenting and reflecting. Those three were able to clearly articulate their purpose and showed signs of major transformation in their missional imaginations. Examples of this transformation come across in the following kinds of comments from their interviews: God is here and in the community; collaboration (with other congregations) is essential; young people are the church now – children are fully engaged; seeing God as the leader of this process; discovering the Spirit’s workings already happening around us and naming it publically; open to new ministries while balancing capacity with enthusiasm. One of these congregations sold their building before this process began and became a “house church” nesting within partner congregations. By 2016, this congregation had stopped nesting and is now meeting on their own.

The one congregation that showed major changes in spiritual and listening practices but only some signs of experimenting and reflecting demonstrated some signs of transformation, but that transformation was not yet complete. That congregation is currently re-examining their structures and staff roles to make them more flexible. They want to develop a new vision and purpose for the congregation, but aren’t there yet. However, they do express confidence in God’s promise that they are on the right path. They understand that God is both in the church and the community and they must partner with the community to fully engage mission.

### *Somewhat engaged:*

Two congregations described only some spiritual, listening work and reflection. One of them had done considerable experimentation, but the other had only done some. Neither of them could clearly articulate their purpose, though both felt they were making progress. Both of them demonstrated some shifts in attitudes but not many behaviors associated with missional imagination.

### *Not engaged:*

Only one congregation did not engage spiritual, experimenting or reflecting practices. That congregation did engage some listening (one to one conversations) at council for about two years, but never did so across the congregation or with people outside the congregation. While the ministry review pre-work described initial steps being taken by the leadership team, things fell soon afterward. This is how Michael described it:

In phase three of the journey, one of the covenant commitments was to have each congregation at least engage in some conversation around the ELCA commitment to inclusion of LGBTQ people in the life of the congregations. *(It must be noted that this is a significant proportion of the population in this context.)* There was no requirement to complete the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) process. The team assigned to this congregation had several meetings with the interim Pastor, council and congregation. There was a strong vocal reaction to the expectation with a former retired pastor leading the charge. It came to be revealed that some of the council leaders started having secret meetings without informing the interim pastor, council or president and treasurer (which supported having the conversation). At the next council meeting – which had a representative attending, the pastor, council president and treasurer resigned from leadership and the congregation. At the next meeting, the council voted to leave the strategy.

Michael concluded that this was a continuation of previous dysfunctional behavior within the congregation. He noted a lack of trust within the congregation and leadership as well as with partner congregations and the synod. Michael's conclusion is that "The culture of the congregation can only change when there exists enough trust and some room for open communication."

### **Starting points matter:**

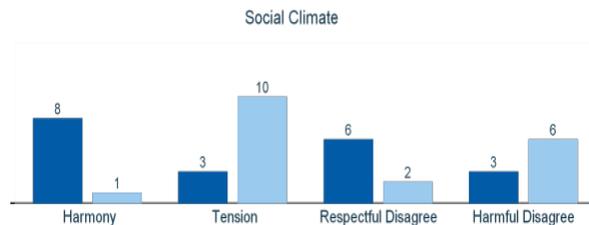
Since each of the seven congregations took the Congregational Vitality every-member survey before beginning the process, it is possible to compare congregations based on the gifts and challenges they had when they started.

***The weakest:*** *Stories of two congregations that moved in different directions.*

Two congregations had an initial score 3.5 or lower (associated with struggling congregations).

**First congregation:** The first congregation's 2013 score was 3.5 (indicating a congregation that is struggling). When they started the process, people seemed to be getting along well with only had 4% describing tension (See chart below. Dark blue-2013, light blue 2015). However, 45% said they were not growing spiritually. The leadership style was described as a mix between "leadership that takes charge" (29%), "not sure" (29%), and "leadership that acts on the goals people here have been involved in setting" (24%). Most described the overall vitality as "struggling but still viable" (61%) and only 5% said it "may not survive much longer". These initial survey results suggest a fragile congregation that is getting along but not grounded in their connections with God.

This was the same congregation that was not able to engage in the process and the only congregation that had a lower post-test score of 3.2. In their 2015 post-test, 33% said they were not growing spiritually (fewer than before), but 50% said there was tension and 30% said there was open, harmful conflict (far more than before). This major negative shift in social climate reflects the internal conflict described by Michael.



The most common description of the leadership style in 2015 was “not sure” (27%) followed by “inspires people to action” (23%) and then “people start most things” and “takes charge” at 18% each. Most still described overall vitality as “struggling but still viable” (57%) but now 36% said it “may not survive much longer”. This shift in the wrong direction is illustrated in the chart on the right.



Indeed, this congregation was in worse shape after the intervention than before. It cannot be assumed that the intervention itself is the entire cause of this change, particularly since the congregation never fully engaged the teachings from the intervention. However, it does appear that the pressure to challenge members and potentially change, which is an intentional part of the intervention, was a factor in the congregation’s negative shift because it applied stress to an already fragile congregation.

**Second Congregation:** This congregation had an initial score of 3.4 in 2013. That year, 16% reported tension, 5% said there was harmful conflict, but most said there was harmony (65%) or respectful disagreements (15%). Thirty-five percent said they were not growing spiritually. Twenty-two percent described leadership as “inspiring people to action” while 23% said it “acts on goals people have been involved in setting”. Overall vitality was described as “struggling but still viable” by 61%, while 26% said they “may not survive much longer”

Michael reported initial frustration with the leadership in this congregation because they refused to fully engage. The ministry review describes them as having “passive involvement”. Even so, the pre-work was completed in 2014, several marks of participation were noted including lay leaders stepping up to take on “much-needed ministry.” Congregation leaders noted a “sense of “holy discontent,” an awareness that there’s a lot of work to do and that God is calling us to tackle it.” They named specific collaborative events with non-English speaking neighbors.

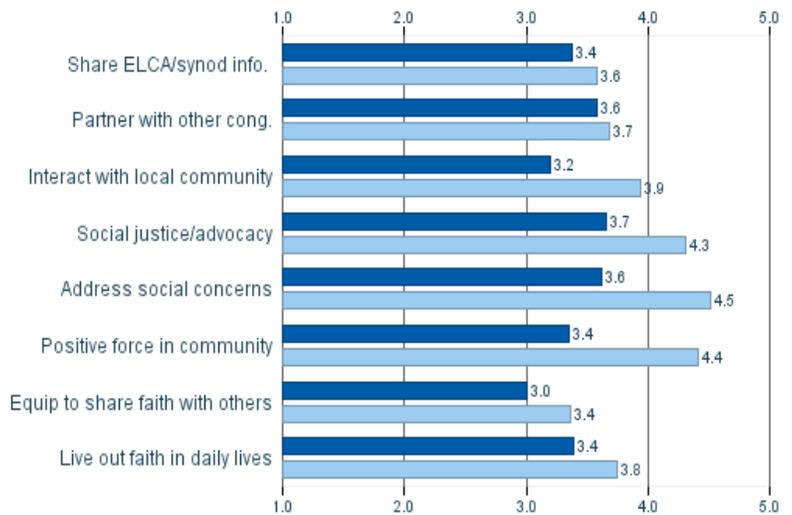
Upon Michael’s follow-up interview in 2016, he was pleased to see that they had now begun to engage experimenting and some reflecting in addition to some spiritual exercises and listening. Michael noted distinct shifts in their missional imagination as this congregation began to be more honest with each other, engage their neighborhood school, see other congregations as “co-workers in the Kingdom” rather

than view them as competition. They also seemed to see God in new ways, “God was shaking us up out of our stuckness; and hugging us into a future of experimentation and collaboration.”

The positive shifts expressed in the interview were also revealed on the survey completed in October 2016. Now the congregation’s average score is 4.0. The congregation is smaller now – about half the size due to deaths and people moving out of this increasingly expensive neighborhood. Now 20% report tension, only 43% report harmony and 37% say there are open respectful disagreements. No one says there is harmful conflict. These numbers suggest that change has not come easily.

Connecting with the World

However, now only 25% say they are not growing spiritually (compared to 35% before). Twenty-six percent described leadership as “inspiring people to action” (up from 22%) while 30% said it “acts on goals people have been involved in setting”. The biggest change was in the way congregants described their relationships with the world. As the chart shows, every item saw some increase and some moved from close to three to well over four.



This congregation answered a slightly different summary question. Instead of describing “overall vitality” they were asked about their “overall sustainability”. In response to this new question, 34% said they were “losing ground but still viable” and only 17% said they “may not survive much longer”. Another 35% said they were “maintaining” and 14% said they were “able to grow”. They were divided on whether or not they had enough people to do ministry well, but most felt that people had enough time and/or energy to participate beyond worship. The greatest concern regarding sustainability appears to be financial because 87% agreed that they are using up their financial resources.

The new survey also asked individual members to describe how they experienced God in their own lives and their congregation’s. The most common response was strong agreement that God is concerned about the congregation’s well-being (43%) and not removed from the congregation’s daily life (39%). All but 13% everyone agreed or strongly agreed that God is directly involved in the congregation’s daily life.

So while this congregation started off in essentially the same place as the first example, they did eventually engage the practices prescribed by the strategy and experienced some increased tension/disagreements, however nothing prevented them from continuing. In the end they are seeing positive changes. Their transformation is not yet complete, but the progress is clear.

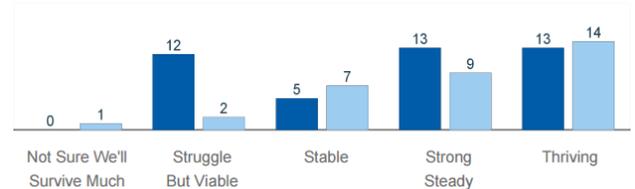
**The strongest:**

Only one congregation had a pretest score over 4.3 (level identified with thriving congregations). In this congregation's initial survey, 28% said they were not growing spiritually. Only 4% (two people) reported tension or harmful conflict while the rest reported harmony or respectful disagreements. Leadership was described as "acting on goals others set" (46%) and "inspiring people to action" (41%). The most common description of the congregation's overall vitality was "thriving" or "Strong and steady" with each getting 30%. Another 27% said the congregation was struggling but still viable.

The 2015 post-test Congregational Vitality Survey composite score went up to 4.6 (slight improvement on an already high score). However, specific improvements appear to have taken place in key areas. In the second survey, the social climate continued to be healthy (with only one person reporting tension and no one reporting harmful conflict), but now everyone reported some level of spiritual growth. Leadership was now most often described as "inspiring people to action" (54%) and "acting on goals others set" (36%).



In the 2015 survey 42% described the congregation as "thriving", 27% "strong and steady" and only 9% as "struggling but viable" or "may not survive". This also appears to be a marked improvement.



This congregation participated fully in all short the term practices and demonstrated signs of transformed missional imagination even before the intervention. Below are notes from Michael:

*This congregation* has been in the transformational process for over a decade. It has successfully transitioned from a relatively small congregation with aging membership to a dynamic multi-generational, multi-organizational community. There was not much of the old model or behaviors remaining when *this congregation* joined the multi-congregational cohort.

When asked to describe their participation in the process they said: *We have* "been reorganizing over the past four years and are now able to contribute lessons learned to the larger *cohort* community. Our engagement in the strategy allows us to move forward in being renewed and reorganized again and again through the agitation of these relationships."

So even though this congregation was already vital, participating in this process allowed them to grow even further while simultaneously adding value to the other participating congregations.

**Those in between:**

Of the four other congregations in the study, all had Congregational Vitality Survey composite scores of 4 or 4.1. By 2015, all of them increased between .1 and .5. Specific changes in these congregations varied.

- The first congregation was one of the highly engaged congregations described above. It reported an increase in the number of people growing spiritually with fewer people saying they feel stalled. There was an increase in open respectful disagreements (rather than harmony), and an increase in overall vitality. Leadership described as "inspiring others to action" moved from 31% to 36% of respondents, and leadership described as "acting on goals others set" moved from 31% to 42%.

- The second congregation was another highly engaged congregation. It showed increased spiritual growth, maintained social climate, and increased overall vitality. The biggest change was in leadership style which shifted between 2013 and 2015 from 31%- 23% saying it “acts on goals others set”, 23%-8% saying it “takes charge” and 16%-46% saying it “inspires people to action”.
- The third congregation was highly engaged in spiritual and listening practices, but not as engaged in experimenting and reflecting. It saw increases in the number of people reporting spiritual growth with simultaneous increases in tension, and more disagreement about the overall vitality. This congregation had 35% reporting leadership that “inspires people to action” in 2013 and 37% in 2015.
- The fourth congregation was somewhat engaged. It saw improvements in spiritual growth and overall vitality as well as a maintained healthy social climate. In 2013, only 17% described leadership as “inspiring people to action” while 31% said leaders “act on goals other set”, but in 2015, 54% said leadership “inspired people to action” and only 9% said it “acted on goals others set”. Comments from the interview note that this congregation is being “dragged into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by *this strategy*”, learning to use Bible studies in new ways, awakening to the need to be friends within the community and “hopeful about what will come next”. This is one of the places where awareness and attitudes have shifted but not yet behavior.

#### **Impact on worship attendance and mission support:**

Annual report data from 2012 (before the intervention) and 2015 (at the end of the intervention) was used to study changes in congregation’s worship attendance and finances. Two congregations did not complete the annual report in 2015 and were therefore not included. Those two happened to be the most and least vital congregations at the end of the project.

All of these congregations have an average worship attendance under 100 people with Two under 50. Some congregations experienced increased worship attendance while others experienced decreases. Losses in two of the congregations were described as attrition through death and people leaving the community.

In the area of mission support, only one of the five congregations lowered the total dollars given to the synod between 2012 and 2015. Three congregations increased total mission support dollars. That increase was consistent with an increase in the percentage of regular income used for mission support in two of those congregations but was a decrease in the third. Per member giving increased in two congregations, remained the same in one and decreased in the other two.

Financially, three congregations experienced an increase in regular giving, but also experienced increased operating expenses. The net result is that in 2015, all but one congregation spent more on regular operating expenses than they brought in through regular giving. The one congregation that brought in more income than they spent is the same one that sold its building in 2012-2013 and became a house church. Their decreased income was outpaced by decreased expenses. Since that time they have steadily increased membership and giving.

Overall, none of the changes in worship attendance, mission support, income or expenses were related to changes in vitality, initial vitality levels or degree of engagement in the core practices.

# Conclusions: Things to watch in the future

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While it is far too soon to draw conclusions, the patterns described in this study suggest that:

- Congregations that are relatively healthy can experience transformation in their sense of purpose and missional imagination if they engage in spiritual, listening, experimenting and reflecting practices. They may also be more likely to lift up new lay leadership and become more engaged in mutual relationships with their communities.
- Including congregations that are already quite healthy can benefit both that congregation and the other participating congregations.
- Congregations with low vitality scores may have more difficulty fully engaging and will likely experience stress when new practices and expectations are introduced. Those with low levels of internal trust and/or dysfunctional behavior patterns may be less likely to benefit and may even be harmed by the expectations for participation that comes with participation in this kind of intentional, collaborative process. In these cases, other kinds of interventions may be more appropriate. However, this study demonstrated that it is possible for a less vital congregation to benefit when they engage in the spiritual, listening, experimenting and reflecting practices. Their progress may happen much more slowly than other congregations.
- Leadership style appears to matter. Leadership that is most often described as “inspiring people to action” seems to be associated with more positive changes. When leadership shifts toward this style, it appears to accompany other positive changes.
- Even though congregations see positive changes in their sense of and participation in God’s mission and their missional activities in their communities, there is no evidence that these changes are or will necessarily be accompanied by increased worship attendance, membership giving or mission support. It does not mean that there is no relationship between them, it means that the relationship is complex. Improving one will not necessarily improve the other.

While more research is needed, initial signs are that projects like this, which train congregational leaders in spiritual discernment, listening, experimenting and reflecting practices show promise as a tool for congregational missional renewal. How synods can best encourage congregation’s full engagement remains an open question.

This study and others continue to suggest that missional renewal is not directly linked to sustainability.<sup>1</sup> While growing, financially secure congregations do tend to be vital, congregations that increase vitality, don’t necessarily grow more sustainable. If the goal of transformation/renewal is for congregations become more missional, then this appears to be a promising approach. However, if another goal is to help congregations become more sustainable both now and into the future, additional interventions appear to be needed.

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<sup>1</sup> See Vitality of ELCA congregations in 2016 as [video](#) or [PDF](#)

## Congregational Reflection Questions asked by DEM

Please use this form to reflect on the \_\_\_\_ (name of your synod project) \_\_\_\_ you did with the synod some time ago and describe has happened since. Your responses will help synod staff and the larger church make changes in the future. Complete this form by answering information for each line or typing responses in the spaces below each question. Feel free to use as much space as you need – don't worry about page breaks.

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_ CongID: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Synod: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Person/Group that completed this form: \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions about your congregation's participation in this process.

1. Describe how you and/or your congregation participated in following practices and how those practices have informed your work so far: (If you have not engaged these practices please say so.)
  - a. Spiritual Practices (Dwelling in the Word, Biblical learning, discernment, prayer, etc.)
  - b. Intentional Listening (e.g. one to ones, appreciative inquiry interviews, focus groups, etc.)
  - c. Experimenting (e.g. trying new things)
  - d. Reflecting (e.g. thinking about what happened and what you learned)
2. If coaching was involved in this process, talk about how your team worked with your coach. Describe what (if any) impact the coaching experience had your work?
3. Please write the names of any new lay leadership that has emerged in this process. Describe what role each person has played so far.

### Questions about the outcomes of this process.

4. In your own words, what is your congregation's current purpose? (Don't just cite your mission statement, talk about what it means. If you don't have a clear sense of your congregation's purpose, say "not sure".)

5. Identify 2-3 discoveries your leadership team made during this process. Talk about why or in what way these were discoveries. (i.e. what information, understandings, experiences, practices, reflections did you gain in because of process?)
  
6. In light of this process, share examples of new ways this congregation now actively connects people with...
  - a. God
  
  
  - b. each other
  
  
  - c. the world (your local context and beyond).
  
7. Describe any new relationships your congregation established with the residents of your community.
  
8. Write 3-5 short statements about your congregation based on what you learned.  
They will start with “We used to....” And end with “now we.....”  
(e.g. We used to (think, feel, have the habit of, have an attitude of, or do) \_\_\_\_\_;  
Now we (think, feel, have the habit of, have an attitude of, or do) \_\_\_\_\_.)

**Moving forward:**

9. What did you learn or get reminded of while doing this reflection?
  
10. What are your next steps?
  
11. Describe anything in your congregation that might keep from continuing this journey.
  
12. Describe what gifts or assets your congregation has that will help you move forward in God’s mission.
  
13. How can the synod continue to support you moving forward?

Thank you for reflecting on your experience. Please save and return to: [Linda@congregationalvitalityproject.com](mailto:Linda@congregationalvitalityproject.com)  
These responses will be shared verbatim with your synod staff so that they can learn from you. Your responses will also be compiled as part of a national research project. Reports from the national project may include descriptions of substance of your comments and some quotes without identifying specific individuals or groups.

Attachment 2: Completed for each congregation reflection by DEM.

## Missional Imagination Score Sheet

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_ Cong ID \_\_\_\_\_ Synod: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Each synod seeks to engage the missional imagination of congregational leaders. We expect changes in attitudes to eventually result in new behaviors/practices. *See the second page for examples of old/new or unhealthy/healthy attitudes and behaviors.*

After reading congregational reflections, copy the text or summarize content in the appropriate column below. The result will be a list of examples of the attitudes and practices described in the reflection grouped by whether they represent an old or unhealthy model, new or healthy model or movement toward a new or healthier model.

Look specifically for “God language”. Note when/if God is used as the subject of action verbs (e.g. God does x). Look specifically for attitudes and practices or behaviors relating to mission, motivation, leadership development, relationships among congregation members, and relationships with local community.

### Attitudes

Old model or unhealthy attitudes	Movement	New-model or healthy attitudes

### Practices or Behaviors

Old model or unhealthy behaviors	Movement	New-model or healthy practices

### Describe the congregation’s overall change

Consider the notations above. Indicate the one response that best represents the movement or lack of movement in this congregation.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ This congregation is moving in the wrong direction in both attitude and direction.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ This congregation is stuck in the old/unhealthy model– no appreciable movement in attitudes or behaviors. No willingness or ability to work on these things at this time. It may be the wrong time for this congregation to work toward renewal.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ This congregation is struggling with resistance – some wanting to stay in the old and others trying to move toward the new. Some positive steps have been made, however the struggle has prevented significant, steady growth. Change is needed (resistance overcome) before they will be able to move forward.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ There has been a positive change in attitude, but it is not yet reflected in behaviors. They appear to be moving in the right direction without enough resistance to derail the process. It is still early in the process.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ There appears to be some positive movement in attitudes and behaviors/practices, but the transformation is incomplete so far.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ This congregation has transformed from an old model or unhealthy situation to a predominantly new/healthy model
7. \_\_\_\_\_ This congregation was always and continues to be in the new/healthy model

## Examples of Old/New model attitudes & behaviors

<b>Old model or unhealthy attitudes</b>	<b>New model or Healthy attitudes</b>
Resistance or no buy for process	Enthusiastic about process
Survival- fear based	Hopeful - optimistic
Scarcity	Generosity & Abundance
Deficit focused (what we don't have)	Asset based (what we do have)
Inward focus (country club or social club mentality)	Outward focus (Driven into the world by God)
God not mentioned or distant/passive	God used with action words
Afraid of God or of failing God	Trust God with success, free to fail
Afraid to act – lack of confidence	Confident in God's promises (ok to fail)
Church sends people to do mission	Church itself is sent to do mission
Vague understanding of why they act as a church and as individual disciples	Intentionality of church and individuals
Ask people to join us and what we do	Join people to support what they want to do
God is here and we share God with the community	God is here and in community. We partner.
Subject to object (us/them)	Subject to subject (we are partners in community)
Congregation as an island in community	Congregation as collaborative partner
Fixing problems to get us back to where we were.	We are being transformed into something new
Afraid of or avoid/resist change	Change is part of who we are and what we do
Newcomers must learn the right way to do things	Newcomers may show us new ways to do things
"Plastic people" – we don't talk about difficult things as individuals and/or congregation.	Authenticity- we talk about what is actually happening in our lives and our church
Consumer mentality	Sense of ownership among participants
Competing with other congregations	Collaborating with other congregations
Pastor as Chaplin	Pastor as coach
People like us are welcome	Diversity is valued
Young people are the church of the future	Young people are the church now. They are full members whose ideas/skills are sought out, valued and used.
<b>Old model or unhealthy behaviors</b>	<b>New-model or healthy behaviors</b>
Shutting down creativity and action	Inspiring people to action
Ridged structures limit activities	Adaptive structures allow for experimentation
Reactive decision making and planning	Proactive decision making and planning
Conflict/tension or conflict avoidance	Open/respectful discussion
Tight control over what happens or anything goes permission giving without focus	Creative, purpose focused experimentation with reflection and adaptation
Dysfunctional relationships and behaviors	Collaborative, functional relationships
Secrets, poor or lack of communication	Proactive, transparent, helpful communication
Lack of intentional plan	Clear intentional plan for moving forward even if end goal is vague
Cliques – especially in leadership	Rotating leaders, using the gifts of all including young people and newcomers
Disconnect between faith and people's daily life behaviors	Incarnational activities among people (talking about faith, living out vocational call)
Evangelism efforts non-existent or designed only to get new members	Evangelism = teaching people to share faith and invitation
Neighborhood outreach nonexistent or only designed to attract members	Neighborhood outreach that builds relationships and partners
Vague leadership roles – blurred expectations	Clear leadership roles and expectations
Power/ authority used to control or assert dominance	Power/authority used to lift up weaker members or community people (servant leaders)
Can't articulate clear purpose	Very clear on purpose – can explain