

Lutheranism in the United States
Part III: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Rev. Arthur C. Bergren

1988 Evangelical Lutheran Church In America was established
Lutheran Church in America
American Lutheran Church
Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches

Basic Facts about the ELCA

Baptized Members: 3.3 million
Congregations: 9091
Synods: 65 in 9 geographic regions
Roster: 16,001 pastors and 1213 deacons
Seminaries: 7
Colleges and Universities: 26
Schools: 14 high schools, 296 elementary schools,
1573 early childhood centers
Social Services Agencies: 280 parent corporations
Serve 1 in 50 Americans in 2005
Camps and Retreat Centers: 145
Serve 450,000 people each year
ELCA World Hunger Appeal: 2017 – 21.3 million donated
Oldest ELCA congregation: Founded in 1649
Largest Congregation: 13,894 baptized members

ELCA Structure

Program Units: Evangelical Outreach & Congregational Mission,
Vocation & Education, Multicultural Ministries, Church in
Society, Global Mission, Publishing House of the ELCA and
Women of the ELCA
Officers of the Church: Presiding Bishop, Secretary, Treasurer
Web Site: www.elca.org

Northeastern Iowa Synod – St. Paul's Lutheran Church & School
1 of 65 Synods

Bishop Steven Ullestad
Staff: Rev. Steve Brackett, Linda Hudgins, Rev. Mark Anderson
Director of Evangelical Mission: Rev. Dr. Joelle Colville-Hanson
Bishop's Office: Waverly, Iowa
Call Process, Stewardship Resources, Support of the Roster
Support agencies and institutions of territory: Lutheran Social Service
145 Congregations
2 Colleges: Wartburg and Luther
Web Site: www.neiasynod.org

In the first section of Lutheranism, I mentioned the ELCA's decline.
ELCA's Office of Research and Evaluation Projections
67,000 members in 2050 – 30 years from now
16,000 in worship by 2041 – 21 years from
These Projections are based on death rates and decline.

Here are some additional details

1988: 11,120 congregations – 2018: 9091 congregations
1988: 5.2 million members – 2018: 3.3 million members
1988: 86,000 baptisms – 2018: 32,000 baptisms
1988: Average congregation size of baptized members 375 –
2018: Average congregation size of baptized members 338
1988: Average weekly worship attendance 149 –
2018: Average weekly worship attendance 95

Closer to home, here are statistics for the NE Iowa Synod

1988: Baptized Members 94,000 – 2017: Baptized Members 69,000
1988: 192 Congregations – 2017: 148 Congregations
1988: 1426 Baptisms – 2017: 621 Baptisms
1988: 980 Deaths – 2017: 820 Deaths

Our Tradition in every way is weakening and trending downward in all categories.

But this not a reason to despair as God is in this.
I don't believe anything has slipped in between God's hands
I suspect God is leading us to a new reformation.

Phyllis Tickle argued every 500 years the Church changes

500: Fall of the Roman Empire

and the Church became the keepers of education and culture

1000: The East West split of the Church.

Rome in the West and Constantinople in the East

1500: Protestant Reformation

2000: Right on schedule

The old models are not working

We live in an in-between time.

The new model has not emerged but the old model does not work.

What to expect

Congregations who cling to the past will not survive

Congregations who experiment and think out of the box will thrive

Mission Support from Congregations will decline as finances change.

Synods will inevitably become larger.

Synods will send in less giving to the Churchwide.

Churchwide will continue to solicit funds

above and beyond mission support.

Synods will remain strong but the Churchwide unit will shrink

Some ministries will endure: ELCA World Hunger Appeal,

Global Mission

Long Term:

Just like Lutheranism in the US, we will see a breaking a part

Then a drive for unity.

This is the time of breaking a part.

All traditions liberal & conservative are in decline

The denominational model is fracturing

I suspect it will collapse in on itself

I suspect a new alignment will naturally occur in time

Conservative Stream of Protestantism

Progressive Stream of Protestantism

Here locally, you have heard me preach and teach about this.

We are growing and dedicated to thinking out of the box.

Example: Live streaming

What started off as a necessity to stay connected in pandemic
St. Paul's understands that this is way to reach beyond ourselves
It's hard to stay

But as the years unfold, there may be new opportunities to expand.

If we find ourselves without our tradition, we could locally partner
with Wartburg College.

Our ministry already leans to the progressive stream of Christianity
Those are Wartburg College's values.

This is pure speculation now, a vision of what could become.

But imagine if the wider church no longer existed.

St. Paul's would become part of a loose confederation of progressive
Christian Communities

Imagine Wartburg retaining its dedication to being a college rooted
in the Christian Progressive Tradition

Both institutions could grow closer in a variety of ways

It is imaginable that the seminary system could fail and collapse

This could allow St. Paul's and Wartburg College to partner in the
training of pastors.

While I cannot see the details of a new future,

I can imagine a vibrant and exciting environment that St. Paul's
would flourish

Time Frame

By the time I retire, I expect synods will be becoming larger

Also the Churchwide Structure will have reorganized multiple times.

All because of cash flow

In retirement, I expect to see two kinds of congregations

Those that are dying as they cling to the past

Those that are thriving as they engage their community

Decentralization of our Churchwide Offices

After my time of earth, I expect the realignment of Progressive and
Conservative Christianity would take shape and form

New models of ministry will have emerged.

I expect St. Paul's to be part of that future

In the meantime...

Leadership needs to remain fiscally wise, ready to experiment with new models of ministry and lovingly embrace our progressive roots.

Members need to remain flexible in this time of change, remain generous with time, talent and treasure, remember God is with us in this extraordinary time