

# Partnering For Mission



A resource for congregations  
discerning God's call to mission  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Introduction

**We are resurrection people  
Who pray first  
Walk together  
And change lives.**

We are “claimed by God, gathered by the Spirit, and sent...” This defines us as Lutherans in Christ’s Church. We are formed as congregations to reach new people with the Gospel, inviting them into a new life of faith, and calling them to join in doing God’s work in the church and in the world. This is what we mean by mission.

God is calling us to reach out to our neighbor with the Gospel. This is true for individual Christians as well as for whole communities of faith. Keeping this as our central emphasis, we must be aware that our Church exists for mission in the context of a changing world.

This booklet is designed to be a beginning in the discernment process for a congregation that is looking into renewing its ministry by considering partnering for the sake of mission. There are a variety of options open for you, but a passion for mission is necessary for any of them to work. We are **NOT** partnering for survival. Jesus didn’t call us to survive, but to reach people with the Good News of his love and grace. At every step along the way, please consult with your conference dean, the Upstate New York Synod’s Director of Evangelical Mission and your area Mission Renewal Team. They are available to help in the process.





## Steps to take in the discernment process

It will seem like you are doing endless surveys/questionnaires, study and research, but each step will give you a little more information and help you determine what God is calling you to do.

1. **Pray** for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you embark upon this discernment process. Post the prayer in your newsletter and announcements regularly. Perhaps use it to begin every committee meeting.
2. **Prepare the soil** through faith-building exercises revolving around questions such as “Who are we as God’s people?” and “What does God want us to be doing?”

Do a Bible study on:

- ✠ Matthew 14:22-33
- ✠ Jeremiah 29:11
- ✠ Acts 10:1-43
- ✠ 1 Corinthians 16:13-20
- ✠ Philippians 2:1-11

Resources:

[Living Lutheran](#) by Dave Daubert

[Unbinding Your Soul](#) by Martha Grace Reese

For many congregations, it will be a challenge for folks to move beyond “What do I want for me and my church?” to a deeper sense of purpose. Focus on how cooperation is central to the way in which God works in the world.

3. **Communicate**, communicate, communicate! Make sure that your members know what you are exploring, why you are exploring it, and how far along you are in your explorations. Use a variety of communication methods. Begin with a congregations meeting that includes a vote to explore partnership.
4. **Examine the numbers and background** of your congregations, pages 5-6, “Where we’ve Come From and Who We Are Today – Do We Need to Change?” You will need a variety of people to do this research. One person should not do it all.
5. Study “**Life Cycle of Congregational Change**” – page 7 - and identify where you are.
6. Contact your Regional Renewal Team to discuss the possibility of taking the **Congregational Vitality Assessment**. This will help you understand how your congregation connects with God, one another and the world. Your dean will know who is in charge of this.
7. **Do a Community Needs Assessment**. Talk to key people in your neighborhood – government officials, community leaders, first responders, neighborhood/community organizations, school boards, Chamber of Commerce, school principals, library board, census data, etc.
8. Ask your leadership (staff, council and committee chairs) to do the “**Worksheet on Congregational Sustainability – Are We at Risk?**,” page 8, and discuss it.

9. Ask your congregations to do the **“Ready for Renewal Checklist”** on page 9-10. This might be done after worship on two consecutive weeks so that as many as possible have the opportunity to do it. Mailing it out usually won’t get you the best return rate. Gather in small groups to discuss the results.
10. Examine **“Some Options for Ministry and Mission,”** page 11 & 12. Which one is God calling you toward and with whom?
11. **Invite potential partners** into the conversation. At this stage it may be wise to bring your Dean, the synod Director of Evangelical Mission, or a consultant into the conversation as an outside voice.
12. **Steps in the formation of a partnership**
  1. Once you begin the dance with a potential partner: Relate, relate, relate! Plan joint fellowship and worship activities with members of the partnering congregations so folks can get to know and respect each other as people of faith and mission.
  2. Share your congregation’s story (history) – What has God done among you? Where is God leading you in mission and ministry?
  3. Identify needs and gifts (what can you contribute? What do you need?)
  4. Receive and process information about each congregation
  5. Share potential models of partnership & decide which one God is calling you to.
  6. Research and agree to principles that will govern your relationship – estimated hours the pastor works in each congregation, worship times, etc.
  7. Develop and tweak a written agreement. Use focus groups and forums.
  8. Approval of the agreement by church government (3 or more levels)
    - a. Committee and informal legitimizers
    - b. Council/board
    - c. Congregational meeting/voter assembly
  9. Kick-off the new ministry with a celebration
  10. Pray as hard as you work, and work as hard as you pray.

**Please note that the synod constitution requires synod council approval for any realignment of congregations – S13.21. The alignment of congregations in pastoral charges, and all alteration in any alignment, shall be subject to approval by the Synod Council.**

If you are the point of closing, please refer to “A Resource for Holy Closure” on the synod’s website: <http://upstatenysynod.org/document-center/synod-documents>.





## Where We've Come From and Who We Are Today Do We Need to Change?

Take a careful look at your church in these areas: (See the Trend Report for your congregation on the ELCA website for helpful information about your congregation: <http://www.elca.org/tools/findacongregation> Type in your zip code, click on your congregation, click on the full trend report for your congregation.

**1. History.** Make a timeline of key events in the history of your congregation going back 50 (or 100 years, if able.) Label events in these categories:

- dates of pastorates;
- building-related events, such as an addition or major purchase;
- when paid staffing positions were added or removed;
- times when you became involved with other congregations for ministry;
- times when the congregation was involved in a community project;
- times when Bible study groups were formed and/or ended;
- worship-related events, such as a change in service time, style, or frequency of communion, etc.;
- times when the congregation was faced with a decision to take on more debt and accepted and/or declined.

Looking over the timeline:

- What are the major events that have shaped the congregation to what it is today?
- What are the trends? What is the congregation's attitude toward change? ... debt? ... use of the facilities?

**2. Mission Statement.** What is the congregation's mission statement? Does it reflect the sense of mission that the congregation shares today? When was the last time it was revisited and/or modified? Does that need to happen soon?

*(Tools to help you with #3 - #5 are available at <http://upstatenynod.org/document-center/call-process>.)*

**3. Attendance/Membership.** Use a graph to enter the last 20 years of statistics on church attendance and membership.

- What patterns does this show?
- If these patterns continue, what will happen in 5 years? 10 years?

**4. Age/sex profile.** Use a graph to illustrate the age and sex distribution of church members.

- Compare to those of 20 years and 10 years ago.
- What are the dominant age groups? Is our congregation getting older or younger?
- How does this compare to the age profile of our surrounding community?
- What might we look like 10 years from now if things continue?

**5. Giving profile.** Chart regular offerings for a 10-year period. What is the trend? Chart the regular offerings by how they were spent: benevolence or mission dollars, salaries, and building improvements.

- What does this chart say about our priorities as a congregation?
- If this trend continues, will we still be expanding our ministry in 10 years or merely paying the bills?
- Take a survey of the annual income level of the congregation.

6. **Membership distribution.** Take an area map and place pins where current members reside.

- Label by color households under age 55, over age 55, and
- new members that have joined in the last five years.

Draw a one-mile, three-mile, and five-mile radius around the church.

- Where do most members live?
- Is this congregation reaching the immediate community?
- What might our mission field look like in 10 years?

7. **Facilities.** What is the condition of our:

- worship space,
- education/fellowship areas,
- parking,
- restrooms,
- childcare facilities,
- property, including primary sources of heating.

What percentage of our regular offering will be needed to keep up the facility for 10 years?

8. **Commitment profile.** Use a graph to illustrate the age and years of service of church leadership, including council and committee members.

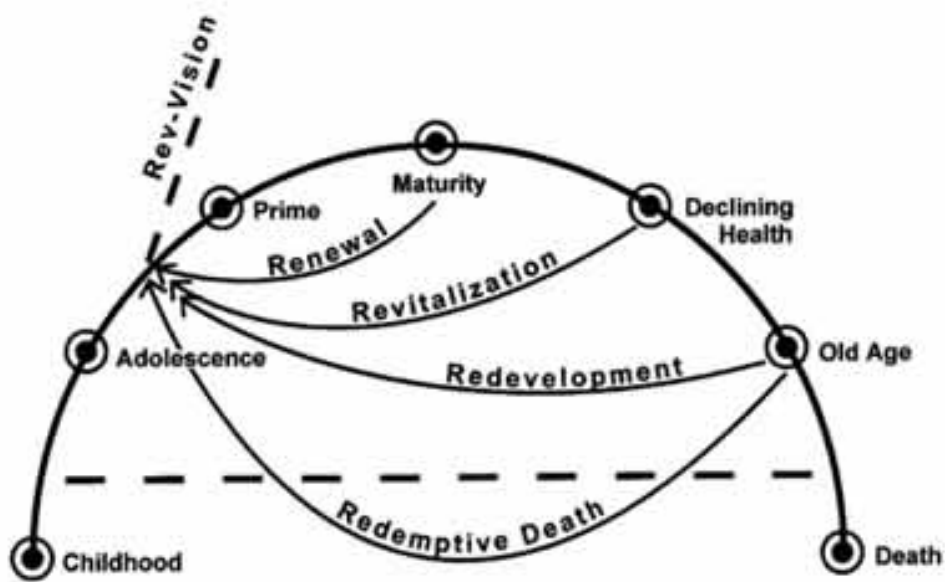
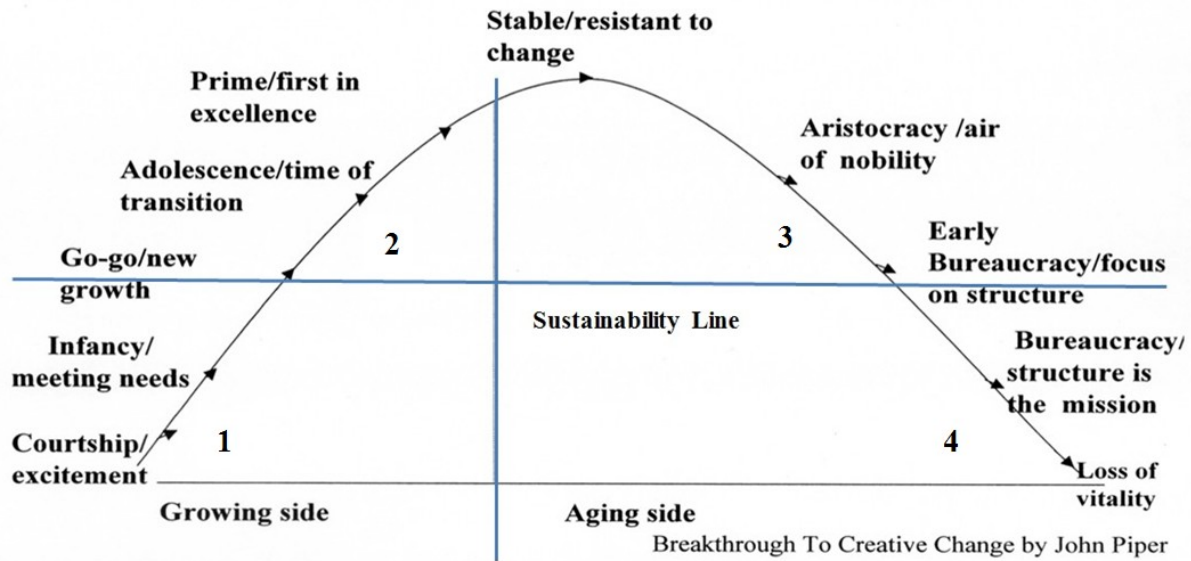
- Is there shared leadership among the congregation, or are the same people the only volunteers?
- What will happen if this trend continues in 5 or 10 years?





**Life Cycle of Congregational Change**

# Life Cycle of Congregational Change





## Worksheet on Congregational Sustainability Are We At Risk?

Using attendance figures for the previous ten years, chart your congregation's average attendance. (*Tools to help you with #3 - #5 are available at <http://upstatenynsynod.org/document-center/call-process>.*)

Then use the following questions as a springboard for further discussion, answering each with a simple "yes" or "no."

- | Yes | No  |   |
|-----|-----|---|
| ___ | ___ | 1. Do we have a pattern of growth in attendance?  |
| ___ | ___ | 2. Will our trend of growth, plateau or decline allow us to thrive and develop ministry for the future in this place?   |
| ___ | ___ | 3. Can we maintain our own existence as a congregation and provide ministry in the community, synod and ELCA?   |
| ___ | ___ | 4. Can we survive without some form of life support from bequests, special gifts?   |
| ___ | ___ | 5. Do we have sufficient numbers of people to volunteer for ministry within the congregation and outreach into the community?                                   |
| ___ | ___ | 6. Are new efforts in evangelism and Christian Education feasible?  |
| ___ | ___ | 7. Are there sufficient funds and interested membership to do ministry within the congregation as well as outreach and evangelism into the community and world? |
| ___ | ___ | 8. Are we experiencing the presence of first-time visitors on a regular basis?  |
| ___ | ___ | 9. Do they return for a second or a third visit?  |
| ___ | ___ | 10. Do 20-25% of our first-time visitors eventually join the congregation?  |
| ___ | ___ | 11. Is the congregation's main focus on outreach/evangelism?  |
| ___ | ___ | 12. Is the congregation striving to do more than trying to survive/keep the doors open?   |
| ___ | ___ | 13. Has the congregation grown in the last five years?  |
| ___ | ___ | 14. Do we have enough members to do ministry well?  |
| ___ | ___ | 15. Does giving in the congregation enable "Great Commission" work, or does most of the giving go towards maintenance and survival?                             |
| ___ | ___ | 16. Are there young families active in the church?  |
| ___ | ___ | 17. Has the congregation maintained a good level of stewardship including several families (10-12) who tithe faithfully to the congregation?                    |
| ___ | ___ | 18. Is the congregation willing/able to adapt its ministry and lifestyle in order to develop the ministries that will meet the needs of a changing community?   |
| ___ | ___ | 19. Is the present facility physically adaptable for use?   |
| ___ | ___ | 20. Can the congregation afford the repairs that are needed to use these facilities for ministry?   |

If you marked 5 answers "No", we suggest you contact the Dean of your Conference to discuss the trends that are revealed. If you marked 8 or more answers "No", this may suggest a serious condition of decline for your congregation. It is time to look courageously and honestly at your situation, and consider what options you have as a congregation.





## A Ready for Renewal Checklist

Answer the questions below as honestly and prayerfully as possible by checking one of the three boxes at the right:

	Yes	We Think So	Honestly, No
1 This church conveys, in word and deed, a message that is “good news.” We are known and respected in our community for genuine strengths.			
2 We are outreach-oriented with a consistent focus on people who are not members.			
3 When differences arise we address each other with openness and respect.			
4 We have clear goals and expectations between the pastor and the congregation and we communicate them both ways regularly.			
5 We are successful in involving the entire congregation in various Leadership and other active roles.			
6 We know who we are and why we are here as a community of faith.			
7 We are willing to commit the financial resources it may take to bring about intentional renewal in our congregation, including hiring a consultant.			
8 Our leadership and several key “influencers” of the congregation agree that God may be calling our congregation to embark in a new direction.			
9 Our leadership is ready to listen to God, each other, and the surrounding community.			
10 Our leadership agrees that the desire to know and do God’s will for the congregation is stronger than the desire to survive as a congregation. (The pain of staying as we are is greater than the pain of changing.)			
11 Our leadership and a critical mass of the congregation will commit to daily prayer for our future.			
12 Our leadership and a critical mass of the congregation will commit to regular Bible study around our future.			
13 Our leadership and a critical mass of the congregation will commit to growing their personal financial stewardship.			
Totals			

**Results:**

Mostly “Yes”: Your congregation is ready to embark on a journey of intentional renewal. Please contact your Dean or Director of Evangelical Mission for further guidance in this process.

Mostly “We Think So”: Your congregation is ready to enter into a process of discerning intentional renewal. Read on to see what kinds of steps you may feel God calling your congregation to take as it reshapes itself for mission and ministry in its context.

Some “Honestly, No” and some “We Think So”: Your congregation may be ready to discuss some initial steps toward renewal. Read on and begin the discussion of your options at your next council meeting or other meeting of key leaders in the congregation.

Mostly “Honestly, No”: Please read on about some of the options your congregation may wish to discuss as they look toward their future ministry. Invite your Assistant to the Bishop to meet with your leadership and discuss these and other options.





## Some Options for Ministry and Mission

- † **Yoked Parish** (2 point parish) – Two or more congregations who share the compensation costs of a pastor so that they can have continuous pastoral coverage. Few, if any, programs are shared by the partners. The budget for the staff person(s) is usually shared as a contract (formal written agreement) with the other congregations(s). The goal in a yoked parish is to maintain, develop, strengthen and grow each congregation.
  - Each congregation maintains its own structure
  - One congregation “buys” the time of the pastor from the other congregation. The time to be spent in each congregation is to be determined prior to the call process. An average work week for a pastor is considered to be 50 hours a week with 2 days off.
  - A call committee is joint and will include members of both congregations.
  - The call to a pastor is issued by one congregation (an ELCA requirement) but both congregations need an affirmative vote to call, based on their constitution.
  - The calling congregation pays the pastor and the second (or third) congregation reimburses the calling congregation for their percentage of time.
  - The contract yoking the congregations should be reviewed and renewed annually with the hope of moving toward a cooperative parish model.
  - If the yoke is broken, either by financial changes or one congregation pulls out, a new call is negotiated.
  
- † **Cooperative Parish** – Congregations which have agreed to work together with a common staff and programs they carry out together for mission and ministry. The partners function as one unit with a shared vision, guiding principles and/or mission statement. A formal written agreement is needed. The goal is to develop, strengthen and grow the common ministry.
  - There is one parish council, a unified common budget, and all committees are joint. Individual congregational councils may meet as needed or constitutionally required.
  - One call committee with equal representation from each congregation
  - The parish account (budget) pays the pastor
  - Each congregation maintains its own name, however, the cooperative parish may also be named
  - The contract should be reviews and renewed every 5 years with the hope of moving toward a consolidated/merged model.
  
- † **Consolidation or Merger** – In this model congregation become one new congregation with a new name. The ELCA has produced a document called “Together in Mission: The blending of Ministries through Merger or Consolidation.”
  
- † **Area Ministry** – An area Ministry Strategy describes a setting where congregations, ministries, and others develop a partnership to both have a collective impact on a specific area and to renew congregation ministry through the work of re-rooting in the community or through gaining missional clarity.
  
- † **Shared facilities with an ecumenical partner** – Two congregations of different denominations share a building and/or a pastor, but each congregation retains its own membership role and denominational identity. The ELCA’s full communion partner include: Episcopal, Presbyterian Church of the USA, United Methodist, United Church of Christ, Moravian and Reformed Church in America congregations.

- ✚ **Multi-Site Ministry / Satellite Campus** - when a thriving congregation either opens a second/third/fourth, etc. campus or takes over formerly independent ministries in other locations. Each site may have its own ministry leader, but worship services from the parent site are broadcast to the satellites.
- ✚ **Church Without Walls** – this is a congregation that does not own property, but enters into a covenant with another entity for worship/program space.



## People Resources

**Conference Dean:**

**UNYS Director of Evangelical Mission:**

**Area Mission Strategy Team:**

**Attorney :**

When you get to the point of making a decision for change, you will need an attorney well versed in New York State religious corporation law. Please call your dean.



## Printed resources

- “Developing Cooperative Ministries” – available as a PDF ([michael.bennethum@elca.org](mailto:michael.bennethum@elca.org))
- [www.churchcollaboration.com](http://www.churchcollaboration.com)
- "God's Ecumenical Ministry, Shared" – available as a PDF ([michael.bennethum@elca.org](mailto:michael.bennethum@elca.org) )
- “Spiritual Vitality through Cooperative Ministry,” Diana A. Stephen. Presbyterian Church (USA), 2008.
- Living Lutheran ; Dave Daubert
- Unbinding Your Soul; Martha Grace Reese
- Cooperating Congregations – Portraits of Mission Strategies; Gilson A.C. Waldkoenig & William O. Avery
- [www.upstatenynsynod.org](http://www.upstatenynsynod.org)
- [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org)

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