

A Statistical Overview of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod

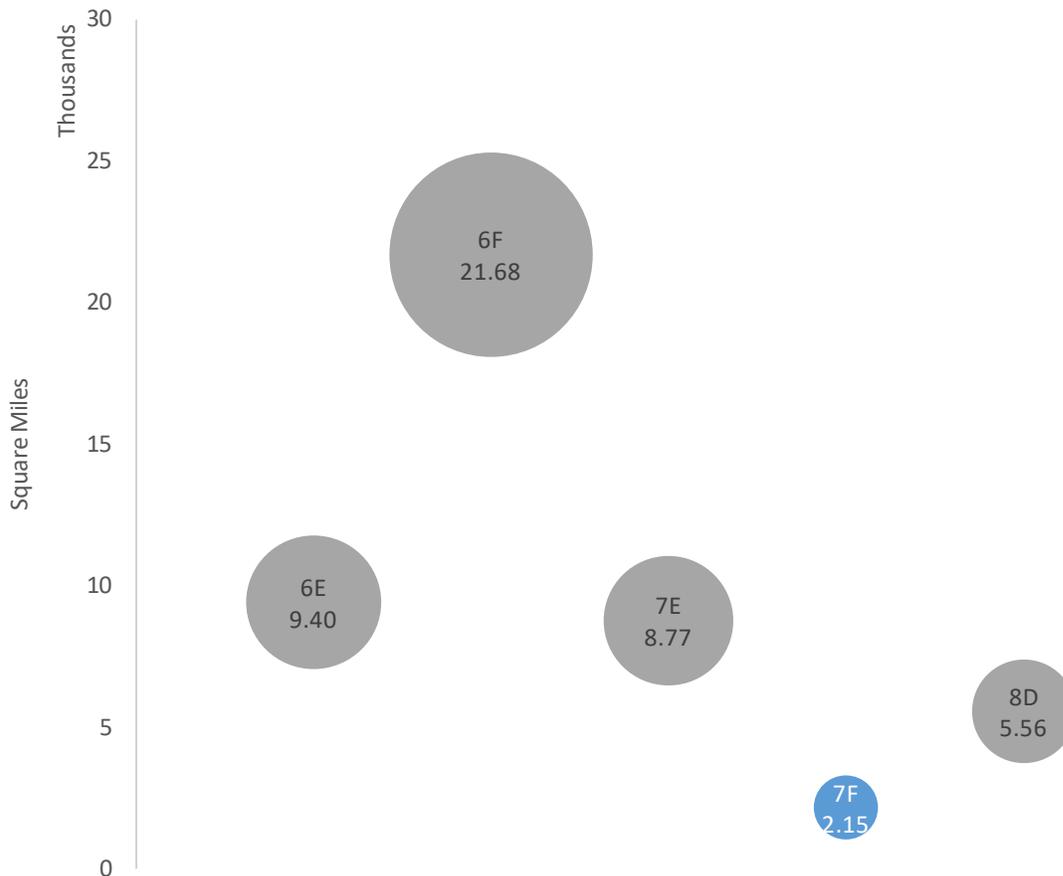
With comparisons to Northeastern Ohio (6E), Southern Ohio (6F), Northeastern Pennsylvania (7E), and Lower Susquehanna Synod (8D)

Research and Evaluation, Office of the Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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Territory

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod (7F) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America covers 2,154 square miles. The smallest area covered by a synod is the Saint Paul Area Synod (1,535 square miles) whereas Alaska, the largest synod by area, covers 571,951 square miles. The median territory covered is 22,000 square miles. Twenty synods in the ELCA cover 10,000 square miles or less. Figure 1 shows the number of square miles covered by each synod in this report.¹

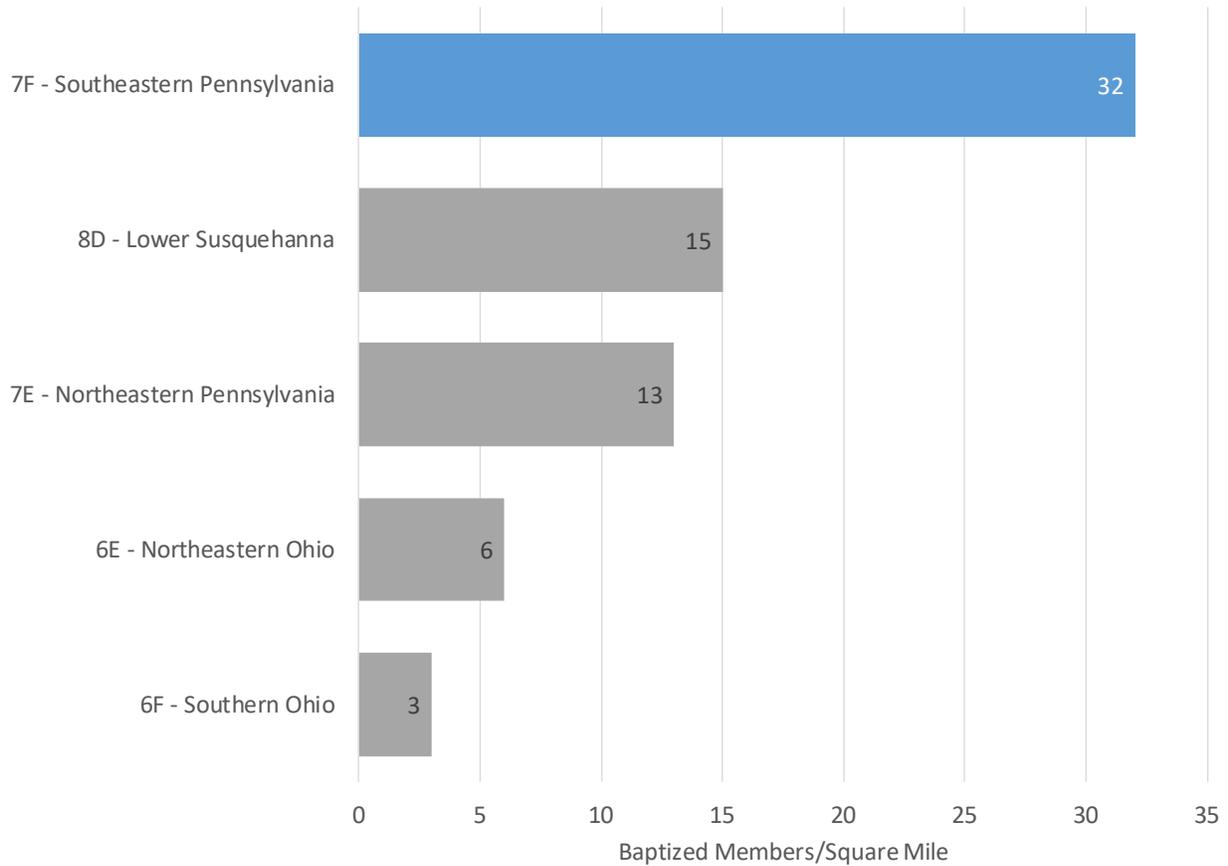
Figure 1: Synod Territories, in Thousands of Square Miles



¹ For a better fit, we condensed synod names: 6E is Northeastern Ohio, 6F is Southern Ohio, 7E is Northeastern Pennsylvania, 7F is Southeastern Pennsylvania, and 8D is Lower Susquehanna Synod.

Figure 2 shows the number of ELCA baptized members per square mile in these selected synods. Southeastern Pennsylvania reported a total of 69,180 baptized members in 2016, which is 32 members per square mile. By comparison, Southern Ohio Synod has 3 members to per square mile and Lower Susquehanna has 15 members per square mile.

Figure 2: Baptized Members per Square Mile



Per the 2010 Census, the territory of Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod had 4,008,994 people. In 2017, it is estimated to have 4,115,660 people and projected to have 4,186,063 people in 2022, an increase of 1.71 percent. The 69,180 baptized members (as of 2016) accounted for 1.69 percent of the estimated 2016 population of the synod. In 2000, the 101,959 baptized members made up 2.65 percent of the 3,849,642 people in the synod.

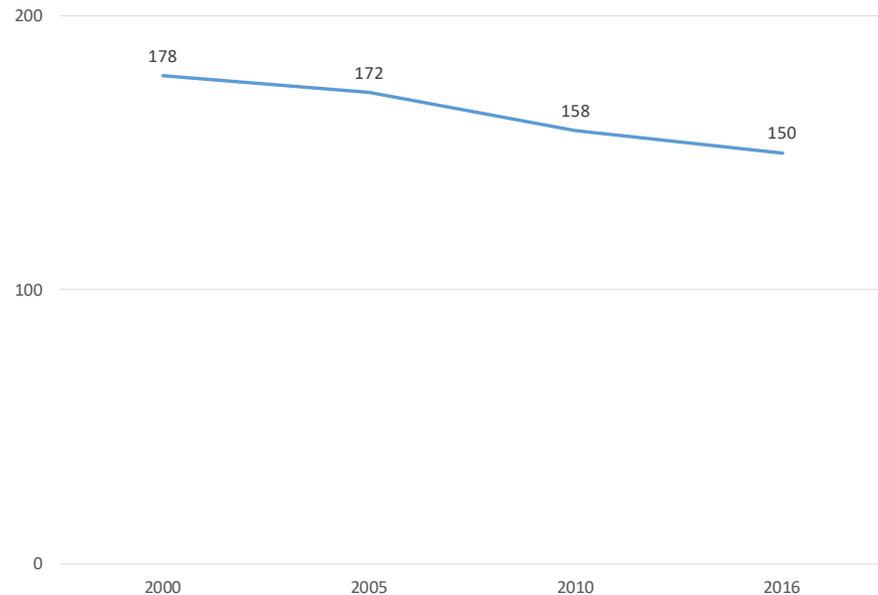
Table 1: Synod Population and Membership

	General Population	ELCA Baptized Members	Members as % of Population
2000	3,849,642	101,959	2.64
2010	4,008,994	85,105	2.12
2016	4,101,129	69,180	1.69

Baptized Membership and Worship Attendance

At the end of 2016, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod had 150 organized congregations; at the end of 2010, the synod reported 158 organized congregations, and in 2005, the synod had 172 congregations. At the end of 2000, there were 178 congregations in the synod. Overall, the number of congregations has declined 16 percent since 2000 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Number of Congregations



In 2016, congregations in the synod averaged 461 baptized members per congregation; in 2010 the average number of baptized members per congregation was 538. In 2016, the synod baptized 689 children, 97 adults, and affirmed the faith of 582 adults. As a point of comparison, congregations reported losing 759 baptized members to death and 4,788 overall in 2016. As Figure 4 shows, in Southeastern Pennsylvania the gap between members received due to baptisms and baptized members lost to death has narrowed considerably in the past few years.²

In 2016, the aggregate worship attendance on a typical Sunday was 15,001 (about 22 percent of baptized membership) with an average attendance per congregation of 100. The ELCA had an average worship attendance of 101 per congregation (approximately 26 percent of baptized members).

In 2016, 31 percent of congregations had an average worship attendance of 126 or more. These congregations accounted for 59 percent of the synod's average worship attendance overall (see Figure 5). We see 23 percent of congregations with an average worship attendance between 26 and 50; these congregations account for nine percent of the synod's overall worship attendance. In 2006, 37 percent of congregations in the synod accounted for 68 percent of the overall worship attendance. Congregations with between 26 and 50 in average worship attendance comprised 10 percent of congregations, but only three percent of average worship attendance.

² For this statistic, we only used the sum of child and adult baptisms and subtracted this from the number of baptized members lost to death, akin to the rate of natural increase.

Figure 4: Difference Between Members Received by Baptism and Baptized Members Lost to Death

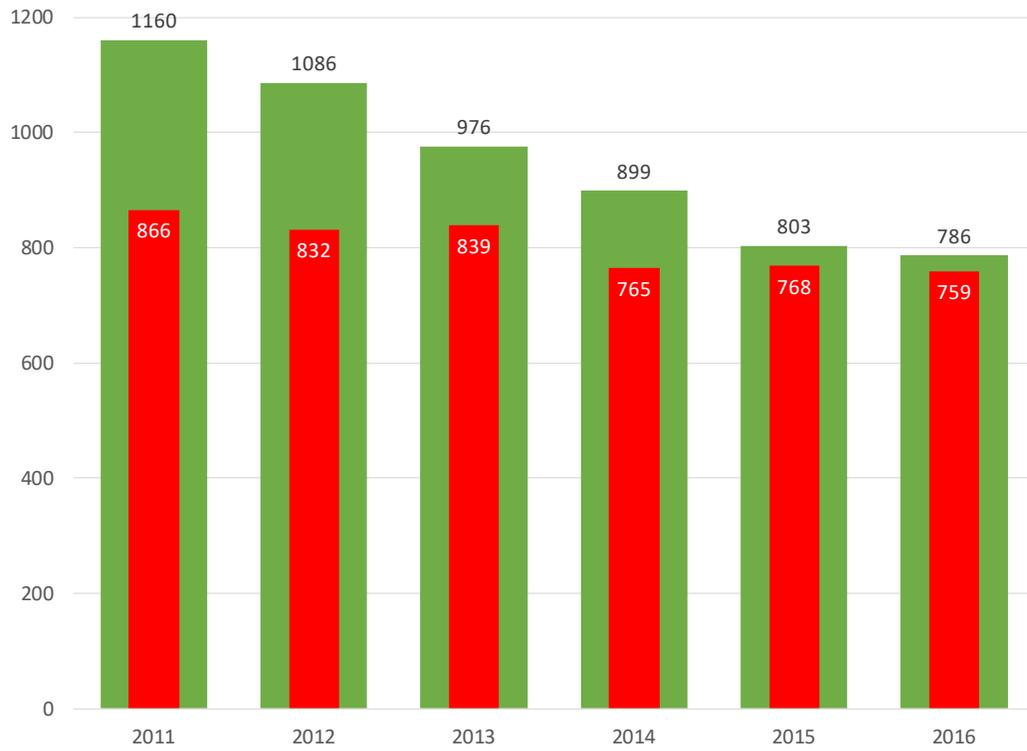


Figure 5: Distribution of Attendance and Congregations, 2016

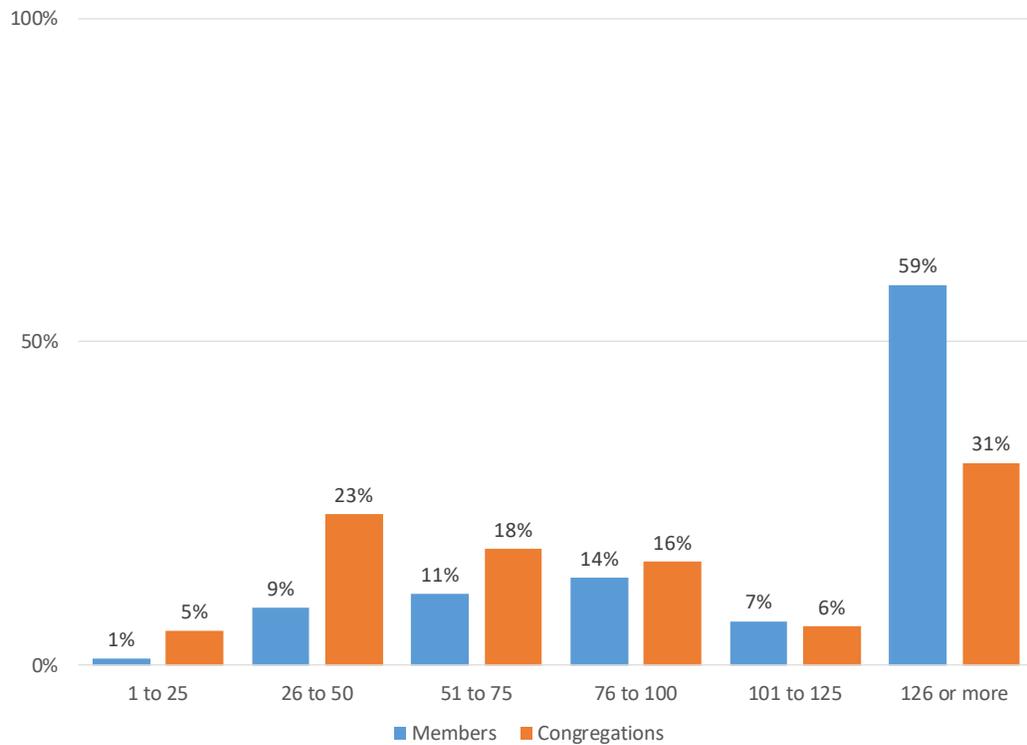
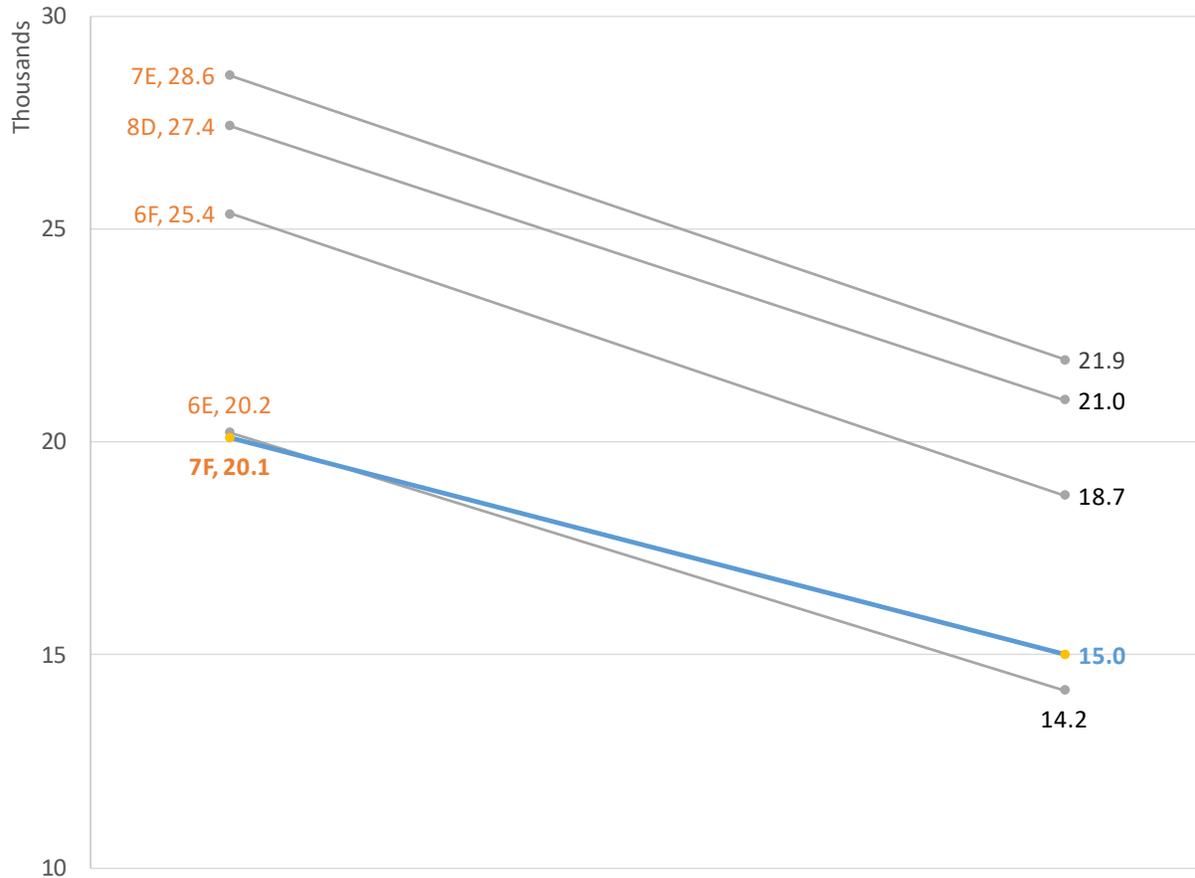


Figure 6 shows the trend in worship attendance for synods comparable to Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod (7F) between 2010 and 2016. As the figure indicates, attendance has been in decline for the synods cited in this report, with each synod reporting a decline in average attendance between 24 and 30 percent, since 2010.

Figure 6: Change in Aggregate Worship Attendance, 2010 to 2016

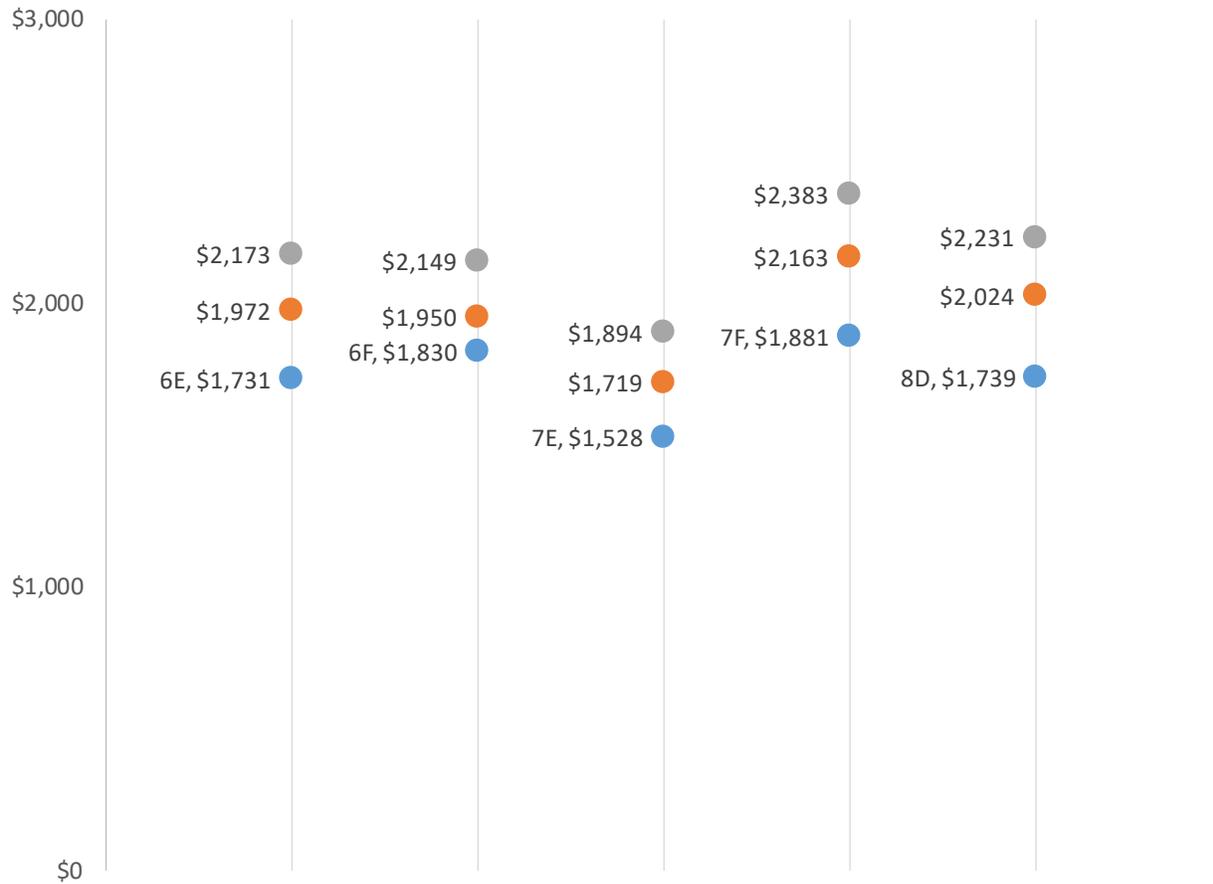


Giving

Undesignated and designated (total) giving was \$35.7 million for the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod in 2016. This averaged out to \$2,383 per attendee. In 2010, total giving amounted to \$37.8 million or \$1,881 per attendee. The 2016 total giving amount adjusted for 2010 dollars would be \$32.4 million.³ This suggests despite a higher rate of giving per attendee, the synod has not been able to offset the financial losses resulting from lower attendance rates (see Figure 7).

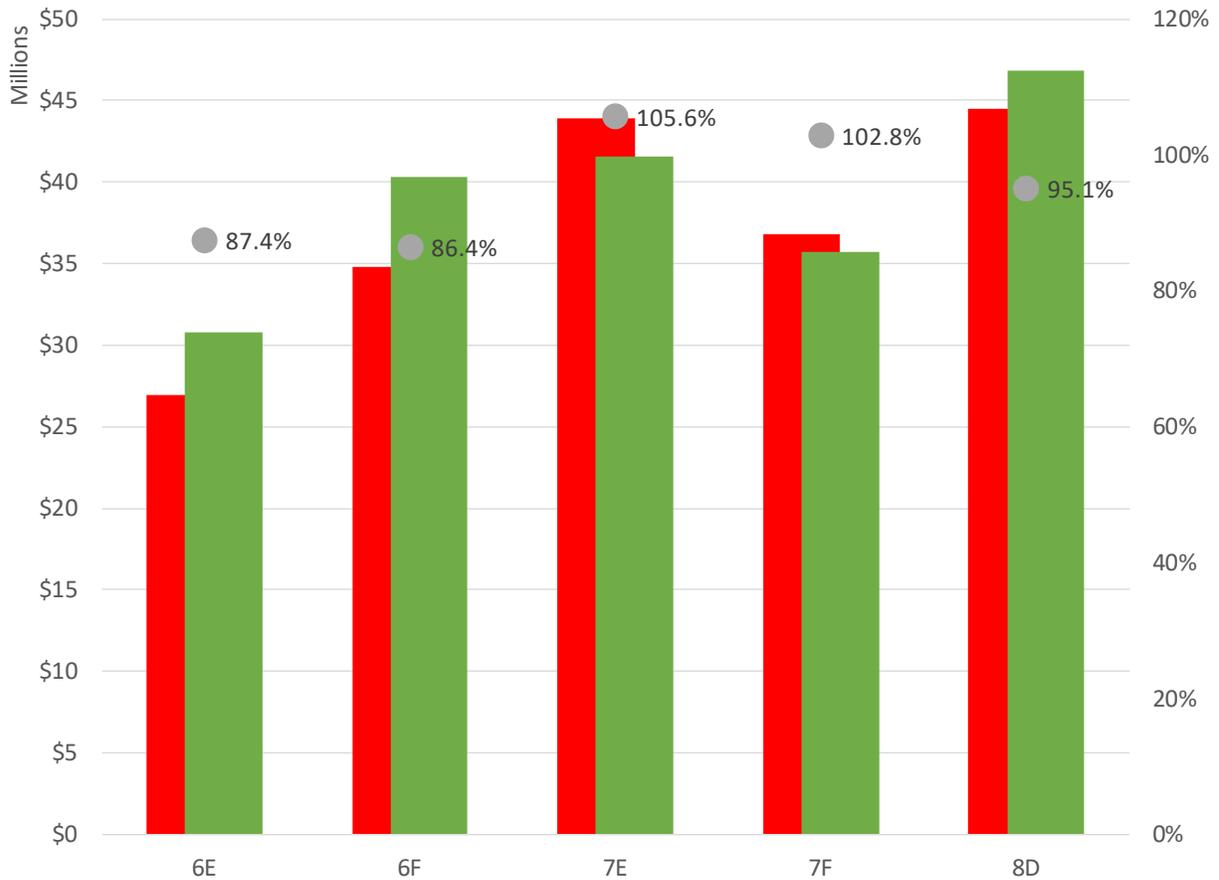
³ We used [Tom's Inflation Calculator](#) and the CPI to calculate these figures.

Figure 7: Giving per Attendee, Selected Synods, 2010, 2016, and 2016 adjusted for 2010 Dollars



Operating expenses for the synod in 2010 were \$38.1 million, or 74 percent of total disbursements. In 2016, operating expenses were \$36.8 million, accounting for 80 percent of total disbursements. When looking at operating expenses as a percentage of total giving for the synods, 7E and 7F have expenses greater than total giving covers while this is not the case for 6E, 6F or 8D (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Operating Expenses as a Percentage of Total Giving



Mission support is the amount of money shared through congregations for the ministries of synods and the ELCA churchwide expression. Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod shared, as a percentage of regular giving, 6.1 percent in mission support. Table 2 shows the mission support per attendee as well as percentages for selected synods and the ELCA.

Table 2: 2016 Mission Support per Attendee and as a Percentage⁴

	Mission Support	Aggregate Worship Attendance	Undesignated Giving	Per attendee	As % of undesignated giving
6E	\$1,360,225	14,175	\$26,157,963	\$95.96	5.2
6F	\$1,582,551	18,747	\$34,502,589	\$84.42	4.6
7E	\$2,237,713	21,936	\$36,282,922	\$102.01	6.2
7F	\$1,830,064	15,001	\$30,120,706	\$122.00	6.1
8D	\$2,541,838	20,988	\$41,274,764	\$121.11	6.2
ELCA	\$97,463,395	935,583	\$1,755,274,518	\$104.17	5.6

⁴ These amounts are from the “Summary of Congregational Statistics” report for the year ending 31 December 2016. The per attendee figure is calculated based on the reported mission support divided by the synod’s aggregate worship attendance.

The Synod Office and its Financial Resources

Section 10.21 of the Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America outlines the primary purpose of synod offices:

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

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

Despite the consistency of responsibilities, the amount of money available to synod offices to carry out these responsibilities varies widely. Table 3 shows all the synods referenced in this report and the amount of mission support income shared with them.

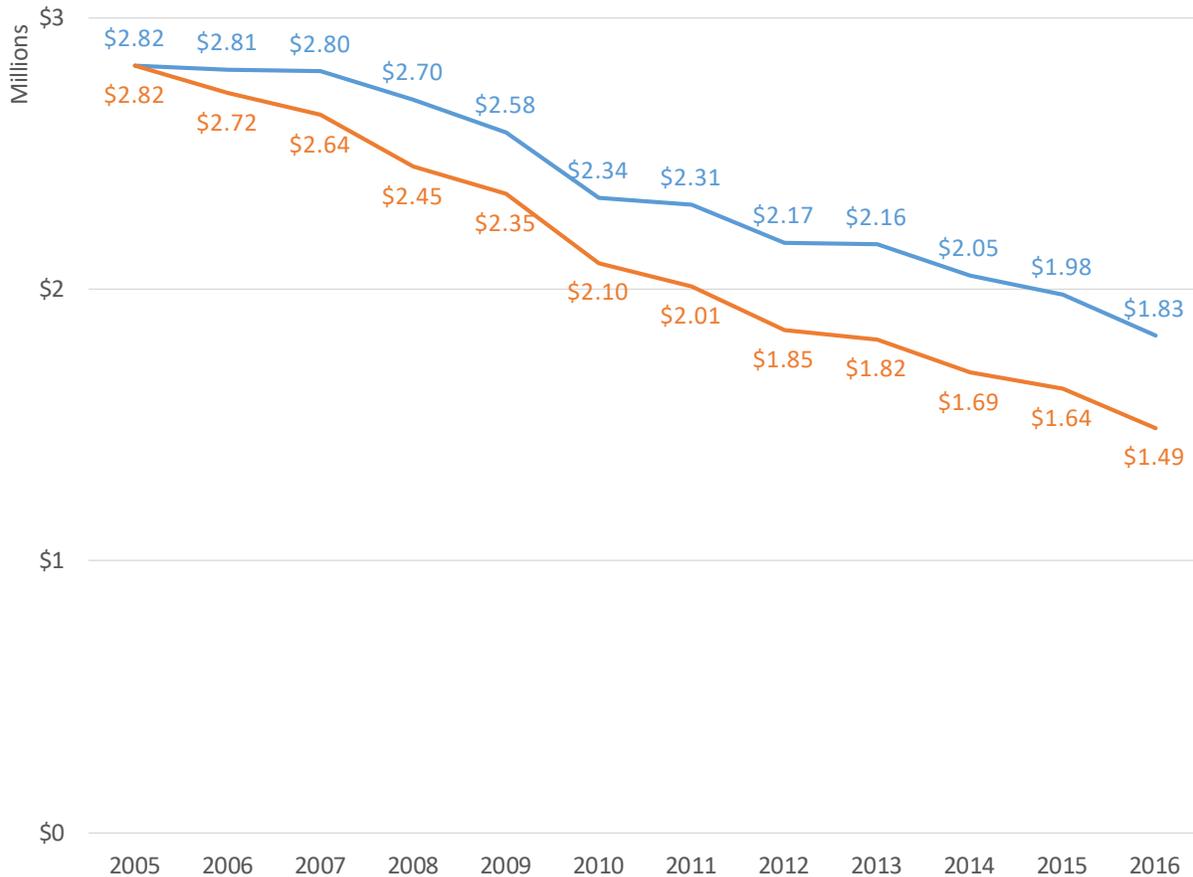
Table 3: Mission Support for Selected Synods, 2016⁵

	From Congregations to Synod	Percent to Churchwide	Amount to Churchwide	Amount Remaining in Synod
6E – Northeastern Ohio	\$1,367,326	50.0%	\$683,663	\$683,663
6F – Southern Ohio	\$1,618,700	40.0%	\$647,480	\$971,220
7E – Northeastern Pennsylvania	\$2,223,253	47.0%	\$1,044,929	\$1,178,324
7F – Southeastern Pennsylvania	\$1,851,136	50.0%	\$925,568	\$925,568
8D – Lower Susquehanna	\$2,210,531	45.0%	\$994,739	\$1,215,792

As Figure 9 shows, while the actual dollar amount of congregational giving to the synod for mission support has increased, when factoring in inflation, the amount shared is lower in 2016 than 2005.

⁵ These amounts are from “2016 Synods Detailed Remittance report as of 1/31/2017” worksheet. To calculate “From Congregations to Synod” we divided “Amount to Churchwide” by “Percent to Churchwide”.

Figure 9: Congregational Giving to Mission Support for Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
 Actual and Adjusted for 2005 Dollars



Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Bishop Election Questionnaire

In Fall of 2017, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod conducted a brief questionnaire asking respondents about their congregations’ successes and struggles, what skills and gifts the next bishop will need, and what role will be most important for the new bishop to fulfill. The questionnaire was made available through social media, websites, PDFs and direct email invitation.

In summary, the next bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod should focus on being a “caster of vision” and relationship builder. Additionally, the new bishop should have wisdom, vision, knowledge, and/or patience, be a pastor to pastors and be a consensus builder. For the synod to show “love of neighbor”, it should make efforts toward “anti-racism”, focus on issues around hunger and homelessness, and economic justice. Success in the synod in three years’ time would manifest as congregations growing in average worship attendance, becoming more diverse and working for social justice. Finally, being a cohesive Christian community is important as well.