

A Statistical Overview of the Southwestern Texas Synod

With Comparisons to Synods in Region Four

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Territory

The Southwestern Texas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America covers 79,159 square miles. The smallest area covered by a synod is the Saint Paul Area, 1,535 square miles whereas the largest area covered is Alaska at 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 territory of the other synods in Region 4.

Figure 1: Territory of the Synods in Region 4

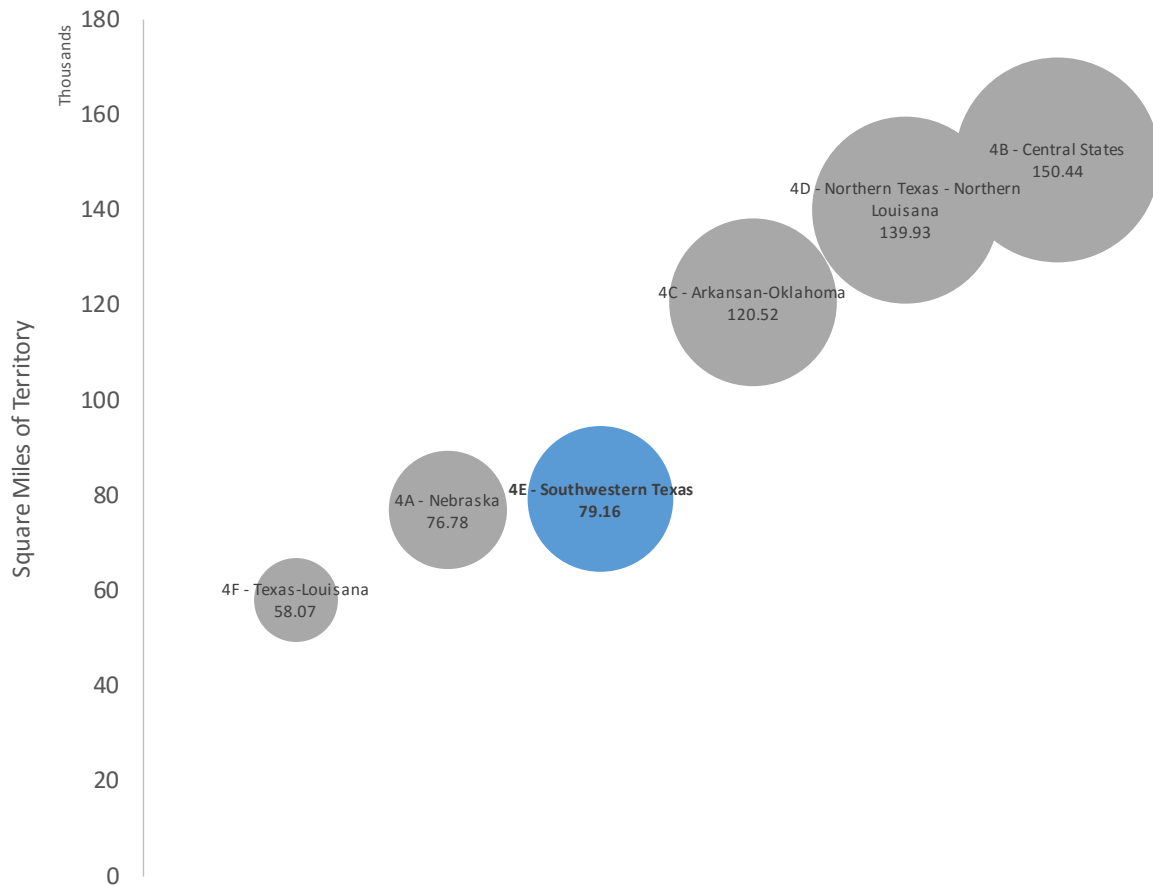
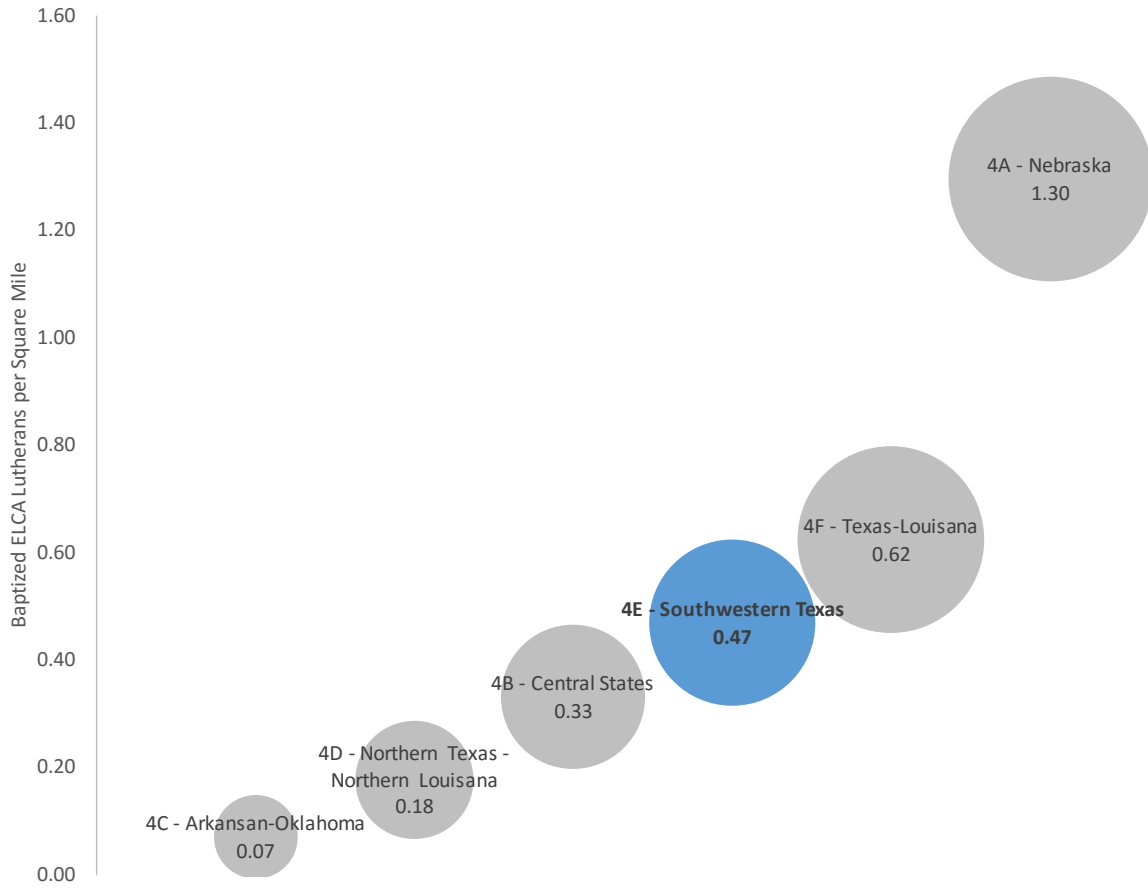


Figure 2 shows the number of ELCA Lutherans per square miles in these synods. There were 37,192 baptized members in the Southwestern Texas synod in 2015, which is approximately one person per two square miles. This compares to almost 11 ELCA Lutherans per square mile in Southwestern Pennsylvania or seven in Delaware-Maryland.

Figure 2: Baptized ELCA Lutherans per Square Mile

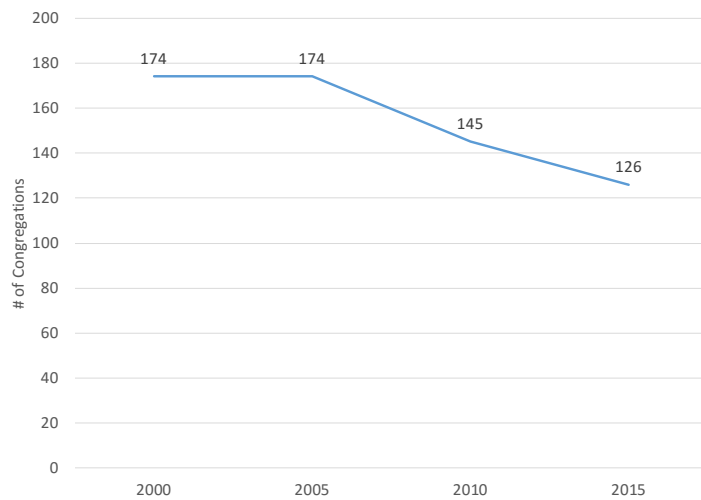


Per the 2010 US Census, the population of the synod's territory was 6,586,943. The 2016 estimate is 7,319,136; the population is projected to be 7,887,115 in 2021, an increase of seven percent. Baptized ELCA Lutherans account for half a percent of the population currently; in 2000 the 71,906 baptized ELCA Lutherans accounted for 1.4 percent of the 5,280,361 people in the synod's territory.

Baptized Membership and Worship Attendance

At the end of 2015, the Southwestern Texas Synod had 126 organized congregations; at the end of 2010 there were 145 congregations. There were 174 congregations in both 2000 and 2005. Many congregations in the ELCA chose to disaffiliate with the ELCA after the actions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly: Southwestern Texas lost 35 congregations due to the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

The number of congregations has declined 28 percent since 2000.

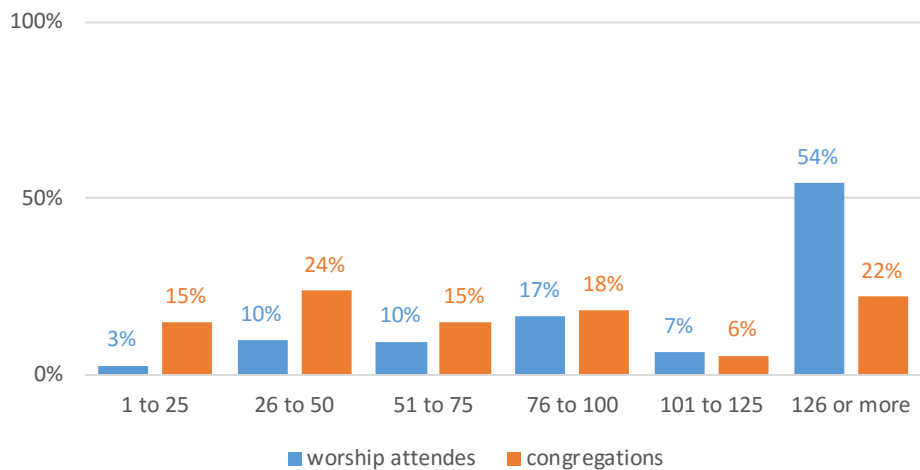


In 2015, the total baptized membership of the synod was 37,192, or an average of 295 members per congregation. The average size of an ELCA congregation, by baptized membership, was 399 in 2015. In 2015, the synod baptized 419 children under the age of 16 and 53 adults over the age of 16 while affirming the faith of 385 adults.

In 2015, the aggregate worship attendance on a typical Sunday was 12,094 (33% of baptized members) with an average of 92 people in attendance per congregation. (The average number of attendees per a congregation for the ELCA was 105 in 2015, or 27 percent of baptized members).

Ninety-one of the 126 active congregations (72%) in the synod had an average attendance of 100 or fewer in 2015 (see right) while these same congregations accounted for 40 percent of all worshipers in the synod in 2015. In 2009, the aggregate worship attendance in the synod was

Twenty percent of the congregations account for 54 percent of attendees.



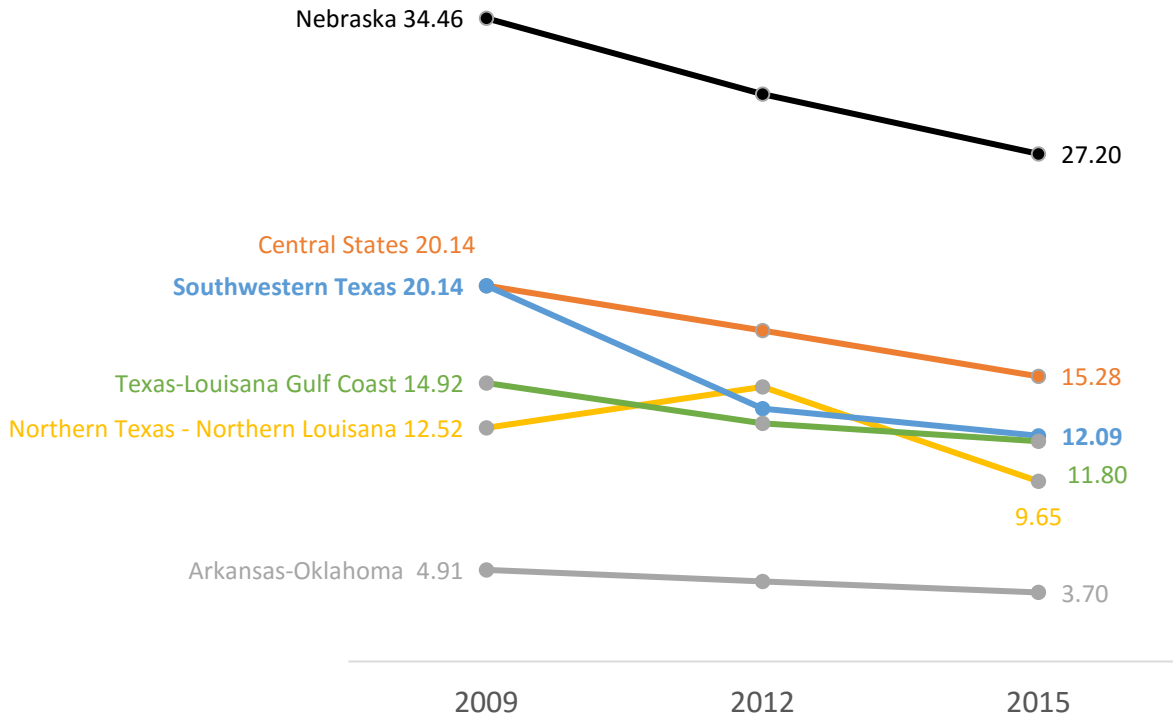
20,138 and on average, 119 attended worship. Since 2006 the number of congregations with 50 or fewer in attendance has increased from 24 percent to 39 percent.

Figure 3 presents the trend in worship attendance for synods in Region 4 from 2009 to 2015. As the chart indicates, overall average attendance is down an average of 26 percent throughout the synod, with Texas-Louisiana having the lowest rate of decline at 21 percent and Southwestern Texas having the highest rate of decline at 40 percent. Numerically speaking, Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod reported the

fewest number of attendees lost (1,210) while again Southwestern Texas reported the highest rate of decline, with 8,044 attendees lost.

Figure 3: The aggregate number of attendees is down throughout the synod, with Southwestern Texas showing the largest declines.

Attendance figures reported in thousands.

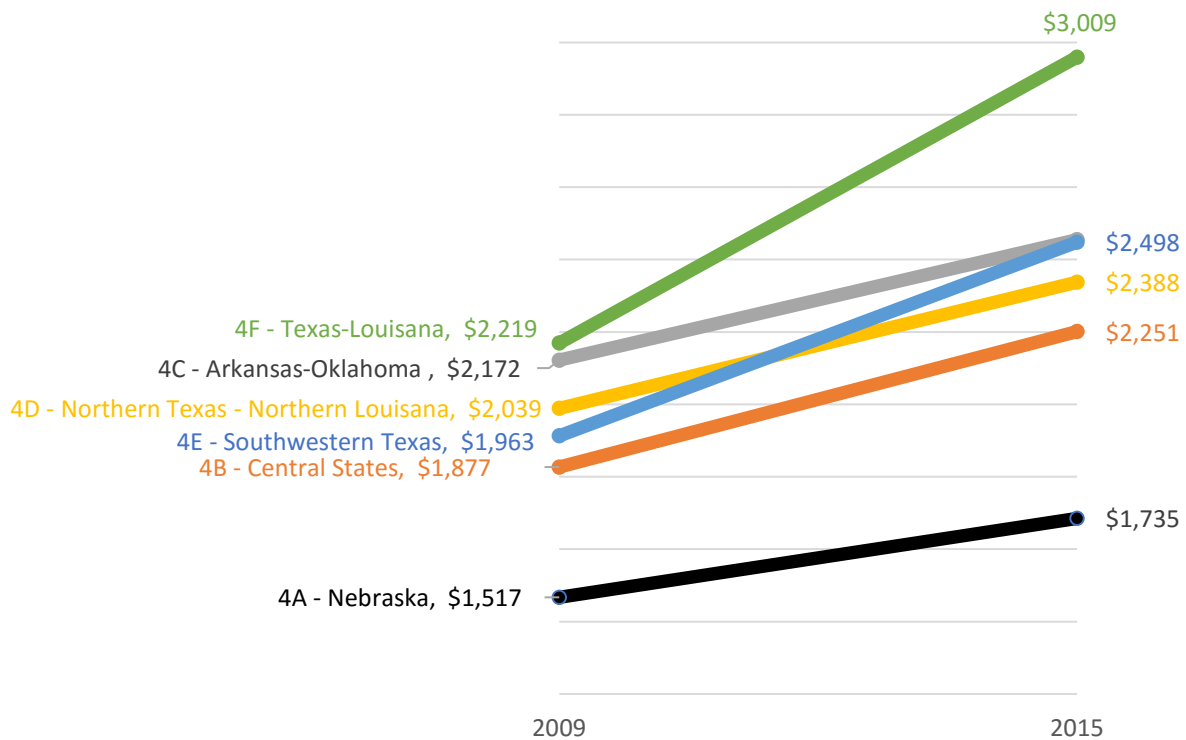


Giving

Total giving (undesigned and designated giving) from the members of the Southwestern Texas Synod in 2015 was \$30,214,599, or \$2,498 per worship attendee. In 2009, total giving was \$35,950,937 or \$1963 per worship attendee. The 2015 value of the 2009 amount is \$35,950,937¹. Despite giving more, the attendees have been unable to offset losses due to the overall decline in worship attendance.

¹ We used Tom's Inflation Calculator (http://www.halfhill.com/inflation_js.html)

Total Giving (undesigned and designed) per Attendee,
2009 and 2015



Operating expenses have increased as a percent of total giving from 66.0 percent in 2009 to 88.9 percent in 2015.

Mission support is the amount of money given through congregations for the ministries of synods and the ELCA churchwide expression. In the Southwestern Texas synod, mission support as a percentage of regular giving was 5.70 in 2015. Table 1 shows the rest of Region 4 and the ELCA.

	Mission Support per Attendee	% of Undesignated Giving
Nebraska (4A)	\$124	7.75
Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana (4D)	\$125	5.95
Central States (4B)	\$114	5.77
Southwestern Texas (4E)	\$122	5.70
<i>ELCA</i>	<i>\$101</i>	<i>5.58</i>
Arkansas-Oklahoma (4C)	\$128	5.36
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast	\$112	5.23

The Synod Office and Its Financial Resources

Section 10.21 of the *Constitutions, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* outlines the primary purposes 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 tis territory. In fulfillment of this role and consistent with policies and procedures of this church the synod shall:

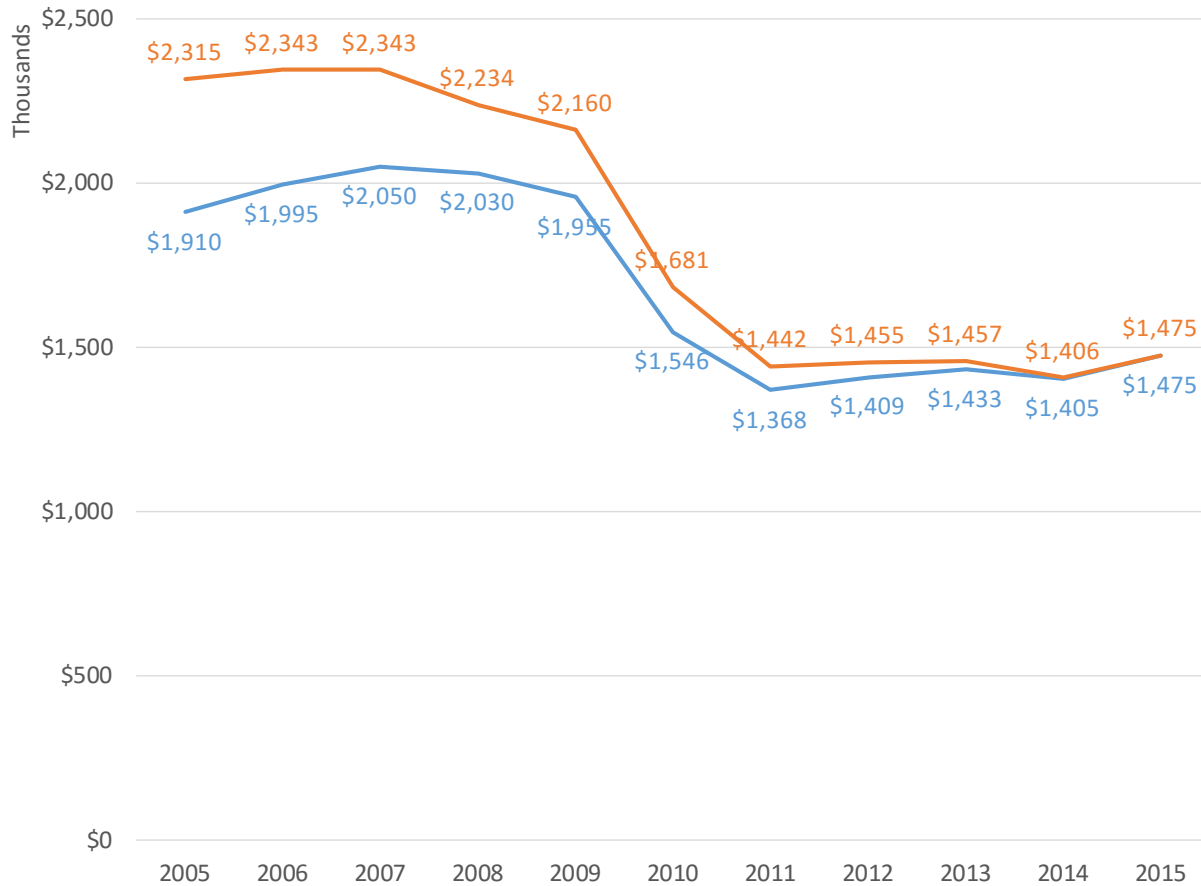
- a. Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered leaders in the synod;
- b. Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations;
- c. Strengthen interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and foster relationships 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 on the territory of the synod.

Despite the consistency of responsibilities, the amount of money available to synod offices to carry out these responsibilities varies widely. Table 2 shows all six Region 4 synods and the amount of mission support income to them.

Table 2: Mission Support for Region 4 Synods, 2015

	From Congregations to synod	Percent to Churchwide	Amount to Churchwide	Amount Remaining in the Synod
4A - Nebraska	\$3,369,192	54.5%	\$1,836,210	\$1,532,982
4B - Central States	\$1,741,561	50.3%	\$875,801	\$865,760
4C – Arkansas-Oklahoma	\$472,299	41.6%	\$196,707	\$276,000
4D - Northern Texas - Northern Louisiana (est.)	\$1,207,310	48.0%	\$579,509	\$627,801
4E - Southwestern Texas	\$1,474,725	51.8%	\$763,557	\$711,168
4F - Texas-Louisiana	\$1,316,962	50.0%	\$658,461	\$658,501

Figure 6: Reported and Adjusted for Inflation Congregational Giving per attendee to Mission Support, 2005 to 2015²



Congregational Vitality

The 2015 Annual Congregational Report asked congregational leaders to describe their congregation's connections with God, each other and the world, answering 15 questions using a five-point scale with 1 being the low anchor and 5 being the high anchor.³ The scores were averaged across the synod, Region 4 and the ELCA to give an idea of how congregations (or at least the persons submitting the report) think they are doing on connecting to God, each other and the world. As a guideline, **scores lower than 3 suggest the congregation isn't doing well in an area; scores between 3 and 4 suggest there is room for improvement; and scores higher than 4 suggest the congregation does well or is strong in this area.**

As Figure 7 suggests, the synod's descriptions of themselves was very close to how the other two groups described themselves. Except for being a positive force in the community, the ELCA average was more than half a point higher than what the synod reported.

² These figures have been adjusted for inflation to reflect 2015 dollars. Years 2005 through 2014 are based on information from parochial reports. The 2015 figure is from the audited financial statement of financial position.

³ See <http://www.congregationalvitalitysurvey.com/> for more information as well as results by congregation.

Figure 7: Vitality Descriptions of the Synod, Region 4 and the ELCA



Along with descriptions of the congregations, those completing Form A were asked to share how well their congregation is doing at various tasks, like building healthy relationships among members, addressing social concerns, and interacting with the local community; in short, we asked them where they are strong. The scores were averaged and again, we see parity in the scores; the synod’s scores were very close to what the both the region and ELCA reported (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Vitality Strengths of the Synod, Region and ELCA

