

Southwest California Synod Bishop Election Report
Research and Evaluation
Office of the Presiding Bishop
February 2021

Territory, Population and Baptized Membership

The Southwest California Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America covers 20,088 square miles. Geographically, it ranks 36th out of ELCA synods. The smallest area covered by a synod is the Saint Paul Area, 1,535 square miles; the largest area covered is Alaska, 571,951 square miles. The median territory covered is 22,000 miles. Twenty synods in the ELCA cover 10,000 square miles or less. Figure 1 shows the territory covered for the synods of Region 2.

Figure 1: Territory of the Synods of Region 2 in Square Miles

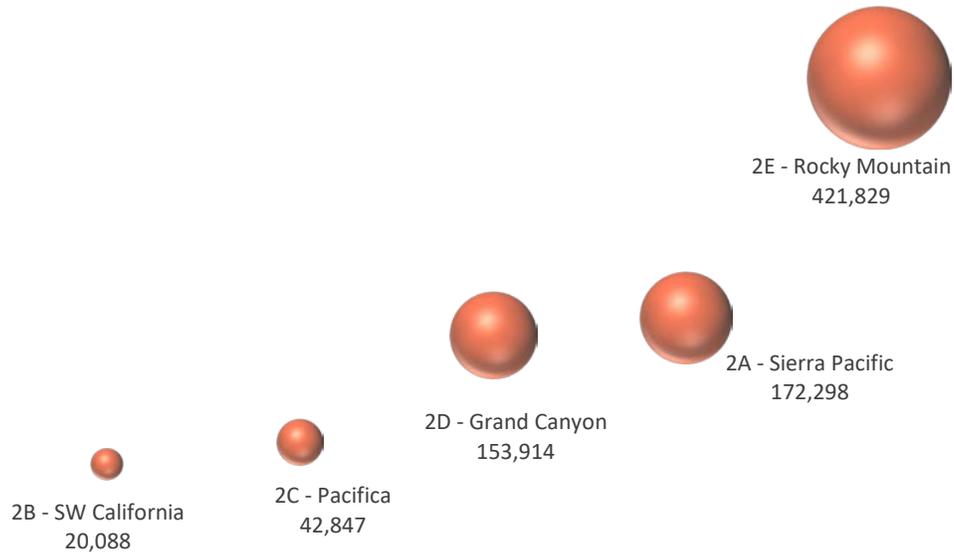
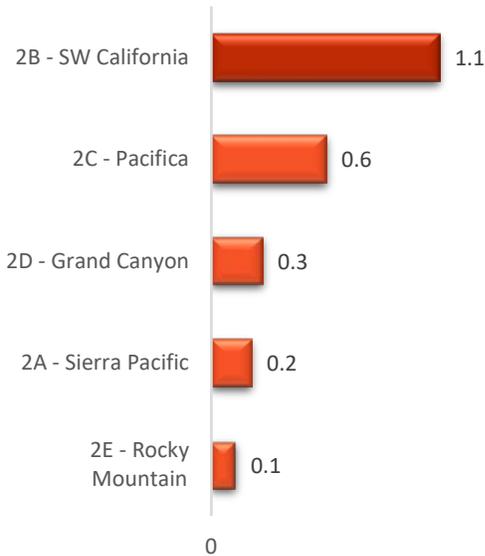


Figure 2 shows the number of Lutherans per square mile in the synods of Region 2. There were 23,052 baptized ELCA Lutherans in the Southwest California Synod in 2019, which is 1.1 baptized members per square mile. No synod in Region 2 is densely populated with ELCA members.

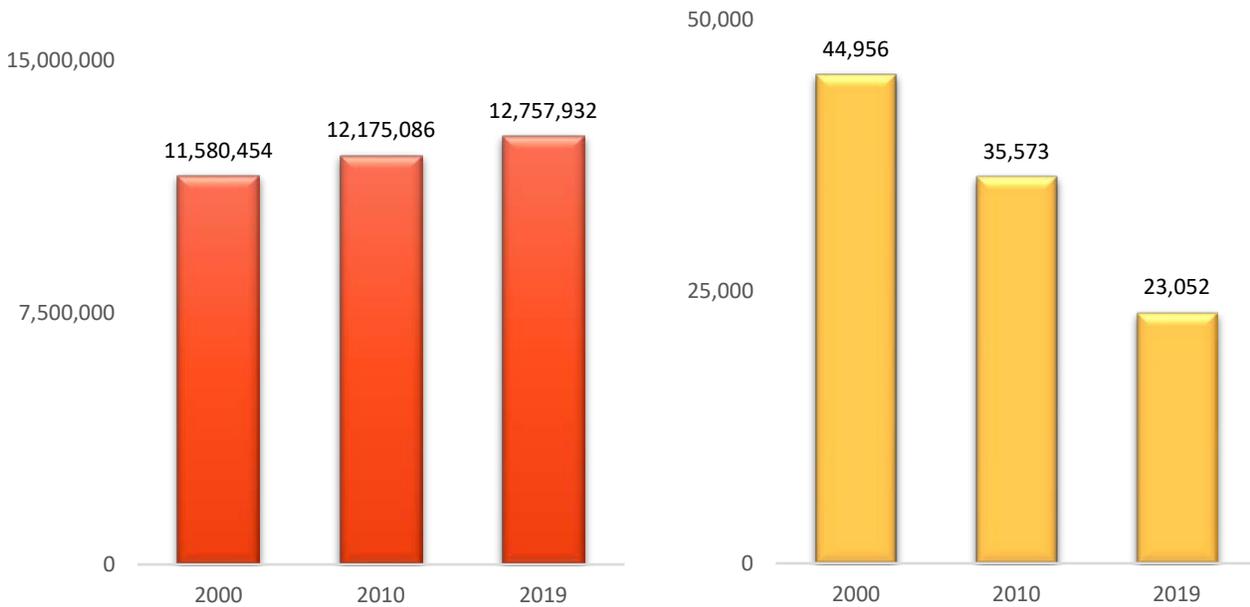
Figure 2: Baptized ELCA Lutherans per Square Mile



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According to the 2000 US Census, the population of the territory of the Southwest California Synod was 11,580,454. The 2010 population was 12,175,086; the population was estimated to be 12,757,932 in 2019. The baptized membership has declined from 44,956 in 2000 to 23,052 in 2019. Baptized membership has declined by 49 percent while the overall population has increased ten percent. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3: Southwest California Population and ELCA Baptized Members



Worship Attendance and Congregations

At the end of 2019, the Southwest California Synod had 115 congregations. In 2009, there were 135.

In 2019, the baptized membership of the synod was 23,052 or an average of 200 per congregation. The average number of baptized members in a congregation in the ELCA was 364. Also, in 2019, the congregations of the synod baptized 196 children and 125 adults while also affirming the faith of 298 adults.

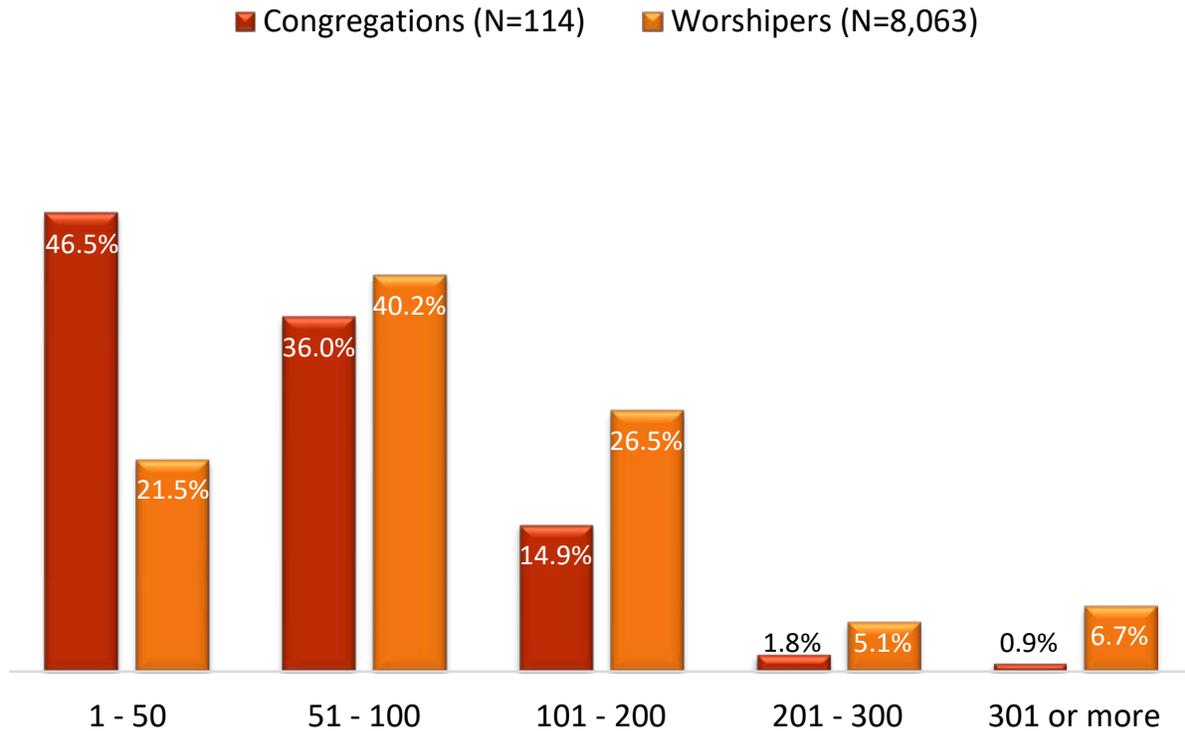
In 2019, the aggregate weekly worship attendance in the synod was 8,063 (35% of the baptized members) with an average of 70 in worship per congregation. The average weekly attendance for a typical congregation in the ELCA in 2019 was 92 or 26 percent of the baptized. Table 1 shows average weekly attendance for the synods of Region 2 and the ELCA. ELCA members in Region 2 are more intentional about worship attendance than ELCA members as a whole.

Table 1: Average Weekly Attendance 2019

Synod	Average Weekly Attendance	Percentage of Baptized Members Attending Worship
2D – Grand Canyon	18,451	45.1%
2C – Pacifica	9,645	38.4%
2A – Sierra Pacific	12,931	36.4%
2B – SW California	8,063	35.0%
2E – Rocky Mountain	16,453	32.3%
ELCA	831,520	25.5%

Eighty-three percent of the congregations in the Southwest California Synod had 100 people or fewer attending worship during an average week in 2019 (see Figure 4) while these same congregations accounted for 62 percent of all worshipers in the synod. Twelve percent of the people in the pews are in congregations worshipping more than 200 people. These four congregations account for 14 percent of the worshipers in the synod: Ascension in Torrance (504 people), Holy Trinity in Thousand Oaks (210 people), First in Torrance (201 people) and Trinity in Ventura (199). In 2009, the aggregate weekly worship attendance in the synod was 14,700. The average number attending worship per congregation during an average week in 2009 was 110. Since 2009, the percentage of congregations with 50 or fewer in worship has increased from 29 percent to 47 percent. The number of congregations worshipping over 200 per week has decreased from 13 percent to three percent in the same time frame.

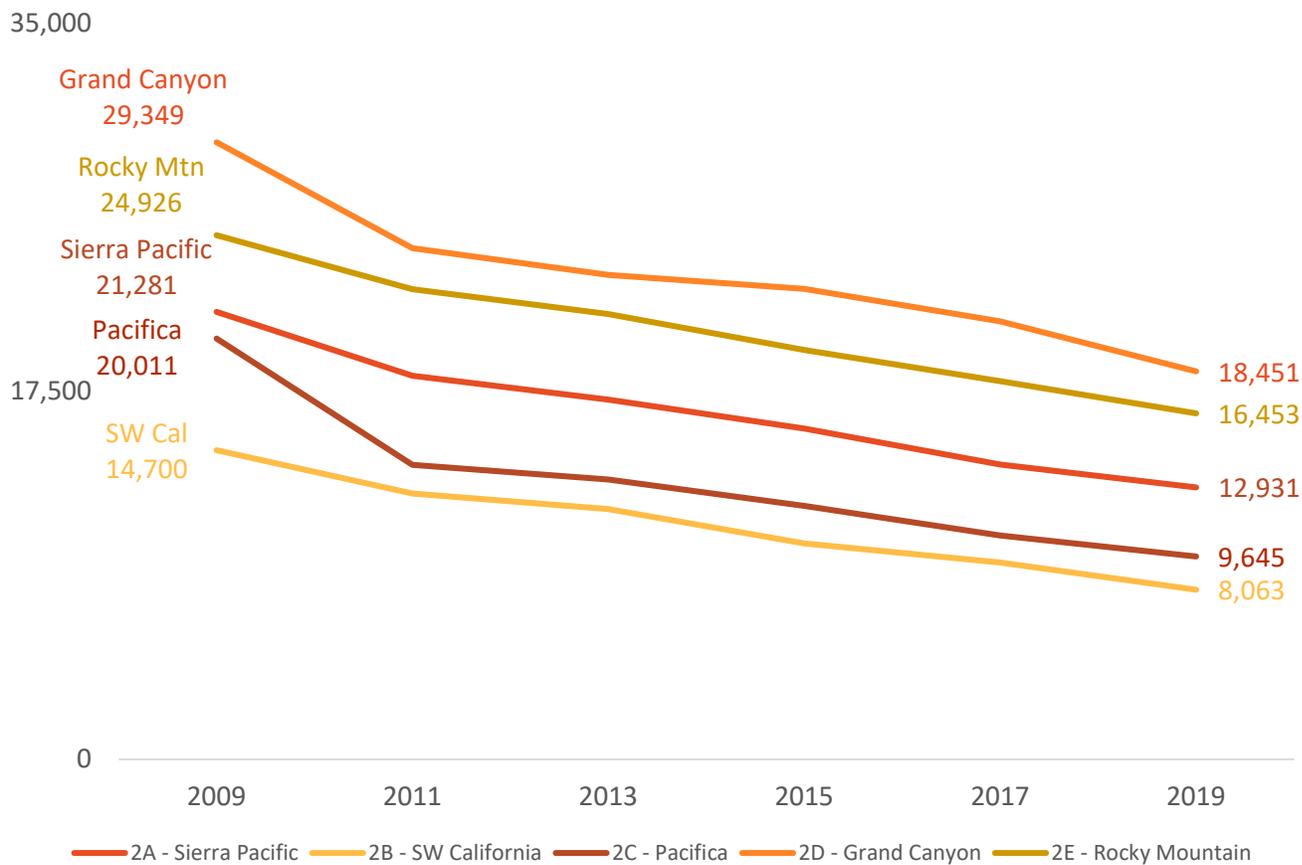
Figure 4: Percent of Congregations and Worshipers by Typical Worship Attendance for the Congregations of the Sierra Pacific Synod in 2019*



*Of the 114 congregations in the Southwest California Synod, 46.5% (red bars) have 50 or fewer people in worship in a typical week. Of the 8,063 people in worship each week (orange bars), 40.2% are in congregations with 51-100 people attending worship.

Figure 5 presents the trend in worship attendance for the synods of Region 2 for 2009 to 2019. All synods have seen declines in the past ten years: Pacifica -52 percent, Southwest California -45 percent, Sierra Pacific -39 percent, Grand Canyon -37 percent, Rocky Mountain -34 percent. There were sharp declines in both the Grand Canyon and Pacifica Synods from 2009 to 2011 related to the Churchwide Assembly decision on human sexuality. The decline in average attendance for the ELCA from 2009 to 2019 was -36 percent.

Figure 5: Change in Worship Attendance from 2009 to 2019



Giving and Mission Support

Total giving (undesignated and designated giving) from the members of the Southwest California Synod in 2019 was \$21,547,936; the average amount given per attendee was \$2,672 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Total Giving per Worship Attendee

Synod	Total Giving Per Worship - 2009*	Total Giving Per Worship Attendee - 2019
Rocky Mountain	\$2,398	\$3,023
Pacifica	\$2,603	\$2,988
Sierra Pacific	\$2,508	\$2,973
SW California	\$2,233	\$2,672
Grand Canyon	\$1,885	\$2,202
ELCA	\$2,062	\$2,470

*2009 dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. The actual amount in the Southwest California Synod in 2009 was \$1,874.

In 2009, total giving to the congregations in the synod was \$27,540,763 (\$32,813,448 in 2019 dollars). The average amount given per worship attendee in 2009 was \$1,874 (\$2,233 in 2019 dollars). Despite giving \$439 more per year on average, these attendees have been unable to offset losses due to the overall decline in worship attendance.

Operating expenses in the synod have increased as a percentage of total giving from 120 percent in 2009 to 181 percent in 2019. Congregations are covering their expenses for operations with other non-giving funding sources (see Table 3).

Table 3: Operating Expenses as a Percentage of Total Giving

Year	Total Giving	Operating Expenses	Operating Expenses as % of Giving
2019	\$21,547,936	\$38,977,926	180.9%
2009	\$27,540,763	\$33,158,035	120.4%

Mission support is the amount of undesignated money shared through congregations for the ministry of synods and the ELCA churchwide expression. Table 4 presents mission support both as a percentage of undesignated giving from congregations and per congregation.

Table 4: Mission Support as a Percentage of Congregational Undesignated Giving and per Congregation – 2019¹

Synod	% Congregational Undesignated Giving for Mission Support	Mission Support per Congregation
Grand Canyon	5.99%	\$23,027
Rocky Mountain	5.49%	\$14,972
Pacifica	6.03%	\$13,409
Sierra Pacific	5.10%	\$9,702
SW California	5.65%	\$8,805
ELCA	5.37%	\$10,467

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 the 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 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 5 shows mission support figures for the synods of Region 2.

Table 5: Mission Support in 2019*

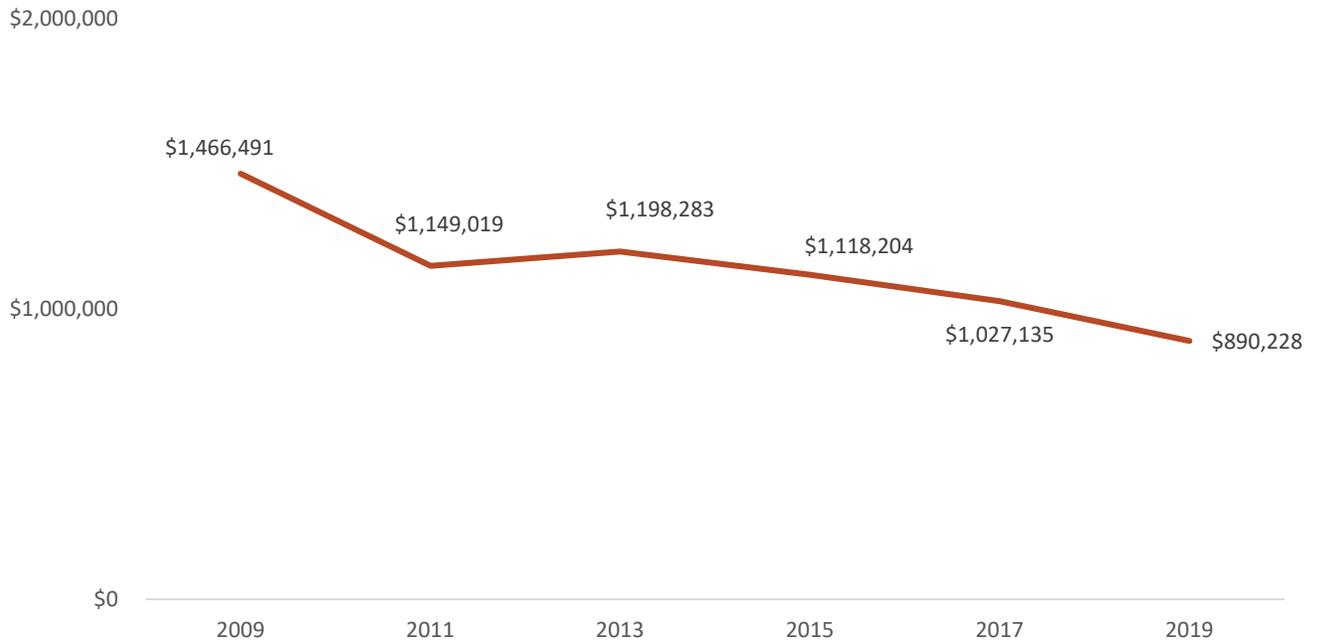
Synod	From Congregations	% to CWO	Amount to CWO	Amount Remaining in Synod
Rocky Mountain	\$2,365,688	47.50%	\$1,123,702	\$1,241,986
Grand Canyon	\$1,905,424	50.00%	\$952,712	\$952,712
Sierra Pacific	\$1,606,338	37.00%	\$594,345	\$1,011,993
Pacifica	\$1,367,631	51.00%	\$697,492	\$670,139
SW California	\$890,228	50.00%	\$445,114	\$445,114

* It is impossible to calculate an exact percentage share for the ELCA as a whole. Some synods share a dollar amount instead of a percentage of mission support. Also, five synods are part of the Mission Support Experiment and are sharing at a reduced percentage in order to fund the DEM salary and congregational vitality grants. According to the Churchwide audited financial statements, the 65 synods shared \$42,589,112 in mission support with the Churchwide Organization in 2019. According to the summary of Form A congregational reports, the congregations shared \$93,907,971 with the 65 synods.

¹ Table 4 is calculated with Form A data supplied by the congregations. Tables 5 and 6 are calculated with the audited financial statements provided to the ELCA Church Council.

Figure 6 presents the amount of mission support income shared with the Southwest California Synod office from the congregations of the synod from 2009 to 2019.

Figure 6: Congregational Giving to Mission Support for the Southwest California Synod from 2009 to 2019²



² These figures have been adjusted for inflation to reflect 2019 dollars. The actual dollar amount in 2009 was \$1,230,845.