



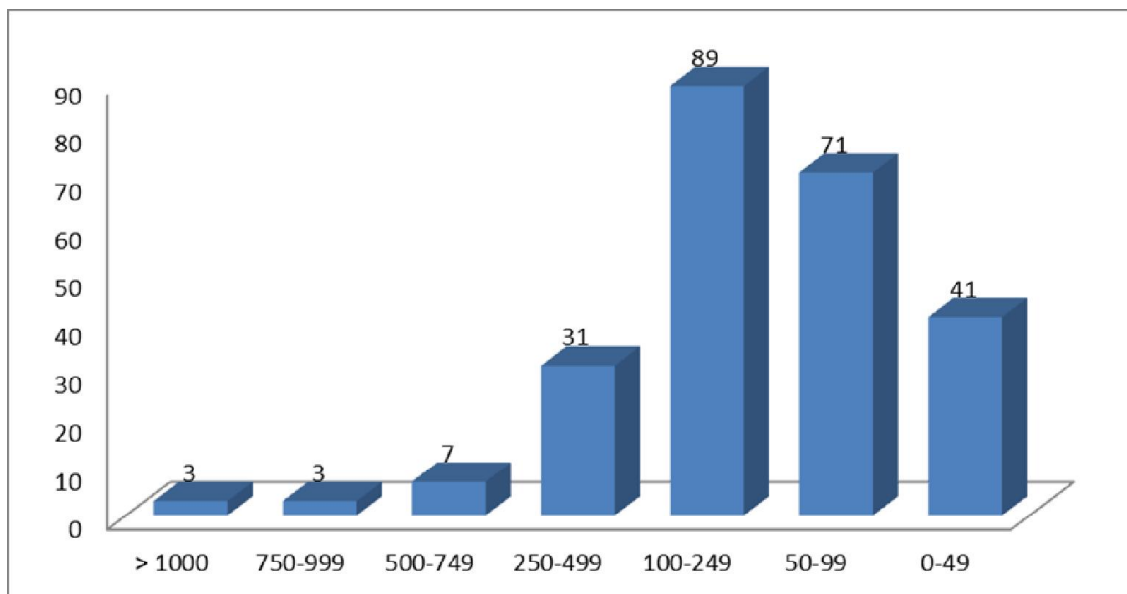
LEGACY CHURCHES

Taking God's Mission into the Future
MN South District – LCMS

1. AVERAGE WORSHIP ATTENDANCE IN THE MN SOUTH DISTRICT OF THE LCMS

245 total congregations

- 1,000+ = 3 congregations (1%)...avg. of 1,260
- 750 to 999 = 3 congregations (1%)...avg. of 836
- 500 to 749 = 7 congregations (3%)...avg. of 584
- 250 to 499 = 31 congregations (13%)...avg. of 353
- 100 to 249 = 89 congregations (36%)...avg. of 169
- 50 to 99 = 71 congregations (29%)...avg. of 72
- 1 to 49 = 41 congregations (17%)...avg. of 31



2. THE LIFE CYCLES OF CONGREGATIONS

Unless a congregation introduces new commitments to its community at the maturity and plateau stages, it becomes very difficult to maintain its ministries into the future. Crucial is continuous renewal of the mission of the church in its community.

- Birth...years 1-5
- Growth...years 5-20
- Maturity...years 20-30 (most vulnerable)
- Plateau...years 30-50
- Decline...years 60-80
- Death

See the "Life Cycles of a Congregation" graphic.

3. EXTERNAL FACTORS LEADING TO A CHURCH'S DECLINE

- Change of Landscape...re-zoning or re-routing of roads...can see it, but can't get to it
- Loss of Population...gradual and slow leak of people
- Triple Elder Effect...older church, older members, and older pastor...difficult to draw younger families
- Pace of Change...significant changes in the community (ethnic, commercial, jobs, age)

4. INTERNAL FACTORS LEADING TO A CHURCH'S DECLINE

- Resistance to Change
- Volunteers...fewer and more burnout
- Conflict...potential to be mismanaged
- Relational Dysfunction...unhealthy relationships
- Debt...too much, or possibly too little or none



5. CLOSURE FACTORS

- Attendance Decline...below a "critical mass" of approx. 30-50 adults
- Inadequate or Inefficient Staffing/Volunteers
- Income Decline...inadequate to support ministry off full-time pastor
- Last Five Years...no growth, visitors, new members
- Age/Tenure of Members
- Survival is the Mission...not the Great Commission

6. OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO LEGACY CHURCHES

- Short-Term Models
 - Secure new sources of income, often via facility rental
 - Secure loan for operational expenses
 - Change pastors (short term if number of lay volunteers does not increase)
 - Go to a part-time or bi-vocational pastor
- Closure Models
 - Traditional Close (assets usually go to district; building may be sold or new ministry placed there)
 - Phoenix Close (assets to new church plant on site, often new pastor, new name)
 - Merger Close (assets handed over to larger church; church becomes additional site of larger church likely with new pastor and new name)
- Transformational Models
 - Rebirth (realistic ministry plan for the future; new intentional commitments to community; perhaps new name, new pastor)
 - Partnership with nearby stronger church (becoming a dual congregation)
 - Mentoring relationship with nearby large church (larger church sends 50-100 people committed to worship and outreach ministries)

Legacy Church Options – Expanded Explanations

Short-Term Models

- Secure new sources of income, often via facility rental
- Secure loan for operational expenses
- Change pastors (short term if number of lay volunteers does not increase)
- Go to a part-time or bi-vocational pastor

These options are meant to act as a “bridge” from the congregation’s current standing to a planned and articulated process of missional development. The first three options in this section should be seen as temporary solutions while a more permanent solution is developed.

Closure Models

These options articulate and develop plans to close the congregation in its current form

- Traditional Close (assets usually go to district; building may be sold or new ministry placed there) No ministry legacy is planned for; this is simply a transfer of physical assets, most often to the MNS District, as articulated in the congregation’s Articles of Incorporation / Constitution.
- Phoenix Close (assets to new church plant on site, often new pastor, new name)
A legacy of ministry is planned for, seeded by existing congregational assets of physical building and land. A new church is planted with a new ministry vision, mission, and strategy under the guidance of a trained church planter.
- Merger Close (assets handed over to larger church; church becomes additional site of larger church likely with new pastor and new name)

In this model physical assets are transferred to a sister congregation. Any remaining staff members agree to relocate to other ministry sites or service opportunities, and all remaining members become a part of the larger church or another congregation of their choosing.

Transformational Models

- Rebirth - A realistic ministry plan for the future is developed in conjunction with a ministry coach; new intentional commitments to community; often a new name and a new pastor are chosen. These actions must be welcomed and supported by the existing membership and significant steps taken over a 2 – 3 year period with regular support, encouragement, and accountability. Deep change in structure, function, and ministry attitude is required.
- Partnership with nearby stronger church (becoming a dual congregation) - Requires a willingness to share personnel resources and partner with a sister congregation to develop ministry beyond current membership resulting in two distinct congregations with shared values, similar missions and compatible strategies.
- Mentoring relationship with nearby large church (larger church sends 50-100 people committed to worship and outreach ministries) - Congregation and its leadership place themselves under the guidance of a sister congregation in order to clarify ministry vision and mission and to emulate the strategy of the mentoring congregation. Most often requires deep changes in ministry structure.