

A Report on the Demographic Composition of Synod and Churchwide Leadership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

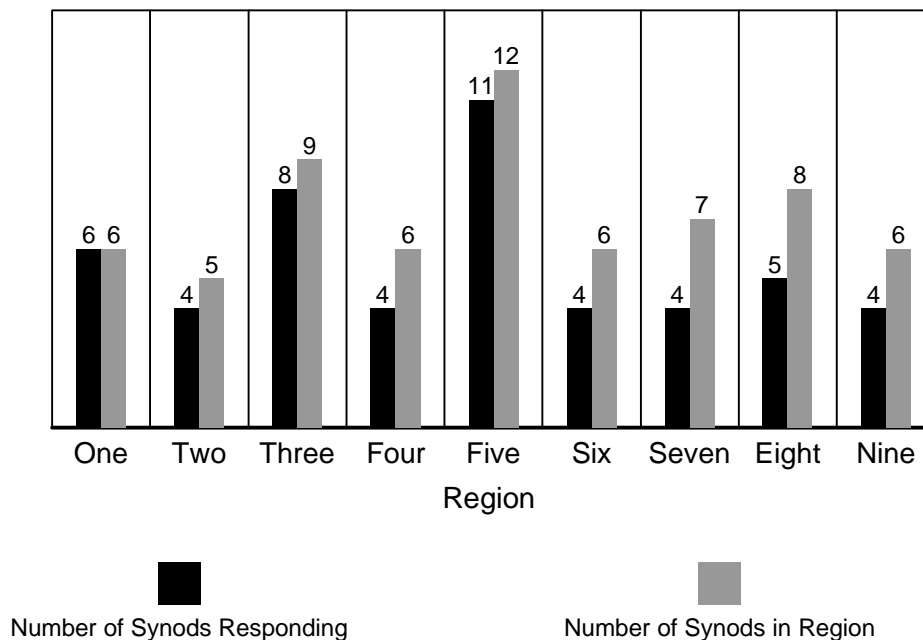
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At the April 1990 meeting of the Churchwide Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) a request was made for a report on the composition of leadership of the ELCA. At the November 1991 meeting of the Churchwide Council, a resolution was passed specifying that the study of composition be conducted regularly by the Commission for Women, the Commission for Multicultural Ministries, the Office of the Bishop and the Department for Research and Evaluation.

This report presents data for 1997 compared to data collected in 1994.¹ Tables are presented that show the change in the composition of the staff and volunteer leaders of the churchwide organization and the synods. In 1994, 57 synods responded to the request for information, though only 51 provided information on their synod volunteers. In 1997, 50 responded as of October 16, 1997. The synod response rate is presented below by Region. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1
Response by Region



¹ Only the data on the percent and number of churchwide council, boards, standing and advisory committee members is from 1995.

The synod response rate is somewhat higher in the West (Regions 1 and 2 at 10/11=91%) and in the Midwest (Regions 3, 4, and 5 at 23/27=85%) compared to the East/South (Regions 6, 7, 8, and 9 at 17/27=63%). Overall the response rate has declined since 1990 when 60 synods responded, but only slightly since 1994 when only 51 synods provided complete information.

CHURCHWIDE COUNCIL, BOARDS, STANDING AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES

For the churchwide organization, 55.6 percent of the members of the churchwide council, boards, standing and advisory committees of the churchwide units are males compared to 44.4 percent who are females. This distribution between males and females is relatively stable. In 1995, 57.5 percent of the members of churchwide boards, standing and advisory committees, including members of the churchwide council, were males compared to 42.5 percent who were females.

The total number of African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American and persons of other races (nonWhite) has declined slightly from 23.5 percent in 1995 to 21.3 percent in 1997. Most of this decline is among male clergy and male lay persons. (See Table 1.)

The largest gain in participation is among Associates in Ministry (AIMS) with the addition of ten more persons who are AIMS among the churchwide volunteers in 1997. The percentage increase is from 3.1 percent of the total in 1995 to 5.8 percent in 1997.

In general, the rates of participation among the members of the churchwide council, boards, standing and advisory committees by race/Hispanic origin, roster category and gender show relatively little significant variation between 1995 and 1997.

SYNOD VOLUNTEERS

For the synods, 57.8 percent of the volunteers including the members, chairs or conveners of committees, boards, conferences and other organizational units with the exception of the synod council, are males compared to 42.2 percent who are females. This distribution by gender is also relatively stable over the past few years. In 1994, 59.0 percent of the synod volunteers were males compared to 41.0 percent who were females.

The total number of African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American and/or persons of other races (nonWhite) has also declined slightly among the synod volunteers between 1995 and 1997. In 1995, 5.9 percent of the volunteers were African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American and/or of other races (nonWhite) compared to 3.8 percent in 1997. Much of this decline is among male clergy and among lay persons in general. (See Table 2.)

SUMMARY ON THE CHURCHWIDE COUNCIL, BOARDS, STANDING AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND SYNOD VOLUNTEERS

While the rate of participation for females is largely the same as in 1995, the participation rate among African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American and/or persons of other races (nonWhite) has declined slightly among both the churchwide council, boards, standing and advisory committees and the synod boards and committees between 1995 and 1997. While the churchwide data are complete, it may be that participation rates for African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans and/or persons of other races (nonWhite) are significantly underestimated because some of the synods that did not report (mostly in the East) may be more likely to have higher than “normal” rates of participation of persons from these groups.

MEMBERSHIP ON SYNOD COUNCILS

The percent and number of synod council members by gender and roster category is very stable between 1994 and 1997. In 1997, 41.3 percent of the synod council members were female compared to 40.4% in 1994. (See Table 3.)

This stability is also evident for participation rates by race/Hispanic origin, with 8.8 percent of the persons on synod councils being African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American in 1997 compared to 8.9 percent in 1994. (See Table 4.) Once again, however, this data may not reflect the actual participation rate among African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans.

The participation rate of synod council members by roster category, race/Hispanic origin, and gender is presented in Table 5 with more detail on gender and race/Hispanic origin presented in Table 6. Table 5 shows a slight increase in participation rates of female clergy and lay persons particularly among African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American persons. Table 6 shows that most of this gain is among Asian and Hispanic persons.

CHURCHWIDE STAFF

The composition of the churchwide staff by gender has remained consistent since 1994. In 1994, 24.7 percent of all the staff were women in executive staff positions compared to 24.2 percent in 1997. In 1994, 35.0 percent of all the staff were women in support positions compared to 34.9 percent in 1997. (See Table 7.) The percent of the entire staff in executive positions remained constant as well with 34.9 percent men compared to 24.2 percent women.

The composition of the churchwide staff by race/Hispanic origin has remained consistent as well. (See Table 8.) In 1994, 10.1 percent of the churchwide staff were African American, Asian, Hispanic or Native American persons in executive positions compared to 10.6 percent in 1997. In both 1994 and in 1997, 16.5 percent of the staff were African American, Asian, Hispanic or Native American persons in support positions. (See Table 8.) The percent of the entire staff that was African American, Asian, Hispanic or Native American persons remained constant as well

with 27.1 percent in 1997 compared to 26.6 percent in 1994.

Table 9 and Table 10 show more detail on the composition of churchwide staff. Table 9 shows the percent and number of churchwide staff by race/Hispanic origin by employment category and gender. All the shifts from 1994 to 1997 are modest with a slight increase in the number of African American, Asian, Hispanic and Native American persons (particularly) females in both executive and support staff positions with a slight decrease in the number of White females in both executive and support staff positions. (See Table 9.) There has also been an increase in the number of white males in support staff positions. Most of the gains for African American, Asian, Hispanic and Native American persons in executive staff positions have been among Hispanic persons with a net increase of 5 executives between 1994 and 1997. (See Table 10.)

SYNOD STAFFS

The composition of the synod staffs by gender has improved slightly for women since 1994. In 1994, 17.0 percent of all the persons on synod staffs were women in executive positions compared to 19.7 percent in 1997. (See Table 11.) At the same time, the vast majority of women on synod staffs are in support positions (78.2%) and men outnumber women in executive positions almost 2 to 1 (1.9 male executives for every 1 female).

The composition of the synod staffs by race/Hispanic origin has improved slightly as well. (See Table 12.) In 1994, 3.4 percent of all synod staff persons were African Americans, Asians, Hispanics or Native Americans in executive staff positions compared to 2.4 percent in 1997. In 1994, 5.5 percent of all synod staff persons, executive and support, were African American, Asian, Hispanic or Native American. In 1997, 7.5 percent were African American, Asian, Hispanic or Native American. At the same time, African American, Asian, Hispanic and Native American executives are outnumbered 16 to 1 (15.9 white executives to every 1 African American, Asian, Hispanic or Native American). The ratio was 21 to 1 in 1995. (It would take eight more African American, Asian, Hispanic or Native American on synod staffs to reach a 10 to 1 ratio.) Finally, once again, one should bear in mind that synods in the East were least likely to report so the actual participation rates by race/Hispanic origin may be underestimated.

Table 13 and Table 14 show more detail on the composition of synod staffs. Table 13 shows the percent and number of churchwide staff by race/Hispanic origin by employment category and gender. All the shifts from 1994 to 1997 are modest with a slight increase in the number of African American, Asian, Hispanic and Native American persons who are in executive and support staff positions among females. There has also been a slight increase in the number of persons who are White females in executive staff positions. (See Table 13.) There has been no increase in the number of male African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American persons in executive staff positions and there has been a slight decrease in the number of persons who are White males in executive staff positions. Table 14 shows that the increase for female, African American, Asian, Hispanic and Native American executives on synod staff is an increase of 3 positions--one African American, one Asian/Pacific Islander, and one Hispanic person.

CONCLUSIONS

There is slow progress in the ELCA at increasing the rate of participation for females and of African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans and persons of other races (nonWhite). For the churchwide council, boards, standing and advisory committees the rate of participation among women is up almost 2 percent between 1995 and 1997 to 44.4 percent. For the synod boards and committees the rate of participation between 1994 and 1997 is up just over 1 percent to 42.2 percent for 1997. For the synod councils the rate of participation for women is up 0.9 percent to 41.3 percent. The number of female executive staff at the churchwide level is stable at 24.2 percent of the total staff. The number of female executive staff at the synod level is up slightly at 19.7 percent.

Among African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans and persons of other races (nonWhite) the pattern is slightly downward and overall there is a much lower rate of participation. For the churchwide council, boards, standing and advisory committees the rate of participation for African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American persons is down about 3 percent between 1995 and 1997 to 21.3 percent. For the synod boards and committees the rate of participation between 1994 and 1997 is down 1.5 percent to 3.3 percent for 1997. For the synod councils the rate of participation is the same as in 1994 at 8.8 percent. The number of African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American executive staff at the churchwide level is up 0.5 percent to 10.6 percent of the total staff. The number of African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American executive staff at the synod level is up 1.0 percent to 3.4 percent of the total staffs. Perhaps most at issue is the drop in participation rate among African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans for the churchwide council, boards, standing and advisory committees and the overall level of participation on synod councils and on synod boards and committees.