

ELCA Appalachian Task Force

Studies & Discernment for Action

Executive Summary

There are over 1,000 ELCA churches and 16 synods in Appalachia, using the definition of the region provided by the Appalachian Regional Commission (<https://www.arc.gov/maps>). ELCA Region 8 has over 670 Appalachian churches and the five synods completely inside Appalachia. Regions 7 and 9 have almost equal numbers of Appalachian churches, with Region 6 not far behind.

The ELCA Appalachian Task Force (TF) held nine “town hall” consultations throughout Appalachia in 2016; two statistical surveys by ELCA Research & Evaluation; and deliberation within the TF. The following foci emerged, with attendant questions pointing to work ahead:

WORD AND SACRAMENT MINISTRY

The ELCA is changing and contracting in Appalachia. In an era when the church is experiencing decline in some areas – finances, attendance, and membership – there is a compelling and continuing need for a viable and energized Word and Sacrament ministry to proclaim a word of hope to the people in Appalachia. What best practices prepare us to meet the changes the future brings?

COMMUNICATIONS AND NETWORKS

The ELCA must improve communication regarding existing resources in the Appalachian region. How do we share stories of successful ministries? How do we identify potential partners in the public and private sectors? How do we claim the positive profile of Appalachia?

VISION FOR DIVERSITY

The ELCA, in faithfulness to the Gospel, is committed to be an inclusive church despite division in society. In the Appalachian region, this often remains unspoken. The ELCA is asked to take the moral authority to name and claim a vision of a beloved community in Appalachia that is built with a foundation of hope, capacity, civility and inclusion. How do we build a beloved community that speaks truth to power?

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

The ELCA sets forth affirmations and commitments to support Lutheran congregations’ participation in society. In Appalachia, we have the opportunity, willingness, and tools to take stock of our resources, learn from each other and share resources through cooperation, communications, coordination, and collaboration. Moving forward into the future, how do we celebrate, recognize and strengthen existing resources and networks in Appalachia?