

Multi-Point Parishes in the ELCA

What is a Multi-Point Parish?

A multi-point parish is a group of congregations which share a pastor.

How many multi-point parishes are there in the ELCA?

There are 799 multi-point parishes. These parishes include between two and six congregations. The total number of congregations in these parishes is 1,753. There are:

- 676 parishes made up of two congregations
- 102 parishes made up of three congregations
- 12 parishes made up of four congregations
- 7 parishes made up of five congregations
- 2 parishes made up of six congregations

(The only way we know that a congregation is part of a multi-point parish is when it is served by a pastor (or pastors) who also serves another congregation or several congregations. Congregations which do not have a called pastor aren't counted here, even though they may be operating as a multi-point parish. We have little or no information about interim pastors and contract pastors. Multi-point parishes, therefore, served by pastors not under call by the congregations are also not counted.)

Are multi-point parishes usually served by one pastor?

Yes, but there are a few situations where two pastors (commonly two pastors married to one another) serve a multi-point parish. Even less commonly, three or more pastors serve a multi-point parish. There are:

- 25 parishes made up of 2 congregations served by two or more pastors
- 18 parishes made up of 3 congregations served by two or more pastors
- 4 parishes made up of 4 congregations served by two or more pastors
- 1 parish made up of 5 congregations served by two or more pastors
- 1 parish made up of 6 congregations served by two or more pastors

Where are most multi-point parishes?

Most multi-point parishes are found in Minnesota, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Iowa. The synods with the largest percentage of their congregations in multi-point parishes are:

- Eastern North Dakota Synod - 63.7% of congregations
- Western North Dakota Synod - 51.8% of congregations
- Northwestern Minnesota Synod - 47.8% of congregations
- La Crosse Area Synod - 45.7% of congregations
- South Dakota Synod - 45.3% of congregations
- Southwestern Minnesota Synod - 40.8% of congregations
- Northwest Synod of Wisconsin - 40.0% of congregations

In what kinds of communities are multi-point parishes found?

Multi-point parishes are found in rural and small town communities. While 50.4% of all ELCA congregations are located in rural communities and in towns with less than 10,000 population, 94.5% of all multi-point parishes are located in these communities, 2.9% are in small to medium-sized cities and their suburbs, and

2.4% are found in large cities and their suburbs.

How large are the congregations which make up multi-point parishes?

Most congregations which are part of a multi-point parish are smaller than average. Their average size is 205 baptized members and half are smaller than 162 baptized members. The smallest has 11 members and the largest has 4,395 members. Their average attendance is 63 members and half have fewer than 53 members attending on an average Sunday. Their average current operating expenses are \$34,444 and half are below \$28,912 in expenses.

Is the number of multi-point parishes likely to change?

Many smaller ELCA congregations have no called pastor, which may indicate the possibility for additional multi-point parishes. For example, among the 1,798 ELCA congregations currently with no called pastor there are:

- 567 congregations with 1-99 baptized members
- 506 congregations with 100-199 baptized members
- 235 congregations with 200-299 baptized members
- 490 congregations with 300 or more baptized members

Some of these congregations are in the call process, some are served by interim pastors, some are served by pastors under contract. For smaller congregations with limited resources, one staffing strategy is to become part of a multi-point parish.

Tell us what you think! Comments and suggestions are [welcome](#).

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