

## 2018 District Convention Report – the New Jersey District

The 2017 New Jersey population was estimated to be 8,953,745 people, residing in 21 counties and 566 municipalities; with the following population distributions:

<u>Gender</u>	population	percentage
Female	4,577,819	51.32%
Male	4,375,926	48.68%

### Age (median age = 40.0)

Homeland (Z)	2005-2025	1,418,493	15.84%
Millennial (Y)	1982-2004	2,589,455	28.92%
Gen X (13 <sup>th</sup> )	1961-1981	2,511,743	28.05%
Boomer	1946-1960	1,570,789	17.54%
Silent	1925-1945	742,862	8.30%
GI	1901-1924	120,403	1.34%

### Racial/Ethnic

Asian		760,101	8.49%
Asian Indian	310,242		
Chinese	131,757		
Filipino	116,184		
Korean	98,755		
Black/African American		1,141,065	12.74%
White		5,254,732	58.69%
Hispanic/Latino		1,615,108	18.04%
Puerto Rican	449,600		
Mexican	223,958		
Cuban	87,452		
Pac Is/Am Indian		182,739	2.04%

### Marital Status (Population 15+)

Never married	2,387,334	32.14%
Married	3,796,710	51.12%
Divorced	598,349	8.06%
Separated	148,014	1.99%
Widowed	497,305	6.70%

### Employment Status (Population 16+)

Blue Collar	1,438,697	31.83%
White Collar	3,081,482	68.17%

<u>Household size</u>	population	percentage
1-person	827,097	25.25%
2-person	976,405	29.81%
3-person	568,498	17.35%
4-person	515,230	15.73%
5-person	235,873	7.20%
6-person	89,052	2.72%
7-or-more person	63,636	1.94%

#### Household income

Less than \$10,000	165,801	5.06%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	113,130	3.45%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	248,830	7.60%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	245,052	7.48%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	341,194	10.42%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	514,852	15.72%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	414,161	12.64%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	578,631	17.66%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	326,468	9.97%
\$200,000 or more	327,672	10.00%

As one surveys the religious landscape regarding those who reside in New Jersey, the population can be placed within these religious categories and preferences:

		2014	2004
Catholic & Orthodox		34.0%	39.2%
Catholic	33.5%		
Orthodox	0.5%		
Historic Mainline Protestant		16.8%	18.8%
Baptist	5.0%		
Congregational	1.5%		
Episcopalian/Anglican	1.9%		
Lutheran	2.6%		3.1%
Methodist	3.4%		
Presbyterian/Reformed	2.3%		
Other Protestant Denominations		6.7%	5.8%
Other Non-Christian Religious		10.9%	11.4%
Buddhism/Hindu/Sikh/Taoist	0.9%		
Islam/Baha'i	0.3%		
Judaism	7.9%		
Mormon	0.4%		
None/No Preference or Spiritual		31.2%	24.4%

## **The State of the New Jersey District – LC-MS**

The New Jersey District comprises fifty congregations, with 10,892 baptized members and 9,167 communicant members and an average Sunday worship attendance around 3,718. Fifteen congregations operate a preschool ministry, five congregations operate a preschool ministry plus an additional grade, and one congregation operates a preschool through eighth grade ministry. As a Lutheran presence, we are almost invisible in a State that numbers nearly 9,000,000 residents (one out of every 822 residents is a LC-MS member).

We continue to see that many of our congregations are growing smaller in terms of both baptized and communicant membership; and that the average age of those who worship are getting older. We also know that this trend has been taking place for many, many years now, beginning already in the early 1980s. At present, of the fifty New Jersey District congregations, eight are close to closing their doors since their average worship attendance is below twenty-five now and another fifteen congregations worship below fifty members on an average Sunday morning.

The crisis situation in which we find ourselves is this: we no longer live in a church culture but in an un-churched and de-churched culture. This state of affairs both challenges and invites God's people to acquire and possess a proper ministry balance between edification and evangelism; most importantly, to become more missionary in our posture and orientation toward those who are not Christians.

### **Pressing Ministry Challenges**

#### **Ministry challenges related to evangelism**

- + how do we witness to, and evangelize, people “who are not like us” – a people who have built their lives upon non-Christian narratives, especially the growing segment of the population who have “no religious or spiritual preference (31.2% of NJ residents)”
- + we struggle to reach the younger generations with the Gospel (nearly 45% of NJ residents are under the age of thirty-six – Millennial and Homeland generations)

#### **Ministry challenges related to becoming a mature disciple of Jesus Christ**

- + for many Christians, their identity and mission is defined more by a “church member” mentality than by what the Scriptures have to say about “who they are in Christ” and “why they are in the world”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Scriptures use many different words to help us understand who we are in Christ: disciple, priest, witness, servant, steward, living letter, temple of the Holy Spirit, salt, light, etc. For example, a disciple is a believer in Jesus Christ who is an active student of God's Word, building one's life on the words and practices of Jesus Christ – someone who is stamped and fashioned in

- + for many within our congregations, who grew up within the Lutheran church, they stopped studying the Scriptures at age thirteen or fourteen when they were confirmed and have not grown in their knowledge of Christ and His way of living

### **Ministry challenges related to our life together as the body of Christ**

- + there has been an increasing erosion in denominational loyalty since the 1970s
- + we are struggling to pay our bills, compensate our called church workers, and maintain our physical plant/properties – let alone have significant dollars for the extension of His kingdom to the ends of the earth

### **Ministry challenges related to living out our Christian faith before a watching world**

- + we have many ex-neighborhood congregations that were established by Northern European ethnic peoples who were raised within, or were very familiar with, the Lutheran faith; however, most of these ethnic groups no longer reside in the neighborhood in which our congregations are located and we do not know how to minister to, and connect with, our new neighbors
- + we struggle to...
  - + communicate the Biblical message in oral, print, broadcast and digital culture; and how to use social media effectively for social engagement and ministry in the “public square”
  - + overcome, and speak into, a culture that perceives and judges the Christian faith to be irrelevant in answering the big questions, and dealing with the day-to-day problems, that people have in, and with, life
  - + engage in a ministry of Christian apologetics; in other words, how to defend the Christian faith in a secularized and pluralistic culture so that we are “able to give a reason for the hope that lives within us, yet with gentleness and respect” to the many kinds of people who are trying to making sense of life, and the realities around us, without the hypothesis of the Triune God...and how to be, live, and witness as His people in a post-churched world

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the mold of Jesus Christ and is a living witness to Him. Jesus identified two marks of a disciple: if you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples (Matthew 7:24-27; John 8:31-32); and if you love one another (John 13:34-35).

## What Is Our Reflective Response to This Present Reality?

From the very beginning of time and human history, God's fundamental mission is to save humankind; for God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of their salvation in Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:4).

So that His mission might be accomplished in the lives of all peoples, God has entrusted His people with four ministries.

- + **an evangelistic ministry**, as they seek to evangelize large numbers of non-Christians through their life of witness and Gospel proclamation and bring them, by God's grace, to faith in Jesus Christ
- + **a maturational ministry**, as they grow up into Christ, who is the Head of the body, and become mature disciples of Jesus, who are also His stewards, servants, priests, witnesses, salt, light, and living letters
- + **an organic ministry**, as they are connected to each other in relationships that live out the "one another" admonitions of the New Testament, with each believer using his or her gifts for the building up of the body and for the common good
- + **an incarnational ministry**, so that wherever they go, and to whomever they come into contact with, they are able to be His ambassadors and living letters, mediating His mind and word and demonstrating His love, concern and compassion for others

### New Jersey District -- Four Desired Outcomes:

The New Jersey District Board of Directors has identified four desired outcomes that guide the ministry labors of the District President in his relationship with the professional church workers and congregational members of the New Jersey District congregations. These desired outcomes are:

- + to equip people in New Jersey District congregations for Christian leadership (Synodical emphasis: life together)
- + church workers who are spiritually mature, professionally competent and living a healthy family life (Synodical emphasis: life together)
- + to equip members of New Jersey congregations for their outreach ministries and to enable them to bring saving faith to the unchurched residents of New Jersey (Synodical emphasis: witness)
- + to encourage New Jersey congregations in their social and human care ministries (Synodical emphasis: mercy)

The following statements describe core, strategic focuses that will guide the New Jersey District during the next triennium (2018-2021) as we seek to fulfill the Lord's Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-49) and Great Commandment (Matthew 25:31-45; Luke 10:25-37; John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-12, 19-21).

### **Ten Strategic Focuses:**

- Focus #1: a District-wide process that addresses the pressing issues and adaptive challenges that are facing Professional Church Workers and New Jersey District congregations by...
- + clearly identifying and stating the pressing issues and adaptive challenges that we are facing together in ministry
  - + thinking biblically and theologically about these issues and challenges; and discovering what the Scriptures have to say about these things (since all theology and ministry practices are normed by Scripture)
  - + formulating an action plan that is congregationally owned and constructed; a plan that identifies the next steps to be taken...and then implementing that ministry plan
- Focus #2: connecting and networking as we form and equip ourselves for ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- + twice a year the District President convenes a Saturday meeting for the congregational presidents of the New Jersey District so that we might grow in our leadership skills and abilities, mutually encourage each other in our leadership labors, and to discuss ways in which we can address the pressing issues that we are facing in our respective congregations
  - + pastors are invited to attend a monthly learning community led by Rev. Dick Izzard and Rev. Paul Huneke
  - + church planters, and young pastors engaged in congregational revitalization, meet weekly with Rev. Matt Peeples (Director of *the Kairos Network*)
- Focus #3: identifying twenty to thirty pastors for potential pastoral ministry service in New Jersey congregations; they will be the next generation of pastoral leaders to shape the District's ministry culture and lead it into the future

- Focus #4: strengthening New Jersey District congregations through equipping resources and events, along with the onsite or online ministry of specialized District staff and NJD church workers...plus the ministry curriculum of the *New Jersey District Leaders and Learners* program
- + evangelistic ministry
    - + LASSIE method of witnessing the Gospel Mark Woods
    - + how did Jesus do evangelism Steinbronn
    - + life is all about stories: helping people make sense of their story in light of His story Steinbronn
    - + joining Jesus on His mission: how to be an everyday missionary Greg Finke
  - + maturational ministry
    - + Divine Drama (with notes from the Bethel Bible Series)
      - + the biblical narrative selected pastors/teachers
      - + our narrative selected pastors/teachers
    - + wise scribes trained for the kingdom: the parables of Jesus Steinbronn
    - + fifty stories that every Christian should know and why these stories really matter Huneke/Steinbronn
  - + organic ministry
    - + family life ministry Caitlin Dinger
    - + Stephen's ministry selected pastors/teachers
    - + adult Lutherans organized for action Shirley Carpenter
    - + revitalization movement Steinbronn
  - + incarnational ministry
    - + joining Jesus on His mission: how to be an everyday missionary Greg Finke
    - + mission leadership formation series Steinbronn

- Focus #5: extending His Kingdom through the formation of mission leaders and church planters; and establishing new congregations
- + *the Kairos Network* has a ministry goal of forming 100 mission leaders and planting ten churches in the next ten years, beginning in 2018
  - + mission leadership formation series Steinbronn
    - + foundational courses
      - + the mission of God
      - + discipleship: "who I am in Christ" and "why am I here"
    - + contextual courses
      - + personal and biblical worldview...and the worldview of the major non-Christian and non-Trinitarian world religions and cultural "isms" (such as naturalism, existentialism, etc.)
      - + culture learning and how to exegete and understand the plurality of worldviews and designs for living that are being embraced and expressed in their core allegiances, beliefs, and values
    - + contextualization courses
      - + communication theory, seven dimensions of cross-cultural communication, and "communicating the Gospel God's way"
      - + apostolic contextualization and Christian apologetics
- Focus #6: the formation of missionaries and church planters for labor in densely urban congregational and mission contexts
- + wise scribes trained for the kingdom: the parables of Jesus as a theology of mission Steinbronn
  - + joining Jesus on His mission: how to be an everyday missionary Greg Finke
  - + the church planting formation process of *the Kairos Network* Matt Peeples
  - + mission leadership formation series Steinbronn



Focus #7: design and establish a “restart” model for densely urban and suburban congregational ministry

- + affirming and ensuring that every task of the Church makes sense and has a purpose only as it leads to the mission of “making disciples of all peoples”; the Great Commission lays a double obligation upon the ministry of the church:
  - + the strengthening of present disciples in their already existing discipleship through edification
  - + proclaiming the Gospel to those who are not yet His disciples with the hope that they will become His disciples through evangelism
- + *the Kairos Network* has a ministry goal of forming 100 mission leaders and several of these mission leaders could be sent to help a congregation experience a new chapter of ministry in that place
- + participation in a revitalization process that seeks to discover and assess...
  - + local institutional factors such as "what kind of church are we...why do we do what we do...what are supposed to be doing"
  - + local contextual factors such as "who is my neighbor...am I my brother's keeper...what is happening in the world outside of my church's walls"
  - + local institutional strategies such as "what kind of church would we like to be according to the Scriptures...where do we begin, when, and with whom"
  - + local contextual strategies such as "redeveloping a missionary mindset for North America and how to proclaim the Gospel to people who have embraced, and who live by, non-Christian and non-Trinitarian core allegiances and narratives"
- + exegeting one's congregation and community in order to know and understand their core beliefs, core values and communal life ways
- + discerning ways of talking and living that communicates the Gospel into the minds and lives of those who are disconnected from Christ (Romans 10:9-17; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Focus #8: exploring and embracing the counsel and practices of the five Word-gifts from our ascended Lord, given to equip His people for their work of edification and evangelism (Ephesians 4:11-16)

- + disciples, as "wise scribes," know that the Scriptures are the great treasure store of soteriological and hermeneutical wisdom for making sense of the "human story"
- + life is all about stories and every person has a story, filled with many conversations, scenes and snapshots
- + everyone lives by a script...so how have you been scripted by your sinful human nature (1st skin) and by your culture (2nd skin)
- + how have you gone about making sense of life's story -- for the way we understand life depends on what conception we have of the human story
- + not all interpretations of life's story are true for many false prophets have gone out into the world -- the prophets connected with the many non-Christian and non-Trinitarian world religions, along with the many cultural "isms" of our time such as naturalism, pessimistic existentialism, secularism, positivism, etc.
- + God has a story -- the metanarrative -- that makes sense of every human story...for the sacred scriptures make known two kinds of wisdom so that every human being can make sense of his or her story in light of His story and His promises of salvation in Jesus Christ
  - + soteriological wisdom...to make us wise unto salvation which is by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:15)
  - + hermeneutical wisdom...to help us make sense of life's story in light of His story/stories (Matthew 13:11, 16-17, 51-52; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Focus #9: developing a process to interface with, and minister to, "at-risk" congregations so that they might experience a new chapter of ministry

- + there are ten NJD congregations that worship less than thirty people, with most of them located in densely urban contextual settings, so how can we strengthen the Word and Sacrament ministry in these congregations

Focus #10: exploring creative and innovative ways of ministry configurations at the congregational and circuit levels

- + approximately one-third of NJD congregations are "stand alone" congregations; that is, they can fully compensate a pastor and sufficiently fund their congregational ministry without receiving additional income from "non-congregational sources"
- + model 1...one of these "stand alone" congregations would partner with an "at-risk" NJD congregation so that, over the next couple of years, the "at-risk" congregation could be strengthened through this ministry partnership
- + model 2...two or more NJD congregations could come together in order to start a new congregation, with each congregation selling its facilities and finding a new worship location
- + model 3...two NJD congregations decide to form a "dual parish" in which they are served by one pastor...the two churches come together and reach an agreement concerning worship times, office hours, and ministry expectations for the shared pastor; and then how much each congregation will contribute toward the pastor's compensation...and because each congregation is now served part-time by a pastor (thereby reducing the financial costs to each congregation), additional funds could be made available to call a part-time church worker for specialized ministry such as a "director of Christian education" or a "director of Christian outreach"
- + model 4...five NJD congregations located in a circuit or region could "covenant" together so that they are served by three full-time pastors (and possibly a specialized staff person)
- + model 5...a NJD congregation resolves to close, entrusting its assets to the New Jersey District so that it can strengthen existing, and extend into new places, Word and Sacrament ministry and gift designated LC-MS 501c3 ministries like LWML, Lutheran Hour Ministries, etc. through a "memorandum of understanding" with the NJD
  - + the assets received from the closing, and property sale, of St. Luke, Elizabeth are being used to foster the church planting labors of *the Kairos Network* in urban settings like Hoboken
  - + the assets received from the closing, and future property sale, of St. John Harrison are being used to foster the cross-cultural ministry of Dr. Eric Moeller among the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking residents of Harrison and Newark, along with gifting three designated 501c3 ministries (LWML, Lutheran Hour Ministry, Veterans of the Cross)

In closing, the Professional Church Workers and Congregations of the New Jersey District are thankful for the specialized and sacrificial ministry of these special servants:

- + Caren Vogt (Lutheran Schools)
- + Caitlin Dinger (Christian Education, Communications and Internet/Social Media, Family and Youth Ministry)
- + Dave Hildebrandt (Property Management, Annual Golf Classic Tournament)
- + Elaine Schleifer (Assistant to the District President and District Secretary)
- + Bill Webster (Business Manager and Finances)
- + Rev. Dick Izzard (Congregational Consultant, Advisor to the District President and Church Worker Well-being)
- + Rev. Paul Huneke (Congregational Consultant, Advisor to the District President and Church Worker Well-being)
- + Rev. Brad Hildebrandt (Congregational Consultant, Advisor to the District President)
- + Rev. Matt Peebles (Director, the Kairos Network)
- + Dr. Eric Moeller (Missionary to NJ Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking residents)
- + Bill Schmidt (Director, Ministry to Armed Forces and Veterans, Operation Barnabas)
- + Larry Schumann (Property Management, Advisor to the District President)

As with the Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, we have this good work that is ours in Christ Jesus and He is the One working through us to accomplish His saving intentions toward all people. Therefore we can rejoice in this “partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a work in you will carry it to completion until the Day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:3-6).

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Dr. Anthony Steinbronn  
District President, New Jersey District, LC-MS