



Discerning the season of your congregation's life is a crucial step for vitality and sustainability. It is important to look at a wide range of options and to prayerfully discern the direction God is calling your congregation.

Synod means "walking together". The synod staff will be walking with you as you discern and live into the most faithful option for your congregation. There is no right or wrong answer but rather the goal is to be faithful to the situation facing your congregation and your unique setting.

**Choosing Transformation:** making significant change to current context from within to connect with God's mission.

**Choosing Partnership:** engaging in shared ministry with another congregation(s) for the sake of the gospel

**Choosing Resurrection:** embracing the end with belief in the promise that God is doing a new thing.

Any of these options require wrestling with questions of mission, leadership, finances, property, worship location and times, and legacy. May God's Spirit guide and sustain you as your discern together.

*"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." - Isaiah 43:19*

Anchored in grace and hope, we seek to engage congregations in vital conversations about purpose and ministry in the world.

A Holy Conversations booklet including detailed descriptions and discernment tools is available at:  
<http://nwswi.org/congregational-vitality/holy-conversations>



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# Holy Conversations

OPTIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS  
CONSIDERING A VITAL AND  
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

## Choosing Transformation

*Making significant change to current context from within to connect with God's mission*

**INTENTIONAL VITALITY PROCESS** is a option is grounded in Bible study, prayer, conversation, reflection and action while clarifying the congregation's part in God's mission. Led by an outside facilitator, this intentional vitality process seeks transformation in the congregation's life through purposeful change.

**REDEVELOPMENT** is a spiritual and structural process that engages the congregation in leadership, structural, and programmatic changes. The process has a heavy focus on re- rooting in your community. This option requires a congregational vote and a commitment to new pastoral leadership identified in conjunction with the bishop and director for evangelical mission. The process is guided by a congregational redevelopment team, new pastor, and the director for evangelical mission. Considerations are current size, capacity, and the mission field. The synod and the congregation must be in agreement that this is a viable redevelopment site.

**SELLING THE BUILDING** is an option if the building impedes mission or is the only financial asset. With funds from the sale, existing membership would find a new place to worship and be in mission. As with the other options in this category careful attention to God's mission in the new locale and changes in leadership are important.

**LAY LEADERSHIP** - Some congregations can be transformed into lay-lead ministries. The NWSWI has a process of raising up Synodically Authorized Ministers, or SAMs, to serve appropriate congregations. SAMs are raised up in the local church, trained through the Lay School of Ministry, and authorized by the bishop.

## Choosing Partnership

*Engaged in shared ministry with another congregation(s) for the sake of the gospel.*

**YOKING** is when two or more congregations agree to remain in their existing buildings, remain separately incorporated, and share pastoral staff. This option offers the opportunity for two or more congregations to work cooperatively in ministry and afford the services of pastoral staff. This is the most viable option for a full-communion partnership.

**MERGER** is when one or more congregations close and all the members and assets are merged into an existing congregation. ( $A+B = A$ )

**CONSOLIDATION** is when two or more congregations close and one new congregation is formed out of the others ( $A+B = C$ )

Merger/Consolidation may be the best option for settings in which there are limited resources and obvious duplication of building and efforts. However, prayerful consideration should be given to the long range of effects on mission and ministry, not just financial matters. This option can be quite fruitful, leading to new vitality and life, but involves a lot of prayer and work.

**ANCHOR CHURCH** is an possibility when a struggling congregation initiates and partners with healthy congregation to share resources.

- In the Accompanying Model both partners remain independent but healthy congregation provides visioning, strategic planning, and coaching.
- In the Adoption Model assets are joined. Partners share the mission, budget, staff, council, resources, and membership as the anchor church, but space is allowed for worship expression and programming.

## Choosing Resurrection

*Embracing the end with the belief in the promise that God is doing a new thing.*

**CLOSING AND RE-OPENING AS A NEW CHURCH** is best when a congregation that values a presence in the community over its own needs to maintain ministry, this option provides a vital entry point for a new congregation. The congregation chooses to end its ministry - to close the doors for 12 to 18 months - then re- open as a new mission start. Existing members are commissioned to join other congregations while the synod works to identify the new mission focus, leadership, and plan. The building and assets in full are turned over to the synod.

**WORD & SERVICE MISSION** is a viable option when congregations with a significant existing social ministry may choose to close as a Word & Sacrament community and find a future as a Word & Service mission. Existing members direct their energies to their social ministry alone while finding a new church home in another congregation. This option includes holy closure for the Word and Sacrament community. Sustainability for the mission often includes organizing as a non-profit.

**HOLY CLOSURE** allows Good Friday grief to become Easter joy when a congregation lives into the promise of death and resurrection. Through Holy Closure, members find a deep sense of satisfaction and faith leaving a strong legacy which includes paying forward financial resources for the sake of the Gospel. Holy closure includes the sober realization of the existing situation and a period of time to mourn the loss of the congregation many people have loved. The procedural steps in the process our outlined ELCA's booklet Leaving a Legacy of Mission and Ministry.