

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape with a dirt road that splits into two paths, forming a 'Y' shape. The terrain is dry and brownish, with some sparse vegetation. The text 'Holy Fork in the Road Conversation' is overlaid on the right side of the image in a white, outlined font.

Holy Fork in the Road Conversation

From Worry to Wonder
NWSWI Synod Assembly 2023

WORRY

anxiety, uncertainty over actual or potential problems or concern ·

ORIGIN

Old English wyrgan strangle, seize by the throat, wring neck, choke, harass

Matthew 28:7-8 When you come to fork in the road remember Jesus has gone on ahead of you.

Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.




NW Synod of Wisconsin

196 Congregations

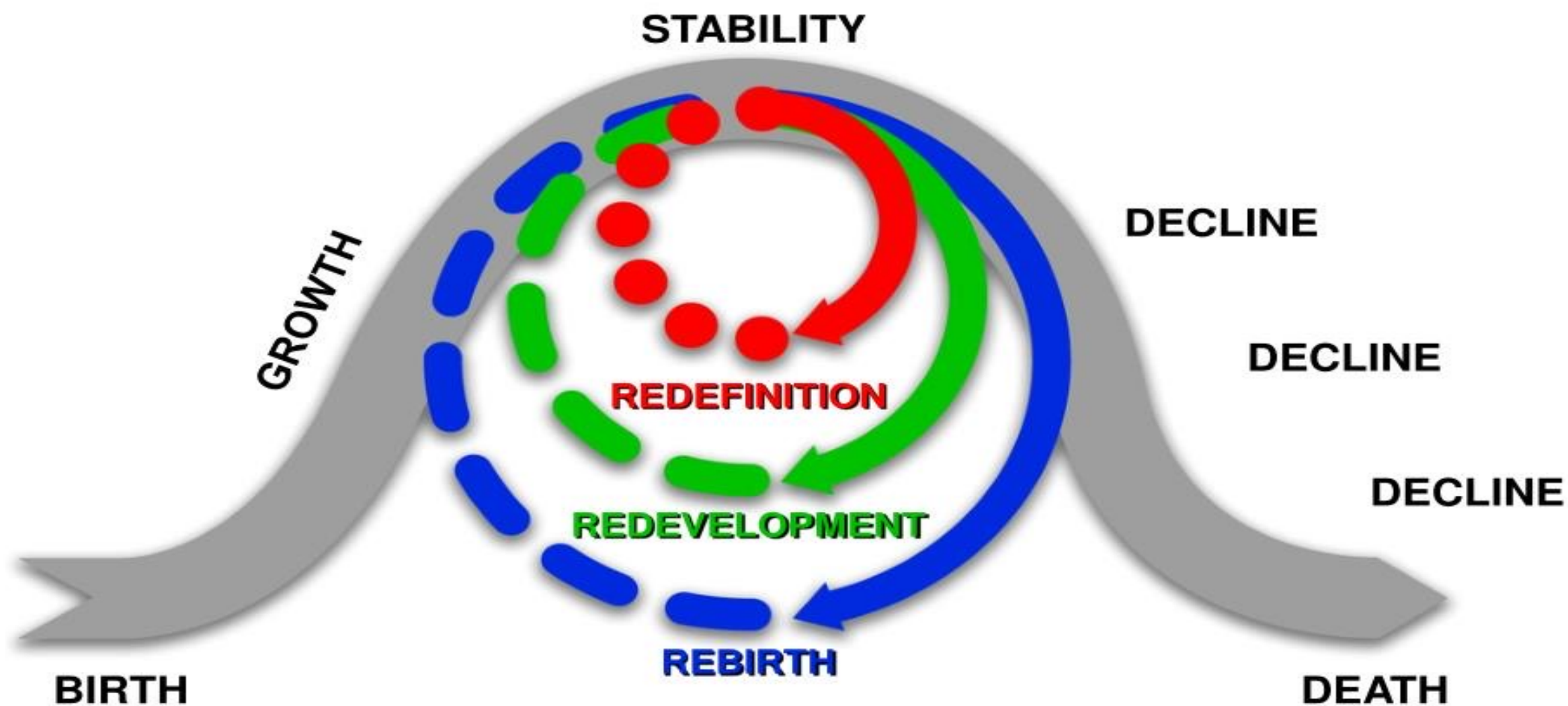
68 Average Worship Attendance
20s or less.

34% of the ELCA congregations
in the NWSWI are worship in
the 20s or less.



**We are committed and
will continue to invest in training leaders to be
innovative and accompany congregations seeking
to become more vital and sustainable with new
ways of proclaiming the good news of Jesus.
This takes energy.**

The Congregational Life Cycle

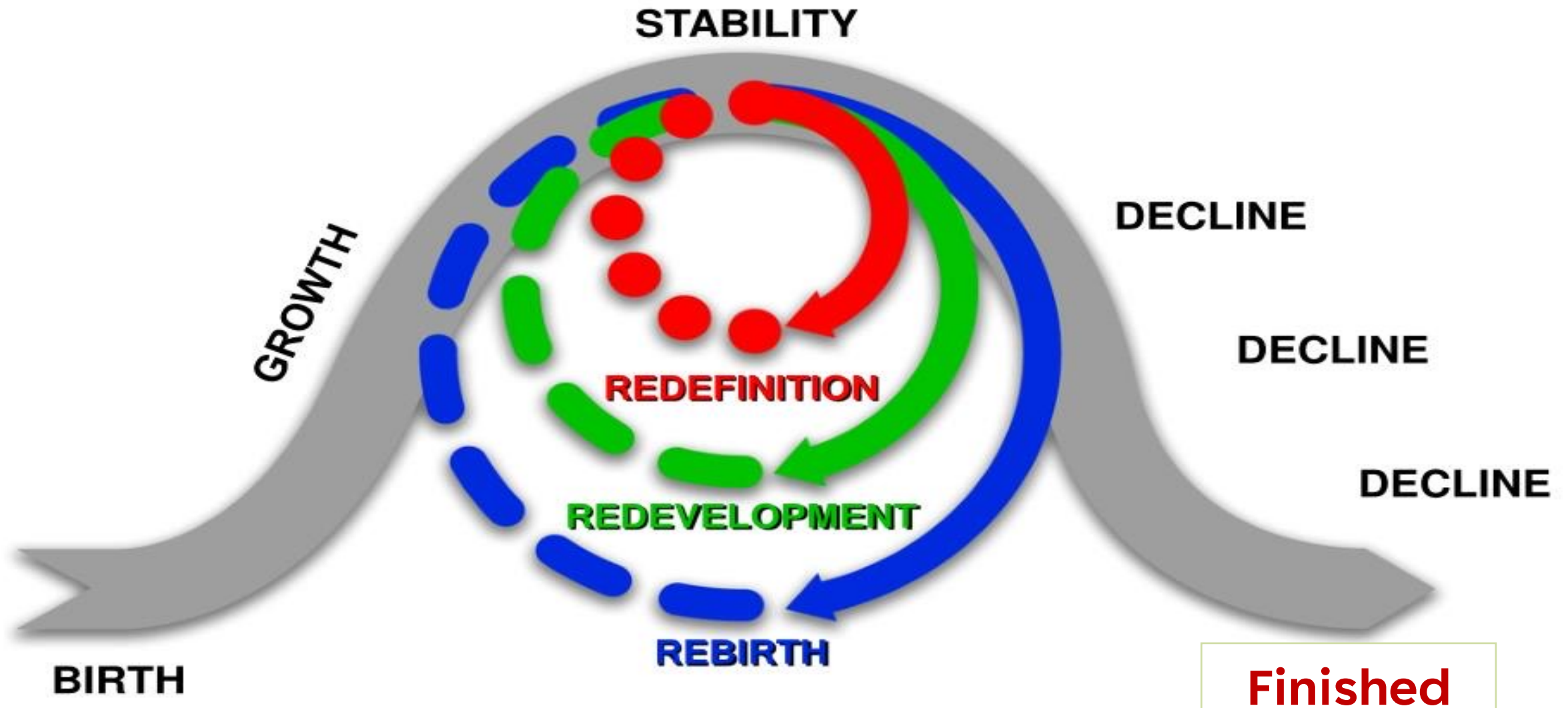


Where is your congregation on the lifecycle chart?

Discuss:

- 1. Where are you now?**
- 2. What would it take to move to renewal and growth? Stability?**
- 3. Do you have the energy to do it?**

The Congregational Life Cycle





DO YOU HAVE THE ENERGY TO
TAKE THE PATH TO GROW?



TAKE THIS ENERGY AUDIT

Spiritual Energy

- a) How many active members between the ages of 35-64?
- b) How many members are active in ministry beyond worship?
- c) How many are active in adult Bible Study?
- d) Is the energy level for ministry beyond worship very high, high, average, low, very low?
- e) Does your congregation have a full council? How difficult is it to find members to serve on the council? How many of your current council members have served more than two terms? What does your constitution say about term limits?
- f) How would you describe the spiritual passion of members to continue to bring in the harvest for Jesus' sake?

Spiritual Energy

Does our congregation have enough spiritual energy for ministry for the next

1 year-YES/NO/I'm not sure

3 years-YES/NO/I'm not sure

5 years-YES/NO/I'm not sure

MISSIONAL ENERGY

- a) When you think about your congregation do you believe there is a possibility for redevelopment/rebirth/revitalization? What would it take for that to happen?
- b) What is the best possible future you can imagine for your congregation in the next 5 years/10 years? Does your congregation have the energy to make that happen?
- c) Does your congregation have a clear sense of purpose? Will this purpose propel it forward into God's mission to redeem the world?

Missional Energy

Does this congregation have
enough missional energy for

1 year-YES/NO/I'm not sure

3 years-YES/NO/I'm not sure

5 years-YES/NO/I'm not sure

FINANCIAL ENERGY

What percentage of your income is used for...

- a) building maintenance**
- b) building debt**
- c) staff salary**
- d) programs**
- e) mission beyond the congregation**

How much do you have in reserves? Saving, endowment, cash? How would you describe your cash flow pattern?

FINANCIAL ENERGY

Does this congregation have the financial energy for the next

1 year-YES/NO/I'm not sure

3 years-YES/NO/I'm not sure

5 years-YES/NO/I'm not sure



DEMOGRAPHICS REALITIES

- a) Has the population of your context changed in the last 10 years?
- b) How many ELCA congregations are within 5 /10 /15 miles of your building?
- c) How many Methodist, Presbyterians, UCC, Episcopal nearby ?
- d) How healthy are the 3 closest to your building?
- e) How many students are in Sunday School or confirmation?
- f) Describe the enrollment trends of your closest schools.

Read together Luke 10

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest...”⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you...’

ARE YOUR BEST DAYS AHEAD
OF YOU OR BEHIND YOU?

Read Luke 10:1-12 Reflect

Is the harvest complete in
your geographic place?

Do the laborers have
energy to do bring in the
rest of the harvest?

Could you share your
resources with others with
more energy to continue
the harvest?



ARE YOUR BEST DAYS AHEAD
OF YOU OR BEHIND YOU?

Does your
congregation have
the missional,
spiritual, financial
energy for the next
five years?

Annual Report to the
Bishop Survey
82% said YES
1% said NO
17% said UNSURE



ARE YOUR BEST DAYS AHEAD
OF YOU OR BEHIND YOU?

How do the pastors,
deacons and SAMS
evaluate their
congregations?
Annual Report to the
Bishop survey

25% Thriving/Growing
61% Stable
20% Declining/Dying



Holy Fork in the Road Options

- **Put more energy in Faithful Innovation:**
- **SAM instead of a Pastor:**
- **Shared Ministry:**
- **Consolidation:**
- **Merger:**
- **Parallel Development:**
- **Relocation:**
- **Becoming a Mobile Church:**
- **Closure:**



Τετέλεσται-IT IS FINISHED

JOHN 19:30

WHEN JESUS HAD RECEIVED THE WINE, HE SAID, “***IT IS FINISHED.***” THEN HE BOWED HIS HEAD AND GAVE UP HIS SPIRIT.

THE PERFECT INDICATIVE PASSIVE TENSE OF THE WORD TELOS



τέλος an end, completed, purpose fulfilled,
finished, accomplished, to bring to conclusion,
maturity or perfection

Tetelestai-It is finished



Teleos-τέλος

Gardening-end of the season-the harvest is completed-everything is done-just the compost and leaves intentionally left to fertilize next year's produce.

Teleos-an end, fulfilled purpose

No one says that leaving the garden in the fall after the good harvest was collected that it is a failure only that the season is over, it is finished, it is completed and fulfilled its purpose.



Finished Not Failed

How and when to have the conversation with your leaders about the completion of ministry and closing congregation's building.



**You can have this conversation sooner rather than later,
before...**

SUMMARY

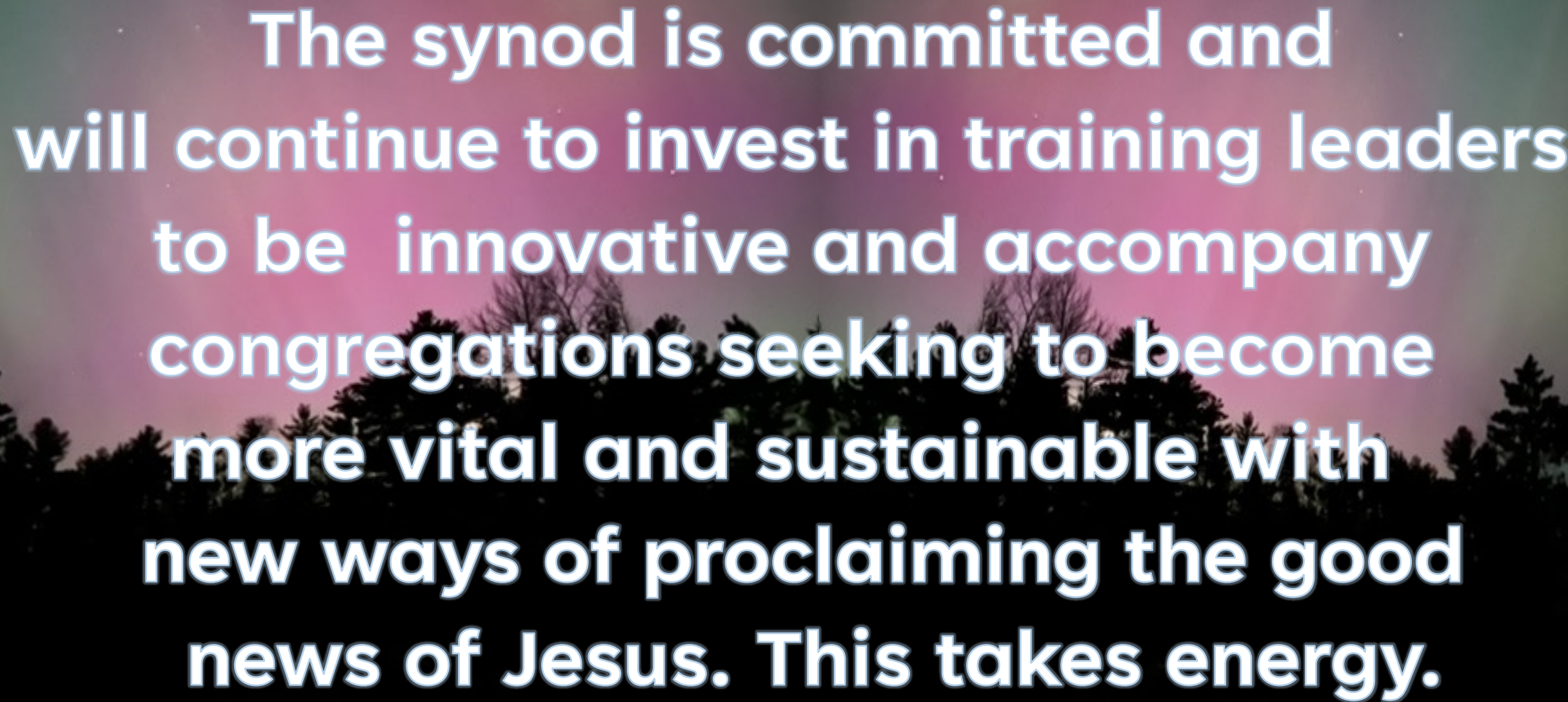
- 1. You hit bottom and**
- 2. three of your council members are in the nursing home and you no longer worship in the winter because the members don't drive on snow and/or they go south or**
- 3. You can no longer hold a legal congregational meeting and will then**
- 4. need to go under synod administration**



It is finished, not failed.



To be clear, no one wants your congregation to close. The Synod does not want your congregation to close. Buildings may close but ministry can continue.



The synod is committed and will continue to invest in training leaders to be innovative and accompany congregations seeking to become more vital and sustainable with new ways of proclaiming the good news of Jesus. This takes energy.



[Close_of_Congregations_2016.pdf \(elca.org\)](#)

Here's the link to the resource for
Leaving a Legacy and closing a congregation

[EPIC Holy Closure on Vimeo](#)

2022



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Legacy Planning



What are you
willing to do
so that the next
generation
comes to know
and love Jesus?

- **Shared Ministry**: two, three, or four point parish with a parish council and a special shared ministry agreement. EXAMPLE: Northstar Ministry, NSM. Ogema; NUIC; Amery; ONE, Withee
- **Consolidation**: Two or more congregations “go out of business” to become a new congregation with a new name. May move to a new location. EXAMPLE: First and OS became Spirit, Fristad and Milltown-Joy
- **Merger**: One congregation gives up its separate identity (“goes out of business”) and unites its assets, including members, with an already existing congregation. EXAMPLE: Upper Pigeon burned and merged with Peace in Pigeon Falls.
- **Closure**: Little Plum Lutheran Closed

Fork in the Road
Decisions

Options for Congregations at the Holy Fork in the Road

- Sharing a Pastor:
- Shared Ministry:
- Consolidation: Two or more congregations “go out of business” to become a new congregation with a new name. may move to a new location.
- Merger: One congregation gives up its separate identity (“goes out of business”) and unites its assets, including members, with an already existing congregation.
- Restart: A congregation stops worshipping for six months while actively and intentionally exploring its mission context (i.e. neighborhood). Bible study and fellowship occur at a time other than Sunday mornings. After discerning and developing a new mission plan that includes a purpose statement, guiding principles, missional direction, and action plans, a new name is chosen, allowing the congregation to claim a new identity.
- Parallel Development: If it is determined that there is strong potential for a mission development serving a different population in the same area as the initial congregation, a mission developer may be called to develop the new ministry. Three-quarters of the developer’s time would be focused on the new development, one-quarter time to the existing congregation.
- Relocation: A congregation sells its current site and begins to worship at an alternative site.
- Becoming a Mobile Church: A congregation sells its current site and becomes a church without its own permanent property. Sunday worship space is secured perhaps at another congregation, nursing home, rental building, etc. All other ministry gatherings, meetings, Bible studies, etc. are held in public spaces.
- Closure: This option acknowledges that congregations follow a natural cycle of birth, life, and death. Closure involves legal, practical, and emotional processes and financial costs. This may be done with an integrity and faithfulness that leaves a legacy for future ministry

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Fork in the Road Conversations

