

“Cultural Proficiency,” cont.

How German-centric is Concordia and the LCMS?

The coefficient for the percentage of [a county’s] population that identifies as German American is the first important result to note. The more people in a county that identifies as German American, the larger the LCMS population — on average and controlling for all other variables. This further under-scores the degree to which the LCMS remains very much an ethnic church. Whether we are looking at states or counties, it is clear that the LCMS remains geographically concentrated in those regions that drew large numbers of German immigrants, predominantly in the nineteenth century.

It is worth noting that the data used to determine the percentage of a county as German American (the American Community Survey) is based on self-reporting, rather than any kind of genealogical study. That is, people are classified as German American if they say they are German American, meaning that they not only have German roots, but they are aware of those German roots.

We see negative coefficients for other white ethnic groups. A larger English and Irish American population was associated, on average, with a smaller LCMS population. The strong relationship between German ethnicity and the LCMS is interesting because the LCMS does not deliberately identify as an ethnic church. While many Orthodox churches are explicitly ethnic (though not officially discriminatory), as are churches that cater to African Americans, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the LCMS is officially an inclusive denomination.

There are both positive and negative interpretations of this finding. On the one hand, it indicates that the relatively small number of minority LCMS adherents is probably not due to any racial discrimination per se. The LCMS has also had a difficult time attracting non-Hispanic whites of other ethnic ancestries, and it is difficult to imagine that the LCMS engages in discrimination toward English Americans, Italian Americans, or Irish Americans.

On the other hand, it demonstrates that LCMS affiliation remains largely a characteristic that one inherits at birth — that is, if you are a member of the LCMS, your parents probably were, as well. If you were not born and baptized into an LCMS family, it is unlikely that you belong to the LCMS today. This underscores both the need for the LCMS to improve its outreach to other communities, and the importance of increasing the birthrates of its current membership.

From “The LCMS in the Face of Demographic and Social Change: A Social Science Perspective” by George Hawley, *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, December 2016, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 48. For Hawley’s discussion on outreach see p. 35. For his section on success stories see p. 50. For the Conclusions see p. 70.

<https://blogs.lcms.org/2016/journal-of-lutheran-mission-december-2016>