

**MN DISTRICT PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE  
2024 MN DISTRICT TEACHERS CONFERENCE  
ST. CROIX LUTHERAN ACADEMY, WEST ST. PAUL, MN**



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**November 4, 2024**

## **Embrace Your Noble Work**

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*Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task....Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:1,13)*

How would you rank the importance of the following professions:

- Lawyer
- Electrical engineer
- Block layer
- Portajohn technician

Your answer will likely vary depending upon your need at the moment.

If you are being sued following a car accident, a lawyer will rise to the top of your favorite-people list. If you are spending the day at a soccer tournament in a sports complex, you will offer up a prayer of thanks for portajohn techs when nature calls. Often our favorite people are those who are there for us in our time of need.

How do you rank the importance of your profession as a called servant of the Word among the long list of other vocations? Society doesn't regard gospel servants as highly as it did 50 years ago. While we receive a livable wage in ministry, it often doesn't compare with the income one can generate in other professions. It is reported a small portajohn business owner can easily clear \$360,000 net income a year. In many ways the personal benefits of serving in gospel ministry don't compare favorably with a large number of other vocations.

The public ministry certainly wouldn't have compared any better during the infancy of the Christian church. Nevertheless, the apostle Paul makes this trustworthy declaration, "Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task." Overseeing—shepherding—God's people is καλοῦ ἔργου. On what basis does Paul make this assertion? Those who teach and preach Christ are carrying out an essential task. They point others to the one and only ransom from sin and death. This message is not merely needed by some people some of the time. What everyone needs, we have been called to proclaim. Those who serve well in this regard gain a good standing—a good standing before their fellow believers and before God in Christ.

Although many reject the message of Christ-crucified, we in the public ministry have a front row seat to its power. We see how it unburdens the guilty, comforts the grieving, gives perseverance to the weary, courage to the timid, hope to the distraught, and joy to the despondent. What that message is for others, it is also for us. This is the great assurance for our faith the Holy Spirit gives to us as we administer word and sacrament.

“Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.” Take this trustworthy saying to heart and impress it upon your brothers and sisters in ministry. Together, let’s embrace our noble work in Christ.

In Him,

*Pastor Dennis Klatt*

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## Pastoral briefs

**Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles:** the [COP Pastoral Letter](#) on Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles has been made available in the WELS Together e-news page of the official WELS website.

This pastoral brief does not change our doctrine or replace our doctrinal statement adopted in 1993. We are striving to emphasize the complimentary and interdependent aspects of God’s design and the role of vocation in the application of God’s will to male-female relationships. We pray that it will promote more study and appreciation of God’s design and will.

**Critical Theory:** This letter, commissioned by the synod in convention in 2023, has been approved by the COP and is undergoing final proofing and formatting. It will be published in the Together e-newsletter in November.

## Church governance resources

Because of the bearing that the biblical principles of man and woman roles have on our governance structures, the COP strongly urges congregations to review the new pastoral brief before tackling governance changes. Within the next few months, WELS Congregational Services will release new resources to assist congregations and schools considering amendments to their bylaws. Please also involve our district constitution committee early in your work. Pastor David Peters (chair), Robert Harting will be eager to assist you. Any changes to bylaws must be approved by the constitution committee before they are implemented.

## Triennial convention proposal will not advance

Based on input received from last summer’s district conventions, the COP has decided not to advance to the 2025 synod convention the proposal to move from biennial to triennial synod conventions.

## Committee on Identity, Gender, and Sexuality

[Madeknown.net](#) is now live with FAQs, devotionals, speaker information, and support resources.

## WELS 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary

A committee is preparing for the 2025 celebration of the 175th anniversary of WELS founding. The anniversary theme will be “Christ Through Us.”

## VEBA efforts

The rebalancing of “rate region” premiums will result in higher-than-normal increases for many of us over the next three years. WELS Benefit Plans Office is working hard to maintain rates and benefits that are fair and generous to all our called workers. Calling bodies may wish to use a higher deductible plan in concert with a Health Reimbursement Arrangement or a Health Savings Account. These products allow the calling body and called worker to share in health care costs without a negative tax implication for the called worker.

According to [WELS Compensation Guidelines](#), the calling body is responsible for 100% of the called worker’s premiums.

## Challenges facing small colleges

Higher education, particularly small colleges, has been facing big challenges since COVID. In 2024, small colleges in the U.S have been closing at an average rate of one per week. While MLC enjoys many top rankings among small colleges, it is not immune to the challenges. MLC is working closely with a consultant and with WELS administration to face the challenges and to continue to serve its mission of training called workers in a changing environment. Martin Luther College is a vital component to the ministry of our churches and schools.

## White paper

At our 2024 district convention, BME administrator Pastor Paul Prange presented the findings and recommendations of the Ministry Recruitment Task Force. One of the twenty recommendations from the committee was that “the COP commission a White Paper to develop a shared philosophy of ministry to students and families active in other Christian churches.” The COP has begun to work on this.

## Called Worker Vacancy Update

<b>Pastor</b>	<b>Pilgrim, Minneapolis, MN (Not calling in lieu of merger discussion results)</b>
<b>Total Parish Vacancies 30</b>	<b>Shepherd of the Lakes, Fairmont, MN</b>
<b>- 22 are actively calling.</b>	<b>Christ, North St. Paul/Hugo, MN (Associate Pastor)</b>
	<b>Mt. Olive, Delano, MN</b>
	<b>Petra, Sauk Rapids, MN</b>
	<b>St. Paul’s, Prescott, WI</b>
	<b>Salem, Stillwater, MN (Associate Pastor)</b>
	<b>Hope, Andover, MN</b>
	<b>Calvary, Glenwood/ St. John, Hancock</b>
	<b>Cross, Rockford, MN (Merging with Salem, Greenfield Anchored in Christ Ministries)</b>
	<b>Zion, Olivia, MN (Not calling in lieu of partnership discussion results)</b>
	<b>Zion, Springfield/ Peace, Marshfield, MO</b>

	<p><b>Good Shepherd, Burnsville (Associate Pastor)</b></p> <p><b>Grace, South St. Paul, MN</b></p> <p><b>Crown of Life, West. St. Paul, MN (Associate Pastor)</b></p> <p><b>Mt. Olive, St. Paul, MN (Not calling in lieu of merger discussion results)</b></p> <p><b>Christ, Zumbrota, MN</b></p> <p><b>St. John's, Redwood Falls, MN (Associate Pastor)</b></p> <p><b>St. John's, Lake City, MN</b></p> <p><b>Divinity, St. Paul, MN (Not calling in lieu of merger discussion results)</b></p> <p><b>Beautiful Savior, Austin, MN</b></p> <p><b>Zion, Sanborn, MN</b></p> <p><b>St. John, Glencoe, MN</b></p> <p><b>Shepherd of the Hills, Duluth, MN</b></p> <p><b>Grace, Nye Twshp (Osceola) WI (Not Calling)</b></p> <p><b>St. John, Boyd (Omro Township), MN (Not Calling)</b></p> <p><b>Zion, Russell, MN Currently served by Dan Herold, Christ, Marshall, MN</b></p> <p><b>Shepherd of the Hills, Inver Grove Heights, MN</b></p> <p><b>Zion, Morton, MN (Not Calling)</b></p> <p><b>Grace, Clear Lake, WI/Zion Almena, WI (Not Calling)</b></p>
<b>Staff Ministry Vacancies</b>	<b>NorthCross, Lakeville, MN – Ryan Klatt deliberating</b>
<b>Upcoming Retirements</b>	<b>Jack Kelly – May 31<sup>st</sup> tentatively</b>
<b>Calls Accepted into the District</b>	<b>David Brandt - Grace, Oronoco, MN</b>

## WELS Parish Pastoral Vacancies

There are currently 151 parish pastor vacancies across WELS. Adding in vacancies for pastor trained individuals the total number of pastor vacancies is 162

## Pastor call hiatuses

The COP has again decided to observe pastor call hiatuses around Christmas and Easter. Around Christmas, calls will not be issued Friday, December 13 through Sunday, January 12. Around Easter, calls will not be issued Saturday, April 12 through Wednesday, April 23.

## MN District Current Teacher Vacancies

### 5 - Principal Vacancies

Bloomington, Bloomington/Living Hope, Shakopee, MN  
 Good Shepherd, Burnsville, MN  
 St. John, Lake City, MN  
 St. John, Caledonia, MN  
 Christ (Samuel), Marshall, MN

## 2 - ALHS Instructor Vacancy

West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, MN – English  
St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West St. Paul, MN - Band

## 5 - LES Vacancies

Christ, North St. Paul, MN – Grade 1  
Trinity, Belle Plaine, MN – Grades 1-2, Music  
Emanuel/Grace, Hutchinson, MN – Grades 2-4  
St. Paul's, New Ulm, MN – Grade 2, piano, Science  
St. Paul's, New Ulm, MN – Grade 6/Vice Principal  
St. John's, Redwood Falls, MN – Grade 7

## 4 – ECM Vacancies

Christ, Baxter, MN  
Little Lambs, Duluth, MN  
Christ, Cambridge, MN  
MLC ECLC, New Ulm, MN

The Teacher Call Window opened October 15<sup>th</sup> and will run through Monday, April 15, 2025. Ministries looking to fill a vacancy or new position are asked to request a candidate list using the [WELS Online Call Request System](#). **Teachers are considered call eligible if they have competed the third year of their assigned call or two years of a call subsequent to assignment.** Please see the guidance for acknowledging and deliberating a divine call posted on the MN District Teacher's Conference resource page.

## Self-assessment updates

Pastor and Teacher self-assessments are the primary means for congregations and schools to consider the strengths and preferences of candidates at call meetings. Therefore, it is important that each called worker 1) complete a self-assessment and 2) update it every year or two. Complete and up-to-date records help to promote confidence in our call system. To access and update your online assessment data go to [cloud.wels.net/me](https://cloud.wels.net/me).

## Minister of the Gospel Tax Status

Teachers issued provisional calls must be enrolled in the WELS Ministry Certification program through Martin Luther College to qualify for Minister of the Gospel tax status with the IRS. Provisionally called teachers who fail to enroll must have FICA withheld and submitted by the calling body.

## Staff Minister Vacancies

Across the WELS two congregations are actively calling for staff ministers. Three others are considering the addition of a parish staff ministry position. Currently there are at least seventeen congregations calling to fill associate pastor positions. District presidents are encouraging congregations who do not need an additional pulpit preacher to consider calling a staff minister to meet their ministry needs.

From my own experience in the Minnesota District, the primary barrier to congregations calling a staff minister instead of a second or third pastor is a lack of awareness. Most lay members and even some

pastors are not familiar with the depth of staff minister training and/or the scope of gospel ministry they are equipped to carry out. We are actively taking steps to build such awareness when conducting pre-call meetings, via reports, and through personal conversations.

## Ministry Cooperation Meetings

The MN District is currently holding Ministry Cooperation Meetings in each of the Minnesota Conferences. The purpose of these meetings is to initiate thought and discussion about ways in which congregations and schools in close proximity to each other can partner to carry out more and better gospel ministry.

In some cases, ministries are stable but individual congregations may lack the critical mass to carry out youth, young adult, senior, or music ministries. In other cases, it may be wise for congregations and schools to consider merging in order to preserve a WELS ministry in the area. It is better to thrive together than struggle or die alone. It may also be beneficial to the kingdom for called workers and lay members with high level gifts in a particular area to use them beyond their local congregation or school.

Examples of partnerships may include but are not limited to joint worship committee planning sessions via video conference, shared SPED resource teachers, shared branding for publicity, a joint choir assembled from members of 3-4 churches singing at a different church each month, and joint outreach at a county fair.

To date, two conference-wide Ministry Cooperation Meetings have been held (St. Croix & Red Wing) and four circuit/areas: St. Croix Conference – East Circuit; 5 St. Paul/Minneapolis congregations; Red Wing Conference - Rochester Circuit; Danube/Olivia/Renville/Redwood Falls churches. Other districts with congregations in close proximity are working along similar lines.

## District Appointments

Pastor Roger Rockhoff – MN District Ministry of Christian Giving Chairman

Pastor Robert Harting – MN District Constitution Committee

Mr. Nathan Kallies – MN District Legislation Committee

Mrs. Jamie Fischer – Associate MN District Early Childhood Coordinator

## MN District Website

Stay up to date with MN District news and events by subscribing to the MN District electronic mailing list via this [LINK](#).

**WELS Night at the Timberwolves** ~ Sunday November 17<sup>th</sup> at the Target Center. The deadline for purchasing tickets at the group rate has been extended. **TO PURCHASE TICKETS:TIMBERWOLVES.COM/GROUPOFFERS + PROMO CODE: 2425WELS.**



## Minnesota District Special Ministries Annual Report

### Highlights from Special Ministries Work in The MN District

1. **WELS Mission for the Visually Impaired (MVI)** Since many people who are blind are looking to audio resources, MVI continues offers audio recordings of *Meditations*, *Forward in Christ*, about half of The Peoples Bible commentaries, and other resources at [listen.wels.net](http://listen.wels.net). MVI continues to add to the listen library.
2. **Ministry to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing-** The newest resource from MDHH is Gospelhands.net – the first ever online dictionary of Christian religious signs. Also available on that page are weekly streamed signed services and sermons. An interpreter continues to help at the Jesus Cares Program at St. John's in Glencoe MN.
3. **Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry/Jesus Cares Ministry/Joy in Jesus Camps**—There continues to be a strong partnership between IDDM and JCM in the District. Twice a year in October and February, Joel Gaertner, Stephen Schmidt, Patrick Feldhus, and Carrie Ogonoski continue to connect our future Special Ed teachers from MLC to these ministries. A new program called SMILES is being developed and was promoted at the District Convention and the International LWMS. There are 28 Jesus Cares programs in our District.  
The two “Joy in Jesus” Camps had 43 campers and 18 volunteers.
4. **MN District Workshop**-On March 9<sup>th</sup>, Special Ministries brought in CSF for a presentation on Mental Health at St. Croix Academy. There was a reminder to make use of the MAP program in our congregations and schools.
5. **Prison Ministry**-While the work of prison ministry has historically been done via sharing printed Bible study books, much of that work is transitioning to tablets which the institutions make available. With this transition, we have seen an increase in tests returned and have a need for more test correctors.
6. **Military Services** -There is a great partnership with Lutheran Military Support Group in our District. There are scholarships for anyone who is/was in the military and is looking to go into the ministry.

#### **Future Plans**

- Continue the partnership between JCM and IDDM with presentations at MLC and the “Joy in Jesus” camps
- Continue promotion of Special Ministries in our District especially the ones that are centered in our District (MVI & Prison Ministry)
- Use our District workshop conference to emphasize an area of Special Ministries
- Emphasize [wels.net/referral](http://wels.net/referral) for all areas of Special Ministries.

**Our committee members** – Pastor Patrick Feldhus, Pastor Steve Smith, Pastor Ed Fredrich, Pastor Robbin Robbert, Michelle Markgraf, Professor Kari Muentel, Brad Price, Ursula Heuer, and Pastor Darren Green

Pastor Patrick Feldhus, MN District Coordinator

Email: [pfeldhus@hotmail.com](mailto:pfeldhus@hotmail.com)

Cell Phone: (920)918-9949



## **MN District Reporter**

The district email list consists of 457 records; 213 pastors, 79 teachers, and most of the rest are lay men and women.

Please submit news items either as text that is complete, proofread, and ready to go, or as a PDF document that is formatted to your liking.

Circuit pastors are encouraged to invite pastors who are new to the district to subscribe to the list. Please also encourage all pastors in your circuits to invite their called workers and laypeople to subscribe. Here is a bulletin announcement you might use/modify:

**MN District Email List...**Do you want to keep up with what's going on in the Minnesota District of the WELS? Stay in touch by subscribing to the district email list. Go to [welsmn.org](http://welsmn.org) and click 'mailing list' at the top of the page to sign up.

The Presidium recently sent out a survey to solicit feedback about our district email list. The results seem to indicate that people are generally satisfied with it. Do you have suggestions for improvement?

## **MN District Nominating Committee**

In October the district nominating committee began its work of assisting in the process of identifying nominees for the 2025 Synod Convention elections. The positions that are up for election as shown below. If you know someone (in or out of the MN District) who is qualified to serve in a position and would like to put their name forward, please talk to, text, or email me.

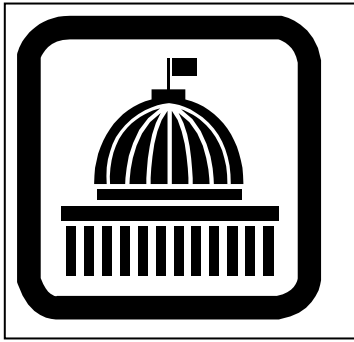
<b>Board</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Incumbent</b>	<b>Can be re-elected?</b>
Appeals	Chairman (pastor)	Kenneth Cherney	No
Appeals	Member (pastor)	Thomas Jeske	No
Appeals	Member (pastor)	Paul Zell	Yes
Appeals	Member (teacher or staff minister)	Nathan Kieselhorst	No
Appeals	Member (teacher or staff minister)	Steven Rosenbaum	Yes
Appeals	Member (teacher or staff minister)	Stephen Schultz	Yes
Appeals	Member (layman)	Gregory Galler	Yes
Appeals	Member (layman)	Mark Werre	Yes
Commission on Evangelism	Chairman (pastor, teacher or staff minister, or layman)	Douglas Tomhave	Yes
Commission on Lutheran Schools	Chairman (pastor, teacher or staff minister, or layman)	Ryan Wiechmann	Yes
Board for Ministerial Education	Member (parish pastor)	John Bortulin	Yes
Board for Ministerial Education	Member (teacher or staff minister)	James Henrickson	Yes
Board for Ministerial Education	Member (layman)	Adam Zastrow	Yes
Martin Luther College Governing Board	Chairman (parish pastor)	Michael Woldt	Yes, not running
Board for Home Missions	Chairman (parish pastor )	Matthew Brown	Yes
Board for World Missions	chairman (pastor)	Jonathan Schroeder	Yes
Board for World Missions	Member (teacher or staff minister)	Matthew Doering	Yes
Synodical Council	At large member (pastor)	John Bortulin	Yes
Synodical Council	At large member (pastor)	Joel Jenswold	No
Synodical Council	At large member (teacher or staff minister)	Thomas Plitzuweit	Yes

### **James Panning**

**[james.a.panning@gmail.com](mailto:james.a.panning@gmail.com)**

**talk/text: (702) 237-9272**





## Minnesota District Legislation Committee



### Report to the MN District – November 2024

#### **Abortion Amendment in Missouri**

Earlier this fall the Missouri Supreme Court cleared the way for an abortion amendment to be put on the November ballot. This amendment to the state constitution would guarantee a woman's right to have an abortion in all 9 months of pregnancy.

#### **New Tax**

Chances are you have heard about the new Minnesota Paid Leave Law (PLL). What you may not have heard about is the new tax associated with this new law, a tax of 0.7%. This new tax is scheduled to go into effect in January of 2026, but reporting is scheduled to start in October of this year. All of our WELS churches and schools are subject to this PLL reporting and tax. The new tax is based on called worker compensation. The question has been raised as to what constitutes compensation. To the best of our understanding, compensation includes whatever a called worker gets taxed for self employment/social security-Medicare tax. In other words, both salary and housing allowance are considered compensation. If you need further guidance, we suggest that you contact your local tax attorney.

Respectfully submitted,

Martin Bentz, Chairman  
[mbentz@trinitybelleplaine.org](mailto:mbentz@trinitybelleplaine.org)

Minnesota District Legislation Committee: Rev. Ed Lehmann, Nate Kallies, Rev. Martin Bentz

# DISTRICT DISCIPLESHIP REPORT

## Ongoing Resources

Resources at WELS Congregational Services website. The first three are subscription-based and will be sent directly to church/member emails:

- *Marriage Moments* (weekly)
- *WELS Family Devotions* \* now linked as a resource on **The Foundations** page
- *Transformed Teen Devotions* (+ facilitator guides) \* now linked as a resource on **The Foundations** page
- *WELS Youth Night* (fall '24 keynote & small group discussion guide uploaded)

## NEW 2024 RESOURCES

- **APOLOGETICS: Defend the Faith** - - Uploaded a couple months ago, this is Dr. Mike Berg, WLC, riffing on apologetics for six parts. Fascinating, well-done video series packed full of info. Originally intended as a youth resource, my gut tells me it may be better received by an adult audience because of its meaty content. Discussion guides accompany.
- **MadeKnown.net** - The WELS Committee on Identity, Gender, & has launched <https://madeknown.net/> a website dedicated to walking in faith alongside those who struggle with identity, gender, and sexuality. Resources, devotions, topical perspectives, and dedicated support through speaking engagements and personal connections are offered.
- **"An Honest Conversation"** – a youth ministry video resource meant to encourage teens to open up and talk about questions they have regarding LGBTQ topics. This isn't a doctrinal study of passages pointing out right and wrong. Before teens share law & gospel that they've been taught, how do they establish a relationship of love and trust with others that lead to conversations? That's the gist of the study.
- **WELS Online National Teen Bible Study <NEW>** \* the first one was successfully held Sunday, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>! The next one is scheduled for **Sunday, November 10<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm CST**. Many WELS churches lack a "critical mass" of teens. The goal is to create online connect opportunities with each other around God's Word.

## INCOMING YET THIS FALL ...

- **STEWARDSHIP LECACY – "Beautiful Truth" Series.** The 2<sup>nd</sup> installment of the eventual 5-part stewardship series will be uploaded by October 1<sup>st</sup> for use yet this fall. This series explores the beauty of Christian truth, the importance of deeply grasping it for ourselves and communicating it to others, especially the critical need to connect younger generations living in an increasingly ambivalent culture.
- **"Welcome Home"** is a ministry emphasis with resources to heighten awareness and encourage members of their personal role in being hospitable to and welcoming back missing members. Resources will include planning for special Sunday worship, sermon ideas, bible study handout & leaders guide, a promotional video and a start up guide. Due to come out by the end of October.

## FUTURE RESOURCES BEING DEVELOPED IN 2025 ...

- *Revitalizing Sunday School* – best models and practices
- *Small Group Ministry* - to build relationships
- *"Speak to My Heart"* – a congregational marriage enrichment video resource based on the book of Ruth & presented by Prof. Mark Paustian.
- *Stewardship Legacy: "Temple" series*
- *"Man Up or Girl Fight"* – 3-part teen video series on similarities/differences of young men and women as they serve together in God's church.



## MN DISTRICT SCHOOLS COORDINATOR

**Dave Gartner**

**Minnesota District Schools Coordinator Report**

**November 4, 2024**

My position as MN District Schools Coordinator is to be available to assist called workers, elementary and high schools, early childhood centers, boards, and congregations. I am available to meet with you or your administration and if the situation needs a larger team or several days, I also work with Jim Sievert from WELS Synod offices. Please reach out to me. I have included the Commission on Lutheran Schools Fall report as of September. Please feel free to read this report to have a bigger picture of the workings of the CLS: [W 2024 Fall Commission & ECDC DSC Report.docx](#)

I have a fabulous team that works with me because I couldn't do this position without their help:

LaShawn Smith - Early Childhood District Coordinator

Jamie Fischer - Assistant Early Childhood District Coordinator (new team member/September)

Jared Christensen - MN District Lutheran Teachers Conference (MNDLTC)

Eric Kaesermann - WELSSA Accreditation

Macord Johnson - School Counselors

Dr. Kelli Green - Special Education

Sam Nelson - Lawyer - School Law (Now also has his Wisconsin License) - Employee Manual and Student Handbook workshops - dates will be sent out soon.

### **Please read this in its entirety from Martin Luther College:**

Minnesota's 2023 Revision of the Standards of Effective Practice for Teacher Licensure In the state of Minnesota, the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) is responsible for licensing teachers and overseeing teacher preparation programs. Martin Luther College has had the opportunity to make its graduates license-eligible with a Minnesota Tier 3 license since 2001. To achieve this status, MLC was required to have its early childhood, elementary, and secondary programs approved by PELSB. A resolution to have only license eligible candidates presented to the Assignment Committee for assignment into the teaching ministry was an MLC Governing Board resolution passed in 2008 with the support and encouragement of the WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools. In April 2023, PELSB adopted changes to the Standards of Effective Practice. These are the standards used to license teachers in Minnesota when it comes to their pedagogical practices. While these teaching standards moved in number from ten to eight, the content of the standards is mostly the same. Two of the standards (Standard 2 - Learning Environment and Standard 8 - Racial Consciousness and Reflection) include wording that has raised concerns. **Verbs such as "foster," "incorporate," and "affirm" when referencing topics of gender identity, critical race theory, and LGBTQ+ are what have raised this concern. The WELS College of Ministry wants to assure its constituents that PELSB does not mandate how MLC meets these standards but allows us to meet them in the light of God's Word and encourages us to meet them according to our mission. MLC chooses the courses that meet these standards. MLC is particularly clear in its communication with PELSB, ensuring that our stance and decisions are well-understood. We communicate our conviction not to have our preservice teachers teaching lessons in public schools where**

the lesson content would disagree with our faith. Neither our pre-service candidates nor graduates in our Lutheran school system are ever required to demonstrate adherence in a way that disagrees with our faith to obtain or renew a Minnesota teaching license. This has been true since the inception of teacher licensure eligibility at MLC. A continuing example is the way in which teachers address the topic of evolution in a science classroom as an existing theory in the world of science, but not one Christians subscribe to. Through the Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (MACTE), MLC, and other Christian colleges in Minnesota, have a voice at the table in discussions with PELSB which allows colleges like MLC to express how and where in our curriculum we choose to meet PELSB's standards in keeping with our mission and the confession of our faith to meet them. Thank you for the love, support, and prayers we know you have for Martin Luther College. As we continue to train future ministers of the gospel, we value our partnership with WELS members. Please direct any questions or concerns regarding this topic to these MLC leaders:

Dr. Richard L. Gurgel, MLC President ([gurgelrl@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:gurgelrl@mlc-wels.edu))

Dr. Jeffery P. Wiechman, MLC VP for Academics ([wiechmjf@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:wiechmjf@mlc-wels.edu))

Dr. Cynthia E. Whaley, MLC Licensure Officer ([whaleyce@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:whaleyce@mlc-wels.edu))

### **Temporary Discontinuation of Two MLC Licensure Programs**

Temporary Discontinuation of the Privilege to Make Graduates Eligible for a Minnesota Teacher License in Two MLC Programs. MLC's license-eligible and approved programs are reviewed by Minnesota's Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) and given an updated licensing status every three years. Two of our programs (5-12 Social Studies and K-12 Physical Education) were recently given the temporary license application status of "Discontinued." After attempts during a probationary period, progress was made in the area of required data analysis and data-driven decision-making in both programs. However, PELSB ruled that the progress was not significant enough for MLC to retain its eligibility to recommend students for teacher licensure in each program. These rulings apply only to new students in the programs. Students already in these programs before the rulings have not had their eligibility to apply for teacher licensure affected in any way. Once the decision about these programs' status was announced, MLC continued to work even more fervently to rectify these shortcomings with PELSB. We have communicated to our students, faculty, administration, and board what will need to be done in order to regain an eligible status for recommending candidates in both programs as soon as possible. Plans are in place as MLC endeavors to do everything within its power to regain the privilege of recommending teacher licensure for new students in these two programs. It's important to know that the quality of these academic programs, their curriculum, their instructors, and their field experiences are not in question. The same is true of MLC's accreditation status with the Higher Learning Commission. These all remain strong and in place. Students in these programs remain eligible for their MLC degree, graduation, and ministry assignment. MLC sincerely apologizes for the uncertainty and confusion that these rulings cause among our students and WELS constituency. We ask you to please remain confident in your trust in us as we work through this issue. Thank you for the love, support, and prayers we know you have for Martin Luther College. As we continue to train future ministers of the gospel, we value our partnership with WELS members. Please direct any questions or concerns regarding this topic to these MLC leaders:

Dr. Richard L. Gurgel, MLC President ([gurgelrl@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:gurgelrl@mlc-wels.edu))

Dr. Jeffery P. Wiechman, MLC VP for Academics ([wiechmjf@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:wiechmjf@mlc-wels.edu))

Dr. Cynthia E. Whaley, MLC Licensure Officer ([whaleyce@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:whaleyce@mlc-wels.edu))

### **Early Childhood Support Task Force**

The Early Childhood Support Task Force work focused on building awareness and understanding of what Christ-centered, high quality early childhood care and education look like and need. A resource has been developed that outlines key areas of early childhood ministry. The resources provide a listing of best

practices, questions to ask to assure that best practices are being met, strategies, and then resources. **The intended audience includes congregational leaders, boards, members, circuit pastors, and the Conference of Presidents.** Other supplemental resources are being considered. The core document is in the editing and formatting phase.

### **Early Childhood Non-WELS Task Force**

Over 35% of those serving in our early childhood ministries as directors or lead teachers are not WELS members. We continue to hear that most ECMs do not have an intentional plan in place to share their mission and what we believe and teach with these staff members.

Work continues for this task force in response to this need. We have gathered several resources in each of the categories below:

- **Level Zero:** These documents are essential to have in place before hiring new staff members. Examples include: job descriptions, handbook policies, interview questions, etc.
- **Level One:** These resources are shared with staff members either prior to employment or shortly after they are hired. Materials in this category provide a brief overview of the ministry and the basic teachings of the Bible and WELS, highlighting the staff member's role in the early childhood ministry. Examples include: statement of beliefs, core values, ministry overview, etc.
- **Level Two:** Resources in this category provide a basic Bible introduction (3-4 lessons). These mini-courses give staff members an initial look at the basic truths of Scripture.  
Goals/Objectives:
  - Share the Gospel with those who are serving in our ministry.
  - Help all staff members to understand who we are and what we believe, so they feel comfortable serving and supporting our ministry.
  - Provide a potential steppingstone to welcome them to attend a full BIC class and dig even deeper into God's Word.
- **Level Three:** For those who complete Level Two materials and have expressed interest in learning more, this category consists of a Bible Information Class (BIC). At this point, we have many examples of BIC courses, but we are still working to provide examples that weave in the staff member's role in the ministry.

The goal of this project is to equip pastors and early childhood leaders with the resources they need to share what the Bible teaches, their ministry's mission, and their staff members' role in the ministry. We also want to recognize the amazing opportunity we have to share the gospel with those who are serving with us.

### **First time WELSSA MN District accredited schools**

- Cross of Christ Lutheran School - Coon Rapids, MN
- Resurrection Lutheran School - Rochester, MN

My last comment as I have mentioned many times in the past is to make sure your principal and early childhood director are getting proper administrative release time to carry out their calls. The Steve Granberg and Greg Schmill thesis papers outline some best practices for release time. A bare minimum for the present day is two hours per day for a small school and for many schools it may be half to full-time administration. Being an administrator is not the same as it was 20 years ago or even 10 years ago. Administrators are asked to be recruiters, financial directors, mission advancement directors, coaches, bus

drivers, to name a few and also have time for family and being active in the congregation. Years ago, some MLC students I polled said they were saying they didn't want to be administrators because of the time commitment compared to their classmates who only taught. I am starting to see a change and more are starting to consider administration again because congregations are giving them time to lead. THANK YOU for helping change the narrative and fix the issue. It only can be fixed through you.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as Minnesota District Schools Coordinator. I consider it a privilege and if you ever need to reach out, please feel free to call or email. Blessings to you all in your ministries.

Dave Gartner  
MN District Schools Coordinator  
Principal - West Lutheran High School  
507-430-3789  
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# Minnesota District Worship Committee Report

## November 2024

**Rev. Craig Engel, Prof. Craig Hirschmann and Teacher Mike Marquardt** serve as members of Minnesota District Worship Committee. **Pastor Joel Gawrisch** has served as the coordinator for the committee since 2021, filling out the term initially held by Teacher Mike Marquardt. Please reach out with worship-related questions and feedback. Joel Gawrisch: [joelg@wels.us](mailto:joelg@wels.us)

### Activity in the Past Year

- Worship planning and execution for pastoral conferences, District Leadership Workshop, and District Convention.
- Support for congregations for introducing resources, demonstrate flexible use of resources, answer questions, and assist with worship planning.
- Leadership Workshop presentation: Life-of-Christ Worship – encouraging the central place of the Life of Christ in worship through focus on Church Year resources (liturgy, lectionary, hymnody, etc.)
- District Easter Vigil service held on Easter Eve in the Chapel at St. Croix Lutheran Academy. This worship event included singers, musicians, and attendees from many parts of the District.
- **2024 National Conference on Worship, Music, & the Arts:** July 30-August 2, 2024, Carthage College, Kenosha, WI. Two committee members presented at the conference: *School Chapel Worship* (Marquardt & Gawrisch) and *Strategic Planning for Worship Enrichment* (Gawrisch)

### Coming up

- District Leadership Workshop, District Easter Vigil Service, District Pastors Conference Worship

### Christian Worship Hymnal Suite

- To make the most of the CW21 “suite of resources” are available at [christianworship.com](http://christianworship.com) and [online.nph.net/church-supplies/categories/hymnals-songbooks/christian-worship-suite](http://online.nph.net/church-supplies/categories/hymnals-songbooks/christian-worship-suite). CW: *Guidebook* is in the early stages of the editing phase.
- *Musician’s Resource* (downloadable choral alternates, lead sheets, modulations, and instrumental packs (SATB voices of pew edition settings in a variety of transpositions for instruments. New materials are added regularly at: [online.nph.net/musicians-resource](http://online.nph.net/musicians-resource).

### A Look Ahead for the Commission on Worship

- In cooperation with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, C/W will be developing materials for pastors who want to improve their preaching. This may include resources like refresher materials for those who have found themselves drifting when it comes to purpose statements, or good Lutheran video examples of alternate preaching styles.
- In cooperation with Lutheran Schools, C/W plans to work with the content development team for the new theology curriculum, incorporating resources for teaching Lutheran hymnody at all age levels. This collaboration will begin in 2025. The hymnology instructional materials published by NPH are available to congregations and schools who want to include hymnody instruction even before development on the new theology instructional resources begin.

- C/W plans to publish online Hymnal and Psalter Handbook resources, including the history and common usage of all hymns and psalm settings, and one-sentence descriptions of hymns for use in bulletins.
- In cooperation with worship planners at WELS area Lutheran high schools, C/W plans to supply resources that will allow and encourage high schools to make the best use of the treasures old and new available in the new hymnal suite. Similarly, C/W will work with Home Mission personnel to discover which of the new hymnal resources work best in unique Home Mission settings.

### **Special Thanks**

- After nearly 30 years of service, Rev. Bryan Gerlach retired at the end of August as the first and only full-time Director of the Commission on Worship. He had served since 1996. He ran his last worship conference (#9!) in July with over 1000 people in attendance.
- Rev. Paul Prange is serving as the next Director, albeit part-time. He is reconstituting the actual Commission, which has not functioned fully for over a decade because of all the attention paid to the new hymnal project. The new Commission met on September 17-18. Rev. Prange listed all of the suggestions for Commission on Worship activities, and asked the group to evaluate and prioritize them. The top priority turned out to be a revived hymnal introduction program. More suggestions are welcome.

Respectfully submitted,  
Joel J. Gawrisch