



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. 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 9th, 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 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

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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 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

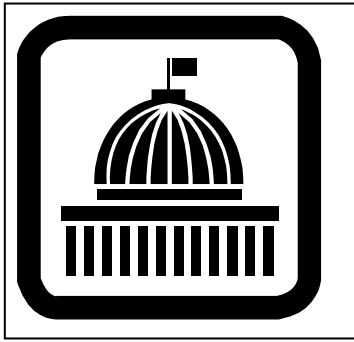
In October the district nominating committee began its work of assisting in the process of identifying nominees for the 2025 Synod Convention elections. The positions that are up for election as shown below. If you know someone (in or out of the MN District) who is qualified to serve in a position and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

Board	Position	Incumbent	Can be re-elected?
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 Henrikson	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

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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

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. 8th! The next one is scheduled for **Sunday, November 10th 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 2nd installment of the eventual 5-part stewardship series will be uploaded by October 1st 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)

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

Dr. Cynthia E. Whaley, MLC Licensure Officer (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:

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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
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