

# THE MINNESOTA DISTRICT PRESIDENT'S REPORT



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April 10, 2024

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## More Jesus—More Peace

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:16-17).*

“People don’t need more counseling. They need more church.” That’s what Pastor Dan Nommensen, former Christian Family Services counselor, had to say about the current mental health crisis in our nation. While there are certainly psychological

conditions that require professional mental health care, he contends there is a correlation between deteriorating mental health and the drop in worship attendance. Even in our WELS congregations, while our inactive lists may not be growing, more people are gathering for worship less often.

I’m not telling you something you don’t know, when I say more church means more Jesus. In a church where preaching and teaching are Christocentric, the message of Christ for us puts hearts at rest. In Christ we have a strong man who has shouldered all our guilt and cancelled its curse on the cross **for us**. In Him we have a perfectionist law-keeper who freely gives away his righteousness **to us**. In Him we have a Shepherd who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth **protecting us**. In Him we know our story ends **with us** by his side in everlasting glory. None of these are maybes or mightbes. They are certainties in Christ. Such certainties produce peace. Peace in Christ. More Church means more Christ. More Christ means more peace in a turbulent and isolating world.

More Church also means more connections to the body of Christ which tangibly express the love of Christ. Smiles, handshakes, hugs, and greetings are exchanged when we come together in God’s house. They indicate we are not alone on our journey of faith. They demonstrate we are valued. They communicate we are loved. With gospel overtones they motivate us to be little Christs to others.

Brothers, as WELS Lutheran pastors you have been uniquely trained to proclaim Christ for us. You have what an anxious world needs—the peace of Christ. Give your family, your classroom, your congregation and the world more Christ that all might have more peace.

Your servant in Christ,

*Pastor Dennis Klatt*

## **WELS Called Worker Vacancy Update**

### **Pastor Vacancies**

Synod wide there are a total of 175 pastor vacancies, 157 of those are parish vacancies. In the Minnesota District there are currently 30 pastoral vacancies of which 26 are parish pastor positions. You will note five congregations have been calling for more than two years and six have been calling for over one year.

**Pilgrim, Minneapolis, MN	Zion, Springfield/ Peace, Marshfield, MO
**St. Paul's, North Mankato, MN	Good Shepherd, Burnsville (Associate Pastor)
**Resurrection/Life, Rochester, MN	NorthCross, Lakeville, MN (Associate Pastor)
**Christ, North St. Paul/Hugo, MN	St. John's, Nodine, MN
*Christ Our Rock, Rochester, MN	Grace, South St. Paul, MN
*Shepherd of the Lakes, Fairmont, MN	Crown of Life, West. St. Paul, MN
*Petra, Sauk Rapids, MN	First, La Crescent, MN
*St. Paul's, Prescott, WI	Mt. Olive, St. Paul, MN
*Salem, Stillwater, MN	Grace, Oronoco, MN
*Calvary, Glenwood/ St. John, Hancock	Christ, Zumbrota, MN
***Grace, Clear Lake, WI/Zion Almena, WI	MVL-New Ulm, MN Dean of Students/Religion,
***Shepherd of the Hills, Inver Grove Heights, MN	SCLA, W. St. Paul, MN - Religion
Mt. Olive, Delano, MN	One Africa Team - 2 Vacancies
Hope, Andover, MN	
Cross, Rockford, MN (Has merged with Salem, Greenfield)	
Zion, Olivia, MN	

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\*Vacant for over a year  
\*\*Vacant for over two years  
\*\*\*Not actively calling

### **Recent Ministry Changes**

Wayne Schoch accepted call to King of Kings, Maitland, FL  
Roger Riedel accepted call to Beautiful Savior, Petosky, MI

James Krueger accepted call to Redeemer, St. Croix Falls/St. John, Centuria, WI.  
Nathan Fager accepted call to Faith, River Falls, WI  
Peter Leyrer accepted call to Emmanuel, Hudson, WI

**26 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary seniors will be available for assignment May 21-22.**

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### **Teacher Vacancies**

**There are currently 253 teacher vacancies.** Since October 15, 2023, 1,051 teacher calls have been issued. Of those 256 (24.4%) were accepted, 603 (57.4%) were returned, and 17 were filled by mid-year assignment.

The number of MLC graduates making themselves available for assignment May 16-17 has not been determined. There will likely be more than 130 vacancies remaining after all candidates have been assigned. Calling bodies are encouraged to begin thinking of staffing contingencies should their assignment request go unfilled. Information with suggestions in this regard has already been sent to every school administrator. Please contact President Klatt if you did not receive it.

### **Current MN District Teacher Vacancies**

MLC - 2

High School Instructors: 6

Principals: 4

LES Teachers: 10

ECE Teachers: 7

**The calling of active teachers will continue through April 15, 2024. Instructions for submitting assignment requests have already been sent to all calling bodies.**

**NB:** 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.

### **Ministry Recruitment Tips from the MLC Admissions Staff**

1. Demonstrate joy in ministry.
2. Dispel the myth that serving in ministry means living in poverty.
3. Establish a group of lay members to identify and encourage young people who display ministry gifts.
4. Pastors, please provide the names of confirmants to the MLC Admissions department when requested!
5. Support the Congregation Partner Grant Program

**New Teacher Induction & Pastor Partner Program Fee Increase:** To cover rising costs of the two programs the New Teacher Induction Program fee and the Pastors Partners Program fee will be increased to \$1,500 a year. (Effective assignment season 2025) Since this fee increase will still not cover the full cost of the programs, alternate funding sources are being sought to cover the remainder of the program expenses.

**Prospective Teacher Vetting Process** The Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS) has developed a more thorough process for vetting teachers who are not MLC trained that includes: evaluations of their professional competency, criminal background checks, pastoral recommendations and District President interviews. The COP will continue working with CLS to flesh out the details of the process.

**Graduate Level Theology Certificate Offering** The COP has approved Martin Luther College's request to add a graduate level theology certificate as a fourth option for teaching ministry certification candidates.

## MINNESOTA HUMAN RIGHTS ACT UPDATE

1. This past Monday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, the Minnesota House of Representatives tabled the judiciary policy bill which was to be considered that day. Rep. Niska had posted an amendment to restore the religious exemption. This is seen as a positive sign, and there is a belief among insiders the bill was tabled to allow the House DFL staff to develop its own language as a fix.
2. A group of seven Minnesota private colleges including Bethany Lutheran College and Martin Luther College jointly sent a letter to Gov. Walz and the respective majority leaders seeking the restoration of the religious exemption.
3. Feel free to distribute to your members the link below. It connects to a petition asking the Governor and legislators to reinstate the MHRA religious exemption clause:  
[https://oneclickpolitics.global.ssl.fastly.net/messages/edit?promo\\_id=22406](https://oneclickpolitics.global.ssl.fastly.net/messages/edit?promo_id=22406)
4. Continue to petition our risen and ascended Lord to move the hearts of our civil leaders to honor and protect our religious freedoms.

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## WELS CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS REPORT

The Conference of Presidents (COP) held its winter meeting April 3-5, 2024. Items addressed include the following:

- **Critical Theory Pastoral Brief:** The 2023 WELS Convention instructed the COP to prepare a pastoral brief addressing the issue of Critical Theory. The first draft has been completed and is under review for fine tuning. It will be made available when completed.
- **Roles of Men and Women Restatement:** After several years of crafting the restatement (and several revisions) of the doctrine of the roles of men and women, discussing, and wrestling with various aspects of the issue, the COP has concluded that the matters in question would better be addressed by a pastoral brief rather than by a new doctrinal statement. The plan is that the pastoral brief will be released as soon as it is completed by the COP.
- **WELS 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:** A committee has been appointed to plan for the 2025 celebration of the 175th anniversary of WELS founding in 1850. The anniversary theme will be “Christ Through Us.” More information will be forthcoming.
- Ministerial Recruitment Task Force meeting and has received 54 suggestions for topics to study. Their report will be included in the 2024 RTTTD.
- **WELS Congregational Services** is preparing a congregational governance module to be made available this summer. In advance of their release workshops will be

held for the members of the district Constitution Committees and praesidiums members to acquaint them their rationale and use.

- **Congregation Cooperation/Amalgamation**

- Due to changing demographics many communities are experiencing population declines which also impacts local congregations. A growing number of WELS churches are worshiping 20 or less per Sunday. In many of those cases other WELS congregations are within 10-15 miles driving distance. With the growing pastor vacancy rate, it makes good stewardship sense for such congregations to consider amalgamating with neighboring WELS churches. In addition to reducing the pastor vacancy rate there are a number of ministry benefits to be realized as congregations who join together will have the critical mass to do more gospel ministry.
- Similarly, there is also wisdom in cooperation between thriving congregations in the areas of youth and senior ministry, outreach, and many other areas of ministry. Local circuit gatherings provide natural opportunities for such discussions to begin.

- **Discipleship Update**

- Stewardship Legacy Series – The “Time” module came out in 2023. The remaining Ts (talent, treasure, truth, temple) will be developed concurrently by end of 2024 with resources for worship, sermon, bible studies, devotionals, etc.
- WELS Committee on Identity, Gender, & Sexuality – “MadeKnown.net” website is in development as well as FAQs, devotionals, speaker bureau information, and support resources. The goal is to “launch” at Youth Rally the last week of June 2024.
- Welcome Home 2.0 – A missing member/member care congregational emphasis for Fall 2024 to encourage members to understand their importance/involvement in building stronger relationships with one another. Stronger member connects are critical to closing the back door of our churches.

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## MN District Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) Report

2023 CMO Subscription \$2,699,472

2023 Actual CMO Offerings \$2,841,174

MN District 2023 CMO Performance 105.2%

MN District 2024 CMO Subscription \$2,692,314

Total WELS 2023 CMO Offerings 23.39 million  
Total WELS 2024 CMO Commitments \$23.2 million

1,216 congregations out of 1,227 (99.1%) submitted their 2024 CMO subscription. This is a wonderful level of synodical participation for which we give thanks!

CMO offerings through the first 3 quarters of 2024 are again higher than this same quarter a year ago (\$5.25M up 3.9%). We thank and praise God for moving the hearts of his people to give so generously.

## **WELS Statistical Reporting**

1,200 churches out of 1,241 submitted their 2023 congregational statistics. This effort was blessed with a 96.7% compliance across our church body. Thank you for your part in providing this valuable information. It is a useful tool to track how the Lord is blessing our labors and for planning how we can be better positioned for future gospel ministry.

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## **WELS Congregational Services (CS)**

Congregational Services intends to roll out a series of workshops over the next several years which will focus on congregational culture. The intent is to offer workshops in the various pastor conferences of our districts. Watch for promotional materials to appear this summer.

## **Upcoming Summer WELS Events**

- *Taste of Missions* will be held on Saturday, June 15, 2024, on the campus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. The event kicks off with a special worship service where new home and world missionaries will be commissioned. This in-person event will be livestreamed.
- The 2024 WELS International Youth Rally will be held June 25-28 at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. The goal is to have more than 2,500 people in attendance for the four-day rally. Website is live. Registration runs March 6-May 28th. Cost per attendee is \$410 (early bird, April 30) or \$430, month of May. Recent communication from Colorado State University announced they will charge an additional \$20 per attendee for lodging and food taxes because state law no longer exempts non-profit events. Worship plans are being made for communion as part of the closing worship service – a first in rally history. A helpful explanation for youth leaders about this is included in rally resources.
- Promotion and event planning for two other major conferences this summer include the WELS Women's Ministry Conference July 28-30 under the theme "Empowered to Proclaim" and the National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts July 30-Aug. 2 under the theme "Sing a new song to the Lord". Many staff hours are required for the design, writing, event planning, and promoting the conferences to encourage WELS members to attend. Full coverage of both events will be included in *Forward in Christ* and *Together* e-newsletter.

- The 10<sup>th</sup> annual WELS Night at the Brewers will be held Friday, July 12, 2024. Discounted tickets for WELS members and guests are reserved all together in a block of seats. Ticket link: [brewers.com/wels](http://brewers.com/wels). WELS Night at the Brewers draws nearly two thousand members each summer.
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### **Upcoming District Events:**

**2024 MN District Convention:** June 18,19 @ Martin Luther College look for registration information to land in your in-box in May.



## **Spring Update - 2024**

The Lord has provided a number of opportunities for mission plants, restarts, and cross-cultural ministries supported by the District Mission Board and the WELS Board for Home Missions. Here is a summary of the work being done in those places.

### **Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids and North Liberty, IA**

This multi-site ministry continues to have a strong relationship with the North Liberty Community Center where they hold weekly Bible class and worship services. Pastor Lucas Callies has been focused on cultivating leaders for the North Liberty location and connecting with prospects in the area.

### **Peace, O'Fallon, IL**

Pastor Philip Schroeder is in the process of leading this group through a transition. The storefront which served as the worship center for Christ Our Savior in Collinsville for the better part of two decades was no longer available. The Lord appears to be opening more doors slightly to the south, in O'Fallon, where there is more population and economic growth. But since there is already a "Christ Our Savior Lutheran" in that area, the move also came with a name change. Peace has been holding worship services at O'Fallon High School.

### **Beautiful Savior, West Des Moines, IA**

Beautiful Savior was approved as a mission restart in the spring of 2023. This allows them to call a full-time pastor. Pastor Brian Schmidt has accepted that call and was installed in August. Over the past 6 months, Pastor Schmidt has been focused equally on connecting with inactive members and on meeting new prospects. This has resulted in increased attendance in worship and in Bible study, as well as increased activity in giving and in serving.

### **St. John / San Juan, St. Paul, MN**

With the Mexican Consulate right next door and the *Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio* (CLUES) renting a portion of St. John's building for community services, there is no shortage of people to meet for bilingual missionary Pastor Timothy Otto. He has been capitalizing on these opportunities with 12 child baptisms and 2 adult baptisms over the past year – as well as adding several dozen to the list of prospects. St. John holds Spanish services on Saturday evenings.

### **Immanuel Hmong, St. Paul, MN**

A vibrant congregation in the heart of St. Paul, Immanuel is very active in reaching out to the Hmong community around them. Pastor Pheng Moua is a highly motivated missionary with a gift for teaching. The Lord has brought in 6 adults and 5 children into his family through the water and the Word. Immanuel Hmong continues to utilize shared space with St. John— which is now a center for Spanish, Hmong, and English-speaking ministries.

### **Looking Ahead to 2024**

We will continue to be aggressively pursuing all avenues to start up new missions and to enhance existing mission-minded ministries. As it stands right now, there are 3 requests from our district awaiting approval when the Board for Home Missions meets April 18-19. St. Mark in Mankato and

Faith in Prior Lake have both requested ministry enhancement funds. Salem in Greenfield and Cross in Loretto have jointly requested unsubsidized mission status, which will allow them to continue working closely with the DMB through a transition in ministry approach.

We are thankful to the many members, pastors, and congregations in our district who support us in these efforts and who have started conversations about mission opportunities in their local context. If you would like to stay up-to-date about missions in our district, visit [www.mndistrictmissions.com](http://www.mndistrictmissions.com). For the missions throughout WELS, visit [www.wels100in10.net](http://www.wels100in10.net).

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Steve Waldschmidt (Chairman)

Mr. Douglas Dorn

Rev. Robert Guenther

Rev. Mark Kaesmeyer

Mr. Daryl Schultz

Mr. Glenn Schulz

Rev. Dustin Sievert

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# MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN GIVING REPORT

## Minnesota District - SPRING 2024

### Current ministry blessings:

- **Congregation Mission Offerings** - Through February 2024, CMO totals almost \$3.39 million, a 10.5% increase over CMO 2023 for the same period. On a fiscal basis through February 2024 (8 months), total CMO is \$15.99 million, 2.1% higher than the previous fiscal year. Thank the Lord for continuing to bless his church through generous gifts!
- **100 Missions in 10 Years** - Ministry of Christian Giving is working with WELS Home Missions on this campaign which runs through June 2024. Since July 2021, we have received 2,480 gifts/commitments from 1,645 individuals and groups totaling \$3.03 million. Praise God for his blessings on this campaign!
- **WELS Endowments** - The distribution from endowments has surpassed \$1.2 million in 2023. Find out how endowments impact home and world missions at [www.wels.net/endowments](http://www.wels.net/endowments). To find assistance in encouraging bequests or to request a presentation on congregational planned giving, call 414-256-3209.
- **IRA Charitable Distribution** - Anyone 70.5 or older may direct qualified distributions to WELS ministries from their IRA accounts. These apply to the donors' required minimum distributions and are tax-free (federal). Encourage members to see their tax planner or visit [wels.net/christian-giving](http://wels.net/christian-giving) to learn more.

### Useful tools provided by the Ministry of Christian Giving:

- **Stewardship Legacy** - WELS Discipleship released the first part of a stewardship emphasis called Stewardship Legacy. This program emphasizes the “whole life” approach to stewardship, including time, talents, treasures, temple, and God’s Truth. Find the first part, A Time for Everything, at [www.welscongregationservices.net](http://www.welscongregationservices.net).
- **Grace of Giving Newsletter** - MCG works with WELS Communication Services produces a newsletter that shares opportunities for supporting WELS ministry. See an online version at [wels.net/christian-giving](http://wels.net/christian-giving).
- **An Encouraging Word E-newsletter** - A bi-monthly e-newsletter intended to help you promote joyful giving in your congregation. Click subscribe at [Stewardship Resources](#).
- **Joyful Generosity and Other Stewardship Programs** - Find stewardship programs and resources (i.e. Joyful Generosity, A God-Lived Life, 10 for 10, etc.) at congregational services or click this link - [Stewardship Programs](#)
- **Congregational Planned Giving Program Manual** - Help your congregation jump-start a program of promoting planned giving opportunities to members. [Congregational Planned Giving Program](#)

**Christian Giving Counselors:** Three giving counselors serve our district. Rev. Michael Hatzung (612-280-4491 - [michael.hatzung@wels.net](mailto:michael.hatzung@wels.net)) serves part time as a deferred counselor (estate planning and deferred gifts to WELS). Rev. Steve Schmeling (612-222-2050 - [steve.schmeling@wels.net](mailto:steve.schmeling@wels.net)) and Rev. Phil Spaude (612-720-1323 - [philip.spaude@wels.net](mailto:philip.spaude@wels.net)) serve as current gift counselors (immediate offerings and gifts to WELS mission and ministry). Your counselors provide services to your congregation and WELS constituents of with no expectations of honorarium: preaching, presentation, and/or Bible study for a Stewardship Sunday, Mission Festival, or Ministry Sunday.

**Please contact me if you would like any assistance or guidance in stewardship planning, personal finance courses, wills and estate planning, endowment funds, setting CMO, or budgeting for ministry.**

In Christ's Service,  
Rev. Peter Sulzle (MCG District Chairman - [pastorsulzle@stjohnredwood.org](mailto:pastorsulzle@stjohnredwood.org), 507-430-5343)

## WELS Special Ministries Updates Spring 2024

### **Military Services Committee**

We encourage every WELS congregation to develop a culture that loves, appreciates, and supports its military members, their families, and veterans. How do we get started? Strive to make sure your pastor and congregation are aware when their member: 1. Joins the military. Encourage or help the member to register at [wels.net/refer](http://wels.net/refer). 2. Will deploy. Verify that the member is registered and has provided updated information at [wels.net/refer](http://wels.net/refer). 3. Is deployed. Express concern for the member's family and a desire to help them while the military member is away from home. It is important to track the movements of a member in the military for continued spiritual support. When a service member moves, please provide updated information at [wels.net/refer](http://wels.net/refer) so that an MCP or the national civilian chaplain can maintain contact. This is helpful, even if the home pastor remains the service member's primary pastor.

### **Prison Ministry Committee**

Any inmate can request a Bible directly from our mailing center. We will supply one free-of-charge to the inmate, provided delivery is allowed by the facility in which the inmate is housed. Refer inmates to our ministry-by-mail program (correspondence courses or pen pal letters) at [wels.net/refer](http://wels.net/refer).

### **Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministries**

**CONFIRMING AND COMMUNING THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS** - Although it may be a challenging task to bring a person with special needs to the point of being a properly prepared communicant, it is God's will that we do all we can to bring it about. With God's help and blessing, it can be done in many cases. For more information please contact: Pastor Joel Gaertner Director, WELS Commission on Special Ministries [joel.gaertner@wels.net](mailto:joel.gaertner@wels.net) 414-256-3240

S.M.I.L.E.S. (Songs, Movement, Instruments, Learning, Encouragement, and Signing) is designed to serve two purposes: 1) to facilitate the integration of special-needs individuals and their families/caregivers into the fabric of a local congregation; 2) to serve as an outreach vehicle of a congregation to the special-needs community in their area.

S.M.I.L.E.S., an introductory video has already been produced and will be released soon in conjunction with a video of an entire S.M.I.L.E.S service that will be taped in April. Materials for congregations to begin their own S.M.I.L.E.S program are in the works as well.

### **Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

Equipment loan - unsure about using ALDs? Try an MDHH loaner. Guest speakers - we can speak to your school, church leaders or church organization about this ministry. Seed money - we provide assistance for starting a deaf ministry. Sign language class - an online course is offered by MLC. MDHH is developing a sign-language based website called Gospel Hands.

### **Mission for the Visually Impaired**

MVI also serves people who have reading impairment. MVI has an online library, called "WELS Listen Library." The Listen Library provides visually impaired and print impaired people Christian audio and digital resources that can be read online or downloaded to a device.

### **Committee on Mental Health Needs**

The WELS/ELS Christian Therapists Network provides a network for professionally-trained therapists in fellowship with the WELS or ELS to enhance the delivery of Bible-based, Christ-centered therapy. It is a referral source for WELS/ELS congregations and called workers, and the Network helps Christians find professionally-trained, Christian therapists in their area. <https://christiantherapistnetwork.com/>

Member Assistance Program (MAP) is also available for congregations and schools that wish to cover the costs of counseling services for their members. CFS counselors also provide Educational Presentations on a variety of topics, in-person, via webinar, or asynchronously through the CFS website.

Responding to the Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse- Freedom for the Captives is a WELS Special Ministries taskforce that provides resources for survivors of child sexual abuse, and for churches and their leaders who desire to minister faithfully when cases of such abuse become known. A wide variety of resources can be found on the Freedom for the Captives website, [freedomforcaptives.com](http://freedomforcaptives.com). Responding to the Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse makes clear the need for such resources. It can be printed out for presentations or sharing with individuals to make them aware of the need for Christians to respond in a godly manner, and to introduce them to the website. Free online abuse prevention training, called "Standing Up for Children," is now available at [welscongregationalservices.net/abuse-prevention/](http://welscongregationalservices.net/abuse-prevention/)

Conquerors through Christ- Conquerors through Christ (CtC) is a WELS Special Ministries taskforce to help Christians deal with the temptations and devastation caused by Internet pornography. A wide variety of resources and videos can be found on the CtC website, [conquerorsthroughchrist.net](http://conquerorsthroughchrist.net). This brochure can be printed to share with groups or to help someone find the resources and support they need to deal with this problem.

Patrick Feldhus WELS MN District Special Ministries Coordinator [pfeldhus@hotmail.com](mailto:pfeldhus@hotmail.com)

**WELS Synodical Council  
Meeting Summary  
November 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>**

***Ministry Update***

1. Approved plan to improve the lower level of the MLC Chapel - Phase 1 \$250K; total cost \$900K
2. Home Missions reported 10 new church starts requiring 15 called workers (7 called worker positions have been filled to date)
3. Larry Schloemer provided presentation of all the exciting efforts underway in World Missions
4. Congregational Services reported statistics on Commission of Lutheran Schools
  - a. In last two years, positions filled:
    - i. 191 MLC graduates
    - ii. 220 Former WELS teachers
    - iii. 219 WELS members entering WELS teacher ministry
  - b. 34 Principal vacancies were reported

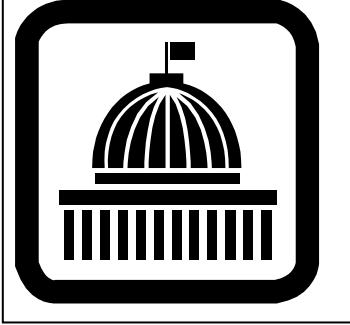
***Administrative Update***

1. Church Extension Fund
  - a. Currently 21 construction loans in flight
  - b. As of September 30, 2023, there are 8 potential applicants in discussion
2. Church Giving Report
  - a. CMO through October 2023 remains strong, totaling \$18.3M (\$21K higher than the same period in 2022)
  - b. \$2.7M has been received for 100 Mission in 10-year initiative
3. Synod Wages
  - a. A motion was made to increase called worker compensation in FY25 from the original plan number of 2.5% to 4.0%. The motion was debated and narrowly defeated
  - b. A motion was made and carried to encourage member of the Synodical Council (especially lay representatives) to encourage congregations to go above the 2.5% increase

***Financial Update***

1. Financial Audits - WELS Synod and WELS Foundation each received unmodified opinions from their auditors, Baker Tilly
2. Financial Forecast - Expectations on FY24 & FY25 CMO have not changed - remains strong (~\$23M)
3. Synod Capital Projects - A model to enable borrowing to expedite building projects was presented and approved; distribution of \$2M from the Financial

Stabilization Fund was approved with subsequent annual \$1M distributions to follow



# Minnesota District Legislation Committee



## Report to the MN District – April 2024

### **Minnesota Human Rights Act**

In 2022 gender identity was included as part of sexual orientation within the Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA). At the time there was still a religious exemption for sexual orientation included in that legislation. Last year the Minnesota legislature passed into law a new, separate definition of gender identity which contained no corresponding religious exemption. This spring a motion to amend the law to include a religious exemption was voted down in the Minnesota legislature. If it stands as written, our WELS ministries in Minnesota will be considered in violation of state law for insisting that those who serve in our ministries adhere to our Biblical teaching, practice, and lifestyle related to sexual orientation and transgenderism.

### **Amendment to the Minnesota Constitution**

The Equal Rights Amendment is a proposed amendment to the Minnesota Constitution that would ensure that “equal rights” shall not be abridged or denied on the basis of “gender identity or expression.” It also includes protection of a woman’s right to abortion up to the moment of a baby’s birth. Also concerning is that there are no protections in the proposed amendment for religious freedom. The bill has already been passed by the Minnesota Senate and is set to be voted on by the Minnesota House. If it passes the House, it will be set to go to Minnesota voters in the fall.

### **Gender-Affirming Rights Act**

A bill has been introduced in the Minnesota legislature that would give every “individual” the “fundamental right to make autonomous decisions about the individual’s own gender, and related gender-affirming health care.” Since the language of the bill does not define the word “individual,” every child and adult would have the right to make these decisions. Parents and guardians would have no right to prevent their children from making such decisions.

## **Assisted Suicide Bill**

In the current session a bill has been introduced in the Minnesota legislature that would legalize physician-assisted suicide. The bill would allow doctors to prescribe a lethal dose of medication for patients to take if they have received a diagnosis of six months to live. Doctors would be allowed to prescribe the lethal dose of medication but not directly administer it. Though the language of the bill has been updated to address some concerns, it still has many concerning provisions, including no mental health evaluation requirement, no family notification, no safeguards for people with disabilities, and no nurse or doctor present when the lethal drug is taken.

## **New Teacher Licensing Standards Update**

Previously it was reported that new standards for teacher licensure were approved by the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) and were set to go into effect on July 1, 2024. The new standards required candidates to demonstrate from their coursework their ability to:

- “affirm” student identities, including sex and gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation and “incorporate” them into a learning environment
- “understand” how “ethnocentrism, eurocentrism, deficit-based teaching, and white supremacy undermine pedagogical equity”
- “assess” their “biases” and “mitigate their own behavior to disrupt oppressive systems”
- “empower” learners “to be agents of social change to promote equity”

In response to this language, the Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (MACTE), which includes representatives from many faith-based colleges, held several meetings with the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB). The meetings resulted in the change of verbiage from “foster,” “affirm,” and “incorporate” to “understands.”

Respectfully submitted,

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

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

# WELS Commission on Evangelism Update

Update – Spring 2024



The *Everyone Outreach* workshop has been revised from 8 hours to 5 hours. We hope the shorter version will encourage more congregations and members of those congregations to participate. All the material from the original is still covered, but in a shorter timeframe. If your congregation has not yet experienced EO, consider doing so soon! Learn more at [www.everyoneoutreach.com](http://www.everyoneoutreach.com)



In his second letter to Timothy, St. Paul wrote, "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season" (4:2). Using St. Paul's experiences in the city of Philippi as a model, *In Season and Out of Season* seeks to encourage and equip God's people to share that message in any and every situation. Available at [www.welscongregationservices.net](http://www.welscongregationservices.net)



*One by One* is a Bible study based on Pastor David Rosenau's keynote presentation at the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership in January of 2020. Pastor Rosenau helps Christians understand why it is so important to see every soul as a treasure and why we want to be willing to spend the time and effort necessary to share the gospel with each one. Available at [www.welscongregationservices.net](http://www.welscongregationservices.net)



*Let's Go* provides online, video-based personal witness training. Where *One by One* is primarily motivational, *Let's Go* is instructional. *Let's Go* can be used by large and small group Bible studies and by individual Christians. Available at [www.welscongregationservices.net](http://www.welscongregationservices.net)



The *Congregational Evangelism Kit* provides video-based training for congregational evangelism leaders and teams, and is available at [www.welscongregationservices.net](http://www.welscongregationservices.net)

## Outreach Newsletters

The Commission on Evangelism annually offers *Outreach Newsletters* to WELS congregations. The newsletters each consist of a devotional article targeted at congregations' prospects. There are twelve newsletters offered each year. The newsletters can be downloaded, free of charge, at [www.welscongregationservices.net](http://www.welscongregationservices.net).

## Congregational Services newsletter

If you haven't already done so, consider subscribing to the Congregational Services newsletter. It provides a weekly email update of all the new resources from CS. Simply go to [www.welscongregationservices.net](http://www.welscongregationservices.net) and subscribe at the bottom of the homepage.

Serving alongside you,

*Eric*

*Rev. Eric Roecker: Director, WELS Commission on Evangelism  
eric.roecker@wels.net and 414-256-3287*



SPRING 2024

## WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY SPOTLIGHT

### MISSION AND MINISTRY

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) held its 2024 Mission and Ministry seminar February 6–8. This annual three-day event provides students an opportunity to hear from a wide range of people in a wide range of ministry settings. It's another chance for them to see how their classroom lessons apply to real-world gospel work.

Attendees heard updates and stories from WELS World Missions, Home Missions, and Congregational Services under the theme of "We Will Walk in the Name of the Lord" based on Micah 4:5. Each day of Mission and Ministry offered eight breakout sessions, a keynote speaker, and highlights from World Missions, Home Missions, or Congregational Services. In a world that wonders which path is the right one for them, our witness is a bold and thunderous cry that we will walk in the name of the Lord, forever!

### WINTERIM

During early January, Winterim—the two-week session between semesters—gives students who choose to stay on campus an opportunity to study in areas of personal interest not normally part of the seminary curriculum. This year more than fifty students participated in learning opportunities that took them off campus, whether to participate in outreach trips in Virginia, Texas, Arizona, and California, or a cultural immersion in Colombia. The students who participated came back to campus with increased zeal for the ministry that is, Lord willing, ahead of them.

Several pastors were also on campus to participate in courses offered through Grow in Grace. In addition, a group of students of the Pastoral Studies Institute gathered on campus for a week. Most Winterim courses are open to WELS/ELS pastors and to students from seminaries affiliated with WLS.

### SECOND SEMESTER ENROLLMENT

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. That is always true. Sometimes it is also obvious to see. As we experience a high number of vacancies in our synod, we more readily recognize the need to pray for more workers for the harvest. The Lord has answered our prayers with an enrollment of 134 students. For the first time in several years, the enrollment at the beginning of the year and the enrollment at the beginning of the second semester are the same. There are 27 seniors, 41 middlers, and 37 juniors on campus, with 29 serving off-campus, 28 as vicars and one in an emergency call.

### ACCREDITATION SITE VISIT

The Commission on Accreditation of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) recently reviewed the seminary's self-study report submitted December 1, 2023, and has authorized a comprehensive evaluation visit for initial accreditation April 15–18, 2024. Though the Commission considered the self-study promising, they also do not guarantee that accreditation will be granted following the evaluation visit.

### END-OF-YEAR EVENTS

Assignment Service: May 23, 10 a.m.

Graduation Concert: May 23, 7 p.m.

Graduation: May 24, 10 a.m.



Since establishing a new Summer Quarter (SQ) pattern, where SQ travels to districts in odd-numbered years, SQ is back on the WLS campus for 2024. This means a greater variety of courses are offered (including courses for STM credits), on-campus lodging and food, as well as nightly fellowship opportunities. In addition, in 2024, SQ is offering new courses as well as new fellowship opportunities. Pastors should have received a promotional mailing in February. Registration for SQ opens March 25.

**Here are the top ten reasons for pastors to consider attending SQ in 2024 (June 17–21 and June 24–28).**

10. The SQ menu includes seventeen different courses, scheduled so that pastors can attend both weeks or only one.
9. This on-campus event happens only in even-numbered years. Your next chance would be 2026. Carpe diem!
8. The dorm-and-cafeteria-deal-of-the-century: A pastor can stay in the dorm and enjoy fourteen meals in the cafeteria for \$250 per week.
7. SQ provides access to the library, the gym, and our scenic 80-acre campus. Weather-wise, the second half of June is about as good as it gets in Wisconsin.
6. Flexibility: Take only one course or take several. (Any credits earned could count towards an STM degree.) Some pastors work on other projects or on strategic planning while they are here—a mini-sabbatical.
5. The fellowship of pastors: SQ provides opportunities to interact with other pastors in and outside the classroom. To mutual encouragement!
4. Meet pastors from our greater (global) confessional Lutheran fellowship. Learn with and from them. Encourage them.
3. There will be new enhancements in 2024, including three evening activities each week, making SQ an all-around-enjoyable event.
2. Daily chapel!
1. The faculty and staff of WLS are working hard to make SQ a unique opportunity for you to grow in faith, knowledge, zeal, and skill for gospel ministry.

## PASTORAL STUDIES INSTITUTE

a partnership of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and WELS Joint Missions

We'll call him Pastor A. Basically, his church body left him. He understood what the Lord's Word said about marriage and gender, and couple relations reserved only for marriage. He understood all these issues because his church body's seminary had taught those biblical concepts to him based upon God's Word. Then, one day at his church body's annual convention, all of that was turned upside down and now everything and anything was acceptable. Pastor A's church body left him, along with many other pastors just like him.

Pastor A's congregation heard the news and they fully supported him in the search for a new church building in which to worship. That church building happened to be one of our WELS churches that was more than willing to open their worship space to this homeless flock. As a result, Pastor A. started having weekly meetings with the WELS pastor. They talked a lot about doctrine, and what the Bible says, and what WELS teaches and believes. Pastor A. eventually agreed to accept our invitation to join us for our Symposium on the seminary grounds in September. Pastor A. very much liked what he heard.

Pastor A. eventually found a larger space for his flock to worship, but he continued to meet weekly with the WELS pastor. They continued to talk about doctrine, and what the Bible says, and one day Pastor A. asked about the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) program at WLS and what he would have to do to enroll. The WELS pastor suggested that perhaps they use their weekly meeting time to start one of the PSI courses and see how things develop. The WELS pastor explained to Pastor A. that in order to be officially enrolled in the PSI program he would have to be in fellowship with us. Pastor A. told the pastor that since they had started meeting he hadn't learned so much since he left seminary. He wanted to keep meeting and studying.

We don't know how this is going to turn out. We pray that Pastor A. will see that ours is a church body that still teaches and preaches the Word of God in its truth and purity, without one day suddenly turning everything upside down. We pray that Pastor A. is brought into our fellowship and that our PSI Team has an opportunity to teach him, share the distinctly Confessional Lutheran truths with him, and ultimately call him brother. This is just one of the ways that PSI seeks to carry out its charter and walk with men of all kinds of backgrounds with the hope of training confessional Lutheran pastors. We don't know how this is going to turn out, but we pray that it does to the benefit of Pastor A. and his flock, and to the glory of God. We pray that this is your prayer, too.



# WELS Investment Funds—

providing cost-effective, professionally managed investment portfolios to help organizations achieve their ministry goals

**Since 1997, WELS Investment Funds has been providing investment portfolios to benefit WELS and affiliated ministries.**

## The benefits

- **Ease of use.** Our professional staff can meet with your organization and guide you through the steps to open and maintain an investment account.
- **Strength in numbers.** As more congregations and organizations invest in WELS Investment Funds, the cost savings benefits increase.
- **Proven history.** As of March 31, 2024, WELS Investment Funds managed \$321 million for 253 WELS and affiliated ministries.

**Does your congregation or school have funds that you are considering investing? Please contact us to explore your options.**

## Contact us

Executive Director Jim Holm, CFP®  
[jim.holm@wels.net](mailto:jim.holm@wels.net) or 414-256-3206

Investor Services Specialist Monica Peavy  
[monica.peavy@wels.net](mailto:monica.peavy@wels.net) or 414-256-3207



Connect with us to see how we can help you achieve your ministry goals.  
Visit [wels.net/welsfunds](http://wels.net/welsfunds).

## The funds

There are four funds available, based on your organization's needs and ministry goals.

### For organizations with endowment and scholarship funds:

- WELS Balanced Fund  
(60% equity/40% fixed income)
- WELS Endowment Fund  
(75% equity/25% fixed income)

### For organizations that wish to customize their own portfolio mix:

- WELS Equity Fund  
(100% equity)
- WELS Income Fund  
(100% fixed income)

## An example

St. Mark's Lutheran Church receives an inheritance of \$100,000. They use the funds to set up an Outreach Endowment Fund to support their outreach activity to their community. St. Mark's invests the \$100,000 in the WELS Balanced Fund, and they draw 4% from their fund each year to pay for outreach events. The funds they request are conveniently deposited into their congregation's checking account when needed.



**WELS Investment Funds**  
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

# WELS Foundation— helping God's people support the ministries they love since 1965

**Charitable gift annuities:**  
A gift that pays income for life

**Charitable gift annuities have become  
a popular way for donors to support  
themselves and the ministries they love.**

## How they work

1. A donor makes a gift of cash or securities to WELS Foundation.
2. The donor receives fixed income payments for life and a charitable income tax deduction.
3. After the donor is called home, the remainder is distributed to the ministry or ministries the donor has chosen.

**Contact us to learn how charitable gift annuities can benefit a ministry close to your heart.**

## Contact us

Executive Director Jim Holm, CFP®, at [jim.holm@wels.net](mailto:jim.holm@wels.net) or 414-256-3206



Want to learn more?  
Scan the QR code to  
watch a brief video about  
charitable gift annuities.

## SOME GREAT NEWS ABOUT CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITIES

**What difference can 0.4 percent make? A lot!**

On Jan. 1, 2024, the gift annuity payout rates increased by about 0.4%, depending on the age of the person setting up the annuity. This is great news for donors who establish gift annuities this year to support the ministries they love!

## A good news scenario

Under the new payout rates, Martin, who is 80, transfers \$25,000 in exchange for a charitable gift annuity. He will receive annual payments of \$2,025 at the new rate of 8.1%. Under the old rates, the same gift amount would have provided \$1,900 in annual payments.

*To view the current annuity payout rates table,  
visit [wels.net/charitable-gift-annuity](http://wels.net/charitable-gift-annuity).*



To learn more about supporting the ministries you love,  
visit [wels.net/foundation](http://wels.net/foundation) or call 800-752-8940.



Dear friends in Christ,

Since 1993, WELS Church Extension Fund (WELS CEF) has been providing loans and grants to new mission congregations and loans to self-supporting congregations to acquire land and buildings and also for the construction of ministry facilities for gospel outreach.

WELS CEF has provided . . .

- **\$44.57 million** in matching land and facility grants to home mission congregations since 1993
- **\$226.89 million** in loans approved since fiscal year 2017
- **\$15.34 million** in grants to WELS Home Missions to help fund mission operations since 2010

## All of this starts with WELS congregations and members—like you—who invest in WELS CEF.

By purchasing investment, retirement/IRA, and savings certificates through WELS CEF, you can support yourself and your family—and WELS mission congregations. **Your investment helps provide financing for mission congregations to purchase land or build or renovate worship facilities.**

May God bless and keep you as you gather in his name today!

View our current rates and learn how you can invest with WELS CEF and simultaneously support WELS Home Missions at [wels.net/cef](http://wels.net/cef).



The purchase of WELS CEF securities is subject to risks, which are described in our Offering Circular.

The selected financial information above should be viewed in conjunction with our audited financial statements contained in the Offering Circular. The WELS CEF Offering Circular can be found online at [wels.net/offering-circular](http://wels.net/offering-circular). This is not an offer to sell, nor the solicitation to buy, our securities. We will offer and sell our securities only in states where authorized. WELS CEF certificates are unsecured general debt obligations. WELS CEF is not a bank or regulated financial institution.

This offering is made solely by the Offering Circular.

Not FDIC or SIPC insured • Not a bank deposit • No WELS guarantee

**Where investing in your future builds churches**

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### ENROLLMENT

**579** Undergraduates

Representing  
**27** states  
and **4** countries



### MINISTRY PROGRAMS

Part-time and full-time students

### EDUCATION

*Includes Staff Ministry*

<b>104</b>	First-year
<b>80</b>	Sophomore
<b>92</b>	Junior
<b>95</b>	Senior
<b>44</b>	Fifth-year
<b>11</b>	Other

**426** Total

### PRESEMINARY

*Year of graduation*

<b>36</b>	2026-27
<b>42</b>	2025-26
<b>30</b>	2024-25
<b>45</b>	2023-24

**153** Total

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

**56** ECE program students

### CONTINUING ED / GRADUATE STUDIES

**1,145** Continuing Education students



**137** Graduate Studies students

<b>14</b>	MA Theological Studies
<b>56</b>	MS Educational Admin
15	EC Director
38	Principal
3	Technology Director
<b>56</b>	MS Education
9	Ed Tech
21	Instruction
14	Leadership
12	Special Ed

**11** MS Special Education

### MID-YEAR GRADUATION

**15** December graduates

Of those able to be assigned anywhere, all were permanently assigned. There were two candidates with geographic limitations (needing to be assigned to a specific area) who went unassigned. They will come before the Assignment Committee in May. And there were several requests that went unfilled.



### FROM THE PRESIDENT

**A Prayer to Speak...  
and an Example to Live**

*by Rich Gurgel, MLC president*

It's arguably the most important new paragraph in our new hymnal.

Our new hymnal *Christian Worship* is filled with wonderful worship resources for church (and home), but perhaps no paragraph may have a greater impact than this one from the Prayer of the Church in Setting Three of The Service (p 198):

*Instill in the hearts of our children a desire to follow you as they prepare for future days. Help them distinguish between what is passing and what is eternal, between instant thrills and lasting joy. Encourage more young people to prepare for service in the public ministry of the gospel.*

What an eternally important set of petitions to ask from our gracious God for the next generations!

How important that we renew the practice of regularly praying for workers. The new *Christian Worship* restores in our midst that regular practice from the General Prayer in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941). There were many beautiful prayers in the previous edition of *Christian Worship*, but prayers for future workers had all but disappeared from its pages.

Since the harvest is always more than plentiful, and the workers are always far too few, this new paragraph in the Prayer of the Church takes seriously Jesus' urging us to pray for more workers!

And then don't forget the congregational response to that prayer!

*Mold us and move us to be good examples for our youth.*

If you're reading this update, you are a lay leader or called worker in our synod. That next generation is watching you. They are watching to see what it looks like to know the difference between "what is passing and what is eternal." They are watching to see if indeed our greatest joy is the pearl of great price, the gospel of Jesus.

May God hear and answer our prayers for workers. And may this be part of his answer: to enable us by his Spirit's power to live lives that show future workers the gospel's joy even under the cross!

# NEW DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI RELATIONS

Please join us in welcoming **Michelle Markgraf** as the director of Alumni Relations for the Mission Advancement Office. Michelle is a DMLC graduate and has served as a called teacher.



She completed her MBA, which led her to employment as the operations manager and executive director of a variety of businesses.

She has served as a director for Kingdom Workers and most recently has been running her own consulting firm. She is a passionate and driven volunteer, generously giving her time to a large number of non-profits in the area.

## MLC DAY IS MAY 1

Join MLC supporters across the globe in celebrating and promoting ministerial education on MLC Day.



### What can you do to participate in MLC Day?

You can pray, share, and give to support the training of future called workers.

- Use MLC's Project Elijah classroom materials to have your own ministerial education recruitment week.
- Write a prayer for our students and staff.
- Submit photos and videos celebrating students and graduates.
- Download signs and materials.
- **Give to your College of Ministry. Your gifts on MLC Day will help fund the Congregational Partner Grant Matching Fund, directly supporting MLC students.**

## MLC'S CONTINUING EDUCATION

# SUPPORTING AND TRAINING GOSPEL MINISTERS WHILE THEY SERVE

As the WELS College of Ministry, MLC does more than just prepare people for future service. Increasingly, MLC supports and trains gospel ministers while they serve.

**Alternative Pathway to Professional Licensure (APPLE):** This new competency-based program for working adults is being designed to assist any WELS member to transition to Lutheran school teaching. While we are still seeking approval from our accreditor for this program, about 80 individuals have already expressed interest, and Director Nichole LaGrow plans to enroll her first cohort in fall 2024.

**Teaching Ministry Certification:** MLC is helping 213 teachers obtain their ministry certification. These are WELS educators who earned their degrees at other colleges and are seeking the theology training necessary for ministry certification.

## MLC'S MISSION ADVANCEMENT

# BOOSTING FINANCIAL AID BY 10% ANNUALLY!



Pursuing Excellence  
UNDER THE CROSS

Approximately 75% of MLC students graduate with debt. In an effort to assist students, MLC has created a matching scholarship fund known as the Congregational Partner Grant Program (CPGP).

This program allows congregations to encourage and support their members who are preparing for the public ministry at MLC. It also allows individuals and congregations without student members to support future called workers.

### How does it work?

- **The Congregation** designates the monies in their CPGP fund toward their students who have been admitted to MLC.
- **MLC** matches the grants for each student.

Reducing student debt is a major focus of MLC's strategic plan **Pursuing Excellence Under the Cross**. The CPGP has proved to be a very effective tool. In 2022-23, we matched more than \$600,000 in congregational grants, awarding a total of almost \$1.25 million to our students.

And we are looking for even bigger numbers. Each year, we are boosting the "match max" by 10%. In 2023-24, we are matching \$1,325 per student per year. *That's \$2,650 in financial assistance per student per year!*

**557** Students supported by CPGP

**284** Congregations participating in CPGP

**\$800,502** Given by congregations to the program

**\$695,780** Matched by MLC in the program

Amounts as of 2/2/2024.

### New Teacher Induction:

This year we are mentoring 254 first-and second-year teachers, including some who are not MLC graduates but are serving in WELS schools. We are thankful for our 163 mentors and are seeking additional experienced educators to help guide the next generation of Lutheran teachers.

**Early Childhood Ministry Support:** MLC has revamped its online training for early childhood teachers currently serving in WELS early childhood ministries. These include ...

- Free resources for local onboarding and inservices (*available June 2024*)
- Focused 3-credit CDA Credential preparation
- Improved early childhood teaching ministry certification
- Associate degree option for those with previous college background (*tentatively available summer 2024*)

If you have any questions related to this report or other matters related to our ministry, contact us at [mlcinfo@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:mlcinfo@mlc-wels.edu).

Martin Luther College • 1995 Luther Court, New Ulm MN 56073 • 507.354.8221 • [mlc-wels.edu](http://mlc-wels.edu)



# Grace across China NOW

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." John 3:16

## Pastor's Conference Report – Spring 2024

Recently, I had the privilege of touring our WELS ministries in Hong Kong and Thailand. Our visit to a Buddhist temple in Hong Kong on a festival day could be summarized in this way, "People stood shoulder to shoulder with incense sticks in their hands as they slowly made their way to a shrine for one of their gods. There they prayed for good fortune during the Year of the Dragon. None of those thousands of people know the loving relationship with the true God that Jesus has won for them." We walked. We talked. We prayed for them. Yet, after meeting our liaison and various others I would quickly add, "I was blown away by the commitment and dedication of the Lutheran leaders I met. Because of their sacrifice and hard work, the gospel is coming to more people. 316NOW is honored to work with that team of men and women."

### About 316NOW

316NOW is a ministry of WELS and ELS members who are committed to bringing the gospel to the Chinese people by empowering Chinese Christian leaders and churches through Scripture study, mentoring, and consulting. As a partner ministry with the WELS, 316NOW collaborates with other WELS ministries that are China-focused.

### Grace Bible Institute (Pastor Bob Balza, Administrator)

For the past nineteen years, this has been the core of 316NOW's (previously China Partners) work. Many pastors have taught online through interpreters and then visited their study groups and house churches in China. Those tours of mainland China have stopped for a simple reason: China doesn't want Christian influence outside of its control. The pandemic allowed the government, led by Xi Jinping, the president of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since 2013, to restrict travel by foreigners, especially Christian preachers and teachers. In these past four years, only a few of our American pastors have entered mainland China. Their teaching could only be done in very small groups that met privately, out of sight of the government.



Worshiping the only true God in China

Our online classes diminished during this time and communication became strained. Many students no longer responded or joined our studies. However, as covid symptoms lightened in 2022, we were able to slowly start again and rebuild our contacts. Currently, we work through a liaison pastor who has become the hub for relationships. (You can read his most recent report below). We recouped about 70% of the study groups with his counsel and recruitment and are back up to five or six concurrent classes. Our teachers are reconstituting their classes for Spring, gathering students, and getting into the groove of weekly studies. There will be studies in John's Gospel, Parenting, Law & Gospel, and Baptism.

Administrator Bob Balza has spent considerable time developing a deaconess curriculum that will be field-tested, translated, and revised. Overall, we have nearly 40 courses with multiple lessons that are translated into Mandarin.

## **Expatriate Outreach (Pastor James Enderle, Administrator)**

Because so many Chinese people have emigrated (there are now fifty million expats from China spread all over the world), we've initiated a new division of work called Expatriate Outreach. Recently, we rolled out the carpet for our expat efforts on the West Coast. With the assistance of a digital consultant from Texas, we started recruiting students in America through Google Ads and a new website. A few typical speed bumps have slowed us down, but we're leaning forward and learning. Several Mandarin speakers gave us input on how to set up and translate what we've put out there in English. Now we're beginning to process inquiries and follow up on them as we develop our registrar position. Pastor Larry Schlormer, the Administrator of World Missions (WELS), gave us encouragement and insights on how other cross-culture ministries have developed in America, and how we can continue to work with local churches and ministries as we identify prospects.

Our goal is to broaden our bandwidth of communications as we guide individuals toward a local ministry where they can worship, receive the Word and Sacraments, and grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. As they mature in faith, we expect some students to self-identify for deeper study and potential leadership. We're working with the Pastoral Studies Institute to help those who are called by the Holy Spirit to seek training for pastoral ministry.

*The Diaspora of the Chinese people (this is a Greek word that means the "dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland") has opened doors all over the world as huge numbers of people leave the mainland for a better life. Click this link [DIASPORA](#) for a detailed explanation of the numbers and this for the [impact on expatriate strategies](#) across Christianity.*

## **Mentoring Counseling Ministry (Pastor Adam Gawel, Administrator)**

This team primarily supports our pastors, leaders, and house churches in mainland China. Adam has direct contact with our liaison pastors as they think and pray over their people and develop strategies to invite others into the framework of confessional Lutheran (biblical) teaching. The Chinese leaders can easily get discouraged so they need a network where they can bring their concerns, learn from each other, and grow in grace. As Paul says in Ephesians, *"Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*



Security remains a concern for every individual

and group. We consult with IT experts as well as our students on how to keep God's people safe in their communications. Yet we also continue to reach out carefully to identify new students. By mapping our contacts and leaders, we have a much clearer picture of who is where and what they're doing.

## **Mission Advancement (Pastor Jim Kleist, Administrator)**

Jim Kleist has worked hard to advance our development of communication and interaction with supporters. He responds to all inquiries, thanks and informs donors, and produces brochures, pamphlets, reports, and cards. Attending events, he represents 316NOW and shares our stories. Together with our previous executive director Pastor Jim Aderman, he's creating a strategy for next year based on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 316NOW. You will be hearing more about this in 2025.

## **Family & Marriage (No Current Administrator)**

316NOW is building a clearinghouse for marriage and family materials that Chinese church leaders will use to train families for a better, more biblical balance in marriage and parenting. Up to this point, we have defined our strategy and gathered resources. We're in a holding pattern as we recruit a leader for this work. We continue to pray that we might find the right person at the right time to move this effort forward.

## **Sheep to Lambs (Bob Fischer, Administrator)**

This division equips Chinese Christians to teach children about God's grace in Jesus. This is important in China because it's illegal to teach anyone under 18 about the Bible. Sunday schools, Christian camps, and Christian schools no longer exist in China. *Sheep to Lambs* provides training and lesson materials so any teacher can be successful. It also provides age-appropriate and biblically sound materials for students.

During the last calendar year, a second set of Sheep to Lambs lessons for grades K-2 has been selected and written. These are currently being translated into Mandarin and will be linked to our 316NOW website for use by Chinese families here in the US and in China. Parents will be directed to these lessons by church leaders (pastors, deaconesses, teachers) for use in their homes. In addition, five lessons have been written instructing leaders in the best way to guide parents in their efforts.



## **From our Liaison (Pastor Barnabas, pseudonym)**

I have now added Brother Benjamin (pseudonym) to the Pastor Training Team. We will meet for ten weeks and will be doing sermon studies 2 weeks at a time, reading the first week, and then writing the sermon the second week. Right now, we are working through Lent texts. Two other pastors from the south are also in the group. Brother Benjamin is now leading the group independently in (place undisclosed), and I have begun to mentor Brother Benjamin as a sub-liaison with 316NOW. Brother Benjamin is also serving in GBI, and in May I plan to have him come to (place undisclosed) for a retreat. (Brother Benjamin and Brother Klay (pseudonym) have been faithful new GBI students and they take every class we offer.) I will be visiting and encouraging Brother Benjamin's group in (place undisclosed), as well. I talked to Joshua (pseudonym) about this, and he was very receptive.



Picture of a Pastor in China (not one of ours)

## **Annual Meeting**

Our Board of Directors will meet in June to review the overall health of our organization, adjust our strategic plans for future ministry, and advise our executive team on how to improve our daily operations.

## Informing Confessional Lutherans

316NOW shares information about Chinese culture with American Christians. God has been remarkably generous to China, the most populous nation in the world. We share the stories of those blessings. We also highlight the spiritual challenges there so believers here can consider how God has positioned them to help. You'll find our blog at [316NOW.org/connect](http://316NOW.org/connect).

316NOW makes presentations to congregations, Bible study groups, Sunday schools, elementary schools, youth groups, and gatherings of friends. Our pastors are also available for preaching at worship services. Depending on the number of questions and comments during the presentation, our presentation will be between 45 and 60 minutes. Our presentations can be in-person or online. We prefer that our travel costs be covered; that allows us to use those funds for ministry in China. However, we are happy to work with groups on our covering costs.

### More information

You'll find more information oabout 316NOW on our website: [316NOW.org](http://316NOW.org).

Email us at [316NOW@316NOW.org](mailto:316NOW@316NOW.org)

Sign up to receive occasional email updates here:



We completed our annual [15 Days of Prayer](#) effort on February 24<sup>th</sup>. Thank you for inviting your members to participate. We offer a [free prayer guide](#) that can be used during any month.

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# SPRING UPDATE

FROM MISSION ADVANCEMENT

*Perhaps you have heard the sentiment shared*

**DIRECTOR OF  
MINISTRY RELATIONS**

**PASTOR  
JOHN  
BOGGS**



MINISTERIAL  
EDUCATION  
SINCE  
**1865**

that Luther Prep School is only a school for those families whose children are sure they want to be a pastor or teacher. The reality, though, is that many teens don't know what they want to be by the time they graduate high school, let alone begin these crucial four years in their young lives.

**That's where LPS comes in.** Luther Prep's curriculum sets up our students for post-high school success. All the while, the encouragement and ministry experiences gained while enrolled here help our students to better answer the question, **"Lord, how can I serve you with my life here on earth?"**

We won't shy away from our mission to prepare young people for public Gospel ministry, but it is our prayer that all our alumni use their gifts to God's glory and serve him **in whatever they do in life.**

Because we want to make Luther Prep a viable option for every family in WELS, we have a multitude of financial aid options to keep the cost of attending from becoming a barrier. Even if money is not the challenge, we realize that sending your child "away" for high school can be daunting. **We get it.** We take that responsibility seriously. We embrace the trust families give us and look forward to working with you as we partner together in such a critical time of your child's life.

To build awareness of our purpose and ministry, the LPS Governing Board recently approved a new position, the Director of Ministry Relations (DMR). This position will connect with congregations, schools, and families through visits, preaching, and presenting. Professor John Boggs has been asked to develop and serve in this role part-time for the remainder of the 2023-24 school year. He will also continue to teach Old Testament, coach, and coordinate recruitment efforts to Martin Luther College.

**For more information on this new role, or how LPS can partner with your congregation, school, or family, please contact Professor Boggs ([boggsjh@lps.wels.net](mailto:boggsjh@lps.wels.net)).**

## LIVES PREPARED GALA

On Saturday, April 20, Luther Prep will hold its annual gala, Lives Prepared with Pastor David Scharf from Martin Luther College serving as the event emcee. This sold-out event brings together 368 guests and over 75 student and adult volunteers to share the mission and ministry the Lord has blessed us with. Event proceeds will benefit financial aid and the purchase of a 12 passenger van for student life.

Join us as an online guest to bid on our fabulous auction items and watch the program livestream.



**BID AND JOIN THE LIVESTREAM AT  
LPS.WELS.NET/GALA2024**



## SUMMER CAMPS

Luther Prep is excited to offer many different summer camps starting in June! **Registration** is now open.

Visit our website at [www.lps.wels.net/summercamps](http://www.lps.wels.net/summercamps) for more information and to register.

Please contact [LPSCAMPS@LPS.WELS.NET](mailto:LPSCAMPS@LPS.WELS.NET) with any questions.



**CAMPS OFFERED GRADES K - 8  
DAY CAMPS & OVERNIGHT  
PRICES \$35 - \$180**



## CAMPUS EVENTS

**Saturday, April 13**

**Saturday, April 20**

**Saturday, May 4**

**Saturday, May 4**

**Sunday, May 5**

**Sunday, May 12**

**Friday, May 24**

**Saturday, May 25**

**HSPT - 8th grade placement test @ 9am**

**Lives Prepared Gala @ 5pm**

**Open House @ 5pm**

**Children's Theater @ 7pm**

**Children's Theater @ 4pm**

**Spring Band Concert @ 7pm**

**Commencement Concert @ 7pm**

**Graduation @ 10am**

*Wisdom  
Faith  
Ministry*