

THE MINNESOTA DISTRICT PRESIDENT'S REPORT



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Proclaim the Resurrection Reality!

"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe....Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:27, 29)

The icon that looks like an engine suddenly lights up on the dash of your car. The engine sounds fine. The car is still moving. What is seen on the dashboard appears at odds with what you perceive with your ears and see outside of the windshield. What is the reality of the situation? Is there a problem with your car or not? Do you take your car to the mechanic or deny the testimony of the dash light and continue driving?

Thomas found himself in a similar dilemma. He had been told Jesus was alive. That's what he heard with his ears. However, there was no visual confirmation of this to satisfy his eyes. Therefore, he denied the reality of Jesus' resurrection. He did so to his own ongoing despair. Satan and Thomas' flesh had blinded him to the unseen reality of Jesus' resurrection.

Today, Satan, the world, and the flesh are still up to the same game. They draw us into a materialist view of the universe. Such a view sees God's creation, which gives evidence of a designer, yet declares, "Because I can't see him, I won't believe he exists." From there this unholy trio lead people to a deeper blindness of not only denying the reality of the unseen, but even of the seen. The emergence of transgenderism and transhumanism are examples of this. The ancient heresy of Gnosticism has resurfaced with a new paint job. The reality of what can be clearly seen and touched is now denied. Humanity is stripped of its physical essence, of the image of God, and ultimately of any accountability or guilt before God. The check engine lights of famines, diseases, and earthquakes are flashing. But Satan, the world, and our flesh whisper, "Never mind. Keep driving. Your sin and its consequences aren't real."

Ultimately the ignored check engine light of your car will result in catastrophic system failure, a long walk, an expensive tow, or a car wreck. Ultimately the ignored testimony of creation and Scripture result in everlasting catastrophe—both body and soul in hell.

When Jesus appeared to him, Thomas' eyes were satisfied. He believed the reality of what he heard. "My Lord and my God," he declared. At that moment he received the antidote to his despair. In body and soul, Jesus had fulfilled the law for all. In body and soul, Jesus had suffered the consequences for the sins of world—separation from God and the separation of his human soul from his human body. By his physical resurrection Jesus was and remains proof of the reality that God has accepted his sacrifice for sinners, will raise up all the dead on the last day, and will give everlasting life to all who believe. For Thomas the reality

of the resurrection made the words of the prophets more certain. However, blessed are those who are made certain of Jesus' resurrection by the word of the prophets.

We are the among that blessed number. By the power of the Holy Spirit our blindness has been cured. We confess with Thomas, "My Lord and my God." As we proclaim and administer the means of grace, the Holy Spirit also opens the eyes of others to the reality that he who laid down his life for us has taken it back again. Sharing the reality of Jesus' saving work—this is our glorious calling. This is our undeserved privilege. This is our unequalled joy. Because Jesus lives this too is a reality—our labors in his name are not and will never be in vain. God bless you as you proclaim the resurrection reality!

To Him be the glory!

Pastor Dennis Klatt

Called Worker Vacancies

There are currently 24 MN District parish vacancies in addition to 3 non-parish pastor positions. Synod wide there are currently 175+ pastor vacancies. Changes have been put in place to reduce the number of pastors receiving two calls on the same day. Districts with less than 20 vacancies are limited to one congregation calling per day. Districts with 20+ vacancies may issue two calls on the same day. Saturday and Sunday are considered one day.

Current MN District Vacancies:

Our Savior, Kasson, MN
Pilgrim, Minneapolis, MN
Christ Our Savior, Collinsville, IL
St. Paul's, North Mankato, MN
St. John, Lake Benton, MN/Good Shepherd, Pipestone, MN
St. Peter's, St. Peter, MN
Christ Our Rock, Rochester, MN
Resurrection/Life, Rochester, MN -
Salem, Woodbury, MN
Shepherd of the Hills, Inver Grove Heights, MN
Shepherd of the Lakes, Fairmont, MN
Beautiful Savior, West Des Moines, IA (BHM Funding Granted)
Faith, River Falls, WI
St. John's, Centuria, WI/Redeemer St. Croix Falls, WI (4 church merger to be considered)
Grace, Clear Lake, WI/Zion Almena, WI (Not Calling)
Christ, North St. Paul, MN
Emmanuel, Hudson, WI
Mt. Olive, Delano, MN
Petra, Sauk Rapids, MN
St. Paul's, Prescott, WI
Redeemer, Maple Grove, MN
Salem, Stillwater, MN
Holy Trinity, New Hope, MN

Hope, Andover, MN
MVL – Dean of Students/Religion, New Ulm, MN
One Africa Team (2)
Zion, Morton, MN (Not calling)

Teacher Vacancies

Since October 16, 2022, 1120 teacher calls have been extended synod wide. There are currently 259 WELS teacher vacancies: 46 principal vacancies and 19 ECE director vacancies.

MN District Teacher Vacancies

Principal: 5
ALHS: 7
K-8: 8
Foreign Missions: 1
ECE: 8 (One director)
Total - 29

**THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENT REQUESTS IS April 28 FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF
MINISTERS AND MAY 8 FOR PASTORS.**

PLEASE CONSIDER BRINGING YOUR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO VISIT MLC!

Getting high school students on our campus is very key to our recruitment work!

If you have a young man in your congregation whom you believe might have gifts for the pastoral ministry, please contact me to schedule a visit. I can subsidize your travel costs, pay for a motel room etc. I also have an MLC polo for you as well.

Also, with their parents' permission, please send the names, cell phone numbers, graduation year, addresses etc. of any students in your congregation who might have gifts for the public ministry. Having those names in our database is also very key to our work!

Please contact me Joel Thomford at 507-217-3714 or thomfojw@mlc-wels.edu.

WELS Statistical Trends

WELS experienced its biggest one-year baptized membership loss ever, down over 9600 total members (about 2.8%). Typically, WELS has been hovering between 4,000 and 5,000 losses per year (approximately a 1.3% decline). The same is true with communicants. We shrunk by over 7,400 in 2022 (about 2.73%). When we look at where those losses came from, it appears that since COVID churches are aggressively going through the inactive rolls to determine a more accurate count of current membership. Presently, WELS stands at just over 330,000 souls, 265,000 of which are communicants (80.1%).

A positive sign good member shepherding is taking place is that worship attendance continues to recover. The last year before COVID (2019), WELS had 143,670 people in weekly worship (41.2% of total membership). In 2020, with the lockdowns, that plummeted to 100,999 (29.3%). 2021 saw a slight rebound, to 107,441 (31.6%). 2022 saw another bounce, to 116,265 (35.1%). Again, it would seem there is a good amount of in-reach work taking place.

Something VERY important to note – the WELS birth rate was again under 3000. Here are the last five years: 2018 = 5,095; 2019 = 4,653; 2020 = 2,911; 2021 = 3,021; 2022 = 2,950. Compare that to 2004, the last time it was over 8000 births. This is unlikely to reverse when you consider the age demographic breakdowns in WELS (unless Gen Z is going to average 5 kids per couple). How does this collapse affect us? One example. Every year since amalgamation, the enrollment at MLC has been between 2.2% and 2.5% of the sum of WELS kids born eighteen, nineteen, twenty, and twenty-one years prior. If that holds, it has profound implications for enrollment at MLC and WLS in the coming years.

The world's view of children as more of a liability than a blessing is influencing to a degree WELS couples of childbearing age. While being sensitive to those who are struggling with infertility, there is a need for us as shepherds to emphasize the specific blessings of children in our confirmation and pre-marital counseling classes. Those blessings include the fulfillment experienced when sharing the love of Christ with children entrusted to our care, the raising up of a new generation of witnesses for Christ in a spiritually lost world, having someone to support, advocate, and care for you in old age, and to have an everlasting legacy. The souls in our households are the only "things" from this earth that will follow us into heaven.

Provisional Called Worker Tax Status

Please inform your provisionally called teacher(s) and your treasurer/bookkeeper that provisionally called teachers qualify for IRS Minister of the Gospel Tax Status **ONLY IF** they are enrolled in the WELS Ministry Certification Program. If they are not enrolled in the certification program, they do not qualify for Minister of Gospel tax status with the IRS. Subsequently the congregation must withhold SECA and the worker with a provisional call may not utilize the tax deductions afforded to Ministers of the Gospel.

The Foundation: worship, outreach, and school resources

WELS Communications ran a diagnostic of traffic on various WELS pages. They looked at "online events," which simply means someone clicked on the page and

- a) stayed on for a lengthy period of time
- b) scrolled (rather than closing out), and, if applicable
- c) downloaded something. In the first year

The Foundation had 81,502 online events. That is by far the most highly utilized WELS resource. There is a sounding board of over 100 individuals providing feedback about how to improve it. The Foundation will provide a new worship plan every year going forward. New resources (e.g. Service Builder services) will be rolled out in due time. The Foundation has many aims. The foremost aim is simply to save pastors time. Fully utilized, it could save at least a day of work for a solo pastor. This additional time can be used for the face-to-face efforts with members/prospects, where the rubber really hits the road.

MN District Schools Coordinator Report

April 18-20, 2023

The MN District has been very busy this year with the majority of schools growing in enrollment and many schools receiving graduates from the MLC assignment committee. West Lutheran High School hosted a New Teacher Induction (NTI) seminar for first and second year graduates of MLC. This program continues to strengthen new teachers with the intention, and it appears to be working, of keeping new teachers from resigning in their first few years of teaching.

From October 20-21, early childhood, elementary, and high school teachers gathered together for the MN District Lutheran Teachers Conference at MLC under the theme: United in Christ being guided by Ephesians 4:11-13 *11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (NIV)* There were over 325 teachers in attendance becoming one of the largest if not the largest MN District Teachers Conference and over 200+ at the entertainment Thursday night filling out BINGO cards trying to get to know each other better. MLC was a wonderful host and we look forward to teachers conference being held at Bethany Lutheran College, October 19-20, 2023 with the theme: Stand Firm With Joy and being guided by 2 Corinthians 1:20-22, *20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. 21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

Bethany Lutheran College was the host of the WELS Choral Fest from November 4-6 where half of our WELS high schools joined together for the regional event. Friday night was packed with families for the individual choirs doing their pieces with choreography while MN District high schools, West Lutheran, St. Croix Academy, and Minnesota Valley Lutheran choirs did not disappoint.

Martin Luther College again held their Evangelism Day on November 9. Speakers from across the country from various and very different ministries spoke to the students encouraging them and getting them fired up to do evangelism going forward. It was easy to see the joy and excitement by the students knowing that they would be in this harvest field very soon.

It was great to see so many MN District pastors, teachers, and lay people travel to Chicago and also some present at the WELS Leadership Conference. This is the 2nd time this conference has been held working on a 3 year rotation. WELS high schools were invited to bring their students along to get their ideas on ministry as well as preparing them as current and future leaders of the church. Sixty-six teens came to the conference and it was a blessing to see so many of them be so active and in tune to the happenings in ministry. In three years we hope to double the amount of teens that will attend.


On February 25, West Lutheran hosted the MN District Workshop. There were 6 speakers for the pastors, teachers, and lay people to listen to while helping them grow or gain ideas to help their ministries. There were 120+ in attendance which was a blessing to see after a few years of COVID attendance.

The MN District along with Mr. Sam Nelson, of Nelson Law Firm, has decided to host 4 legal workshops for our churches and schools. These legal workshops will help ministries create an Employee Manual and a Student Handbook that they can bring back and use in their ministries. The first of 4 of these workshops, that will all be the same, will be held on May 1 at West Lutheran High School from 8:30am - 3:30pm. This workshop will cover all the legalities that ministries need to be aware of during these present times. It's not a matter of if you will ever have legal issues, it's when you will have legal issues. Please speak with Dave Gartner if you are interested in attending.

I consider it a blessing to serve as the MN District Schools Coordinator and in this position I get to visit with many called workers and hear about many ministries, speak with early childhood teachers, and attend many principal conferences. It is very comforting to know we have so many wonderful early childhood, elementary, and high school leaders in the MN District striving to make each of their ministries better than the day before. Continue to pray for them and lift them up and give them the support they need.

One of my positions as DSC is to prepare the list of teacher and staff minister delegates from the MN District to attend the WELS Synod Convention at Michigan Lutheran Seminary July 31-August 3. Here is the list of teacher and/or staff minister delegates that will be representing the MN District: Macord Johnson, Joel Pankow, David Gartner, Jonathan Roux, Steven Biedenbender, Michael Plocher, Adrian Smith, David Zabel, Michael Vlieger, and Tyson Zarnsdorf. Please pray for these individuals as they take this time away from family and their current ministry to be instrumental in helping move the synod forward for years to come.

Listed below is the Commission on Lutheran Schools Report that Mr. Jim Rademan put together for all of the District School Coordinators. Please read to learn more about what is also happening throughout the synod. Blessings on your year.

 February 2023. Lutheran Schools Report and Agenda

Yours in Christ's Service,

Dave Gartner
MN District Schools Coordinator
Principal - West Lutheran High School

WELS Commission on Evangelism

Update – Spring 2023



In his second letter to Timothy, St. Paul wrote, “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season” (4:2). Although originally written as an encouragement to a first-century pastor, Paul’s words are equally applicable to twenty-first century Christians. We have the same message to share with sinners who desperately need to hear it. 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.

This video-based bible study is now available at www.welscongregationalservices.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. Using powerful personal stories and drawing from his wealth of experience both as a detective and a parish pastor, 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.

One by One is available at www.welscongregationalservices.net



Let's Go provides online, video-based personal witness training. Where *One by One* is primarily motivational, *Let's Go* is instructional. It teaches a simple, three-part approach that any Christian can put into practice. 1) Love the unchurched people God has brought into your life. 2) Listen carefully to their thoughts, beliefs, concerns, etc. 3) Lead them to the gospel. *Let's Go* can be used by both large and small group Bible studies as well as by individual Christians.

Let's Go is available at www.welscongregationalservices.net



The *Congregational Evangelism Kit* provides video-based training for congregational evangelism leaders and teams. It explains the importance of and implementation of tools such as:

- creating a prospect database
- capturing prospect information
- creating a welcoming worship atmosphere
- Come and Go strategies
- And more

A pastor or evangelism team can work through the kit, putting each tool in place and, when finished, have all the basic evangelism elements functioning.

It should be noted that the *Congregational Evangelism Kit* does not address the encouraging and equipping of members as personal witnesses. Other resources such as *Let's Go* and *One by One* are designed for this task.

The *Congregational Evangelism Kit* is available at www.welscongregationalservices.net



Everyone Outreach is a program designed to help congregations build a culture of outreach so that every ministry and every member is thinking about and participating in outreach. The program kicks off with a two-day workshop where participants discover thought habits that may be keeping them and their congregation from reaching out with the gospel as well and as often as they would like. Following the workshop, resources are provided that help create new thought habits resulting in new behaviors and, Lord willing, more outreach.

38 facilitators have been trained and are being deployed to workshops across the WELS.

More than 260 congregations have expressed interest in the program. 78 workshops have been held to this point.

Dates are still available for the summer and fall of 2023.

Learn more about *Everyone Outreach* at www.everyoneoutreach.com

Serving alongside you,

Eric

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

Ministry of Christian Giving (MCG) Report - Minnesota District SPRING 2023

Current ministry and blessings from the Lord:

- **Congregation Mission Offerings** - For the calendar year through March 2023, CMO totals almost \$5.05 million, which is a 1.2% increase over CMO 2022 for the same period. Thank the Lord for continuing to bless his church through his people's generous gifts!
- **100 Missions in 10 Years** – Ministry of Christian Giving is working with WELS Home Missions on this campaign. WELS mailed materials to congregations in August and sent e-appeals and a mailed appeal to individuals in September. Please encourage pastors in your circuits and conferences to review these materials with their congregations. The campaign runs through June 2024. Praise God!
- **WELS Endowments** – The distribution from endowments was almost \$1.2 million in 2022. For assistance in encouraging gifts/bequests, request a "Different Ways to Make Planned Gifts" presentation or a seminar on congregational planned giving by calling 414-256-3209.
- **IRA Charitable Distribution Opportunity** – These provide a unique giving opportunity for anyone 70.5 or older to direct qualified distributions to WELS ministries from their IRA accounts. These count as the donors' required minimum distributions and are tax-free for federal tax purposes. Encourage members to see their tax planner or visit wels.net/christian-giving and click *IRA charitable distributions* to learn more.

Useful tools provided by the Ministry of Christian Giving:

- **"A God-Lived Life" Challenge** – This stewardship program produced by Congregational Services will give pastors and God's people an opportunity to put into practice what God's Word teaches – to help us live a more "God-lived" life. This challenge is focused on digging into God's Word at church and home. Find the program at [A God-Lived Life](#).
- **Joyful Generosity: Creating a culture of generosity in our congregations** – This is a comprehensive school of stewardship with many beneficial resources which a council or stewardship committee/team can use to develop a stewardship culture and plan. [Previous Stewardship Programs](#)
- **Grace of Giving Newsletter** - MCG works with WELS Communication Services, WELS Foundation, and Sharpe Group to produce a newsletter that shares ministry updates and opportunities for supporting WELS ministry through planned gifts. The April 2022 issue was mailed to all active pastors as well as WELS donors. An online version of the newsletter is found at 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](#).
- **Other Stewardship Programs** – Find stewardship programs and resources (i.e. 10 for 10, 364 days of Thanksgiving, Faith Focused Finances) at congregational services or click this link - [Previous 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](#)
- ***WELS Christian Giving Training*** – Ministry of Christian Giving annually offers development training to WELS employees and anyone serving in development for a WELS-affiliated ministry. The dates for the 2023 training will be set soon.

Christian Giving Counselors:

Three Christian giving counselors serve our district. Rev. Michael Hatzung (612-280-4491 – michael.hatzung@wels.net) serves as a deferred counselor (estate planning and deferred gifts to WELS). Rev. Steve Schmeling (612-222-2050 – steve.schmeling@wels.net) and Rev. Phil Spaude (612-720-1323 – philip.spaude@wels.net) serve as current gift counselors (immediate offerings and gifts to WELS mission and ministry). Rev. Spaude accepted a retirement call to serve the Crow River, Red Wing, and St. Croix conferences. Your counselors provide services to your congregation and the constituents of WELS with no expectations of an honorarium (synod supported): preaching and presentation for a Stewardship Sunday, Mission Festival, or WELS Mission and Ministry Sunday, Bible studies on various aspects of Christian stewardship, Christian estate planning seminars, and information on tax-wise offerings/gift planning.

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. If I don't have the advice or answers you are seeking, I will connect you with someone who does.

In Christ's Service,
 Rev. Peter Sulzle
 Ministry of Christian Giving District Chairman
 pastorsulzle@stjohnredwood.org
 507-430-5343



WELS SPECIAL MINISTRIES

District Special Ministries Spring, 2023

New Bible Class from Special Ministries “Helping the Hurting with Hope” is a new Bible class to help participants appreciate the role of compassion in a Christian’s personal and congregational life. It provides gospel motivation for participants to go beyond their comfort zones and act in compassionate ways through the Spirit’s power. Where the Bible class succeeds in cultivating compassion, congregations will be better spiritual refuges for people with broken lives and welcome people looking for a church family where they can walk a new path after release from prison, or in recovery from addiction, or starting a new life after a public fall into sin. Helping the Hurting with Hope is available from welscongregationalservices.net/helping-the-hurting-with-hope/. It comprises an introductory lesson with a video and four additional lessons. The participant’s lessons, leader’s guide and video are downloadable.

Circuit Presentations: Effective Soul Care Partnership These video presentations for WELS / ELS pastors and therapists make an excellent way for your conference to address mental health topics. A panel of pastors and therapists discuss a topic where collaboration and cooperation between spiritual shepherds and professional Christian counselors can serve the needs of church members. “Effective Soul Care Partnership” is a partnership between WLCFS Christian Family Solutions and WELS ELS Christian Therapists Network (a WELS Special Ministry). Contact Angela Glaeske at Christian Family Solutions: aglaeske@wlcfs.org to schedule a case study at your next circuit meeting. See the WELS ELS Christian Therapists Network website for updated information: christiantherapistnetwork.com

Christian Worship now in Braille Mission for the Visually Impaired now has braille copies of the new hymnal available for free to churches with members who read braille (email welsvisimp@wels.net). MVI is also working to supply the hymnal electronically in braille for those who use handheld devices to read braille on the internet. The lyrics of all *Christian Worship* hymns are being uploaded to our Listen Library for braille access by the blind. Our patrons can already search for hymn lyrics at Listen.WELS.net under the “Worship” tab. Any person who is visually impaired can become a patron with free access to all our Christian resources by completing the MVI Service Application on the Listen Library website.

Volunteer training 1 Equipping the saints for works of service is easier when there are training resources. For example, a few concerned members who want to help a family with a severely disabled child can receive excellent guidance from the congregational volunteer materials from Light for Parents, a Special Ministries group. For information, email staff@lightforparents.com.

Volunteer training 2 Some members want to serve on a larger scale. Special Ministries is looking for volunteers. Prison Ministry offers mentor training, a valuable way to make a difference in the life of someone who has been released from prison. For more information and to refer someone, go to wels.net/prison-ministry or email prisonministry@wels.net. Mission for the Visually Impaired needs people who can do repetitive computer tasks (such as sound

editing on a recorded book) or are willing to learn how to braille. To learn more, email welvisimp@wels.net.

\$500 Grant Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is offering a grant of \$500 to any church that installs a hearing loop to assist the hard of hearing people in their ministry. For details see WELS.net/mdhh or email mdhh@wels.net.

Military Service brings spiritual danger Can you imagine a young person leaving home, facing life and death situations and pressures to sin? It happens to our military members. The dangers and the solutions are described in the video **“Staying Close to God’s Word While in the Military.”** csm.welsrc.net/military-resources/ If you have a member in the military or entering the military, refer them at wels.net/refer

Online learning – Chaplain courses Chaplain Certification offers useful online learning opportunities, often with financial aid, even if you (or your lay leader) does not become a chaplain. In September these online chaplaincy courses will be offered: “Communicating Forgiveness,” “Ministering to the Incarcerated and their Families,” “Geriatric and Care Facility Ministry” (Free!), “The Spiritual Side of PTSD” and “Grounded in Scripture” a doctrinal course for those interested in ministry but have not had a foundational study of Scripture. For more information, see the MLC website mlc-wels.edu/continuing-education/wels-chaplain-certificate/ or email chapcert@wels.net.

Child Safety has always been a Christian issue. Early Christians rescued abandoned babies and organized orphanages. Luther and Walther were ahead of their time in speaking against child abuse. WELS offers the most thorough abuse prevention resources of any faith community. Freedom for the Captives’ website has new information every month – not only to make our churches and schools safer, but to recognize child abuse and respond to protect children. Have you looked at the website this month? Freedomforcaptives.com

Where do they turn? Are your members so familiar with Conquerors through Christ that when they need a resource, they know where to find it? One WELS mom turned to the CtC website when her eight-year-old saw some porn on the Internet. “The materials for parents are amazing,” she told us. Promote the conquerorsthroughchrist.net website to your members and called workers.

Summer Camps for people with developmental disabilities In June and July, Camp BASIC and Camp Phillip’s Jesus Cares Camp will offer special programs for people with special needs. Next fall, the Joy in Jesus retreat will also be held in Minnesota. For more information, see wels.net/iddm/parents-and-family/

Patrick Feldhus
WELS MN District Special Ministries Coordinator
pfeldhus@hotmail.com

Minnesota District Worship Committee Report

April 2023

Who We Are

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

Joel Gawrisch: joelg@wels.us

Activity in the Past Year with Special Reference to Hymnal Introduction

- In-person congregational, pastoral conference, and district Leadership Workshop to introduce resources, demonstrate flexible use of resources, and answer questions.
- Support to help promote purchase of CW resources.

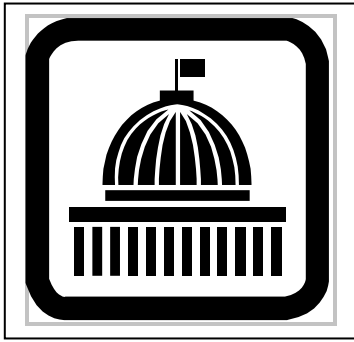
A Look Ahead

- Organist, Choir Director, Worship Planner workshops that are modelled on Choral Reading sessions.
- Strategic planning for how the C/W can best serve the synod now that the hymnal project is largely completed.

Christian Worship Update

- As of the end of March 2023, NPH estimates that about 850 WELS congregations have adopted the new hymnal, and about 550 congregations have subscribed to the Service Builder program.
- A soft launch of Musician's Resource (MR) took place in 2022. MR provides choral alternates, lead sheets, modulations, and instrumental packs (SATB voices of pew edition settings in a variety of transpositions for instruments). MR resources are digital resources (downloadable PDFs); customers will need to be logged into an account to purchase.
- *Christian Worship Playlist* will be available in the next few weeks. Annual subscription will be \$225 in addition to *Service Builder* account. (The original notice about *Playlist*: <https://www.christianworship.com/articles/2021/11/11/playlist>.)
- More Resources at <https://www.welscongregationalservices.net/hymnal-introduction-resources> like *Service Builder* orientation videos. The eighth video in the series offers a broad overview of the most pressing issues concerning digital copyright.
- Christian Worship: Easy Hymn Accompaniments
 - [Chorale Edition](#)
 - [Piano Edition](#)
 - [Discounted Set](#)
- National Worship Conference July 2024 – no firm date yet.

Respectfully submitted,
Joel J. Gawrisch



Minnesota District Legislation Committee



Report to the MN District – April 2023

Congress Passes Same-Sex Marriage Bill

On December 8, 2022, the U.S. House passed the *Respect for Marriage Act*, a bill that had previously been approved by the Senate. The bill requires the federal government to recognize same-sex marriages performed in states where they are legal. While it does not require all states to legalize same-sex marriage, it does require individual states to recognize same-sex marriages performed in states where they are legal.

Department of Education Proposes Eliminating Protection for Religious Student Groups

In September of 2020 the Department of Education adopted common sense regulations that protect religious student organizations on public college campuses. On February 28, 2023 the Department of Education announced that it wants to rescind those regulations.

Supreme Court to Hear Cases Challenging the Liability Immunity of Internet Service Providers

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear two cases (*Gonzalez v. Google* and *Twitter v. Taamneh*) that will challenge the immunity provided to Internet Service Providers granted by Section 230 of the *Communications Decency Act of 1996*. Under Section 230 companies such as Google and Twitter are shielded from liability for the speech of their users because they are considered “platforms” rather than “publishers.” The plaintiffs in the cases are suing to hold the tech giants liable for terrorist content posted on their platforms and allegedly promoted by their algorithms. The companies argue that they are platforms for free speech and do not censor or necessarily approve or disapprove of posted content. Documents disclosed in the recent release of Twitter files show that these companies do, however, censor content and have banned certain users because of their political views/opinions. So should these tech companies continue to enjoy immunity protection under Section 230 if they are not, in fact, “platforms” for free speech? The Supreme Court will have to decide.

Minnesota Legislature Approves Abortion Rights Bill

On January 28, 2023, the Minnesota Senate approved the *Protect Reproductive Options Act*, a bill on abortion rights, a bill that was signed into law by Governor Walz on January 31st. The bill guarantees a woman's right to abort her baby for any reason, at any time, up to birth. The right to an abortion was already protected in Minnesota due to a 1995 state Supreme Court decision known as *Doe v. Gomez*. This new legislation makes it official state law. The bill also prohibits local governments from restricting access to abortion, birth control, sterilization and prenatal care

New Teacher Licensing Standards Approved

The new standards for teacher licensure that were proposed by the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) were mostly approved by two administrative law judges in December of 2022 and are set to go into effect on July 1, 2024. The new standards will apply to all new teachers applying for state licensure (including educators who end up teaching at private schools). Among other things, the new standards will require 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”

It is highly likely these new standards will be challenged in court as a violation of First Amendment rights. As a current teacher licensing agent for the State of Minnesota, Martin Luther College is closely monitoring the situation. Our college of ministry remains committed to providing a confessional Lutheran education to its students. If necessary, it will discontinue serving as a state licensing agent. We pray that will not be the case.

Respectfully submitted,

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