



Your gifts, **God's blessings**

An annual report to our members

Message from the President

“You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago” (Micah 7:20).

FRONT COVER: Huntersville Lutheran, Huntersville, N.C. Photo credit: Andrea Van Sice

NOTE: Some information in this report is compiled from communications previously published. Special thanks for reprint permission from Martin Luther College’s *InFocus*, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s *Preach the Gospel*, WELS Missions Blog, and *Forward in Christ* magazine.

God’s faithfulness is as steadfast for us as a synod as it is for us as individuals. This annual report reviews some of the ways that God has displayed his faithfulness to us in guiding and blessing our work as a synod.

Those blessings begin close to home in our churches and schools. Well-trained pastors, teachers, and staff ministers serve by faithfully proclaiming God’s Word. Those workers, products of our ministerial education schools, are gifts of God whom he has sent as workers into his harvest field.

We look back on how God blesses our congregations as they gather around his Word and sacraments. Through his means of grace, he not only creates and strengthens faith and enables us to bring up our

children in the training and instruction of the Lord. He also moves us to serve him in our Christian vocations and to reach out to our communities with his saving gospel.

We also work together to plant new congregations here in the United States and Canada. He has moved us to establish the goal of opening 100 new home missions in 10 years. In 2025, the third year of this plan, those efforts are already being blessed by God.

Then we see how God is blessing our efforts to extend God’s church around the world. He has continued to give us many opportunities to support existing world missions and to expand the reach of his gospel to more people in more places. He has opened hearts to support those mission efforts with generous prayers and offerings.

At our synod convention, a new long-range strategic plan called “Christ through us” was adopted. This plan will guide us for the next ten years as we carry out the work that God has given us to do. We recognize that while we do the planning under God, it is God himself who will bless the work that we do.

We marvel at God’s faithfulness to us,

despite the many times when our faithfulness has wavered. And we thank him that his faithfulness, so evident during the past year, will always continue.

Mark Schroeder

REV. MARK SCHROEDER
WELS President

PICTURED LEFT: WELS’ 68th biennial convention was held July 21–24, 2025, at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. The theme, “Christ through us,” underscored God’s blessings to WELS as it celebrated its 175th anniversary. Jeremy Angle, Northwestern Publishing House’s president, presented President Mark Schroeder with the pictorial book prepared for the anniversary. President Schroeder is also pictured thanking James Huebner for his 16 years of service as the synod’s first vice president. To catch up on the news from synod convention, visit welsconvention.net.





Ministry recruitment counselor installation

Called to **prepare**

WELS ministerial education

The purpose of WELS' ministerial education program is the preparation of candidates for the public ministry of the gospel. Pastors, teachers, and staff ministers are prepared to proclaim Christ's love in the congregations, schools, and mission fields of our fellowship. WELS supports ministerial education on three levels at four schools—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; and preparatory high schools Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

In 2025, the Board for Ministerial Education launched a four-year pilot program to strengthen ministry recruitment efforts across the synod. Ministry recruitment counselors, a new called position, will work alongside pastors, teachers, staff ministers, parents, and lay leaders to help them actively recognize gifts in others, share information about ministerial education, and keep gospel ministry top of mind for WELS youth.

Three individuals accepted calls to serve in this role—Mary Heckendorf, Sam McKenna, and Mark Schroeder. Pictured above is Duane Rodewald, chairman of the Board for Ministerial Education, installing the counselors during a service at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on Oct. 20, 2025.

Charlie Vannieuwenhoven began serving as administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education in January 2026.

"Charlie brings a unique variety of ministry experience to the administrator position having served in an established congregation, a mission church, and at Luther Prep," says Rodewald. "All of these experiences will help him keep the big picture of gospel ministry in mind as he assists and encourages our ministerial education schools and synod to meet the needs and opportunities with well-trained and gospel-centered workers for today and the future."



The seminary is a place for students to grow in their knowledge of God's Word, in their faith in Jesus as their Savior, and in their skill in ministering to and with God's people. **During the 2025–26 school year, enrollment for the three years of on-campus studies is 115 men.**

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) prepares men to serve in the pastoral ministry by providing them with spiritual, theological, and professional training. Students attend classes for two years, serve as full-time vicars during their third year, and then attend classes and write a thesis in their fourth year. Throughout their time at the seminary, students receive opportunities to serve in a variety of ministries and to experience other cultures to help prepare them for their future calls.

In partnership with WELS Joint Missions, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) provides pre-seminary and seminary training to North American students from a variety of countries and cultures. As WELS congregations reach out to refugees and immigrants with support and the gospel, candidates for pastoral ministry are introduced to the Pastoral Studies Institute team. Training is provided at the local level, where a candidate's local WELS pastor serves as his supervising pastor. In many cases this training leads to international opportunities as well, since many of these spiritual leaders want training both for themselves and for church leaders in their countries of origin. In addition, the Pastoral Studies Institute provides consultation on curriculum and educational practices for seminaries and Bible institutes of church bodies in fellowship with WELS throughout the world.



SEMINARY CHORUS

"Singing in the Seminary Chorus not only grows our singing and playing abilities but also grows our faith through the ministry conversations with each other and our tour host families," noted Jordan Massiah, a 2025 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. **"As we travel and sing the gospel, we grow and remind each other of Christ's love. The growth I experience in the chorus equips me to help others grow."**

VICAR YEAR

"While the three years in the classroom learning from professors who have served as pastors are essential to the formation of future pastors, the vicar year plays a critical role," notes Earle Treptow, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

"Under the supervision of a gospel-centered pastor, a vicar gets to put into practice what he has learned. He gets to see what pastoral ministry looks like day after day."

Treptow continues: "Preaching 20–25 sermons during that year, regularly teaching confirmation classes and adult Bible classes, actively reaching out to the community and following up on visitors, observing his supervising pastor lead a congregation and equip the saints for service, and having in-depth conversations with his supervising pastor make all the difference for a pastor-in-training."

Joel Schewe (pictured third from left) is serving his vicar year at Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati/Oakley, Ohio. He is working with Beautiful Savior's pastors, including (from left) Alexander Groth, Jacob Ungemach, and Thomas Westra.



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VICARS IN
2025–26



THE HOLY SPIRIT'S MOUTHPIECE

"It's often easier to see God at work in your life when you look back than when you're in the thick of it," shares 2025 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduate Jacob Borgwardt.

Borgwardt began pursuing an engineering degree after high school. "I realized, though," he says, "that I wanted to switch paths to be a pastor when I found the weekly campus ministry Bible studies . . . more interesting than my math and science courses."

Assigned to serve Crossroads, a mission restart on the north side of Chicago, he says, **"Being a pastor is getting a chance to be a mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit to tell the world, one person at a time, that the peace and hope and joy that they crave is theirs already."**

GROW IN GRACE

Nine pastors completed the Master of Sacred Theology (STM) degree in 2025 (pictured with Grow in Grace's director, Brad Wordell, far right). **Grow in Grace, the seminary's institute for continuing education, partners with pastors for in-person and online spiritual and professional growth.** In 2025 Grow in Grace celebrated the 15th anniversary of its Pastor Partners Mentoring Program. Almost 250 men have completed the three-year program that partners a new seminary graduate with an experienced pastor for growth and encouragement.



For more information,
visit wls.edu.





"Worship is the very heartbeat of life at MLC," says Jacob Behnken, dean of chapel. "It's the time each day when the entire campus family, with all their different roles and responsibilities, come together to be fed with the Word of God and to sing their thanks and praise to the Lord who has saved them."

Pictured is David Scharf, professor of theology, distributing communion during a special chapel service for the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed.

For more information,
visit mlc-wels.edu.



Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn.:

- prepares men for pastoral training at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary;
- prepares men and women for service as teachers and staff ministers in the synod's churches, schools, and other institutions;
- prepares men and women for other church ministries, both full- and part-time, responding to the needs of WELS;
- prepares international students for ministry in partnership with WELS mission fields; and
- provides programs of continuing education that meet the ministerial needs of WELS.

MLC'S GRADUATING CLASS OF 2025

The class verse: "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

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STAFF
MINISTRY

91
TEACHING

30
PRESEMINARY

MASTERING SPECIAL EDUCATION

Jennifer Ertman graduated with a master's degree in special education in May 2025. She has served as early childhood director and a member of the Student Services team at Crown of Life Christian Academy, Fort Atkinson, Wis., since 2018. Through her work in student services, she wanted to help students with special needs and those who need extra support. With two sons who are exceptional learners, she notes, **"Majoring in special education was the obvious choice for me so that I could help open the doors to Christian education for other families."**

MLC conferred 17 master's degrees in May 2025.



OPENING DOORS FOR SECOND-CAREER TEACHERS

After years of working as an assistant teacher and substitute teacher at Divine Savior Academy–Santa Rita Ranch, Liberty Hill, Texas, Terri Kulick (pictured) realized she could turn her love for God and her students into a teaching career—with help from Martin Luther College’s APPLE (Alternative Pathway to Professional Licensure Eligibility) program. APPLE gives returning adult learners a pathway to an elementary teaching ministry degree without requiring them to leave their jobs in WELS schools.

APPLE is:

- **100% online:** Students can finish a degree while staying in their own home, community, and job.
- **Competency-based:** It builds on what students already know and focuses on the knowledge and skills they still need.
- **Learner-centered:** Students follow a personalized pathway shaped by their background, experience, and schedule.
- **Flexibly-paced:** Students can study and learn when it works for them.
- **Faculty-guided:** Participants benefit from one-on-one mentoring and support every step of the way.



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GRADUATE STUDENTS
IN 2025–26



PREPARING PASTORS

Advanced Christian Rhetoric students practice writing and giving a sermon.

650



UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS IN 2025–26

TRAINING PRINCIPALS

Five 2025 MLC graduates are part of the **principal training program**, including (left to right) Kyle Doering and Joshua Aden. Program participants express a willingness prior to graduation to be assigned to the program, receive recommendation from MLC to be considered, and are assigned to a ministry approved by WELS to train a future leader.





Forty-two students graduated from Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., in 2025.

Preparatory schools

Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., and Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., prepare high school students for future service as pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and congregational leaders. Both schools offer “Taste of Ministry” opportunities for students, which include shadowing called workers to learn more about their work. Students also are given firsthand gospel experiences on campus and during mission trips.



MICHIGAN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

Michigan Lutheran Seminary opened the 2025–26 school year with **194 students**. Each year the junior class visits Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as well as other WELS sites such as the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. Pictured is the class with WELS President Mark Schroeder.

LUTHER PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Luther Preparatory School is training **393 students** during the 2025–26 school year. Senior boys have the opportunity to write and deliver a devotion for evening worship under the direction of a pastor on staff. After the devotion, the student's classmates gather around and encourage him. Pictured is Will Olson.



Called to **proclaim**

Home Missions


WELS Home Missions plants churches and assists mission-minded congregations in the United States, Canada, and the English-speaking West Indies. In 2025, WELS Home Missions approved support for 12 new mission starts and six enhancements.

“Our goal is to expand WELS’ reach through strategic church planting so that millions more will have the opportunity to hear the gospel,” says Mark Gabb, administrator of WELS Home Missions. “This is at the heart of our 100 Missions in 10 Years initiative, and these new missions bring us closer to that milestone. We thank God for the prayers and support that make this bold outreach possible.”

NEW MISSIONS SUPPORTED IN 2025 INCLUDE:

- **San Tan Valley, Ariz.:** Since 2022, the Arizona-California District Mission Board has been working with Heritage, Gilbert, Ariz., to plant a new mission in rapidly growing San Tan Valley. A core group has been gathering regularly for Bible study, worship, and community events.
- **Erie, Colo.:** Erie has experienced a 55 percent population increase from 2010 to 2020, with continued growth expected. A core group of ten adults has been gathering for fellowship and Bible study while attending local festivals to share plans for a new church.
- **Naples, Fla.:** Ranked among the best places to live and retire, Naples is seeing fast growth and demographic change. The district mission board and mission counselor have made multiple visits—talking with locals, meeting community leaders, and learning about the area’s needs.
- **Olathe, Kan.:** Olathe, located in the southwest Kansas City metro area, has seen its population surge, and continued growth is expected. A core group from Mt. Olive, Overland Park, Kan., has been hosting regular Bible studies and planning meetings.
- **Buffalo, N.Y.:** Buffalo is one of the largest metro areas in the United States without a WELS church. A core group has begun gathering for Bible study and outreach, laying the groundwork for a new church plant.

(continued on next page)



Members of **Ascension, Jacksonville, N.C.**, formed a core group to begin a new church about an hour away in Wilmington. In 2025, WELS Board for Home Missions granted support for this mission. Pictured is Steven Saatkamp, pastor at Ascension.

- **The Sandhills, N.C.:** The Sandhills area of North Carolina is growing as retirees and young families move in. Its proximity to Fort Bragg also draws military personnel who often settle there permanently. A core group from Tree of Life, Cary, N.C., has begun outreach and canvassing in a region where confessional Lutheran churches are few.
- **Wilmington, N.C.:** Wilmington is in one of the fastest-growing corners of North Carolina. A core group of 18 people from Ascension, Jacksonville, N.C., meets regularly for Bible study and planning.
- **Arlington, Tenn.:** Arlington is on the brink of rapid growth with Ford Motor Company set to build a new plant for electric truck production. Since 2022, the South Atlantic District Mission Board has been working with a dedicated group of 60 members and Jim Turrieff, pastor at Gloria Dei, Memphis, Tenn., who have now relocated and established a fresh start in Arlington under a new name.
- **Jarrell, Texas:** Jarrell is a growing town north of Austin. Don Patterson, pastor at Holy Word, Austin, has been working with a core group of 11, which began holding weekly worship in 2024. The group has identified 90 prospects, many of whom it connected with by volunteering at the local food pantry.
- **Altoona, Wis.:** Altoona is one of the fastest-growing communities in western Wisconsin. A core group from St. Mark, Eau Claire, has been active hosting community events, launching monthly devotional services, and building a growing prospect list since early 2023.
- **Madison, Wis.:** A core group of 14 adults familiar with the area has been working together since 2022, meeting regularly for Bible study and ministry planning. The group has secured a rental space for worship and community activities. A new mission plant in the center of rapidly growing urban Madison would allow WELS to reach an entirely new demographic.
- **West Richland, Wash.:** West Richland, located just outside the Tri-Cities, is experiencing rapid growth. A core group from Southridge, Kennewick, Wash., has been working to establish a second site in West Richland since 2024. The group has already begun outreach through community service activities and fellowship events.

The Board for Home Missions is also financially supporting ministry enhancements for **Christ, Clarksville, Md.** (restart); **Living Word, Petaluma, Calif.** (restart); **Living Word, Waukesha, Wis.;** **Redeemer, Edna, Texas;** **Risen Savior, Lakewood Ranch, Fla.;** and **Saint Mark Mankato, Mankato, Minn.**

SOWING SEED

There tends to be so much focus on the “launch service” when you’re starting a brand-new church. When planting a church, the outreach and preparation leading up to that big Sunday is a key focus of ministry. So, we came up with a number of outreach strategies. Of course, personal connections and friendships formed in the community have been the best ways to show Christ’s love. Still, on a corporate level, we came up with and carried out a few ideas. Much of it seemed like throwing paint at a wall.

Sunday, Sept. 28, 2025, Living Stone, Conway, Ark., finally held its official launch worship service! The Lord blessed us with 96 souls in attendance. It was wonderful to have so many people there to encourage us, celebrate that big day, and most importantly, hear the gospel of forgiveness of sins through Jesus! As I looked out at the group of people in front of me, I thanked God that the faces I saw came from all sorts of avenues. Some came from our mass mailer. Some came from our food drive. Some we had seen again and again through our Food Truck Nights and personal contacts. Some saw our ads online, and some just came because they were friends and family of our members.

I think there’s a better analogy for our pre-launch outreach efforts besides “throwing paint at the wall.” We were sowing seed. **We scattered and sowed that seed and let the Lord Jesus take care of the rest.**

C.J. Fury, home missionary at Living Stone



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HOME MISSIONS
LAUNCHED WORSHIP
SERVICES IN 2025

DID YOU KNOW?

WELS Home Missions supports **151 home mission congregations.**



A SMALL GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN

Sure Foundation, Woodside, Queens, N.Y., celebrated its 25th anniversary on Oct. 5, 2025.

“When you look over the congregation at Sure Foundation on a Sunday morning,” says Mark Gabb, administrator of WELS Home Missions, “you see a small glimpse of heaven where people will be gathered from every nation, tribe, people, and language. For me, it’s always a reminder that the gospel is for all people, including those who may look and live very differently from many of us.”

Sure Foundation is currently made up of 191 members, but the membership is always changing. “The city receives immigrants from all over the world and people from all over the United States. One in seven people in the US live in NYC at some point,” says Timothy Bourman, home missionary at Sure Foundation. “We regularly baptize and confirm adults only to transfer them to other WELS congregations as they move.”

Bourman continues, **“We are always stunned at the grace of God. He always does more than we ask or imagine.** When I began my work and joined Sure Foundation, WELS was wondering if our message could resonate in a place like New York City. The fact that we are not only surviving but thriving at 25 years, I hope, encourages WELS that we have an answer to that question.”

Learn more at
wels100in10.net.



ANSWERING LIFE’S BIGGEST QUESTIONS

I met Jay when he came to a Bible study on the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater campus. He was a charismatic, funny, frustratingly intelligent young man with many questions. Hard questions. Jay was a Christian sponge, soaking up every drop of truth he could. He hadn’t grown up Christian. His parents were immigrants from India and practiced a nominal, cultural Hinduism. In God’s Word, he found answers to the biggest questions of life—answers that were not to be found in the worldview of his upbringing.

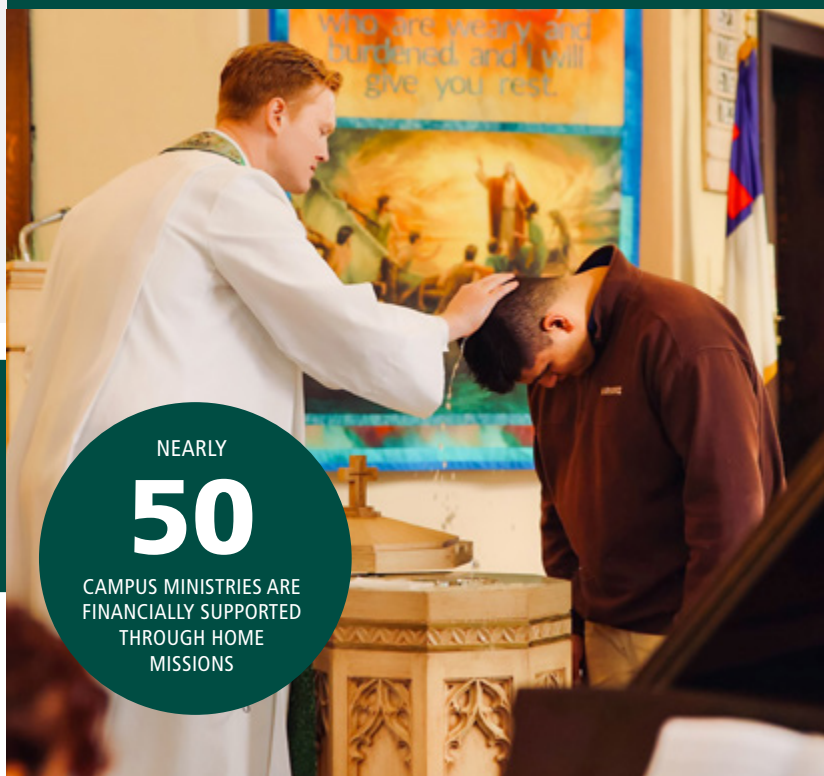
These answers, however, came with a cost. According to Jay, baptism was off the table—his family would view this as an unforgivable betrayal of their culture and possibly disown him.

A few months into the school year, Jay stayed after Bible study to ask questions like normal, but this question was different. This question was far more difficult: **“Is it really worth it, Pastor?”**

How ironic that Jay’s most devastating question was the only one that could be answered with a single word: “Yes.”

After some shared tears, a woefully ineloquent stammering from me, and an embrace between brothers, Jay walked back to his dorm that night. And he came back. He learned over time that he was not alone in his pain. During months of meetings, questions, and searching, the Holy Spirit was enlightening him. Jay was baptized into the great family of believers.

Samuel Schulz, pastor at St. John, Whitewater, Wis.



NEARLY

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CAMPUS MINISTRIES ARE
FINANCIALLY SUPPORTED
THROUGH HOME
MISSIONS



In October 2025, TELL students in **Kenya** were invited to attend a seminar in Nairobi. This was the first time many of the students met in person, even though they have been studying together online for more than two years.

World Missions

WELS World Missions conducts and encourages gospel outreach in 49 countries and is exploring outreach opportunities in 16 prospective new mission fields. World Missions brings the light of God's Word to the world through evangelism efforts, church planting, training national workers for ministry, and providing religious materials in foreign languages.

Fifty world missionaries partner with more than 500 national pastors to conduct outreach and to train more than 400 students for service in Christ's kingdom.

World Missions supports mission work:

- in **Africa**, where missionaries partner with national church bodies in seven countries and are exploring outreach with 12 groups in 10 additional countries throughout the continent;
- in **Asia-Oceania**, where 17 missionaries have joined together to equip, encourage, and empower others to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to 1.8 billion unreached souls;
- in **Europe**, where missionaries partner with national churches to train the next generation of church leaders and bring the true gospel to countries without a strong Lutheran presence;
- in **Latin America**, where tens of thousands of people are being reached through *Academia Cristo* online courses and 45 individuals are actively leading a group in worship and study;
- through **Multi-Language Productions**, which has produced materials in more than 56 languages and reaches tens of thousands of English-speakers in more than 30 different countries through the TELL online training platform; and
- on **Native American** reservations, where the gospel is being shared on the Apache reservations in Arizona, and the Native Christian Network has begun outreach to additional tribes.



NEW CHURCHES BEING PLANTED IN LATIN AMERICA

At the synod convention of *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*, WELS' sister synod in Latin America, two new church bodies were welcomed into fellowship—a church plant in Tenancingo, Mexico, led by Juan Reyes (pictured middle), and the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church—Puerto Rico. The new church in Tenancingo is the second church plant established through *Academia Cristo* outreach efforts to join this growing synod. Pictured with Reyes is Henry Herrera (left), president of *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*, and Luis Acosta, a WELS missionary in Latin America. Learn more about Reyes at forwardinchrist.net/juan-reyes.

MISSIONARIES ON THE MOVE

Several world missionary families are transitioning to new locations to further the ministry of the gospel.

In **Latin America**, Missionary Matthew Behmer and his family (pictured right) recently relocated from Quito, Ecuador, to Mexico City, Mexico. Behmer can now more easily meet regularly with students in the area who have started *Grupos Sembrador* (church plants) and are teaching others what they have discovered through *Academia Cristo* courses. Five *Grupos Sembrador* are in Mexico City, three in Mexico, and more throughout Central America.

This move is part of a new concept called the “mobile hub,” in which missionaries relocate to new areas but only temporarily—for maybe one or two years.

Missionary Joel Sutton will join Behmer in Mexico City in early 2026, relocating his family from Paraguay. Two other missionaries—Luis Acosta and Abram Degner—will be redeployed to Ecuador, allowing for easier travel to visit church plants across Latin America.

On the **Asia-Oceania** team, Missionary Mark Zondag has relocated from Chiang Mai, Thailand, to Bangkok, a city of 11 million people where only 1.1 percent identify as Christian. Here he will work to reach out to the native Thai people, an estimated 30 to 40 percent of whom will live in Bangkok at some point in their lives.

In **Africa**, Missionaries Benjamin Foxen and John Roebke are moving from Zambia to Arusha, Tanzania. This move will allow the One Africa Team not only to help train future church workers in the African Mission Evangelism Church but also to connect with two other Tanzanian church bodies that have shown interest in learning more about WELS and its teachings.



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PROSPECTIVE
WORLD MISSION
FIELDS

THREE NEW EVANGELISTS IN THAILAND

In 2025 the churches in Thailand celebrated the graduation of three evangelists from the pastoral studies program run with the assistance of Asia Lutheran Seminary's Regional Theological Education Program. Two of these three men will continue their work planting churches in two different nearby villages. The third will help support the ministry of another church in the area.

The Asia-Oceania team serves 18 different countries. The team—with members in Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Australia—explores new mission opportunities, supports existing sister synods, and trains current and future leaders for service in their churches through Asia Lutheran Seminary.



TASTE OF MISSIONS

Taste of Missions is an annual event aimed at giving WELS members a “taste of missions.” The event culminates with an in-person gathering at which new missionaries are commissioned and long-time missionaries share their experiences with attendees. Students are encouraged to participate ahead of time through a teen poster contest and grade school activities. Pictured is a third-grader from **Trinity-St. Luke’s, Watertown, Wis.**, learning about WELS missions with her class.

In 2026, Taste of Missions will take place at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., on June 13. Learn more at tasteofmissions.com and see how members can participate online as well.



FIELDS ARE RIPE IN ASIA-OCEANIA

Only 8 percent of the 4.5 billion people in Asia and Oceania know Jesus as their **Savior**. That staggering reality brought together 72 church leaders, missionaries, and partners from 14 countries for the Asia-Oceania Convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, held June 9–13, 2025, in Bali, Indonesia. Under the theme “That All May Hear and Believe,” this in-person gathering offered encouragement, connection, and practical tools for gospel ministry across the region. WELS missionaries and international partners left uplifted, reminded that they are not alone—and that the fields truly are ripe for harvest.

MISSION JOURNEYS

A Mission Journeys team from Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., traveled to **Ascension, Jacksonville, N.C.** The students helped get the word out about a new mission church in Wilmington, N.C., and gathered food for a local children’s organization.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities in mission fields at home and abroad, visit wels.net/missionjourneys.



For more information,
visit wels.net/missions.





Congregational Services organizes national conferences where called workers and laypeople can discuss best ministry practices and receive encouragement for their shared mission. June 23–25, 2025, about 450 attended the **WELS Education Conference** in Green Bay, Wis.

Called to serve

Congregational Services

WELS Congregational Services exists to encourage and equip congregations for faithful and fruitful gospel ministry.

Congregational Services works onsite with churches and schools through several programs where an individual or team assists church and school leaders as they evaluate current ministry efforts and plan for the future.

Congregational Services produces a wide variety of resources that churches and schools can utilize in their efforts to feed the faithful, reach the lost, and pursue the straying. Visit welscongregationalservices.net to see the resources that are available.

Congregational Services consists of six commissions:

- **Commission on Congregational Counseling:** Serves congregations in their efforts to evaluate ministry efforts, congregational organization, and staffing needs; develop plans to adjust and expand ministry efforts over time; and equip lay leaders in their vital roles.
- **Commission on Discipleship:** Serves congregations in their efforts to help members grow in both their knowledge of God's Word and their sanctified service of Christ and neighbor.

- **Commission on Evangelism:** Serves congregations in their efforts to seize every opportunity the Lord provides to evangelize lost souls, both through congregational outreach efforts and through personal witnessing.
- **Commission on Special Ministries:** Serves congregations in their efforts to bring the gospel to those with needs or circumstances that prevent them from being served through the congregation's usual ministries.
- **Commission on Worship:** Serves congregations in their efforts to glorify God and strengthen God's people through Word and sacrament.
- **Commission on Lutheran Schools:** Serves congregations in their efforts to provide Christian education through Lutheran schools and other early childhood ministries.

Learn more at
welscongregationalservices.net.





WELS EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The WELS Education Conference was held June 23–25, 2025, in Green Bay, Wis. About 450 educators from WELS schools convened for three days under the theme “Now You Are.” That theme contrasts our natural state with the wonderful blessings we have as members of God’s family in Christ. Now more than ever, people are seeking meaning, purpose, and belonging. **A Christian teacher’s important task is to create a culture that promotes not only learning but also our connection to Christ and each other.**

The conference included two keynote presentations and a variety of themed sessions (pictured), including early literacy, the culture of assessment, student care, and ministry cultivation. Attendees also had the opportunity to peruse services and products from 30 different sponsors and vendors as well as enjoy worship and fellowship with colleagues.



DID YOU KNOW?

Amazing Grace Virtual Academy, a fully accredited online WELS high school, celebrated its first graduation of fully online learners on May 15, 2025.



WELS MISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING CONFERENCE

Opportunities to connect, share experiences, and grow in God's Word were just a few of the blessings attendees experienced at the Hands of God conference held in July 2025.

Sponsored by the WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the conference focused on how to serve the deaf and hard of hearing members of God's church. Forty people—including more than 20 deaf or hard of hearing individuals—discussed topics like using technology devices in church for the deaf/hard of hearing, welcoming deaf/hard of hearing guests at church, and setting up a deaf Bible study. One workshop—led by a panel of deaf members—centered on the Deaf culture, how it is unique, and how congregations can bridge any gaps.

"In America, about three percent of deaf people regularly attend church," says Daniel Frey, pastoral advisor for the WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Committee. **"So we talked a lot about what we can do to really help that number grow."**

Eight people from Frey's congregation, Gethsemane, Lee's Summit, Mo., attended the conference, including five who are deaf and two interpreters.

"As their pastor, I was so happy that they were there and got to talk with other deaf Christians and tell their story to other deaf Christians," Frey says.

The WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, part of WELS Special Ministries, exists to help congregations share the gospel with members of WELS and others who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Learn more at wels.net/mdhh.

THEOLOGY CURRICULUM TASK FORCE

On July 14–16, 2025, a focus group of pastors and teachers met at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry in Waukesha, Wis., to provide feedback to the Theology Curriculum Task Force.

The task force began meeting in 2023, led by Melanie Giddings, curriculum coordinator for WELS Lutheran Schools. Consisting of pastors and teachers across all grade levels, leaders on the task force are now using the information gained from the focus group to revise and clarify information for the project's writing teams, which are beginning their work in 2026.

Other updates on the theology curriculum project include:

- The curriculum will include four instruction programs designed for four age groups—early childhood, elementary school, middle school, and high school.
- Four writing teams are being assembled for these four programs.
- Both digital and print materials are being developed.

Ben Reichel, youth and young adult pastor at St. Mark Ministries, De Pere, Wis., serves on the curriculum's task force. He

notes that the task force decided to start with the end in mind. **"We came up with six 'picture of the graduate' statements (see image) that summed up who we wanted our students to be when they graduated from high school,"** says Reichel. "With that

picture in mind, we worked our way backward to guiding principles and supporting standards, which would then help us create the content we wanted to see."

Giddings reminds WELS members, though, that "while we can focus our energy and time on developing a curriculum and instructional programs with the most effective and quality instructional practices, we know these components only attend to biblical knowledge and skill acquisition. By faith, we trust that the work of the Holy Spirit will grow the grace and knowledge of God in students' hearts."



DID YOU KNOW?

The WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has created an online religious sign language dictionary to help the deaf and interpreters share the gospel more effectively. Visit gospelhands.net.



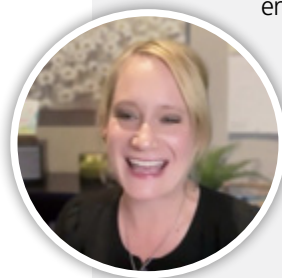
WELS YOUTH NIGHT

WELS Discipleship offers a series of youth-focused events with the aim of **gathering youth from congregations in geographic proximity for fellowship and Scripture study**. This resource provides all the pieces needed to plan, train, promote, and host a Youth Night event. Every package in the series has its own unique event theme, keynote video, and small group discussion guide. Pictured is a WELS Youth Night hosted by Wisconsin Lutheran College for youth in the Milwaukee area.

WOMEN'S MINISTRY WEBINARS

WELS Women's Ministry exists to nurture, encourage, and equip women to faithfully use their gifts for service in God's kingdom. One of the ways it does that is through its webinars, which are offered multiple times per year.

"Webinars continue to be a platform for women across our synod to share what they've been doing in their churches, homes, and communities," says Rachel Hall-dorson (pictured), a member of the WELS Women's Ministry Executive Board and host of the webinars.



"Their passion and love for their Savior shines through and inspires those watching and listening to apply it to their own lives and situations."

During the webinars, women learn from panelists, connect with each other via the chat feature, ask questions in the Q&A, and have access to resources that help equip them to share Jesus with other women in their congregation and with those who may not yet know Jesus.

Learn more at wels.net/women.

THE FOUNDATION

About **60 percent** of congregations are currently using components of *The Foundation*, a suite of resources that builds upon the importance of public worship both on Sunday morning and throughout the week. Resources contained in *The Foundation* include



seasonal thematic worship plans, weekly worship plans, school resources, a podcast for preachers, and worship series promotional graphics and videos. In addition to these free resources, all the Congregational Services devotions—WELS online daily devotions, family devotions, school devotions—capture the worship themes for that week. Thus, congregations that use *The Foundation* have a focused spiritual message that is repeated throughout the week in the homes of members who utilize those devotions.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Each year WELS Congregational Services analyzes congregational statistics.

"Statistical analysis can be a chilly task if we think it is just about numbers," notes Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services. "But that isn't how we view such things. **We know that behind every number is a soul, and behind every soul is the love of Christ. That's what drives us—not trends or targets, not fear or pride, but love.** Christ's love compels us."

In 2024, the Holy Spirit blessed WELS congregations with 4,126 adult confirmations. That is the most adult confirmations since 2012 and the second highest total since WELS has been tracking that statistic (for more than a half-century). To put that in perspective, over the past decade, WELS has averaged 3,300 adult confirmations annually. 2024 marks the fourth straight year that total adult confirmations increased.

To read the full statistical analysis, visit welscongregationalservices.net and click "Stats Report" on the right in the top menu.

LARGE-PRINT HYMNAL NOW AVAILABLE

In a joint effort between the Mission for the Visually Impaired and Northwestern Publishing House, the large-print edition of *Christian Worship: Hymnal* is now available. The large-print hymnal includes the full content of *Christian Worship: Hymnal* but in a larger format to aid those with vision problems.

“Over 20 percent of all WELS members have some type of visual impairment,” says Lawrence Povinelli, the Mission for the Visually Impaired’s chairman. Making this available is important, explains Povinelli, because “all want to participate in worship and have access to our worship materials. **The reduction in eyesight should not close the door to participating in worship.**”

Learn more at nph.net.



TRENDS IN SCHOOL STATS (Enrollment Growth/Decline — 5 years)

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
ECM	11,672	12,009	11,799	11,338	10,784
LES	26,586	27,578	28,081	28,361	28,067
ALHS	6,041	6,413	6,779	6,879	7,097
LPS/MLS	605	601	602	605	583

ECM=Early childhood ministry LES=Lutheran elementary school
ALHS=Area Lutheran high school LPS/MLS=Luther Preparatory School/
Michigan Lutheran Seminary

14,000

PEOPLE SUBSCRIBE
TO WELS' DAILY
DEVOTIONS.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief

To help carry out its ministry of compassion, WELS Christian Aid and Relief approved \$426,357 to support humanitarian aid projects in WELS mission fields throughout the United States and worldwide for fiscal year 2025–26.

“These grants provide an opportunity to show compassion to those who are struggling and lead to many conversations about our compassionate Savior,” shares Dan Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief.

The humanitarian aid projects supported by the grants take many forms, including health care for the sick and dying, borehole drilling to provide clean drinking water, food and warm clothing, school supplies for underprivileged kids, assistance for legal immigrants, scholarships for poor students, mosquito nets, and vocational training.

Amazing Grace, Amarillo, Texas, (pictured) is using grant funds in multiple ways—providing school supplies to kids in need, delivering meals door to door in community neighborhoods, and helping feed those who are homeless.

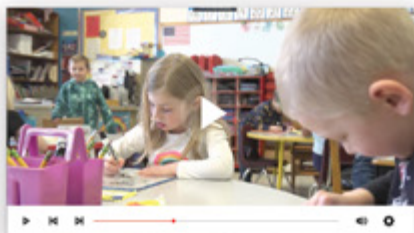
Hans Thomford, pastor at Amazing Grace, says, “These grants help us to love our community and put ourselves and our new mission around even more people in need of

Jesus’ love and forgiveness! The compassion net can really go a great distance with these funds.”

To learn more about the work of WELS Christian Aid and Relief or to support its ministry, visit wels.net/relief.



Stay informed all year through these WELS news sources



WELS CONNECTION monthly video



TOGETHER e-news + video updates



FORWARD IN CHRIST monthly magazine

Learn more at
wels.net/news-media



Support Services

MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving works on behalf of the Conference of Presidents, assisting with gathering Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) and encouraging direct gifts to WELS through mailed appeals, coordination of special offerings, and WELS Christian giving counselors.

We praise God that 2024 was another record-setting year for Congregation Mission Offerings, and as of this writing, 2025 is also looking to finish with strong congregational offerings.

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving coordinated the collection of a special offering celebrating the **175th anniversary of our synod** through congregations, a mailed appeal to members, and a special collection at the synod convention. More than \$413,000 has been given.

Christian Giving is also partnering with Luther Preparatory School on the "Magnify" campaign to invite major gifts and commitments to build a new music center on the Watertown campus. The goal is \$16 million. Gifts, commitments, and LPS reserves/events for the campaign total \$8 million.

Christian Giving is working with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., on approaching major donors during a quiet phase of its "Compelled" capital campaign to enhance the school's education wing, faculty offices, and gym gathering space. Gifts and commitments total almost \$8 million.

Visit wels.net/givingcounselors to find your giving counselor and receive free, confidential assistance with offering a gift to WELS.



WELS TECHNOLOGY

Thirty WELS members met at Divine Savior, Doral, Fla., from Feb. 21–23, 2025, to discuss the intersection of **Artificial Intelligence** and the church. Pastors, teachers, staff ministers, missionaries, employees at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, and lay members learned more about AI and its current and potential future impact on WELS ministry. Attendees discussed ethical as well as practical issues. WELS Technology spearheaded the event and is working to provide resources that can help ministries across the synod as this technology continues to develop.

Called to **support**

WELS INVESTMENT FUNDS

In 2000, WELS launched a new ministry tool with a simple goal: help WELS congregations, schools, and affiliated ministries manage God's blessings wisely so they could focus more fully on sharing the gospel. That tool? WELS Investment Funds.

St. Paul, Muskego, Wis., became the very first congregation to invest with WELS Investment Funds. For church administrator Randy Fink, the decision was about stewardship and mission. "We were looking for a better way to manage our long-term financial resources," Fink recalls. "WELS Investment Funds has been a great partner—easy to work with and reliable. It's saved us a lot of time compared to managing investments on our own."

From the beginning, WELS Investment Funds was designed with ministries in mind—offering cost-effective, professionally managed portfolios for purposes like endowments, scholarships, and building funds.

Over the years, St. Paul has received numerous estate gifts that have been placed into investment accounts

managed by WELS Investment Funds. These funds have enabled a wide variety of ministry initiatives, including a Community Counseling and Care Center (pictured). This center opened on St. Paul's campus as a satellite site for Christian Family Solutions, a WELS-affiliated organization specializing in counseling care and mental health treatment. Initial funds supported a pastor earning a master's degree in mental health counseling. Later, two rooms were remodeled to house the counseling center and now four counselors serve hundreds of people each year, both members and those in the community.

Today, more than 260 WELS organizations—including Lutheran schools, congregations, and ministries—entrust more than \$350 million to WELS Investment Funds. As WELS Investment Funds moves forward, its mission will remain the same: helping ministries make the most of God's gifts so they can share his grace today and for generations to come.

Learn more about WELS Investment Funds at [**wels.net/welsfunds**](http://wels.net/welsfunds).



CHRISTIAN FAMILY
SOLUTIONS

Proceeds invested through **WELS Investment Funds** helped St. Paul, Muskego, Wis., open a community counseling center as well as support one of its pastors, **Jeffrey Bonack** (pictured), to pursue his master's degree in counseling.



WELS CHURCH EXTENSION FUND

WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc., (WELS CEF) provides financing through loans and grants to mission congregations so they can acquire land and purchase or build ministry facilities to be used for gospel outreach in coordination with WELS Home Missions. The money to carry out WELS CEF's mission comes from investments and gifts from WELS members, congregations, and affiliated organizations.

In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, **\$19.8 million of new loans and \$4.5 million of new grants were approved to mission congregations.** In addition, WELS CEF disbursed \$1.3 million of endowment and unrestricted net asset grants to Home Missions.

For more information, visit wels.net/cef.

Pictured: On July 26, 2025, Huntersville Lutheran, Huntersville, N.C., dedicated its new worship facility. WELS CEF helped the church with a loan and a grant for the project.



NORTHWESTERN PUBLISHING HOUSE

Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) provides Christ-centered, biblically sound resources to the members of WELS and beyond. NPH publishes *Forward in Christ*, *Meditations: Daily Devotional*, elementary and Sunday school curricula, Bible studies, worship materials, music, and faith-strengthening books. In 2025, NPH released more than 25 Christian resources in print and digital formats, including:

- **5-Minute Bible Studies for Women:** Written by women for women, these 156 short studies based on passages from Luke are rich with applications for daily life.
- **I Can Go to Church:** Children with shorter attention spans or special needs can find it challenging and even overwhelming to participate in worship. This customizable, illustrated guide has durable pages that can easily be rearranged to match the specific flow of your church's worship service.
- **Ephesians, The Unsearchable Riches of Christ:** Discover what God wants you to know about the unsearchable riches of Christ, which are yours by faith.
- **People's Bible Devotions series:** Each of the authors of the People's Bible Devotions series has a deep understanding of the Bible and extensive experience in ministry, providing you with rich scriptural insights. The first two books in the series were published in 2025.

Visit nph.net or call **800-662-6022** to learn more about the ministry of NPH.



WELS FOUNDATION

WELS Foundation supports gospel-centered work by helping individuals and organizations make planned gifts to the ministries they care about. Through WELS Foundation, donors can support WELS congregations, schools, missions, and special ministries while creating a lasting, Christ-centered legacy.

In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, WELS Foundation distributed \$8.5 million to WELS ministries through planned gifts. These distributions provided steady, dependable support for congregations, schools, missions, and special ministries.

WELS Foundation simplifies the planned giving process for individuals and families by offering a wide range of giving options—including charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, donor-advised funds, endowments, and gifts of appreciated assets. Its gift processing services handle the details of complex charitable gifts, ensuring gifts are managed efficiently and according to the donor's intent.

To learn more, visit wels.net/foundation or contact WELS Foundation at WELSFoundation@wels.net or **800-752-8940**.

WELS BENEFIT PLANS

The WELS Benefit Plans Office (BPO) serves WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod workers and organizations through administration of the WELS Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association (VEBA) Health Plan, the WELS Pension Plan, and the WELS Shepherd Plan.

The WELS VEBA Health Plan provides benefits for church and school workers and their family members in accordance with God's Word while remaining compliant with applicable law. The VEBA Plan provides comprehensive, nationwide coverage. More than 80 percent of WELS workers and calling bodies participate in WELS VEBA.

Coverage and benefits provided through WELS Benefit Plans are uniform throughout all 50 states. This supports WELS ministry and the call process by providing access to high-quality, affordable benefits for workers and calling bodies regardless of geographic location.

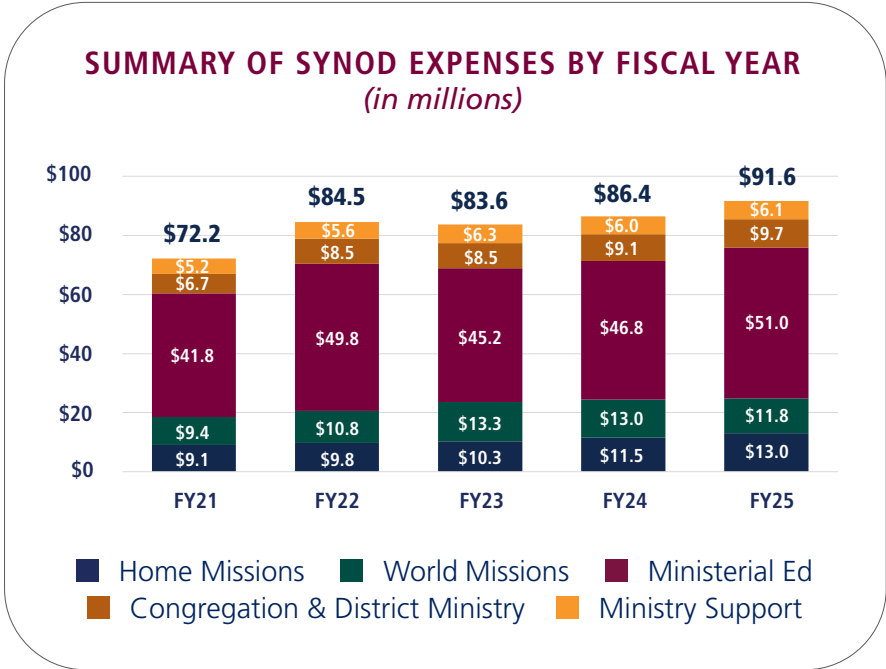
Visit welsbpo.net for more information.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Financial Services provides finance and accounting services that support WELS ministries and safeguard the assets God has provided. These services include financial planning and analysis, financial statement preparation and audit coordination, transaction processing, payroll services, insurance and risk management, cash and investment management, and legal-related services.

“By God’s grace and through the faithful stewardship of members across the synod, WELS continues to be in a strong financial position, with consistent levels of giving and healthy reserves to support ongoing ministry,” notes Kyle Egan, WELS’ chief financial officer and treasurer. “As we look ahead, we pray for clear vision and unity as we carry out the work before us in the synod’s new long-range strategic plan, ‘Christ through us.’ ”

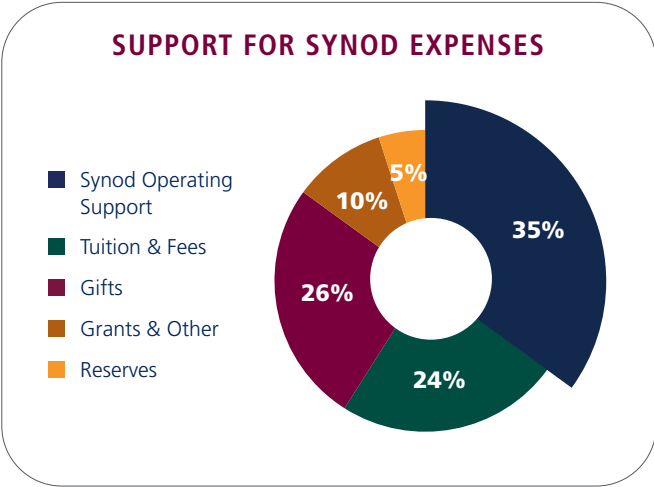
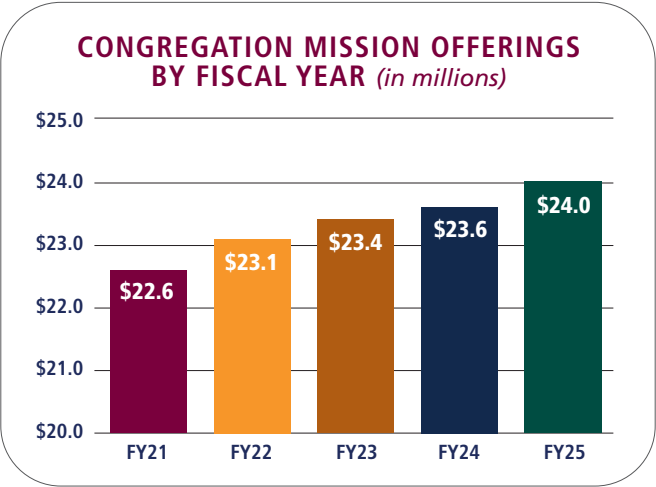
Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) are critical to WELS’ financial position, funding approximately 70 percent of Synod Operating Support every year. WELS finished fiscal year 2025 (year ended June 30, 2025) with CMO of \$24.0 million, an increase of 1.8 percent over the previous year. WELS is thankful for the continued generosity of its people in supporting ministry efforts. Another key component of WELS’ financial position is strong reserves, including the Financial Stabilization Fund. This fund holds all undesignat-



ed, non-CMO funding sources—such as gifts, grants, bequests, investment income, and other support—and is utilized each year to provide approximately 30 percent of Synod Operating Support. The balance of the Financial Stabilization Fund decreased in fiscal year 2025 due to a year-over-year decline in bequests. Even so, WELS remains blessed for the stability this fund provides, enabling consistent management of the operating budget while supporting the ongoing expansion of mission and ministry.

In July 2025, synod convention delegates passed the proposed fiscal year 2025–26 and 2026–27 ministry finan-

cial plan, which includes funding for Ministerial Education, Home and World Missions, Congregation and District Ministry, and Ministry Support. Total synod expenses (including the four ministerial education schools) for the biennium are expected to be just over \$100 million each year. These expenses will be supported by Synod Operating Support—consisting of CMO and the Financial Stabilization Fund (approximately 35 percent)—as well as tuition and fees, reserves, gifts, and grants (approximately 65 percent).





Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive
Waukesha, WI 53188-1108

WELS *in brief*

As a Christian church body, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's calling is to nurture the faith of our members and to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

WELS is the third largest Lutheran church body in the United States with 1,237 churches, 327,943 baptized members, and 261,357 communicant members.

WELS has 12 districts to allow for more area-specific ministry, personal contacts, and member involvement.

WELS congregations—either individually or as federations—operate one of the largest parochial school systems in the United States. This system includes 269 Lutheran elementary schools, 335 early childhood ministries, and 29 area Lutheran high schools. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., a liberal arts college for Christian men and women, is a WELS-affiliated ministry.

WELS maintains four schools for the education of our pastors, teachers, and staff ministers—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wis.; Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minn.; Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wis.; and Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Mich.

WELS supports work in mission fields in the United States and in countries around the world.

WELS is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, an organization of 34 confessional church bodies throughout the world.

Five separately incorporated entities work closely with WELS to provide resources necessary to carry out WELS' ministry.

Known as the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, the synod's headquarters in Waukesha, Wis., houses WELS' areas of ministry and support staff as well as the subsidiaries, WELS Archives, and the WELS Visitor Center.

From collections that document the administration of WELS to individual congregational records, the WELS Archives helps preserve and share the history of our synod. Visit wels.net/archives for more information.

Tours to the WELS Visitor Center may be scheduled by e-mailing cmmtours@wels.net or by calling **414-256-3200**.

For more information about the **Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod**, including a directory of local congregations and schools, visit wels.net.

