

# Proceedings

September 2023

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD  
Waukesha, Wisconsin

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
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Unless otherwise noted, these are referencing the 2023 BORAM, which can be found at **[welsconvention.net/boram](https://welsconvention.net/boram)**.



# Voting delegates

## Arizona-California District

### Pastors

Aaron Boehm  
Ryan Heiman  
Christopher Hoppe  
Mark Jacobson  
Nathan Kassulke  
David Koelpin  
Andrew Mueller  
Jason Schmidt  
John Sprain

### Teachers and staff ministers

Douglas Meyer  
Benjamin Priebe  
Scott Stevenson

### Laymen

Jay Bartley  
Chris Bradshaw  
Eric Cereske  
Carl Evers  
Pat Foley  
Tim Grams  
Brian Heinitz  
Peter Kosanke

John Pooley  
Joel Samelson  
John Sempert  
Scott Yanke  
Richard Ybarra  
Peter Yee  
Daniel Zarbock  
Andrew Zwick

## Dakota-Montana District

### Pastors

David Reichel  
James Schmeling  
Paul Stern  
Benjamin Tomzcak

### Teachers and staff ministers

Ryan Rosenthal

### Laymen

Andrew Bender  
Aaron Cook  
Dave Edison  
Robert Feldhus  
Keith Gibbs

Thomas Klaudt  
Joseph Purcell  
Marlo Schlomer  
Will Stone  
Dean Weiss

## Michigan District

### Pastors

Fred Adrian  
Terry Balogh  
Joshua Becker  
Stephen Daley  
John Eich  
Kenneth Jahnke  
Thomas Meissner  
Scott Mosher  
Guy Purdue  
Adam Seelow  
Joel Voss  
Mark Voss

### Teachers and staff ministers

Richard De Frain  
Samuel Korth  
Paul Leifer  
Aaron Luedtke  
Kevin Needham  
Joshua von Stein

### Laymen

Harold Cooper  
Rick Crego  
Kem Fecho  
Richard Fischer  
Tom Furnner  
Gary Gilgen  
Kevin Heine  
Ken Hoekstra  
Ray Howe  
Ernie Koepke  
Matt Koepke

Mark Lochhaas  
Mick Mohacsi  
Ron Nichol  
Ted Reuschel  
Mark Salchert  
Steven Sanchez  
Aaron Smuda  
Mark Virant  
Bob Wagner  
Tim Wildauer

## Minnesota District

### Pastors

Daniel Balge  
David Barkow  
Johann Caauwe  
Eugene DeVries  
Brian Dose  
Mathew Ewart  
Henry Koch  
Edwin Lehmann  
Lawrence Olson  
James Panning  
David Peters  
Brian Roloff  
Allen Schleusener  
Wayne Schoch

### Teachers and staff ministers

Steven Biedenbender  
David Gartner  
Jon Hermanson  
Macord Johnson  
Joel Pankow  
Michel Plocher  
Jonathan Roux  
Adrian Smith  
Michael Vlieger  
David Zabel  
Tyson Zarnstorff

### Laymen

Andrew Bare  
William Baumeister  
Allan Duesterhoef  
Seth Greeder  
Joel Grunke  
Larry Holst  
David Luepke  
Paul Nibbe  
Lance Otto

Wayne Paulsen  
David Pfeifer  
Harold Plath  
Jeff Siewert  
Darwyn Tri  
John Wiese  
Douglas Woodward  
Kevin Zeltwanger

## Nebraska District

### Pastors

Paul Biedenbender  
Philip Henning  
Rodney Rixe  
Fred Schurman III  
Timothy Spiegelberg  
Joel Vogel

### Laymen

Harvey Dunn  
Greg Green  
Andrew Haag  
Gregory Neitzke  
Wesley Schroeder  
Kenneth Stephens  
Larry Todd

## North Atlantic District

### Pastors

James Douglas  
Harland Goetzinger III  
Michael Seifert

### Laymen

Jon Bartel  
Jim Bruland  
Roger Krahn  
Jim Lake

Marty Ranft  
Bill Scramm  
Josh Semrow

## Northern Wisconsin District

### Pastors

Mark Albrecht  
Luke Boehringer  
Kenneth Frey  
Timothy Johnson  
Michael Kampman  
Matthew Langebartels  
Andrew Luehring  
Aaron Mueller  
David Ruddat  
Daniel Sargent  
Karl Schultz  
Aaron Schultz  
Joel Stuebs  
Joel Zank  
Adam Zimpelmann

### Teachers and staff ministers

Jeffrey Miller  
Jarrod Pfarr  
Phillip Rehberger  
Jacob Steinmetz  
Daniel Vogel  
Benton Witte  
Landon Zacharyasz

### Laymen

Bruce Bitter  
David Frederickson  
Paul Griepentrog  
Ellery Gulbrand  
Rod Haskins  
Dave Holm  
Rick Kerr  
Bill Klass  
Bob Krummel

Tim Lynch  
Tim Malchow  
Robert Mammel  
Donald Potthast  
Justin Slominsky  
Anthony Surian  
John Talsma  
John Tauscher  
Jim Vandenberg

## Pacific Northwest District

### Pastors

Bart Brauer  
Geoffrey Cortright  
Daniel Lange

### Teachers and staff ministers

Jason Gibson  
Glenn Metzger

### Laymen

Lukas Dahlberg  
Ben Dose  
Richard Leendertsen  
Mark Redlawk

Joseph Thompson  
Mark White  
Michael Williams

## South Atlantic District

### Pastors

Harmon Lewis  
Carlos Leyrer  
Jonathan Quinn  
Bramdeo Ramgolam  
Joel Seifert  
Benjamin Zahn

### Teachers and staff ministers

John Althoff  
Ryan Loberger  
Dane Mattes

### Laymen

Robert Blackwell  
Brian Cottrell  
Aaron Curtis  
Tom McDonough  
Kris Heine

Aaron Marohl  
Andrew Schmidt  
Michael Scott  
Michael Sholes  
Tom Teteak

## South Central District

### Pastors

Matthew Brown  
John Hering  
John Koelpin  
Paul Seager

### Teachers and staff ministers

Chad White

### Laymen

Brad Bartels  
Adam Burkhard  
Bill Limmer

Scott Salesky  
Dennis Scharp

## Southeastern Wisconsin District

### Pastors

Jonathan Balge  
Andrew Bauer  
Joseph Berg  
William Carter  
John Cook  
Christopher Doerr  
Nathan Ericson  
Seth Haakenson  
Jason Hacker  
Brian Hackmann  
Paul Horn  
David Kolander  
Kurt Loescher  
Phil Merten  
Paul Nitz  
Dale Reckzin  
Collin Vanderhoof  
Richard Waldschmidt  
Erich Westphal  
David Wierschke

### Teachers and staff ministers

James Braun  
Paul Burmeister  
Benjamin Carlovsky  
Seth Fitzsimmons  
Paul Frisque  
Joel Grulke  
Michael Henning  
Adam Igl  
Stephen Kamps  
Michael Koestler  
John Kolander  
Philip Krueger  
Philip Leyrer  
Matthew Linton  
James Livingston  
Martin Miller  
Levi Nagel  
Brian Papenfuss  
Paul Patterson  
Timothy Payne  
Timothy Rimpel  
Jonathan Rosenow  
Timothy Sonntag

### Laymen

Alex Alonte  
Daniel Baker  
Richard Baumgart  
Brian Garcia  
Thomas Gentz  
Steven Johns  
Kevin Keller  
Greg Martin  
Daniel Miller  
Paul Nehlen  
Randy Nickel  
Daniel Ody  
Mark Pamperin  
Michael Romas  
Ronald Schmidt  
David Sitzman  
Ronald Smits  
Dennis Sprenger  
Mike Stiglitz  
Jacob Trompler

## Western Wisconsin District

### Pastors

Garrett Alford  
Nathan Berg  
Jeffery Bolwerk  
Christian Christenson  
Jerry Ewings  
Don Frelitz  
Jon Hadler  
Richard Pamperin  
Scott Schultz  
Scott Schwertfeger  
Korey Van Kampen  
Robert Williams  
Scott Wolfram  
Dustin Yahnke

### Teachers and staff ministers

Todd Dahlke  
Nathan Dittrich  
Timothy Kassulke  
Peter Lemke  
John Melso  
Tom Plitzuweit  
Andrew Willems  
Eric Ziel  
Thomas Zuberbier

### Laymen

James Allen  
Christopher Collins  
Richard Dorn  
Howard Draheim  
Stuart Everhart  
Christopher Frick  
LaVern Georgson  
Richard Goss  
Nathan Greve  
Myron Guenterberg  
Brian Gumtz  
Dennis Guderjahn

Tim Hahn  
Thomas Horton  
Brian Lash  
Steven Loehr  
Leonard Luedtke  
John Lumsden  
Jonathan Mayer  
Joel Marheine  
Doug Miller  
Zachary Noland  
Jody Volkman  
Timothy Wiedenfeld

## World missionaries

Matthew Behmer  
Guy Marquardt  
Luke Wolfgramm

# Advisory delegates

## Officers

Rev. Mark Schroeder, president  
Rev. James Huebner, first vice president  
Rev. Joel Voss, second vice president\*  
Rev. Robert Pasbrig, recording secretary  
Mr. Kyle Egan, chief financial officer and treasurer

## District presidents

Rev. Jon Buchholz, Arizona-California  
Rev. Philip Hirsch, Nebraska  
Rev. Michael Jensen, Western Wisconsin  
Rev. Dennis Klatt, Minnesota  
Rev. Daniel Leyrer, Southeastern Wisconsin  
Rev. Donald Patterson, South Central  
Rev. Michael Seifert, North Atlantic\*  
Rev. Snowden Sims, Michigan  
Rev. John Steinbrenner, Pacific Northwest  
Rev. Charles Westra, South Atlantic  
Rev. Joel Zank, Northern Wisconsin\*

## Synodical Council

Mr. Pete Aisbet, Southeastern Wisconsin District  
Mr. John Fowler, South Atlantic District  
Mr. Steven Hansen, Arizona-California District  
Rev. Joel Heckendorf, pastor-at-large  
Rev. Joel Jenswold, pastor-at-large  
Mr. Chris Kestner, Michigan District  
Mr. Jake Lemke, Western Wisconsin District  
Mr. Brent Masters, Pacific Northwest District  
Dr. Ryan Olson, North Atlantic District  
Mr. Thomas Plitzuweit, teacher-at-large\*  
Mr. Thomas Schermerhorn, Northern Wisconsin District  
Mr. Chip Woods, Nebraska District

*\* Also served as voting delegate*

## Board for Ministerial Education

Rev. Matthew Crass, president, Luther Preparatory School  
Rev. Richard Gurgel, president, Martin Luther College  
Rev. Mark Luetzow, president, Michigan Lutheran Seminary  
Rev. Paul Prange, administrator, Board for Ministerial Education  
Rev. Earle Treptow, president, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

## Home and World Missions

Rev. Mark Gabb, chairman, Board for Home Missions  
Rev. Larry M. Schlomer, administrator, Board for World Missions  
Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, chairman, Board for World Missions  
Mr. Sean Young, senior director, Missions Operations

## Congregational Services

Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator, Congregational Services and director, Commission on Congregational Counseling  
Mrs. Cindi Holman, national coordinator of early childhood education, Commission on Lutheran Schools  
Mr. Paul Patterson, associate director, Commission on Lutheran Schools\*  
Teacher James Rademan, director, Commission on Lutheran Schools  
Prof. David Scharf, chairman, Commission on Congregational Counseling

## Other

Mr. Jeremy Angle, president, Northwestern Publishing House  
Prof. James Danell, chairman, Commission on Inter-Church Relations  
Mr. Lee Hitter, director, Communication Services  
Mr. James Holm, executive director, WELS Foundation/WELS Investment Funds, Inc.  
Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director, Ministry of Christian Giving  
Mr. Dennis Maurer, director, Human Resources  
Mr. Scott Page, executive director, WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.  
Mr. Joshua Peterman, director, WELS Benefit Plans  
Rev. Daniel Sims, director, WELS Christian Aid and Relief  
Rev. James Pope, executive editor, *Forward in Christ*

\* Also served as voting delegate

# Floor committees

## Committee #1: President's Report

Pastor Jason Hacker, chairman  
Pastor James Douglas, secretary  
Pastor Paul Biedenbender  
Pastor Aaron Boehm  
Pastor Brian Hackmann  
Pastor Harmon Lewis  
Teacher John Althoff  
Teacher John Melso  
Teacher Kevin Needham  
Teacher Joel Pankow

Teacher Jonathan Rosenow  
Layman Jay Bartley  
Layman Joel Grunke  
Layman Ray Howe  
Layman Bill Limmer  
Layman Joel Marheine  
Layman Steven Sanchez  
Layman Bill Schramm  
Layman Daniel Zarbock  
Layman Kevin Zeltwanger

## Committee #2: Conference of Presidents

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman  
Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary  
Pastor Harland Goetzinger III  
Pastor Ryan Heiman  
Pastor Philip Henning  
Pastor Paul Horn  
Pastor Jonathan Quinn  
Teacher Steven Biedenbender  
Teacher Brian Papenfuss  
Teacher Joshua von Stein

Layman Alex Alonte  
Layman Chris Bradshaw  
Layman Jim Bruland  
Layman Christopher Frick  
Layman Keith Gibbs  
Layman Ernie Koepke  
Layman Josh Semrow  
Layman Aaron Smuda  
Layman John Wiese  
Layman Peter Yee

## Committee #3: Commission on Inter-Church Relations

Pastor David Kolander, chairman  
Teacher Martin Miller, secretary  
Pastor Nathan Kassulke  
Pastor David Ruddat  
Pastor Karl Schultz  
Pastor Joel Vogel  
Pastor Rodney Rixe  
Pastor Adam Seelow  
Teacher Michael Vlieger

Layman William Baumeister  
Layman Bruce Bitter  
Layman Eric Cereske  
Layman Brian Garcia  
Layman Dennis Guderjahn  
Layman Thomas Klautdt  
Layman Matt Koepke  
Layman Roger Krahn  
Layman Mark Virant

## **Committee #4: Ministry of Christian Giving**

Pastor William Carter, chairman  
Staff Minister Levi Nagel, secretary  
Pastor Luke Boehringer  
Pastor Jon Hadler  
Pastor Christopher Hoppe  
Pastor Fred Schurman III  
Missionary Luke Wolfram  
Teacher Macord Johnson  
Teacher Timothy Payne

Teacher Jarrod Pfarr  
Layman Jon Bartel  
Layman Carl Evers Jr  
Layman Richard Fischer  
Layman David Fredrickson  
Layman Zachary Noland  
Layman Darwyn Tri  
Layman Bob Wagner

## **Committee #5: Communication Services**

Pastor Adam Zimpelman, chairman  
Teacher Paul Leifer, secretary  
Pastor Jonathan Balge  
Pastor Stephen Daley  
Missionary Guy Marquardt  
Pastor Daniel Sargent  
Pastor Allen Schleusener  
Pastor Robert Williams

Teacher David Zabel  
Layman Kem Fecho  
Layman Tim Grams  
Layman Bob Krummel  
Layman Jim Lake  
Layman Daniel Miller  
Layman John Talsma

## **Committee #6: Synodical Council**

Pastor Carlos Leyrer, chairman  
Teacher Andrew Willems, secretary  
Pastor John Hering  
Pastor Mark Jacobson  
Pastor David Peters  
Pastor Richard Waldschmidt  
Teacher James Braun  
Teacher Nathan Dittrich  
Teacher Samuel Korth

Teacher Tyson Zarnstorff  
Layman Robert Blackwell  
Layman Paul Griepentrog  
Layman Rod Haskins  
Layman Brian Heinitz  
Layman Ken Hoekstra Jr  
Layman Ronald Schmidt  
Layman Kenneth Stephens  
Layman Tim Wildauer

## **Committee #7: Ministry Financial Plan (Budget)**

Pastor Matthew Brown, chairman  
Teacher Adrian Smith, secretary  
Pastor Seth Haakenson  
Pastor John Koelpin  
Pastor James Panning  
Pastor Jason Schmidt  
Pastor Aaron Schultz  
Teacher James Livingston  
Teacher Aaron Luedtke  
Teacher Tom Plitzuweit

Teacher Landon Zacharyasz  
Layman Andrew Bare  
Layman Harvey Dunn  
Layman Kevin Heine  
Layman Rick Kerr  
Layman Tim Lynch  
Layman Tom McDonough  
Layman Paul Nehlen  
Layman John Pooley  
Layman Jeff Siewert



## **Committee #8: Home Missions**

Pastor David Koelpin, chairman  
Pastor Michael Seifert, secretary  
Pastor Terry Balogh  
Pastor Nathan Ericson  
Pastor Scott Schultz  
Pastor Joel Voss  
Teacher Paul Burmeister  
Teacher John Kolander  
Teacher Michael Plocher  
Teacher Eric Ziel

Layman Christopher Collins  
Layman Rick Crego  
Layman Allan Duesterhoef  
Layman Ellery Gulbrand  
Layman Gregory Neitzke  
Layman Marty Ranft  
Layman Joel Samelson  
Layman Michael Sholes  
Layman David Sitzman

## **Committee #9: World Missions and Joint Mission Council**

Pastor Paul Seager, chairman  
Teacher Matthew Linton, secretary  
Pastor John Eich  
Pastor Lawrence Olson  
Pastor Erich Westphal  
Pastor Dustin Yahnke  
Teacher Benjamin Carlovsky  
Teacher Jonathan Roux  
Layman Harold Cooper  
Layman Seth Greeder  
Layman Greg Green

Layman Kris Heine  
Layman Kevin Keller  
Layman Bill Klass  
Layman Leonard Luedtke  
Layman Robert Mammel  
Layman Randy Nickel  
Layman Wesley Schroeder  
Layman John Sempert  
Layman John Tauscher  
Layman Larry Todd

## **Committee #10: Ministerial Education**

Pastor Scott Mosher, chairman  
Teacher Philip Leyrer, secretary  
Missionary Matthew Behmer  
Pastor Eugene DeVries  
Pastor Kenneth Frey  
Pastor Edwin Lehmann  
Pastor Tim Spiegelberg  
Teacher Todd Dahlke  
Teacher Richard De Frain

Layman Richard Baumgart  
Layman Pat Foley  
Layman David Luepke  
Layman Greg Martin  
Layman Michael Romas  
Layman Justin Slominsky  
Layman Jim Vandenberg  
Layman Andrew Zwick

## **Committee #11: Congregational Services A**

**(Congregational Counseling, Discipleship, Evangelism)**

Pastor Benjamin Tomczak, chairman  
Pastor John Sprain, secretary  
Pastor Andrew Bauer  
Pastor Henry Koch  
Pastor Daniel Lange  
Pastor Richard Pamperin  
Teacher Philip Krueger  
Teacher Timothy Rimpel  
Teacher Timothy Sonntag  
Layman Richard Dorn

Layman Howard Draheim  
Layman Dave Edison  
Layman Brian Lash  
Layman Mark Lochhaas  
Layman Tim Malchow  
Layman Daniel Ody  
Layman Will Stone  
Layman Anthony Surian  
Layman Scott Yanke

## **Committee #12: Congregational Services B**

**(Worship, Special Ministries)**

Pastor Bart Brauer, chairman  
Teacher Michael Koestler, secretary  
Pastor Joseph Berg  
Pastor Johann Caauwe  
Pastor Don Frelitz  
Pastor Kenneth Jahnke  
Pastor Brian Roloff  
Layman James Allen  
Layman Daniel Baker

Layman Lavern Georgson  
Layman Peter Kosanke  
Layman Mick Mohasci  
Layman Lance Otto  
Layman Mark Pamperin  
Layman Joseph Thompson  
Layman Dean Weiss  
Layman Douglas Woodward

## **Committee #13: Congregational Services C**

**(Lutheran Schools)**

Teacher David Gartner, chairman  
Teacher Stephen Kamps, secretary  
Pastor Fred Adrian  
Pastor Christian Christenson  
Pastor Kurt Loescher  
Pastor Andrew Luehring  
Pastor Paul Stern  
Pastor Mark Voss  
Teacher Douglas Meyer  
Layman Adam Burkhard

Layman Lukas Dahlberg  
Layman Stuart Everhart  
Layman Nathan Greve  
Layman Dave Holm  
Layman Larry Holst  
Layman John Lumsden  
Layman Aaron Marohl  
Layman Ron Nichol  
Layman Dennis Scharp  
Layman Richard Ybarra

## **Committee #14: Support Services**

Pastor David Barkow, chairman  
Teacher Scott Stevenson, secretary  
Pastor Christopher Doerr  
Pastor Thomas Meissner  
Pastor Bramdeo Ramgolam  
Pastor Joel Stuebs  
Pastor Scott Wolfram  
Teacher Adam Igl

Teacher Jeffrey Miller  
Layman Ben Dose  
Layman Tom Furnner  
Layman Richard Goss  
Layman Paul Nibbe  
Layman Donald Potthast  
Layman Andrew Schmidt  
Layman Ronald Smits

## **Committee #15: Subsidiaries and Benefit Plans**

Pastor Geoffrey Cortright, chairman  
Teacher Michael Henning, secretary  
Pastor Jeffrey Bolwerk  
Pastor John Cook  
Pastor Matthew Ewart  
Pastor Phil Merten  
Pastor Aaron Mueller  
Pastor James Schmeling  
Teacher Jason Gibson

Teacher Phillip Rehberger  
Teacher Jacob Steinmetz  
Layman Andrew Bender  
Layman Myron Guenterberg  
Layman Richard Leendertsen  
Layman Wayne Paulsen  
Layman Ted Reuschel  
Layman Michael Scott  
Layman Michael Williams

## **Committee #16: Northwestern Publishing House and Publication Coordinating Commission**

Pastor Korey Van Kampen, chairman  
Teacher Paul Patterson, secretary  
Pastor Joshua Becker  
Pastor Brian Dose  
Pastor Jerry Ewings  
Pastor Matthew Langebartels  
Pastor Dale Reckzin  
Teacher Seth Fitzsimmons  
Teacher Jon Hermanson

Teacher Daniel Vogel  
Layman Aaron Cook  
Layman Brian Guntz  
Layman Tim Hahn  
Layman David Pfeifer  
Layman Mark Redlawk  
Layman Mark Salchert  
Layman Dennis Sprenger  
Layman Mike Stiglitz

## **Committee #17: WELS Christian Aid and Relief**

Pastor Joel Seifert, chairman  
Teacher Peter Lemke, secretary  
Pastor Michael Kampman  
Pastor Guy Purdue  
Pastor David Reichel  
Pastor Wayne Schoch  
Pastor David Wierschke  
Teacher Benton Witte  
Staff Minister Chad White

Layman Robert Feldhus  
Layman Gary Gilgen  
Layman Andrew Haag  
Layman Thomas Horton  
Layman Steven Johns  
Layman Doug Miller  
Layman Marlo Schlomer  
Layman Jacob Trompler  
Layman Mark White

## **Committee #18: Constitutional Matters**

Pastor Daniel Balge, chairman  
Pastor Nathan Berg, secretary  
Pastor Mark Albrecht  
Pastor Garrett Alford  
Pastor Collin Vanderhoof  
Pastor Benjamin Zahn  
Teacher Paul Frisque  
Teacher Timothy Kassulke  
Teacher Ryan Loberger  
Teacher Glenn Metzger

Layman Brian Cottrell  
Layman Aaron Curtis  
Layman Thomas Gentz  
Layman Steve Loehr  
Layman Harold Plath  
Layman Joseph Purcell  
Layman Scott Salesky  
Layman Tom Teteak  
Layman Timothy Wiedenfeld

## **Committee #19: Elections**

Pastor Scott Schwertfeger, chairman  
Teacher Joel Grulke, secretary  
Pastor Timothy Johnson  
Pastor Paul Nitz  
Teacher Ben Priebe

Teacher Ryan Rosenthal  
Teacher Tom Zuberbier  
Layman Brad Bartels  
Layman Jonathan Mayer  
Layman Jody Volkman

## **Committee #20: Steering**

Pastor Jon Buchholz, chairman, Arizona-California District President  
Pastor Snowden Sims, Michigan District President  
Pastor Joel Zank, Northern Wisconsin District President

# President's Report

Aug. 1, 2023

Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

President Mark Schroeder

**W**hen people are asked what they would like to study in Bible class, many pastors will tell you that the most frequent request is the book of Revelation. That's understandable, I suppose, for a number of reasons.

First, this inspired letter from the apostle John to the seven congregations in Asia Minor is filled with images and pictures that can be confusing and hard to understand. Lutherans do not want to be confused when they read their Bibles.

Second, some of the images themselves at first glance can be frightening and disturbing. Lutherans do not want to be frightened and disturbed when they read their Bibles. Yes, they want to see the reality and results of their own sin, but they also want to know the comfort and assurance of God's grace and to know that when God tells us not to let our hearts be troubled, he means it.

Third, they know that the book of Revelation deals with things that are still to come. Who doesn't want at least a basic understanding of what they can expect the future of God's world to hold?

And finally, Lutherans are aware that many Christians have misread and misinterpreted parts of the book of Revelation, and they want to know how to respond when they run into people who hold beliefs that do not align with the scriptures.

What do all those reasons for wanting to study Revelation have in common? All of them are rooted in the perception that the book of Revelation is hard to understand and can be disturbing, unsettling, and even frightening.

But is it? I believe that, while there are some details that can be difficult to interpret, John's letter to the churches in Asia Minor is one of the easiest books of the Bible to understand. And far from being frightening and disturbing, I believe the message in Revelation is one of the most comforting, encouraging, and uplifting in all of God's Word. *Why?* Because the main message and theme of Revelation is simple: Yes, the world we live in has been terribly damaged by sin. Yes, Christians living in this sin-damaged world will experience the effects of sin in their own lives and in the culture around them. Yes, Christians will be persecuted and suffer for their faith. Yes, as long as this world stands, Satan will be attacking God's people and God's church. Yes, at times it will look to us like Satan and his forces are winning that war and that the church is losing it. But then comes the beautiful truth and the message of incredible comfort: Yes, all of that may be true now, but don't be afraid, don't be discouraged, don't despair, don't give up. Because Jesus is coming. And in the end, he wins. And so do we.

That is a message of comfort, of hope, of encouragement, of *certainty*. God's church can be filled with comfort, hope, encouragement, and certainty when we hear the voice from heaven say, "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ, because the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, the one who accuses them before our God day and night. They conquered him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony. . . . For this reason, rejoice, you heavens and those who dwell in them" (Revelation 12:10-12). How can we not be filled with comfort, hope, encouragement, and certainty when we hear Jesus himself say to us, "Yes, I am coming soon!" (Revelation 22:20). And even as we embrace the cross in our lives, we are filled with comfort, hope, encouragement, and certainty, and in faith we respond, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). Because he *is* coming. And in the end, he wins. His victory is our victory.

Even as we struggle against the attacks of Satan and the effects of sin in this world, we already see the indescribable blessings of God's grace for us as individuals and for our synod. They are too many to list, but here are just a few:

- By his grace God has preserved the truth of his Word among us and has maintained our commitment to standing on and proclaiming that truth. Every pastor, teacher, and staff minister in our synod believes and teaches that the scriptures are God's inspired and inerrant Word. The lay members of our congregations are happy to belong to a synod in which there is no doubt or uncertainty about the truth proclaimed in the Scriptures. There is no debate about the reliability of the Bible in all that it says, and there is no one posing the question that Satan first raised: "Did God really say?" While we may sometimes take this for granted, we should never underestimate how blessed we are. While many, if not most, Christian churches have abandoned their belief that the Bible is fully and completely the Word of God, it is no small thing to rejoice that we have been led to believe, teach, and confess that the Scriptures are true in all they say. God's Word has been and remains our great heritage.
- By his grace God has preserved our commitment to preaching and teaching that properly presents both law and gospel and that focuses on Christ and his saving work. "Christ for us"—what he did to save sinners through his perfect life and innocent death remains the central theme of sermons heard in our churches and classrooms. God has enabled us to avoid the trend in so many Christian churches today where preaching and teaching focuses on social issues, gives advice on how to cope with life in a difficult world, or promotes a theology of glory rather than the theology of the cross. It is no small thing that God has kept his message of salvation in Christ as the central focus of our proclamation.
- By his grace, God has helped us to remain focused on our mission to share the gospel with more and more people. Our world mission efforts have focused not only on strengthening the confessional stance of our partner churches and mission churches around the world. We have also been committed to looking for new opportunities to expand the reach of the gospel in places where we have not been. Sometimes those opportunities come about because of careful exploration and planning. At other times God drops those opportunities into our laps when we could not have anticipated it. Who could have imagined that we would be invited to Vietnam, where a church body of 140,000 members has asked us to teach and train their pastors to be confessional Lutherans? Added to that, God has blessed our efforts to expand our worldwide fellowship with Lutheran church bodies that desire to unite with other confessional Lutheran synods. In recent years, our synod has declared fellowship with the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia and the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ–Kenya. At this convention, we will declare fellowship with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod of Uganda and affirm our fellowship with the *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* in Latin America. WELS missionaries and representatives of other sister church bodies are in discussions with several other church bodies seeking fellowship with our synod.
- By his grace, in our own country, we have embarked on an effort to plant 100 new home missions in ten years. This project is not simply designed to meet an arbitrary numerical goal. Rather it is an effort to take the gospel to more places and to more people than we are currently doing. The first nine mission starts have been approved; some have already been blessed with pastors, while others are calling. A tenth new mission may be approved this fall. And, on a congregational level, we see a renewed commitment to finding ways to connect with communities and with people, all in an effort to share the gospel on a person-to-person basis with as many people as possible.
- By his grace God has continued to unite us in the value that we place in liturgical worship, while at the same time rejoicing in the rich variety of form and music that liturgical worship provides. To underscore the importance of liturgical worship, we've produced a new hymnal that is finding widespread use in our congregations and homes.
- By his grace, our synod has not given in to the pressure of an increasingly hostile culture to abandon biblical values. We have clearly stated our belief that God created human beings as distinctly male and female and that these God-created genders cannot be abandoned or changed on the basis of personal choice. We have maintained that God established marriage as a union between one man and one woman, and that his gift of sex is intended by him to be used only with the lifelong bond of marriage. We have clearly taught and confessed that human life begins at conception and that any effort to end that life before birth is sinful and is an act of rebellion against the One who alone creates and ends human life. We have publicly stated our thanks and appreciation for the freedom to worship, to preach, and to teach biblical truths, and that if the government or anyone else seeks to silence or restrict us in those activities, we will obey God rather than man. We have resisted the culture's message of racial hatred and

division and have continued to be committed not only to sharing the gospel with people of every nation, tribe, and language, but also to emphasize that “there is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one and the same in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

- By his grace, we have remained committed to bringing up our children in the training and instruction of the Lord. Our WELS schools are enjoying their highest levels of enrollment ever. Our early childhood education programs are increasing at a rapid pace, and in those programs congregations are making increased efforts and focus to connect non-WELS families with the life and worship of those congregations.
- By his grace, God has moved his people to support the work we do together as a synod with great generosity. Even during the COVID pandemic, offerings for the synod’s mission and ministry increased. The financial reports that you will hear at this convention will illustrate that once again, God gives more than we can ask or imagine.
- By his grace, in 2025 WELS will celebrate its 175th anniversary. A committee, chaired by Prof. Joel Otto, has been appointed to oversee the planning and implementation of our synodwide celebration.

The list of God’s gracious blessings on our synod could go on. We thank and praise him for these undeserved blessings. But as we celebrate those blessings, we cannot be blind to the challenges that we face as individuals and as a synod in this sin-infected world.

What are some of those challenges?

Over the span of more than three decades, our synod has experienced a steady decline in members. Synod membership peaked in 1990 and has fallen in nearly every year since. That decline has not been caused by a growing number of people leaving our synod or because of a decrease in the number of people who join our synod by way of adult confirmation or profession of faith. The primary cause of the decline is demographics. The average age of our members is increasing while the numbers of births and infant baptisms are only a fraction of what they were only a few years ago.

That decline in membership, especially among the younger generations, has had a marked impact in a number of ways. Many congregations—both in rural and urban settings—have seen a decline in membership to levels that threaten their viability. These congregations are being encouraged, when feasible, to consider merging with other WELS congregations nearby. While enrollment in our Lutheran schools has grown, most of that growth has been a result of the increased enrollment of non-WELS mission prospects; the percentage of WELS students in our schools has been decreasing. Perhaps one of the biggest impacts of fewer WELS children can be seen in the called worker shortage that has been growing more acute by the year.

The number of souls in our synod is something that is determined only by God. We plant and water the seed of the gospel, but he is the One who makes it grow. We gladly leave the results to him. But while the results of gospel ministry are in God’s hands, the faithful stewardship of that gospel ministry is a responsibility that God has given to us. A desire to be faithful in our stewardship of his gospel has led us prayerfully to embark on an effort to plant 100 new missions in ten years—to establish new sites for gospel ministry so that more people can hear the good news and be touched by the work of the Holy Spirit. A desire to be faithful in our stewardship of the gospel has compelled us to expand our fellowship beyond our borders by looking for new mission fields abroad. And a desire to be faithful in our stewardship of the gospel will lead individual members and congregations to focus on the importance of evangelism and outreach in their communities. We do this not through gimmicks or trendy programs that attempt to draw people to the church for all the wrong reasons, but by faithfully and consistently doing as Philip did with Nathanael, telling him, “Come and see!” (John 1:46).

Another challenge we face—and it is really nothing new for the church militant—is the fierce opposition of a godless culture. What perhaps is new, at least in our experience, is that the attack on biblical values has become so open and widespread that these godless philosophies and lifestyles have become mainstream when they were previously held by a small minority. Now they are being accepted by an increasing segment of our society. These views and philosophies are not only defended, but those who hold these views increasingly demand their acceptance and support by all. They portray Christians and churches that hold to biblical values as closed-minded, bigoted, and hateful. And we Christians are not immune to the temptation to conform and surrender to the strong cultural currents swirling around us.



It goes without saying that, as a synod that stands on the scriptures and holds to biblical truths and values, we will continue to be bold in stating our beliefs and ready to articulate those beliefs in our preaching and in our personal witness.

We need to ask God to give us the courage at all times to speak the things that we have seen and heard, regardless of the consequences. At the same time, as a synod we need to be very careful in our preaching and teaching not to venture into the realm of politics or give the impression that the mission of the church is to reform society through political means. We preach Christ crucified and risen. We proclaim the truth of God's Word. We acknowledge the clear Lutheran distinction between the kingdom of God's left hand (the secular and political world) and the kingdom of his right hand (the spiritual kingdom in which God rules by the working of the gospel). We teach God's people the truths of God's Word, and we encourage them as individual citizens to participate in the political realm as the salt and light that God intends them to be.

One of the greatest and most obvious challenges is our shortage of called workers. As mentioned before, one of the reasons for this shortage is simple demographics. There are fewer WELS young people who are available to train for the public ministry. The increasing cost of tuition in our ministerial education schools is another factor. Perhaps we have become less faithful in encouraging our children and young people to consider preparing for the public ministry.

Could now be the time for us to commit ourselves to a concerted and wide-ranging synodwide effort to encourage more people to serve in the public ministry and to provide as much assistance as possible to make that choice more affordable? The harvest is indeed plentiful. The workers are few. Should we fervently ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest field and then do all we can to be his instruments in bringing that about? I believe that the answer to those questions is, "Yes, now is the time."

As we embrace the cross and anticipate the crown, it's certainly fitting for us to keep in mind our Lord's messages of both warning and encouragement to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 2 and 3).

As he said to the church in Ephesus, he commends Christians who faithfully endure hardship and who hold to the truth of God's Word. But he warns us not to forsake our first love—the love for the gospel and the mission to proclaim it.

As he said to the church in Smyrna, he reminds us that while we may experience suffering and poverty, we are rich in God's grace and need not fear any suffering that may come to us.

As he said to the church in Pergamum, he recognizes that we live where Satan has his throne, but even there, God has enabled us to hold fast to his name.

As he said to the church in Thyatira, God acknowledges our works of faith and love and commends us for them. At the same time, he warns us not to allow false teachings to creep unnoticed into our midst, but rather to hold fast to what we have until he comes.

As he said to the church in Philadelphia, God promises to continue to place before us the door that has been opened by his saving message so we can seize the opportunities he gives us to share that message.

As he said to the church in Sardis, he calls us to repentance for at times resting on a reputation of faithfulness when, in reality, there are times when our faith grows listless and our actions are hollow.

And as he said to the church in Laodicea, he lovingly warns us against becoming lukewarm and complacent in our faith and in commitment to his Word and his mission.

Those churches in Asia Minor are a perfectly accurate picture of the Christian church in this world. The church on earth is a gathering of people whom God has redeemed and made his own through the work of his Son. It is a group of people who have been blessed by God with saving faith and who often display that faith in works of Christian love, service, and faithfulness. But the church on earth is also comprised of people who need our Savior's loving call to repentance and his fervent warnings of the consequences of spiritual apathy and complacency.

There is much about the future we don't know. But God has told us important things that we do know. In the days and years ahead, God will continue to call us to repentance and to strengthen our faith through the trials and crosses that we face in a sinful broken world. So, God's people first embrace the cross of Jesus, where he brought



about the healing and forgiveness we so desperately need. And we embrace the cross of suffering, which God allows for the strengthening and spiritual good of his people. And as we embrace the cross, we know something else. We look ahead and anticipate the crown in keeping with the promise Jesus himself gave: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Embracing the cross and anticipating the crown, we do well to remember again the message of the book of Revelation: Yes, the world we live in has been terribly damaged by sin. Yes, Christians living in this sin-damaged world will experience the effects of sin in their own lives and in the culture around them. Yes, Christians will be persecuted and suffer for their faith. Yes, as long as this world stands, Satan will be attacking God's people and God's church. Yes, at times it will look to us like Satan and his forces are winning that war and that the church is losing it. But then comes the beautiful truth and the message of incredible comfort: Yes, all of that may be true now, but don't be afraid, don't be discouraged, don't despair, don't give up. Because Jesus is coming. And in the end, he wins. And so do we.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Schroeder". The script is cursive and fluid, with a small flourish at the end.

WELS President Mark Schroeder



# Reports and resolutions

## Committee #1: President's Report

### **Subject: Appointments and installations 2021–2023**

Reference: Report from the President's Office

Report No. 01

#### **Installations**

Rev. James Pope, *Forward in Christ*, executive editor

Rev. Joel Gaertner, Commission on Special Ministries, director

#### **Appointments**

*To Accounting Oversight Committee*

Mr. Todd Backus

Mr. Jeffrey Fischer

Mr. David Maccoux

Mr. Daniel Riebe

Mr. Kevin Rusch

Mr. William Schultz

*To Commission on Christian Aid and Relief*

Rev. Bruce Marggraf

Rev. Richard Warnecke

Rev. Thomas Spiegelberg

*To Commission on Congregational Counseling*

Rev. Kevin Westra

*To Commission on Inter-Church Relations*

Rev. Bart Brauer

Prof. James Danell

Rev. Thomas Fricke

Rev. John Koelpin

Prof. Joel Otto

Prof. Bill Tackmier

Rev. Benjamin Tomczak

Prof. Bradley Wordell

*To Committee on Constitutional Matters*

Mr. Kenneth Gosch

Rev. Eric Steinbrenner

Rev. Richard Waldschmidt

*To Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors*

Rev. Nathaniel Biebert  
Mr. Matthew Groth  
Prof. Brian Hennig  
Prof. Paul Koelpin  
Mr. Jeremy Korell  
Mr. Dwight Luedtke  
Prof. Steven Pagels  
Mr. John Pratt  
Mr. Joel Raasch

*To Publication Review Committee*

Rev. Richard Dolan  
Rev. Larry Ellenberger  
Rev. Harlyn Kruschel  
Rev. Richard Lauersdorf  
Rev. Joel Prange  
Prof. James Schneider  
Rev. John Schroeder  
Rev. James Westendorf

*To Support Committee*

Rev. Brett Brauer  
Rev. Timothy Ehlers  
Rev. Wayne Schoch

*To Synodical Council*

Rev. Joel Zank

*To WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc., Board of Directors*

Mr. Timothy Boerneke  
Mr. Mark Hartman  
Mr. Joel Kock

*To WELS Foundation, Inc., Board of Directors*

Rev. Jonathan Kolander  
Mr. Mike Krueger  
Mr. Scott Neitzel  
Mr. John Pahmeier  
Mr. David Wendland

*To WELS Investment Funds, Inc., Board of Directors*

Rev. Charles Degner  
Mr. Seth Hansen  
Mr. Joel Luehmann  
Mr. John Wenker

*To WELS Retirement Program Commission*

Mr. Robert Bullens  
Mr. James Hahm  
Mr. Samuel Kruschel  
Mr. Kyle Koltz  
Mr. Daniel Markgraf  
Mr. Thomas Medema  
Mr. Lee Miller  
Rev. Joel Sauer  
Rev. James Turriff

*To WELS VEBA Commission*

Mr. James Gabriel

Mr. Dan Markgraf

Mr. Todd Poppe

Pastor Jason Hacker, chairman

Pastor James Douglas, secretary

**Subject: To support and sustain the ministry**

Reference: Report from the President's Office

Report No. 02

We bless the Lord for the faithful service of President Schroeder and we are thankful for his report to this convention. He outlines the many and varied blessings that our synod has received according to the Lord's mercy, while at the same time identifying the significant challenges that we face in our mission and ministries together under Christ's reign, notably:

"One of our greatest and most obvious challenges is our shortage of called workers."

There are many contributing factors in this matter and a direct and deliberate approach to meeting this challenge is necessary, perhaps not so much to solve a shortage, but to be able to sustain an adequate ministerium in the years to come to carry out the ministry of the gospel.

We concur, "Yes, now is the time."

Pastor Jason Hacker, chairman

Pastor James Douglas, secretary

**Subject: Membership—called workers**

Reference: Report from the President's Office

Resolution No. 01

WHEREAS the following pastors, professors, graduate tutors, male teachers, and male staff ministers are recommended by their respective district presidents for voting membership in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod; therefore be it

Resolved, that the following be graciously welcomed into the voting membership of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) and Martin Luther College (MLC):

**ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA DISTRICT**

Rev. Grant T. Hagen, Pan de Vida Lutheran Church, Garden Grove, Calif., from WLS

Rev. Trung Le, King of Kings Lutheran Church, Garden Grove, Calif., from WLS

Rev. Justus J. McKenzie, St. Peter Lutheran Church, Modesto, Calif., from WLS

Mr. Jonah R. Babinec, North Hollywood Christian Academy, North Hollywood, Calif., from MLC

Mr. Josiah R. Klatt, Apostles Lutheran Church, San Jose, Calif., from MLC

Mr. Benjamin L. Riegsecker, California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif., from MLC

**DAKOTA-MONTANA DISTRICT**

Rev. Karl A. DeMarce, St. John Lutheran Church, Tappen, N. D.

Rev. Daniel J. Spaude, Mighty Fortress/St. John Lutheran Church, Red Deer/Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada, from WLS

Mr. Aaron Fischer, St. Martin's Lutheran School, Watertown, S.D., from MLC

**MICHIGAN DISTRICT**

Rev. Ross A. Gottschalk, associate to the president of the Michigan District, Columbus, Ohio, from WLS

Rev. Samuel P. Helwig, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Perry, Mich., from WLS

Rev. Isaac Pappenfuss, Trinity Lutheran Church, Saline, Mich., from WLS

Rev. Paul C. Ritter, Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Warren, Mich., from WLS  
Rev. Jeremiah M. Wallander, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., from WLS  
Mr. Lucas A. Martin, Hope Christian Academy, Westland, Mich., from MLC  
Mr. Nathan D. Spaude, St. John Lutheran School, Hemlock, Mich., from MLC

#### **MINNESOTA DISTRICT**

Rev. Robert P. Beaver, Salem Lutheran Church, Woodbury, Minn., from WLS  
Rev. Aaron T. Bush, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., from WLS  
Rev. Karl A. Christie, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Kasson, Minn., from WLS  
Mr. Jakob A. Casper, Bloomington Lutheran School, Bloomington, Minn., from MLC  
Mr. Maxwell C. Holmes, West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn., from MLC  
Mr. Joel T. Holz, Immanuel Lutheran School, Hutchinson, Minn., from MLC  
Mr. Matthew R. Krueger, Salem Lutheran School–Greenfield, Loretto, Minn., from MLC

#### **NEBRASKA DISTRICT**

Rev. Erik P. Lund, St. John/Good Shepherd, Lake Benton/Pipestone, Minn., from WLS  
Rev. David E. Young, Our Redeemer's/Rock of Ages Lutheran Church, Martin, S.D./Gordon, Neb., from WLS  
Mr. Noah T. Worster, Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb., from MLC

#### **NORTH ATLANTIC DISTRICT**

Rev. Justin D. Digman, Abiding Word Lutheran Church, Orleans, Ontario, Canada, from WLS  
Rev. Joshua J. Koelpin, new mission, Boston, Mass., from WLS  
Rev. Andrew P. Krueger, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, East Brunswick, N.J., from WLS

#### **NORTHERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT**

Rev. Erik C. Alair, Ascension Lutheran Church, Antigo, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Joshua J. Frailing, Trinity Lutheran Church, Marinette, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. John Jordan, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Green Bay, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Joseph G. Neuberger, Divine Savior Lutheran Church, Shawano, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Justin D. Steinke, missionary to the Philippines, from WLS  
Rev. Samuel P. Westra, Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Iron Mountain, Mich., from WLS  
Rev. Matthew J. Zenk, Trinity Lutheran Church, Neenah, Wis., from WLS  
Mr. Sheldon L. Habben, Trinity Lutheran School, Minocqua, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Ryan C. Kohl, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Green Bay, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Daniel A. Zabel, Trinity Lutheran School, Marinette, Wis., from MLC

#### **PACIFIC NORTHWEST DISTRICT**

Rev. Joel J. Hopper, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Wash., from WLS  
Mr. Jonah N. Plocher, Christ the King Lutheran School, Bremerton, Wash., from MLC  
Mr. Benjamin B. Washburn, Holy Trinity Lutheran School, Des Moines, Wash., from MLC

#### **SOUTH ATLANTIC DISTRICT**

Mr. Jonah J. Christenson, New Hope Lutheran Academy, West Melbourne, Fla., from MLC  
Mr. Jarrett D. Mielke, Victory Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, Fla., from MLC

#### **SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT**

Rev. Caleb G. King, new mission, Collin County, Texas, from WLS  
Rev. Jacob M. Roecker, Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Oklahoma City, Okla., from WLS  
Mr. Matthew J. Brohn, Divine Savior Academy–Sienna, Missouri City, Texas, from MLC  
Mr. Michael Fromm, Divine Savior Academy–Sienna, Missouri City, Texas, from MLC

#### **SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT**

Rev. Zachary J. Kluball, Victory Lutheran Church, Lexington, Ky., from WLS  
Rev. Nathan T. Klusmeyer, Water of Life Lutheran Church, Racine/Caledonia, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Daniel C. Wessel, Bethany Lutheran Church, Fort Atkinson, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Christian A. Willick, Resurrection Lutheran Church, Aurora, Ill., from WLS  
Mr. Noah M. Arnold, Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill., from MLC

Mr. Hoonsik Jo, Jerusalem Lutheran School, Morton Grove, Ill., from MLC  
Mr. Ryan J. Kluba, Good Shepherd Lutheran School, West Bend, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Conor N. Kopp, Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill., from MLC  
Mr. Nicholas S. Mitchell, Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Caleb Paul, Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill., from MLC  
Mr. Tony W. Sahatjian, Zion Lutheran School, South Milwaukee, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Evan K. Willick, Mt. Calvary Lutheran School, Waukesha, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Keegan A. Young, Christ–St Peter Lutheran School–Centennial Campus, Milwaukee, Wis., from MLC

#### **WESTERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT**

Rev. Nathanael T. Goelzer, Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Davenport, Iowa, from WLS  
Rev. Stephen S. Oelhafen, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Menomonie, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Zachary Satorius, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Ethan J. Schultz, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Samuel R. Schulz, St. John Lutheran Church, Whitewater, Wis., from WLS  
Mr. Brett R. Burger, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Jace Fellers, Christ–St. John’s Lutheran School, West Salem, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Joseph C. Herrewig, Trinity–St. Luke, Clark St. Campus, Watertown, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. David H. Hirsch, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Evan J. Korthals, St. Paul Lutheran School, Lake Mills, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Andrew J. Kramer, Peace Lutheran School, Sun Prairie, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. John R. Niebuhr, St. Mark Lutheran School, Eau Claire, Wis., from MLC

Pastor Jason Hacker, chairman  
Pastor James Douglas, secretary

#### **ADOPTED**

##### **Subject: Membership—congregations**

Reference: Report from the President’s Office  
Resolution No. 02

WHEREAS 1) the following congregation is recommended by the district president for voting membership in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod; and

WHEREAS 2) the constitution of the congregation has been examined and approved by the district constitution committee; therefore be it

Resolved. that this congregation be graciously welcomed into the voting membership of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod:

#### **SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT**

Hope Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas

Pastor Jason Hacker, chairman  
Pastor James Douglas, secretary

#### **ADOPTED**

##### **Subject: Creation of Pastoral Shortage Task Force**

Reference: *President’s report*  
Resolution No. 03

WHEREAS 1) the synod president indicates, “One of the greatest and most obvious challenges is our shortage of called workers” (*President’s report*); and

WHEREAS 2) a teacher shortage task force was appointed by the synod president in May 2022 to study “the teacher shortage issue from all angles to provide concrete recommendations to the Conference of Presidents” (2023 *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 27); therefore be it

Resolved, that the synod president appoint a pastoral ministry shortage task force to study the challenges related to the present pastoral shortage and spiritual support for pastors from all angles to provide concrete recommendations to the synod president to address this matter.

Pastor Jason Hacker, chairman  
Pastor James Douglas, secretary

## ADOPTED

### **Subject: Commitment of recruitment of called workers**

Reference: *President's report*

Resolution No. 04

WHEREAS 1) the synod president posed the question as to whether now is the time to “commit ourselves to a concerted and wide-ranging synodwide effort to encourage more people to serve in the public ministry and to provide as much assistance as possible to make that choice more affordable” (*President's report*); and

WHEREAS 2) Martin Luther College states in its Philosophy of Financial Assistance and Student Debt,

“About 75 percent of MLC students graduate with debt. The debt for that 75 percent averages \$27,000. If two of our graduates marry, the debt can double. Many of our graduates, therefore, enter their public ministries with a challenging burden—a burden exacerbated by the lower lifetime earning potential of called workers compared to college graduates in other fields.

“This financial burden has a negative effect on recruitment. In a competitive college marketplace, we are at a disadvantage in rankings that use a return-on-investment framework. According to a 2019 Sallie Mae report, most high school students and their parents list college cost, often including consideration of return on investment, as the most important factor in their college choice.

“While we remain convinced that the value of ministerial training—and the blessings of a life dedicated to gospel ministry—far outweigh financial considerations, we still must admit that the debt load carried by many MLC graduates likely has a significant negative impact on student recruitment.”; therefore be it

Resolved, a) that the synod president appoint a Recruitment Task Force to study and address the challenges to recruitment for our ministerial education schools; and be it finally

Resolved, b) that the Recruitment Task Force consider the implementation of a called worker tuition reimbursement program at all levels of the ministerial education system.

Pastor Jason Hacker, chairman  
Pastor James Douglas, secretary

## ADOPTED



# Committee #2:

## Conference of Presidents

### **Subject: Report of the Conference of Presidents**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 4-18

Report No. 01

Our committee commends the Conference of Presidents for its faithful labors for our Savior and synod.

After reading and discussing the report of the Conference of Presidents (COP), our committee has the following encouragements:

- We applaud all efforts to formulate the synod's ministry plan, fund it, and execute it. We are especially grateful to our WELS congregations and members who continued to support our synod's mission and ministry through generous Congregation Mission Offerings. We urge congregations to continue their Congregation Mission Offerings and, where able by the grace of God, to increase them so that our synod may expand its mission and ministry.
- We applaud all efforts to strengthen recruitment for full-time public ministry. We specifically pray the Lord will provide needed principal, pastor, and early childhood ministry candidates.
- We echo the gratitude of the COP for the new hymnal and pray that it will enhance the worship and devotional life of our WELS members.
- We give thanks to the Lord for the Translation Liaison Committee and its ongoing efforts to monitor the busy world of Bible translation.
- We applaud the work of the Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee. We are especially grateful for its steady coordination of substantive spiritual and professional growth programs for pastors, teachers, and staff ministers. We give thanks to the Lord of the Church for generous donors who support these various growth programs.

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman

Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary

### **Subject: Convention attendance report**

Report No. 02

The 67th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod was attended by 348 voting delegates composed of 118 pastors, 3 world missionaries, 63 teachers/staff ministers, and 164 lay delegates. An additional 53 advisory delegates and 3 special guests attended all or part of the convention.

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman

Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary

### **Subject: Triennial conference proposal**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 7,8

Report No. 03

Our committee recognizes the Conference of Presidents (COP) is not asking for action on this proposal at the 2023 convention. Nevertheless, our committee notes two preliminary concerns with regard to grassroots participation and synodical responsiveness. We are concerned about reducing grassroots participation at synod conventions and about delaying our ability to respond as a synod in convention to pressing issues that arise. We urge caution on what would be a significant change and support the pursuit of fuller discussion and input from the districts.

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman

Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary

**Subject: Memorial (2023-02), Reevaluation of the call process**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 169

Report No. 04

Our committee does not support this memorial for the following reasons. The key challenge before us is not technological, nor is it a too frequent occurrence of multiple calls issued to one minister. The Conference of Presidents has at its fingertips up to date technology. And the occasion of more than one additional call is relatively infrequent. Rather, the issue at present is a low volume of called workers to fill a high volume of vacancies. We encourage the Conference of Presidents to continue with the call process as it is trusting the Lord of the Church will continue to provide both wisdom and workers for the harvest.

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman

Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary

**Subject: Memorial (2023-04), Artificial intelligence and the church**

Reference: Supplemental memorial to *Book of Reports and Memorials*

Report No. 05

Our committee does not support implementation of a moratorium on the use of language model AI as was stated in this memorial. We recognize, however, that general understanding of the topic of language model AI is relatively low among us. For that reason, we commend the topic for further study by our districts.

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman

Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary

**Subject: Convention offerings**

Report No. 06

A thank offering was gathered at the convention opening service. It has been designated to be split between the two synods with which WELS is declaring or affirming fellowship: Obadiah Lutheran Synod in Uganda and *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* of Latin America.

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman

Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary

**Subject: Expression of gratitude**

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) the accomplishment of the convention's work requires the effort of many people; and
- WHEREAS 2) the work of the synod depends on the concentrated labor of many people within its membership; therefore be it
- Resolved, that the synod in convention express its gratitude to:
1. The faculty and staff of Michigan Lutheran Seminary for hosting this convention.
  2. The support staff and officers of the synod for arranging and conducting the business of this convention.
  3. Those who delivered the sermons and devotions; conducted the services; served as organists and instrumentalists; sang in the choirs; and in other ways led us in worship.
  4. The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society for the presentation of flags.
  5. The delegates and floor committees of the convention for their consecrated efforts; all who served on boards, commissions, and committees of the synod.
  6. The school staff, kitchen staff, audio/visual services, technology services, pages, and volunteers who contributed their time and talent to make the convention flow smoothly to a successful completion.
  7. All organizations who provided materials for the convention.

8. All other WELS agencies who provided time, materials, and representatives to inform delegates of synod work.
9. All others who helped at the convention in any way.

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman  
Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Location of WELS' 68th biennial convention**

Resolution No. 02

WHEREAS Martin Luther College has extended an invitation to host the 2025 synod convention in New Ulm, Minn.; therefore be it

Resolved, that we accept the invitation of Martin Luther College with thanks.

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman  
Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Memorial (2023-01), Pastoral brief on critical theories in light of Scripture**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 169

Resolution No. 03

WHEREAS 1) all of humanity is created in the image of God and stand equally condemned in original sin before him (Genesis 9:6; Psalm 9:8; James 3:9); and

WHEREAS 2) Jesus is the Savior of all and his church includes people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 7:9); and

WHEREAS 3) the concepts of justice and equality, properly understood, are thoroughly biblical (1 Kings 3:9; Psalm 82:3; Isaiah 1:17); and

WHEREAS 4) in our world, the concepts of justice and equality have been toppled from their theological foundations and distorted; and

WHEREAS 5) the prevalence of "critical theory"; "critical race theory"; "diversity, equity, and inclusion"; "social justice"; and related theories are causing confusion and concern; therefore be it

Resolved, that the WELS Conference of Presidents prepare a pastoral brief emphasizing the importance of justice and analyzing critical theories in light of Scripture.

Pastor Andrew Mueller, chairman  
Teacher Dane Mattes, secretary

**ADOPTED**

# Committee #3:

## Commission on Inter-Church Relations

### **Subject: The work of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations—Part one**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 19-22

Report No. 01

What a blessing to review the work of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR). According to our WELS bylaws, the CICR is charged to “serve under the Conference of Presidents by representing the synod in doctrinal discussions with other church bodies who are, or are not, in fellowship with the synod” and to “keep itself informed on the doctrinal trends in other church bodies.” We are grateful for the summary of this work, which the CICR provided in its report to the convention. We also are grateful for the service of Prof. Keith Wessel, who has now concluded his final term on the commission, having served as our contact man for our sister churches in Scandinavia.

### **World Missions One Teams**

It is gratifying to see the close connection between the work of the CICR and the Board for World Missions “in assisting established and emerging church bodies from around the globe who are looking for fellowship with WELS and for assistance in educating pastors in their countries in confessional Lutheranism.” In this connection, representatives from the CICR work with our world mission “One Teams” in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America.

Many requests for fellowship discussions, particularly from church bodies in Africa, have led the CICR to develop a “four-stage toolkit” as a process for determining whether fellowship exists or not. This toolkit, for example, was helpful in the two years-plus of discussions with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod in Uganda, with whom we have the honor of declaring fellowship at this convention. We pray for God’s continued blessing on all the discussions currently being held with various church bodies around the globe. We also pray for God’s blessing on this work in parts of the world where it is becoming increasingly difficult—or impossible—to travel, such as in some parts of Asia.

In regard to our work in Europe, we make special mention of the war in Ukraine, which has had a “significant impact” on our sister churches in Russia and Ukraine. God speed the day when our work in those places can be done in more peace and quietness.

The work of the online education program in Latin America (*Academia Cristo*) has been greatly blessed and has resulted in the formation of a number of Christian groups throughout Latin America. The work of our sister church in Colombia has led the way to form *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* with these groups. As a result of this work, we will have the ability to affirm our fellowship with *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* at this convention.

Pastor David Kolander, chairman

Teacher Martin Miller, secretary

### **Subject: The work of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations—Part two**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 19-22

Report No. 02

### **Other church bodies**

In our country we continue to be privileged to walk in unity with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). We pray for God’s blessing on the work of ELS President Glenn Obenberger as he continues to guide our brothers and sisters in the fellowship of faith we enjoy.

We are saddened by the cessation of formal doctrinal discussions with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). (“Formal doctrinal discussions take place when there is reason to believe that there may be doctrinal agreement.”)

We pray the Lord would allow these discussions to resume at some point.

While we have not held “formal doctrinal discussions” with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), we note that the CICR “strongly endorses the continuation of the informal talks with the Missouri Synod,” with “full confidence in those who represent the commission in them.” These informal discussions began in 2012. We are thankful that these conversations on various doctrines and topics have been deemed “beneficial for both synods, as well as for our sister synod, the ELS, which is a full partner in the talks.” Our committee’s report will include a resolution in regard to these discussions in connection with Memorial (2023-03), which was assigned to us for consideration.

That same memorial notes a concern about the LCMS president addressing the delegates of the 2021 convention from the podium.

We understand that the LCMS president’s first-time attendance of our synod convention as a guest provided an opportunity for us to welcome him and for him to extend a greeting to us in connection with the informal discussions that are currently being carried out. We are grateful for the candor of his words of appreciation for the opportunity to carry out these informal discussions, together with the agreement that it was necessary for WELS to break with the LCMS in 1961. He also concurred that much work still remains to be done before there could be any thought of beginning formal doctrinal discussions.

At the same time, we give our encouragement that, if such a special circumstance should again arise in which a speaker outside of our fellowship might be considered to address the synod in convention, our synod president work with our Conference of Presidents to give appropriate explanation and the necessary publicity, to whatever degree that is possible, to keep the members of our synod informed as to what is taking place, since this has not been our general practice.

Finally, what joy must have been experienced by those who attended the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), which was held in Seoul, South Korea, from June 6–8, 2023. Thirty-four church bodies are part of this conference, which is the international association of churches in fellowship with WELS. God be praised for this blessed fellowship of faith and love.

Pastor David Kolander, chairman  
Teacher Martin Miller, secretary

**Subject: Affirmation of fellowship with *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional***

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* is a church body whose members were all at one time either WELS missions or individual congregations established through WELS mission efforts (in particular, through *Academia Cristo*); and
- WHEREAS 2) WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) has reviewed the doctrinal statement and constitution of *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* and found it to be in full agreement with the doctrine and practice of WELS; and
- WHEREAS 3) the CICR is recommending that WELS publicly affirm church fellowship with *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*; therefore be it
- Resolved. a) that with gratitude to God, WELS publicly affirms church fellowship with *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*; and be it finally
- Resolved. b) that we ask God to continue to give joy and blessing to both of our church bodies through this fellowship.

Pastor David Kolander, chairman  
Teacher Martin Miller, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Declaration of church fellowship with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod of Uganda**

Resolution No. 02

- WHEREAS 1) the Obadiah Lutheran Synod, a confessional Lutheran church body located in the country of Uganda, has formally requested to enter into church fellowship with WELS; and
- WHEREAS 2) the WELS One Africa Team spent at least two years visiting the leadership and congregations of the Obadiah Lutheran Synod; and
- WHEREAS 3) this visitation included reviewing all aspects of its doctrine and practice, as well as the instruction of its leaders; and
- WHEREAS 4) the WELS One Africa Team supports the request of the Obadiah Lutheran Synod to enter into church fellowship with WELS; and
- WHEREAS 5) WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations has reviewed the reports of the One Africa Team and the doctrinal statements and constitution of the Obadiah Lutheran Synod and has found the Obadiah Lutheran Synod to be in full agreement with the doctrine and practice of WELS; therefore be it
- Resolved, a) that with gratitude to God, WELS declares church fellowship with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod in Uganda; and be it finally
- Resolved, b) that we ask God to give joy and blessing to both of our church bodies through this fellowship.

Pastor David Kolander, chairman  
Teacher Martin Miller, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: WELS/ELS/LCMS informal discussions**

Resolution No. 03

- WHEREAS 1) Memorial (2023-03) speaks to the issue of the informal meetings that have occurred between leaders of WELS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) since 2012; and
- WHEREAS 2) “after almost 30 years of doctrinal disagreement,” the synod in convention “suspended fellowship with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod” in 1961; and
- WHEREAS 3) this memorial requests that “the informal meetings with the LCMS be replaced with the method that is currently being used in our dealings with the CLC (Church of the Lutheran Confession),” which are formal doctrinal discussions, a term that our Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) notes in their report that we use when “there may be reason to believe there may be doctrinal agreement”; and
- WHEREAS 4) we respect the sensitivity with which these informal meetings—and the publicity about them—must be handled, so that we do not cause confusion among our brothers and sisters in WELS, especially for those “current members, pastors, and congregations of WELS who left the LCMS for the sake of the gospel and their own conscience,” since in 1961 our synod in convention “suspended fellowship with the LCMS”; and
- WHEREAS 5) in 1961 the synod in convention also resolved that “under conditions which do not imply a denial of our previous testimony we stand ready to resume discussions with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod with the aim of reestablishing unity of doctrine and practice and of restoring fellowship relations, these discussions to be conducted outside the framework of fellowship” (1961 *Proceedings*, pp. 198,199); and
- WHEREAS 6) in 2012 the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) determined that circumstances were appropriate to resume discussions outside the framework of fellowship; and



- WHEREAS 7) the synod in convention in 2013 resolved “that we encourage our leadership in conjunction with the Commission on Inter-Church Relations to continue discussions with the LCMS to strive for true unity based on full agreement in doctrine and practice” (2013 *Proceedings*, p. 32); and
- WHEREAS 8) over the past 11 years the synod president has kept the members of the synod informed on the details of these informal discussions through avenues such as *Forward in Christ*, the Together e-newsletter, the WELS website, and answers to questions posted on the WELS website—and the CICR has done the same through its regular reports to the synod in *Report to the Twelve Districts* and *Book of Reports and Memorials*; and
- WHEREAS 9) these various publicity pieces have spoken candidly about the benefits of these discussions, as well as the realization that “none of the participants at these informal meetings anticipate a restoration of church fellowship between ELS/WELS and the LCMS in the near future” (WELS website post, Oct. 10, 2018); and
- WHEREAS 10) in its report in the 2023 *Book of Reports and Memorials* the CICR “strongly endorses the continuation of informal talks with the Missouri Synod and has full confidence in those who represent the commission in them,” believing that these continued informal talks with the LCMS “are beneficial for both synods, as well as for our sister synod, the ELS, which is a full partner in the talks”; and
- WHEREAS 11) the CICR does not believe we are in a position to initiate “formal doctrinal discussions,” which would mean “there is reason to believe there may be doctrinal agreement”; therefore be it
- Resolved. a) that the synod in convention continue to support the ongoing informal conversations between WELS, the ELS, and the LCMS; and be it further
- Resolved. b) that the Conference of Presidents and the CICR continue to update the members of the synod as to developments in these conversations; and be it finally
- Resolved. c) that we continue to ask the Lord of the Church in his mercy to grant that these informal conversations someday lead to formal discussions and then to the day when it can be said that doctrinal unity truly exists between these three synods on the basis of Holy Scripture, so that fellowship could be declared.

Pastor David Kolander, chairman

Teacher Martin Miller, secretary

#### **ADOPTED**

## Committee #4: Ministry of Christian Giving

#### **Subject: General report**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 23-26

Report No. 01

We commend the Ministry of Christian Giving (MCG) director, office staff, and Christian giving counselors (CGCs) for their continued faithful work in encouraging monetary gifts for gospel ministry. We thank God for the high level of congregational support received through Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) and for the 98 percent participation rate for submitting CMO commitments for 2023.

We further commend the MCG for its decision, at the direction of the Conference of Presidents, to contract with consulting firm BWF to learn how to better nurture relationships with donors and connect them with their areas of interest. We thank God for the many contacts made by our CGCs and for the generosity of WELS members.

We encourage the MCG to continue to coordinate efforts with WELS Communication Services and the various areas of ministry (e.g. Ministerial Education, World/Home Missions, etc.) to prepare giving appeals that are directed and timely. We especially encourage every effort to try to prevent possible “donor fatigue” among WELS donors.

We commend the MCG for its assistance with important projects and campaigns, both past and current, including the Martin Luther College competency-based education initiative, “100 missions in 10 years” with the Board for Home Missions, and Luther Preparatory School’s new music center.

We praise God for the CGCs’ efforts to remain up to date on best practices for giving. We specifically thank God for Rev. Rich Kogler, Rev. Phil Gieschen, Mr. Rick Kneser, and Rev. Dr. Michael Dietz, who finished their service as CGCs in this past biennium. We ask for God’s blessing on new Christian giving counselors Rev. Steve Schmeling, Rev. Craig Wasser, Mr. Pat Ruehrdanz, and Mr. Terry Helton. We pray that God will enable the MCG to fill its office vacancy and two CGC vacancies.

In a time when our world and nation’s economies are uncertain, what an amazing blessing it is to see that our synod’s membership continues to support gospel ministry through their monetary gifts. Praise be to God for his gifts to us and the generosity of his people!

Pastor William Carter, chairman  
Staff Minister Levi Nagel, secretary

## Committee #5: Communication Services

### **Subject: Communication Services**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 26-28  
Report No. 01

We commend Communication Services for its continuing work, under the auspices of the Conference of Presidents, to clearly and consistently communicate the mission and ministry of our synod to the constituency of our synod and beyond. We encourage Communication Services to continue to persistently keep its finger on the pulse of communication media and methods that prove most effective to this work. We invite the synod in convention to join us in giving thanks to our gracious God for gifting us with the faithful service of Rev. John Braun, who served as the editor of *Forward in Christ* for the past 16 years.

Pastor Adam Zimpelmann, chairman  
Teacher Paul Leifer, secretary



## Committee #6: Synodical Council

### **Subject: Final report**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 43-57

Report No. 01

We are encouraged by the Synodical Council's understanding of the Congregational Services report presented by Pastor Jonathan Hein at the synod in convention on Aug. 1, 2023.

A main focus of our committee's discussion was the plan to start 100 new missions in 10 years. We are excited about the prospect of more outreach and are in full agreement that along with the expansion of our congregational footprint, consolidation of ministries should be considered where possible.

Other questions raised concerned the future of Martin Luther College (MLC) and some of our current efforts to grow our called worker pool. Have we properly studied the potential unintended consequences to our worker training college regarding competency-based education, synod certification programs, and the calling of public school teachers into WELS schools? While these programs have the potential to provide much needed workers, we wonder where they will leave MLC in the long run as going to New Ulm is becoming less and less necessary. We encourage the Synodical Council to look into this issue.

We are encouraged and excited by the "Christ through us" long-range plan, specifically its focus on one-on-one evangelism. We see many benefits to the approach and believe Christ's church should continue to be empowered to and encouraged to share the saving truths of the gospel with those closest to us. We are all missionaries, and it will serve our church well if we truly adopt this attitude and culture.

Pastor Carlos Leyrer, chairman

Teacher Andrew Willems, secretary

## Committee #7: Ministry Financial Plan (Budget)

### **Subject: Ministry financial plan (2023–25) FY24/FY25 Biennium**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 71-95

Report No. 01

It is with joyful thanks for the blessings of our gracious God that we note that WELS is financially strong. Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO), unrestricted special fund support, and other unrestricted support increased in Fiscal Year 2021–22 leading to an overall increase in reserves of \$6.0 million. Projections indicate that these trends will continue and be on pace as planned for Fiscal Year 2022–23. The worker training schools remain financially strong with healthy reserve levels and support without donor restrictions trending higher than planned levels. Recent enrollment trends at Martin Luther College, however, are concerning, and long-term financial impact is being closely monitored. WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds, and Northwestern Publishing House finished FY22 financially stronger than when they began the year. Projections for Fiscal Year 2022–23 (FY23) are similarly strong with reported increases of reserves without donor restrictions.

The FY24 ministry financial plan of \$101.8 million and FY25 ministry financial plan of \$104.6 million does assume a 0.5 percent increase in CMO and relies on the drawdown of the Financial Stabilization Fund of approximately \$4.0 million and on areas of ministry and schools using \$11.5 million of reserves.

Pastor Matt Brown, chairman  
Teacher Adrian Smith, secretary

**Subject: Potential issues for the next biennium**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 71-95

Report No. 02

Our floor committee has recognized the many blessings the Lord has showered upon us in the last biennium as our first report indicates. Our committee also unanimously and joyfully supports the proposed ministry financial plan for 2023–24 and 2024–25 as our resolution also indicated. We join our brothers and sisters in our synod in prayer for this plan and commit to serve in whatever way we can.

With this report we wish to highlight some potential issues in the next biennium. These were topics that came up in our committee discussion and in our meeting with WELS Chief Financial Officer Kyle Egan. These potential issues do not lessen our support for the plan, but we do want to let the convention know that these were discussed. We are also confident that these issues are being considered in the ministry financial plan for the next biennium.

We discussed inflation as compared to the projected increase in the salary matrix. We also discussed the lower enrollment at Martin Luther College and what that could mean for the financial stability of MLC. It is impossible to predict what the next two years will bring. We know God will continue to do all that he does through the gospel, but what that looks like in our world and in our synod is in his hands.

Our committee was pleased to hear that financial leadership had considered areas of potential uncertainty in the ministry financial plan. The financial and ministry blessings of the past several years seem to indicate continued strong support for our synodical work in the face of many uncertainties. Most importantly the living and enduring Word of God continues to give us confidence moving forward into uncertain times from our perspective but into times that rest securely in the hands of our Savior God. We joyfully commit our work into his hands and ask him to strengthen us for it through Word and sacrament.

Pastor Matt Brown, chairman  
Teacher Adrian Smith, secretary

**Subject: Ministry financial plan (2023–25) FY24/FY25 Biennium**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 71-95

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) the Lord of the Church has blessed our synod with generous financial offerings from congregations and individuals; and
- WHEREAS 2) the Synodical Council (SC) has thoughtfully and prayerfully studied the needs, opportunities, and resources that our gracious God has placed before our synod; and
- WHEREAS 3) the SC has assessed with cautious optimism the expected financial resources available through Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO), the Financial Stabilization Fund, individual gifts, and other sources of revenue; and
- WHEREAS 4) the SC has proposed a sound ministry financial plan for the FY24/FY25 Biennium that strikes a careful balance between expected financial needs and anticipated financial support for the work of the gospel; therefore be it
- Resolved, a) that we adopt the SC's ministry financial plan for the FY24/FY25 Biennium; and be it further
- Resolved, b) that we encourage every congregation and member of WELS to support the gospel ministry entrusted to our synod; and be it finally

Resolved, c) that we ask the Holy Spirit to continue to inspire his people to give as they have been given, in support of our synod's task to hold before the world the good news of Jesus.

Pastor Matt Brown, chairman  
Teacher Adrian Smith, secretary

**ADOPTED**

## Committee #8: Home Missions

### **Subject: General report**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 97-103

Report No. 01

It is the role of the Board for Home Missions (BHM) to coordinate planting of churches and aiding mission-minded congregations in the United States, Canada, and the English-speaking West Indies so that many more people may hear about Christ's love. We are pleased to report the BHM continues to be faithful in its role as it works in coordination with its district mission boards and various mission counselors.

The report of the Board for Home Missions in *Book of Reports and Memorials* (BORAM) appeals to our Savior's commission to "Go" with the promise of his authority, his presence, and the power of his Word and sacraments (Matthew 28:18-20). Our committee would like to underscore our support of the 100 missions in 10 years initiative adopted at the last convention in pursuit of the Great Commission. We do so with the observation that almost 800 of our roughly 1,250 congregations are in just three states: Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan. While there is still much mission work to carry out in these places, we are not nearly so well positioned to proclaim the gospel in other areas of the country with significant and growing populations. This initiative gives us the opportunity to establish more footholds of gospel proclamation where the harvest is increasingly plentiful.

The challenges we face in such a goal are not few. Monetary support and adequate internal operations are a concern. We recognize, as well, the increased challenge this initiative presents for pastoral staffing. Vacancy rates are already high. Opening more missions increases demand. However, it is noteworthy that some congregational consolidations have occurred in places where one larger congregation can do more gospel ministry than two smaller congregations. Should this become a trend, it could allow for the gradual reallocation of more pastors to other fields over the next ten years. We find it encouraging that WELS had more pastors in 2021 (1,388) than we had in 1990 (1,361), the year our membership reached its all-time high. As a church body we want to steward all our resources as wisely as possible.

We are confident the Board for Home Missions is taking these challenges seriously and continues to work diligently to address them. Our encouragement is that we collectively recognize this work does not just involve the BHM but all the people of WELS. In that spirit, pray the Lord would raise up workers for his harvest field, not only that we might reach a goal but that more and more might be won for the kingdom. Pray for the leaders who have been asked to coordinate the effort, that they are given an extra measure of wisdom and strength for the task. Pray that God would stir our hearts to work together selflessly for the extending of God's kingdom, and open our eyes to opportunities new and old to do just that. Finally, pray that the Lord would increase our trust in all his promises.

In accordance with his promises, the Lord of the Church has already blessed the launch of our "100 in 10" initiative. We are delighted to report that, since the publication of BORAM, two of the nine newly approved mission starts have been staffed with graduates from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. As of the writing of this report, one more has been filled through the acceptance of a call from the field. We thank God for this encouraging start and ask him to

continue to provide us with the missionaries, the money, and adequate Home Missions support staff as we proclaim his saving name in North America.

We are thankful for the yeoman's work of Mr. Sean Young, senior director of Missions Operations, and Pastor Mark Gabb, chairman of the Board for Home Missions, on the "100 in 10" initiative during the vacancy of a full-time administrator. We pray that God provide the right man at the right time.

It is with thanks to God that we highlight the support provided by the BHM toward our WELS Campus Ministry as it strives to connect college students from around the world with the life-giving message of the gospel. Additionally, we give thanks to God for the WELS Mission Journeys program as it provides WELS members many and varied opportunities to walk together in the Great Commission.

We are especially grateful to the Lord for the generosity of the Church Extension Fund, which has been an invaluable partner of WELS Home Missions by providing finances and grants to congregations to support and expand gospel ministry.

We also want to acknowledge and ask the Lord's blessing on the BHM's new relationship with Space Together, a service that could prove to be very helpful for both established and mission congregations in their efforts to be wise stewards of their financial and property resources.

Finally, we entrust the results of all our efforts to God alone. Whatever "trophies" he places in our hands, we lay them at his feet and crown him Lord of all.

Pastor David Koelpin, chairman  
Pastor Michael Seifert, secretary

**Subject: Memorial (2023-06) Staffing new missions**

Reference: Unprinted memorial at [welsconvention.net/boram](https://welsconvention.net/boram)  
Report No. 02

The Home Missions Floor Committee reviewed and discussed this memorial. While we appreciate its intent to use our pastoral resources as wisely as possible, we decided against bringing it to the convention floor. In many cases, using manpower and assistance from neighboring congregations in our fellowship to start new missions is not feasible without hindering the ministry of both parties. In cases where it is feasible, we observe that Home Missions is already availing the mission of such help, e.g., Cincinnati, Kronenwetter, Panama City Beach.

Pastor David Koelpin, chairman  
Pastor Michael Seifert, secretary

## Committee #9: World Missions and Joint Mission Council

**Subject: Board for World Missions and Joint Mission Council reports**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 104-110  
Report No. 01

God has certainly continued to bless the work of the Board for World Missions and the Joint Mission Council as the gospel continues to spread in 45 different countries around the world. We ask that God would bless the exploration efforts in the 19 prospective new mission fields. May God continue to find workers to carry out his Great Commission!

We celebrate the work of *Academia Cristo* in expanding our church fellowship in Bolivia, finding ways to use church planters to begin new churches in Central and South America, and effectively using social media to spread the gospel. We rejoice in the doors God has opened to expand ministry through the theological education center in Vietnam, the Apache Christian Training School, a new mission in London, and the Obadiah Lutheran Synod in Uganda. We urge our missionaries to continue in their faithful work as our worldwide fellowship approaches a point where it will surpass the size of our church body in North America!

The Pastoral Studies Institute continues to do important work in training men to spread the gospel in their own unique cultural settings. Twenty-four men are currently enrolled in the program. A new program, formed with the Urban Advisory Board, called the Joshua Urban Ministry Program, is training urban Black men for local urban Black ministry and has formed its first cohort.

We urge churches to consider participating in the WELS Mission Journeys program. This program allows members to experience gospel outreach firsthand and take these skills and experiences back home where they can use them to reach out to their own communities.

Pastor Paul Seager, chairman  
Teacher Matt Linton, secretary

## Committee #10: Ministerial Education

### **Subject: Gratitude for faithful servants**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 111-143  
Report No. 01

We are concerned about parish pastor vacancies in WELS. We are also concerned about vacancies in principal and early childhood director positions. We want to see all classrooms and pulpits filled with qualified pastors and teachers. But amid those concerns, we do not want to forget the tremendous blessings we have in the men and women who are currently serving in our congregations and schools, especially in our ministerial education schools. Their faithfulness to the Word of God and their unqualified subscription to the Lutheran Confessions are gifts from our gracious God, who leads and equips them to serve. We support the effort to arrange a special synodwide recruitment effort. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send more workers into his harvest fields!

Pastor Scott Mosher, chairman  
Teacher Philip Leyrer, secretary

### **Subject: Special opportunities for non-traditional students**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 112,132  
Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS      1) after the Assignment Committee at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary did its work in 2023, there were still 140 vacancies for pastor-trained men synodwide (136 in 2022, 95 in 2021, 87 in 2020); and after the Assignment Committee at Martin Luther College did its work in 2023, there were still 158 vacancies for teacher-trained men and women synodwide (at least 140 at this time in 2022, 90 in 2021, 50 in 2020); and
- WHEREAS      2) both Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Martin Luther College have increased their support for non-traditional students; and

WHEREAS 3) Martin Luther College is constructing a new competency-based education program for the certification of non-traditional students; therefore be it

Resolved, that the delegates of the 2023 synod convention encourage WELS members with degrees in other fields to consider training for the ministry of the gospel.

Pastor Scott Mosher, chairman  
Teacher Philip Leyrer, secretary

**ADOPTED**

## Committee #11: Congregational Services A (Congregational Counseling, Discipleship, Evangelism)

**Subject: Congregational Services A (Congregational Counseling, Discipleship, Evangelism)**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 29-36; [welsconvention.net/boram](https://welsconvention.net/boram)—Supplemental Report Congregational Counseling, Supplemental Report Commission on Adult Discipleship, and Supplemental Report Commission on Evangelism  
Report No. 01

WELS Congregational Services exists to encourage and equip congregations for faithful and fruitful gospel ministry. Our committee reviewed the work of Congregational Counseling, Discipleship, and Evangelism.

We thank the Lord for the many and varied resources that these commissions have provided to our congregations. We recognize and give thanks for the diligent work of those who lead these commissions: Director Jonathan Hein of Congregational Services, Director Donn Dobberstein of Discipleship, and Director Eric Roecker of Evangelism. We also wish to thank Pastor Adam Mueller who was an original member of the Commission on Congregational Counseling and has termed out after a decade of service. We thank these men for their faithful service. We also offer a hearty “thank you” to all the support staff and volunteers who work in these areas of service to support our congregations.

The committee marveled over the many and varied programs that Congregational Counseling has assembled to help congregations with their ministries. One example is Congregational Counseling’s Merging for Mission Program (M4M). We recognize the need for this program. As the Congregational Counseling supplemental report points out, there are statistical trends in church attendance, births and baptisms, new adult members received, school enrollment numbers, and demographic changes (cf. the foreseen “enrollment cliff”), that will require congregations and schools to make critical decisions. Having the assistance of district and synodical people and programs will aid in making wise decisions. One of the members of our committee is currently seeing the results of congregations merging in his hometown. He described how Congregational Counseling steps in and helps when there is a question or a problem. We note with approval that “one component” of the synod’s updated long-range plan “will be the launch of a program that supports congregations in geographic proximity as they consider if their ministry efforts might be strengthened through cooperation or even consolidation” (BORAM, p. 54). Since this already seems to be working and is part of the plans for the future, we pray that Congregational Counseling has the resources that it needs to effectively carry out this program. We welcome and give thanks to God for the addition of Mr. Dan Nommensen to the Congregational Services staff to help coordinate this work.

The positive and uplifting reports of Congregational Counseling were also mirrored in the reports for Discipleship and Evangelism. We encourage the delegates to become familiar with the many programs and resources described in the reports (e.g. Everyone Outreach). The committee encourages the delegates to draw attention to this



information in your home congregation and in neighboring congregations. We also encourage laymen, pastors, and teachers to subscribe to and receive information from the Congregational Services website. The website address is **welscongregationalservices.net**. The committee notes with joy that a great many of the resources from Congregational Counseling, Discipleship, and Evangelism (not to mention the other commissions of Congregational Services) are free of charge. We further encourage congregations to appoint someone (or more than one someone) to study these resources and advocate for them in their congregation as opportunities and needs arise.

We pray that the Lord of the Church continue to bless Congregational Services as the commissions seek to provide necessary resources for our congregations and their ministries.

Pastor Benjamin Tomczak, chairman

Pastor John Sprain, secretary

## Committee #12: Congregational Services B (Worship, Special Ministries)

### **Subject: Special Ministries and Worship**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 29-36; online supplemental reports for Special Ministries and Worship  
Report No. 01

Our floor committee notes the retirement of Rev. Jim Behringer as director of Commission on Special Ministries and thanks him for his faithful service in this area. We also pray that Rev. Joel Gaertner's leadership as the new director continues the important task of sharing the gospel with anyone and everyone despite any challenge or obstacle. It is heartening to see the compassion in action that Special Ministries leads and encourages.

Our floor committee gave considerable discussion to the new hymnal. We first of all want to acknowledge the massive amount of work that was put into the hymnal and thank project director Michael Schultz, the nearly 100 volunteers, and the staff at Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) for their commitment and effort. Our committee expresses appreciation especially for the vast resources available, the Service Builder program, and the options for the psalms.

We discussed the implementation of the new hymnal in the congregations of our committee members. Not all the congregations represented in our committee are using the new hymnal, but the majority of them are, whether that means using the services in their entirety or introducing elements from the services. The following comments were noted. The services and music of the new hymnal seem to require a high level of musicianship and significant preparation, with some items seeming to require a concert-level ability to do well. That is not necessarily a bad thing, but we could see congregations with fewer musical resources having some struggles. Simplified accompaniments may be welcome for some congregations. Some members have found it difficult to sing some of the psalms, chants, and other liturgical parts. The books for musicians are cumbersome to transport and to use. Perhaps there could be a different organization of material to ease in playing for worship. With those comments noted, the committee does not mean to disparage the project or the finished product. The committee thanks the hymnal project participants for a wealth of resources and the beauty of what they have brought together.

Finally, our floor committee discussed an unprinted memorial (2023-05) regarding WELS' heritage of worship. Committee members confirmed the accuracy of the memorial's whereas statements, and the committee agreed to bring the memorial to the floor of the synod convention. It was noted that some of the translation work proposed

in the memorial has been done already by a Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) source. Our committee explored how much might need to be translated and how much a project like this might cost for a paid translator to do the work. Based on information gained from a man who has professionally translated materials for the LCMS, a rough estimate puts the project at 150,000 words at a potential cost of \$12,000 to \$15,000 if a translator charged full price to do the work. That estimate may be highly exaggerated based on certain factors (how much material is already translated and publicly available, how much a translator is going to charge, whether or not someone might take on the work at a reduced rate or even pro bono, etc.); however, our committee felt it was important to make the voters aware of a potential cost with this resolution.

Pastor Bart Brauer, chairman

Teacher Michael Koestler, secretary

**Subject: WELS' heritage of worship**

Reference: Unprinted Memorial (2023-05) on the convention website

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) 2023 is the quincentennial of Dr. Martin Luther's publication of *Ordenung Gottis Diensts Ynn Der Gemeyne* ("Order of Divine Service in the Congregation," *Luther's Works* 53:9–14) and the beginning of the evangelical reform of worship; and
- WHEREAS 2) the *Ordenung Gottis Diensts* is substantively reflected in the *Gottesdienst-Ordnung* of the first Wisconsin Synod *Agende* of 1896; and
- WHEREAS 3) 2024 will be the quincentennial of Dr. Martin Luther's publication of the first evangelical hymnal, *Etlich Cristlich lider*; and
- WHEREAS 4) the chorales in *Etlich Christlich lider* are contained in the first Wisconsin Synod hymnal, *Evang.-Lutherisches Gesangbuch* of 1870; and
- WHEREAS 5) neither the Wisconsin Synod's *Agende* of 1896 nor its *Evang.-Lutherisches Gesangbuch* of 1872 (a correction of the 1870 edition) have been fully translated and published in English; therefore be it
- Resolved, that the synod in convention commission the translation and publication in English of the *Agende* of 1896 and *Gesangbuch* of 1872 for posterity, academic interest, and in thanksgiving to God for our 500-year heritage of evangelical worship.

Pastor Bart Brauer, chairman

Teacher Michael Koestler, secretary

**DEFEATED**

## Committee #13: Congregational Services C (Lutheran Schools)

**Subject: Lutheran Schools**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 29-41

Report No. 01



WELS has seen record growth in the last biennium in its early childhood, elementary, and high school ministries. We thank the Lord for placing these souls in our care and giving us the opportunity to help them better know their Savior. It is our strong encouragement to all congregations and federations with schools to examine all the opportunities the Lord has given them and have a harvest strategy to connect those families with the gospel. We praise him for allowing us to serve in these opportunities to faithfully share the means of grace.

The growth in our WELS schools has been a tremendous blessing, but it has also led to some challenges in filling classrooms with the necessary teachers. The first challenge is that Martin Luther College is experiencing a strong decline in enrollment. We are thankful that 220 inactive teachers have returned to the classroom and that 211 secular education degree teachers have been given provisional calls to teach in our schools with the intent that they will enroll in the synod certification program. But this has still not given us enough teachers.

The second challenge is that the number of teachers that have graduated from MLC has not kept up with the number of teachers who are leaving, either by retirement, death, or resignation. A task force has been formed to examine these and other challenges in our attempts to maintain a healthy educational program for our children. This task force has been examining the number of teacher resignations we have seen over the years. They have also reported some of the things that have been implemented to reduce this number. A program to assign new MLC graduates with a mentor in their area to encourage and strengthen the young teacher's ministry has been successful. Exit interviews with teachers who have resigned have been conducted to see why the resignation took place and to see if there was any way that this could have been prevented.

Congregational Services is also developing a program to help congregations strengthen the relationship between congregation and school to ensure a healthy relationship between the two. We applaud the work of the task force as they strive to encourage young people to consider the teaching ministry and as they strive to retain the teachers we have and, when necessary, to strive to regain those who have left the teaching ministry. We want to thank them for their service and we will continue to pray that this task force will be guided by the Lord's wisdom to make changes that will help grow the number of teachers for our WELS schools. We also want to pray that the hearts and minds of our current students would consider a career in the full-time called ministry.

A task force has been formed to help guide our synod and schools on the topic of Identity, Gender, and Sexuality. This task force along with visiting teams being formed will work with our synod and its schools to help navigate this extremely sensitive topic/culture that surrounds us. We want to extend our thanks for those serving on this task force working through difficult situations.

Congregational Services, along with Lutheran Schools, is working on a Leaders Reflection Program to help congregations and schools foster a stronger church and school culture. Making sure the church and school are on the same page is pivotal to a successful ministry culture. Please feel free to reach out to synod offices to see if a team may be able to work with your ministry in building cohesive church and school goals and objectives.

The Conference of Presidents has called Ms. Melanie Giddings to be the curriculum coordinator of the Commission on Lutheran Schools. She is a synodically-trained teacher with curriculum and instruction expertise and commitment. Melanie will serve as the person coordinating the efforts in the development of a framework and unifying curriculum to meet the varied needs of WELS schools and the students they serve to advance the gospel ministry. Thank you, Melanie, and may the Lord be with you on this new call for WELS.

We want to thank all those who are serving on task forces mentioned above and pray that the Lord of the church will bless their efforts and grant them wisdom to help make the changes necessary to grow the holy Christian church, while using our WELS schools to assist in this growth process.

Ephesians 3:20: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

Teacher Dave Gartner, chairman  
Teacher Stephen Kamps, secretary

# Committee #14: Support Services

**Subject: Technology Services**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 60-63

Report No. 01

The WELS Technology team's primary calling is to connect gospel-sharers with the available technologies to better assist in the spread of the gospel. Its work encompasses many service areas including web services and software. This report focuses on the work in the area of information services. We are thankful for the synod creating a new security analyst position and promoting Mr. Aaron Hopefl to that position. This position allows for regular analysis and assistance in the work to keep a secure environment. Looking ahead and being aware of the constant need to be vigilant, the Information Services team will seek out two new vendors for software licensing and a new password management solution. We have been blessed that our synod has not seen a tremendous amount of security breaches, and we pray that this new position and future licensing will continue to mitigate this.

Pastor David Barkow, chairman

Teacher Scott Stevenson, secretary

**Subject: Financial Services**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 64,65

Report No. 02

Financial Services prepares and provides accounting and financial information that support and serve WELS ministries. It provides numerous services to many areas of ministry. Its work in monitoring the support forecast and ministry financial plan for fiscal year 2023 has been done well despite challenging economic times. This provides stability and confidence to our synod and its work. We also thank Financial Services for its continued work on developing a ministry financial plan, as well as its work investigating new approaches to developing and financing major capital projects at our four ministerial education schools.

Pastor David Barkow, chairman

Teacher Scott Stevenson, secretary

**Subject: Human Resources**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 65,66

Report No. 03

Human Resources oversees the personnel functions for synod personnel. We are thankful that the Lord has provided our Human Resources department with many layworkers who have staffed key positions throughout this last year. Human Resources continues to train and educate congregational leadership in the use of the Called Worker Compensation Calculator. This continues to be a blessing to our congregations throughout our synod. Human Resources also continues to bless our congregations by providing them with human resources support.

Pastor David Barkow, chairman

Teacher Scott Stevenson, secretary

**Subject: Facility Services**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 66,67

Report No. 04

Facility Services provides support for ministries carried out at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. The building, grounds, and equipment of the facility are considered to be in good to excellent condition. A roofing project was completed in April 2022. Other upcoming care includes sealcoating the parking lot and removing/replacing some pavers. We are thankful for the synod's good stewardship and planning by directing a portion of rents paid by WELS' subsidiaries and WELS' affiliate to a WELS building fund.

Pastor David Barkow, chairman  
Teacher Scott Stevenson, secretary

## Committee #15: Subsidiaries and Benefit Plans

### **Subject: WELS Historical Institute**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 145-147

Report No. 01

The committee wishes to thank all those past and present who have been involved in the preservation of our WELS history through the work of WELS Historical Institute. We note the service of Dr. Joel Pless who served on the board for 17 years and chairman for four years. Since WELS Historical Institute is self-funded through membership dues, gifts, and memorials, the committee would encourage the membership of WELS to consider the wide variety of ways they can support WELS Historical Institute, including membership in the institute, monetary gifts, donation of items for WELS Archives, tours of the WELS museum at Salem Lutheran Landmark Church, and making use of its online presence at its website and on Facebook.

Together with those currently involved with WELS Historical Institute, the committee notes these items, first of all, as they look back:

- A celebration was held on Sept. 25, 2021, at Salem Lutheran Church in Milwaukee to mark the 40th anniversary of WELS Historical Institute.
- A celebration was held on July 10, 2022, at St. John's on the Hillside, the historic church in downtown Milwaukee, to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Synodical Conference. A presentation was given by Pastor Peter Prange on the founding of the Synodical Conference, which can be found on the new WELS Historical Institute website, [welshistoricalinstitute.org](http://welshistoricalinstitute.org).

Then we and WELS Historical Institute look ahead:

- The goal of WELS Historical Institute is to “completely restore to its 1863 appearance” Salem Lutheran Landmark Church in time for the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Lutheran Church [presentation of the Augsburg Confession] on June 25, 2030. The institute is raising funds to replace the flat roof on the former Salem School, which is attached to Salem Landmark Church.
- The institute is gearing up to have several special events in connection to the 175th anniversary of the founding of WELS.
- Three lectures on historical topics are scheduled for August, September, and October 2023.
- A new pictorial history of WELS and accompanying video are planned for WELS' 175th anniversary. All members of WELS are invited to submit historical pictures of people, buildings, events, and ministry activities for consideration in these projects.

Pastor Geoff Cortright, chairman  
Teacher Michael Henning, secretary

**Subject: WELS Foundation, Inc.**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 149-151

Report No. 02

Millions of dollars were distributed through WELS Foundation, Inc., the past two years to WELS congregations and institutions. This didn't happen by chance. This subsidiary works hard to "provide, direct, channel, and manage funds for religious, charitable, and educational purposes consistent with the principles of the synod." What vital work! In order to keep this from being one of WELS' "best kept secrets," as past convention proceedings have noted, we encourage delegates to become informed and communicate this shrewd stewardship opportunity with congregants.

Individual donors of major assets may gift them in tax-wise ways through WELS Foundation. They may utilize an endowment, donor-advised funds, charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, and other strategies that are available.

Pastor Geoff Cortright, chairman

Teacher Michael Henning, secretary

**Subject: WELS Investment Funds, Inc.**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 151,152

Report No. 03

WELS Investment Funds provides cost-effective, professionally managed investment portfolios exclusively for WELS congregations and WELS-affiliated ministries. The committee was encouraged by these details:

- Since the inception of WELS Investment Funds, the expense ratios have gone down from about 0.5 percent to about 0.3 percent. The more dollars under management, the lower these fees may become.
- In the past two years, the flow of money into WELS Investment Funds has been approximately \$5 million greater than the flow of money out of the funds.
- WELS Investment Funds is operated and governed by people who have a tremendous amount of experience in the world of finance and investing. The experience they bring is truly a blessing from God to the people they serve.
- While some WELS ministries may be able to manage their own investments, many congregations depend on the knowledge and expertise of WELS Investment Funds to set up and manage an investment portfolio on their behalf.

With greater participation from WELS ministries, WELS Investment Funds can become an even more impactful source of ongoing financial support to carry out the mission of the church.

Pastor Geoff Cortright, chairman

Teacher Michael Henning, secretary

**Subject: WELS Benefit Plans**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 153-156

Report No. 04

We thank God for the Retirement and VEBA Commissions' faithful service supporting workers and ministry. We're especially thankful for the smooth transition from the WELS Pension Plan, which was frozen Dec. 31, 2021, to the new defined contribution plan (Shepherd Plan) and, in particular, the Retirement Program Commission's communication to organizations and their workers during the transition. The commission reports that all calling bodies have joined the Shepherd Plan, and all called workers serving at least half time have Shepherd Plan accounts.

We're thankful for the ongoing efforts of Benefit Plans to "strike the best balance between acceptable costs to calling bodies and meaningful benefits to participants." We note with thanksgiving that there were no VEBA Plan rate increases for 2021 and 2022, that Pension Plan rates have remained unchanged since 2020, and that there was a 12 percent reduction in administration fees paid by Shepherd Plan participants effective July 1, 2023. We are also thankful for enhanced VEBA Plan benefits, including coverage of eligible costs at 100 percent to diagnose COVID-19, coverage of eligible costs for telehealth consultations with health care providers, protection of members

from “surprise” balance billing for care obtained at certain out-of-network providers, and the extension of certain timeframes for requesting special enrollment and filing claims.

We encourage Benefits Plans in their planned efforts to engage participants and communicate investment options and planning resources to workers to help workers meet their financial goals for retirement. We encourage all calling bodies to timely report call status changes to WELS so that workers receive the correct contributions. We encourage all calling bodies to participate in the VEBA Plan and offer Plan coverage to all eligible workers.

Pastor Geoff Cortright, chairman  
Teacher Michael Henning, secretary

**Subject: WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 147,148  
Report No. 05

WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF) exists to provide loans and grants for mission congregations under the direction of the WELS Board for Home Missions (BHM) and to provide loans for self-supporting congregations for ministry expansion purposes. Since its inception CEF has played a critical role in new mission starts and will continue to play a critical role in the BHM’s “100 in 10” church planting initiative. Our committee notes with thanksgiving the special grants given towards BHM of \$1.6 million, \$1.7 million, and \$1.1 million in Fiscal Years 2022, 2021, and 2020 respectively and \$2.1 million this current Fiscal Year (2023). These grants account for 20 to 25 percent of BHM’s operating budget on average over the last four fiscal years. Our committee also notes CEF’s matching grants program to mission congregations towards the downpayment for an initial land purchase (4 to 1) or new facility construction project (2 to 1), as well as for an existing facility purchase. CEF’s generosity is making a real difference to our missions!

As explained to us, CEF balances these grants with an emphasis on maintaining positive operational results. It does this to uphold its fiduciary responsibility towards investors, avoiding lending risk, which could result in compromising their future ability to lend. Since CEF reports to federal and state securities commissioners in 47 states, they must maintain a disciplined approach to granting loans to mission congregations and self-supporting congregations capable of repaying these mortgages.

In performing due diligence for this convention, our committee interviewed 30 individuals regarding CEF’s work, with an eye looking forward to the “100 in 10,” including eight home mission pastors with direct experience in applying for a loan with CEF. We observed from all sides that few WELS pastors, home missionaries, and laypeople have expertise in the ability to work in the complex world of commercial real estate lending. This may be termed a “knowledge gap” that often creates a steep learning curve for these home missionaries and lay leaders in missions. Mission pastors asked for more guidance and information than is currently available in applying for loans with CEF. CEF leaders stressed to our committee the importance for district mission boards and mission congregations to approach CEF with questions and seek input as early as possible in the process to avoid delays or challenges.

Our interviewees shared a range of solutions with us, all of which seek better communication and a greater realization that CEF works as a mission partner with Home Missions and the mission congregations it serves. Our committee would like to highlight just three ideas that kept recurring during our interviews of home missionaries.

1. Requesting preparatory site visits by CEF loan officers to help CEF understand a mission’s context in the real estate market, coach mission congregations towards a successful loan application, and build a spirit of mission partnership.
2. Providing online video tutorials on the CEF website or providing an online course to give congregations more detailed information regarding the loan application process as a starting point for information.
3. Identifying a person or position that could serve as a mission counselor for real estate with a focus on coaching mission congregations through the loan application, land acquisition, and building processes. Such a position would supplement the current mission counselor program serving our home missions congregations who coach missions on outreach strategies. Our committee heard input that this would be an ideal position for a layperson with commercial real estate experience.

Our committee, therefore, encourages the leaders of CEF and BHM to seek ways to dialogue on these items listed above. Our committee wants everyone in WELS to see that CEF serves as a critical mission partner to the “100 in



10" church planting initiative and encourages WELS members to support CEF through their investments aimed to support our mission churches.

Pastor Geoff Cortright, chairman  
Teacher Michael Henning, secretary

## Committee #16: Northwestern Publishing House and Publication Coordinating Commission

**Subject: General thanksgiving**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 156-159  
Report No. 01

We thank Northwestern Publishing and its staff for their continued commitment to providing sound doctrinal material that is relevant to the lives of people who belong to our congregations and are enrolled in our schools. These materials are helpful for pastors and teachers, congregations, schools, and individual Christians, all who seek to grow in their faith and knowledge of God's Word and help others do the same.

Pastor Korey Van Kampen, chairman  
Teacher Paul Patterson, secretary

**Subject: *Christian Worship* hymnal**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 157  
Report No. 02

We commend Northwestern Publishing House for its work in getting *Christian Worship* and its accompanying resources assembled and published and give thanks to God that 70 percent of congregations have already invested in this hymnal and resources for their worship life. Thanks are also given to all who worked on the Hymnal Project in ways great and small from start to finish. Their time and labor in the Lord is deeply appreciated.

Pastor Korey Van Kampen, chairman  
Teacher Paul Patterson, secretary

**Subject: Eclectic Bible translation options in *Christian Worship: Service Builder***

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 157  
Report No. 03

While it was not mentioned in their printed report, we also commend Northwestern Publishing House for pursuing grant funding to include an eclectic approach for the lectionary portion of *Christian Worship: Service Builder*. This application is intended to streamline and simplify the production of worship folders for pastors and church staff. Having multiple Bible translation options (NIV11, CSB, ESV, EHV) to use for Scripture readings within the application would greatly assist in achieving that goal. NPH is pursuing approximately \$35,000 in grant money for this project. If the grant is awarded, the resource could be available by the start of the new church year in November 2023. We pray for God's blessing on this effort.

Pastor Korey Van Kampen, chairman  
Teacher Paul Patterson, secretary

# Committee #17:

## WELS Christian Aid and Relief

### **Subject: Report on Christian Aid and Relief**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 58-60

Report No. 01

WELS Christian Aid and Relief partners with WELS Home and World Missions to support humanitarian aid that delivers basic needs to people in our mission fields all around the world. These efforts are funded through special gifts of God's people in WELS and help to build trusting relationships that lead to opportunities to share the good news of our Savior.

With thanksgiving to God for his work through his people, the committee notes the following items:

- A Disaster Relief Task Force was formed in October 2021 and continues to research best practices for carrying out disaster relief. The task force is currently creating a disaster management system and training process to provide well-trained leaders and volunteers for safe and effective disaster relief deployments. The goal is to roll out this program to the entire synod by the end of 2026.
- In November 2022, Christian Aid and Relief launched **welsdisasterrelief.net** to better manage volunteer information, communicate with volunteers, and connect volunteers to opportunities to serve in Jesus' name.
- Christian Aid and Relief Commission members stand ready to preach and present on their work to WELS congregations and are currently scheduled for 17 presentations in 2023. Contact WELS Christian Aid and Relief to request a speaker.

We encourage all WELS congregations to publicize and promote the work of WELS Christian Aid and Relief and we encourage all members of our synod to support this ministry of compassion with their prayers, generous offerings, and volunteer support. We thank outgoing members Pastors Bruce Marggraf and Richard Warnecke for their faithful service on the WELS Christian Aid and Relief Commission and Pastor Robert Hein for his 12 years of service as chairman. We pray for God's blessings on Pastor Thomas Spiegelberg who began a four-year term of service as chairman on July 1, 2022.

Pastor Joel Seifert, chairman

Teacher Peter Lemke, secretary

# Committee #18:

## Constitutional Matters

### **Subject: Synod Bylaws, Conventions (Section 3.00): Time and Place**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 161,162

Resolution No. 01

WHEREAS 1) the ministerial education schools that ordinarily host conventions—Luther Preparatory School, Martin Luther College, and Michigan Lutheran Seminary—routinely also have other activities on their campus in early August; and

WHEREAS 2) these schools do not ordinarily host these activities during the last full week of July; therefore be it  
Resolved, that the delegates of the 2023 synod convention approve the proposed revisions in Section 3.00 (a) of the Synod Bylaws.

Pastor Daniel Balge, chairman  
Pastor Nathan Berg, secretary

### ADOPTED

#### **Subject: Synod Bylaws, Publishing (Section 6.00): Publication Coordinating Commission**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 162

Resolution No. 02

WHEREAS 1) the Publication Coordinating Commission has not functioned for some time; and  
WHEREAS 2) the work of coordinating and prioritizing synodical publications is being done by other entities; therefore be it  
Resolved, that the delegates of the 2023 synod convention approve the deletion of Section 6.00 of the Synod Bylaws.

Pastor Daniel Balge, chairman  
Pastor Nathan Berg, secretary

### ADOPTED

#### **Subject: Synod and District Bylaws, Discipline and Appeals**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 162-168

Resolution No. 03

WHEREAS 1) modern communication allows for shorter time periods for notification of an appeal; and  
WHEREAS 2) the current bylaws do not set time periods for notification of a disciplinary action and notification of an appeal; and  
WHEREAS 3) in current parlance "suspension" ordinarily implies a temporary punitive action, but a disciplinary action is permanent; and  
WHEREAS 4) current bylaws make no specific mention of how discipline is to be carried out as it pertains to WELS-affiliated ministries and those serving them; and  
WHEREAS 5) current bylaws do not define in detail the authority granted to the district and synod Board of Appeals; and  
WHEREAS 6) under the proposed bylaw revisions the word "suspend" is retained in only one place, Section 8.00 (c); and  
WHEREAS 7) the phrase in the proposed revisions of Section 8.10 (e d), Section 8.30 (e d), and Article XXII Section 3 4, which reads in all three: "with a copy forwarded," could be misconstrued to mean a copy of "all correspondence and documentary evidence relative to a disciplinary action together with a summary report" of the action of a Board of Appeals; therefore be it  
Resolved, a) that the delegates of the 2023 synod convention adopt the additional revision of changing the word "suspend" in Section 8.00 (c) to "remove"; and be it further  
Resolved, b) that the delegates of the 2023 synod convention adopt the change of the phrase "with a copy forwarded" in the proposed revisions of Section 8.10 (e d), Section 8.30 (e d), and Article XXII Section 3 4, to "with a copy of a summary report forwarded"; and be it finally



Resolved. c) that the delegates of the 2023 synod convention approve the proposed revisions to Sections 8.00 through 8.60 of the Synod Bylaws and Articles XXI through XXV of the District Bylaws with the emendations described in Resolved a) and Resolved b).

Pastor Daniel Balge, chairman  
Pastor Nathan Berg, secretary

**ADOPTED**

## Committee #19: Elections

**Subject: Elections**

Report No. 01

**President of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod**

Rev. Mark Schroeder

**Second Vice President of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod**

Rev. Joel Voss

**Board for World Missions, member (laymen)**

Mr. Arlin Bornschlegl

Mr. Mark Schulz

**Board for Ministerial Education, chairman (parish pastor)**

Rev. Duane Rodewald

**Board for Ministerial Education, member (layman)**

Mr. Paul Hahm

Mr. Brian Scheele

Mr. Dean Waldschmidt

**Board for Ministerial Education, member (teacher or staff minister from a Lutheran high school)**

Mr. Gerald Zeamer

**Board for Ministerial Education, member (teacher or staff minister from the Michigan, Minnesota, Northern Wisconsin, Southeastern Wisconsin, or Western Wisconsin districts)**

Mr. Daniel Markgraf

**Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Governing Board, chairman (parish pastor)**

Rev. Jonathan Scharf

**Michigan Lutheran Seminary Governing Board, chairman (parish pastor)**

Rev. Andrew Retberg

**Luther Preparatory School Governing Board, chairman (parish pastor)**

Rev. Timothy Spaude

**Commission on Congregational Counseling, chairman (pastor, teacher, staff minister, or layman)**

Rev. David Scharf

**Commission on Discipleship, chairman (pastor, teacher, staff minister, or layman)**

Rev. John Boggs

**Commission on Special Ministries, chairman (pastor, teacher, staff minister, or layman)**

Rev. Steven Wagenknecht

**Commission on Worship, chairman (pastor, teacher, staff minister, or layman)**

Rev. Michael Schultz

**Board of Appeals, member (pastor)**

Rev. David Rosenau

**Board of Appeals, member (layman)**

Mr. Jonathan Hood

Pastor Scott Schwertfeger, chairman

Teacher Joel Grulke, secretary

# 2023 memorial disposition

Memorial	Subject	Author	Committee	Disposition	Reference
2023-01	Statement on critical theory and social justice	Dr. Philip V. Hahn, Madison, Ala.	#2 Conference of Presidents	Addressed in a committee resolution	Resolution 02-03
2023-02	Reevaluation of the call process	Mr. Paul Taylor, Baltimore, Md.	#2 Conference of Presidents	Addressed in a committee report	Report 02-GR-04
2023-03	Informal doctrinal discussions with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod	Pastor Paul Meitner, Winthrop, Minn.	#3 Inter-Church Relations	Addressed in a committee resolution	Resolution 03-03
2023-04	Artificial Intelligence and the church	Mr. Daniel G. Baker, Milwaukee, Wis.	#2 Conference of Presidents	Addressed in a committee report	Report 02-GR-05
2023-05	WELS' heritage of worship	Mr. David G. Moseley, Warrens, Wis.	#12 Congregational Services B	Addressed in a committee resolution	Resolution 12-01
2023-06	Staffing new missions	Rosebud Circuit Delegate Conference, Nebraska District	#8 Home Missions	Addressed in a committee report	Report 08-GR-02



# Revisions to the WELS Bylaws

The 2023 synod in convention passed the following revisions to the WELS Bylaws (see the report of the Constitutional Matters Floor Committee, pp. 47-49 of this book). Additions are underlined. Deletions are indicated by a strikethrough. These bylaw changes were recommended by the Conference of Presidents and the Office of the President. Background rationale is provided for each recommended change. Only those areas of the bylaws recommended for change and adopted by the 2023 synod convention delegates are included here; those not being amended are not printed in this recommendation but can be found in the synod Constitution and Bylaws if reference is needed. For a complete, updated copy of the WELS Constitution and Bylaws, visit [wels.net/about-wels/synod-reports](https://wels.net/about-wels/synod-reports) or contact the President's Office at 414-256-3202 for a printed copy.

## Recommendation #1

*Background: The ministerial education schools suggest the change. Conventions that begin on the last Monday in July sometimes continue into August, when there are routine activities beginning the school year on the three campuses that normally host conventions. Scheduling the synod convention a week earlier in those cases would be helpful.*

## Synod Bylaws

### CONVENTIONS

#### Section 3.00

#### Conventions: Time and Place

(a) Regular conventions of the synod as described in the constitution shall be held in odd-numbered years. Conventions shall be scheduled ~~from Monday through Friday, if necessary, starting the last Monday~~ during the last full week in July.

## Recommendation #2

*Background: The Publication Coordinating Commission has not functioned for some time. The work of coordinating and prioritizing synodical publications has been done by other entities such as the Commission on Congregational Services and Northwestern Publishing House. Removing this commission will not hinder the work of coordinating and prioritizing synodical publications, with the result that the commission no longer needs to be included in the bylaws and required to be a part of the synod's structure.*

## Synod Bylaws

### PUBLISHING

#### Section 6.88

#### Publication Coordinating Commission

(a) There shall be a Publication Coordinating Commission that shall coordinate and prioritize the publishing (pre-press, production, marketing, distribution, analysis, and inventory control) and media production of the synod's boards, commissions, and Northwestern Publishing House.

(b) The commission shall evaluate the needs for Christian literature and media tools in congregations, schools, and homes, and recommend to appropriate synod agencies the development of such resources.

(c) The Publication Coordinating Commission fund supports the commission's work. The commission shall administer the fund. All major expenditures from the fund shall be approved in advance by the executive committee of the Synodical Council.

(d) The commission shall be chaired by a member appointed by the synod president. The synod president, in consultation with the appropriate board, shall appoint the following members to the commission: one member

from Northwestern Publishing House, one member from each area of ministry, and three at-large members. Appointments shall be for a term of four years, with no limit on the number of terms served.

(c) The director of communications shall be an advisory member of the commission. Additional advisory members may be appointed by the chairman as necessary. The commission shall report to the Synodical Council through the president or his designee.

### Recommendation #3

*Background: While the sum and substance of the proposed bylaws is the same as our current bylaws, the following changes have been made:*

*1) In many cases, we are proposing that notification time periods be shortened from 60 days to 30 days. In an age of instant communication, it seems unnecessary to allow the possibility of two months to go by before conveying information that deeply impacts people and organizations. We have also attempted to set and define a reasonable period of time for notifying individuals and groups of a discipline action that has been carried out—7 days, and for forwarding appeals requests to the proper appeals board—5 days.*

*2) In the proposed bylaws, the words “suspend” and “suspension” have been replaced with “remove” and “removal.” In our current culture, the idea of a suspension would seem to imply a temporary punitive action. When a student is suspended from school, it is for a set period of time with the expectation that the student will be returning to school when the suspension period has been “served.” In the discipline actions described in our church body’s bylaws, the disciplinary action, generally speaking, is for cause. It could be misleading to speak of a suspension if the word itself conveys a temporary situation. We believe that using the words “remove” and “removal” conveys a definitive and permanent action. At the same time, the use of these words does not negate the possibility of an appeal by the party under discipline.*

*3) Our current bylaws make no specific mention of how discipline is to be carried out as it pertains to WELS-affiliated ministries and those serving in them. (For examples of such ministries and organizations, please see the “Affiliate ministries” section of the most recent WELS Yearbook.) While it may be assumed that the same guidelines that govern all other cases of discipline would be applied to these affiliate ministries, good order would seem to dictate that we make specific mention of them in the bylaws as we do other groups such as boards and missionaries.*

*4) We have spelled out in more detail the authority granted to the district and synod Boards of Appeals. The current bylaws say that the boards may “require such testimony that in its judgment is relevant.” We have sought to clarify this by saying that each board has the right to “. . . conduct interviews and to request additional information from anyone it deems to be connected to the matter.”*

*5) All other changes are rather minor in nature. There are places where wording is dropped or placed in another subsection (or article) of these bylaws.*

## Synod Bylaws

### DISCIPLINE AND APPEALS

#### Section 8.00

#### **Jurisdiction and Procedure in Removal of Synod Elected and Appointed Officers; Board, Commission, and Committee Members; Ministries; and Church-Affiliated Organizations**

(a) In the case of the synod president, the first and second vice presidents with the concurrence of the Conference of Presidents and the Synodical Council may ~~suspend~~ remove the president from his office ~~with pay~~. The president shall have ~~60~~ 30 days thereafter to appeal this ~~suspension~~ removal. ~~If there is no appeal within the appeal period, the action shall be final, and the president is removed from office. If he appeals, the appeal will be heard by the Synod Board of Appeals. If he appeals, the appeal is initially submitted to the acting synod president, who shall, within five days of receipt, forward the appeal to the Synod Board of Appeals.~~

(b) In the case of the synod first and second vice presidents and the recording secretary, the president with the concurrence of the other two elected officers, the Conference of Presidents, and the Synodical Council may ~~suspend~~ remove another officer from his office ~~with pay~~. The officer shall have ~~60~~ 30 days thereafter to appeal this ~~suspension~~ removal. ~~If there is no appeal within the appeal period, the action shall be final, and the officer is removed from office. If he appeals, the appeal will be heard by the Synod Board of Appeals. If he appeals, the appeal is initially submitted to the synod president, who shall, within five days of receipt, forward the appeal to the Synod Board of Appeals.~~

~~(c) In the case of removal from office of synod board, commission, or committee member: the board commission or committee may suspend remove a member from his position, and he shall be notified in writing of this action within 30 days. The member shall have 30 days thereafter to appeal this removal. If there is no appeal within 60 days thereafter, the action shall be final, and the member is removed from office. If he appeals, the appeal will be heard by the Synod Board of Appeals. The decision of the Synod Board of Appeals shall be the final disposition of the matter. If he appeals, the appeal is initially submitted to the synod president, who shall, within five days of receipt, forward the appeal to the Synod Board of Appeals.~~

(d) In the case of ministries and affiliated ministries whose ministries cross district lines or which serve the broader synod, oversight of doctrine and practice is the initial responsibility of the praesidium of the district in which the headquarters of the organization is located, and, ultimately, with the Conference of Presidents.

(e) In all cases of removal, the responsible entity shall provide written confirmation to the individual or group removed within seven days of removal. Any removal requires the cessation of all duties and responsibilities while the appeal process, if any, is being carried out. The responsible entity shall report the removal to the synod via the call report and other appropriate means of communication.

~~(d) (f) The conduct of the review shall rest solely with the discretion of the Synod Board of Appeals. The board shall have the right and power to examine all documentary evidence and correspondence and to require such testimony that in its judgment is relevant. The decision of the Synod Board of Appeals shall be the final disposition of the appeal.~~

### **Section 8.10 Synod Board of Appeals**

(a) The Synod Board of Appeals shall be composed of 10 members: a chairman, three pastors, three teachers, and three laymen. The Synod Board of Appeals shall be elected by the synod in convention from a slate of candidates submitted by the synod's Nominating Committee. The chairman shall be a pastor. Members' terms shall be for four years and they may succeed themselves twice. Terms shall be staggered. Members of the Synod Board of Appeals may hold other elective or appointive offices.

(b) A five-person Board of Appeals panel shall be formed to decide each appeal. The chairman or his designee plus four board members selected by the chairman shall make up a Board of Appeals panel. Each panel must include at least one pastor, one teacher, and one lay member.

(c) The panel is to act independently as it considers the appeal. It has the right and responsibility to review all documentary evidence. It has the right to conduct interviews and to request additional information from anyone it deems to be connected to the matter. It has the responsibility to rule whether the disciplinary action was justified in its substance and whether the process followed was in keeping with biblical principles and with any applicable bylaws.

~~(d) All correspondence and documentary evidence relative to a disciplinary action together with a summary report shall be filed in the office of the president within 60 30 days after the appeal has been concluded with a copy of a summary report forwarded to the removing entity and the appellant. The decision of a Board of Appeals panel shall be the final disposition of an appeal.~~

### **Section 8.20**

#### **Jurisdiction and Procedure in Disciplinary Actions and Removal from Office at the District Level**

(a) In cases of discipline among pastors, teachers, and congregations of both self-supporting and mission status, the district in which such pastors, teachers, and congregations hold membership and/or serves shall exercise original jurisdiction. The Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction.

(b) In cases of discipline among the faculties of the synodical schools or the area Lutheran high schools and administrators of synodical boards and commissions, the respective board or commission shall exercise original jurisdiction. The district in which the appellant is a member and/or serves and the Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction successively.

(c) The two district vice presidents with the concurrence of the district circuit pastors may ~~suspend remove~~ the district president from his office. The president shall have 60 30 days thereafter to appeal this ~~suspension~~

removal. If there is no appeal within 60 days, the action shall be final, and the officer is removed from office. If he the president appeals, the appeal will be heard by the District Board of Appeals. The Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction.

(d) In the case of district vice presidents and secretary, the district president with the concurrence of the circuit pastors may suspend remove another officer. The district officer shall have ~~60~~ 30 days thereafter to appeal this suspension removal. ~~If there is no appeal within 60 days, the action shall be final and the officer is removed from office.~~ If he appeals, the appeal will be heard by the District Board of Appeals. The Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction.

(e) In the case of a congregation, ministry, or affiliated ministry operating within one district, it may become necessary for the district through its praesidium, after consultation with the Conference of Presidents, to remove the congregation, ministry or affiliated ministry from membership in or affiliation with the synod for cause. The group shall have 30 days to appeal this removal. If the group appeals, the appeal shall be heard by the district Board of Appeals. The decision of the District Board of Appeals may be appealed to the Synod Board of Appeals.

~~(f) (f)~~ The conduct of review shall rest with the District Board of Appeals. ~~The board shall have the right and power to examine all documentary evidence and correspondence and to require such testimony that in its judgment is relevant.~~ The decision of the District Board of Appeals may be appealed to the Synod Board of Appeals. Upon the appeal, the Synod Board of Appeals may review the action of the District Board of Appeals.

~~(f) (g)~~ In the case of removal from office of district board, commission or committee members, the board, commission, or committee may suspend remove a member from his position. ~~He shall be notified in writing of this action within 30 days.~~ The member shall have ~~60~~ 30 days to appeal the suspension removal. ~~If there is no appeal within 60 days, the action shall be final, and the member is removed from office.~~ If he appeals, the appeal will be heard by the District Board of Appeals. The decision of the District Board of Appeals may be appealed to the Synod Board of Appeals. Upon appeal, the Synod Board of Appeals may review the action of the District Board of Appeals.

~~(g) (h)~~ In cases of discipline among missionaries under the jurisdiction of the Board for World Missions, the respective administrative committee shall exercise original jurisdiction. The Board for World Missions, the District Board of Appeals and the Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction successively.

(i) With the exception of appeals by laymen who are disciplined by their congregations, all appeals shall be submitted to the synod president who shall forward them to the appropriate Board of Appeals.

(j) In all cases of removal, the responsible entity shall provide written confirmation to the individual or group removed within seven days. Any removal requires the cessation of all duties and responsibilities while the appeal process, if any, is being carried out. The responsible entity shall report the removal to the synod via the call report and other appropriate means of communication.

### **Section 8.30**

#### **District Board of Appeals**

(a) The District Board of Appeals shall be composed of 10 members: a chairman, three pastors, three teachers, and three laymen. It shall be elected by the district in convention from a slate of candidates submitted by the district's nominating committee. The chairman shall be a pastor. Their terms shall be for four years and they may succeed themselves twice. Terms shall be staggered. Members of the District Board of Appeals may hold other elective or appointive offices.

(b) A five-person Board of Appeals panel shall be formed to decide each appeal. The chairman or his designee plus four board members selected by the chairman shall make up a Board of Appeals panel. Each panel must include at least one pastor, one teacher, and one lay member.

(c) The panel is to act independently as it considers the appeal. It has the right and responsibility to review all documentary evidence. It has the right to conduct interviews and to request additional information from anyone it deems to be connected to the matter. It has the responsibility to rule whether the disciplinary action was justified in its substance and whether the process followed was in keeping with biblical principles and with any applicable bylaws.

~~(e) (d)~~ All correspondence and documentary evidence relative to a disciplinary action together with a summary



report shall be filed in the office of the district president within ~~60~~ 30 days after such action has been concluded with a copy of a summary report forwarded to the removing entity and the appellant. The decision of a Board of Appeals panel shall be the final disposition of an appeal unless, when possible, an appeal is made to the Synod Board of Appeals. The decision of the District Board of Appeals shall be respected by all the members of the Synod, even while an appeal may be made to the Synod Board of Appeals.

#### **Section 8.40**

##### **Rights of the Disciplined Party**

(a) Any person or congregation that has been disciplined under Section 8.20 shall be notified in writing by the district president of the right of appeal under ~~Section 8.10~~ Sections 8.20 and 8.30 of the bylaws within 30 days of completion of the disciplinary action. A copy of these sections shall be included in the letter.

(b) ~~They shall have 60~~ The disciplined party shall have 30 days to appeal the action. To exercise the right of appeal the disciplined party shall file notice of appeal ~~with the Board of Appeals within 60~~ with the synod president within 30 days of the notification of the right of appeal. The synod president shall forward the appeal to the appropriate Board of Appeals.

#### **Section 8.50**

##### **Appeals by Laypersons**

(a) A layperson who has been subject to a disciplinary action by a congregation shall have the right to appeal the action. The layperson shall be notified in writing by the congregation of the right of appeal to the District Board of Appeals. Such notification shall occur within 30 days of the completion of the disciplinary action. Such appeal must be filed with the district president in writing, with a copy to the congregation, within ~~60~~ 30 days of the notice of disciplinary action.

(b) Upon receipt of the appellant's request, the district president shall notify the District Board of Appeals.

(c) The constitution for the districts affirms that "in intracongregational matters the district shall have purely advisory authority" (Article IX, Section 2). The review shall be conducted, therefore, to determine whether the process leading to the disciplinary action and the doctrinal basis of the disciplinary action were scriptural.

(d) The conduct of the review shall rest solely with the District Board of Appeals. The board shall have the right and power to examine all documentary evidence and to require such testimony that, in its judgment, is relevant.

(e) The District Board of Appeals shall submit its decision in writing to the appellant with a copy to the disciplining body, circuit pastor, and district president. The decision of the District Board of Appeals shall be the final disposition of the appeal.

(f) Within 30 days of the board's decision, the complete records of the board shall be filed with the district president, who shall act, if necessary, in accordance with his responsibility for the district's doctrine and practice.

#### **Section 8.60**

##### **Appeals after Removal from Office**

(a) A pastor or teacher who has been removed from office because of "established inability to perform the duties of his/her office" (*Model Constitution and Bylaws for Congregations of the WELS*, 1997, Article IX, Section 2) shall have the right to have the action reviewed by the District and Synod Board of Appeals successively. The request for review must be filed in writing within ~~60~~ 30 days of the notice of removal from office. The request for review is to be addressed to the president of the synod who shall notify the appropriate Board of Appeals.

(b) The conduct of the review shall ~~solely~~ with the District Board of Appeals. ~~The board shall have~~ It has the right and ~~power responsibility to examine review~~ all documentary evidence ~~and to require such testimony that, in its judgment, is relevant to the case. It has the right to conduct interviews and to request additional information from anyone it deems to be connected to the matter. It has the responsibility to rule whether the disciplinary action was justified in its substance and whether the process followed was in keeping with biblical principles and with any applicable bylaws.~~

(c) If the board rules in favor of the pastor or teacher who has been removed, the pastor or teacher shall be restored to the official list of pastors and teachers and declared eligible for a call into the ministry.

(d) If the board rules against the pastor or teacher who has been removed, the pastor or teacher shall have the right to appeal to the Synod Board of Appeals through the synod president within ~~60~~ 30 days of notification of the action by the District Board.

(e) Upon appeal of either party, the Synod Board of Appeals may review the action of the District Board of Appeals. The records of the district board's proceedings shall be used as a basis for any review. It has the right and responsibility to review all documentary evidence. It has the right to conduct interviews and to request additional information from anyone it deems to be connected to the matter. It has the responsibility to rule whether the disciplinary action was justified in its substance and whether the process followed was in keeping with biblical principles and with any applicable bylaws.

(f) The decision of the Synod Board of Appeals shall be the final disposition of the case.

## District Bylaws

### ARTICLE XXI

#### Jurisdiction and Procedure in Disciplinary Actions and Removal from Office at the District Level

**Section 1.** In cases of discipline among pastors, teachers, and congregations of both self-supporting and mission status, the district in which such pastors, teachers, and congregations hold membership and/or serve shall exercise original jurisdiction. The Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction.

**Section 2.** In cases of discipline among the faculties of the synodical schools or the area Lutheran high schools and administrators of synodical boards and commissions, the respective board or commission shall exercise original jurisdiction. The district in which the appellant is a member and/or serves and the Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction successively.

**Section 3.** The two district vice presidents with the concurrence of the district circuit pastors may ~~suspend~~ remove the district president from his office. The president shall have ~~60~~ 30 days thereafter to appeal this ~~suspension~~ removal. ~~If there is no appeal within 60 days, the action shall be final, and the president is removed from office. If the president appeals, the appeal will be heard by the District Board of Appeals. The Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction.~~

**Section 4.** In the case of district vice presidents and secretary, the president with the concurrence of the circuit pastors may ~~suspend~~ remove another officer. The district officer shall have ~~60~~ 30 days thereafter to appeal this ~~suspension~~ removal. ~~If there is no appeal within 60 days, the action shall be final, and the officer is removed from office. If he appeals, the appeal will be heard by the District Board of Appeals. The Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction.~~

**Section 5.** In the case of a congregation, ministry, or affiliated ministry operating within one district, it may become necessary for the district through its praesidium, after consultation with the Conference of Presidents, to remove the congregation, ministry, or affiliated ministry from membership in or affiliation with the synod for cause. The group shall have 30 days to appeal this removal. If the group appeals, the appeal shall be heard by the District Board of Appeals. The decision of the District Board of Appeals may be appealed to the Synod Board of Appeals.

~~**Section 5.**~~ **Section 6.** The conduct of review shall rest with the District Board of Appeals. ~~The board shall have the right and power to examine all documentary evidence and correspondence and to require such testimony that in its judgment is relevant. The decision of the District Board of Appeals may be appealed to the Synod Board of Appeals. The decision of the District Board of Appeals may be appealed to the Synod Board of Appeals.~~ Upon appeal, the Synod Board of Appeals may review the action of the District Board of Appeals.

~~**Section 6.**~~ **Section 7.** In the case of removal from office of district board, commission or committee members, the board, commission, or committee may ~~suspend~~ remove a member from his position. ~~He shall be notified in writing of this action within 30 days. The member shall have 60~~ 30 days to appeal the ~~suspension~~ removal. ~~If there is no appeal within 60 days, the action shall be final, and the member is removed from office. If he appeals, the appeal will be heard by the District Board of Appeals. The decision of the District Board of Appeals may be appealed to the Synod Board of Appeals. Upon appeal, the Synod Board of Appeals may review the action of the District Board of Appeals.~~

**Section 7: Section 8.** In cases of discipline among missionaries under the jurisdiction of the Board for World Missions, the respective administrative committee shall exercise original jurisdiction. The Board for World Missions, the District Board of Appeals, and the Synod Board of Appeals shall exercise appellate jurisdiction successively.

**Section 9.** With the exception of appeals by laymen who are disciplined by their congregations, all appeals shall be submitted to the synod president who shall forward them to the appropriate Board of Appeals.

**Section 10.** In all cases of removal, the responsible entity shall provide written confirmation to the individual or group removed within seven days. Any removal requires the cessation of all duties and responsibilities while the appeal process, if any, is being carried out. The responsible entity shall report the removal to the synod via the call report and other appropriate means of communication.

## ARTICLE XXII

### District Board of Appeals

**Section 1.** The District Board of Appeals shall be composed of 10 members: a chairman, three pastors, three teachers, and three laymen. It shall be elected by the district in convention from a slate of candidates submitted by the district nominating committee. The chairman shall be a pastor. Their terms shall be for four years and they may succeed themselves twice. Terms shall be staggered. Members of the District Board of Appeals may hold other elective or appointive offices.

**Section 2.** A five-person Board of Appeals panel shall be formed to decide each appeal. The chairman or his designee plus four board members selected by the chairman shall make up a Board of Appeals panel. Each panel must include at least one pastor, one teacher, and one lay member.

**Section 3.** The panel is to act independently as it considers the appeal. It has the right and responsibility to review all documentary evidence. It has the right to conduct interviews and to request additional information from anyone it deems to be connected to the matter. It has the responsibility to rule whether the disciplinary action was justified in its substance and whether the process followed was in keeping with biblical principles and with any applicable bylaws.

**Section 3: Section 4.** All correspondence and documentary evidence relative to a disciplinary action together with a summary report shall be filed in the office of the district president within ~~60~~ 30 days after such action has been concluded with a copy of a summary report forwarded to the removing party and the appellant. The decision of a Board of Appeals panel shall be the final disposition of an appeal unless, when possible, an appeal is made to the Synod Board of Appeals. The decision of the District Board of Appeals shall be respected by all members of the Synod, even while an appeal may be made to the Synod Board of Appeals.

## ARTICLE XXIII

### Rights of the Disciplined Party

**Section 1.** Any person or congregation that has been disciplined under Article XXI shall be notified in writing by the district president of the right of appeal under Article XXII of the district constitution within 30 days of completion of the disciplinary action. A copy of these articles shall be included in the letter.

**Section 2.** ~~They~~ The disciplined party shall have ~~60~~ 30 days to appeal the action. To exercise the right of appeal the disciplined party shall file notice of appeal with the ~~Board of Appeals~~ synod president within ~~60~~ 30 days of the notification of the right of appeal. The synod president shall forward the appeal to the appropriate Board of Appeals.

## ARTICLE XXIV

### Appeals by Laypersons

**Section 1.** A layperson who has been subject to a disciplinary action by a congregation shall have the right to appeal the action. The layperson shall be notified in writing by the congregation of the right of appeal. Such notification shall occur within 30 days of the completion of the disciplinary action. Such appeal must be filed with the district president in writing, with a copy to the congregation, within ~~60~~ 30 days of the disciplinary action.

**Section 2.** Upon receipt of the appellant's request, the district president shall notify the District Board of Appeals.

**Section 3.** The constitution for the districts affirms that "in intracongregational matters the district shall have

purely advisory authority” (Article IX, Section 2). The review shall be conducted, therefore, to determine whether the process leading to the disciplinary action and the doctrinal basis of the disciplinary action were scriptural.

**Section 4.** The conduct of the review shall rest solely with the District Board of Appeals. The board shall have the right and power to examine all documentary evidence and to require such testimony that, in its judgment, is relevant.

**Section 5.** The district Board of Appeals shall submit its decision in writing to the appellant with a copy to the disciplining body, circuit pastor, and district president. The decision of the District Board of Appeals shall be the final disposition of the appeal.

**Section 6.** Within 30 days of the board’s decision, the complete records of the board shall be filed with the district president, who shall act, if necessary, in accordance with his responsibility for the district’s doctrine and practice.

## ARTICLE XXV

### Appeals after Removal from Office

**Section 1.** A pastor or teacher who has been removed from office because of “established inability to perform the duties of his/her office” (*Model Constitution and Bylaws for Congregations of the WELS*, 1997, Article IX, Section 2) shall have the right to have the action reviewed by the District and Synod Board of Appeals successively. The request for review must be filed in writing within 60 30 days of the removal from office. The request for review is to be addressed to the president of the synod who shall notify the appropriate Board of Appeals.

**Section 2.** The conduct of the review shall rest solely with the District Board of Appeals. ~~The board shall have the right and power to examine all documentary evidence and to require such testimony that, in its judgment, is relevant to the case.~~ It has the right and responsibility to review all documentary evidence. It has the right to conduct interviews and to request additional information from anyone it deems to be connected to the matter. It has the responsibility to rule whether the disciplinary action was justified in its substance and whether the process followed was in keeping with biblical principles and with any applicable bylaws.

**Section 3.** If the board rules in favor of the pastor or teacher who has been removed, the pastor or teacher shall be restored to the official list of pastors and teachers and declared “eligible for a call into the ministry.”

**Section 4.** If the board rules against the pastor or teacher ~~who has been removed~~, the pastor or teacher shall have the right to appeal to the Synod Board of Appeals through the synod president within 60 30 days of notification of action by the district board.

**Section 5.** Upon appeal of either party, the Synod Board of Appeals may review the action of the District Board of Appeals. The records of the district board’s proceedings shall be used as a basis for any review. It has the right and responsibility to review all documentary evidence. It has the right to conduct interviews and to request additional information from anyone it deems to be connected to the matter. It has the responsibility to rule whether the disciplinary action was justified in its substance and whether the process followed was in keeping with biblical principles and with any applicable bylaws.

**Section 6.** The decision of the Synod Board of Appeals shall be the final disposition of the case.

# Financials

The financial information listed on the following pages summarizes the ministry financial plan (budget) approved for the 2023–25 biennium by the 2023 convention delegates, outlined on pp. 34 and 35 in Resolution No. 1 from Committee #7: Ministry Financial Plan (Budget).

## **Proposed ministry financial plan for 2023–24 and 2024–25 biennium (FY24/FY25 Biennium)**

### *Development of ministry financial plan*

Planning for the FY24/FY25 Biennium was initiated in February 2022 or about 16 months before the start of the biennium. At that time, the Synodical Council approved initial planning assumptions that would increase synod operating support levels by 3.0 percent annually, including overall wage increases of 2.5 percent annually, healthcare costs increasing at 7.0 percent annually, and retirement plan expenses remaining flat each year. The Synodical Council asked the WELS president to work with the areas of ministry to draft an initial ministry financial plan using this level of synod support for its review at its fall 2022 meeting. With this general direction by the Synodical Council, the areas of ministry, schools, and support service subsidiaries, working with their boards and commissions, proceeded to develop their ministry plans.

In late summer/early fall 2022, initial planning meetings were held with the areas of ministry, ministerial education schools, and support service subsidiaries to walk through their plans. Each individual plan was then consolidated into an overall synod ministry financial plan for review by the Synodical Council in November 2022. In April 2023, the WELS president submitted a slightly modified ministry financial plan to the Synodical Council, updated for the carryforward impact of current FY23 financial results and slightly modified CMO projections for FY24 and FY25 based on 2023 subscriptions. After review of the proposed plan, the Synodical Council approved the FY24/FY25 Biennium plan as presented.

### *Congregation Mission Offerings*

Prior to 2020, Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) had historically been flat to slightly declining since 2008. However, in each of the last three calendar years there has been an increase in CMO. Calendar year reported CMO for 2022 was \$23.3 million, an increase of \$654,000 (or 2.9 percent) over the prior year and \$883,000 (or 3.9 percent) better than 2022 subscriptions. However, when adjusting for inflation, calendar year real CMO for 2022 was \$810,000 (or 3.4 percent) lower than 2021 indicating that the impact CMO can have on ministry has been negatively impacted by the current inflationary environment. Calendar year 2023 subscriptions serve as the baseline for CMO projections in the FY24/FY25 Biennium. CMO subscriptions for 2023 are \$22.9 million, down 1.6 percent compared to actual 2022 CMO receipts but the highest level of subscriptions on record. CMO projections included in the ministry financial plan assume a 0.5 percent increase for both calendar year 2024 and 2025 as we attempt to balance recent CMO trends with the current economic and inflationary environment.

### *Summary of ministry financial plan for FY24 and FY25*

The proposed ministry financial plan for FY24 includes synod support for operating expenses of \$32.8 million, other expenses in areas of ministry and at the schools of \$55.9 million, and \$13.1 million of expense at the subsidiaries for a total ministry financial plan of \$101.8 million. The \$32.8 million of synod support is proposed to be allocated to the areas of ministry as follows:

- Home Missions—\$6.1 million (or 18.6 percent of total synod support)
- World Missions—\$7.4 million (or 22.5 percent of total synod support)
- Ministerial Education—\$8.7 million (or 26.5 percent of total synod support)
- Congregation & District Ministry—\$6.8 million (or 20.8 percent of total synod support)
- Ministry Support—\$3.8 million (or 11.6 percent of total synod support)



The FY25 proposed plan includes synod support for operating expenses of \$33.7 million, other expenses in areas of ministry and at the schools of \$57.2 million, and \$13.7 million of expense at the subsidiaries for a total ministry financial plan of \$104.6 million. The \$33.7 million of synod support is proposed to be allocated to the areas of ministry as follows:

- Home Missions—\$6.3 million (or 18.7 percent of total synod support)
- World Missions—\$7.6 million (or 22.6 percent of total synod support)
- Ministerial Education—\$8.9 million (or 26.5 percent of total synod support)
- Congregation & District Ministry—\$6.9 million (or 20.5 percent of total synod support)
- Ministry Support—\$4.0 million (or 11.7 percent of total synod support)

The proposed financial plan relies heavily on the drawdown of the Financial Stabilization Fund—approximately \$4.0 million over the FY24/FY25 Biennium—and on areas of ministry and schools using \$11.5 million of reserves in addition to other funding sources or one-time funds to sustain ongoing ministry.

The following is a brief summary of the ministry financial plan for FY24 and FY25 for the four ministerial education schools and support service subsidiaries.

#### Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

The financial position of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is anticipated to remain strong as they project a combined surplus without donor restrictions of \$48,000 over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY24 is forecast to be \$7.1 million driven by anticipated average on-campus enrollment of 108 students plus a class of 30 vicars. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY24 are forecast to be \$7.1 million, leading to a surplus of \$18,000.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY25 is forecast to be \$8.0 million driven by anticipated average on-campus enrollment of 101 students plus a class of 44 vicars. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY25 are forecast to be \$8.0 million, leading to a surplus of \$30,000.
- Ending FY25 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$10.3 million.

#### Martin Luther College

The financial position of Martin Luther College is projected to weaken over the next biennium due to continued enrollment challenges. MLC is projecting a combined deficit without donor restrictions of \$2.7 million over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY24 is forecast to be \$23.9 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 610 students. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY24 are forecast to be \$25.3 million, leading to a deficit of \$1.4 million.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY25 is forecast to be \$24.3 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 610 students. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY25 are forecast to be \$25.6 million, leading to a deficit of \$1.3 million.
- Ending FY25 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$12.5 million.

#### Luther Preparatory School

While in a stable financial position, LPS is projecting a combined deficit without donor restrictions of \$295,000 over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY24 is forecast to be \$8.8 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 410 students. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY24 are forecast to be \$9.0 million, leading to a deficit of \$150,000.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY25 is forecast to be \$9.0 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 410 students. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY25 are forecast to be \$9.1 million, leading to a deficit of \$145,000.
- Ending FY25 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$4.1 million.

#### Michigan Lutheran Seminary

While in a stable financial position, Michigan Lutheran Seminary is projecting to improve its financial situation through a combined surplus without donor restrictions of \$45,000 over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY24 is forecast to be \$4.3 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 190 students. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY24 are forecast to be \$4.3 million, leading to a surplus of \$2,000.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY25 is forecast to be \$4.4 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 190 students. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY25 are forecast to be \$4.4 million, leading to a surplus of \$43,000.
- Ending FY25 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$1.7 million.

#### WELS Church Extension Fund

The financial position of WELS Church Extension Fund is anticipated to remain strong as it projects a combined surplus without donor restrictions of \$6.3 million over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY24 is forecast to be \$9.6 million. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY24 are forecast to be \$6.4 million, leading to a surplus of \$3.2 million.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY25 is forecast to be \$10.1 million. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY25 are forecast to be \$7.0 million, leading to a surplus of \$3.1 million.
- Ending FY25 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$95.9 million.

#### WELS Foundation

The financial position of WELS Foundation is anticipated to remain strong. WELS Foundation will continue to work with the Ministry of Christian Giving to encourage new gift instruments and is privileged to continue to administer and distribute donor-directed gifts to various WELS ministries. WELS Foundation is also expected to continue to distribute planned grants to WELS for general operations of \$400,000 for both FY24 and FY25.

#### WELS Investment Funds

WELS Investment Funds does not have reserves because it invests and administers funds for others. The low-cost operating structure is managed through an administrative fee currently set at 17 basis points. The administrative fee may fluctuate from plan levels based on actual market conditions and the size of the overall WELS Investment Funds portfolio.

#### Northwestern Publishing House

While in a stable financial position, Northwestern Publishing House is projecting to improve its financial situation through a combined surplus without donor restrictions of \$940,000 over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY24 is forecast to be \$5.5 million. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY24 are forecast to be \$5.0 million, leading to a surplus of \$0.5 million.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY25 is forecast to be \$5.5 million. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY25 are forecast to be \$5.0 million, leading to a surplus of \$0.5 million.
- Ending FY25 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$15.0 million.

Please refer to the area of ministry, ministerial education school, and support service subsidiary reports contained elsewhere within this book for more details of the ministry financial plans for each area.

#### *Other unrestricted support*

The following assumptions have been used related to unrestricted support (other than CMO) managed within the Financial Stabilization Fund.

- **Grants** (\$2,845,000 in FY24 and \$2,860,000 in FY25)—The majority of the grants come from the Schwan Foundation and are projected to be approximately \$1.9 million per year for FY24 and FY25. WELS Foundation's unrestricted net asset policy facilitates the transfer of undesignated net assets to support WELS general ministries with projected grants of approximately \$400,000 per year for FY24 and FY25. Other grants include distributions of approximately \$400,000 per year from various sources.
- **Gifts from individuals** (\$1,350,000 in both FY24 and FY25)—The vast majority of these unrestricted gifts come from individuals and congregations and are projected to be approximately \$1.1 million per year for FY24 and FY25. In addition, gifts are forecasted from various special appeals for WELS Mission & Ministry. Gifts to these programs are projected to be approximately \$250,000 per year for FY24 and FY25.
- **Unrestricted bequests** (\$1,800,000 in both FY24 and FY25)—Unrestricted bequests represent estate gifts to WELS without donor restrictions and are projected to be approximately \$1.8 million per year for FY24 and FY25.

These estimates are based on recent trends. However, due to the unpredictable timing of the distribution of an estate gift, they are difficult to project.

- **Investment income** (\$1,900,000 in FY24 and \$1,850,000 in FY25)—Investment income represents returns on non-endowed funds, the continued investment returns from existing annuity contracts, and other investable reserves. Current annuity contracts will terminate upon the death of each annuitant. Given current annuity contract returns of between 3.0 percent and 4.0 percent and current increasing interest rate environment, investment income is projected to be approximately \$1.9 million per year for FY24 and FY25.
- **Endowment distributions & other** (\$335,000 in FY24 and \$357,000 in FY25)—Includes distributions from WELS operating endowment funds and other miscellaneous income sources including but not limited to subsidiary rental payments as defined by the Synodical Council's Building Fund policy, the synod's workers compensation and group insurance dividend programs, which fluctuate based on WELS' overall annual loss ratio and proceeds from the corporate credit card rebate program. Slight increases during the biennium were assumed.

The cumulative total of these sources of support into the Financial Stabilization Fund are projected to be approximately \$8.2 million per year for FY24 and FY25. With planned FY24 synod support of \$32.8 million and CMO projections of \$23.0 million, transfers out of the Financial Stabilization Fund during FY24 are planned to be approximately \$9.8 million, resulting in a forecasted decrease in the Financial Stabilization Fund of approximately \$1.6 million to end FY24 with a Financial Stabilization Fund balance of approximately \$16.1 million. In FY25, synod support levels are forecasted to reach approximately \$33.7 million with CMO projections of \$23.1 million leading to an increased level of transfers out of the Financial Stabilization Fund at \$10.6 million. This results in a forecasted decrease in the Financial Stabilization Fund of approximately \$2.4 million to end FY25 with a Financial Stabilization Fund balance of approximately \$13.7 million.

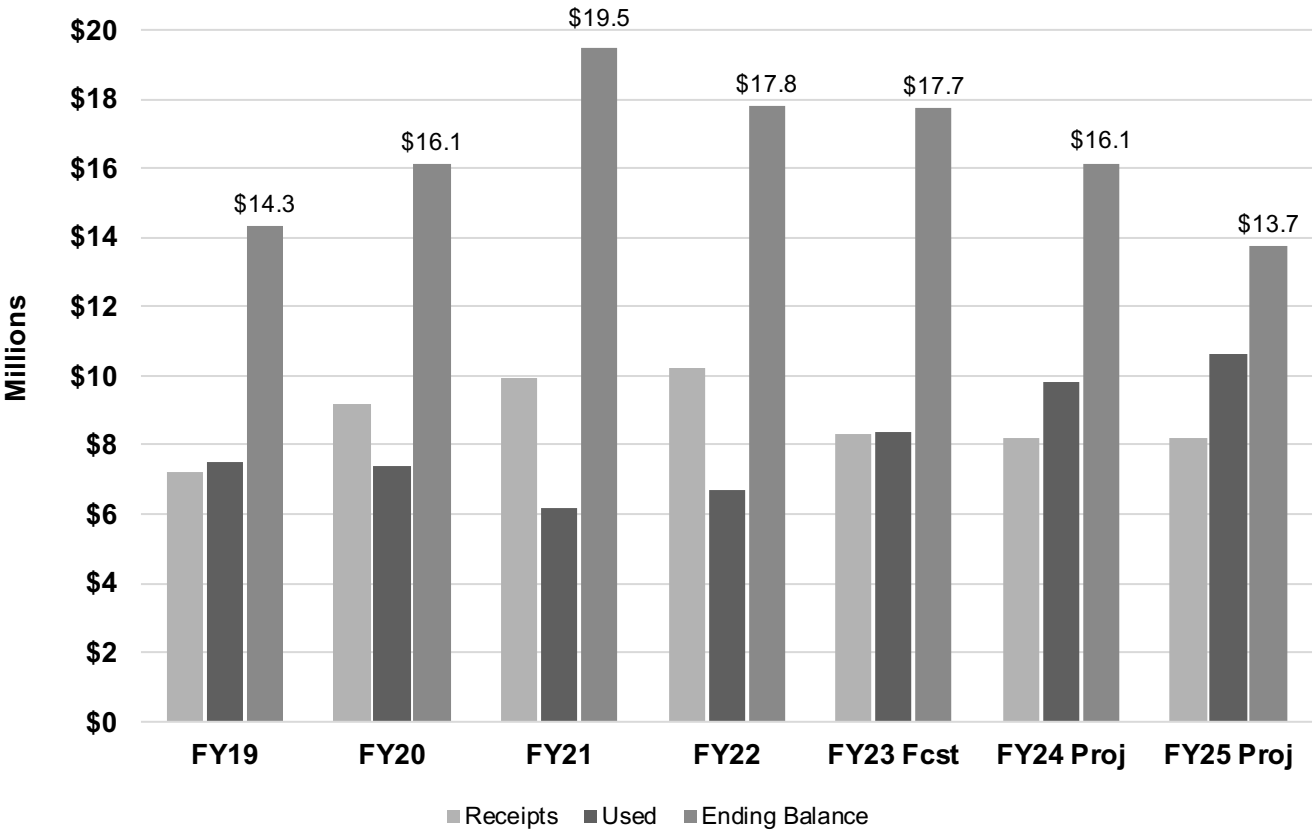
Two primary factors (other than the noted levels of non-CMO unrestricted support above) that could impact the balance of the Financial Stabilization Fund in the upcoming biennium include how each area of ministry performs as compared to their operating budgets funded from synod support as well as the level of CMO received as compared to projections. If savings are seen within area of ministry operating budgets and/or congregations exceed the projected annual 0.5 percent increase in CMO, less will need to be transferred from the Financial Stabilization Fund to cover WELS' operating expenses. However, if CMO receipts fall short of the projected annual 0.5 percent increase, additional transfers out of the Financial Stabilization Fund may be needed (which would draw the balance of the Financial Stabilization Fund lower) or spending reductions may be deemed necessary.

We are thankful to be able to present this ministry financial plan for FY24 and FY25 trusting in God's gracious care for us in our Lord Jesus. At the same time, we also recognize that such trust does not diminish the responsibility God himself entrusts to us to be wise stewards of the finances for the overall synod and its areas of ministry, ministerial education schools, and support service subsidiaries. We ask for God to provide us with the wisdom and leadership to carry out these plans for the next biennium.

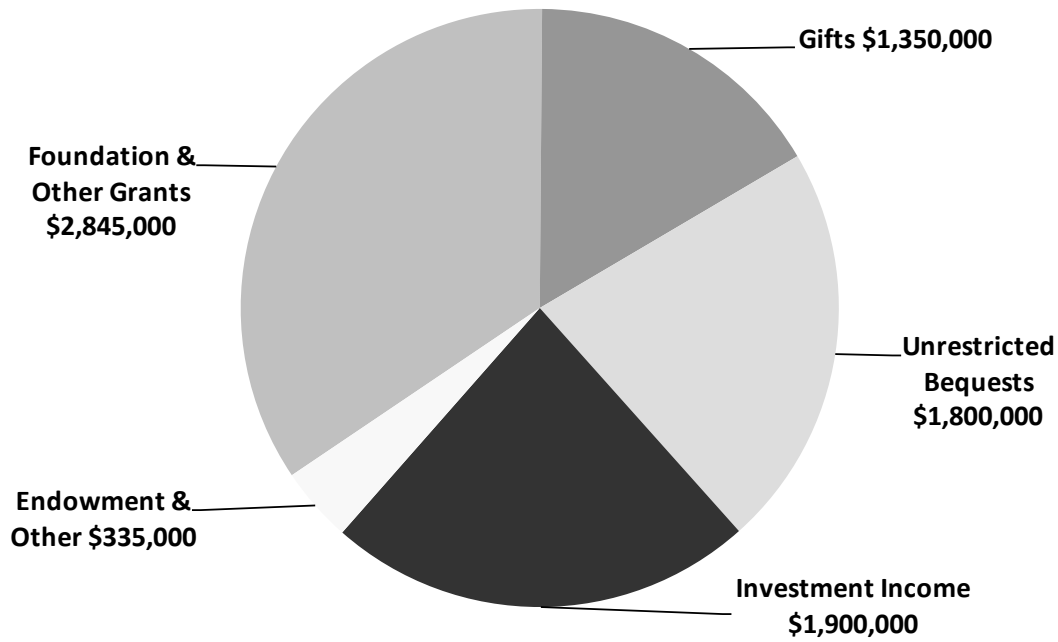
*Mr. Kyle Egan, reporter*



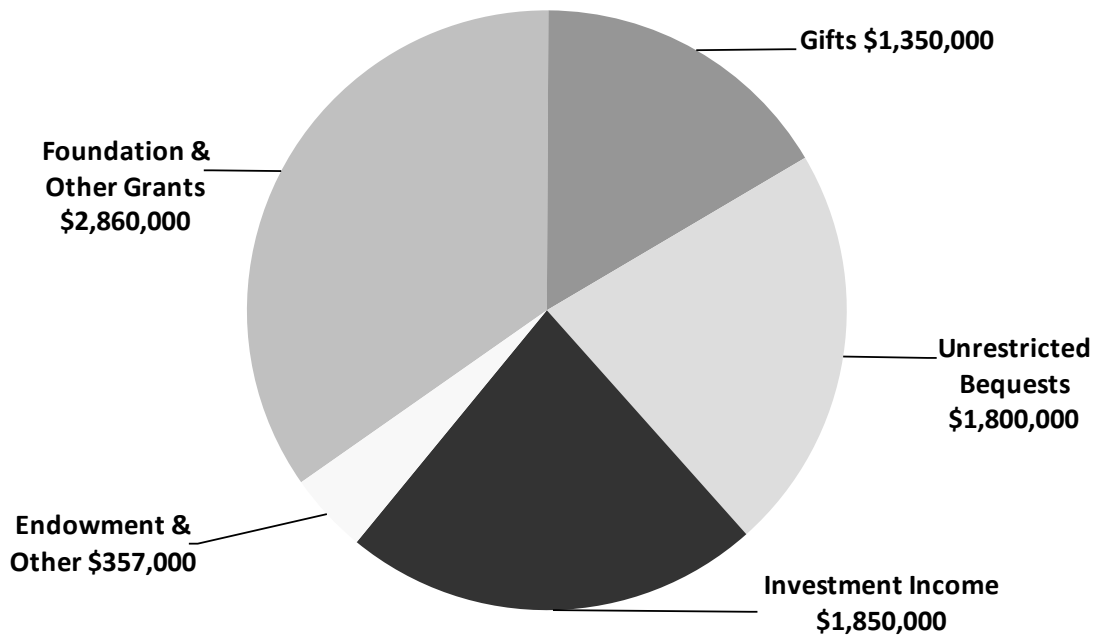
# Financial Stabilization Fund



**FY 2023-24 Support  
Financial Stabilization Fund  
\$8,230,000**



**FY 2024-25 Support  
Financial Stabilization Fund  
\$8,217,000**



**Ministry Financial Plan Summary of Expenses  
Funded by Synod Support and Special Funds, Gifts, Tuition and Fees**

	FY22 Actual				FY23 Plan				FY24 Plan				FY25 Plan			
	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE
<b>SUMMARY</b>																
Home Missions	5,794,000	3,981,295	9,775,295	13.25	5,938,000	4,960,000	10,898,000	13.75	6,120,000	4,965,000	11,085,000	13.75	6,314,000	5,367,000	11,681,000	13.75
World Missions	6,962,000	3,799,263	10,761,263	59.45	7,149,000	5,627,000	12,776,000	66.95	7,369,000	7,224,000	14,593,000	68.45	7,597,000	7,193,000	14,790,000	68.45
Ministerial Education	8,118,872	41,734,205	49,853,077	334.85	8,449,000	37,298,000	45,747,000	336.45	8,688,000	38,516,000	47,204,000	348.25	8,947,000	39,756,000	48,703,000	344.45
Congregation & District Ministry	5,764,343	2,766,234	8,530,577	43.45	6,497,000	1,961,000	8,458,000	44.80	6,840,000	2,677,000	9,517,000	47.10	6,933,000	2,236,000	9,169,000	47.60
Ministry Support	3,171,763	2,400,899	5,572,662	26.85	3,589,000	2,450,000	6,039,000	29.00	3,824,000	2,560,000	6,384,000	30.00	3,951,000	2,602,000	6,553,000	30.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29,810,978</b>	<b>54,681,896</b>	<b>84,492,873</b>	<b>477.85</b>	<b>31,622,000</b>	<b>52,296,000</b>	<b>83,918,000</b>	<b>490.35</b>	<b>32,841,000</b>	<b>55,942,000</b>	<b>88,783,000</b>	<b>507.55</b>	<b>33,742,000</b>	<b>57,154,000</b>	<b>90,896,000</b>	<b>504.25</b>

	FY22	% of total	% change	FY23	% of total	% change	FY24	% of total	% change	FY25	% of total	% change
<b>Synod Support</b>												
Home Missions	5,794,000	19.4%	2.0%	5,938,000	18.8%	2.5%	6,120,000	18.6%	3.1%	6,314,000	18.7%	3.2%
World Missions	6,962,000	23.4%	4.5%	7,149,000	22.6%	2.7%	7,369,000	22.4%	3.1%	7,597,000	22.5%	3.1%
Ministerial Education	8,118,872	27.2%	0.8%	8,449,000	26.7%	4.1%	8,688,000	26.5%	2.8%	8,947,000	26.5%	3.0%
Congregation & District Ministry	5,764,343	19.3%	8.3%	6,497,000	20.5%	12.7%	6,840,000	20.8%	5.3%	6,933,000	20.5%	1.4%
Ministry Support	3,171,763	10.6%	3.2%	3,589,000	11.3%	13.2%	3,824,000	11.6%	6.5%	3,951,000	11.7%	3.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29,810,978</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>31,622,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>32,841,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>33,742,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2.7%</b>

	FY22	% of total	% change	FY23	% of total	% change	FY24	% of total	% change	FY25	% of total	% change
<b>Total Expenses</b>												
Home Missions	9,775,295	11.6%	6.9%	10,898,000	13.0%	11.5%	11,085,000	12.5%	1.7%	11,681,000	12.9%	5.4%
World Missions	10,761,263	12.7%	14.3%	12,776,000	15.2%	18.7%	14,593,000	16.4%	14.2%	14,790,000	16.3%	1.3%
Ministerial Education	49,853,077	59.0%	19.2%	45,747,000	54.5%	-8.2%	47,204,000	53.2%	3.2%	48,703,000	53.6%	3.2%
Congregation & District Ministry	8,530,577	10.1%	27.8%	8,458,000	10.1%	-0.9%	9,517,000	10.7%	12.5%	9,169,000	10.1%	-3.7%
Ministry Support	5,572,662	6.6%	7.1%	6,039,000	7.2%	8.4%	6,384,000	7.2%	5.7%	6,553,000	7.2%	2.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>84,492,873</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>17.0%</b>	<b>83,918,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>-0.7%</b>	<b>88,783,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>	<b>90,896,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>

	FY22 Actual	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	FY23 Plan	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	FY24 Plan	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	FY25 Plan	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE
<b>Support Services Subsidiaries</b>																
WELS Church Extension Fund	-	6,347,779	6,347,779	6.85	-	8,147,000	8,147,000	6.85	-	6,403,000	6,403,000	5.85	-	7,025,000	7,025,000	5.85
WELS Foundation	-	835,375	835,375	3.70	-	1,033,000	1,033,000	3.20	-	1,145,000	1,145,000	4.50	-	1,157,000	1,157,000	4.50
WELS Investment Funds	-	409,582	409,582	2.30	-	472,000	472,000	2.00	-	497,000	497,000	2.25	-	535,000	535,000	2.25
Northwestern Publishing House	-	6,050,036	6,050,036	24.50	-	5,271,000	5,271,000	24.00	-	5,043,000	5,043,000	27.00	-	5,017,000	5,017,000	27.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>13,642,772</b>	<b>13,642,772</b>	<b>37.35</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>14,923,000</b>	<b>14,923,000</b>	<b>36.05</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>13,088,000</b>	<b>13,088,000</b>	<b>39.60</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>13,734,000</b>	<b>13,734,000</b>	<b>39.60</b>

<b>TOTAL WELS &amp; SUBSIDIARIES</b>	<b>29,810,978</b>	<b>68,324,668</b>	<b>98,135,645</b>	<b>515.20</b>	<b>31,622,000</b>	<b>67,219,000</b>	<b>98,841,000</b>	<b>527.00</b>	<b>32,841,000</b>	<b>69,030,000</b>	<b>101,871,000</b>	<b>547.15</b>	<b>33,742,000</b>	<b>70,888,000</b>	<b>104,630,000</b>	<b>543.85</b>
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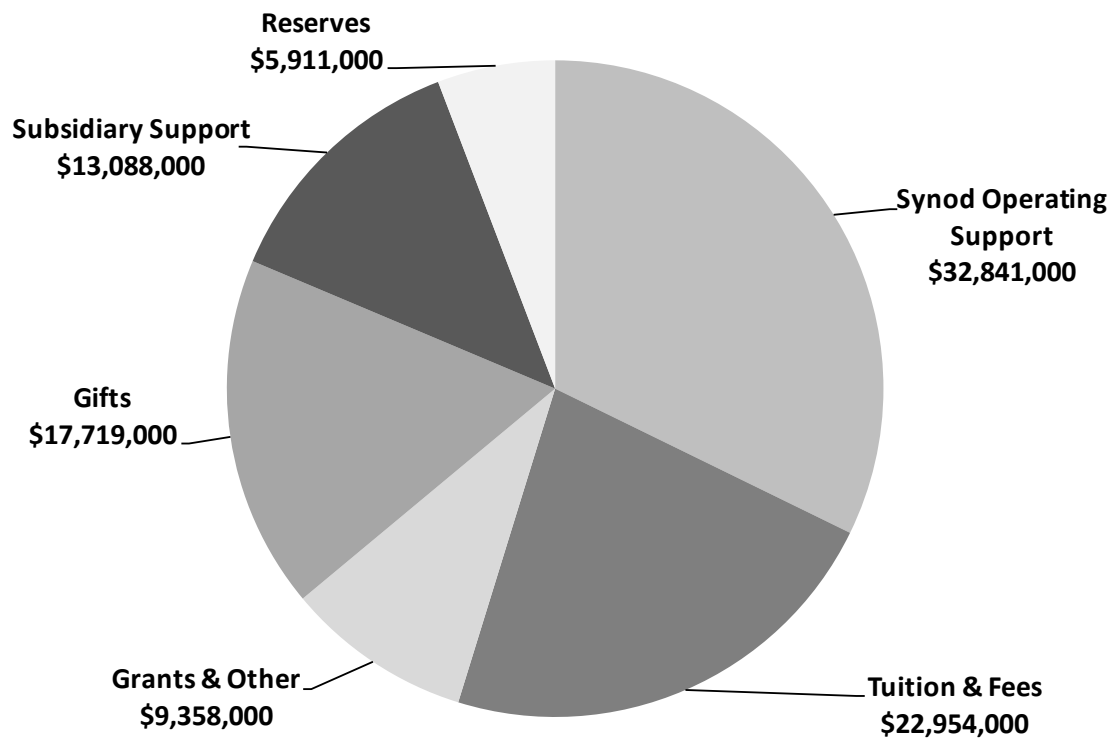
**Ministry Financial Plan Summary of Expenses**  
**Funded by Synod Support and Special Funds, Gifts, Tuition and Fees**

	FY22 Actual				FY23 Plan				FY24 Plan			
	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE
<b>Home Missions</b>												
Board and Administration	715,412	151,444	866,856	4.75	739,344	180,600	919,944	5.75	763,000	75,000	838,000	5.25
Vicars in Missions	114,025	439,996	554,021	0.00	190,000	150,000	340,000	0.00	227,000	476,000	703,000	0.00
Campus Ministry	397,251	112,132	509,383	1.50	407,880	65,500	473,380	1.50	444,000	70,000	514,000	1.50
Multi-cultural Ministry	991,404	663,276	1,654,680	1.00	984,000	749,250	1,733,250	1.00	1,013,000	765,000	1,778,000	1.00
Outreach Ministry	3,575,802	2,092,445	5,668,247	3.00	3,616,776	3,001,050	6,617,826	3.00	3,704,000	2,968,000	6,672,000	3.00
Joint Mission Council Ministry	105	522,002	522,107	3.00	-	813,600	813,600	2.50	-	807,000	807,000	3.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,794,000</b>	<b>3,981,295</b>	<b>9,775,295</b>	<b>13.25</b>	<b>5,938,000</b>	<b>4,960,000</b>	<b>10,898,000</b>	<b>13.75</b>	<b>6,120,000</b>	<b>4,965,000</b>	<b>11,085,000</b>	<b>13.75</b>
<b>World Missions</b>												
Board and Administration	657,438	119,278	776,716	5.75	623,041	111,600	734,641	6.25	442,605	104,000	546,605	5.25
Africa	1,239,931	644,933	1,884,864	11.20	1,399,646	703,075	2,102,721	11.20	1,430,559	917,160	2,347,719	11.20
Europe	572,959	366,025	938,984	3.00	508,800	399,700	908,500	2.00	817,654	318,900	1,136,554	3.50
Latin America	915,761	177,570	1,093,331	11.00	1,119,836	168,200	1,288,036	11.00	1,344,146	151,200	1,495,346	11.00
Native America	342,493	255,369	597,862	3.50	432,620	193,700	626,320	3.50	488,323	316,255	804,578	4.50
Asia	2,190,504	1,402,367	3,592,871	15.00	2,605,093	1,848,132	4,453,225	18.50	1,536,416	3,077,080	4,613,496	19.50
New Initiatives	-	-	-	0.00	-	280,000	280,000	2.00	-	250,000	250,000	0.00
Multi-Language Publications	853,270	706,559	1,559,829	7.00	185,917	1,297,134	1,483,051	9.50	947,647	1,065,000	2,012,647	9.50
Joint Mission Council	-	368,109	368,109	3.00	-	518,459	518,459	3.00	-	551,584	551,584	3.00
Missionary Support	189,644	(240,947)	(51,303)	0.00	274,047	107,000	381,047	0.00	361,650	472,821	834,471	1.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,962,000</b>	<b>3,799,263</b>	<b>10,761,263</b>	<b>59.45</b>	<b>7,149,000</b>	<b>5,627,000</b>	<b>12,776,000</b>	<b>66.95</b>	<b>7,369,000</b>	<b>7,224,000</b>	<b>14,593,000</b>	<b>68.45</b>
<b>Ministerial Education</b>												
Board and Administration	152,823	1,024,845	1,177,668	1.00	215,000	1,180,000	1,395,000	1.00	257,000	1,180,000	1,437,000	1.00
Retiree Health Care	(71,951)	-	(71,951)	0.00	36,000	-	36,000	0.00	25,000	-	25,000	0.00
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary	867,000	6,445,278	7,312,278	35.80	884,000	5,702,000	6,586,000	36.50	867,000	6,236,000	7,103,000	38.50
Martin Luther College	3,672,000	25,066,581	28,738,581	191.10	3,744,000	20,354,000	24,098,000	191.70	3,864,000	21,498,000	25,362,000	198.50
Luther Preparatory School	2,371,000	6,312,349	8,683,349	66.95	2,418,000	6,713,000	9,131,000	65.00	2,488,000	6,468,000	8,956,000	67.50
Michigan Lutheran Seminary	1,128,000	2,885,152	4,013,152	40.00	1,152,000	3,349,000	4,501,000	42.25	1,187,000	3,134,000	4,321,000	42.75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,118,872</b>	<b>41,734,205</b>	<b>49,853,077</b>	<b>334.85</b>	<b>8,449,000</b>	<b>37,298,000</b>	<b>45,747,000</b>	<b>336.45</b>	<b>8,688,000</b>	<b>38,516,000</b>	<b>47,204,000</b>	<b>348.25</b>

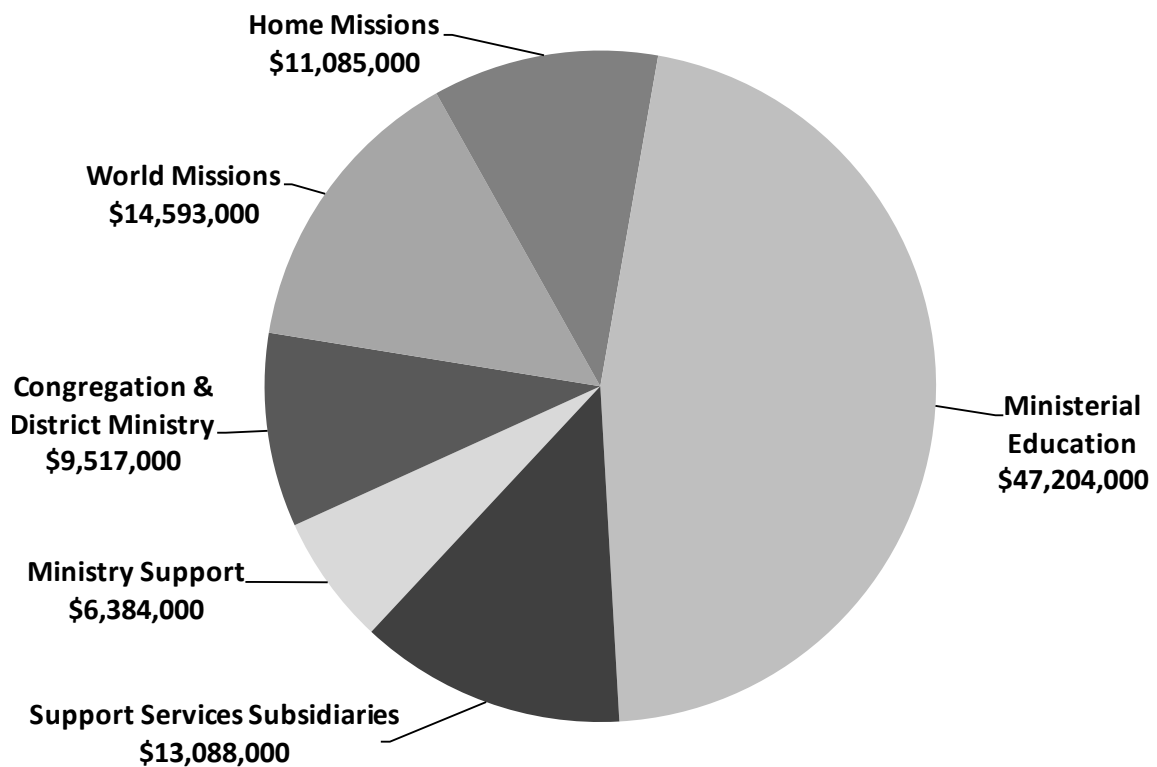
## Ministry Financial Plan Summary of Expenses

		FY22 Actual				FY23 Plan				FY24 Plan				FY25 Plan			
	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	FTE	
Congregation & District Ministry	Congregation Services	1,387,278	1,865,713	3,252,991	17.35	1,527,000	1,688,000	3,215,000	18.50	1,565,000	2,354,000	3,919,000	19.50	1,610,000	2,017,000	3,627,000	19.50
	Conference of Presidents	98,985	67,944	166,929	0.00	152,000	50,000	202,000	0.00	126,000	50,000	176,000	0.00	124,000	50,000	174,000	0.00
	Christian Giving	1,998,844	25,466	2,024,309	18.80	2,459,000	-	2,459,000	19.80	2,510,000	8,000	2,518,000	20.30	2,586,000	8,000	2,596,000	20.80
	Communication Services	671,389	82,839	754,228	7.30	627,000	91,000	718,000	6.50	722,000	100,000	822,000	7.30	748,000	101,000	849,000	7.30
	District Ministries	1,229,246	-	1,229,246	0.00	1,298,000	-	1,298,000	0.00	1,399,000	-	1,399,000	0.00	1,434,000	-	1,434,000	0.00
	Convention	80,000	-	80,000	0.00	-	-	-	0.00	94,000	105,000	199,000	0.00	-	-	-	0.00
	GICR	18,487	724,272	742,759	0.00	42,000	132,000	174,000	0.00	44,000	60,000	104,000	0.00	44,000	60,000	104,000	0.00
	Special Support	37,104	-	37,104	0.00	92,000	-	92,000	0.00	70,000	-	70,000	0.00	70,000	-	70,000	0.00
	Support	243,010	-	243,010	0.00	300,000	-	300,000	0.00	310,000	-	310,000	0.00	315,000	-	315,000	0.00
	TOTAL	5,764,343	2,766,234	8,530,577	43.45	6,497,000	1,961,000	8,458,000	44.80	6,840,000	2,677,000	9,517,000	47.10	6,933,000	2,236,000	9,169,000	47.60
Ministry Support	Facilities	226,996	573,267	800,263	0.00	248,000	247,000	495,000	0.00	254,000	270,000	524,000	0.50	260,000	200,000	460,000	0.50
	Synodical Council	64,792	533,977	598,769	0.00	94,000	520,000	614,000	0.00	82,000	500,000	582,000	0.00	86,000	512,000	598,000	0.00
	Synod Presidium	342,121	-	342,121	2.00	363,000	-	363,000	2.00	388,000	-	388,000	2.00	409,000	100,000	509,000	2.00
	Special Task Forces	301	-	301	0.00	2,000	-	2,000	0.00	2,000	-	2,000	0.00	2,000	-	2,000	0.00
	Archives	86,227	-	86,227	1.00	101,000	-	101,000	1.00	106,000	-	106,000	1.00	109,000	-	109,000	1.00
	Technology	1,388,869	38,823	1,427,692	13.00	1,581,000	33,000	1,614,000	14.00	1,728,000	40,000	1,768,000	14.00	1,782,000	40,000	1,822,000	14.00
	Financial Services	791,248	-	791,248	6.85	917,000	-	917,000	8.00	945,000	-	945,000	8.50	975,000	-	975,000	8.50
	Human Resources	271,209	450	271,659	2.00	283,000	-	283,000	2.00	319,000	-	319,000	2.00	328,000	-	328,000	2.00
	CAR	-	1,254,382	1,254,382	2.00	-	1,650,000	1,650,000	2.00	-	1,750,000	1,750,000	2.00	-	1,750,000	1,750,000	2.00
	TOTAL	3,171,763	2,400,899	5,572,662	26.85	3,589,000	2,450,000	6,039,000	29.00	3,824,000	2,560,000	6,384,000	30.00	3,951,000	2,602,000	6,553,000	30.00

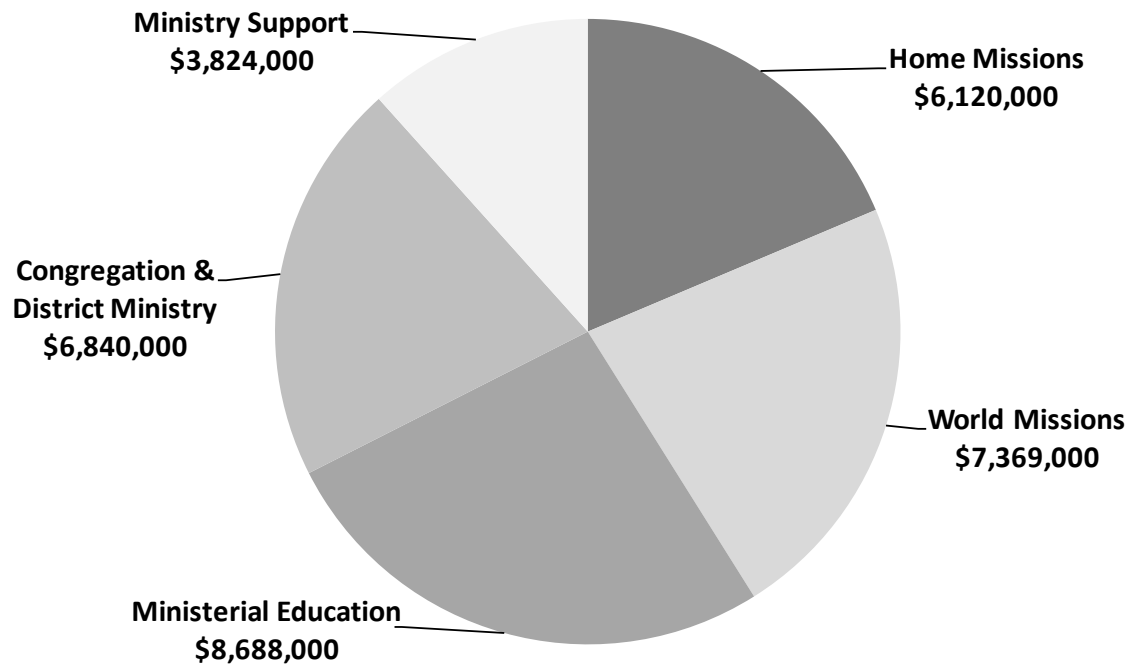
## FY 2023-24 Total Ministry Plan Support \$101,871,000



## FY 2023-24 Total Ministry Plan Expenses \$101,871,000

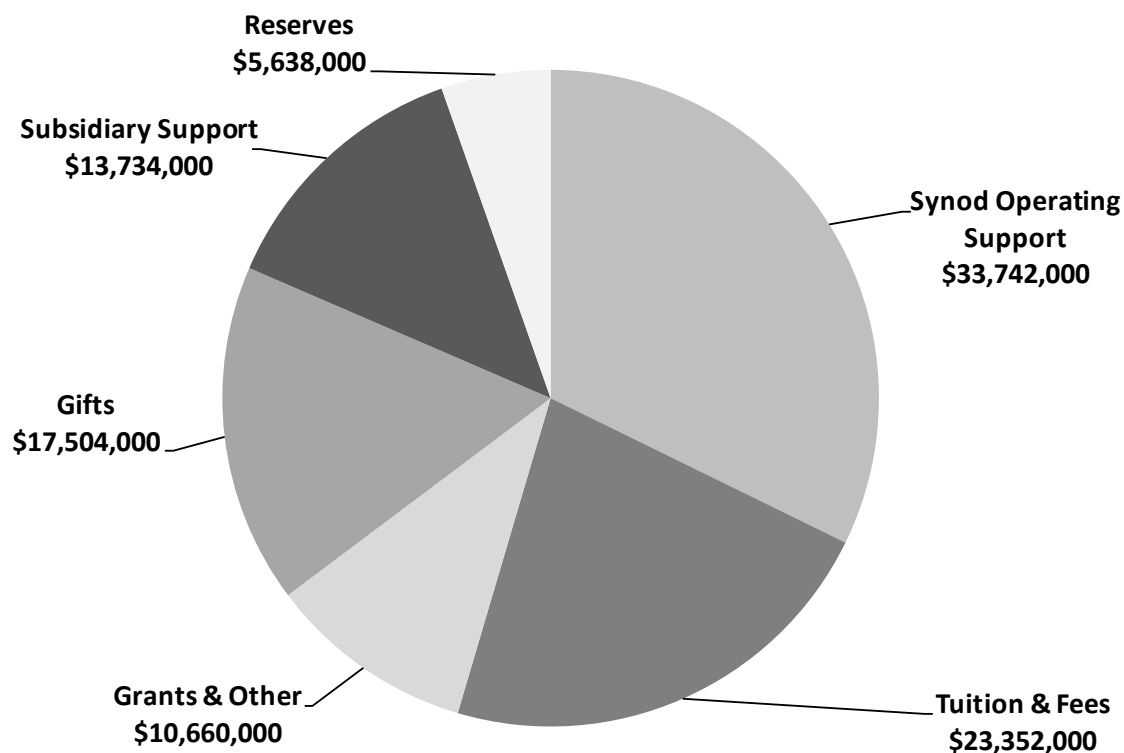


**FY 2023-24 Synod Operating Support Allocation**  
**\$32,841,000**

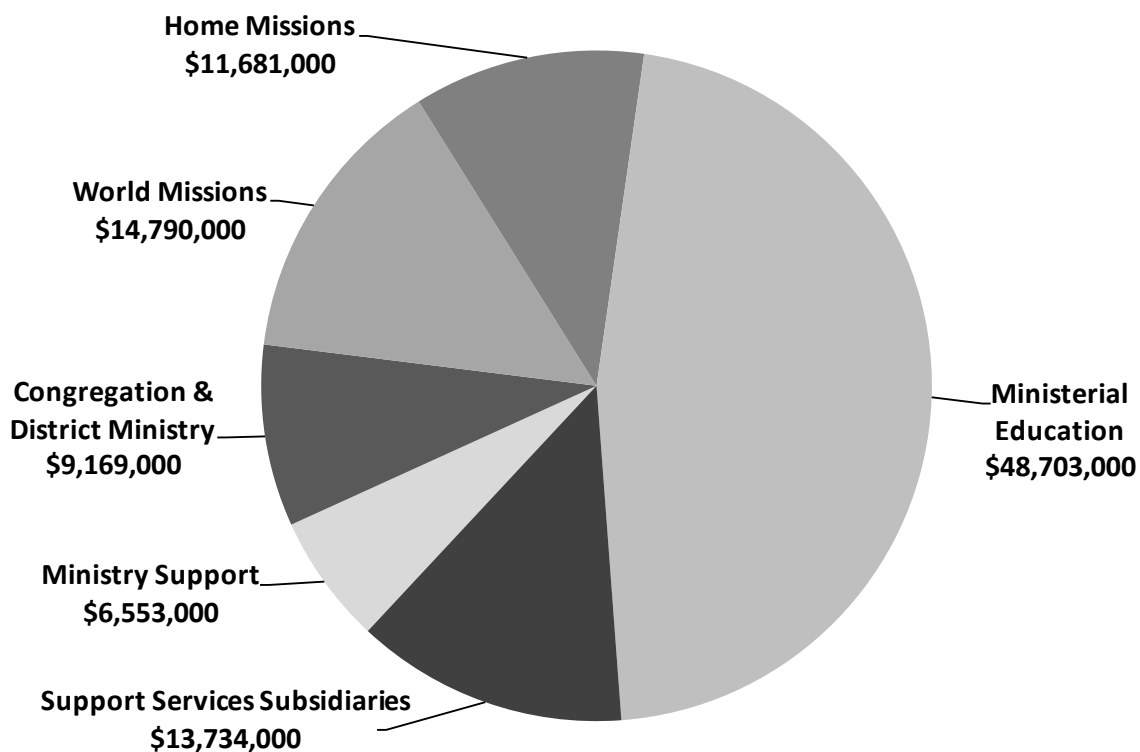




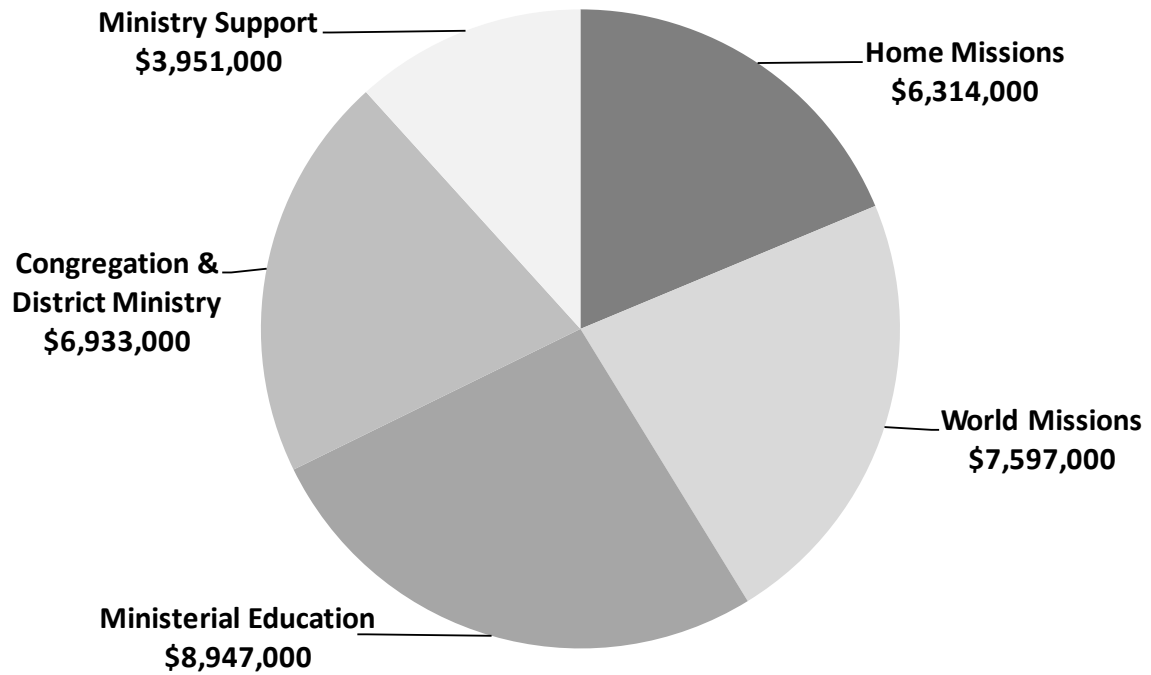
## FY 2024-25 Total Ministry Plan Support \$104,630,000



## FY 2024-25 Total Ministry Plan Expenses \$104,630,000



## FY 2024-25 Synod Operating Support Allocation \$33,742,000





# Minutes

## Monday, July 31, 2023

At 4:00 p.m., delegate orientation was led by Rev. Mark Luetzow, Michigan Lutheran Seminary president; Rev. Joel Voss, WELS second vice president; Mr. Martin Spriggs, WELS chief technology officer; and Mr. Lee Hitter, WELS communications director. The presentation concluded at 4:41 p.m. Dinner at Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS) followed, beginning at 5:00 p.m.

The opening service with communion was held at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Saginaw, Mich., with bus transportation provided from MLS. The presiding minister was Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president, and the preacher was Rev. James Huebner, WELS first vice president. The sermon was based on Revelation 1:4-8. Organist/pianist was Mr. Owen Eubank. Eight instrumentalists and a cantor assisted in beautifying the service. Also participating was the Michigan Lutheran Seminary Concert Choir. The service offering was designated for the Obadiah Lutheran Synod in Uganda and *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional of Latin America*.

Following the worship service, committees met to organize and plan. An opportunity for fellowship with refreshments followed.

## Tuesday, Aug. 1, 2023

At 8:00 a.m., ladies of the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society presented the flags of all the countries in which WELS or churches in fellowship with WELS conduct mission work. The ladies were thanked for their presentation.

At 8:24 a.m., President Mark Schroeder called the convention to order. The opening devotion was led by Rev. Aaron Boehm based on Revelation 5:6-14. The hymn "When Will I Walk" was sung. Boehm was thanked for the devotion.

Rev. Mark Luetzow, Michigan Lutheran Seminary president, welcomed the delegates. He was thanked for his presentation.

President Schroeder announced that by unanimous consent minutes would not be read but will be posted at **welsconvention.net**.

Rev. Scott Schwertfeger, chairman of Floor Committee #19: Elections, presented the nominating ballot for synod president. He read the bylaw description of the president's responsibility. After prayer, paper ballots were cast since the Internet was down. After the ballots were collected, the election was declared closed.

President Mark Schroeder read a letter of greeting from Rev. Michael Herbst, president of the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche*. Introduced were Rev. Tonny Quintero, *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*, and Rev. Glenn Obenberger, president, Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Attendance by Rev. Michael Wilke, president, Church of the Lutheran Confession, is expected later today.

Mr. Kyle Egan, WELS chief financial officer, was introduced. He presented a summary of the synod's current financial status. He was thanked for his report.

Rev. Scott Schwertfeger, chairman of Floor Committee #19: Elections, presented the ballot for the position of synod president. Since the Internet was working, votes were cast electronically. On the ballot were the names of Rev. Jonathan Hein, Rev. James Huebner, Rev. Mark Schroeder, Rev. Earle Treptow, and Rev. Charles Westra. After the votes were cast, the election was declared closed.

Rev. Michael Wilke, president of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, was introduced.

First Vice President James Huebner took the chair. President Schroeder presented his printed report. He was thanked for his report.

Rev. Scott Schwertfeger, chairman of Floor Committee #19: Elections, after prayer, presented the results of the election for synod president. Rev. Mark Schroeder was re-elected. It was moved and supported to make the ballot unanimous. The motion carried.

Schwertfeger read the bylaw description of the duties of the second vice president. The nominating ballot was cast for that position and after all votes were cast, the ballot was declared closed.

South Central District President Donald Patterson presented several materials available at the Northwestern Publishing House display at the convention.

Re-elected President Schroeder shared thoughts on his ministry work and humbly accepted the convention's call to serve another four-year term as president.

At 10:00 a.m. a 20-minute break was declared. The morning session resumed at 10:25 a.m.

Chairman Schwertfeger announced the top three candidates for second vice president: Rev. James Huebner, Rev. Snowden Sims, and Rev. Joel Voss. After the electronic votes were cast, the election was declared closed.

Mr. Kyle Egan, WELS chief financial officer, returned to the podium. He presented the process to develop the synod's ministry financial plan and the proposed plan itself for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025. After answering one question, he was thanked for his report.

Rev. Scott Schwertfeger, chairman of Floor Committee #19: Elections, presented the results of the election of the second vice president, Rev. Joel Voss.

Rev. Glenn Obenberger presented fraternal greetings to WELS from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. He was thanked for his report.

Rev. Greg Lyon, campus pastor of Wisconsin Lutheran College, presented a report from the college. The presentation included a brief video that included greetings from WLC President Daniel Johnson. After providing additional information, Lyon was thanked for his presentation.

Rev. Joel Voss announced his acceptance of the call to serve as second vice president.

Prof. Joel Otto, chairman of the synod's 175th Anniversary Committee, presented a report regarding the plans for the anniversary. He shared several historical highlights using historic photographs. The theme of the anniversary is "Christ through us." Books and videos are to be produced as well as worship resources and various articles in synod publications. Membership in WELS Historical Institute was encouraged. He was thanked for his report.

Rev. Scott Schwertfeger, chairman of Floor Committee #19: Elections, returned to the podium for the election of 17 positions on synod boards and committees.

After votes were cast and after several announcements, the morning session adjourned for lunch.

The afternoon session was called to order at 1:15 p.m. with a devotion led by Rev. Paul Horn. The devotion was based on Revelation 7:9-17. The hymn "Behold a Host, Arrayed in White" was sung. Horn was thanked for leading the devotion.

Rev. Philip Hirsch, Nebraska District president, presented the doctrinal essay, "Embrace the Cross—Anticipate the Crown." Questions and discussion followed. The essayist was thanked for his presentation.

At 3:42 p.m., a break was declared. The afternoon session resumed at 4:03 p.m.

Rev. Jonathan Hein, Commission on Congregational Counseling director, used a PowerPoint to present a statistical summary and analysis. Questions and discussion followed. Hein was thanked for his presentation.

At 5 p.m., President Schroeder closed the afternoon session with prayer.

After the evening meal, World Missions presentations were made by Missionary Matthew Behmer, Missionary Luke Wolfgramm, and Missionary Guy Marquardt.

### **Wednesday, Aug. 2, 2023**

The morning session was called to order by President Schroeder at 8:00 a.m. The opening devotion was led by Rev. Brian Hackmann and was based on Revelation 12:7-17a. The hymn, "Rise, Shine, You People," was sung. Hackmann was thanked for leading the devotion.

Prof. James Danell introduced Rev. Makisimu Musa, president, Obadiah Lutheran Synod of Uganda, who joined the convention via Zoom. Rev. Musa addressed the convention from Africa. The chairman of Floor Committee #3: Commission on Inter-Church Relations, Rev. David Kolander, presented Resolution No. 02 of Floor Committee #3: Commission on Inter-Church Relations. The resolution was moved and supported. The motion carried unanimously. The assembly joined in singing "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."

Prof. Danell introduced Rev. Tonny Quintero, *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*, and Rev. Andrew Johnston. Rev. Quintero addressed the assembly; Rev. Johnston translated. Rev. David Kolander returned to the podium and presented Resolution No. 01 of Floor Committee #3: Commission on Inter-Church Relations. The resolution was moved and supported. The motion carried unanimously. The assembly joined in singing, "God's Word is Our Great Heritage."

Rev. Kolander read Report No. 01 and Report No. 02 from Floor Committee #3: Commission on Inter-Church Relations. Questions were answered. Resolution No. 03 was read, moved, and supported. The motion carried unanimously. The floor committee was thanked for its report.

Rev. Scott Schwertfeger, chairman, reported for Floor Committee #19: Elections. Results to date were reported and four run-off elections were held.

Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of the Board for World Missions, and Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, chairman of the Board for World Missions, addressed the assembly. The men were thanked for their presentations.

A break was declared at 10:00 a.m. The morning session resumed at 10:22 a.m.

Rev. Mark Gabb, chairman of the Board for Home Missions, addressed the assembly. He was thanked for his PowerPoint and video presentation.

Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of the Board for Ministerial Education; Rev. Duane Rodewald, chairman of the Board for Ministerial Education; Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary President Rev. Earle Treptow; Martin Luther College President Rev. Richard Gurgel; Martin Luther College Admissions Counselor Mr. Theodore Klug; Luther Preparatory School President Rev. Matthew Crass; and Michigan Lutheran Seminary President Rev. Mark Luetzow came to the dais. Rev. Prange addressed the assembly and introduced the others, who also delivered presentations.

Rev. Schwertfeger presented the final report of the Elections Committee. It was moved and supported to thank the committee for its work. The motion carried.

Rev. Paul Seager, chairman, presented the report of Floor Committee #9: World Missions and Joint Mission Council. It was moved and supported to thank the committee. The motion passed.

President Schroeder closed the morning session with prayer at 11:52 a.m.

The afternoon session was called to order at 1:15 p.m. Rev. Timothy Spiegelberg led the devotion based on Revelation 14:6,7. The hymn "Preserve Your Word, O Savior" was sung.

Rev. Jonathan Hein, director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling; Teacher James Rademan, director of the Commission on Lutheran Schools; Rev. Joel Gaertner, director of the Commission on Special Ministries; and Mr. Daniel Nommensen, the new operations manager for Congregational Services, were welcomed. Presentations were made by each. Rev. Paul Horn, the new national civilian chaplain, also spoke. The men were thanked for their presentations.

Mr. Jeremy Angle, president of Northwestern Publishing House, was welcomed to the podium. After his presentation, he was thanked.

Rev. Daniel Sims, chairman of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, spoke to the assembly. He was thanked for his presentation.

At 3:02 p.m. a break was declared. The session resumed at 3:23 p.m.

Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of the Ministry of Christian Giving, presented a very positive report to the convention. He was thanked for his presentation.

The assembly heard a presentation by Mr. Brad Price, president/CEO of the Lutheran Military Support Group. Veterans in the assembly were acknowledged with a round of applause. After questions were answered, he was thanked for his words.

Rev. William Carter, chairman of Floor Committee #4: Ministry of Christian Giving, presented the committee's report. Report No. 01 was read. It was moved and supported to accept the report with thanks. The motion carried.

Rev. Adam Zimpelmann, chairman of Floor Committee #5: Communications, presented the committee's report. Report No. 01 was read. It was moved and supported to accept the report with thanks. The motion carried.

Rev. Carlos Leyrer, chairman of Floor Committee #6: Synodical Council, presented the committee's report. Report No. 01 was read. It was moved and supported to accept the report with thanks. The motion carried.

Rev. Scott Mosher, chairman of Floor Committee #10: Ministerial Education, presented the committee's report. Report No. 1 was read. Resolution No. 01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. It was moved and supported to accept the report with thanks. The motion carried.

Rev. Benjamin Tomczak, chairman of Floor Committee #11: Congregational Services A (Congregational Counseling, Discipleship, Evangelism), presented the committee's report. Report No. 01 was read. It was moved and supported to accept the report with thanks. The motion carried.

Rev. Bart Brauer, chairman of Floor Committee #12: Congregational Services B (Worship, Special Ministries), presented the committee's report. Report No. 01 was read. Resolution No. 01 was moved and supported. President Schroeder noted that funding to implement the resolution would need to be considered/approved by the Synodical Council. After further discussion, the motion was called and it failed. It was moved and supported to accept the report with thanks. The motion carried.

Teacher David Gartner, chairman of Floor Committee #13: Congregational Services C (Lutheran Schools), presented the committee's report. Report No. 01 was read. It was moved and supported to accept the report with thanks. The motion carried.

Rev. Andrew Mueller, chairman of Floor Committee #2: Conference of Presidents, presented the committee's report. Reports No. 01, No. 02, No. 03, No. 04, No. 05, and No. 06 were read. Resolution No. 01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. Resolution No. 02 was moved and supported. The motion carried. Resolution No. 03 was moved and supported. There was discussion. It was moved and supported to table the discussion until tomorrow. The motion to table carried.

The afternoon session adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

After the evening meal, at 7:00 p.m., Rev. Paul Biedenbender, Rev. David Koelpin, and Rev. Timothy Spiegelberg shared Home Missions presentations.

### **Thursday, Aug. 3, 2023**

The morning session was called to order at 8:00 a.m. The opening devotion was presented by Rev. Adam Mueller based on Revelation 19:1-9. The hymn "He Will Hold Me Fast" was sung. Mueller was thanked for his devotion.

President Schroeder announced that the service offering totaled \$5,965. It will be given to Obadiah Lutheran Synod of Uganda and *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*.

Rev. Andrew Mueller, chairman of Floor Committee #2: Conference of Presidents, returned to the podium. It was moved to take Resolution 02-03 off the table. The motion carried. The committee withdrew the resolution. A revised Resolution 02-03 was moved and supported. An amendment to Resolution 02-03 was proposed. The original asked the Conference of Presidents to "prepare a pastoral brief on critical theories in light of Scripture." The amended version reads to "prepare a pastoral brief emphasizing the importance of justice and analyzing critical theories in light of Scripture." The amendment was moved and supported. After the vote on the amendment, a division of the house was called. With a show of hands, Floor Committee #19: Elections counted the votes "for"



and “against” the amendment. The motion to amend the resolution carried. The motion to adopt the amended Resolution 02-03 carried. The committee was thanked for its work.

Rev. David Koelpin, chairman of Floor Committee #8: Home Missions, presented the committee's report. Report 08-01 was read. It was moved and supported to accept the report. Discussion followed. The motion carried. Report 08-02 was read. It was moved and supported to accept Report 08-02. The motion carried. The committee was thanked for its work.

Rev. David Barkow, chairman of Floor Committee #14: Support Services, presented the committee's reports. Reports 14-01, 14-02, 14-03, and 14-04 were read. It was moved and supported to accept all the reports with thanks.

Rev. Jason Hacker, chairman of Floor Committee #1: President's Report, presented the committee's work. Report 01-01 was read. It was moved and supported to accept Report 01-01. The motion carried. Report 01-02 was read. It was moved and supported to accept Report 01-02. The motion carried. Resolution 01-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. Resolution 01-02 was moved and supported. The motion carried. Resolution 01-03 was moved and supported. There was discussion. The motion carried. Resolution 01-04 was moved and supported. The motion carried. The committee was thanked for its work.

Rev. Daniel Balge, chairman of Floor Committee #18: Constitutional Matters, presented the committee's report. Resolution 18-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried by the two-thirds majority needed for a bylaw change. Resolution 18-02 was moved and supported. The motion carried by the two-thirds majority needed for a bylaw change. Resolution 18-03 was moved and supported. The motion carried by the two-thirds majority needed for a bylaw change. The committee was thanked for its work.

Rev. Geoff Cortright, chairman of Floor Committee #15: Subsidiaries and Benefit Plans, presented the committee's work. Reports 15-01, 15-02, 15-03, 15-04, and 15-05 were read. It was moved and supported to accept the reports. The motion carried. The committee was thanked for its work.

Rev. Matthew Brown, chairman of Floor Committee #7: Ministry Financial Plan (Budget), presented the committee's work. Report 07-01 was read. Resolution 07-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. Report 07-02 was read. It was moved and carried to receive the reports with thanks. The motion carried. The committee was thanked for its work.

Rev. Korey Van Kampen, chairman of Floor Committee #16: Northwestern Publishing House and Publication Coordinating Commission, presented Reports 16-01, 16-02, and 16-03. It was moved and supported to receive the reports. The motion carried. The committee was thanked for its work.

Rev. Joel Seifert, chairman of Floor Committee #17: WELS Christian Aid and Relief, presented Report 17-01. It was moved and supported to accept the report. The motion carried. The committee was thanked for its work.

Rev. Mark Luetzow, Michigan Lutheran Seminary president, once again thanked all for their attendance and also made several announcements.

President Mark Schroeder offered closing words, speaking of the world into which we are returning. We know we will have challenges, but we also know how the story ends. We have amazing promises. Among them, the gates of hell itself will not stand against the Lord's church. We have the sword of the Spirit and the Word of God. The cross wins the victory for us both now and in eternity. The delegates were thanked for their attention and diligence and asked to share information from this convention with others. Information is available at **welsconvention.net**. God's blessings!

It was moved and supported to adjourn at 10:10 a.m. The motion carried.

The closing service was held in the chapel at 10:45 a.m. The presiding minister was Rev. Mark Luetzow, Michigan Lutheran Seminary president. The preacher was Rev. Joel Zank, Northern Wisconsin District president. The organist was Prof. Joshua Wendt. The devotion was based on Revelation 22:12-21, "Come." Installed were President Mark Schroeder and Second Vice President Joel Voss. Hymns sung included "We Are Called to Serve Together"; "Christ, the Sure and Steady Anchor"; and "Rise to Arms! With Prayer Employ You."

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Robert W. Pasbrig,  
WELS recording secretary



# Convention presentations

For a complete list of convention presentations, see the minutes, which begin on p. 75.

## Opening service sermon: It's all about Jesus

July 31, 2023

St. Paul's, Saginaw, Mich.

Rev. James Huebner

Text: Revelation 1:4b-8

### Introduction

How could the early Christians in and around Ephesus go on? It was so easy to get caught up in the blur of daily activity, the pressure to perform on the job, the feeling that there is never enough time in the day. At the same time, it was not easy to live out their faith amid a culture that downplayed the value of life on both ends of life's spectrum, kicking the elderly to the curb if they became too much of a burden and tossing aside "inconvenient" little ones, a culture that glorified immorality whenever people had the urge, a culture that accepted dabbling in the occult as normal and trumpeted chasing the almighty dollar as the premier goal in life, a culture that thrived on partisan politics and kindled fires of racial division and discrimination at every opportunity, a culture that boiled with splits and tensions even among family members on how to handle diseases that ravaged the community. "This Christian living business is hard," they said, "Neighbors avoid us because they think we're too religious. I lost out on a promotion because I wouldn't play the cheating games the boss wanted me to play. My niece is not baptized, and my sister keeps telling me that it's none of my business. I have a constant battle with my own sinful nature to suppress envy and anger, and my fellow church member confided in me that he has a hard time controlling lust when he's at the marketplace and persons of the opposite gender stroll by." How could those early Christians cope? Who could raise their sights and spirits? Who could change their mood from gloom and doom to hope and happiness?

To do just that, the Lord Jesus reached down from the heavens and lit up the mind and heart of the apostle John, who by this time was in his nineties, banished from his role as supervising pastor for the churches on the left coast of Asia Minor to an island 65 miles to the southwest. Besides all that cultural crud and personal pressure, John and those early Christians knew that the Lord Jesus predicted there would be wars and rumors of wars, disasters, tragedies, tensions in family relationships, and worst of all, visible Christian churches with leaders promoting the big lie that he did not do enough, as if his cry from the cross was not, "It is finished!" but rather, "It's almost finished." That's blasphemy. That is spiritual adultery. That is people thinking they are the bride of Christ committing the vilest unfaithfulness against the groom.

How could those early Christians cope? How can we? With heads bowed, shoulders stooped, shuffling feet, hanging on by our fingernails praying, "Come, Lord Jesus, and make it soon because we're out of gas!" or with heads uplifted, shoulders back, a spring in our step, singing, "Come, Lord Jesus, whenever you decide. In the meantime, we'll joyfully labor even in tough times for you"? Who can raise our sights and spirits? Who will change our mood from gloom and doom to hope and happiness? In the beginning of his letter to the seven churches and to us John has the answer: "It's all about Jesus."

## I. A message to celebrate (Revelation 1:4,5,7)

A. Nearly everyone has a hero. It might be a kind and caring politician (Is that an oxymoron?). It might be a movie or music star. It might be a sports personality or business guru. If you saw at a distance in the airport gate a famous person whom you've admired, you would probably gasp for breath. If that person came waltzing down the sidewalk at the conclusion of worship, all heads would turn. If that person walked right up to you and said, "I'm taking you to lunch tomorrow, and I'm not only going to chat with you, but I'm going to use all my power, influence, and resources to make your life as happy as you can imagine," you'd be nearly speechless.

B. That's exactly what happened to the apostle John but on an even grander scale. Multiply the feeling of awe and amazement by a million. In this vision the Lord Jesus Christ revealed to John his divine splendor, the same kind of splendor which he, his brother James, and Peter caught a glimpse of on the Mount of Transfiguration. You need someone to pick you up when you are down? Jesus is God, glorious God, true God. "Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come" (God the Father), "and from the seven spirits" [or seven-fold Spirit] (God the Holy Spirit), . . . "and from Jesus Christ" (v. 4). Who will raise our sights and spirits? It's all about Jesus. He is with the Father and the Holy Spirit, our three-in-one God, and that means he has the brains and brawn to do it.

C. When we say that the one who raises our sights and spirits is the God-man, Jesus, we could stop right there. Knowing who he is is enough to knock our socks off. But I need someone to tell me the truth, not to sugarcoat who I am and what I've done but the unvarnished truth that my worst problem is not the crud all around and the chaos that makes my head spin but the corruption I was born with. "Jesus Christ . . . is the faithful witness." A witness testifies to what he knows. Jesus' Holy Word always proclaims the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But I not only need the truth about my errors and what I've earned because of them. I need rescue. So do you. "Jesus is . . . the firstborn from the dead." The firstborn among the Israelites was dedicated to the Lord. But God knew how gut-wrenching it would be for an Israelite family to give up a firstborn child, so he told them to sacrifice an animal as a substitute. Jesus sacrificed himself for us and proved it was a full substitution by coming out of the tomb. With that unvarnished truth and remarkable rescue, I also need a guiding and protecting hand as I step out each day. "Jesus is . . . the ruler of the kings of the earth" (v. 5). A great ruler fights for his people, guides and protects them. Jesus fought Satan for us and won. Now he rules, guides, and protects our souls. Who will change our mood from gloom and doom to hope and happiness? It's all about Jesus, our great Prophet, Priest, and King.

Should John spell it out so that we are absolutely clear on why we celebrate that message? "To him who loves us"—ongoing, never ending love—"and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (v. 5b)—a one-time rescue that is a fact and good for all time—all of which has a direct bearing on our future. "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all peoples of the earth [who reject him] will mourn because of him" (v. 7). Let those who reject him mourn! We will celebrate! Jesus is our Savior from sin, from our sin, from our putrid ways and words. It's all about Jesus, and that's a message to celebrate.

## II. A message to communicate (Revelation 1:6,8)

A. Celebrate not obfuscate; hold in our hearts but not hide or hoard. This opening of the revelation makes that perfectly clear. The apostle John received this vision, and Jesus told him what? "Learn to keep your mouth shut, John. Stop talking about me and what I've done so you stay out of trouble!" Absolutely not! "He has made us a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (v. 6). "Speak it, John! Write it. Proclaim it. Let it rip! It's all about me, your Savior. 'I am the Alpha and Omega . . . who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty' " (v. 8). Jesus poured out this vision to John so that he would communicate it to people who were picked on and persecuted, who knew that life is a bowl of cherries and way too often only pits. How could they cope? Who could raise their sights and spirits? Who could change their mood from gloom and doom to hope and happiness? It's all about Jesus. The victory Jesus won for those Christians fueled them with the courage to say "No!" when invited to get drunk on the weekend. They said "No!" to sex outside of marriage. They gave up some creature comforts in order to contribute more to further Christian ministry. They stood at the grave of loved ones and sang, "Christ is arisen from the grave's dark prison. We now rejoice with gladness; Christ will end all sadness" (*Christian Worship* 458), all of which had an impact on friends and neighbors who would eventually have their own pains and problems, troubles and trials and ask their Christian friend, "How do you cope?" Creak! The door opened for them to communicate, "Life on earth is hard and will often make us feel like losers, but with Jesus we have victory over Satan's claws and the jaws of hell. Look what he did, living out what God demands of us but we can't do and paying with his life what we should have paid. So I ask you, dear friend, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or

persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35,37-39). It's all about Jesus.

B. One hundred missions in ten years. Where will we get the workers? Churches merging or closing, shrinking numbers, rising interest rates, declining enrollment in our college of ministry, discussions on whether our Lutheran schools should serve not only members and the unchurched but also the kids of Christians committed to their non-denom church who only are looking for quality private education. How do we solve those issues? How can we get pumped up by glowing reports at a convention and then maintain that joy and excitement when we return home where life, even congregational life, is hard? The lay leader tells the pastor, "I love serving on the church council, but I lost my job, and we have to move." The teacher receives the news, "The stomach pain our thirteen-year-old reported to us and to you is cancer." The pastor's phone rings, "Pick up your associate's wife and bring her to the emergency room. There's been an accident." "Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25). We do not have to live life as though helpless when it crashes around us. We can take the offensive, push Satan aside, and unlock heaven for someone who is afraid of being locked out. We do that whenever we communicate the message that counts the most. So, if there are days when you feel like a loser, re-read this triumphant chapter and this triumphant book, then go and communicate that it's all about Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

It's like getting caught in traffic and arriving at the end of Act III of a three-act play. You see the ending, but you missed out on how the story unfolds, how the characters suffered and got hurt either by others or by their own fault, and how the hero didn't merely pop in at the end to bring down the curtain but who toiled and labored and battled to make it all come out in the end and have the final say. That's where we're at this convention when we peek into the last book of Scripture for our worship and devotions so we can step away from our own weariness, woes, and worries and rejoice in the glorious news of the eternal better that is made real only by Jesus.

When exiled to the island of Patmos, John may not have thought there was much to celebrate. He may have wondered, "Is my ministry in the Ephesus area over?" The Lord Jesus told him, "No!" He came to John and boosted him with a message to celebrate and communicate. It's a message that sums up all of what God wants us to know. It's a message that helps us cope, that raises our sights and spirits, that changes our mood from gloom and doom to hope and happiness, because it's all about Jesus.

# Essay:

## Embrace the Cross—Anticipate the Crown

Aug. 1, 2023

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**T**hat person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. (Theses 19-21 of Martin Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*)

### **The pervasiveness of “cross and crown” language in religion and life**

Mary Baker Eddy, of Christian Science fame, said, “If you launch your bark upon the ever-agitated but healthful waters of truth, you will encounter storms. Your good will be evil spoken of. This is the cross. Take it up and bear it, for through it you win and wear the crown.” “Cross and crown” is central to her teaching: “Whoever reaches the understanding of Christian Science in its proper signification will perform the sudden cures of which it is capable; but this can be done only by taking up the cross daily and following Christ in the daily life”.<sup>1</sup> You’ll win your crown by struggling through the storms—the cross. So says a theologian of glory.

St. Rose of Lima, who only allowed herself to sleep two hours a night at most so that she had more hours to devote to prayer, and who donned a heavy crown made of silver, with small spikes on the inside, in emulation of the crown of thorns worn by Christ, is quoted in the Roman Catholic Catechism, saying, “Apart from the cross, there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.”<sup>2</sup> The catechism continues: “Because in his incarnate divine person Christ has in some way united himself to every man, ‘the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery’ is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to ‘take up their cross and follow him,’ for ‘Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example so that we should follow him in his steps.’ ” “The willingness with which St. Rose adopted sufferings in this life, even taking them upon herself, teaches a valuable lesson to the world today. When suffering is something to be disdained at all costs—consider, for example, the widespread acceptance of and support for suffering-eliminating practices like euthanasia—St. Rose’s story concretely presents another way. Her life illuminates the Gospel’s wisdom on suffering. Keeping in mind Jesus’ admonition to the rich young man, the way to heaven is impossible without taking up the cross (see Mt 19:16-30; Mk 10:17-31; Lk 18:18-30).”<sup>3</sup> You’ll win your crown by taking on sufferings and the cross. So says another theologian of glory.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (pp. 178,179)

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), #618

<sup>3</sup> [www.simplycatholic.com/st-rose-of-lima-the-first-saint-canonized-from-the-new-world](http://www.simplycatholic.com/st-rose-of-lima-the-first-saint-canonized-from-the-new-world)



William Penn's Pennsylvania experiment profoundly influenced the American experiment later. He says what a free-will theologian of glory would say, what one who rejects God showing up in Word and sacrament would say: *no cross, no crown*.

Viktor Emil Frankl was a Jewish-Austrian psychiatrist and holocaust survivor who founded logotherapy, a school of psychotherapy that describes a search for a life's meaning as the central human motivational force. His 1946 book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, has sold 16 million copies and has been translated into 52 languages. He writes:

These tasks, and therefore the meaning of life, differ from man to man, and from moment to moment. Thus it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way. Questions about the meaning of life can never be answered by sweeping statements. "Life" does not mean something vague, but something very real and concrete, just as life's tasks are also very real and concrete. They form man's destiny, which is different and unique for each individual. No man and no destiny can be compared with any other man or any other destiny. No situation repeats itself, and each situation calls for a different response. Sometimes the situation in which a man finds himself may require him to shape his own fate by action. At other times it is more advantageous for him to make use of an opportunity for contemplation and to realize assets in this way. *Sometimes a man may be required to simply accept fate, to bear his cross* [italics mine]. Every situation is distinguished by its uniqueness, and there is always only one right answer to the problem.<sup>4</sup>

A Jewish psychiatrist (and theologian of glory; not all theologians realize they are) says cross bearing is required.

Church historian Eusebius famously reports that Constantine was marching with his army (most think at the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD), when he looked up to the sun and saw a cross of light above it, and with it the Greek words "(ἐν) τούτῳ νικά" ("In this, conquer"), a phrase often rendered into Latin as *in hoc signo vinces* ("in this sign, you will conquer"). Constantine did not know the meaning of the apparition, but on the following night, it is said that he had a dream in which Christ explained to him that he should use the sign of the cross against his enemies. *Onward, Christian soldiers*. And the symbol of the cross has been used by theologians of glory ever since.

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<sup>4</sup> Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984, first published in 1946), pp. 85,86





Figure 1: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In\\_hoc\\_signo\\_vinces#/media/File:Stanze\\_Vaticane\\_-\\_Raffaello\\_-\\_Apparizione\\_della\\_croce\\_\(Higher\\_Quality\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_hoc_signo_vinces#/media/File:Stanze_Vaticane_-_Raffaello_-_Apparizione_della_croce_(Higher_Quality).jpg)

Do I need to say anything about the so-called “Touchdown Jesus” at Notre Dame University? The cross and the crown get mushed together so easily.



Figure 2: [www.heimsath.com/sacred-space-holy-place/50-years-of-touchdown-jesus](http://www.heimsath.com/sacred-space-holy-place/50-years-of-touchdown-jesus)

St. Paul wrote to a splintered group in Corinth, solidly in the context of the 1st-century Greco-Roman Mediterranean world, complete with its ethnic strife, social class rivalries, and competing gods, philosophies, wisdom, and truth claims. And, in the end, he equated the crucified Jesus with the LORD of the Jews, encouraging a solid basis for boasting—in the LORD, Jesus:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel—not with the wisdom used in speeches, so that the cross of Christ would not be emptied of its power.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. In fact, it is written:

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will bring to nothing.

Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in the Jewish law? Where is the probing thinker of the present age? Has God not shown that the wisdom of this world is foolish? Indeed, since the world through its wisdom did not know God, God in his wisdom decided to save those who believe, through the foolishness of the preached message. Yes, Jews ask for signs, Greeks desire wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified—which is offensive to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We preach Christ crucified, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For example, consider your call, brothers. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view, not many were powerful, and not many were born with high status. But God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are strong, and God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with the things that are, so that no one may boast before God. But because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. God did this so that, just as it is written, “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:17-31 EHV)

The astounding central assertion of Christianity is that God put on flesh in Jesus and died as the atoning sacrifice for his creatures. Jesus had to teach the two on the way to Emmaus that he—the Christ—had to suffer and then enter his glory. And that all Scripture is truly centered in him (Luke 24:25-27). A generation later, Jesus’ apostle asserted that the *skandalon*/offense of the cross of Christ is that such a message of freedom makes all the huffing and puffing and working of the glory theologians worthy of castration (Galatians 5:11,12).

In the faithful church, we need to ground “cross” speech—with all of its notions of suffering and even dying—cleanly and clearly and faithfully. Or it will quickly go the way of curved-in-on-ourselves-theology and make the cross all about us and our suffering. And *then* we will arrive at “crown” speech—with all of its notions of ruling and reigning, especially eschatologically—faithfully and clearly and cleanly. We need to put cross and crown terminology together faithfully for the good of any who will be listening.

We’ll be well-served today if we re-clarify a couple of theses of Luther’s when he was called on to explicate his new teaching to his Augustinian brethren at a pastors’ conference in Heidelberg in 1518.



That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things that have actually happened (or have been made, created). That person deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God through suffering and the cross. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.<sup>5</sup>

Hermann Sasse writes against theologians who confuse cross and crown, who use the cross of Christ as a lucky charm for their triumphalistic schemes:

This oldest *theologia crucis* appears to be a typical example of what Luther later called *theologia gloriae*. The cross is a direct revelation of the glory of God on earth. Triumphantly it precedes the victorious armies of the Christian emperors and the valiant hosts of the Church Militant. As in the first centuries the demons fled from the sign of the cross, so now the enemies of the church flee in confusion where the banner of the cross or the relics of the cross appear. Who can resist the power of this sign? The cross is the sign by which unfailing victory is gained. In it God's power becomes visible in the world.<sup>6</sup>

You've heard it—our football team won because we have so many glorious Christians on the team. Our business is booming because we virtue signal our glorious Christianity by not being open on Sunday. This is using the cross for our own ends, not God's. This is being a theologian of glory.

**(We) embrace the cross. (We embrace and we) anticipate the crown.**

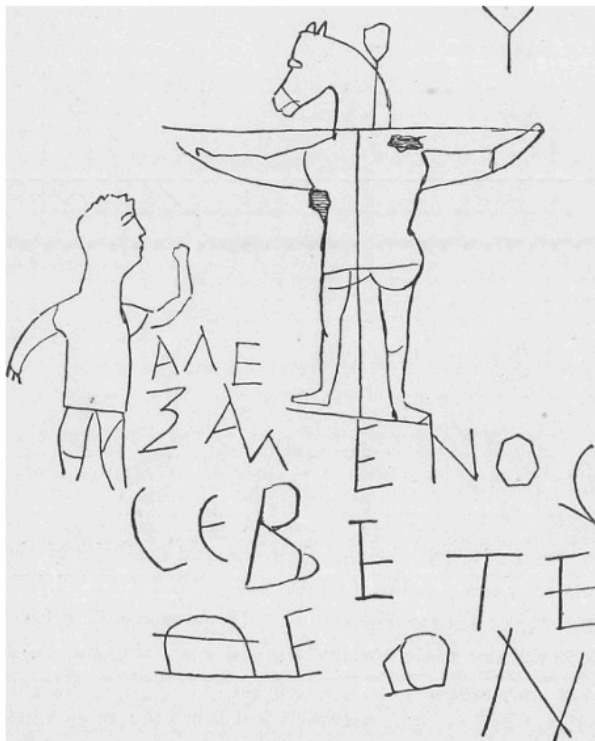


Figure 3: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexamenos\\_graffito#/media/File:AlexGraffito.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexamenos_graffito#/media/File:AlexGraffito.svg)

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, translation of theses 19-21 from *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 72-81.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Sasse, *Letters to Lutheran Pastors, Volume 1, 1948-1951*, "Theologia Crucis," originally written in 1951 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), p. 391.

This image from the first or second century after Christ seems to show a young man worshipping a crucified, donkey-headed figure. The Greek inscription approximately translates to “Alexamenos worships [his] god,” indicating that the graffito was apparently meant to mock a Christian named Alexamenos. Please note clearly that Alexamenos is being mocked for actually worshipping his crucified deity—he understands the theology of the cross is primarily about the assertion that it is the deity being shamed and killed up there on the torture device. This is exactly where this essay is attempting to focus our thinking and our speaking in the faithful church: On the Person crucified up there on the cross and what the promises are that we should be proclaiming in his name to each other and to those who need to hear his promises.

The 2nd-century philosopher Celsus also noticed and then reacted to faithful Christian proclamation. He used an imaginary Jew to be a literary mouthpiece in his critiques of Christian proclamation. John Granger Cook says, “Celsus’ Jew rejects the Christians’ theology of the cross: ‘Do you reproach us, you most credulous people, because we do not think this person is god and because we don’t agree with you that he endured these things to help humankind, so that we too may scorn punishments?’”<sup>7</sup> Later on, Cook says, “Celsus is apparently aware of Hellenistic Judaism’s belief in the Logos as son of God. What he cannot accept is a crucified Logos.”<sup>8</sup> At least Celsus clearly heard faithful Christian proclamation—faithful theology of the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth for the sins of the world—and it literally *scandalized/offended* him.

### **The cross of Christ first and then Christian suffering and the crown faithfully proclaimed**

Today, here at the 2023 convention of WELS, when we say, “We embrace the cross,” let us say more than “we embrace suffering,” or more than “in this sign we’ll conquer.” Let us come to grips with the *hiddenness of God* and with the *unfreedom (the bound will) of the humans* also. For the faithful theology of the “cross/crown” package includes the bound will of the human, the God who reveals himself when and where he wills and the One who promises to do it via the means of grace—in the most foolish of ways.

Let us say, “We are embracing—and proclaiming—a specific cross, the cross of Jesus Christ, and all of the promises attached to him.” Hermann Sasse: “There is one thing to preach, the wisdom of the cross,” in response to Isaiah’s question: “What shall I preach?” “The cross—in this sense—is not one of many theologies (incarnation, atonement, etc.) but it claims to be in contrast to the theology of glory and claims to be the correct Scriptural theology with which the Church of Christ stands or falls.”<sup>9</sup>

Sasse continues:

The cross is *the* revelation. For it is the only place where God makes Himself visible. What do we mean by that? What does Luther mean when he says that we can find God nowhere else than in Christ crucified? How is it that God is present in a special way in the cross?

To understand that we have to ask what revelation is. Revelation occurs when something hidden comes out from its hiddenness into the open. Revelation of God is God’s coming forth from His hiddenness. For God is hidden as all objects of faith are hidden. Faith, after all, according to the definition of Heb 11:1 which Luther quotes so often, has to do with things unseen. And God remains hidden for as long as we live on earth. He dwells in the

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<sup>7</sup> John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), p. 50

<sup>8</sup> Cook, p. 54

<sup>9</sup> Sasse, p. 388



light, which no man can approach, as His word teaches us (1 Tim 6:16). He also said “that He would dwell in the thick darkness” (1 Kings 8:12). He is a “hidden God” (Is 45:15), whose face cannot be seen by any man (Exod 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Jn 4:12) until we shall see Him in the *lumen gloriae* (“the light of glory”), “as He is” (1 John 3:2), “face to face” (1 Cor 13:12; Rev 22:4). But though God remains hidden to our eyes, He still reveals Himself by His Word. So the revelation in the Word is the way of divine revelation in this world.

“At sundry times and in diverse manners” God spake to the fathers by the prophets until “in these last days” (Heb 1:2), i.e., now, at the end of the world, He spake to us through the Son, who is more than a prophet, being “the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of His person” (Heb 1:3). He is the Eternal Word which was in the beginning. This Word is the content of all written and preached words of God. About Him we are told: “And the Word was made flesh . . . and we beheld His glory” (Jn 1:14). Thus the revelation in the *Word* becomes *incarnation*. Therefore Jesus Christ as the *Logos Incarnate* is the revelation of God on earth. Only in Him, the Eternal Word, does God come forth out of His hiddenness. He is the content of all that is divine Word, His incarnation is the making visible of the Word. The man Jesus is the *Verbum visibile* (“the visible Word”). He who sees Him sees the Father, as far as it is possible to see Him in this aeon.

Here we understand Luther’s doctrine of the cross. If God wants to reveal Himself, to make Himself visible to man, He cannot show Himself as He is. He cannot show His glory unveiled. For no man would bear the sight of the *Deus nudus* (God in His unveiled glory). So He chooses the veil of human nature. Incarnation, therefore, is at the same time revelation of God and hiding of His glory. The *Deus absconditus* (“hidden God”), the invisible eternal God, becomes for us *Deus revelatus* (God revealed) in Jesus Christ. But the revelation, this unveiling (which is what *revelatio* originally meant), is at the same time veiling, hiding. This explains Luther’s twofold use of the expression *Deus Absconditus*. Luther can speak of the hidden God in the sense of God as He has not yet revealed Himself, and of God who has revealed Himself by Hiding Himself in the humanity of Jesus Christ. The incarnation, therefore, is at the same time both revelation of God and veiling, hiding of God, in the human nature.<sup>10</sup>

### **As the LORD worked out his salvation story that began in the promise to Adam and Eve and was to culminate on Calvary’s cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, God hid his glory from Moses**

Your pastor learned to work in the Hebrew of the Old Testament. He experienced what all the pastors in our synod had learned—there is a very special name for God, the LORD, that Moses used—the Tetragrammaton (literally, the four-letter name). So special is this name that it has a *Kethibh* (a written presentation—יהוה) and it has a spoken one (*Qere*). Faithful Jews all over the world still today (and faithful Martin Luther College students studying to become candidates for the pastoral ministry) have to come to grips with this name and this God.

We’ve all heard the story. Moses hid his face (Exodus 3:6) from this God who had spoken from the bush that burned but didn’t burn up. He removed his sandals, for it was holy ground—this place where God spoke and answered Moses when he asked what to say to the Israelites when asked the name of the one who sent him. “And God said to Moses, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh” (Exodus 3:14, Tanakh translation, 2004).

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<sup>10</sup> Sasse, pp. 396,397

So mysterious and majestic is the name (and we're not even yet really talking about the hidden One that the name reveals . . . ) that Prof. John Brug says, "We do not know with certainty how this name is to be pronounced." And it could be translated, "I AM," or "I will continue to be what I was," Brug says.<sup>11</sup> We can't overstate the majesty of the LORD's name—and, of course, of the LORD himself.

Moses went as the LORD had sent him and then had led the people out of Egypt. He was now on Mt. Sinai. Moses, overestimating his chumminess with the LORD, or perhaps desperate for assurance, wanted to see God.<sup>12</sup>

And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." (Exodus 33:21-23)

Neither Moses nor any other human could see the face of God and live. So God, in his grace, reveals to Moses what the LORD wanted him to see, his "back," his אַחֲרָי, his τὰ ὀπίσω μου (LXX), *posteriora mea* (Vulgate), his *hintennach* (Luther), his hinder parts.<sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> Sainted Professor Arnold Koelpin, not normally known for earthy speech—unless he was talking Luther talk—said it differently.

This is far from the cuddly bear picture of God and Moses the children's story Bibles portray. This God consumes the humans. This God has to hide himself from the humans for their own good. This God destroys both soul and body of the human sinner in hell. He speaks and it thunders. Limits have

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<sup>11</sup> John F. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), pp. 297,298

<sup>12</sup> Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004) Alter's footnote on Exodus 33:18, "Show me, pray, your glory": "We are not likely to recover precisely what the key term *kavod*—glory, honor, divine presence, and very literally, 'weightiness'—conveyed to the ancient Hebrew imagination. In any case, Moses, who first fearfully encountered God in the fire in the bush, is now ready and eager to be granted a full-scale epiphany, a frontal revelation of the look and character of this divinity that had been speaking to him from within the pillar of cloud."

<sup>13</sup> Alter's note on Exodus 33:23, "you will see My back, but My face will not be seen": "Volumes of theology have been spun out of these enigmatic words. Imagining the deity in frankly physical terms was entirely natural for the ancient monotheists: this God had, or at least could assume, a concrete manifestation which had front and rear, face and back, and that face man was forbidden to see. But such concreteness does not imply conceptual naivete. Through it the Hebrew writer suggests an idea that makes good sense from later theological perspectives: that God's intrinsic nature is inaccessible, and perhaps also intolerable, to the finite mind of man, but that something of His attributes—His 'goodness,' the directional pitch of His ethical intentions, the afterglow of the effulgence of His presence—can be glimpsed by humankind."

<sup>14</sup> *Lutheran Study Bible* note on Exodus 33:22,23: "God would conceal most of His presence from Moses for Moses' own good; Moses does not see God's 'face'—the full expression of His glory, but he does see a glimpse of the divine presence (cf. 34:6-7)."



to be set up for the protection of the people, “lest the LORD break out against them” (Exodus 19). This God is to be feared.

This big God is the One who had chosen to speak it all into existence. So mysterious and so majestic. He could have done anything. And he *speaks*, “Let there be,” and *it is*. And it is good.

Remember that he had chosen to create, hands on, the crown of his creation. He walked with them in the cool of the day, talking to them, male and female, both created in the image of him. There was no need to hide from the humans for their good before their rebellion against their Creator.

But when the man and the woman chose to be god and reject their creator, this LORD God who had spoken it all into existence chose to speak powerfully again. In a promise. A promise of a seed of the woman that would strike the head of the serpent; the seed would win, the God who now hides and yet *speaks* to save the sinners *said/says*.

For so much of the subsequent history of the LORD’s dealings with his people, generation after generation, they proved they loved the other gods around. Since they couldn’t see the LORD, since all they had was his afterglow/his hinder parts/his promises, it seems they cared more about the gods they could see and sense and perceive and perform for or manipulate down to size.

**As the LORD worked out his salvation story that was to culminate on Calvary’s cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, God always, without interruption, absolutely keeps himself hidden in Isaiah’s day**

We jump ahead to the mid-8th century B.C., to Isaiah 45. In the context of speaking of the LORD’s use of Cyrus, the Persian, as a christ (an anointed one), and in the context of the God of Israel sounding like the one who dressed down Job and told him to brace himself like a man so that he would listen, Isaiah writes:

אַנְּוּ אֶתְּהָ אֵל מְסֻתָּר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ:

“Truly you are a God *who hides Himself*, O God of Israel and Savior!” (Isaiah 45:15, August Pieper).

August Pieper, who served in our seminary a century ago, writes in his classic commentary on Isaiah about verse 15:

The predicate of the sentence lies in *mistatter*—you are a God who keeps Himself hidden. The translation should express the characteristic of the Hithpael participle, the uninterrupted continuation of the action. . . . Not only now and then does God hide Himself; but always, without interruption, absolutely, does He keep Himself hidden from the reason and senses of natural man, both as to His being and as to His sovereignty. Though not even we preachers are always fully aware of this characteristic of God’s being, yet it is clearly set forth in Scripture: Exodus 33:18ff; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:12; Isaiah 40:12ff; Romans 11:33ff; Job 38ff; 1 Corinthians 2, etc. etc. No perception by the senses or the intellect, no conclusions based on axioms of human reasoning, no scientific experiment and discovery, no natural philosophy or metaphysical reasoning will ever discover God. He has hidden Himself absolutely from the wise men of the world.<sup>15</sup>

*God always, without interruption, absolutely hides himself.* Even when he reveals himself—this is the point of the incarnation later in history—he hides himself. This is oh! so important to remember as

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<sup>15</sup> August Pieper, *Isaiah II: An Exposition of Isaiah 40-66* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), pp. 280,281



men under God and, especially, as preachers (according to Professor Pieper!), under God and in Christ.

But we get ahead of ourselves.

**As the LORD worked out his salvation story that was to culminate on Calvary's cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, we hear that the children of Israel wouldn't speak the Tetragrammaton in Jesus' day, so hidden was God and so holy was its use**

There is one more important point to highlight before we get to the incarnation, the in-flesh-ness of the Word of God. All the commentators note that so high and so holy is not only the LORD, but also his name, that the Tetragrammaton wasn't spoken for centuries, perhaps beginning with the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians. The special name of the LORD, that mysterious and majestic name that reveals the mysterious and majestic and merciful God, was spoken only once a year by the high priest on the Great Day of Atonement. The God who hides himself, the God of majesty and mystery and mercy, seems to have become even more hidden for years.

**As the LORD worked out his salvation story that was to culminate on Calvary's cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, God's people experience another twist in the hiddenness of God. The God who speaks to his people does so in another language that will be used in the New Testament texts**

Let's jump ahead another seven centuries after Isaiah to the 1st-century Greco-Roman Mediterranean world. Please think about your life as a son of Abraham, a Hebrew, in that first century. You are literate; many aren't. You are literate because your people think very highly of words, for the Hebrew words of God read aloud in both temple and now, synagogue, are recognized as holy. You are also seen as strange because nowhere is there an image of your god—the god of the Hebrews. Your God hides.

But now there are more of your people living in Alexandria than in Jerusalem, which means that there are many Jews who speak and write Greek—enough that a translation into the Greek language needed to be made for God's covenant people. You had heard the story of the exodus, year after year, at the Passover festival. And, if you heard the story in Greek-speaking Alexandria, you heard this:

καὶ εἶπεν Μωϋσῆς πρὸς τὸν θεόν· Ἴδου ἐγὼ ἐλεύσομαι πρὸς τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐρῶ πρὸς αὐτούς· Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἐρωτήσουσίν με τί ὄνομα αὐτῷ; τί ἐρῶ πρὸς αὐτούς;

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωϋσῆν· Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν· καὶ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ· Ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πάλιν πρὸς Μωϋσῆν· Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ· Κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν, θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ θεὸς Ἰακώβ, ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς· τοῦτό μού ἐστιν ὄνομα αἰώνιον καὶ μνημόσυνον γενεῶν γενεαῖς. (Exodus 3:13-15, LXX)

But Moses said to God, "If I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what should I say to them?"

So God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He also said, "You will say this to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you."

God also told Moses, "Say this to the Israelites: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation.'"

Let's note a couple things: 1) How the Septuagint attempted to translate 3:14—'Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν (I AM WHO I AM); and 2) How the Tetragrammaton was translated into the *lingua franca*, Greek—Κύριος (*kurios*/Lord).

Compared to most humans on the planet, you 21st-century Christians and your pastors care a lot about words. Your pastors and you are aware of some of the difficult issues in translating text to another language. Please think for a while about the massive issues involved in translating a name, *The Name* that shall not be named—the Tetragrammaton. How would it feel for your Hebrew-speaking grandpa who had been raised with not saying *The Name*, and now you, a Greek-speaking, (or, at least a Greek-reading) son of Abraham, come to the story—the great salvation story of the Exodus—and there actually a name—*The Name*—is used, er, kind of. It was hard enough to be a son of Abraham without having to come to grips with such a thorny issue. You were raised to memorize and say the great *Shema*: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד: (Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God. The LORD is One.) You were marked as different because you were not only monotheistic but there were no statues and no images of your deity to be seen anywhere. All you had was a word, words from your deity who hid himself. All you had were the temple practices in far-off Jerusalem, if you were able to get there, to see no image, but to see and hear and smell and taste foretastes of the promise of the God who hides himself.

**As the LORD worked out his salvation story that was to culminate on Calvary's cross in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us**

And then along comes an image (cf. Colossians 1:15), of flesh and blood, just like we are, except there was something different.

The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him. He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and dwelled [*tabernacled*] among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testified about him. He cried out, "This was the one I spoke about when I said, 'The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.' " For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, [some texts say *only-begotten God*] who is close to the Father's side, has made him known. (John 1:9-18)

You, dear son of Abraham living in the Mediterranean basin in the 1st century, would have had to think long and hard about the assertions that are being cast about regarding this Jesus. Plenty of your running mates would have rejected him; your natural inclination would be to fight against him at the core of his claims. The world was made through him, John said, but the cosmos did not know him (hidden as he was). But to those who believed in his name (!), he gave the right to be the children of God—no less. And that birthright was a matter of new birth, not of anything else; certainly not the will, free or otherwise, of man. This Jesus tented among us, just like the LORD had tented among his people before there was a temple building. No one had ever seen God or has seen God who hides himself always, without interruption, absolutely. But something has happened, John wrote. *Someone who always, without interruption, and absolutely hides came out of hiding* to be seen and heard, kind of—and for a purpose—that by believing, you may have life in his name.



Eight chapters on in John's Gospel, Professor Joel Gerlach comments,

When Jesus declared, "Before Abraham was . . . I am" (8:58), he intended to identify himself with the God who had revealed himself with the special, unique name (Yahweh/the Tetragrammaton) to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). The people reacted to Jesus' claim by picking up "stones to stone him" for blasphemy. But Jesus was then and is now the eternal "I AM." He is God. He is personal (not just a vague impersonal force in the universe). He is real.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of his Gospel, John told us the purpose for it—"that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"—immediately after he had just written the story of Thomas rejecting the news from the others about Jesus—"We have seen the Lord/τὸν κύριον." A week later, Jesus again appears behind locked doors, speaks peace that the world cannot understand into the room and into the hearts/lives of those there and then addressed the skeptic: "Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου.)

John records that Thomas used the Greek word (κύριός) that was used to translate the Tetragrammaton. Dear 1st-century son of Abraham, living in the Mediterranean basin, you have just had God come out of hiding in your presence. Jesus was just declared to be κύριός/ ἡγεῖ/ Lord. The God who damns both soul and body in hell has just been revealed to you as the One—the One who *saves*. Where is that revelation? In the *person* of Jesus, the *crucified* and now risen One, the only name under heaven given among mankind whereby we must be saved.

So, it's one thing to point out the uniqueness of "the name" in world history and remark about its mystery and majesty. It's another to make the central claim of Christianity that Jesus is the culmination of Judaism, and, in fact, to claim that Jesus actually equates himself to the LORD God whose name was not even to be named, much less was it heard (except for once a year) in his day; and going far past even simply vocalizing the name, Jesus claimed to *be That One and accepted worship. God hidden and revealed in Jesus Christ.*

Do we think that most of our people are actually meditating on this every time they hear "Lord," the translation of κύριός, in the New Testament? Does the God who is too awesome to allow Moses to see him come to mind? To make the claim that Jesus is *kurios*/Lord meant that you needed to be excluded from the Jewish synagogue and the Roman imperial cults for both the God of the Hebrews and the Roman emperor, before Jesus, claimed to be κύριός. It was no small thing for Jesus to be called "Lord/*kurios*." It was much more than calling him the equivalent of what a Mexican means when he says, "*Señor*," or when a German says, "*Herr*," or when an American says, "Sir." Do the Bible hearers in the worship context and the Bible readers in our congregations and that we seek to serve in outreach/evangelism have a clue regarding what is underneath "Lord" in the New Testament? Does it matter if they don't have a clue?

**As we embrace the cross of Christ crucified, we assert that proclamation, not mood management or closing the deal, is the thing (Or, how this could affect preaching; how it certainly affects proclamation that is willing to be labeled Lutheran—that is, authentically catholic and evangelical)**

Richard Muller explains:

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<sup>16</sup> Joel Gerlach, *God's Master Plan: New Testament: An Introduction and Survey* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p. 43

*“Deus absconditus/Deus revelatus: the hidden God/the revealed God; the paradox of God’s unknowability and self-manifestation as stated by Luther. The issue is not that God has been hidden and has now revealed himself, but rather that the revelation that has been given to man defies the wisdom of the world because it is the revelation of the hidden God. God is revealed in hiddenness and hidden in his revelation. He reveals himself paradoxically to thwart the proud, *sub contrario*, under the opposite, omnipotence manifest on the cross.”<sup>17</sup>*

I’m not convinced that Muller understands Luther, but the point here is that Muller says it is, notably, a faithful Luther(an) thing to think about God hidden/revealed. Remember that Luther at Augsburg, along with his colleagues there, said it is sinful to go inventing churches like we Americans are so prone to do. The Augsburg Confession goes out of its way to prove its catholicity; its teaching was/is in continuity with that of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. And Luther never gave up on that; his reformation was about teaching—that the authentic catholic and the authentic evangelical voice of the church actually be heard. But Muller’s point is helpful; it’s that the Lutherans uniquely end up thinking about this and talking about it as they seek to be faithfully catholic and evangelical. *If this hidden/revealed God at the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth thing is so faithfully catholic and evangelical, one would think Lutheran preaching, therefore, would be distinct. And “cross and crown” talk out of Lutheran mouths would also be distinct.*

**One more thing about proper “cross/crown” speech as we clarify “God hidden” at the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth—what some think is pessimistic anthropology—human bound will**

Here’s the section Muller was thinking of when he mentions *sub contrario*/under the opposite above. Luther is responding in his *Bondage of the Will* to Erasmus’ statement in *Freedom of the Will* that some difficult things shouldn’t be spoken out loud for the laypeople to hear:

Still, out of our abundance we will do a work of supererogation and mention two considerations which demand that such things should be preached. The first is the humbling of our pride, and the knowledge of the grace of God; and the second is the nature of Christian faith itself.

First, God has assuredly promised his grace to the humble [1 Peter 5:5], that is, to those who lament and despair of themselves. But no man can be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, devices, endeavors, will, and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will, and work of another, namely, of God alone. For as long as he is persuaded that he himself can do even the least thing toward his salvation, he retains some self-confidence and does not altogether despair of himself, and therefore he is not humbled before God, but presumes that there is—or at least hopes or desires that there may be—some place, time, and work for him, by which he may at length attain to salvation. But when a man has no doubt that everything depends on the will of God, then he completely despairs of himself and chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work; then he has come close to grace, and can be saved.

It is thus for the sake of the elect that these things are published, in order that being humbled and brought back to nothingness by this means they may be saved. The rest resist this humiliation, indeed they condemn this teaching of self-despair, wishing for something, however little, to be left for them to do themselves; so they remain secretly

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), p. 90



proud and enemies of the grace of God. This, I say, is one reason, namely, that the godly, being humbled, may recognize, call upon, and receive the grace of God.

The second reason is that faith has to do with things not seen [Hebrews 11:1]. Hence in order that there may be room for faith, it is necessary that everything which is believed should be hidden. It cannot, however, be more deeply hidden than under an object, perception, or experience which is contrary to it. Thus when God makes alive he does it by killing, when he justifies he does it by making men guilty, when he exalts to heaven he does it by bringing down to hell, as Scripture says: "The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Samuel 2:6). This is not the place to speak at length on this subject, but those who have read my books have had it quite plainly set forth for them.

Thus God hides his eternal goodness and mercy under eternal wrath, his righteousness under iniquity. This is the highest degree of faith, to believe him merciful when he saves so few and damns so many, and to believe him righteous when by his own will he makes us necessarily damnable, so that he seems, according to Erasmus, to delight in the torments of the wretched and to be worthy of hatred rather than of love. If, then, I could by any means comprehend how this God can be merciful and just who displays so much wrath and iniquity, there would be no need of faith. As it is, since that cannot be comprehended, there is room for the exercise of faith when such things are preached and published, just as when God kills, the faith of life is exercised in death. That is now enough by way of preface.<sup>18</sup>

"Utterly beyond his own powers." "Completely despairs of himself." "They remain secretly proud and enemies of the grace of God." "That there be room for faith." "If I could by any means comprehend how this God can be merciful and just who displays so much wrath and iniquity, there would be no need of faith." Erasmus thought that the matter of humans' ability to choose God (or not, as Luther wrote) was too hard for human ears to hear. Luther faithfully has to disagree. If the human can choose his god, then the god that is getting chosen is small and has been made in the image of the man who chose him. Man, Luther points out, does NOT have the capacity to approach the holy God. Not at all. These truths need to be proclaimed, Luther is saying.

**Since God hides and yet is revealed at the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, and since humans have a will bound to invent its own gods, humans only find the devil (!) in their search for deity**

To think about faithful proclamation of the God who hides himself always, without interruption and absolutely, means it is helpful to recognize that those who are fallen creatures of God will, with darkened reason and sight, try to and *actually find* a god somewhere. Luther is commenting on the sailors who called on their gods while Jonah slept below:

Here you find St. Paul's statement in Rom. 1:19 concerning the universal knowledge of God among all the heathen, that is, that the whole world talks about the Godhead and natural reason is aware that this Godhead is something superior to all other things. This is here shown by the fact that the people in our text called upon a god, heathen though they were. For if they had been ignorant of the existence of God or of a godhead, how

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther. *Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972, 1999), pp. 61-64

could they have called upon him and cried to him? Although they do not have true faith in God, they at least hold that God is a being able to help on the sea and in every need. Such a light and such a perception is innate in the hearts of all men; and this light cannot be subdued or extinguished. There are, to be sure, some people, for instance, the Epicureans, Pliny, and the like, who deny this with their lips. But they do it by force and want to quench this light in their hearts. They are like people who purposely stop their ears or pinch their eyes shut to close out sound and sight. However, they do not succeed in this; their conscience tells them otherwise. For Paul is not lying when he asserts that they know something about God, "because God has shown it to them" (Rom. 1:19).

Let us here also learn from nature and from reason what can be known of God. These people regard God as a being who is able to deliver from every evil. It follows from this that natural reason must concede that all that is good comes from God; for He who can save from every need and misfortune is also able to grant all that is good and that makes for happiness. That is as far as the natural light of reason sheds its rays—it regards God as kind, gracious, merciful, and benevolent. And that is indeed a bright light. However, it manifests two big defects: first, reason does admittedly believe that God is able and competent to help and to bestow; but reason does not know whether He is willing to do this also for us. That renders the position of reason unstable. Reason believes in God's might and is aware of it, but it is uncertain whether God is willing to employ this in our behalf, because in adversity it so often experiences the opposite to be true. That is very obvious here. These people indeed call upon God and thereby acknowledge that He can help if He is thus inclined; they even believe that He may help others. But that is as far as they can go; they cannot transcend that. They exhaust every means at their command; they try their utmost. Free will cannot go beyond that. But they do not believe that God is disposed to help them. For if they did, they would not "throw the wares that were in the ship into the sea," nor would they turn to Jonah and urge him to call upon his God. No, they would calmly await the help of God. Moreover, the sea would also have become tranquil as a result of their faith. But this situation calls for a faith that does not doubt but is convinced that God wants to be gracious not only to others but also to me. That is a genuine and a live faith; it is a great and rich and rare gift of the Holy Spirit, and so we shall see it in Jonah.

The second defect is this: Reason is unable to identify God properly; it cannot ascribe the Godhead to the One who is entitled to it exclusively. It knows that there is a God, but it does not know who or which is the true God. It shares the experience of the Jews during Christ's sojourn on earth. When John the Baptist bore witness of His presence in their midst, they were aware that Christ was among them and that He was moving about among them; but they did not know which person it was. It was incredible to them that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. Thus reason also plays blindman's buff with God; it consistently gropes in the dark and misses the mark. It calls that God which is not God and fails to call Him God who really is God. Reason would do neither the one nor the other if it were not conscious of the existence of God or if it really knew who and what God is. Therefore it rushes in clumsily and assigns the name God and ascribes divine honor to its own idea of God. Thus reason never finds the true God, but it finds the devil or its own concept of God, ruled by the devil. So there is a vast difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who or what God is. Nature knows the former—it is inscribed in everybody's heart; the latter is taught only by the Holy Spirit.

We shall illustrate this with a few examples. Let us first consider the papists and the religious. These are laboring under the delusion that God is a being who is moved and



satisfied by good works. That explains their many vocations, sects, and modes of life, in all of which they presume to serve and please God. Now tell me, what are these people worshipping as God if there is no God whose mind and will conforms to theirs? Is it not true that they are honoring their own delusion and their own fancy as God? For in truth there is no God who is of one mind with them. Therefore they go awry with their illusion. They miss the true God, and nothing remains but their own false notion. That is their god. To him they assign the name and honor of God. Of course, no one but the devil can be behind this delusion, for he inspires and governs these thoughts. Thus their delusion is their idol; it is the image of the devil they hold in their hearts. For the real and the true God is He who is properly served not with works but with the true faith and with sincerity of heart, who gives and bestows mercy and benefactions entirely *gratis* and without our works and merits. That they do not believe, and therefore they do not know God but are bound to blunder and to miss the mark.

Here you see where all idolatry comes from and why it is rightly called idol (*Abgott*) and superstition (*Abglaube*) and idolatry (*Abgötterei*); undoubtedly because such delusion draws us away from God (*Ab-Gott*) and alienates us from the true worship of God. Indeed, this is an idol and a superstition that directs us away from God and directs us to the devil in hell. For since everybody proposes to do something which he regards and believes to be pleasing to God and imagines that God is minded as he supposes He is—but in reality God is not pleased by this, and in reality God is not minded as each one supposes—it follows that as many idolatries must arise as there are illusions of that kind. Every idea of pleasing God comes into being except that of faith; this the Holy Ghost must inspire. Thus the idol Baal came to the mind of King Ahab. Since he knew that there was a God, he imagined that it was God who was pleased with his type of worship. Thus he called God Baal, and Baal God, as is evident from Hos. 2:16.

Furthermore, King Jeroboam supposed that it was God who was pleased with the worship of the golden calves. And therefore calves had to be called the God of Israel, and, again, God had to be called a calf (1 Kings 12:28). That is like calling Christ our Lord a lover of cowls or of tonsures today because people assume that He is a God who is in love with cowls and tonsures and is well pleased with such service. I am sure that monks and priests have that conception of Him in their hearts and also call Him that. But this is an idol and superstition and delusion which falls wide of the mark; it is genuine archidolatry. There are innumerable types of idolatry; in fact, there are as many varieties as there are illusions and self-chosen concepts of pleasing God. All but faith in Christ come into this category. And since there is nowhere a God who is pleased with this service, it follows that they are all serving the devil and not God.

Thus you also note that the people in the ship all know of God, but they have no definite God. For Jonah relates that each one calls on his own god, that is, his concept of God, whatever he conceives of God in his mind. And in that way they all fail to encounter the one true God and have nothing but idols whom they call God and honor as God. Therefore their faith, too, was false; it was superstition and idolatry and of no avail. For their god lets them down in the hour of need; he lets them call in vain, so that they despair and find themselves at a loss to know where to find a god who might help them. They run down to Jonah, arouse him, and command him to call on his God. They are curious to see whether there might be another god beside their own to aid them. There you can see that a false faith will not stand the test of adversity, but that both god and faith, idol and superstition, become engulfed and vanish, and that nothing but despair remains. Therefore only the



one living God is entitled to the name and reputation of being a helper in every trouble, Ps. 9:10; Ps. 46:1; for He can rescue from death, Ps. 68:20.<sup>19</sup>

“Where do we find God?” is the question. And the humans who seek god or God or themselves as god are only finding the devil, Luther says. Of course, he’s right. Because God hides. He will only be found where he wills to be found, where he promises to be found. Of course, the humans will only find the devil because that’s what the humans are bound to do; they can do no other since the Fall and before Christ comes again. That means, in the real world (not the next one), there is no one who does good. No one who seeks God. None. All will find always, without interruption, absolutely the devil.

But there are so many who are huffing and puffing and faithing and hoping and striving and bearing their crosses without knowing the cross of Christ—all for “God,” they think. That has to be the case if the people understand themselves to be those who have the power of free choice. They have to make the right choice(s). They have to do. They have to perform. Huff, puff.

**God who hides and is ultimately revealed only in the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth is seen in God *preached*—Christ crucified for us in Word and sacrament**

The illusion of humans’ so-called “free choice” regarding the God who hides himself is only frustrating and, ultimately, damning. A freely choosing human goes together with a god who is small and who can be chosen or invented. But a God who hides himself in order to reveal himself in the way that an omnipotent creating, redeeming, predestinating God does—at the torture device of the Romans with a Jew hanging on it!—goes together with a human who only has needs *coram Deo*/before the face of God.

But it pleases me to take from this passage the opportunity to discuss doubt, God, and the will of God; for I hear that here and there among the nobles and persons of importance vicious statements are being spread abroad concerning predestination or God’s foreknowledge. For this is what they say: “If I am predestined, I shall be saved, whether I do good or evil. If I am not predestined, I shall be condemned regardless of my works.” I would be glad to debate in detail against these wicked statements if the uncertain state of my health made it possible for me to do so. For if the statements are true, as they, of course, think, then the incarnation of the Son of God, His suffering and resurrection, and all that He did for the salvation of the world are done away with completely. What will the prophets and all Holy Scripture help? What will the sacraments help? Therefore let us reject all this and tread it underfoot.

These are devilish and poisoned darts and original sin itself, with which the devil led our first parents astray when he said (Gen. 3:5): “You will be like God.” They were not satisfied with the divinity that had been revealed and in the knowledge of which they were blessed, but they wanted to penetrate to the depth of the divinity. For they inferred that there was some secret reason why God had forbidden them to eat of the fruit of the tree which was in the middle of Paradise, and they wanted to know what this reason was, just as these people of our time say: “What God has determined beforehand must happen. Consequently, every concern about religion and about the salvation of souls is uncertain and useless.” Yet it has not been given to you to render a verdict that is inscrutable. Why do you doubt or thrust aside the faith that God has enjoined on you? For what end did it serve to send His Son to suffer and to be crucified for us? Of what use was it to institute the sacraments if they are uncertain or completely useless for our salvation? For

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 19: Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974, 1999)

otherwise, if someone had been predestined, he would have been saved without the Son and without the sacraments or Holy Scripture. Consequently, God, according to the blasphemy of these people, was horribly foolish when He sent His Son, promulgated the Law and the Gospel, and sent the apostles if the only thing He wanted was that we should be uncertain and in doubt whether we are to be saved or really to be damned.

But these are delusions of the devil with which he tries to cause us to doubt and disbelieve, although Christ came into this world to make us completely certain. For eventually either despair must follow or contempt for God, for the Holy Bible, for Baptism, and for all the blessings of God through which He wanted us to be strengthened over against uncertainty and doubt. For they will say with the Epicureans: "Let us live, eat, and drink; tomorrow we shall die" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32). After the manner of the Turks they will rush rashly into the sword and fire, since the hour in which you either die or escape has been predetermined.

But to these thoughts one must oppose the true and firm knowledge of Christ, just as I often remind you that it is profitable and necessary above all that the knowledge of God be completely certain in us and that we cling to it with firm assent of the heart. Otherwise our faith is useless. For if God does not stand by His promises, then our salvation is lost, while, on the other hand, this is our comfort, that, although we change, we nevertheless flee for refuge to Him who is unchangeable. For in Mal. 3:6 He makes this assertion about Himself: "I the Lord do not change." And Rom. 11:29 states: "The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." Accordingly, this is how I have taught in my book *On the Bondage of the Will* and elsewhere, namely, that a distinction must be made when one deals with the knowledge, or rather with the subject, of the divinity. For one must debate either about the hidden God or about the revealed God. With regard to God, insofar as He has not been revealed, there is no faith, no knowledge, and no understanding. And here one must hold to the statement that what is above us is none of our concern. For thoughts of this kind, which investigate something more sublime above or outside the revelation of God, are altogether devilish. With them nothing more is achieved than that we plunge ourselves into destruction; for they present an object that is inscrutable, namely, the unrevealed God. Why not rather let God keep His decisions and mysteries in secret? We have no reason to exert ourselves so much that these decisions and mysteries be revealed to us.

Moses, too, asked God to show him His face; but the Lord replies: "You shall see My back, but you will not be able to see My face" (cf. Ex. 33:23). For this inquisitiveness is original sin itself, by which we are impelled to strive for a way to God through natural speculation. But this is a great sin and a useless and futile attempt; for this is what Christ says in John 6:65 (cf. John 14:6): "No one comes to the Father but by Me." Therefore when we approach the unrevealed God, then there is no faith, no Word, and no knowledge; for He is an invisible God, and you will not make Him visible.

Furthermore, God has most sternly forbidden this investigation of the divinity. Thus when the apostles ask in Acts 1:6, "Has it not been predestined that at this time the kingdom should be restored?" Christ says to them: "It is not for you to know the times" (Acts 1:7). "Let Me be hidden where I have not revealed Myself to you," says God, "or you will be the cause of your own destruction, just as Adam fell in a horrible manner; for he who investigates My majesty will be overwhelmed by My glory."

And it is true that God wanted to counteract this curiosity at the very beginning; for this is how He set forth His will and counsel: "I will reveal My foreknowledge and predestination to you in an extraordinary manner, but not by this way of reason and



carnal wisdom, as you imagine. This is how I will do so: From an unrevealed God I will become a revealed God. Nevertheless, I will remain the same God. I will be made flesh, or send My Son. He shall die for your sins and shall rise again from the dead. And in this way I will fulfill your desire, in order that you may be able to know whether you are predestined or not. Behold, this is My Son; listen to Him (cf. Matt. 17:5). Look at Him as He lies in the manger and on the lap of His mother, as He hangs on the cross. Observe what He does and what He says. There you will surely take hold of Me." For "He who sees Me," says Christ, "also sees the Father Himself" (cf. John 14:9). If you listen to Him, are baptized in His name, and love His Word, then you are surely predestined and are certain of your salvation. But if you revile or despise the Word, then you are damned; for he who does not believe is condemned (Mark 16:16).

You must kill the other thoughts and the ways of reason or of the flesh, for God detests them. The only thing you have to do is to receive the Son, so that Christ is welcome in your heart in His birth, miracles, and cross. For here is the book of life in which you have been written. And this is the only and the most efficacious remedy for that horrible disease because of which human beings in their investigation of God want to proceed in a speculative manner and eventually rush into despair or contempt. If you want to escape despair, hatred, and blasphemy of God, give up your speculation about the hidden God, and cease to strive in vain to see the face of God. Otherwise you will have to remain perpetually in unbelief and damnation, and you will have to perish; for he who doubts does not believe, and he who does not believe is condemned (Mark 16:16).

Therefore we should detest and shun these vicious words which the Epicureans bandy about: "If this is how it must happen, let it happen." For God did not come down from heaven to make you uncertain about predestination, to teach you to despise the sacraments, absolution, and the rest of the divine ordinances. Indeed, He instituted them to make you completely certain and to remove the disease of doubt from your heart, in order that you might not only believe with the heart but also see with your physical eyes and touch with your hands. Why, then, do you reject these and complain that you do not know whether you have been predestined? You have the Gospel; you have been baptized; you have absolution; you are a Christian. Nevertheless, you doubt and say that you do not know whether you believe or not, whether you regard as true what is preached about Christ in the Word and the sacraments.

But you will say: "I cannot believe." Thus many are troubled by this trial, and I recall that at Torgau a little woman came to me and complained with tears in her eyes that she could not believe. Then, when I recited the articles of the Creed in order and asked about each one whether she was convinced that these things were true and had happened in this manner or not, she answered: "I certainly think that they are true, but I cannot believe." This was a satanic illusion. Consequently, I kept saying: "If you think that all these things are true, there is no reason why you should complain about your unbelief; for if you do not doubt that the Son of God died for you, you surely believe, because to believe is nothing else than to regard these facts as the sure and unquestionable truth."

God says to you: "Behold, you have My Son. Listen to Him, and receive Him. If you do this, you are already sure about your faith and salvation." "But I do not know," you will say, "whether I am remaining in faith." At all events, accept the present promise and the predestination, and do not inquire too curiously about the secret counsels of God. If you believe in the revealed God and accept His Word, He will gradually also reveal the hidden God; for "He who sees Me also sees the Father," as John 14:9 says. He who rejects the Son

also loses the unrevealed God along with the revealed God. But if you cling to the revealed God with a firm faith, so that your heart is so minded that you will not lose Christ even if you are deprived of everything, then you are most assuredly predestined, and you will understand the hidden God. Indeed, you understand Him even now if you acknowledge the Son and His will, namely, that He wants to reveal Himself to you, that He wants to be your Lord and your Savior. Therefore you are sure that God is also your Lord and Father.

Observe how pleasantly and kindly God delivers you from this horrible trial with which Satan besets people today in strange ways in order to make them doubtful and uncertain, and eventually even to alienate them from the Word. "For why should you hear the Gospel," they say, "since everything depends on predestination?" In this way he robs us of the predestination guaranteed through the Son of God and the sacraments. He makes us uncertain where we are completely certain. And if he attacks timid consciences with this trial, they die in despair, as would almost have happened to me if Staupitz had not delivered me from the same trial when I was troubled. But if they are despisers, they become the worst Epicureans. Therefore we should rather impress these statements on our hearts, such as John 6:44: "No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him." Through whom? Through Me. "He who sees Me also sees the Father" (cf. John 14:9). And God says to Moses: "You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live" (Ex. 33:20). And we read (Acts 1:7): "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But go, and carry out what I command." Likewise (Ecclesiasticus 3:22): "Seek not the things that are too high for you, and search not into things above your ability; but the things that God has commanded you, think on them always, and in many of His works be not curious." Listen to the incarnate Son, and predestination will present itself of its own accord.

Staupitz used to comfort me with these words: "Why do you torture yourself with these speculations? Look at the wounds of Christ and at the blood that was shed for you. From these predestination will shine. Consequently, one must listen to the Son of God, who was sent into the flesh and appeared to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8) and to make you sure about predestination. And for this reason He says to you: 'You are My sheep because you hear My voice' (cf. John 10:27). 'No one shall snatch you out of My hands' " (cf. v. 28).

Many who did not resist this trial in such a manner were hurled headlong into destruction. Consequently, the hearts of the godly should be kept carefully fortified. Thus a certain hermit in *The Lives of the Fathers* advises his hearers against speculations of this kind. He says: "If you see that someone has put his foot in heaven, pull him back. For this is how saintly neophytes are wont to think about God apart from Christ. They are the ones who try to ascend into heaven and to place both feet there. But suddenly they are plunged into hell." Therefore the godly should beware and be intent only on learning to cling to the Child and Son Jesus, who is your God and was made flesh for your sake. Acknowledge and hear Him; take pleasure in Him, and give thanks. If you have Him, then you also have the hidden God together with Him who has been revealed. And that is the only way, the truth, and the life (cf. John 14:6). Apart from it you will find nothing but destruction and death.

But He manifested himself in the flesh to snatch us from death, from the power of the devil. From this knowledge must come great joy and delight that God is unchangeable, that He works in accordance with unchangeable necessity, and that He cannot deny



Himself (2 Tim. 2:13) but keeps His promises. Accordingly, one is not free to have such thoughts or doubts about predestination; but they are ungodly, vicious, and devilish. Therefore when the devil assails you with them, you should only say: "I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, about whom I have no doubt that He was made flesh, suffered, and died for me. Into His death I have been baptized." This answer will make the trial disappear, and Satan will turn his back.

Thus on other occasions I have often mentioned the noteworthy example of a nun who underwent the same trial. For under the papacy there were also many godly persons who experienced these spiritual trials, which are truly hellish and thoughts of the damned. For there is no difference at all between one who doubts and one who is damned. Therefore whenever the nun felt that she was being assailed with the fiery darts of Satan (cf. Eph. 6:16), she would say nothing else than this: "I am a Christian."

We must do the same thing. One must refrain from debates and say: "I am a Christian; that is, the Son of God was made flesh and was born; He has redeemed me and is sitting at the right hand of the Father, and He is my Savior." Thus you must drive Satan away from you with as few words as possible and say: "Begone, Satan! (Matt. 4:10.) Do not put doubt in me. The Son of God came into this world to destroy your work (1 John 3:8) and to destroy doubt." Then the trial ceases, and the heart returns to peace, quiet, and the love of God.

Otherwise doubt about some person's intention is no sin. Thus Isaac doubts that he will live or have a pious host. About a man I *can* be in doubt. Indeed, I *should* be in doubt. For he is not my Savior, and it is written (Ps. 146:3): "Put not your trust in princes." For man is a liar (Ps. 116:11) and deceitful. But one cannot deal doubtfully with God. For He neither wants nor is able to be changeable or a liar. But the highest form of worship He requires is your conviction that He is truthful. For this is why He has given you the strongest proofs of His trustworthiness and truth. He has given His Son into the flesh and into death, and He has instituted the sacraments, in order that you may know that He does not want to be deceitful, but that He wants to be truthful. Nor does He confirm this with spiritual proofs; He confirms it with tangible proofs. For I see the water, I see the bread and the wine, and I see the minister. All this is physical, and in these material forms He reveals Himself. If you must deal with men, you may be in doubt as to the extent to which you may believe a person and as to how others may be disposed toward you; but concerning God you must maintain with assurance and without any doubt that He is well disposed toward you on account of Christ and that you have been redeemed and sanctified through the precious blood of the Son of God. And in this way you will be sure of your predestination, since all the prying and dangerous questions about GOD'S secret counsels have been removed—the questions to which Satan tries to drive us, just as he drove our first parents.

But how great would our first parent's happiness have been if he had kept the Word of God carefully in sight and had eaten of all the other trees except the one from which he had been forbidden to eat! But he wanted to search out why God had forbidden him to enjoy the fruits from that one tree. In addition, there was Satan, the malicious teacher who increased and abetted this curiosity. Thus he was hurled headlong into sin and death.

Thus God reveals His will to us through Christ and the Gospel. But we loathe it and, in accordance with Adam's example, take delight in the forbidden tree above all the others. This fault has been implanted in us by nature. When Paradise and heaven have been

closed and the angel has been placed on guard there (cf. Gen. 3:24), we try in vain to enter. For Christ has truthfully said: "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18). Nevertheless, God, in His boundless goodness, has revealed Himself to us in order to satisfy our desire. He has shown us a visible image. "Behold, you have My Son; he who hears Him and is baptized is written in the book of life. This I reveal through My Son, whom you can touch with your hands and look at with your eyes."

I have wanted to teach and transmit this in such a painstaking and accurate way because after my death many will publish my books and will prove from them errors of every kind and their own delusions. Among other things, however, I have written that everything is absolute and unavoidable; but at the same time I have added that one must look at the revealed God, as we sing in the hymn: *Er heist Jesu Christ, der HERR Zebaoth, und ist kein ander Gott*, "Jesus Christ is the LORD of hosts, and there is no other God"—and also in very many other places. But they will pass over all these places and take only those that deal with the hidden God. Accordingly, you who are listening to me now should remember that I have taught that one should not inquire into the predestination of the hidden God but should be satisfied with what is revealed through the calling and through the ministry of the Word. For then you can be sure about your faith and salvation and say: "I believe in the Son of God, who said (John 3:36): 'He who believes in the Son has eternal life.' " Hence no condemnation or wrath rests on him, but he enjoys the good pleasure of God the Father. But I have publicly stated these same things elsewhere in my books, and now I am also teaching them by word of mouth. Therefore I am excused.<sup>20</sup>

Where do we find the omnipotent I AM God who always, without interruption, and absolutely hides himself? In the face of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. But where do I find this Christ? In the Scriptures. Or, even more precisely, in the crucified Christ *proclaimed* on the basis of the Scriptures. Luther:

So that our readers may the better perceive our teaching I shall clearly and broadly describe it. We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world. For inasmuch as he had determined once to achieve it, it made no difference to him whether he distributed it before or after, through his Word, as can easily be proved from Scripture. But now there is neither need nor time to do so.

If now I seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ, as Dr. Karlstadt trifles, in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross. Therefore, Luther has rightly taught that whoever has a bad conscience from his sins should go to the sacrament and obtain comfort, not because of the bread and wine, not because of the body and blood of Christ, but because of the word which in

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 5 : Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968, 1999)



the sacrament offers, presents, and gives the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for me. Is that not clear enough?<sup>21</sup>

**Let our proclamation be *Christ crucified for us*, not merely *about Christ crucified***

Proclamation—actual delivery of the goods—in the name of God is a far different thing than information. If God promises to arrive—and actually deliver the goods of forgiveness, life, and salvation—in a promise, the faithful church gets to promise in the name of God.

Gerhard Forde writes:

To delineate precisely what is meant by proclamation, it is necessary and helpful, at the outset, to distinguish between two different types of discourse employed in the church. We have already been doing that roughly by articulating the difference between explaining and proclaiming. This difference can be maintained as a difference between primary and secondary discourse. Explaining, talking, and writing about God and things theological is secondary discourse. It is the language of theology in general, the language of teaching, and, particularly for our purposes here, of scholarship or systematic theology. Secondary discourse is generally third-person, past-tense discourse. Proclamation, on the other hand, belongs to the primary discourse of the church. Proclamation in its paradigmatic or ideal form is first-to-second-person, present-tense, unconditional address. The most obvious example (paradigmatic form) of such address is in the absolution: I declare unto you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the triune God. (When it comes right down to it, that is about all we have to say in a nutshell.) It is first-to-second-person: I declare to you. It is present tense: here and now I do it. Not tomorrow, not next week, not on judgment day, but here and now in the living present. The deed is done. I give it to you. It is unconditional: I do not say: “God will forgive you if certain conditions are fulfilled, if you properly repent.” Nor do I say that we will pray and hope that God will forgive you. I do not say, “May the Lord have mercy on you.” No, I say it flat out: “I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sins.” It is proclamation. As such, it belongs to the primary discourse of the church, the chief way the church and the Christian address the world.

It is perhaps obvious from this that there are other kinds of communication that also belong to this primary discourse. The liturgy, for instance, belongs to such primary discourse, as well as the sacraments. Moreover, the response to the proclamation, the language of repentance, confession, prayer, and praise also belongs to the primary discourse. Primary discourse as direct, present-tense, first-to-second-person address demands the same kind of language in response. If I proclaim: I declare unto you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, the corresponding response is likewise first-person, present-tense: I repent, I confess, I believe, I praise and thank you, O Lord, or perhaps even, I do not, I will not, I cannot. In any case it is primary. When the proclamation comes, “I declare to you the forgiveness of your sins,” the appropriate response is not, “Well, that’s your opinion!” It is not my opinion. If I were to give my opinion of you, it could be something quite different! The proclamation is instead the divine address, speaking not my words but the word God has commissioned me to say. The only possible

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II*, (ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann)(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), “Against the Heavenly Prophets,” pp. 213,214.



response has to be primary discourse, discourse that is ultimately self-disclosure, revealing who you are. You can only say, I repent, I believe, or I do not.<sup>22</sup>

### **Certainty in the cross of Christ still means it's faithful to say, "I don't know," sometimes**

If God is hidden/revealed in the cross, so also is the church hidden under the cross. How does this show itself in Lutheran *habitus*? One of the ways is in pastoral counseling. Knowledge of the God who hides himself makes the authentic catholic and evangelical (Lutheran) pastor to be rock solid certain in some of his "counsel," that is, in proclamation, but also makes the pastor completely willing to say, "I don't know" when he doesn't know why a particular series of events have occurred that cause the child of God to want to peer into the counsel of God. And, much of the time, he doesn't. He knows the One who does and can proclaim some of that One's will, yes. But we must resist the temptation to be smarter than we are. Practice saying it: "I don't know."

I have no doubt that the sin of Lucifer was something like this, that he wanted to find out and know more about the unknown God than became his station, that is, about the God who has not been revealed and disclosed through the Word. What He is, what He does, and what His will is does not concern me. But this does concern me, that I know what He has commanded, what He has promised, and what He has threatened. When you reflect on these things carefully, you find God, yes, He Himself takes you on His lap. If you fall out of it, that is, if you presume to know anything beyond what has been revealed in the Word, you plunge into the depths of hell.

Therefore the well-known hermit was right when he gave the advice: If you see a young monk ascending to heaven and so to speak, putting one foot in heaven, pull him back at once; for if he puts both feet there, he will see that he is not in heaven but in hell.

This saying gives no other advice than that we should restrain our curiosity and remain within the definite bounds that are placed before us by God. He wanted us to walk on the earth, not on the clouds. He wanted us to learn the revealed Word painstakingly, not to give thought to those things that are too high for us. He wanted us to follow His Word and command, not to inquire with inordinate diligence into the reasons for His commands. When Adam and Eve do this, they perish; for they put themselves in the place of God the Creator and forget that they are creatures.

It is just as Satan says: "Then you will be like gods." You will no longer be creatures who will be concerned about carrying out the commands of God; you yourselves will be gods, you will judge God, and you will do other things—things that are proper for God alone.

Oh, the wretched divinity with which Satan surrounded us through sin when he had this one design, that we should disregard the commands and promises of God. Therefore it is original sin to become a god. Against this disease we must fight throughout our entire life, and we must say with Paul (1 Cor. 2:2): "I know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."<sup>23</sup>

Here is the faithful "cross" speech, not glory church-speak. Here is the faithful proclamation of the church—set over against the bound human will—spoken by the strangest of proclaimers—flesh-and-

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<sup>22</sup> Gerhard Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 45,46

<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 3: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.)(Genesis 17:12) (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961, 1999)

blood clay pots—to those with ears to hear and revealing the God who hides in the way God chooses to reveal himself—at the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

**Solidly on the rock that is the crucified Christ and proclamation of him in Word and sacrament, let us now speak of the Christian life, of trials, suffering, and, yes, crosses**

Here is where we can and should rightly talk about the Christian life now in faith and living until the then of eternity. It's a life of struggle and suffering down here in the sinful world and a life of repentance, for, after all, I am *totaliter*/totally sinful, we confess of ourselves, and, yet, in Christ, we get to hear the other proclaim Christ to me that declares me *totaliter*/totally righteous and a saint. We get to daily deny ourselves and die to ourselves as god and thank our Lord God for all of daily bread life as he chooses to give it to us—crosses and trials included.

For where God's Word is preached, accepted, or believed, and bears fruit, there the holy and precious cross will also not be far behind. And let no one think that we will have peace; rather, we must sacrifice all we have on earth—possessions, honor, house and farm, spouse and children, body and life. Now, this grieves our flesh and the old creature, for it means that we must ever remain steadfast, suffer patiently whatever befalls us, and let go whatever is taken from us."<sup>24</sup>

Life for the humans after the Fall and until Jesus comes again is all under God. We are no longer in Eden. In the liturgy we regularly confess what our sinful flesh deserves—punishment both now and forever. Yet, for the child of God, troubles and struggles serve God's purpose for us. He guides it all. The Christian life is one that experiences plenty of imperfection and troubles. In repentance, we die daily to all that is not God as he has revealed himself in Christ crucified and risen declared to us in Word and sacrament.

As a rule, these troubles are punishments for sin. Nevertheless, in the godly they serve another purpose. For they are inflicted to put present sin to death, because in the saints they extinguish and mortify concupiscence. For death remains in the saints in order to abolish this impure nature. Accordingly Paul says (Ro 8:10), "The body is dead because of sin," that is, is put to death because sin still remains present in the flesh. The cross, therefore, is not a punishment but an exercise and preparation for renewal. For when present sin is put to death and when in the midst of temptations we learn to seek the aid of God and experience God's presence, we acknowledge more and more the lack of trust in our own hearts and we encourage ourselves by faith.<sup>25</sup>

Christian life—because we are still this side of the River Jordan—is hard work. Flesh militates against the Spirit of God.

With regard to the mortification of the flesh and discipline of the flesh, we teach—just as the Confession states—that a genuine rather than a counterfeit death takes place through the cross and afflictions by which God exercises us. In these it is necessary to submit to the will of God, as Paul says (Ro 12:1), "Present your bodies as sacrifices . . ." These are the spiritual exercises of fear and faith. Alongside this true putting to death, which takes place through the cross, a voluntary and necessary kind of exercise also exists, about which Christ says, (Lk 21:34), "Be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation," and Paul (1 Co 9:27) says, "But I punish my body and enslave it . .

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<sup>24</sup>Large Catechism, 65-66, Lord's Prayer, Ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) pp. 448,449

<sup>25</sup>"Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Art. XII, par. 151, p. 214, *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) Kolb & Wengert



. " We should undertake these exercises not because they are devotional exercises that justify but as restraints on our flesh, lest satiety overcome us and render us complacent and lazy."<sup>26</sup>

Grounded firmly in the crucified Christ, God hidden and now revealed, now we understand rightly phrases like *no crucianos, no christianos*. Our crosses don't earn a thing for us. Our struggles in the Christian life are not ever to be the locus of our trust. In Christ alone do I know who I am and where my eternal destiny is. All else that seeks to be my god must be vigorously rebuffed. Even killed. "In regard to the reluctant, recalcitrant flesh, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:27, 'I punish my body and enslave it,' and in Galatians 5:24 and Romans 8:13, 'Those who belong to Christ have crucified,' indeed killed, their 'flesh with its passions and desires' and activities."<sup>27</sup>

The comfort we learned before on account of the big God who predestines and who makes our predestination known and certain in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth matters in life this side of the River Jordan.

This doctrine (of election) also gives us wonderful comfort in crosses and trials, that in his counsel before time began God determined and decreed that he would stand by us in every trouble, grant us patience, give us comfort, create hope and provide a way out of all things so that we may be saved (cf. 1 Co 10:13). Likewise, Paul treats this matter in such a comforting way in Romans 8:28-39, pointing out that in his intention before time began God preordained what sort of crosses and sufferings he would use to conform each one of his elect to "the image of his Son," and that the cross of each should and must "work together for the good" of that person, because they are "called according to his purpose." On this basis Paul concluded with certainty and without doubt that neither "hardship nor distress . . . neither death nor life . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord."<sup>28</sup>

We die to ourselves, over and again, in our Baptism and are renewed by the God who comes to us time and again in proclamation and in Supper.

God is hidden in Christ crucified. The church is hidden under the cross also. We believe, teach, and confess that we know she exists by faith and not by sight; we must resist the temptations to be the Church triumphant before our risen and ascended and exalted Lord, Jesus, comes again. We know where she exists—where the gospel is purely proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered. But it's important to say that we know where the church exists and declaring that as an article of faith is a far cry from seeing the church with our eyes and judging her strength by any metric other than the gospel in Word and sacrament.

But why belabor the obvious? If the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is distinguished from the kingdom of the devil, it necessarily follows that the ungodly, since they are in the kingdom of the devil, are not the church—although in this life, because the kingdom of Christ has not yet been revealed, they intermingle with the church and hold offices in the church. Just because the revelation has not yet taken place does not make the ungodly the church. For the kingdom of Christ is always that which he makes alive by his Spirit, whether it has been revealed or is hidden under the cross, just as Christ is the same, whether now glorified or previously afflicted.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Apology, Art XVI, par. 45-47, pp. 229,230, Kolb & Wengert

<sup>27</sup> Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art IV, par. 19, p. 577, Kolb & Wengert

<sup>28</sup> Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art XI, par. 48,49, pp. 648,649, Kolb & Wengert

<sup>29</sup> Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. VII & VIII, par. 17,18, p. 176, Kolb & Wengert

## **Now, let's rightly see our eternal crown—then, in sight**

The crown is not the *quid pro quo* reward for our good works or for our well-intentioned promises or for our extra hard, extra special acts of penance designed to impress both God and man. But his promise of the crown certainly has to do with our eternity in the presence of the living God.

And such a promise certainly affects our life in the here and now as we live the rest of our lives in faith in the promises of God while we struggle, while we suffer, while we experience the cross, trial, and pain, and especially as we cross the River Jordan in death. "*Wir sind bettler; hoc est verum*, (we are beggars; this is true)," we say, along with Martin Luther. Beggars, yes. But such a grand and glorious and gracious Lord we have who has revealed himself in the bloodied, humiliated face of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. "All this He did that I should be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true."

We will live in his kingdom eternally. Then, in sight. We trust we will live forever in heaven with Him.

And we also now live in his kingdom. Now, by faith. Now, "when our Heavenly Father gives His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth."

For faith-alone-in-the-crucified-Christ-alone theology sets itself up against sight. We live by faith and not by sight. And, yet, in faith, we cross the eschatological divide; we now experience what God promises. St. Paul repeatedly asserts that the faithful in Christ are now seated in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:3; 2:6)—so sure and certain are we that his promises are good.

When we say, "We embrace the crown," we say we win *by faith* in Jesus Christ crucified, the Lamb of God who was slain. Our devotions at this convention will show us our crucified, risen, and exalted Savior from some of the pictures in the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*. Troubles, yes! Hardships also for the people of faith in Jesus Christ, yes! But please draw out in your mind's eye the pictures the Spirit uses St. John to paint for us and note how often at the center is our crucified, risen, ascended, and exalted Lord/LORD, Jesus, reigning victoriously.

Yes, the theologian of the cross sees things the way they are—the humans captive to their own gods and their own ways to please those gods—and yet, in the Christ who is really present in proclamation and in sacrament, we win with our Lord, the victorious crucified Jesus.

When we say, "We anticipate the crown," we are speaking eschatologically. So, yes, we will reign in the kingdom of priests forever with our Lord. We say with St. Paul to his younger co-worker in 2 Timothy 4:8: "There is in store for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord will award me on the last day." Trusting in our living Lord, Jesus, we are certain of our crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

## **Now, let's rightly see our eternal crown—now, in faith**

Martin Luther, from *The Freedom of a Christian*:

All of us who believe in Christ are priests and kings in Christ, as 1 Pet 2:9 says, "You are a chosen race, God's own people, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

The nature of this priesthood and kingship is something like this: First, with respect to kingship, every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm. As a matter of fact, all things are made subject to him and are compelled to serve him in obtaining salvation. Accordingly Paul says in Rom 8:28, "All things work together



for good for the elect,” and in 1 Co 3:21-23, “All things are yours whether . . . life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s . . .” This is not to say that every Christian is placed over all things to have and control them by physical power—a madness with which some churchmen are afflicted—for such power belongs to kings, princes, and other men on earth. Our ordinary experience in life shows us that we are subjected to all, suffer many things, and even die. As a matter of fact, the more Christian a man is, the more evils, sufferings, and deaths he must endure, as we see in Christ the first-born prince himself, and in all his brethren, the saints. The power of which we speak is spiritual. It rules in the midst of enemies and is powerful in the midst of oppression. This means nothing else than that “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Co 12:9) and that in all things I can find profit toward salvation (Ro 8:28), so that the cross and death itself are compelled to serve me and to work together with me for my salvation. This is a splendid privilege and hard to attain, a truly omnipotent power, a spiritual dominion in which there is nothing so good and nothing so evil but that it shall work together for good to me, if only I believe. Yes, since faith alone suffices for salvation, I need nothing but faith exercising the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.

He, however, who does not believe is not served by anything. On the contrary, nothing works for his good, but he himself is a servant of all, and all things turn out badly for him because he wickedly uses them to his own advantage and not to the glory of God.<sup>30</sup>

“The kingdom of heaven has neared,” Jesus told his disciples to announce repeatedly in the Gospels. The announcement of the arrival of the messianic King was happening as God was coming out of hiding in the incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary.

Indeed, the kingdom has neared in the incarnate Christ. And it continues to near when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven.

### **The crown is ours—then, eternally; now, in faith vs. triumphalism that wants the crown now in sight**

Mixing up “cross and crown” talk and not keeping the truths properly distinguished leads quickly to all kinds of silliness. It certainly can lead to the worst kind of confusion regarding the two kingdoms or two realms in which the Lord actually reigns as king. Far, far too many have been tempted to think we know the way things really are by judging which political party is in charge or which legislation is passing in Congress and which laws are seen as constitutional in our nation/state or which football team is winning.

Let the faithful church turn from what is natural to our flesh—being theologians of glory—that is, theologians of a law that others should be doing, including even the law of God. If the faithful church isn’t taking seriously the glorious task of forgiving the sins of the sinners—gospel ministry, which, of course, means telling the humans how badly in bondage they are to the wrong gods—then who is actually doing gospel ministry? We’re all simply arguing about what or who is right or what or who is legal.

Let’s point out the sinfulness of the humans proven by their sinful actions. But let’s not act like the huffers and puffers out there who sing the song of “more” and “harder.” Let’s proclaim the Christ who is both revealed on the cross and who is hidden on the cross; no human would ever invent such

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, “Freedom of a Christian,” from *Vol. 44 of Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957) pp. 289-291

foolishness as Christ crucified as the proclamation that actually gives new life, hope, and salvation. But that's what our God has done. And that's what he continues to do through the faithful ministry of the church.

### **Conclusion: On metrics vs. triumphalist notions of church**

We preach Christ crucified. We deliver the goods—via Word and sacrament. Let the gospel be the offensive thing in our assemblies—not somebody watching his favorite cable channel and aping the party line of this side or that.

Let's stand on the rock of the *theologia crucis* and reject any and all of the other competing stories—all other theologies of glory—some of which are claiming to be scriptural, using all the right words—faith, grace, forgiveness, cross, crown, Jesus—but mushing them together in ways that obscure the clarity and foolishness of the message of Christ crucified for us.

Let's live by faith and not by sight—faith in the crucified and living and reigning Christ—who promises that we rule with him, even now in faith (all things serve us for our good) and eternally (we'll sit on thrones with him).

Let's push off the temptation to turn "cross" terminology into typical curved-in-on-ourselves glory stories; you know—the Christian life is a tough one, so go ahead and make yourself as obnoxious as you possibly can to others so others dislike you; especially to those in the world who don't yet know the name of Jesus rightly and view them as enemies, because you're somehow afraid of them rather than being afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell and the One who gave himself up for us all.

Let's live in the certainty of the shocking promises of the God who hides, even when he reveals himself—that means we live by faith in the promises of God in Christ, not by sight of any kind—not even ecclesiastical metrics. Our God is hidden. So is the church.

Let's live proclaiming that One who comes out of hiding in our faithful proclamation, who promises life eternal, who promises it's all good, who promises a crown. But not a one of us sees the crown. And plenty of us suffer, yes, even bear crosses while traveling to the River Jordan. Let's resist the temptations to be the church triumphant in anything other than Christ crucified—not even in our great mission programs, our great ministerial education system, our great Lutheran teachers, or our great pastors, or our great leadership. All of it—in the final analysis—is down here and therefore is not Christ crucified proclamation or sacrament administration. There alone does our God promise to be our gracious God. Not in a mystical meditation up in the hills. Or in our triumphant stadium-filling events. But in the humble words of your humble preacher, who is clay pot so that the all-surpassing power be of God and not of us (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Let's die to all of it—to anyone and anything other than Christ crucified. There he saves. There he promises us a crown.

This is most certainly true.

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# Closing service sermon: "Come!"

Aug. 3, 2023

Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

Rev. Joel Zank

Text: Revelation 22:12-21

<sup>12</sup> "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

<sup>14</sup> "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. <sup>15</sup> Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

<sup>16</sup> "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

<sup>17</sup> The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

<sup>18</sup> I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. <sup>19</sup> And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

<sup>20</sup> He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

<sup>21</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. (Revelation 22:12-21)

**I**n Christ Jesus who has promised to come back for us, dear fellow redeemed,

At the very end of the movie *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, as a school bus pulls away from the curb, the screen fades to black. Naturally, you'd expect the credits to begin to roll. Instead, the camera takes you to the hallway of the Bueller home where, Ferris, poking his head out of one of the rooms, can't believe what he sees—the audience still in their seats. Looking straight into the camera Ferris says, "You're still here? It's over! Go home! Go!" After a long week of convention, you might hope or even expect that I'm about to say that same thing to you: "It's over. Go home!" I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint you. I have a different word to speak to you. Instead of telling you to "Go!", I say to you, "Come!" Really? At this point in the week? Yes! This is the word we want to have on our lips as we head for home, remembering that "Come!" is both 1) our prayer to the Lord; and 2) our plea to the lost.

When I was a young boy, from time to time, my mother would say to me: "Wait till your father comes home!" Did your mom ever say that to you? How did her words make you feel? That depends on what was going on in your life. If you were being made to wait for dad so that he could hand you your allowance, you'd be champing at the bit for him to show up. On the other hand, if you had misbehaved and dad was the family disciplinarian, the last thing you wanted to hear was the sound of his car pulling into the driveway.

Today, it's not about our dad. It's our Lord Jesus who tells us, "Look, I am coming soon!" (v. 12). How do his words make you feel? Excited? Anxious? Uneasy? How about when he adds: "My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done" (v. 12)? If you're still not sure how to feel about all this, Jesus adds one more vital piece of information: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (v. 13). In other words, "I've been around forever. I don't miss a thing. I remember everything I've ever said, and I never change my mind." This means that the Lord's threats and his promises are unbreakable.

You understand what is riding on these words, right? This isn't the difference between getting your allowance or getting sent to your room. This is a matter of life and death—eternal life versus eternal death! Those who are welcomed into heaven are rewarded with the right to eat from the tree of life and are ushered into heaven's bliss forever. Anyone else—make that, everyone else—is on the outside. John refers to them as dogs . . . who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood (v. 15).

These people sound despicable because they are. For this reason, we might be tempted to pray with the Pharisee: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers . . ." (Luke 18:11). But before we add a hearty, "Amen!", let's understand what makes these people the dogs that they are. Those who practice magic arts are people who want to bend God's will to match their own. They want things their way. Might that be said of you? Adulterers and murderers are people whose hearts are filled with lust and anger. Idolaters are those who don't perfectly and permanently give God first place in their lives. And liars are those who are willing to bend the truth to suit their purpose. We know these sins very well, not just as casual observers of human nature, but as people who were born with a sinful nature of our own, one that, to this day, often has us barking with the dogs rather than singing with the saints.

So, maybe we aren't too eager to have Jesus hurry back—not if his coming means for us the "dawn of the dead." Do you ever worry about that? Are you ever afraid that there is some wrong that you have failed to right or some good deed that you've left undone and it's going cost you in the end? Do you ever feel that your life just doesn't measure up to that of your fellow Christians who are out there in the kingdom doing such great things? Are you afraid that Jesus will return and, in comparison to all those other Christians, find you wanting? Let our Lord put all such fears and worries to rest. Listen to what he says: "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. 'I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star' " (v. 16).

Did you hear that? The One speaking is none other than David's Lord and David's son. This is our God who humbled himself to be born of Mary, the virgin from David's line. This is the One who came to our world for one purpose, to become one with us, to take up our cause by living as our perfect Substitute. Then, because that of itself was not enough, he also took up our sin, the world's sin, and carried that massive burden to the cross, and from there, into hell itself so that by his death, in that God forsaken place, he could settle the wages of our sin, humanity's sin, once for all. Can you picture this in your mind's eye? From the wounds that our Risen Lord Jesus suffered in body and soul that day, there flows a river of red that brings and gives life to those once dead in sin and unbelief.

Whether you can see it or not doesn't matter. What is important is the fact that it has happened to you! When our gracious Lord put his name on you already at your baptism, he bathed you in that crimson flood. He washed away all your sin. And as he brought you up out of that cleansing tide, he dressed you in his very own holiness! This is why we can pray without fear, "Come! Come, Lord Jesus!" This is why we can live in anticipation of Christ's return. For even now we claim by faith the reward he will bring with him that day. It's already ours because the deeds done to earn us this precious prize are none other than Jesus' perfect acts of love, for which he is pleased to give sinful dogs like us all the credit. Through the faith he works in us, we receive the eternal reward that Jesus has earned for us.

Far from being the "dawn of the dead," Christ's return for us, for his bride, the church, will bring a new and glorious morn. This is why Jesus refers to himself as the "bright Morning Star." For just as Venus, the morning star, appears in the eastern sky, signaling the arrival of a new day, so Christ's return will mean for all believers the dawn of our eternal day in heaven.

That day, my friends, is coming soon! Jesus is coming soon! Why does he tell us this? So that we can be about our Father's business with joy and confidence. Think of the worker who has weekends off. That person always finds it easier to go to work on Friday morning than he does on Monday, right? Well, Jesus wants us to know that it's Friday in the kingdom of God. The eternal weekend is almost upon us. Almost, but not quite yet. In the waning hours of this age, there is still work to be done. Knowing that Jesus is soon to return, we will want to go about this work with a sense of urgency. There are still so many lost souls out there held captive by the same lust and anger, the same idols and lies that once controlled us. But as we have been reminded these last few days, we have the God-given tools to break sin's hold on them. We have God's Spirit working through the powerful invitation he himself places on our lips. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' " (v. 17). "Come learn of Jesus your Savior from sin." This is our plea to all those lost souls out there in faraway lands and in our own hometown.

It's not hard to spot the people who need our help. They are the ones all around us who thirst for love and meaning in their lives, so much so that they have abandoned all reason and have adopted for themselves every sort of destructive behavior and lifestyle. And, of course, they don't stop there. In their hopeless quest for acceptance and approval, they are determined to squelch and defeat anyone who would oppose them by word or example including all of us. For this very reason, it is so tempting, isn't it, to see them only as enemies to shun and ridicule? How Satan loves to stir within us our own anger and vengeance to the point where we conclude that those who add so much weight to the crosses we carry deserve to be left to themselves and to the punishment they have coming to them.

Do you ever catch yourself thinking that way? I do. Too often I find within me a frightening mixture of that rogue missionary named Jonah and the unmerciful servant of which Jesus speaks in his parable—the man forgiven so much and yet won't show or share even an ounce of all the grace he's been granted. God forgive us when we are so selfish and stingy with his love. That's just what God does. He forgives us, always, for the sake of our Savior. He forgives us again and again, and as he does, this mercy that comes to us new each day, renews us and grows in us the desire to reach others with this same free forgiveness. And so, we, his bride, empowered by his Spirit, say to those around us, "Come! We beg you to come and quench your thirst for love and meaning in Christ alone!"

Can it really be that simple? Our faith, yours and mine, is living proof that it is! And yet we may be tempted to think that the lost souls around us differ from any who have gone before them—that they are a new breed of lost who need some special message or we'll never be able to reach them for Jesus. Christ himself does away with such nonsense when he says: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll" (vv. 18,19). In his love for us and for all, Jesus wants us to understand that his Word is enough! It will accomplish his saving purpose. To alter it in any way, either by pulling the punches of the law or to sell short the sufficiency of God's grace, would not only jeopardize the souls we seek to help but our own souls as well. Jesus can't stand the thought of it! In love, he assures us that his Word works—it always has, and it always will!

We have what we need, dear friends. We have what we need to embrace the cross and anticipate the crown. In the time we've spent together this week, we have witnessed what our Lord is busy accomplishing through the Word he's given us to keep for ourselves and to cast as seed before the lost. This is the Word that we take with us as we leave this place. We'll remember what we've seen and heard. We'll cherish the friendships made or renewed, and we'll be encouraged each day by the thought that, though many miles may separate us from one another, we are all busy working together, pleading with the lost to learn of Christ, and in this way speeding along the return of him who promises: "Yes, I am coming soon" (v. 20). To which all God's people say: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (v. 20). "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen" (v. 21).