

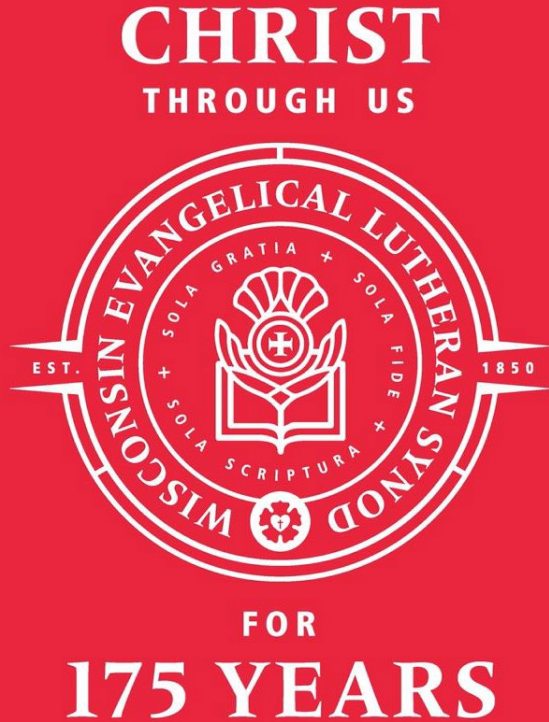


CHRIST

THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

Thanking Christ for Seven Generations of Grace



Asking Him to Bless Our Future Efforts



CHRIST

THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035



2 Corinthians 5:17-21

God... reconciled us to himself through Christ

and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,
not counting people's sins against them.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors,

as though God were making his appeal through us.



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Christ for us

message

motivation

Christ through us

method



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

OUR PLANNING PROCESS



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

Situational Assessment

- internal cultural analysis
- statistical analysis
- Area of Ministry assessments
- compilation of 7,000+ pulse surveys of WELS members
- focus groups of young WELS members (teens to late 20s)
- analysis of 1,000+ congregational exit surveys
- societal trend reviews
- ecclesiastical landscape study



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

Internal

Helpful

Strengths

- Strong doctrinal foundation
- Robust ministerial education system
- Expansive youth private/Christian education system
- Mission zeal

S

Harmful

Weaknesses

- Called worker shortages
- Overemphasis on programmatic evangelism
- Membership retraction, particularly in young members
- Loss of critical mass

W

External

Opportunities

- Expanding world mission fields
- Societal brokenness/spiritually underserved communities
- Youth/family ministry
- Technological potential

O

T

Threats

- Cultural secularization
- Political polarization
- Changes in educational policies (e.g., grant qualifications)
- Erosion in institutional trust

Key Issues

- membership decline; losses predominantly from younger demographics
- called worker shortages; increased demand, impending reduction in supply (the “enrollment cliff”)
- culture/mindset rooted in outdated ministry models
- unrealized opportunities in global fields
- loss of critical mass in North American congregations
- geographic redundancy intersecting with called worker shortages
- loss of mission effectiveness in Lutheran schools



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

	Issues-Based Strategic Planning	Vision-Based Strategic Planning
Primary Question	What issues must we address for the organization to survive or improve?	What kind of organization do we want to become?
Case Use	For organizations facing decline or transition, where the priority is stabilization	For organizations with stability, where the priority is expansion or doing something new
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conduct situational analysis identify key issues establish priorities and goals develop SMART objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clarify purpose/mission establish values and vision develop strategies develop strategic objectives

OUR PURPOSE



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

OUR PURPOSE

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to glorify God by proclaiming the truth of Holy Scriptures as articulated in the Lutheran Confessions—
1 supporting congregations as they equip their members to serve as Christ's ambassadors,
2 training called workers to serve in the ministry of reconciliation,
3 and coordinating mission efforts at home and abroad.



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

OUR PURPOSE

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to glorify God by proclaiming the truth of Holy Scriptures as articulated in the Lutheran Confessions—supporting congregations as they equip their members to serve as Christ's ambassadors, training called workers to serve in the ministry of reconciliation, and coordinating mission efforts at home and abroad.



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

OUR PRIORITIES



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

A close-up photograph of hands holding an open Bible, with a small white object resting on the pages. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

CULTURE

*Cultivating a
Gospel-Driven Culture*

A photograph of a large, multi-story church building with a prominent steeple and arched windows. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

CONGREGATIONS

*Strengthening
WELS' Backbone*

A photograph of a statue of Martin Luther standing in a park-like setting with trees and a building in the background. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

CALLING

*Producing Workers
for a Growing Harvest*

A photograph of a group of children sitting on the ground, clapping their hands. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

COMMISSION

*Bringing Christ
to the Nations*

CULTURE

Cultivating a Gospel-Driven Culture

*If anyone is in Christ,
the new creation has come.*



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

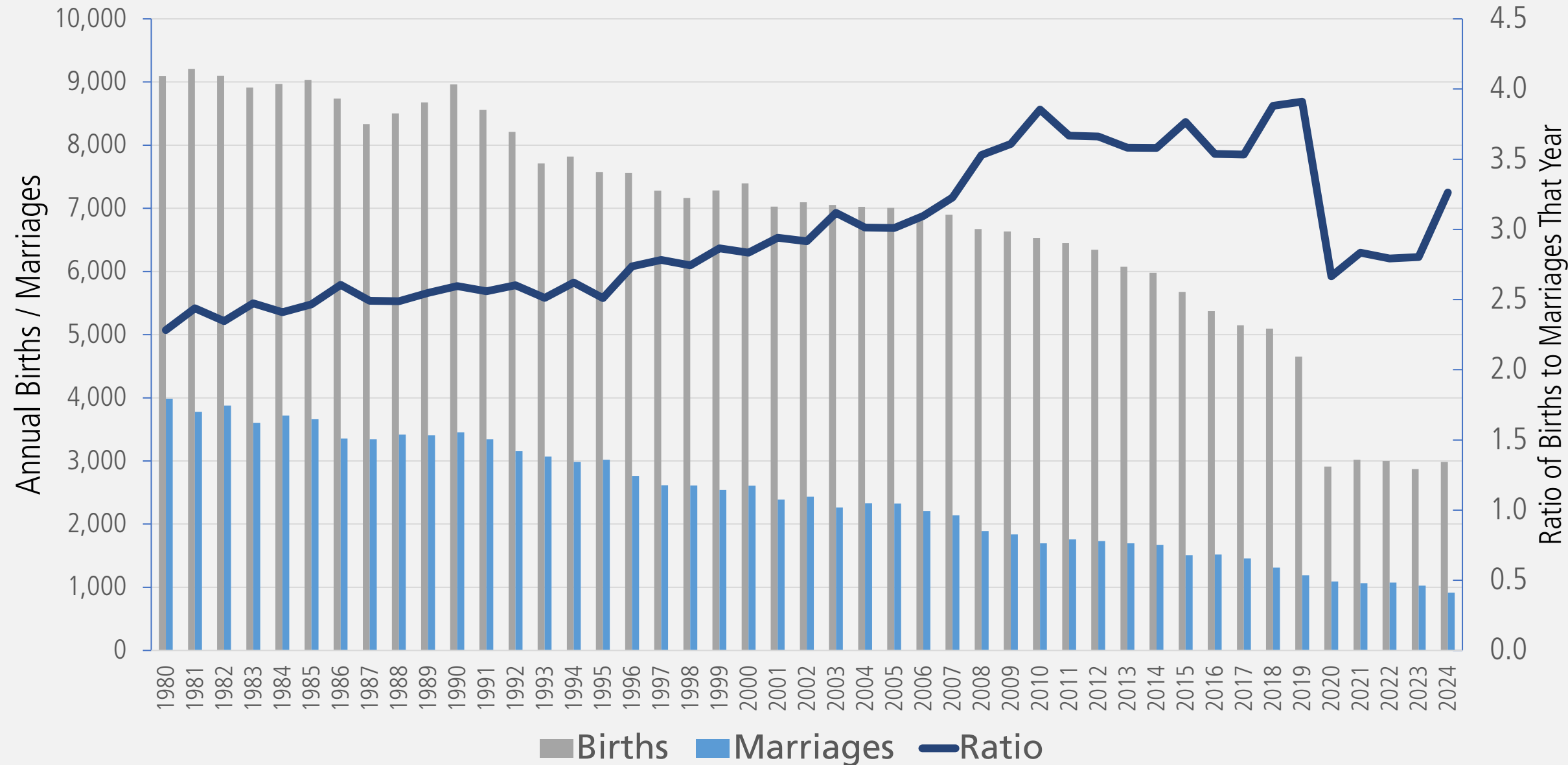


THE STRATEGIC ISSUE IN WELS: ***The Exodus of Young Adults***

In only four years, the 24- to
35-year-old demographic
in WELS declined 13.5%.

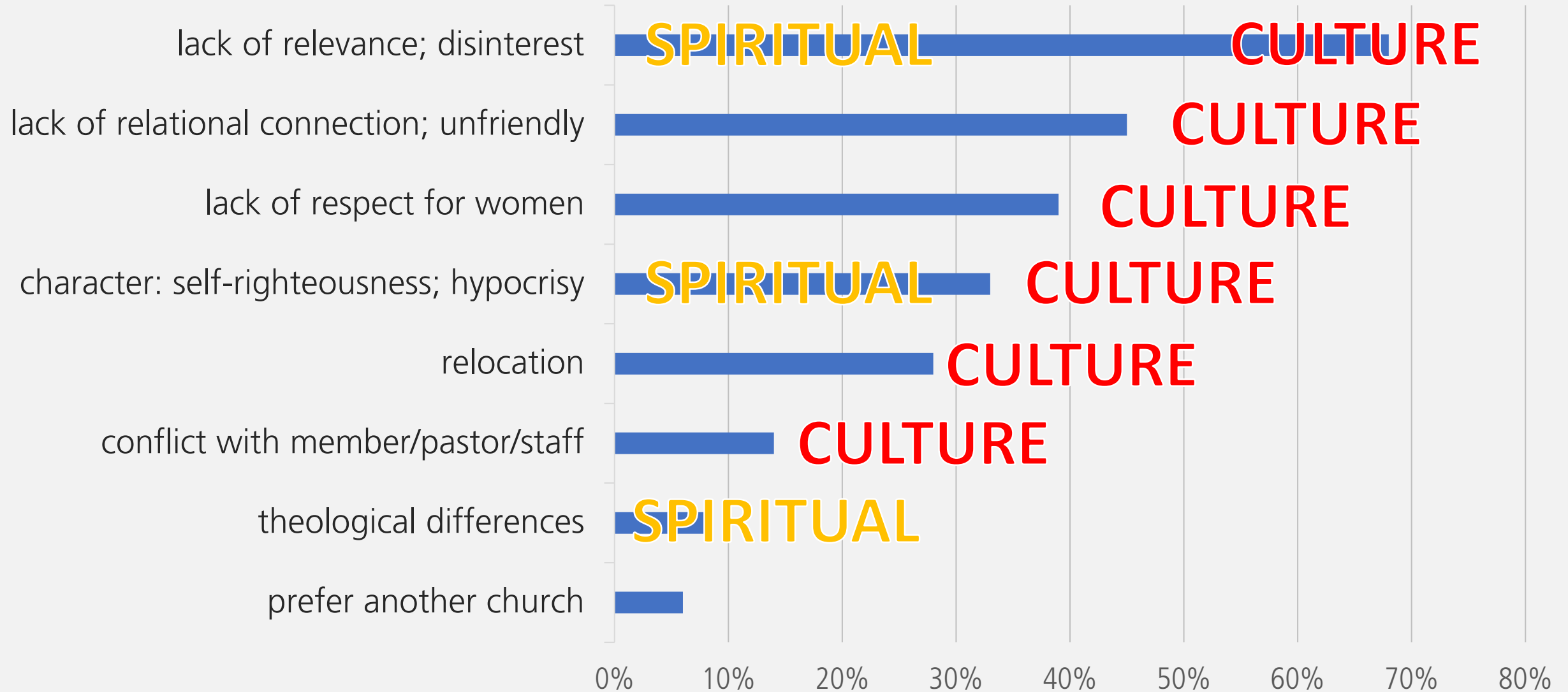
(2016 to 2020)

WELS BIRTHS AND MARRIAGES

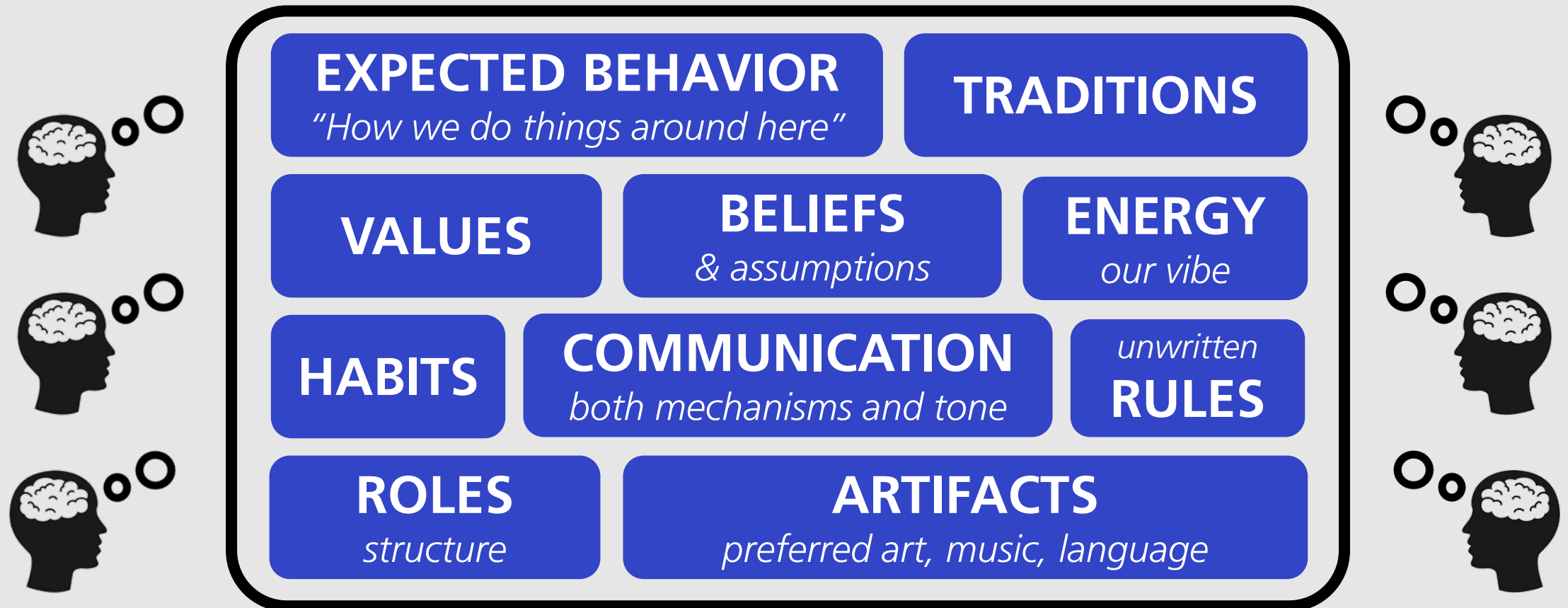


BACKDOOR LOSSES IN WELS

(factors cited in exit surveys)



Culture is the shared thought habits that frame the way a group of people behave and work



How do we need to think differently?

FROM

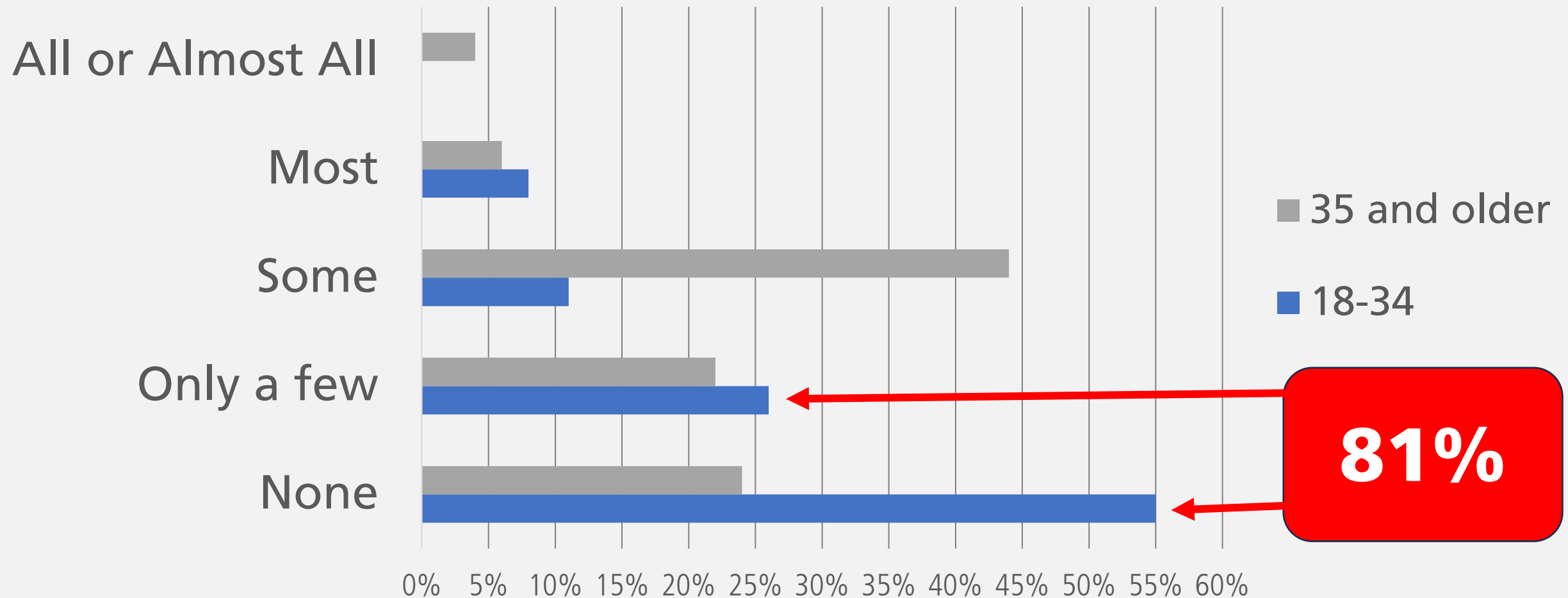
TO



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

Among the people that you consider close friends, how many would you say are members of this church?



How do we need to think differently?

FROM

Fellow members are
friendly Christian
acquaintances

TO

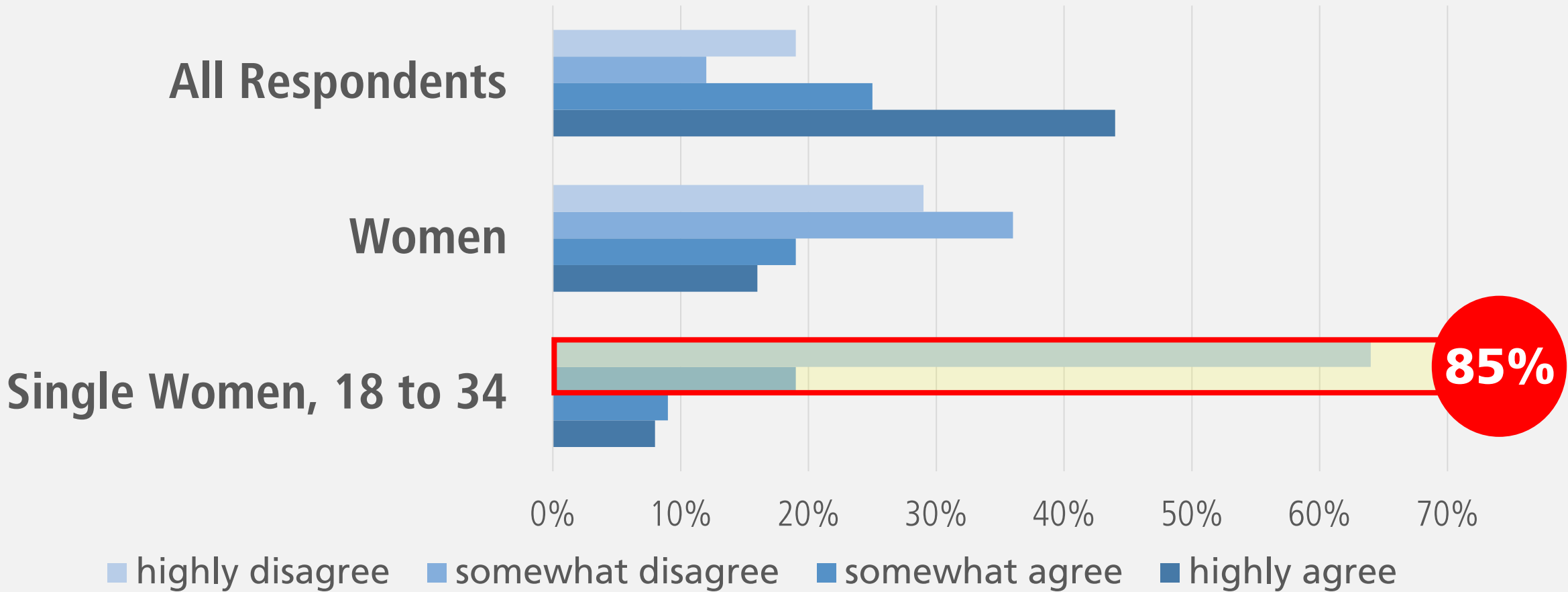
Fellow members are
brothers and sisters,
united by Christ's
blood



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

Agree or Disagree: I am using my God-given gifts to support the mission of my congregation.



How do we need to function differently?

FROM

Not fully utilizing
women's insights or
gifts

TO

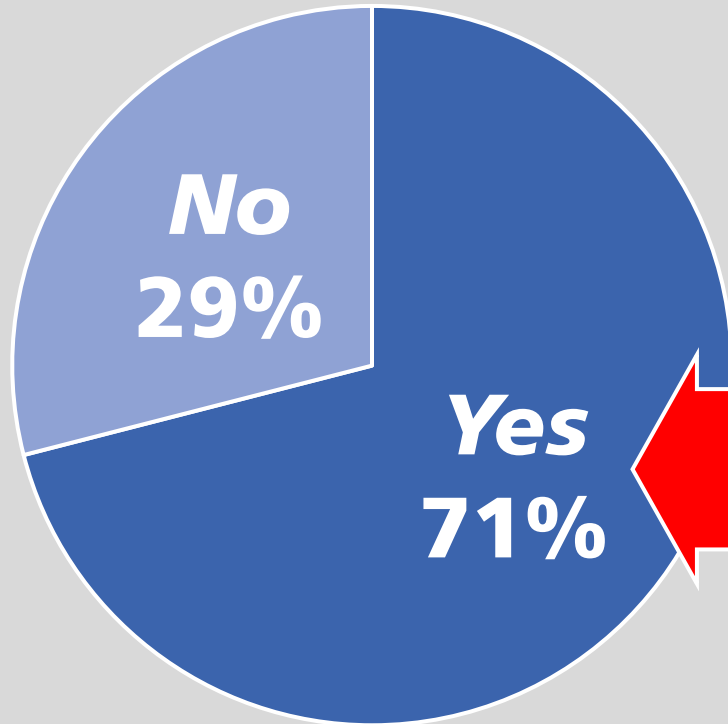
Women using their
gifts in every biblically
appropriate way



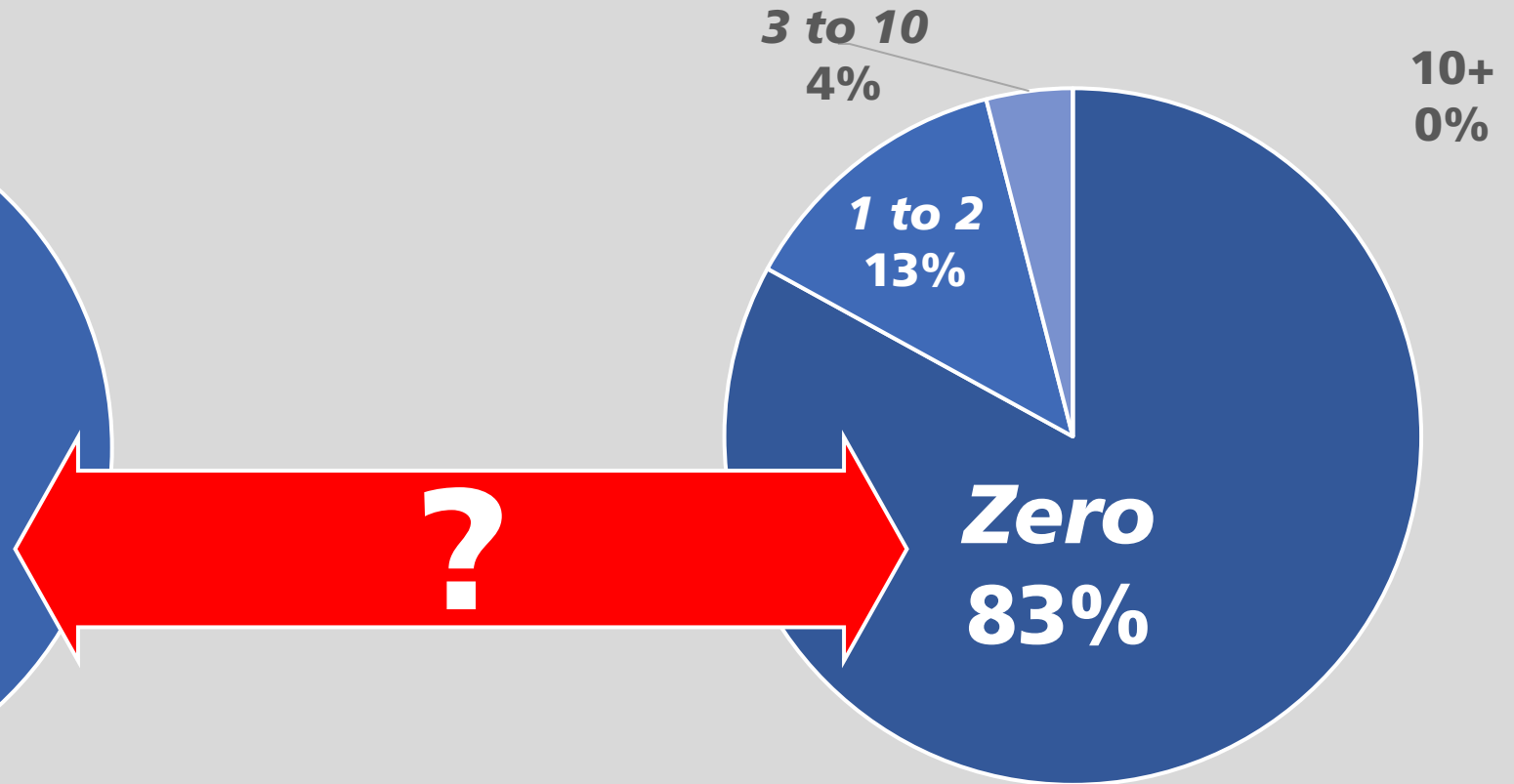
CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

**Are you involved
in your
congregation's
evangelism efforts?**



**How many people did you
share your faith with or
invite to church in the
past 12 months?**



How do we need to think differently?

FROM

Outreach occurs primarily through congregational programs and committees

TO

Outreach occurs primarily through members interacting with the unchurched and unbelievers



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

CULTURE: Our Goals

1. Raise Up Culture-Shaping Leaders
2. Foster a Zealous Gospel Mindset
3. Make Outreach a Personal Effort
4. Encourage Cross-Bearing Discipleship
5. Build Deep Christian Community



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

Cultivating a Gospel-Driven Culture

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by
the renewing of your mind.*

*Then you will be able to test and approve
what God's will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Romans 12:2

CONGREGATIONS

Strengthening WELS' Backbone

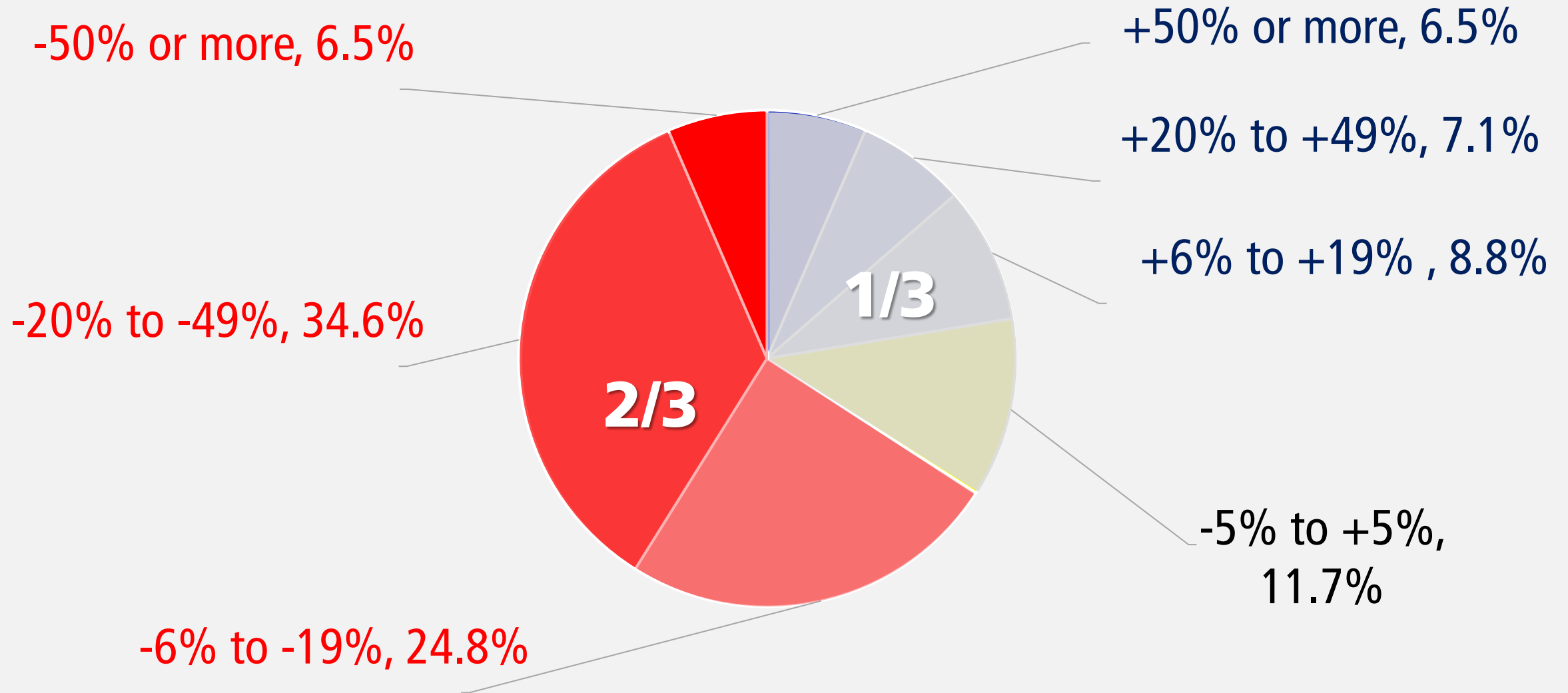
*He has committed to us
the message of reconciliation.*



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

PERCENT CHANGE IN TOTAL MEMBERSHIP IN WELS CONGREGATIONS OVER THE PAST DECADE



WORSHIP ATTENDANCE IN WELS

	2014	2024
under 50	26%	36%
200 to 500	17%	11%

Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

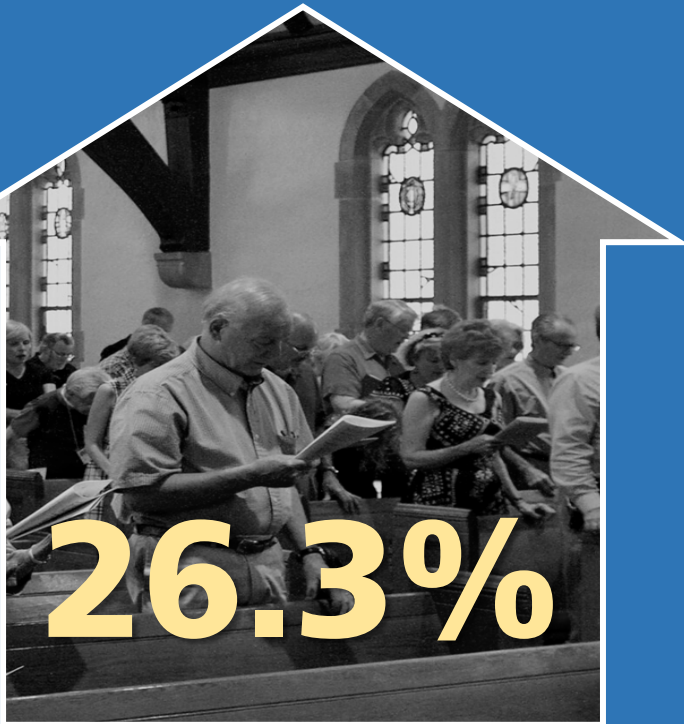
Matthew 18:20

MARRIAGES IN 2024

- 915 total in WELS
- 25% of those marriages occurred in 2.6% of congregations (~30 churches).
- Two-thirds of congregations had zero marriages.

2020 to 2024

*In-Person
Worship*



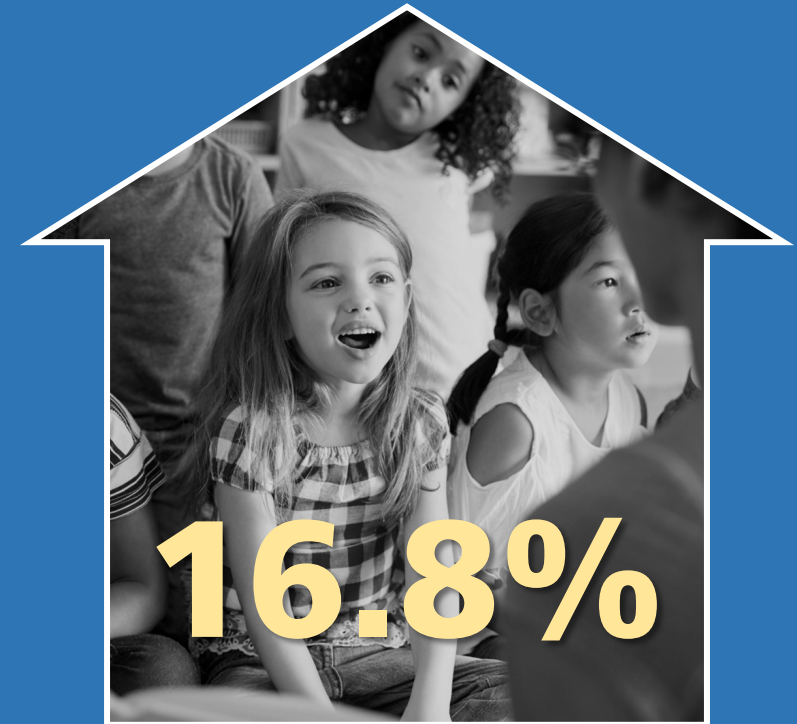
26.3%

*Adult
Bible Study*



22.9%

*Youth
Bible Study*



16.8%

2024 Spiritual Gains

**Adult
Confirmations**

4,126

(second most in WELS history)

**Professions
of Faith**

1,789

**Children
of AC & PoF**

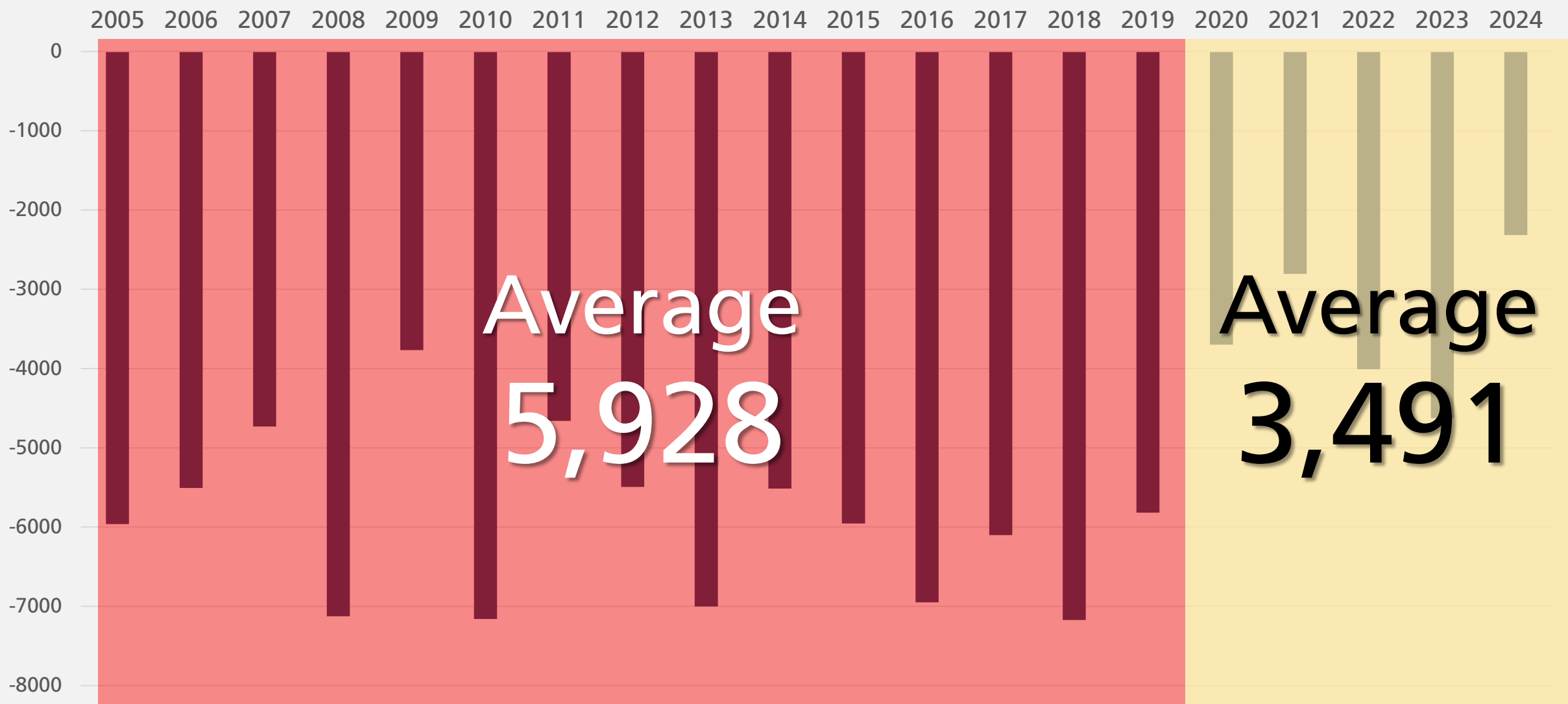
2,161

(second straight year of 2K+)

8,076

2.5%
*of WELS total
membership*

2024 Net Spiritual Losses



2019

SYNOD CONVENTION

*“If we could get our
adult confirmation
to weekly worshiper
ratio to 1 to 29 ...
WELS losses would
stabilize.”*

2019 - 1 to 46

2020 - 1 to 41

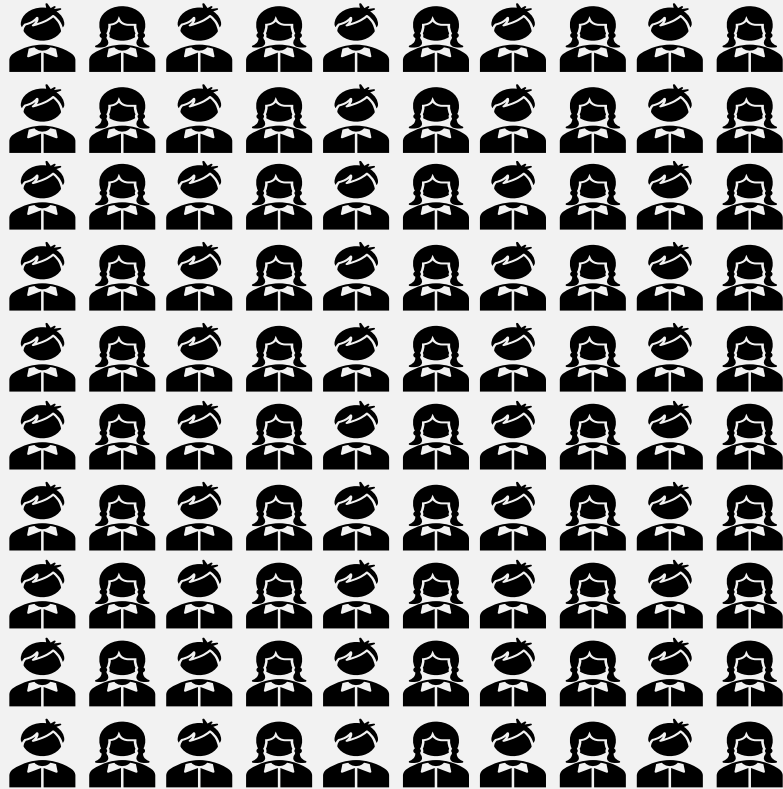
2021 - 1 to 35

2022 - 1 to 35

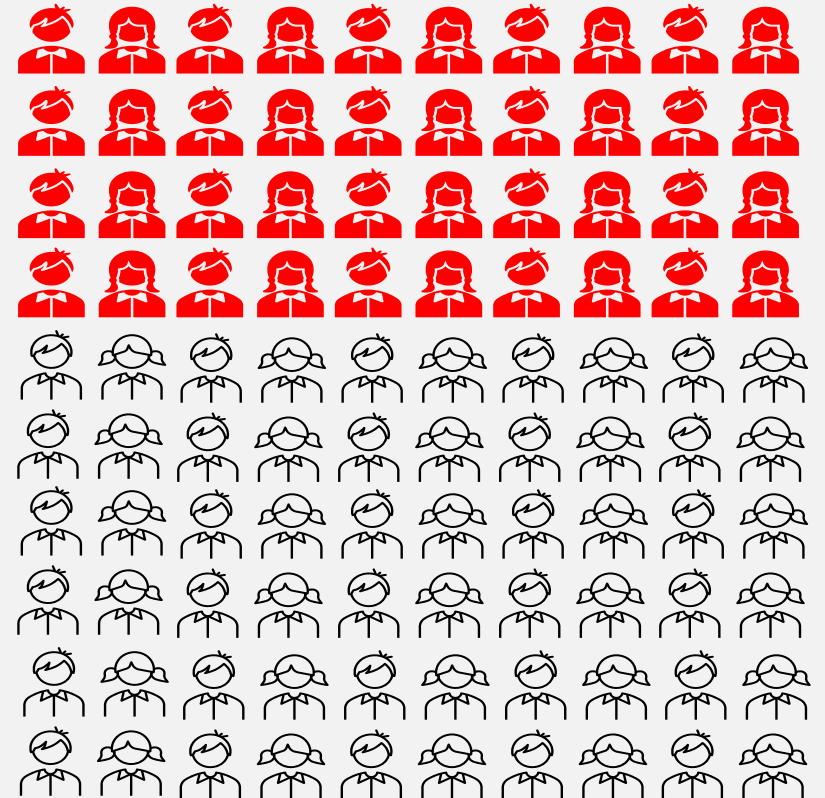
2023 - 1 to 32

2024 - 1 to 31

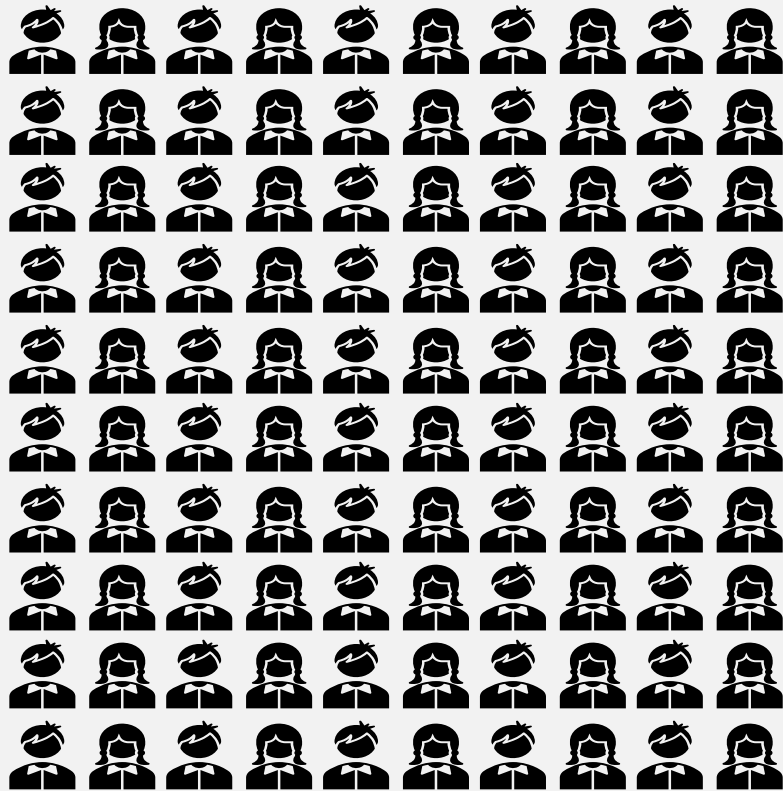
Take one hundred WELS youth. How many will still be churched when they are in their mid-20s?



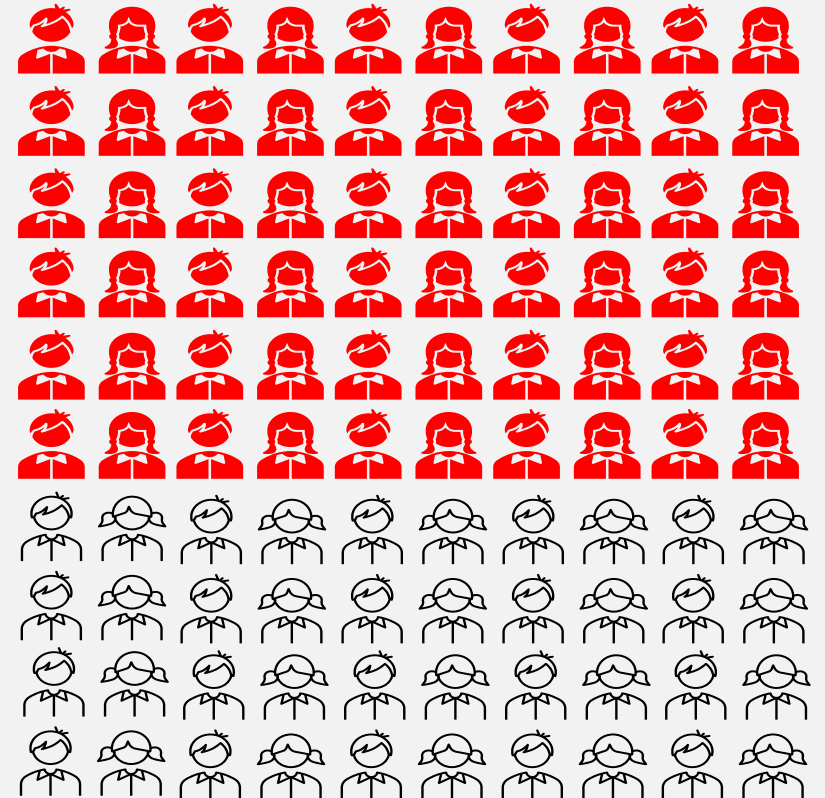
**about
40%**



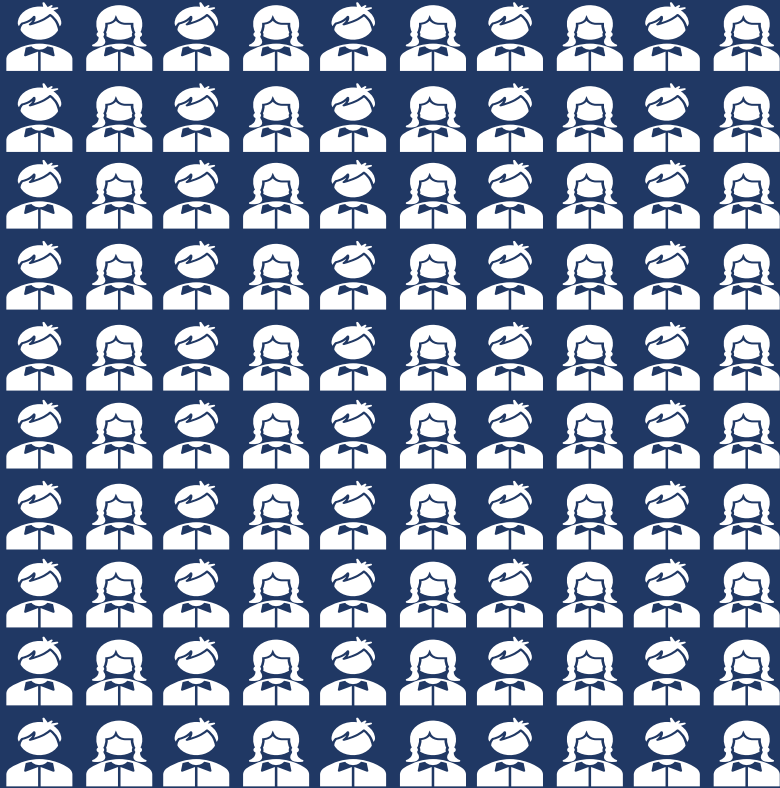
If Christ, through us, would raise the retention rate to 60%, it reduces annual backdoor losses by about . . .



**2,000
souls**



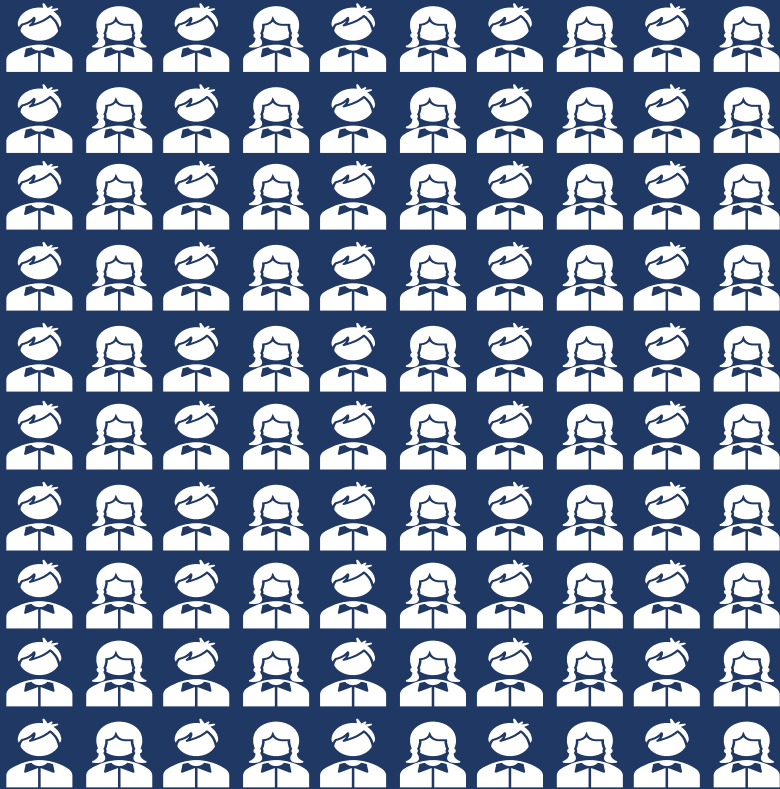
Take one hundred non-WELS households
utilizing our Lutheran schools.
How many will join WELS in a year?



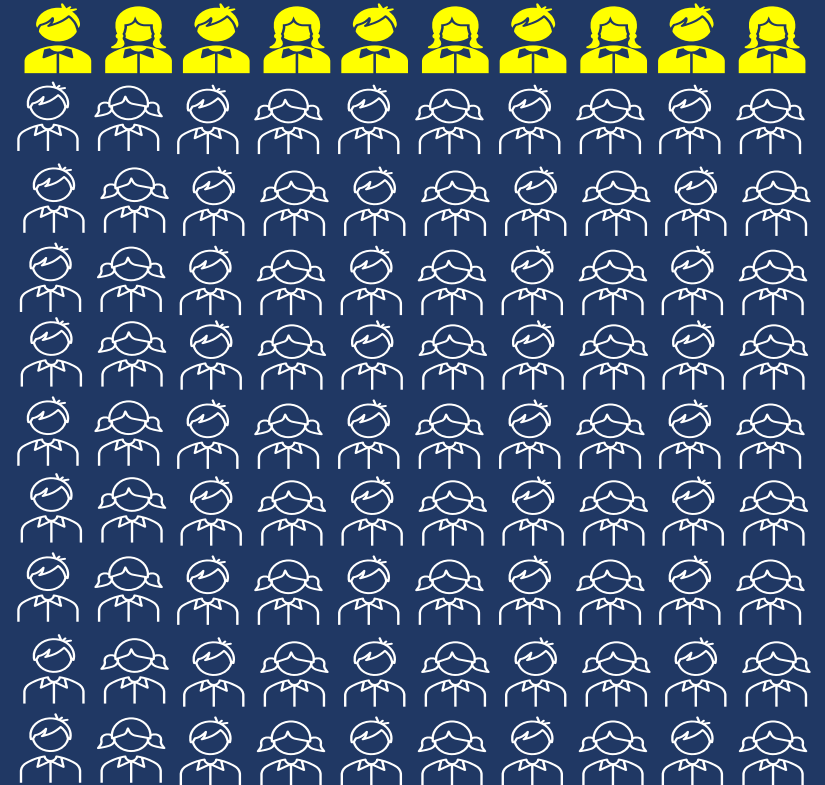
**about
2%**



If Christ, through us, increased the number of non-WELS households who joined to 10%, it would mean about . . .



**3,000
souls**



How do we need to think differently?

FROM

Increased enrollment is the goal for our schools

TO

Accomplishing Christ's mission is the goal for our schools



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

THE NEED FOR NEW CHURCHES

- **Matthew 28**
- **Nationally, church closures are leaving many communities spiritually underserved**
- **New churches reach more people**
- **It is easier to shape healthy congregational culture in a new church**



**100
MISSIONS
IN 10 YEARS**
WELS HOME MISSIONS 2023-2033

+25,000 souls

in WELS' 8th generation



evangelism efforts

2%

3.4M souls

3%



retention efforts

WELS backdoor
losses attributable
to relocation

28%

How do we need to think differently?

FROM

The quantity of WELS
congregations matters
most

TO

The mission capacity of
WELS congregations
matters most



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

CONGREGATIONS: Our Goals

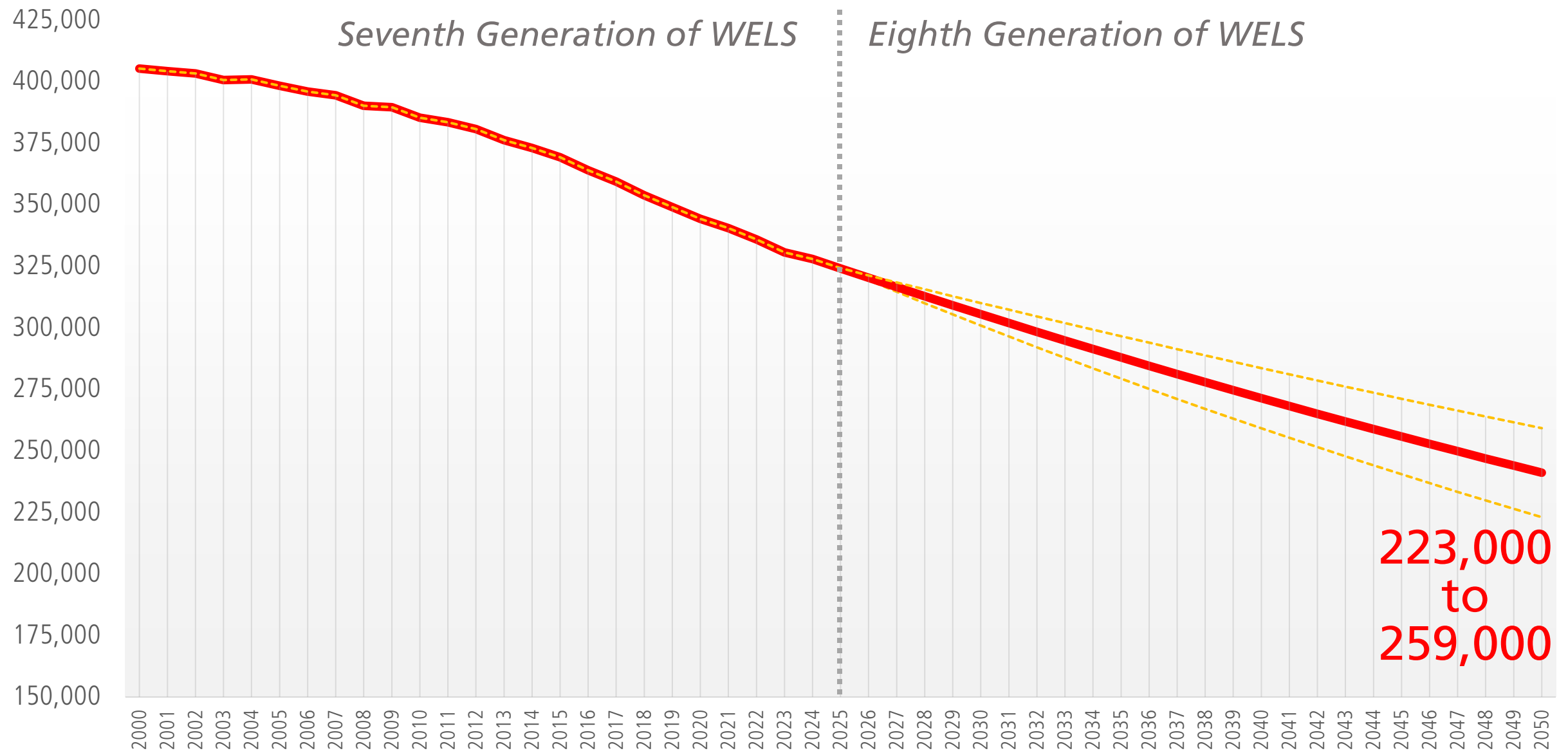
6. Engage the Laity in Mission
7. Support Ministry Enhancements
8. Expand WELS' Reach Through Strategic Church Planting
9. Elevate the Home as the First Mission Field
10. Provide Sound Lutheran Resources



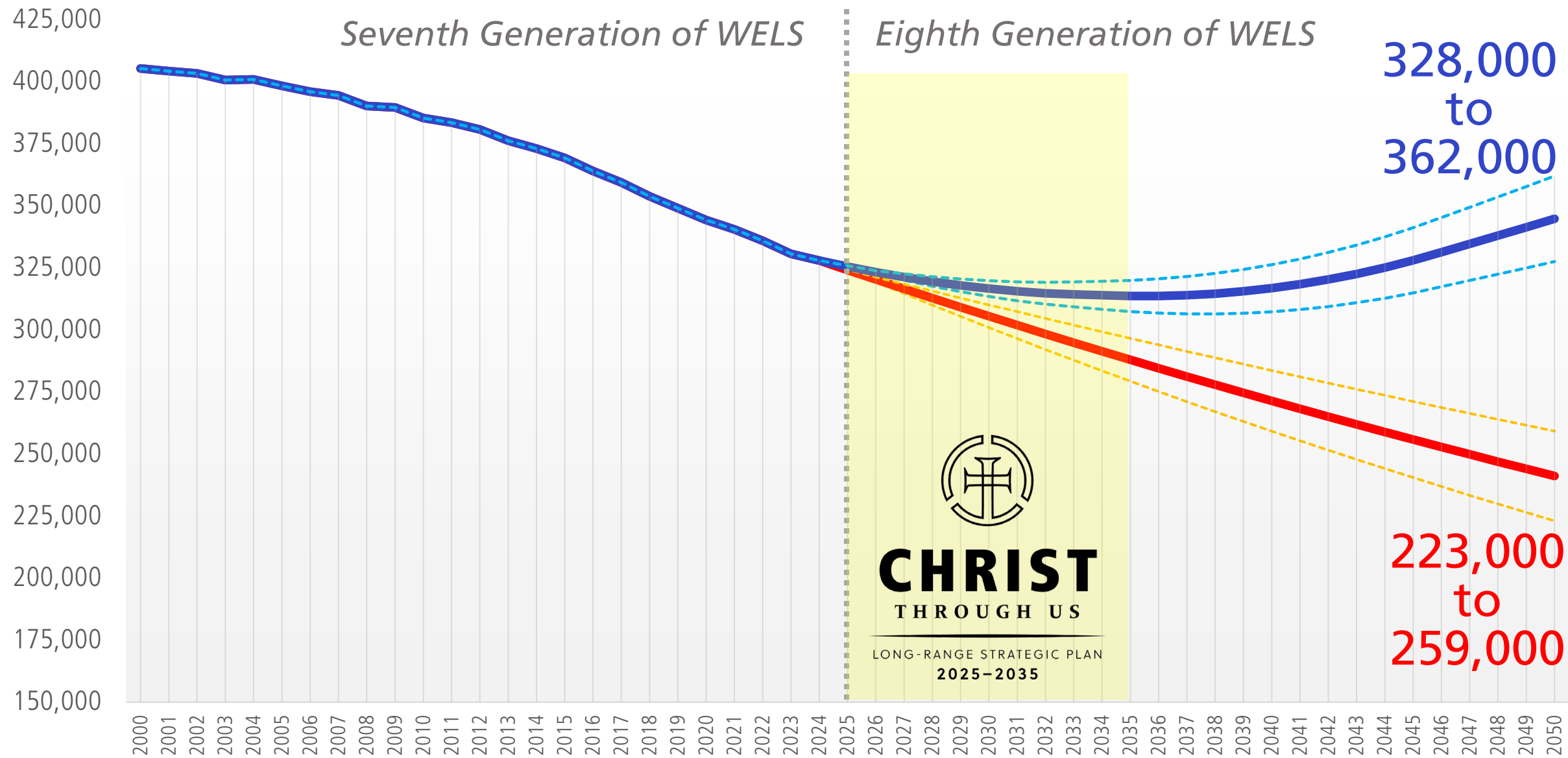
CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

STATUS QUO



CHRIST THROUGH US



COMMISSION

Bringing Christ to the Nations

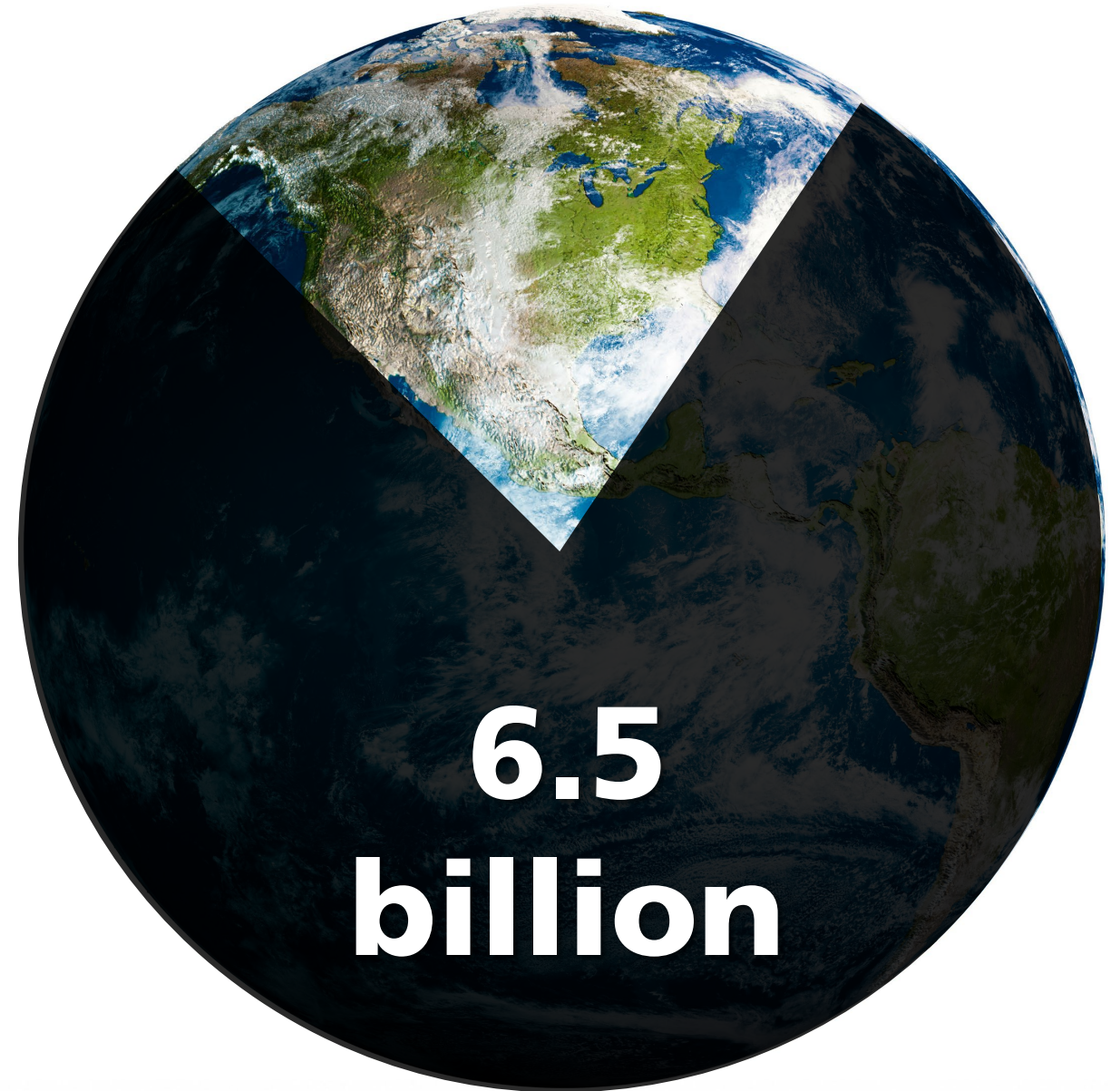
*God was reconciling the world
to himself in Christ.*



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

**Number of people
around the world
living in places
where Christianity
is small or non-
existent presence?**



GLOBAL MISSION OPPORTUNITIES



**rapid urbanization
in Asia and Africa**



**digital
evangelism**



**post-Christian
Europe**



**growing
disillusionment
in other religions**

Historical Approach



Christ Through Us



In the future



GLOBAL MISSION OPPORTUNITIES

A smiling man with a beard, wearing a dark suit and tie, stands in front of a bookshelf filled with books. To his left is a window with a geometric pattern. The background is slightly blurred.

**stateside
cross-cultural efforts**

How do we need to think differently?

FROM

WELS is 300K+
in the States

TO

WELS is the head of a
global network of
confessional Lutherans
numbering 1M+



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

COMMISSION: Our Goals

- 11. Forge a Borderless Support Network
- 12. Equip a Global Missionary Force
- 13. Establish Confessional Lutheran Seminaries
- 14. Expand Multi-Language Mission Efforts
- 15. Pioneer Missions in High-Risk and Unreached Areas



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

2017

*Lutheran
Church
of Ethiopia*

*East Asian
Lutheran Synod*

*South Asian Lutheran
Evangelical
Mission
(Hong Kong)*

2019

*Evangelical
Church
(Taiwan)*

*Lutheran
Congregation
in Mission
for Christ
(Kenya)*

2023

*Obadiah
Lutheran
Synod
(Uganda)*

*Iglesia Cristo
WELS
Internacional
(Latin America)*

2035

1M souls

CALLING

Producing Workers for a Growing Harvest

*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors,
as though God were making his appeal through us.*

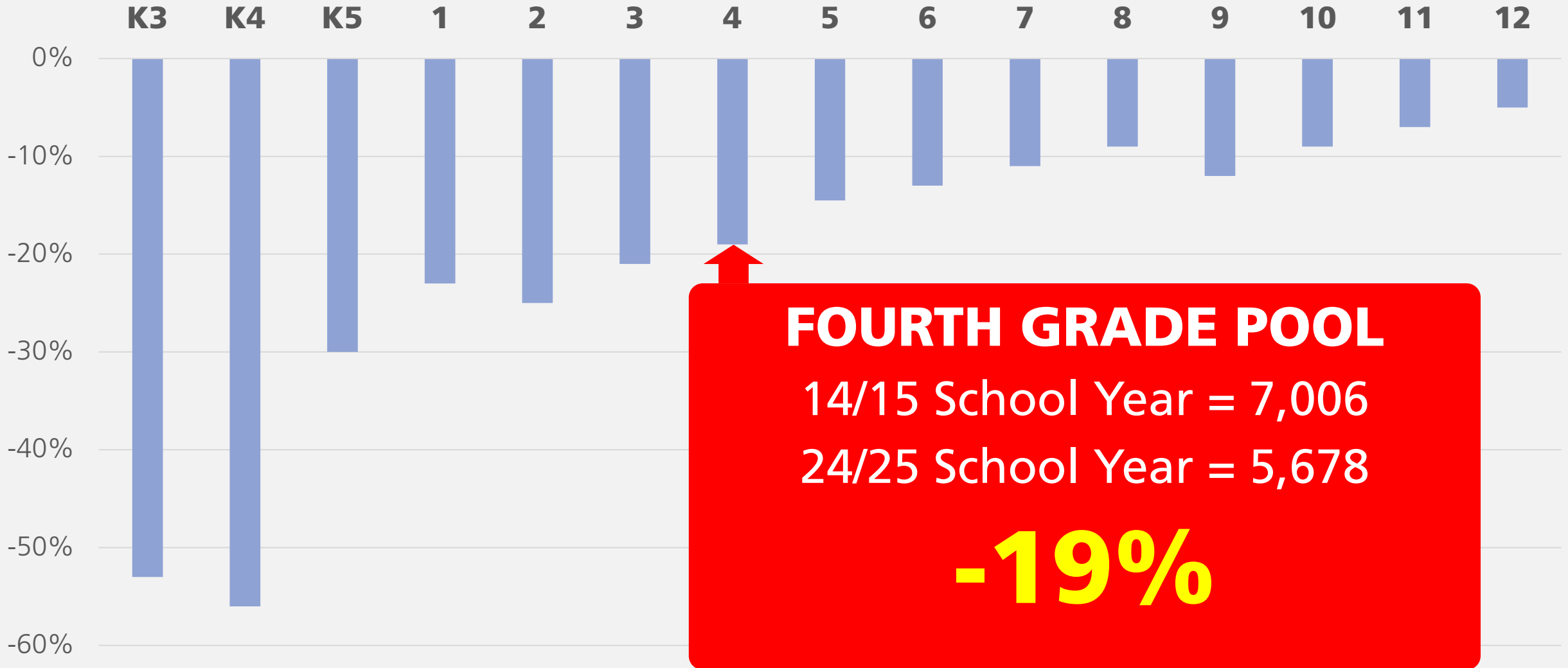


CHRIST
THROUGH US

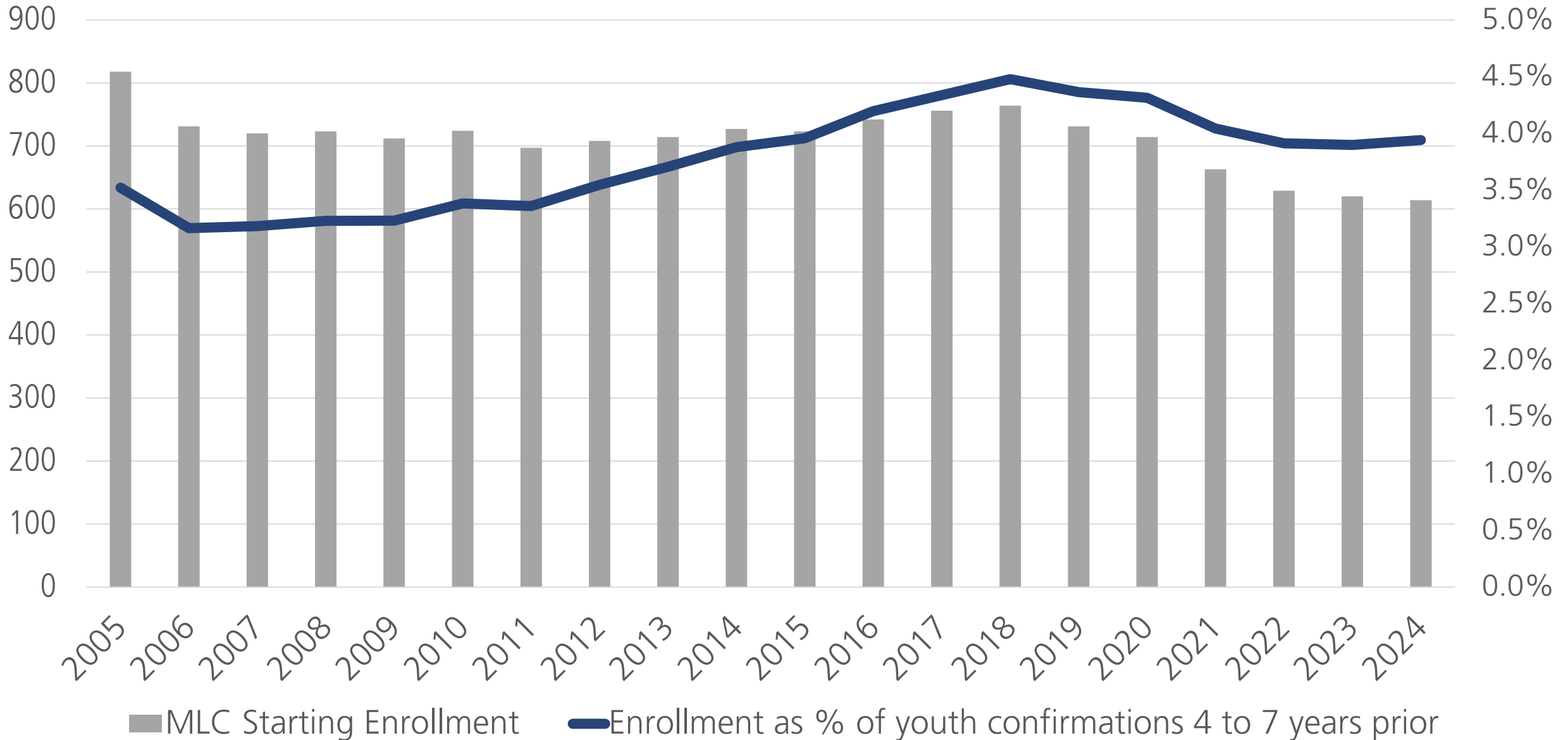
LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

WELS "ENROLLMENT CLIFF"

Pool of Students for Each Grade: 24/25 School Year Versus 14/15 School Year



MLC Enrollment



GOING TO MLC

	historic	what if?
Preparatory Schools	48%	53%
Area Lutheran HSs	9%	15%
Other (public/home)	0.7%	2%

**Currently, that would mean
100 more students annually.**

The background of the slide features a grayscale image of numerous industrial pipes, likely for oil or gas, arranged in a perspective that recedes into the distance. Each pipe is equipped with a valve or flange, and the scene is illuminated by a bright light source from the upper left, creating strong highlights and shadows.

EXPANDING PIPELINES

Second Career Recruitment

Competency Based Equivalency (CBE)

Leveraging Technology

THE DISECONOMY OF SCALE

The background of the slide features a grayscale image of several sandwiches, likely submarine sandwiches, resting on a surface covered with newspaper. The newspaper has various headlines and advertisements visible, such as "WILMINGTON", "SANDWICHES", "PREPARED", and "SUBWAY". Overlaid on this background are two large, semi-transparent geometric shapes: a blue upward-pointing triangle on the left and a gray downward-pointing triangle on the right. These shapes contain white text and percentages.

+2%

annual need for
called workers
(2013-2023)

-1.3%

annual change in
WELS total
membership
(2013-2023)

CALLING: Our Goals

16. Expand Pathways into Gospel Ministry
17. Innovate Recruitment Efforts
18. Ensure the Long-Term Stability of Ministerial Education
19. Establish a Sustainable Strategy for Called Worker Development
20. Support the Well-Being of Called Workers



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

2035 VACANCY RATE



6%



CHRIST THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

CULTURE

One
Culture-Shaping Leaders

Two
Zealous Gospel Mindset

Three
Personal Outreach

Four
Cross-Bearing Discipleship

Five
Christian Community

CONGREGATIONS

Six
Engaged Laity

Seven
Ministry Enhancement Efforts

Eight
Church Planting

Nine
Home/Family Emphasis

Ten
Lutheran Resources

COMMISSION

Eleven
Borderless Support Network

Twelve
Global Missionary Force

Thirteen
World Lutheran Seminaries

Fourteen
Multi-Language Efforts

Fifteen
High-Risk World Missions

CALLING

Sixteen
Expanded Ministry Pathways

Seventeen
Innovative Recruitment

Eighteen
Ministerial Education Stability

Nineteen
Sustainable Worker Supply

Twenty
Called Worker Well-Being



4 DRAWERS: 20 FILES

What goes in them?

- **SMART objectives**
- **KPIs** (key performance indicators)
- **IDS questions** (identify, discuss, solve)

OUR PATH



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

Issues-Based Strategic Planning

- A. conduct situational analysis
- B. identify key issues
- C. establish priorities and goals
- D. develop SMART objectives & KPIs

we're here

next steps



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035

SMART Objectives

- **Specific:** answers “who, what, when”
- **Measurable:** there are criteria for tracking progress (KPIs)
- **Achievable:** the objective is realistic and attainable, considering available resources and constraints
- **Relevant:** clearly supports one of the “Christ through us” goals
- **Time-bound:** a deadline/timeframe is established



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)

- **A KPI is how progress of an objective is assessed or measured.** *E.g., annual budget vs. YTD offerings*
- **A conditional KPI establishes “if/then” relationships.** *E.g., If enrollment is at or above 95% capacity, then we keep a waiting list.*



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035

Funding Types

A. Operational funds (Congregation Mission Offerings)

B. Divisional funds (direct gifts)

B1) sustainable with average annual direct gifts

B2) reflects a spend-down of divisional funds

C. Additional funding needed



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035



100 MISSIONS IN 10 YEARS

WELS HOME MISSIONS 2023-2033

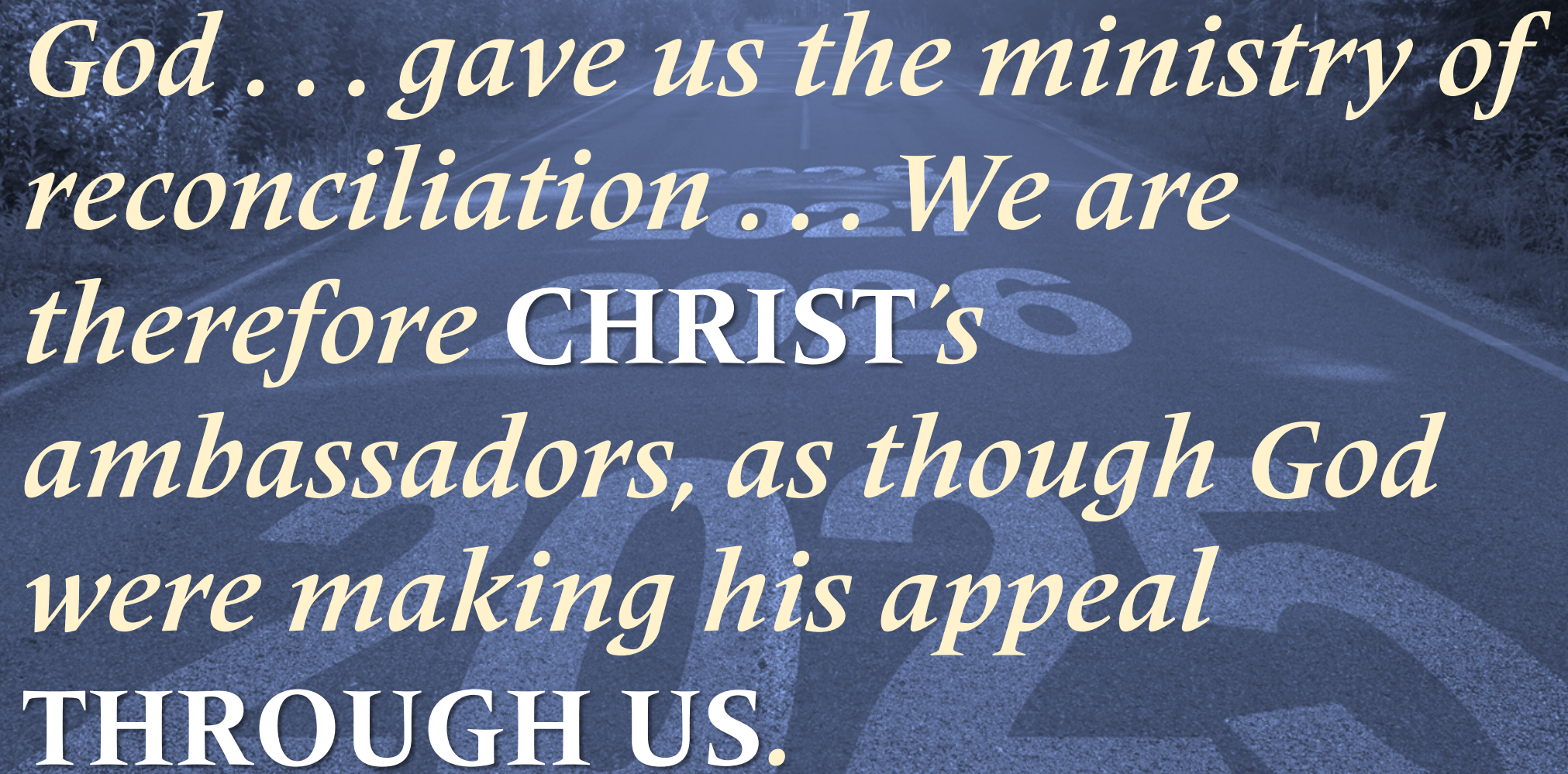
#	OBJECTIVE	GOAL	WHO	WHEN	FUND	KPI
103	Open 5 new home missions	8	HM	26b	A	2.5% North American reach by 2035
104	Open an additional 2 new home missions	8	HM	26b	B1	2.7% NA reach by 2035
105	Open an additional 3 new home missions	8	HM	26b	C	3% NA reach by 2035

OUR PRAYER



CHRIST
THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2035



*God . . . gave us the ministry of
reconciliation . . . We are
therefore CHRIST's
ambassadors, as though God
were making his appeal
THROUGH US.*

2 Corinthians 5:18,20



CHRIST

THROUGH US

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2035