

Book of Reports and Memorials

May 2025

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD
Waukesha, Wisconsin

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
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For more information, visit welsconvention.net/boram.

President's overview

The theme of the 2025 WELS convention is “Christ through us.” The theme reflects the biblical truth expressed by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19,20: “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. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

“Christ through us” is also the theme of the new long-range strategic plan that will be considered at this convention, as well as the theme of our celebration of the synod’s 175th anniversary. The introduction to the “Christ through us” long-range strategic plan summarizes not only what our synod hopes to do under God for the next ten years, but it also beautifully describes what we have been doing as a synod for 175 years and the decisions and direction that this synod convention will address.

The long-range strategic plan’s introduction says, “With hearts full of thanksgiving, we carry out this ministry of reconciliation as individuals and as congregations united in a confessional Lutheran church body. Together, we proclaim the gospel, standing unwaveringly on the full truth of God’s Word as expressed by the Lutheran Confessions. We will labor diligently, yet humbly, knowing that our efforts are but instruments in the hands of the Spirit, who alone brings life. Thus, we press forward in this sacred task—steadfast in our doctrine, bold in our witness, and ever reliant on Christ to accomplish his good work through us.”

May Christ’s cross continue to be our focus as we celebrate 175 years of his grace, as we plan as good stewards for carrying out his work for the next ten years, and as we gather for this convention in which God will equip and strengthen us to work together to serve as ambassadors and keep our focus on Christ, who promises to work through us.

Some of the items on the convention agenda are:

- The synod convention will celebrate the 175th anniversary of the synod in its worship focus, in a convention essay, and in the gathering of a special 175th anniversary thank offering.
- Elections will be held for synodical officers (first vice president and recording secretary) and for various synodical boards and commissions.
- The convention will approve a ministry financial plan (budget) for the next two years.
- We will have the privilege of declaring fellowship with a confessional Lutheran church in Tanzania—the Africa Missionary Evangelism Church. Representatives of our synod have been working with the Africa Missionary Evangelism Church for several years to determine whether we are in full agreement in doctrine and practice. As a result of those discussions, the Commission on Inter-Church Relations will be recommending that our synod declares our two church bodies are in fellowship.
- The new long-range strategic plan, entitled “Christ through us,” will be presented for adoption. This plan outlines how we, under God’s direction and blessings, will carry out our synod’s mission through the year 2035.
- The Conference of Presidents will be recommending a change in the way that elections for synodical officers are held. Currently nominations for officers are made at the convention, with voting taking place very soon after. The change being proposed will ask delegates to submit nominations in early summer and to publish the final ballot. This would give time for the delegates to learn more about the candidates, and it would give time to those on the ballot to begin thinking about the possibility that they could be called to serve. The change, if adopted, would take place at the 2027 convention. The Arizona-California District has submitted a similar proposed change that is somewhat different from the one recommended by the COP.
- Memorials, which are formal requests for the synod to take action, and other recommendations will be discussed and decided.

- All areas of ministry and departments of the synod will report on the work they have done and on the plans they are making. One evening session will feature special presentations by representatives of Home and World Missions.
- The convention will recognize the completion of service for First Vice President James Huebner and Recording Secretary Robert Pasbrig.
- Home and World Missions will describe the increasing opportunities that God is giving to our synod to proclaim the gospel to people here in the United States and around the world.
- Ministerial Education will describe efforts to increase enrollments as part of an effort to ease the shortage of called workers.

The Book of Reports and Memorials

This *Book of Reports and Memorials* (BORAM) is intended to summarize, both for convention delegates and for the synod's entire constituency, the business that will come before the convention. It contains reports from all synodical entities, describing the synod's activities during the past year and providing information about current efforts and future plans. It also contains memorials, which are formal requests to the convention to address specific issues. All delegates are encouraged to read through this book in advance of the convention. It will be available to delegates in both printed and electronic form.

Floor committees

The convention's business will be addressed by floor committees. All delegates are assigned to a floor committee. Each committee is assigned specific matters to address or a task to perform during the convention. Floor committees will have the opportunity to meet at the convention to address the business assigned to them and to address matters that come up during the convention. The floor committees, along with their chairmen, are listed on p. 3.

Delegates

Delegates are expected to attend all convention sessions. Advisory delegates may attend floor committee meetings upon invitation of the floor committee or by mutual agreement. Floor committee chairmen may at any time request that the committee conduct its work without the presence of advisors.

Memorials

A memorial is a formal request for the synod to take specific action. Memorials will be assigned to the floor committee already dealing with the subject matter or area addressed by the memorial.

Sometimes memorials are submitted after the deadline for inclusion in BORAM. These are referred to as "unprinted memorials" because they are not printed in BORAM. Instead, they are printed and distributed to delegates prior to the convention and are assigned to appropriate floor committees for the same kind of consideration received by memorials printed in BORAM.

Schedule

The convention begins with a delegate orientation session on Monday afternoon at 4:00 p.m. The opening worship for the convention takes place on Monday evening at 6:30 p.m. in the Martin Luther College Chapel of the Christ. The convention itself begins on Tuesday morning at 8:00 a.m. Evening sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday are planned. The convention will conclude with a closing worship service on Thursday morning or early afternoon, depending on when the convention business is completed.

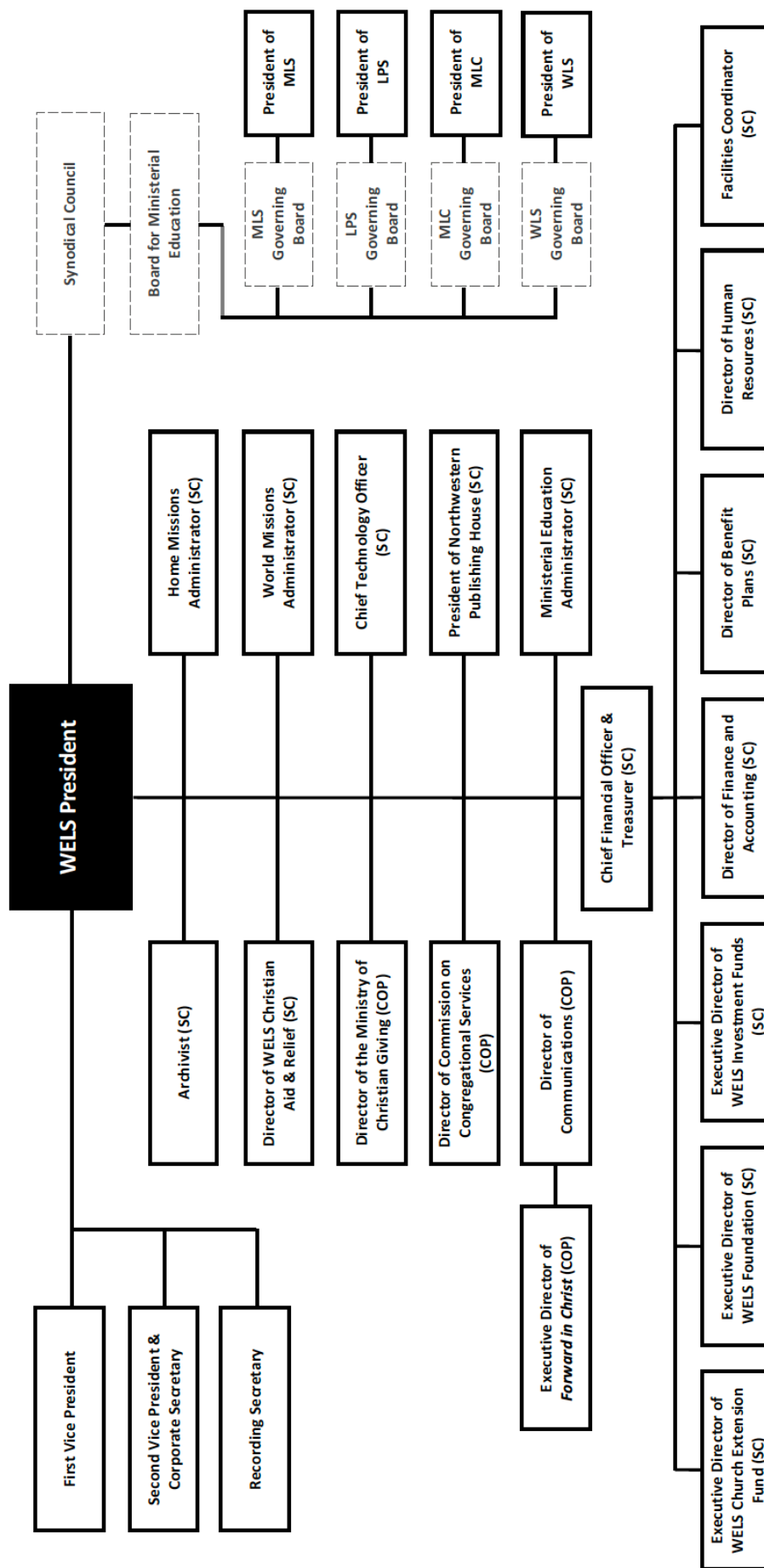
May God bless our gathering, to his glory and for the good of his kingdom!

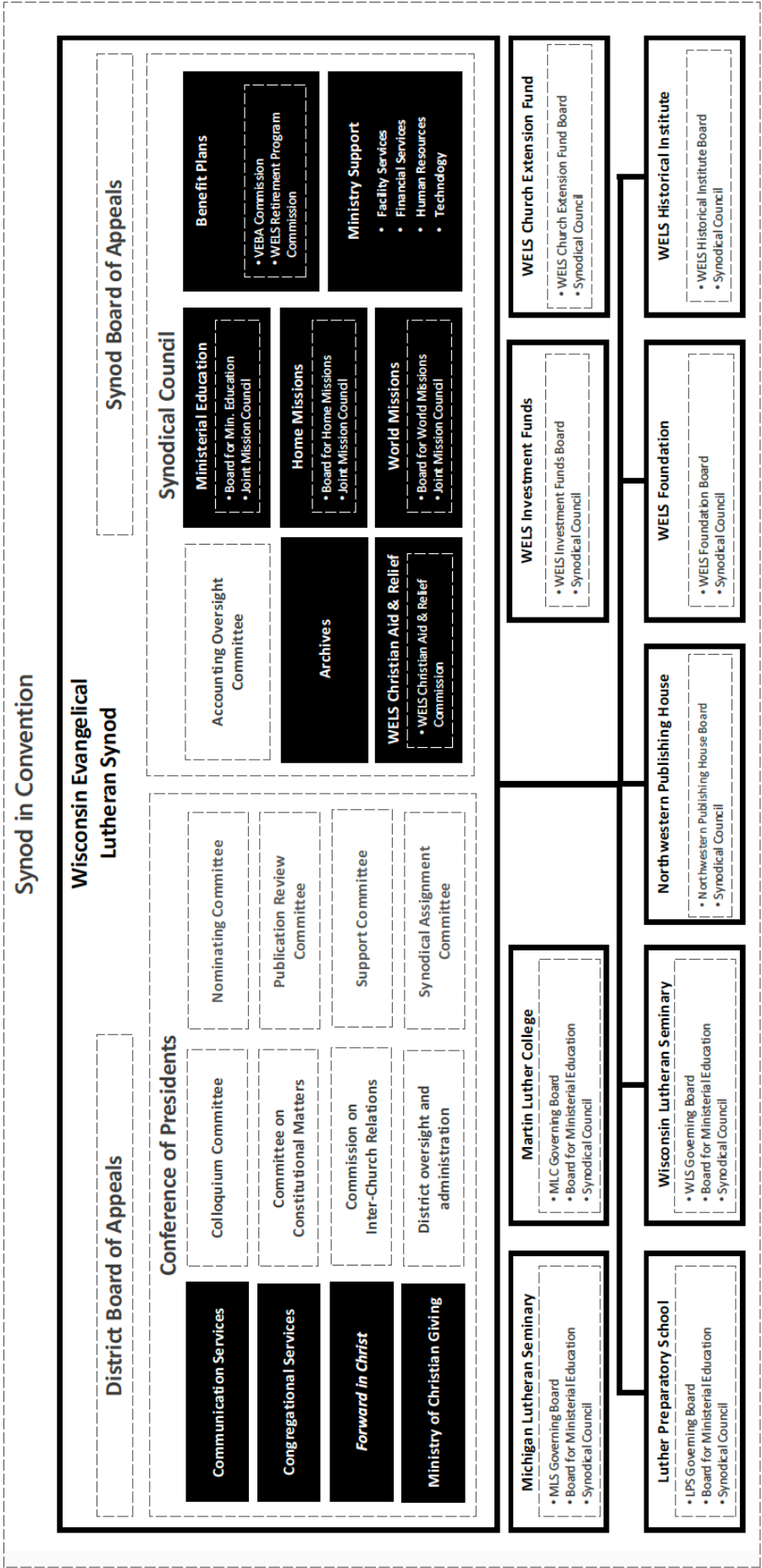
Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

Convention floor committees

Committee	Assignment	Chairman
#1	President's Report	Pastor David Scharf
#2	Conference of Presidents	Pastor Samuel Degner
#3	Commission on Inter-Church Relations	Pastor Daron Lindemann
#4	Congregational Services—Churches Congregational Counseling Worship Evangelism Discipleship Special Ministries	Pastor Mark J. Schroeder
#5	Congregational Services—Schools	Teacher Matthew Bauer
#6	Ministry of Christian Giving and Communication Services	Pastor Geoffrey Kieta
#7	Synodical Council	Pastor Joel Thomford
#8	Financial results and ministry financial plan	Pastor Gary Pufahl
#9	"Christ through us" long-range strategic plan	Pastor Bradley Wordell
#10	Support Services Technology Financial Services Human Resources Facility Services	Pastor Caleb Free
#11	Subsidiaries and Benefit Plans WELS Historical Institute WELS Church Extension Fund WELS Foundation WELS Investment Funds WELS Benefit Plans	Pastor Matthew Frey
#12	Northwestern Publishing House	Pastor James Backus
#13	Christian Aid and Relief	Teacher Fred Uttech
#14	Home Missions	Pastor Kirk Lahmann
#15	World Missions and Joint Mission Council	Pastor Paul Workentine
#16	Ministerial Education	Pastor Peter Metzger
#17	Constitutional Matters	Pastor Brian Doeblner
#18	Elections	Pastor Isaac Crass
#19	Steering	Pastor Joel Zank

Organizational charts





Congregation and District Ministry

The Congregation and District Ministry portion of WELS' ministry financial plan (budget) includes the Conference of Presidents (COP) and all entities overseen by the COP. These include:

Conference of Presidents

- Regular and special meetings of the Conference of Presidents and the Assignment Committee
- Travel and other expenses related to the district presidents' work
- Pastoral assistants provided to the congregations served by the district presidents
- Partial cost of the vicar program

Synod Nominating Committee

Selection of nominees for convention elections

Support Committee

Grants and assistance provided to needy retired called workers and their spouses

Translation Liaison Committee

Evaluation of major Bible translations and communication with their editors and publishers, including suggestions for improvements to translations

Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee

Coordination of efforts to help called workers grow in faith, knowledge, and skill

Commission on Inter-Church Relations

- Regular and special meetings of the commission
- Travel expenses related to inter-church relations
- Annual support for the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC)
- Financial support for sister church bodies as appropriate

Ministry of Christian Giving

- Administration and staff salaries and office expenses
- Salaries and travel expenses for current and deferred Christian giving counselors
- Expenses of counselor training and consultation
- Cost of promotions and appeals

Communication Services

- Content production and management of WELS' web presence, including wels.net and social media outlets
- Graphic design, editorial, and video production services to create WELS communication pieces
- Coordination of public responses and communications of the synod
- Funding for editorial staff of *Forward in Christ*

Congregational Services

- Commission on Worship
- Commission on Evangelism
- Commission on Special Ministries
- Commission on Lutheran Schools
- Commission on Discipleship
- Commission on Congregational Counseling

Conference of Presidents

Floor Committee #2

The Conference of Presidents (COP) is composed of the 12 district presidents, elected by their respective districts, as well as the synod president and the two synod vice presidents, all of whom are elected by the Synod in Convention. The synod president serves as the chairman of the Conference of Presidents. The synod recording secretary, also elected by the Synod in Convention, serves as a non-voting advisory member of the Conference of Presidents.

The Conference of Presidents meets in person three times annually for regular meetings and as needed via teleconference. The Conference of Presidents also meets twice in May each year in its role as the Assignment Committee of the synod.

The Conference of Presidents is responsible for the following areas:

- Supervising, maintaining, and strengthening biblical doctrine and practice.
- Overseeing the calling process by providing calling bodies with call lists for pastors, teachers, and staff ministers as well as counsel and advice pertaining to the divine call.
- Serving as the Assignment Committee to assign graduates of Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to their first calls into the public ministry.
- Working with congregations, often through circuit pastors, to care and provide for the physical and spiritual needs of called workers and their families and to help address issues between congregations and their called workers.
- Encouraging congregations and individuals in their financial support of the synod, primarily through Congregation Mission Offerings.
- Overseeing the work of the Ministry of Christian Giving, Communication Services, and Congregational Services.
- Promoting the synod's mission and ministry in the districts.
- Promoting the general welfare of the synod.
- Providing counsel to the synod president as he carries out his responsibilities.

The Conference of Presidents is divided into three standing committees: the Doctrine Committee, the Congregations Committee, and the Called Worker Committee. Matters for discussion and action are assigned to one of these three committees, and the committees forward reports and recommendations to the entire COP for action.

The Conference of Presidents spends significant time at each meeting discussing specific questions of doctrine and practice and issues formal statements and guidelines in these areas as needed. The COP also addresses practical issues that affect congregations and called workers. The group functions primarily as a "conference," with district presidents and the synod presidium conferring with each other, both seeking and offering advice for the good of the synod and its people.

Overseeing matters of doctrine and practice

Each district president, along with his district officers and circuit pastors, is entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing doctrine and practice in his district, including carrying out discipline of called workers and congregations when Christian love and faithfulness to God's Word require it. To assure as much consistency as possible from district to district, the Conference of Presidents devotes considerable time in its meetings to discussing practical situations, providing a forum for mutual advice and encouragement.

The Conference of Presidents is fully committed to the biblical principle of Christian freedom in matters of adiaphora (things neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture); at the same time, it continues to encourage called workers and lay leaders to exercise their Christian freedom with wisdom, brotherly

love, and extensive consultation with others in our fellowship who may be affected. The Conference of Presidents continues to encourage open and brotherly discussion of such things as worship style, outreach efforts, and congregational organization. The Conference of Presidents believes that such discussion, when done in a spirit of Christian love and based on an ongoing study of the Scriptures, is essential to maintaining our synodical unity, a correct understanding of Christian freedom, and our clear identity as a confessional Lutheran church body.

Doctrinal statements and pastoral briefs

Individually, district presidents deal with matters of doctrine and practice and matters of discipline in their own districts. Collectively, from time to time the Conference of Presidents offers evangelical and pastoral guidance to called workers and members in the form of pastoral briefs on subjects that need addressing. Depending on the subject, the COP may make use of committees of people who are knowledgeable in the subject to study the issue and provide initial input for the pastoral brief.

In keeping with resolutions passed by previous synod conventions, the Conference of Presidents appointed an ad hoc committee to assist the COP in developing a pastoral brief on “justice and critical theories.” The completed pastoral brief was released in 2024. It is available at wels.net/critical-theory-brief.

The Conference of Presidents had also been working for several years to formulate a re-statement of the synod’s doctrinal statement on the roles of men and women. After discussing and reviewing several drafts of a re-statement, the COP concluded that this matter would better be addressed through a pastoral letter. That letter was completed and distributed in 2024. It is available at wels.net/man-and-woman-roles. It was intended primarily to provide an opportunity to affirm the doctrinal principles involved and to foster ongoing discussion of how doctrine is applied in practice. The COP plans to provide principles that can guide congregations as they craft bylaws that reflect biblical doctrine. Several “sample” constitutions will be provided for congregations that are considering bylaw changes.

Reaction to both pastoral briefs has been positive, with few questions or concerns being raised. In regard to the brief dealing with critical theories, some have suggested that the document be amended to include greater detail in certain areas or to change the specific wording in certain places. The brief was intended to be a summary of critical theory to equip called workers and lay members with an understanding of its background and nature to help them respond in a biblical way. Since it was never intended to be a comprehensive overview of all aspects of the history and essence of critical theory, the Conference of Presidents has determined not to add to or revise the document (which could be a never-ending process) unless it is found to contain factual or doctrinal errors. Rather, the COP will encourage those interested to do additional research on their own.

Assignment of ministerial candidates

In its role as the Assignment Committee, the Conference of Presidents continually monitors the number of candidates graduating from Martin Luther College (MLC) and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS). The vast majority of assignments are made in May and June, with a smaller number of teacher and staff minister candidates assigned in December in conjunction with the mid-year graduation at MLC.

The Assignment Committee also assigns third-year seminary students to their place of vicarship. These assignments are made by the COP after extensive consultation with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and the Board for Home Missions. Since the vicar year is actually a part of the seminary’s program of education, the seminary provides input into the vicar assignment process to ensure that the candidates are placed in locations where they can receive thorough training in the practical aspects of the pastoral ministry. Candidates who are identified as having gifts for evangelism/outreach are often assigned to supervising pastors with proven gifts for the same so that the vicar’s evangelism/outreach gifts may be developed. The Vicar in a Mission Setting program has worked well to provide outreach-ready graduates for assignment.

The Assignment Committee has put in place a procedure by which limited-time assignments can be made permanent prior to the May assignment day. In addition, the Assignment Committee has achieved its earlier stated goal of not assigning MLC graduates as school principals. A program to train currently-serving teachers as principals in a three-year process is currently in place.

Long-range strategic plan

The Conference of Presidents recognizes that it is the responsibility of the Synodical Council to develop a long-range strategic plan for the synod's mission and ministry. The COP encouraged the Synodical Council to begin development of a new plan to guide the synod's mission and ministry for the next ten years. That plan, with the theme "Christ through us," is being presented to the 2025 convention for adoption and can be found in an appendix to the Synodical Council's report on p. 60.

Statistics and Congregation Mission Offering subscriptions

The percentage of WELS congregations that submitted 2024 statistics to the synod stands at 96.8 percent. The percentage of WELS congregations that submitted Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) subscriptions for 2025 is 99.2 percent. The Conference of Presidents is thankful to all the congregations that submitted statistics and CMO subscriptions.

Funding for the synod's mission and ministry

While the Synodical Council is responsible for formulating and recommending the synod's ministry program and the budget that supports it, the Conference of Presidents is responsible for funding the ministry program adopted by the Synod in Convention.

The COP operates under the principle that the foundational support for the mission and ministry of the synod is the Congregation Mission Offering (CMO). Other sources of financial support, such as gifts from individuals, bequests, grants from foundations, etc., are great blessings and play an important role in providing the resources necessary to carry out the synod's work. Gifts from these sources can vary widely from year to year; Congregation Mission Offerings, on the other hand, have been a more consistent and predictable source of financial support.

The COP works to encourage congregations to increase their Congregation Mission Offering commitments and to meet or exceed those commitments by the end of the year. Prior to 2020, Congregation Mission Offerings had been relatively flat for ten years. We are grateful that in each year since then congregations have exceeded congregational subscriptions. That upward trend has continued in calendar year 2024. In 2024, WELS congregations provided the highest level of Congregation Mission Offerings in our synod's history. This growth in Congregation Mission Offerings, unexpected gifts, the wise use of undesignated special funds, and efforts by areas of ministry and departments to economize have made it possible not only to maintain synodical ministries but to expand those ministries as God has given the opportunity. The COP thanks our congregations for their commitment to Congregation Mission Offerings and for the generous way in which our members have provided gifts beyond expectations.

The COP has authorized Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to begin a generosity campaign in support of its planned building project. If all parts of the project can be done, it will provide classrooms, remodeling of current space for faculty offices, remodeling of portions of the library, and a gathering space attached to the gymnasium.

Luther Preparatory School has been authorized to begin a generosity campaign for its planned music center.

COP Doctrine Committee and the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The COP Doctrine Committee meets annually with the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod to discuss doctrinal issues and other subjects of mutual interest.

Development of a new K-12 religion curriculum

The development of a new theology curriculum for K-12 students is progressing. The Conference of Presidents asked the Commission on Lutheran Schools to form a task force to oversee this work. The COP called Teacher Melanie Giddings to a full-time position to work with the task force and to serve as the coordinator of this project.

Teaching Ministry Certification report and proposal

Dr. John Meyer, director of WELS Ministry Certification, proposed to the Conference of Presidents three strategies to increase the number of ministry-certified teachers in WELS. Those strategies include proactively reaching out to newly called non-certified teachers to welcome them into gospel ministry

and direct them on how to begin the process of achieving WELS Teacher Ministry Certification. It will also streamline the certification process for non-certified teachers who hold a call and for those not currently serving in a call. It would also require acceptance into the WELS Teaching Ministry Certification program prior to actual installation, ensuring 100 percent participation.

This proposal was approved by the Conference of Presidents.

Calls issued

Pastor Paul Prange accepted a call from the Conference of Presidents to serve as director of the Commission on Worship. Teacher Jamie Walta has accepted the COP's call to serve as the national coordinator of early childhood ministries, replacing Teacher Cynthia Holman, who announced her retirement as of the end of June 2025.

COP liaison with WELS-affiliated ministries and organizations

Dozens of ministries and organizations carried out by WELS members are referred to as "affiliated ministries." Because WELS-affiliated ministries do their work among WELS members and congregations, the Conference of Presidents believes that close communication and cooperation between these ministries and the COP is vital. A three-man standing special committee of the COP makes regular contact with the leaders of these ministries to accomplish this goal on an ongoing basis.

Guidance for congregations that are considering merging or closing

Because of demographic changes, a growing number of WELS congregations are considering whether to merge with one or more neighboring congregations or to close altogether. Other congregations may also begin to consider this as a way of exercising good stewardship of God's resources. The COP has asked Congregational Services to provide counsel and guidance to congregations as they make these decisions.

COP liaison to the Institute for Lutheran Apologetics

The COP asked Pastor Jon Buchholz to continue to serve as the COP liaison on the Institute for Lutheran Apologetics. Buchholz had been serving as the COP representative, and although he no longer serves on the Conference of Presidents, he will continue as the liaison for the COP.

Election procedures for synod officers

The Conference of Presidents is recommending to the 2025 synod convention a bylaw amendment that would change the procedure for the election of the synod president, vice presidents, and recording secretary. Currently, at the start of the convention delegates are asked to nominate one person for the position being filled, with the top five nominees comprising the ballot. Delegates have only a short time to review the nominees and their biographies. Delegates then vote for one of the five, and the voting continues until one person receives the majority of votes cast. Once a person is elected, he is expected to make a decision to accept or decline the call within 24 hours. This process requires a very quick decision and does not provide time for a person to give consideration to the call or to consult with others about it.

The COP is proposing a change that would request nominations from delegates well in advance of the convention. This would give delegates the opportunity to gather information about possible nominees. Once the ballot is formed, the ballot would be sent to the delegates and made available to members of the synod. Delegates would then have the opportunity to give due consideration to the candidates who have been nominated. Those whose names are on the ballot would have the time to consider a possible call to serve and to discuss the possibility with family and other trusted advisors. The actual election would still take place at the convention.

A change in the bylaws will require a two-thirds majority and, if approved, would be implemented for the 2027 convention.

A similar proposal—with some differences—has been submitted as a memorial by the Arizona-California District. Floor Committee #17 (Constitutional Matters) will consider both of these proposals and determine if one (or neither) will be forwarded to the convention for action. These proposals are listed on pp. 189 and 191.

Vacancies

As of the April meeting of the Conference of Presidents, there were 156 pastoral vacancies in the synod,

with 149 of those being parish pastor positions. The 2025 seminary graduating class will provide candidates numbering in the mid-20s, meaning that the pastoral vacancy situation will improve only slightly in the near term. Larger classes at the seminary in the coming years, however, will begin to provide some relief. In the meantime, the COP asks every WELS congregation and member to encourage young men to consider training for the pastoral ministry.

A similar high vacancy rate is taking place in teacher positions. WELS school enrollments have increased significantly in the last two years—a real blessing—but that has caused a need for more teachers than are currently available. It's estimated that even after teacher candidates are assigned at Martin Luther College in May, there will still be approximately 100 to 120 vacancies in teaching positions. The Commission on Lutheran Schools has been working with congregations to find ways to fill the vacancies. At the same time, Martin Luther College will be redoubling its efforts to recruit both traditional and non-traditional teacher candidates. It will also be exploring other ideas to provide more teacher candidates. As in the case of pastors, those in the best position to recruit and encourage young people for the teaching ministry are congregational members, called workers, parents, and grandparents.

The shortage of called workers has complicated the task of providing call lists to congregations and has also resulted in called workers receiving frequent calls. The COP continues to discuss ways to alleviate these pressures until more candidates become available in the coming years.

175th anniversary of the synod

2025 marks the 175th anniversary of the founding of our synod. A committee has been appointed and has been working on plans for a special synodwide anniversary celebration. A summary of the committee's plans are provided in an appendix to this report on p. 13.

The COP authorized a special synodwide thank offering as a part of the 175th anniversary celebration. When the offering launches at the synod convention at the end of July, individuals and congregations may designate their offerings to the synod in general or to support international missions, domestic missions, or ministerial education. More specific uses for the offering by each area of ministry will be announced prior to the start of the offering.

Thanks for faithful service

Last summer, Pastor John Steinbrenner, president of the Pacific-Northwest District, accepted a call to serve as pastor in another district. Pastor Daniel Lange was elected to succeed him. Pastor Jon Buchholz, president of the Arizona-California District, did not stand for election for another term. Pastor Joel Heckendorf was elected to succeed him. We thank these men for their faithful service and welcome the new members of the Conference of Presidents.

Pastor James Huebner will be completing his service for 18 years as first vice president of the synod at this convention. After 20 years of service, Pastor Robert Pasbrig will be stepping down at the conclusion of this convention from his position as recording secretary. Their successors will be elected at this convention. We thank God and these men for their faithful service and pray for God's continued blessing on their ministries.

A look ahead

- Provide supervision of doctrine and practice, as well as assist congregations in the calling process.
- Work with Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to recruit and train future called workers.
- Address questions relating to congregational polity and organizational structure.
- Continue to explore ways to improve coordination and communication between the synod and WELS-affiliated ministries and organizations.
- Encourage congregations to grow their Christian stewardship and in their financial support of the synod and its mission.
- Look for ways to assist the synod in maintaining its identity as a confessional Lutheran synod and to communicate our synod's beliefs to the outside world in a clear and loving manner.
- Work with the Commission on Congregational Counseling and other entities of Congregational Services to help congregations grow stronger and healthier through the means of grace.

- Continue to review the calling process and identify ways in which it can be improved.
- Luther Preparatory School extended an invitation for the synod to hold its 2027 convention on its campus.

The Conference of Presidents invites all members of the synod to join in giving thanks to a gracious God, who has blessed our synod with his pure Word, who has permitted us both to hear and proclaim the saving gospel, and who has united us as one in Christ—in faith, in mission, and in Christian love.

Rev. Mark Schroeder, reporter

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president and chairman
 Rev. James Huebner, WELS first vice president
 Rev. Joel Voss, WELS second vice president
 Rev. Douglas Free, Dakota-Montana District president
 Rev. Joel Heckendorf, Arizona-California District president
 Rev. Philip Hirsch, Nebraska District president
 Rev. Michael Jensen, Western Wisconsin District president
 Rev. Dennis Klatt, Minnesota District president
 Rev. Daniel Lange, Pacific Northwest District president
 Rev. Daniel Leyrer, Southeastern Wisconsin District president
 Rev. Donald Patterson, South Central District president
 Rev. Michael Seifert, North Atlantic District president
 Rev. Snowden Sims, Michigan District president
 Rev. Charles Westra, South Atlantic District president
 Rev. Joel Zank, Northern Wisconsin District president

Advisory:

Rev. Robert Pasbrig, WELS recording secretary

Appendix:

Report of the WELS 175th Anniversary Planning Committee

When a handful of German immigrant pastors serving nine congregations gathered at Salem Lutheran Church in Granville, Wis., just northwest of Milwaukee, on May 26, 1850, to start a new Lutheran church body, could they have imagined what God would accomplish through their small beginning? Yet, here is WELS, seven generations later, continuing to exist as a nationwide and worldwide church body. God in his grace has blessed the proclamation of the pure gospel so that the message of Christ for us has worked in us and gone out through us. By his grace, the synod has developed and continues to operate schools to train ministers of the gospel. By his grace, the synod has sent and continues to send those workers to start new congregations and missions around the world. By his grace, the synod has developed and continues to provide resources to further the work of his kingdom—hymnals, catechisms, devotional books, Bible studies, and much more. From small beginnings, the Lord has accomplished his work through us.

The committee appointed to organize the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the Wisconsin Synod in 2025 began meeting in February 2023. The theme “Christ through us” was chosen to coordinate with the ten-year plan that is being introduced at the 2025 synod convention. The work of the committee to help the synod celebrate this milestone falls under two categories: events and resources.

Events

1. The Seminary Chorus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and the Martin Luther College Choir participated in two well-attended joint WELS 175th anniversary concerts in March. One was held at historic St. John’s on the Hillside in downtown Milwaukee and the other at the Chapel of the Christ on the MLC campus.
2. WELS Historical Institute sponsored a number of events with an anniversary focus. Prof. Joel Otto presented on 175 years of change in WELS worship in April. On May 28, as close to the actual founding date as practical, WELS Historical Institute hosted a special anniversary banquet at Salem in Milwaukee, the site of the founding of the synod. President Schroeder will present on the history of prep schools in Watertown in October. A cemetery tour and a hymn sing are also planned.

3. The primary anniversary celebration is at the synod convention. Prof. Otto is the convention essayist, and his essay focuses on God's blessings to and through WELS over seven generations. Prof. Paul Koelpin is presenting on WELS ministerial education in New Ulm, Minn., during one of the evenings of the convention.
4. Congregations are encouraged to celebrate the 175th anniversary as part of a three-week focus in October. October 13 will focus on the synod anniversary, October 20 will revolve around the ten-year plan, and October 27 is Reformation Sunday. The theme, "Christ through us," will cover all three Sundays. Worship resources have been created in cooperation with Congregational Services and will be available as part of *The Foundation* worship planning resources. Thank you to Prof. Aaron Christie for overseeing this project.

Resources

1. *Christ Through Us: A Pictorial History of the Wisconsin Synod, 1850-2025*, has been prepared and will be formally presented at the synod convention. The nearly 3,000 preorder copies will be mailed in May. Pastor John Braun and Prof. Joel Otto were co-authors. Mrs. Susan Willems, the WELS Archivist, collaborated extensively on photo selection. Pastor Chris Cordes served as the Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) editor overseeing the product. Prof. Paul Burmeister of Wisconsin Lutheran College was the project and design manager. The book has almost 700 images and includes numerous vignettes about interesting and inspirational people, churches, and events. The book can be ordered through NPH at online.nph.net/175annivbook.
2. Prof. em. John Brenner revised and expanded *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, the history book written by Prof. Edward Fredrich and published in 1992. This is a scholarly treatment of the history of WELS. The book should be available at the time of the convention.
3. Monthly bulletin inserts on key turning points in synod history have been prepared and made available on WELS Historical Institute's website, welshistoricalinstitute.org/175th.
4. An interactive timeline of WELS history has also been prepared and is available at welshistoricalinstitute.org/histories/history-of-wels. This was designed for use by pastors and teachers in Bible classes and catechism classes.
5. A variety of videos have been produced including interviews with WELS President Mark Schroeder, WELS historians, and retired pastors and professors. Other videos highlight different areas of WELS history. These are available at welshistoricalinstitute.org/175th. Thanks to Pastors Benjamin Phelps and Benjamin Schaefer for spearheading this project.
6. The committee had the goal of increasing interest by congregations in their own history. Several resources to assist congregations in researching, writing, and presenting their own history and preserving archival material have been provided.
7. Several articles and historical photos are appearing in *Forward in Christ* magazine throughout the year. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* is featuring articles pertaining to WELS history throughout 2025.
8. A Bible study on the synod's history connected with the pictorial history book has been prepared by Pastor Benjamin Phelps with the assistance of the production team at NPH. This is also available at welshistoricalinstitute.org/175th.
9. The October, November, and December *WELS Connection* videos will feature brief stories from the history of WELS connected to ministerial education, home missions, and world missions.
10. Anniversary swag is available for purchase through the online WELS Store, including apparel, a mug, a coaster set, and a Christmas ornament. Visit welsstore.net.

Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly is also planning to devote its summer issue to commemorating the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Wisconsin Synod. The issue will contain articles on WELS history by various WELS authors.

Thank you to Mr. Lee Hitter for his service on the committee prior to his retirement.

It is the prayer of the committee that this anniversary will increase awareness of both the importance of knowing and studying our synod's history and a growing appreciation for God's grace to WELS for 175 years. Very few Lutheran church bodies have retained their identity and can trace their history as far back as WELS can. That is a gift of God's grace working through his Word. He has mercifully continued

to preserve our synod as a group of Christian churches that have remained faithful to the truth of God's Word through many challenges and in the face of opposition. Our synod has had the privilege of proclaiming the message of God's grace in Christ for 175 years. The history of WELS is a story worth remembering and telling.

Prof. Joel Otto, reporter

Prof. Joel Otto, chairman

Rev. John Braun

Prof. em. John Brenner

Prof. Aaron Christie

Rev. Chris Cordes

Prof. Paul Koelpin

Mr. Dan Nommensen

Rev. Benjamin Phelps

Mrs. Julie Wietzke

Mrs. Susan Willems

Nominating Committee

These candidates have been chosen by the synod Nominating Committee to be presented to the delegates of the 68th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The delegates will elect one man for each position listed unless otherwise indicated. Incumbents are noted by an asterisk (*). To view position descriptions and nominee biographies, visit welsconvention.net. This list does not include nominations that may be made from the floor.

Synodical Council

Pastor at large (choose two)

Jonathan Bauer, Mount Horeb, Wis.

John Bortulin, Mukwonago, Wis.*

Bart Brauer, Des Moines, Wash.

Thomas Kock, Brown Deer, Wis.

Stephen Melso, Manitowoc, Wis.

Tyler Peil, Taylorsville, Utah

Teacher or staff minister at large

Nathan Kieselhorst, Watertown, Wis.

Thomas Plitzuweit, Oconomowoc, Wis.*

Benjamin Priebe, Phoenix, Ariz.

Board for World Missions

Chairman (pastor)

Jonathan Schroeder, Sharpsburg, Ga.*

Joshua Sternhagen, Commerce City, Colo.

Paul Workentine, Troutville, Va.

Teacher or staff minister

Matthew Doering, Lake Mills, Wis.*

Andrew Retzlaff, Missouri, Texas

Timothy Schubkegel, Burlington, Wis.

Board for Home Missions

Chairman (parish pastor)

Matthew Brown, Houston, Texas*
Andrew Schroer, Edna, Texas
Nathan Sutton, San Antonio, Texas

Board for Ministerial Education

Parish pastor

Nathan Buege, Katy, Texas
Harmon Lewis, Alpharetta, Ga.
Aaron Voss, Muskego, Wis.*

Teacher or staff minister

John Dorn, Lake Mills, Wis.
Mark Heckendorf, Wellsville, Kan.
James Henrickson, Dallas, Texas*

Layman

David Bergemann, Hudson, Wis.
Mike Scharrer, Wixom, Mich.
Adam Zastrow, Mayville, Wis.*

Martin Luther College Governing Board

Chairman (parish pastor)

Ryan Kolander, Appleton, Wis.
Steven Lange, Louisville, Ky.
John Vieths, Norman, Okla.

Commission on Evangelism

Chairman (pastor, teacher, staff minister, or layman)

Steven Hillmer, Oconomowoc, Wis.
Douglas Tomhave, Lake Mills, Wis.*
Michael Weigand, Fond du Lac, Wis.

Commission on Lutheran Schools

Chairman (pastor, teacher, staff minister, or layman)

Christopher Joch, Burlington, Wis.
Nathan Reich, Tucson, Ariz.
Kevin Westra, Hortonville, Wis.

Board of Appeals

Chairman (pastor)

Kenneth Brokmeier, Brookings, S.D.
Joel Petermann, Harbor City, Calif.
Paul Zell, Henderson, N.C.

Pastor (choose two)

Seth Bode, Noblesville, Ind.
Steven Lange, Louisville, Ky.
Scott Miller, Egg Harbor, Wis.
Peter Snyder, Altura, Minn.
Daniel Solofra, Laveen, Ariz.
Paul Zell, Henderson, N.C.*

Teacher or staff minister (choose three)

Justin Danell, Appleton, Wis.
Dennis Leckwee, Watertown, Wis.
Dane Mattes, Tampa, Fla.

Peter Micheel, Eau Claire, Wis.
Jesse Nofftz, Thornton, Colo.
Benjamin Priebe, Phoenix, Ariz.
Steven Rosenbaum, Wildomar, Calif.*
Timothy Schubkegel, Burlington, Wis.
Mark Werre, Viola, Wis.*

Layman (choose two)

David Bradley, New Market, Ma.
Greg Galler, Lake Elmo, Minn.*
William Schaefer, Lannon, Wis.
Darrell Zastrow, Sun Prairie, Wis.
Jeffrey Zondag, Grayslake, Ill.

Rev. Robert Pasbrig, reporter

Rev. Robert Pasbrig, WELS recording secretary and chairman

Rev. Paul Cole, Northern Wisconsin District

Rev. Jason Free, Southeastern Wisconsin District

Rev. Gary Kluball, North Atlantic District

Rev. Michael Kober, South Atlantic District

Rev. David Maertz, Dakota-Montana District

Rev. Bruce McKenney, Western Wisconsin District

Rev. Joel Pankow, Michigan District

Rev. James Panning, Minnesota District

Rev. Joshua Stahmann, Arizona-California District

Rev. Luke Tembreull, Pacific Northwest District

Rev. Steven Wagenknecht, South Central District

Rev. David Wietzke, Nebraska District

WELS Support Committee

Floor Committee #2

Our calling

The elders who lead well should be considered worthy of double honor, especially the ones who work hard in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17). In our Wisconsin Synod, one way we seek to show such honor to those who serve in gospel ministry is through the WELS Support Committee. This committee has the privilege of providing financial assistance to retired called workers and/or surviving spouses who do not have adequate financial resources for everyday living expenses. The following factors guide our committee as we seek to carry out our calling.

- The fund is not an entitlement program.
- The fund is not an extension of the synod's pension plan.
- The financial assistance received is a charitable gift from the synod to those in need.
- The fund is not established to provide temporary assistance for those who resigned from the ministry.
- The fund does not grant financial assistance to those who need assisted living and nursing home care.
- The fund is not intended to be the main source of income. Assets and other means of income are expected to be used first, with Support Committee assistance supplementing those resources.

Our current situation

The Support Committee is composed of five district first vice presidents of WELS. The first vice president in every district is the contact person for the Support Committee. Each year the district first vice presidents reach out to local pastors, circuit pastors, and district officers to request their help in making sure the Support Committee is made aware of retired called workers and/or their surviving spouses who may need financial help. Once a possible recipient is identified, a simple application form is used to help determine the level of need. The Support Committee then reviews all the applications received and must approve them before assistance begins. The annual amount budgeted for this work is \$315,000. Currently 22 individuals or couples throughout the synod receive support. It also often happens that during the course of the year new requests are made to the Support Committee. What a blessing that our Lord allowed our synod to take care of all those who are seeking assistance.

A look ahead

The Support Committee will continue to provide assistance to retired called workers and/or their surviving spouses as long as synod finances make it possible. Please speak with your pastor, circuit pastor, or district first vice president to inquire about gifts through the Support Committee.

Subscriptions to *Forward in Christ*, *Meditations*, and *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* are also provided to those recipients who request them. The Support Committee thanks Northwestern Publishing House for covering the costs of these subscriptions.

Rev. Brett Brauer, reporter

Rev. Brett Brauer, chairman

Rev. Michael Enderle

Rev. Stephen Helwig

Rev. Aaron Steinbrenner

Rev. Jon Zabell

Translation Liaison Committee

Floor Committee #2

Our calling

The Translation Liaison Committee (TLC) was established by the 2013 WELS convention “to evaluate major Bible translations; to communicate with their editors and publishers; to offer, when appropriate, suggestions to improve such translations; and to share its findings with the synod at large” (2013 *WELS Proceedings*, p. 68).

The same seven members appointed by the Conference of Presidents in 2013 continue to serve—four parish pastors and three professors. In 2023, the COP reaffirmed the usefulness of the Translation Liaison Committee and resolved to appoint replacements whenever any of the original appointees decide to retire from the committee.

Our current situation

Revision of the English Standard Version

In February 2025, the Translation Liaison Committee was surprised to learn that a minor revision of the English Standard Version (ESV) is going forward. The last revision of the ESV was in 2016, and at that time the overseers stated that they wanted to preserve a stable text without making frequent changes. The ESV text is overseen by the ESV Translation Oversight Committee, but this committee meets only once every five to ten years. When they met in Wheaton, Ill., in July 2024, it was their first meeting in nine years.

A report about the changes, including a list of the text changes, can be seen at esv.org/about/2025-updates. According to this report, the ESV Translation Oversight Committee “made changes to 36 Scripture passages involving 42 verses, resulting in a total of 68 word changes. . . . In addition to the above text changes, a limited number of changes were made to 57 footnotes, and a few additional changes were also made to punctuation in 14 verses.” The Translation Liaison Committee hopes to prepare a report about these changes for an upcoming issue of *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

Revisions to other English translations

Revisions to the standard English translations continue to surface. Here are the latest revisions that have been noted by the Translation Liaison Committee as it monitors the busy world of Bible translation:

- 2020—Christian Standard Bible (CSB): A few changes after the first publication of the Christian Standard Bible in 2017
- 2020—New American Standard Bible (NASB): A substantial revision, including gender-inclusive language
- 2021—New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition: A substantial revision with about 20,000 total changes

New International Version

The last revision of the New International Version (NIV) was in 2011, and the Committee on Bible Translation—the independent, 15-person committee that oversees the text of the NIV—has not announced any plans for the publication of another revision. However, the Committee on Bible Translation has been meeting every summer since the 1970s to work on improvements in the NIV, and at some point a revision no doubt will be published.

A major activity of the Translation Liaison Committee in recent years has been the preparation of translation suggestions for the NIV. The Committee on Bible Translation welcomes input and has promised that all of our committee’s suggestions will be considered. So far, the Translation Liaison Committee has submitted 119 suggestions, and the committee plans to submit another 20-25 suggestions in the summer of 2025. If anyone sees something in the NIV that they believe could be improved, the committee would be happy to receive the observation so that we could consider writing up a formal suggestion.

A look ahead

Online translation reviews

The Translation Liaison Committee is planning to prepare translation reviews of the most significant modern English translations, giving general background information along with information about translation philosophy, intended audience, and usefulness for confessional Lutherans. We intend to post these reviews online, where they can easily be updated when necessary.

Book about Bible translation

The Translation Liaison Committee is also planning to prepare a book on the topic of Bible translation. The proposed book will not offer an evaluation of current translations; that material will be covered in the online translation reviews. Rather, the book will present the variety of issues that are involved in translating the Bible—from selecting the Hebrew and Greek texts, to picking a preferred translation method, to handling idioms and language peculiarities, to presenting the final product, to editing and revising. The book hopefully will help laypeople understand what is involved in Bible translation so they will be better able to navigate the current “eclectic” situation in WELS, where a variety of Bible translations are in use.

With these writing projects, the Translation Liaison Committee hopes to leave behind some resources through which we can share with others what we have learned about Bible translation during our years of service on the committee. If anyone has any suggestions about these projects or anything else pertaining to Bible translation, you are invited to reach out to a member of the Translation Liaison Committee.

Prof. Thomas Nass, reporter

Prof. Thomas Nass, chairman

Rev. Brett Brauer

Prof. Kenneth Cherney, Jr.

Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee Floor Committee #2

Our calling

The Continuing Education for Called Workers (CECW) Committee is a subcommittee of the Conference of Presidents (COP) that meets twice each year. It coordinates our synod's efforts to assist called workers to grow in faith, knowledge, and skill to carry out their unique vocations. Growth for our called workers is not about advancing in a career, gaining recognition, or increasing compensation. Growth for our called workers is about growing in the gospel in order to be clearer presenters of God's mercy wherever God has called, whether that is in the home, the church or school, or the community.

This committee works to help synodical leaders and calling bodies clearly understand why it is wise for calling bodies to invest in the continued growth of their called workers. To that end, the committee also seeks to urge lay leaders to understand the importance of investing in assisting current called workers toward growth in letting Christ's love be ever more clearly seen.

The Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee includes representatives from the Board for Ministerial Education, Martin Luther College, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as well as representatives from WELS Congregational Services. By the synod's constitution, our chairman is the first vice president of the synod, and we report to the Conference of Presidents (COP). Our report is divided into the committee's work for pastors, for teachers, and for staff ministers.

Pastors

Our current situation

We thank God for the good work that is being done by so many entities in our church body encouraging pastors to grow. A considerable part of that work has been entrusted to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), which carries out most of this work through Grow in Grace. Grow in Grace seeks to partner with pastors for spiritual and professional growth in informal (not-for-credit) and formal (for-credit) ways.

To supplement informal study by pastors, Grow in Grace provides the following: a monthly digital newsletter called *Grace Notes*; a monthly digital newsletter called *The Four Branches*, book reviews called *The Shepherd's Study*; a monthly *Shepherd's Study Podcast*; study packets; a three-year mentoring program called Pastor Partners; and celebrations of ministry retreats for men who have served in the pastoral ministry for 3, 10, 25, and 35 years. Grow in Grace spends approximately \$2,000 per year to make thousands of journals available to all WLS alumni through the AtlaSerials Database on the WLS website under "library resources." This is a valuable resource for both informal and formal continuing education. Beginning in 2025, *Grace Notes* will highlight useful articles from the ATLA Database.

Grow in Grace offers formal courses in a Master of Sacred Theology (STM) degree program. Many pastors take courses for credit without the intention of pursuing a degree. The best time for pastors to commit to earning an STM degree is after they have been serving for a few years and before they celebrate 20 years in ministry. An STM degree can be earned in one of nine focus areas: Biblical Theology—New Testament, Biblical Theology—Old Testament, Church History, Education, Missiology and Evangelism, Pastoral Care, Pastoral Leadership, Preaching and Worship, and Systematic Theology. Pastors may take

STM for-credit courses through on-campus Summer Quarter in even-numbered years, courses at satellite events in the districts in odd-numbered years, online courses in any year, and Winterim courses in January. Qualifying credits from partner institutions and guided research under the supervision of an advisor may also contribute to an STM degree. Pastors are also able to audit courses at satellite events in their districts in odd-numbered years or during Winterim.

More than 200 pastors have been mentored by Pastor Partners, a program formally adopted by the synod in 2015 that provides a new seminary graduate with three years of focused encouragement from a trained pastoral mentor. Prof. em. John Brenner serves as the coordinator for Pastor Partners, working with a Mentor Leadership Team of seven pastors.

Three essay/workbook resources were prepared under former WLS Prof. Richard Gurgel's leadership to help pastors plan for growth. "Guard What Has Been Entrusted to Your Care" encourages pastors to guard the gifts of time, faith, health, and brothers/sisters. "Reclaiming Our Christ-Centered Lutheran Devotional Heritage" helps pastors strengthen their devotional life. "Fan God's Gifts into Flame" helps pastors approach planning for growth from a biblical perspective. The seminary continues to offer these resources on its website at wisluthsem.org.

About two dozen parish pastors contribute to *The Shepherd's Study*, providing two book reviews digitally each month. About a dozen pastors write for *The Four Branches*, a monthly e-newsletter that offers a brief article of interest in each of the four areas of theological study. Each monthly newsletter is opened by about 1,100 pastor recipients with an average click-through rate of about 30 percent.

A look ahead

Under the leadership of Pastor Bradley Wordell, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Grow in Grace will work with local circuit pastors to seek their input and provide formal continuing education that will support informal continuing education in their circuits. Grow in Grace will also continue to work with the WLS faculty and with valued adjunct instructors to provide a quality formal continuing education program that will serve the needs of WELS pastors and congregations in the 21st century.

As of April 2024, the STM program of WLS is accredited through the Association of Theological Schools.

The Grow in Grace office has worked with WELS Technology to develop a Professional Development Plan for pastors. It is a part of the pastor profile on WELS Cloud and should be reviewed and updated annually. The data will help WLS plan for, promote, and provide resources, courses, and events that meet the needs and expectations of our pastors.

Teachers

Our current situation

WELS teachers or aspiring WELS teachers who need ministry or professional certification should contact Dr. John Meyer at Martin Luther College (MLC), meyerjd@mlc-wels.edu, 507-354-3221 ext. 398, to determine the next steps in their course of study.

To encourage development in educational leadership, WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS) provides financial and professional development support to men and women in the Principal Training Program, Director Training Program, Principal Credential Cohort, Director Credential Cohort, and Director Apprentice mentoring programs. For more information, contact lutheranschools@wels.net.

Commission on Lutheran Schools encourages all teachers to have a Ministry Development Plan. The commission also continues to support federations and individual schools desiring training to support the Ministerial Growth and Evaluation Process that was launched in 2020.

Continuing education resources from Martin Luther College

MLC strives to offer relevant, high-quality, affordable courses to help meet the needs of WELS teachers. Courses are available on location and synchronously online in:

- Early Childhood
- Educational Technology
- Graduate Studies

- Ministry Certification
- Pastors' Courses
- Special Education

Educational formats include certificate programs, degree programs, stand-alone courses, and free webinars.

Graduate program changes coming

Beginning July 2025, all MLC graduate degree programs will require 30 credits instead of the current 36. The change reflects the growing trend in higher education to offer master's degrees at the minimum number of credits. Those currently in a program have the option to complete the program they are in or move to a 30-credit program.

MLC and the Commission on Lutheran Schools are seeking to ensure the principal and director graduate degrees reflect the current demands of those positions. To that end, the on-campus and adjunct graduate faculty members in the principal and early childhood director emphases will meet with synod officials and existing school leaders to explore the current landscape with an eye toward reviewing and revising the curricula.

Expanded support for existing early childhood teachers

A four-tier system of support for early childhood teachers in the field seeks to help early childhood ministries train its workforce professionally and spiritually. The goal is to retain valued ministry members and maximize a whole-of-ministry outreach effort.

- Tier One: Free resources for use by directors for onboarding new hires for ministry and teaching. Twenty-five free training modules in five high-need ministry and professional areas. Located on the MLC website, mlc-wels.edu.
- Tier Two: A three-credit, one semester preparation for earning the Child Development Association (CDA) credential.
- Tier Three: An 18-credit WELS Teaching Ministry Certification program specifically designed for early childhood teachers, whether hired or called. Completion permits congregations to locally call teachers, if desired.
- Tier Four: An Associate's of Applied Science in Early Childhood degree for existing lead and assistant teachers that includes ministry certification and leads to call eligibility.

Alternative pathway to professional licensure eligibility

This online, competency-based model provides non-traditional candidates with an opportunity to earn an MLC elementary education degree and teaching license. It is especially designed to accelerate completion by working adults. At present, 21 students are engaged in the first step—a theology minor. Most of this first cohort will begin the professional training in August 2025. A recent Schwan Foundation grant supports this program as it gets off the ground. Prospective candidates are encouraged to contact the director, Dr. Nichole LaGrow, at lagrowna@mlc-wels.edu.

A look ahead

OpenLearning@MLC, a two-day free virtual conference, June 11 and 12, 2025, will focus on teacher wellness and recent changes involving structured literacy instruction.

WELS Lutheran Schools will host the WELS Education Conference in Green Bay, Wis., in June 2025.

Staff ministers

Our current situation

Staff minister continuing education begins with the annual Staff Minister Conference and its opportunities for networking and spiritual growth. That conference is held every fall on a three-year cycle: 1) At Martin Luther College, 2) in one of the districts in the Midwest, and 3) in a district outside of the Midwest.

Martin Luther College's Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS) is recommended for ministry-certified staff ministers and teachers. It is 100 percent online, so it is accessible by men and women regardless of where they live. This program contributes to the spiritual and professional growth of

individuals by equipping them to be reflective, competent, and dedicated workers in the kingdom through advanced studies in Scripture, doctrine, church history, and ministry.

A look ahead

As congregations make their ministry plans in view of our current called worker shortages, they might consider calling local WELS people with an appropriate background to serve provisionally in their home congregations. Options exist for such persons to seek staff ministry certification while already serving. Interested individuals or congregations can contact Dr. Lawrence Olson at MLC, olsonlo@mlc-wels.edu or 507-354-3221 ext. 252, for further information.

Prof. John Meyer, reporter

Rev. James Huebner, WELS first vice president and chairman

Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services

Prof. John Meyer, director of continuing education and graduate studies, Martin Luther College

Prof. Lawrence Olson, director of staff ministry, Martin Luther College

Teacher Jim Rademan, director of WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools

Prof. Bradley Wordell, director of continuing education, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Commission on Inter-Church Relations Floor Committee #3

Our calling

The WELS Bylaws charge the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) 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.” This function is in keeping with the object and purpose of the synod: to “extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church” (WELS Constitution, Article IV).

To carry out its calling, the Commission on Inter-Church Relations meets twice each year for regular meetings, at which time it receives updates about sister synods throughout the world. It also reviews doctrinal statements and constitutions from groups recommended for fellowship by our World Missions One Teams and responds to questions from them. Some members of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations represent WELS at the conventions of sister synods. Others meet regularly with our Board for World Missions One Teams (see below) and travel to foreign countries to assist church bodies that are seeking to take confessional Lutheran stances. Some commission members also travel to attend national conventions and regional gatherings of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC).

Our current situation

The origins of the CICR go back to the days leading up to our suspension of fellowship with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in 1961. In the early years, our commission was occupied mainly in doctrinal discussions with other Lutheran church bodies in the Western world. Gradually our work has shifted to discussion partners predominantly in the non-Western parts of the world, where the gospel is bearing much fruit. As a result, the CICR now works closely with WELS Board for World Missions (BWM) in assisting established and emerging church bodies from around the globe who are looking for fellowship with WELS and/or for assistance in educating their pastors in confessional Lutheranism. Many of the inquiring groups are either breaking off from established church bodies or are seeking fellowship and assistance after leaving other church federations. Some are self-supporting church bodies, while others require mission assistance.

Pastor Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions, also serves as the part-time administrator for the Commission on Inter-Church Relations. CICR members are assigned to work in tandem with the World Missions One Teams. (See the report of the Board for World Missions beginning on p. 123.) The CICR representatives on the One Teams represent the inter-church perspective on the team. Each representative attends the One Team meetings most appropriate for each team and, through that connection, has a voice in how WELS interacts with the various sister churches in a team's designated area of the world. The CICR representatives provide doctrinal guidance when the members of a One Team respond to inquiries from churches interested in establishing fellowship ties with WELS. Several years ago, the CICR developed a four-stage "toolkit" containing guidelines for the various visits, interviews, doctrinal discussions, and official communication that take place between WELS representatives and church bodies that are seeking fellowship with WELS. As the discussions with such a church pick up momentum, the CICR representative usually makes an onsite visit to the church as it moves into stages two through four of the fellowship toolkit. The toolkit has resulted in increasing blessings in our communication with the church bodies throughout the world with whom we are now in fellowship or are in the process of establishing fellowship. The CICR representatives to the various One Teams are as follows:

- One Africa Team: Prof. Bradley Wordell, Pastor Jonathan Bilitz
- Asia-Oceania Team: Pastor Benjamin Tomczak, Pastor John Koelpin, Prof. Nicolas Schmoller
- One Europe Team: Prof. James Danell
- One Latin America Team: Pastor Bart Brauer

Here's what's happening in the work of the four One Teams.

Africa

The CICR continues to be in contact with our long-time church partners in Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, and Zambia through our representation on the One Africa Team. In the last decade, our synod has received an unprecedented number of inquiries from Lutheran church bodies in Africa that find themselves no longer in doctrinal agreement with their previous partners in Western Lutheranism. The catalyst for these inquiries has often been the cultural shifts in the West on social issues like marriage and sexuality. In the last ten years, through the efforts of the One Africa Team and our Commission on Inter-Church Relations representative on the One Africa Team, fellowship has been established with the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia, the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ–Kenya, and the Obadiah Lutheran Synod of Uganda. The latest church that the One Africa Team has been working with and that the CICR is recommending for declaration of fellowship at our 2025 convention is the Africa Mission Evangelism Church in Tanzania. Other African churches and groups that the One Africa Team is just beginning discussion with include the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession of Uganda, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Uganda, Rev. Mkwetta and Trinity Lutheran Congregation, *La Mission Évangélique Luthérienne au Congo*, *L'église Évangélique Luthérienne Du Burkina Faso*, Community of Lutheran Evangelical Churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Lamb of God Lutheran Church in Liberia. Our missionaries in Africa have done yeoman's service in facilitating these discussions. To help our CICR member of the One Africa Team, Prof. Bradley Wordell, with this work, the CICR has added its newest member, Pastor Jonathan Bilitz, to the One Africa Team.

Asia-Oceania

TEXT REMOVED FOR SECURITY PURPOSES

TEXT REMOVED FOR SECURITY PURPOSES

Because Asia and the Pacific Rim are made up of such diverse people groups and are parts of the world where Christianity is not the predominant religion, the CICR is eager to foster relationships between these churches. This year, the CICR used its annual appeal for gifts to support the Asia-Oceania CELC gathering in Indonesia. CICR member Pastor John Koelpin will attend this regional gathering to encourage our brothers in the faith in the region. The CICR is also interested in supporting the translation of the Book of Concord into all the languages of the people among whom we are working in this part of the world.

The Asia-Oceania Team divides itself into three functions: explore, support, and train. The CICR members on the Asia-Oceania Team work with the “explore” and “support” functions—Koelpin with “support” and Tomczak and Schmoller with “explore.” It’s a good example of how the CICR is not just active in maintaining relations with churches but also in seeking out relationships with churches.

Europe

WELS treasures its longstanding fellowship with brothers and sisters in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Ukraine, Portugal, Albania, Russia, Bulgaria, and Czechia. Like us, these churches and congregations have struggles—including raising up the next generation of pastors. But their fervent love for Scripture and each other is evidence that God is at work.

WELS Missionary Luke Wolfgramm has settled into his new ministry base in Leipzig, Germany. Here, Wolfgramm teaches as an adjunct instructor at our sister church’s seminary. He also stays in contact with our other European sister churches and partners with them for gospel-teaching, preaching, mentoring, encouraging, and listening. Through our sister church in Portugal, we also assist in the work of the *Igreja Luterana Confessional no Brasil* in Brazil.

A recent development in our work in this part of the world is the creation of the Biblical Lutheran Church of the United Kingdom. The Rev. Dr. Peter Myers, a British clergyman, has been instrumental in its formation. Myers initially joined the WELS mission in London through profession of faith. Since that time, he has attended Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s Summer Quarter and, since September, has been meeting regularly with members of the seminary’s Pastoral Studies Institute. Myers has now moved with his family to northern England and is gathering a congregation in Manchester. He recently wrote an extensive confession of faith for the new Biblical Lutheran Church of the UK, which the Commission on Inter-Church Relations is in the process of reviewing with him.

Unfortunately, the Bulgarian Lutheran Church no longer exists as a functioning church body. Established as a WELS mission after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Bulgarian Lutheran Church existed for several decades, operating a seminary in the capital, Sofia, with WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod instructors. As the mission transitioned to local leadership, the Bulgarian leaders were unable to sustain the work. The CICR, as well as the leaders of our sister church in Germany, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, have tried to reach out over the last several years to the remaining individuals in the Bulgarian Lutheran Church but have now lost all contact with them. An outgrowth of the Bulgarian Lutheran Church is the Confessional Ev. Lutheran Church–Bulgaria, which serves Roma people. It continues to function, but its sole pastor, Ilyan Itsov, has serious health issues, and his ability to minister has been limited.

The Czech Ev. Lutheran Church, our sister church in the Czech Republic, is also experiencing difficulties. One of its two pastors resigned from the ministry recently, and services at the Martin Luther School in Pilsen are becoming less frequent. This church has operated a ministry out of the school since the Evangelical Lutheran Synod established it after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Our sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is considering how best to move forward.

Latin America

WELS has had long-time relationships with Lutheran churches in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Brazil, and the CICR continues to maintain contact with these churches. At the 2023 synod convention, WELS affirmed fellowship with *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*. This pan-Latin American church body grew out of WELS’ *Academia Cristo* online Christian training program.

Members of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (Chairman James Danell, Administrator Larry Schlomer, One Latin America CICR representative Bart Brauer, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary President Earle Treptow), as well as Prof. em. Paul Wendland, have been involved in a series of meetings with the One Latin America Team about *Academia Cristo*’s model of church planting. The uniqueness of *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*’s work in Latin America presents certain challenges in how congregations are formed and how they are pastored.

Academia Cristo has gathered individuals from all over Latin America via the internet, many of whom do not live near fellow believers. So how does the church gather these people into congregations, and how

can they receive the personal education and spiritual care of a pastor? *Academia Cristo* has developed the role of *sembradores* (seed planters) who receive education and training beyond that of normal lay Christians but who do not yet have a full theological and pastoral education. *Academia Cristo* has also developed a role for women who want to lead women's ministry (*sembradoras*) among some of these emerging groups. In addition, the One Latin America Team has expanded the role of counselor for *sembradores* and the groups they are planting in an effort to increase the time and presence our missionaries have in training these workers. A key question that was discussed in the meetings is who may administer the sacraments in these emerging groups. In response to that question, *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* has developed a pastor training program, which will provide a long-term solution.

North America

WELS has been in fellowship for most of its history with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). It's a brotherhood we treasure. Chairman Danell attends the annual meeting of the ELS Doctrine Committee with WELS Conference of Presidents' Doctrine Committee. He also attends the ELS WELS Forum, which takes place every other year. CICR members interact regularly with ELS men. Occasionally, our interests overlap in mission fields around the world. The brotherly interactions we have with them as we pursue the common goal of proclaiming Christ's love to our world are a valuable part of carrying out our calling. Our ELS contact man on the CICR (currently Pastor Thomas Fricke) attends the ELS convention every summer.

The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) is a conservative American Lutheran church with which we are not in fellowship. The Commission on Inter-Church Relations continues to be represented in the informal talks that are held each year among WELS, the ELS, and the LCMS. The most recent meeting took place Dec. 9 and 10, 2024, at Marywood Retreat Center near Jacksonville, Fla. The main topics of discussion were the public ministry and the roles of men and women in the church.

Representatives of the three church bodies presented their churches' doctrinal perspectives on the ministry. As in past meetings, the LCMS participants again advocated the position that the pastoral office is divinely instituted and that other forms of ministry (Lutheran school teachers, directors of Christian education, deacons, etc.) are derived from the pastoral office, with only certain circumscribed functions of the pastoral office delegated to them. WELS representatives articulated the biblical principle that God has instituted the ministry of the gospel and has given freedom to Christian congregations to determine the parameters and scope of the work it calls individuals (pastors, teachers, staff ministers, etc.) to perform on behalf of the congregation.

The other main topic discussed at the meeting was the roles of men and women in the church. LCMS representatives presented on the historical development of women's suffrage within the church, the roles that women currently serve in the LCMS, and calls for women's ordination, the last of which have become much less frequent in their church body in recent years. Representatives of the ELS and WELS presented their statements on the roles of men and women. WELS representatives introduced the other participants to the Conference of Presidents' recent pastoral letter on the scriptural principles of man and woman. The next informal meeting of the three church bodies will take place on Dec. 8 and 9, 2025.

Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

The next international convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC)—a worldwide fellowship of Lutheran church bodies of which WELS is a member—is planned for May 29–June 1, 2026, in Lusaka, Zambia. This will be the first time that an international CELC convention has been held on the continent of Africa. At this meeting, representatives from the 34 member churches will worship and discuss theological essays together. They will elect new CELC officers; adopt an additional article for the CELC doctrinal statement, *The Eternal Word*; and welcome several new churches into membership. The 2023 international convention in South Korea benefited from gifts given to the CELC Travel Assistance Fund, which permitted many to attend who otherwise couldn't afford the travel. We hope the same will be the case in 2026.

Two regions of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference will be holding regional meetings in 2025. The Europe region will meet in Nerchau, Germany, on May 23–25, and the Asia-Oceania region will meet in Bali, Indonesia, on June 10–12. CICR members will be attending these meetings on behalf of WELS.

The CELC Global Theological Education Commission, formed in 2021, has been quite active. Online conferences for theological educators were held in 2024 and 2025, and a bimonthly e-newsletter has been established. For more information, see the CELC website, celc.info.

A look ahead

This summer, four members of the CICR (Pastor Bart Brauer, Pastor Thomas Fricke, Prof. Bill Tackmier, and Pastor Benjamin Tomczak) will complete their final terms on the commission. This represents a significant change for a body with only ten members. We thank God for their service to him and his church. We pray that the three pastors and one professor who will be succeeding them after this summer's convention will be equally blessed as they carry out the privileged task of seeking out and fostering church relations.

It's an exciting time in church relations. While it can be challenging to reach out with the gospel in North America and much of the West, other parts of the world are hungry for relationships with solid, doctrinally sound Lutheran churches. The creation of the One Team concept allows the CICR to coordinate its work with WELS Board for World Missions. Whereas the work of the CICR was at one time more focused on interaction with established church bodies, our work today focuses more on interacting with emerging churches throughout the world that require theological education and mentoring in order to bring them to a more mature confessional stance. The development of One Teams allows the CICR to have a voice together with our leaders who work in missions. Our contribution to that discussion is to bring doctrinal guidance and encouragement to these young church bodies and individuals who are reaching out to WELS while leaving financial assistance questions that are sometimes involved in these requests to the Board for World Missions, which is much more equipped to handle such matters.

As the Western world becomes less and less Christian in its viewpoint, it's exciting to see that parts of the world, such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America, present us with many opportunities to give doctrinal and confessional encouragement and education to so many inquiring voices. We pray for God's wisdom and strength as we respond to these requests and as we encourage our brothers and sisters throughout the world to remain faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

Formal recommendation to the Synod in Convention

On the basis of a three-year dialogue and visitation between the WELS One Africa Team, the Commission on Inter-Church Relations, and the Africa Mission Evangelism Church, and after reviewing the Africa Mission Evangelism Church's doctrinal statement, which includes its commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, the CICR recommends to the Synod in Convention that WELS formally declare fellowship with the Africa Mission Evangelism Church in Tanzania.

Prof. Bill Tackmier, reporter

Prof. James Danell, chairman
Rev. Bart Brauer, vice chairman
Prof. Bill Tackmier, secretary
Rev. Jonathan Bilitz
Rev. Thomas Fricke
Rev. John Koelpin
Prof. Joel Otto
Prof. Nicolas Schmoller
Rev. Benjamin Tomczak
Prof. Bradley Wordell

Ex officio:

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

Advisory:

Rev. James Huebner, WELS first vice president
Rev. Larry M. Schlomer, administrator of WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and WELS Board for World Missions
Rev. Earle Treptow, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Ministry of Christian Giving

Floor Committee #6

Our calling

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving (MCG) serves on behalf of the Conference of Presidents to encourage every WELS member to “excel in the grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7,9) through Christ. It is our privilege to help God’s people offer gifts to Jesus for his work in their congregations, synod, and WELS-affiliated ministries.

The Ministry of Christian Giving assists the Conference of Presidents with its responsibility to fund the Lord’s work through our synod. This funding is provided through Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) as well as direct gifts to WELS from individuals, groups, and foundations.

- In the area of CMO, our efforts are focused on informing congregations of ministry opportunities and needs, particularly as they prayerfully set their annual commitments. We also send congregations quarterly reports of their offerings to WELS.
- In the area of direct gifts from individuals, we regularly mail and e-mail appeals for support of our gospel work. We provide information to donors about Christian estate planning and other planned giving options that allow them to give in a way that is beneficial for them, their families, and the ministries close to their hearts. WELS Christian giving counselors (currently 13.4 full-time equivalents including 1 semi-retired and 13 full-time) are called workers serving all 12 districts of WELS who apply scriptural principles to the gift planning process. Since giving counselor services are funded by our church body, there is no cost to individuals or congregations for their assistance.
- Gifts from foundations often result from consultation between the Ministry of Christian Giving director, other synod leaders, and the foundations regarding their goals for supporting WELS ministry.

Our current situation

Congregation Mission Offerings

The Ministry of Christian Giving coordinates with WELS Communication Services to share Congregation Mission Offering updates and ministry impact through WELS media. Each year the Ministry of Christian Giving oversees the process of collecting congregational offering subscriptions beginning in late summer and lasting through the first Friday of February. This involves mailed and e-mailed communications as well as direct follow-up by our Ministry of Christian Giving district chairmen. We are happy to report a 99 percent participation rate in the subscription setting process for 2025 (the average participation rate over the past ten years has been 98 percent).

In addition, we collaborate with Communication Services to develop a yearly video and the WELS annual report, *Your gifts, God’s blessings*, to inform members of the work being done through congregational offerings. We praise our Lord and thank our congregations that 2024 was the fifth consecutive calendar year in which our congregations have offered a record total of Congregation Mission Offerings and the third consecutive year in which CMO surpassed \$23 million. (For details on CMO pledged and received, see the report of the ministry financial plan on p. 88.)

Christian giving counselors

Through face-to-face, phone, and Zoom visits and presentations, our Christian giving counselors invite faith-prompted support of WELS ministries. Here are the results of this nurture of individual donors by our WELS Christian giving counselors and director in FY24:

- 1,398 meaningful meetings (in-person, Zoom, phone) with donors;
- 3,078 meaningful contacts (phone calls, e-mails, mailings) with donors;
- \$12.7 million in immediate gifts from assigned donors;
- \$1.99 million in irrevocable expectancies from assigned donors;

- \$23.4 million in new revocable expectancies arranged with assigned and unassigned donors; and
- \$7.6 million in revised revocable expectancies arranged with assigned and unassigned donors.

From FY08–FY24, our Christian giving counselors have nurtured an annual average (per FTE) of

- \$577,715 in immediate gifts (17-year total of \$127 million; annual average of \$7,473,568).
- \$2,270,018 in new/revised deferred expectancies (17-year total of \$501 million; annual average of \$29,501,115).

During the 2023–25 biennium, our church body annually invested approximately \$1.68 and \$1.71 million in our field staff and about \$832,000 and \$878,000 in our office staff (including appeals, materials, and database fees) to serve Jesus, his gifted people, and our areas of ministry. We thank our Lord for the generous return he's given on our investment in the Ministry of Christian Giving.

On June 30, 2024, WELS Christian giving counselors Pastors Jerry Ewings and Tom Mielke transitioned to new calls. We thank God for their labors and pray that he blesses their new gospel endeavors. Through the WELS Conference of Presidents, our Lord graciously gave us men to fill those and two other vacancies: Pastor Nathan Cordes (Dakota-Montana, Minnesota-south, and Nebraska Districts), Mr. Ralph LePore (Arizona-California and Pacific Northwest Districts), Pastor Jim Fleming (Northern Wisconsin District), and Mr. Mark Werre (Western Wisconsin District). Pastor Phil Spaude retired at the end of 2024. We thank our Lord for his faithful service to Jesus and his people in partnership with us for the past 11 years.

We also thank God for the work of our WELS ministerial education mission advancement teammates. Mr. Kevin Keller retired after serving as the mission advancement director at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for 20 years. Mr. Sean Young, who formerly worked with WELS Home and World Missions, is the seminary's new mission advancement director. Mrs. Sue Boulden retired from Luther Preparatory School. She served as the mission advancement project coordinator for 14 years. We ask God to bless them!

WELS 175th anniversary offering

The Ministry of Christian Giving is working with WELS Communication Services to coordinate a special offering commemorating WELS' 175th anniversary. Gifts to the 175th Anniversary Fund will support future goals in North American ministry (including Home Missions and Congregational Services), international ministry (World Missions), and worker training (Ministerial Education). Members may give to one of the specific categories or to the general anniversary fund to support all three. The offering will launch at the synod convention in July at which time more information will be shared with congregations and members.

100 Missions in 10 Years

The Ministry of Christian Giving coordinated with Home Missions through June 2024 on the 100 Missions in 10 Years synodwide initiative that was approved at the 2021 synod convention and launched in September 2022. From July 1, 2021, through March 5, 2025, the Lord has graciously allowed WELS to receive 3,869 gifts from 2,110 individuals/groups totaling \$3.76 million to be used toward establishing 100 new home missions and enhancing 75 mission congregations during 2023–2033.

Luther Preparatory School music center campaign

The Ministry of Christian Giving is partnering with Luther Preparatory School, WELS Chief Financial Officer Kyle Egan, and consulting firm Generis on the capital campaign to build a new music center on the Watertown, Wis., campus. We are actively involved in quiet phase major donor visits. By God's grace, we have received \$1.7 million in gifts and commitments. In addition, Luther Preparatory School has designated \$2.25 million toward the project.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary campaign feasibility study

The Ministry of Christian Giving continues to coordinate with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, WELS Chief Financial Officer Kyle Egan, and consulting firm Generis to prepare for a capital campaign—starting with a major donor quiet phase—for an education wing, remodeled offices, and auditorium gathering space.

Appeals

The Ministry of Christian Giving works closely with our WELS areas of ministry and ministerial education schools to send about 13 mailed appeals and 6 e-appeals each year. Each of the synod's four main areas

of ministry receives two of the annual mailed appeal slots and some e-appeals, while other initiatives (e.g., Commission on Inter-Church Relations, Christian Aid and Relief, Mission and Ministry, and WELS endowments) receive one mailed appeal slot per year. Another annual appeal encourages charitable gift annuities managed by WELS Foundation. The appeals coordinate with other WELS media including *WELS Connection*, *Forward in Christ*, WELS' websites, and the *Together* e-newsletter. Over the past ten fiscal years, God has blessed these appeals with an average net income of \$955,166 each year.

WELS endowment funds

Twenty years ago at the 2005 synod convention, delegates prayerfully considered how WELS could support gospel ministry in a predictable and ever-increasing manner. One answer was to establish the WELS endowments, which benefit the Lord's work in WELS Home, World, and Joint Missions and at our four ministerial education schools. Out of gratitude for God's love and a desire to help more people know Jesus as their Savior, WELS members have, as of the end of 2024, faithfully contributed \$127 million to these endowments, including \$40.3 million in gifts received and \$86.4 million expected. In July 2024, the annual distribution from the WELS endowments was about \$1.4 million. We praise God for these blessings!

Encouragement of planned gifts

The Ministry of Christian Giving's congregational planned giving program manual helps congregations promote planned giving opportunities to members. It also provides guidance on setting up a planned giving committee as well as establishing and administering an endowment fund. Our Christian giving counselors are available to introduce the planned giving program to congregational leaders. Learn more at wels.net/plannedgivingprogram.

Grace of Giving is mailed each spring and fall to WELS members eligible for supporting ministry through planned giving instruments. This newsletter includes inspiring stories of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, ministry updates, and planned giving opportunities. See the latest at wels.net/graceofgiving.

In recent years qualified charitable distributions from IRAs have become a popular way for anyone 70.5 or older to support ministry. These distributions are free from federal and potentially state income tax when individuals direct them to their church, synod, and other WELS ministries. Donors can also use qualified charitable distributions to establish charitable gift annuities. The Ministry of Christian Giving works with WELS Foundation to inform individuals and WELS-affiliated ministries of this opportunity and provides helpful resources at wels.net/qcd.

Development counsel to other organizations

The Ministry of Christian Giving annually offers development training to Christian giving counselors, Ministerial Education mission advancement staff, Missions administrators, and anyone serving a WELS-/ELS-affiliated ministry in development. One goal of such training is to encourage a consistent approach to God's people that is Christ centered and donor sensitive and that minimizes potential donor fatigue and the impression that we're competitors or trying to "get" something from our fellow Christians. Twenty-one people participated in our 2025 training.

WELS-affiliated ministries can arrange a part-time collaborative partnership with the Ministry of Christian Giving where our counselors assist their organizations with major and planned giving donor nurture. Contact Pastor Kurt Lueneburg, WELS director of Christian Giving, at 414-256-3214 or kurt.lueneburg@wels.net for more information.

Improved event registration and e-mails

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving worked with WELS Missions and WELS Technology to utilize current software to better manage event registrations and promotional e-mails. The new tools allow for more efficient data processing and will reduce expenses.

A look ahead

Lord willing, WELS Ministry of Christian Giving will move forward with the following specific initiatives over the next couple years:

- We will continue to praise and thank God for the offerings of his faithful people to his Church and encourage strong congregational and individual mission offerings.

- We will add a mid-level donor giving counselor to our office team.
- We will continue working with WELS Home Missions, Luther Preparatory School, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on their respective initiatives.
- We will enhance online donation options for WELS members.
- Our next Christian giving training session for WELS/ELS advancement personnel is scheduled for Jan. 12–16, 2026. Contact us to register or receive more information (800-827-5482 or mcg@wels.net).

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving is privileged to serve our Savior and you by helping God's people generously fund the ministries that touch their hearts. We are happy that these gifts in response to Christ's love are helping us as a synod to fulfill our calling of proclaiming Jesus' name to more and more people.

Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, reporter

Communication Services

Floor Committee #6

Our calling

Communication Services exists to assist the Conference of Presidents in communicating WELS' mission to members of the synod. It is responsible for clear and consistent communication of the synod's mission from the synod's national office and for exploring, supporting, and expediting innovative media usage and shared communication for WELS ministries and congregations. It is also responsible for reviewing and authorizing all new communications originating in the synod's national office.

Our current situation

The Communication Services staff is focused on utilizing the following communication approaches to support the ongoing mission and ministry of the synod.

Forward in Christ

Forward in Christ (FIC), the official monthly magazine of WELS, brings Lutherans together through shared stories of faith and articles that address important issues facing Christians today. FIC also provides an in-depth look at important biblical truths while striving to inspire its readers to live lives of Christian service. It shares news from WELS congregations, schools, ministry affiliates, and synodical areas of ministry. Each issue is designed to educate, inform, and inspire.

Currently *Forward in Christ* has more than 26,000 monthly subscribers. Congregational subscriptions comprise the great majority of that number, with 880 congregations subscribing. Issues can be delivered in bulk to the church or sent directly to members' homes—all at a reduced cost from the individual subscription price. A one-page newsletter included with each bulk shipment to congregations details easy ways to share content in a congregation. Find it as well as more ways to promote the magazine at forwardinchrist.net/promote. Visit nph.net/fic for current subscription information.

Forward in Christ's dedicated website, forwardinchrist.net, provides content from each monthly issue as well as supplemental materials. Readers can sign up at forwardinchrist.net/subscribe to receive a free weekly e-newsletter filled with articles, photos, and sneak peeks. In 2024, forwardinchrist.net had about 170,000 visitors and more than 280,000 pageviews. Through *Forward in Christ's* Facebook and Instagram social media sites, WELS members have multiple ways to access and share the magazine's content.

If you are interested in creating awareness of the magazine in your congregation, Executive Editor James Pope is available to preach and/or conduct Bible classes. Submit your request at forwardinchrist.net/submit. There you can also submit photos, articles, and questions for possible inclusion in the magazine.

wels.net

The synod's official website, **wels.net**, continues to be our most utilized channel of communication. The most popular pages viewed by our visitors in 2024 were Daily Devotions, home page, call reports, and Through My Bible in Three Years. The synod's website continues to provide timely content both for WELS members and non-members who want to learn more about Jesus, WELS, and what we believe.

WELS Connection

WELS Connection, the monthly video viewed in more than 750 congregations, is now in its 39th year of providing stories that highlight the important work happening as a result of your Congregation Mission Offerings to the synod. *WELS Connection* is a 6- to 7-minute video usually shown after a worship service. It is an effective way to reach our members and provide monthly uplifting stories and important information every member should know about our synod and its work. The success of *WELS Connection* is due to the partnership we have with our congregations. Congregations choose to connect members to the work of our broader synod by showing the video each month. Beginning in 2025, *WELS Connection* is now entirely digital. Due to the cost of DVD replication and mailing services, the videos are only available via online streaming and download. The video files are available on the *WELS Connection* subscription page at online.nph.net/wels-connection-subscription.html.

Together

Together, a bi-weekly e-newsletter, is e-mailed to more than 8,000 subscribers the first and third Tuesday of each month. This newsletter reports on the news and events within our synod that every WELS member should know. Special *Together* video updates are also included in many editions. To subscribe, visit wels.net/subscribe.

Annual report

Your gifts, God's blessings: An annual report to our members provides a clear picture of the synod and the activities carried out by its areas of ministry. Copies of the report were mailed in January to all congregations as well as to members who have made a direct gift to WELS during the year. To view the report online, visit wels.net/annualreport.

In the mailing to congregations, we also include a two-sided flyer that gives an overview of WELS and its ministries. This flyer is perfect for describing WELS to those who may not be aware of the larger denominational fellowship that we enjoy. It is a helpful addition to a congregation's tract racks, narthex displays, and community fair booths. Free print copies of both the annual report and flyer are available from Northwestern Publishing House at online.nph.net/wels.

Social media

Our Facebook page, facebook.com/welslutherans, has more than 105,000 page followers. Our Instagram page, instagram.com/welslutherans, has more than 8,200 page followers. Please consider following these social media sites to stay updated on WELS news and events.

Events

The final communication approach that is used to engage our members is synod events. Members and called workers of our synod enjoy a deep and lasting fellowship with one another, and our synod is known for its desire for training, learning, and growth. National events are a highlight of WELS' work, and our Communication Services team is involved in helping them succeed. We now have a full-time events manager, Mrs. Michelle Gartner, who works with area of ministry representatives and our team focusing on the planning and implementation of these events. Take note of these upcoming events.

- Taste of Missions will be held Sat., June 14, on the campus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. The event kicks off with a special worship service where new home and world missionaries will be commissioned. This in-person event will be livestreamed.
- The 2025 WELS National Education conference will be held in Green Bay, Wis., June 23–25. The theme, "Now You Are," contrasts our natural state with the wonderful blessings we have as members of God's family in Christ. Christian teachers' important task is to create a culture in our schools that promotes not only learning but also our connection to Christ and each other.

- The 11th annual WELS Night at the Brewers will be held Fri., July 11. Discounted tickets for WELS members and guests are reserved together in a block of seats and are available at brewers.com/wels. WELS Night at the Brewers draws nearly two thousand members each summer.
- The 68th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 21–24, 2025, at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn. About 400 voting delegates from around the country will attend the convention.
- The third WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership will be held Jan. 19–21, 2026, at the Hilton Hotel in Chicago, Ill. This conference seeks to encourage congregational members and leaders in spreading the gospel. Plenary sessions will discuss larger strategic issues that are relevant for all congregations. The breakout sessions are more tactical in nature. Some share “best practices.” Others address challenges that are applicable only to some congregations. Still others are more devotional, providing the motivation to do all we can with the gospel. Registration will open in fall 2025.
- The WELS International Youth Rally will take place on the campus of Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, July 14–17, 2026. The theme will be “Christ through us.” For 50 years, the rally experience has brought together generations of WELS youth and youth leaders to deepen their commitment to Christ and put on display the incredible grace and power of the holy Christian church.

A look ahead

WELS 175th anniversary

The Communication Services team is working on the ongoing celebration of our synod’s 175th anniversary. Various events and resources are being promoted throughout 2025. We are working with WELS Historical Institute, WELS Archives, and the WELS 175th Anniversary Planning Committee to continue promoting 175 years of God’s grace to WELS. Information on all the resources for this anniversary year can be found at welshistoricalinstitute.org/175th. The Communication Services team is also working with the Ministry of Christian Giving to organize a synodwide anniversary offering allowing our congregations and members to show their thanks by supporting the work of our synod.

WELS long-range strategic plan

Synod convention delegates will consider a proposal for a new long-range strategic plan. This plan will be used by our Communication Services team as an ongoing framework for our communication efforts. We will highlight the goals of this plan and update members on progress so the plan remains a living and prioritized effort of our synod over the next ten years. We will use our main channels of communication listed previously to keep our members updated. However, WELS Communication Services will also shift its focus to several major initiatives beginning in 2025, preparing to support the synod’s long-term goals.

WELS brand refresh

We desire to present our church body to members and non-members in the most positive light. In 2010, WELS went through a brand strategy audit and identity redesign. Now after 14 years, we must once again clearly articulate the tremendous blessings we enjoy as a synod and as individual Christians, and all that we do in response to those blessings. We are in the process of completing a brand strategy audit to recalibrate our brand’s strategy, identity, messaging, and engagement. Our brand is of utmost importance. We are asking our audience to trust us, support us, and join us. Our brand helps to instill confidence, highlights the importance of our work, and points people to the gospel that ultimately moves individuals to serve right along with us. The brand refresh efforts are a precursor to the next initiative.

wels.net redesign

Beginning in fall 2025, WELS Communication Services and WELS Technology will begin a redesign of wels.net. It has been ten years since the last redesign, and this is crucial for maintaining a relevant and effective online presence. It enables improvements in user experience, enhances brand consistency, optimizes use by mobile devices, boosts search engine optimization, and drives more conversions in which we can communicate Christ’s love. By modernizing design, improving functionality, and ensuring content remains up to date, a redesign will help our website continue to serve as a valuable tool for members, leaders/called workers, and those who may not know about WELS or are looking for information about Christianity. The process is expected to take 18 to 24 months.

Customer relationship management system

For a denomination of our size and scale, a robust Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is essential to cultivate meaningful connections with our called workers and members. By consolidating data and interactions, this system empowers us to understand the needs and aspirations of called workers and members, particularly as we share our synod's long-range plan. This centralized platform streamlines communication across various channels (e-mails, surveys, newsletters, texts, and blogs) automates key tasks, and enhances engagement. Consequently, we can deliver targeted communication campaigns; strengthen relationships with our congregations; and make informed, data-driven decisions.

Support for subsidiaries

WELS Communication Services supports WELS' subsidiaries by producing communication materials and organizing events to promote their activities and engage with their respective audiences.

For WELS Church Extension Fund, this involves creating updates on rates and activity to encourage investments that fund loans for church building projects.

For WELS Foundation, Communication Services supports giving counselors and partners through newsletters, webinars, reports, and donor stories, with upcoming video resources planned.

For WELS Investment Funds, the team generates annual and quarterly reports, fact sheets, videos, and webinars featuring investment insights.

Communication Services has provided a great amount of support to WELS Historical Institute in 2025 due to the promotion of the synod's 175th anniversary. This support includes event management, video editing, copyediting, layout and design, website content creation, and promotion.

In conclusion

As you can see from this report, WELS Communication Services plays a multi-faceted role within our synod. The team provides a number of key functions, including:

- **Maintaining synod and congregational reputations:** We work to build and maintain a positive public image for our church body. This includes handling public relations, media relations, and crisis communications.
- **Facilitating intrasynodical communication:** We ensure that called workers and members are informed about synod news, call activity, resource development, doctrinal statements, and long-range plans to foster unity throughout the synod. This includes producing the annual report, *Book of Reports and Memorials*, *Report to the Twelve Districts*, and *Proceedings*—the official record of each synod convention. We also manage events that bring together WELS members.
- **Facilitating external communication:** We manage communication efforts for our synod with the public. This includes creating and distributing press releases, managing social media, and developing promotional materials.
- **Overseeing brand management:** We are responsible for maintaining a consistent brand identity across all communication channels. This ensures that the synod's message is clear and recognizable.

Your dedicated WELS Communication Services team is proud of our synod's efforts to advance the gospel and continues to work hard on your behalf to facilitate the message of "Christ through us" to all relevant audiences.

Mr. Dan Nommensen, reporter

Congregational Services

Floor Committee #4 (Churches)

Floor Committee #5 (Schools)

Our calling

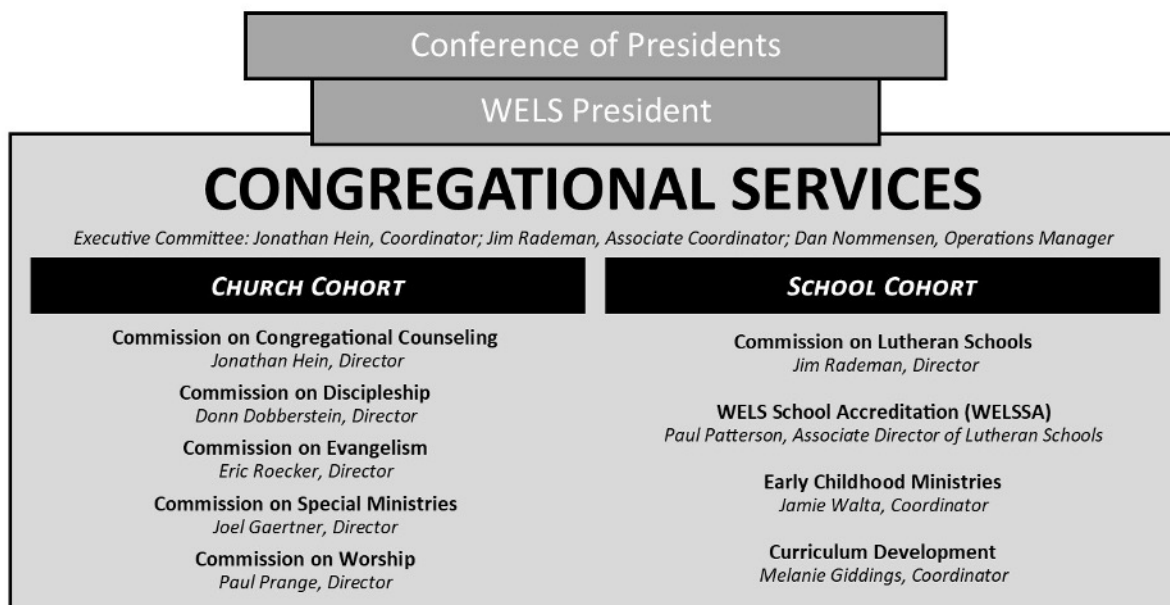
WELS Congregational Services exists to encourage and equip congregations for faithful and fruitful gospel ministry.

That encouragement comes through Congregational Services' members working onsite with churches and schools. Congregational Services offers several programs (described throughout this report) where an individual or team from Congregational Services will visit the congregation and assist church and school leaders as they attempt to evaluate current ministry efforts and plan for the future. Additionally, Congregational Services organizes a number of national conferences where called workers and laity alike can discuss best ministry practices and receive encouragement for our shared mission.

To help equip congregations for ministry, Congregational Services produces a wide variety of resources that churches and schools can utilize in their efforts to feed the faithful, reach the lost, and pursue the straying. Most of these are disseminated at welscongregationalservices.net. To stay up to date on the latest resources, subscribe to WELS Congregational Services' resource update newsletter at welscongregationalservices.net/subscriptions.

Congregational Services serves directly under the Conference of Presidents. The Conference of Presidents has two groups that assist them in their efforts: circuit pastors, who serve as the pastor's pastor, and Congregational Services, to help congregations assess and carry out their ministry efforts.

Congregational Services operates in two cohorts: church and school. Congregational Services consists of six commissions:



- **Commission on Congregational Counseling**—Exists to serve congregations in their efforts to evaluate ministry efforts, congregational organization, and staffing needs; develop plans to adjust and expand ministry efforts over time; and equip lay leaders in their vital roles.
- **Commission on Discipleship**—Exists to serve congregations in their efforts to help their members grow in both their knowledge of God’s Word and their sanctified service of Christ and neighbor.
- **Commission on Evangelism**—Exists to serve congregations in their efforts to seize every opportunity the Lord provides to evangelize lost souls, both through congregational outreach efforts and through personal witnessing.
- **Commission on Lutheran Schools**—Exists to serve congregations in their efforts to provide Christian education through Lutheran schools and other early childhood ministries.
- **Commission on Special Ministries**—Exists to serve congregations in their efforts to bring the gospel to those with needs or circumstances that prevent them from being served through congregations’ usual ministries.
- **Commission on Worship**—Exists to serve congregations in their efforts to glorify God and strengthen God’s people through Word and sacrament.

Each commission has a director. Directors not only work with the commissions to plan ministry efforts and resources but also conduct various consultations with churches and schools when requested. Additionally, directors train volunteers to assist in operating these in-field programs. Congregational Services is thankful for the dozens of pastors, teachers, and laypeople who provide encouragement and guidance to churches and schools that request such help.

The Congregational Services Coordinating Committee consists of the directors, operations manager, coordinators, and chairmen of each commission (elected by the Synod in Convention). Annually the Congregational Services Coordinating Committee prioritizes the programs and resources proposed by each of the commissions. The Congregational Services Executive Committee consists of the coordinator (a pastor), the associate coordinator (a teacher), and the operations manager (a layman). The Congregational Services Executive Committee is responsible for allocating the human and financial resources necessary to carry out the initiatives approved by the Congregational Services Coordinating Committee.

Congregational Services is also responsible for studying WELS statistical trends. It analyzes the data and produces an annual summary of the relevant information. Highlights from 2024 are included as an appendix to this report on p. 43. The full 2024 Statistical Summary and Analysis is available at welsconvention.net/boram.

WELS’ ministerial education system, world mission efforts, and home missions work are all predicated upon having a broad base of congregations to support those efforts. Thus, by serving local congregations, Congregational Services hopes to also assist in the worldwide gospel efforts of WELS.

Our current situation

Consultations

Congregational Services offers several programs where representatives of Congregational Services are onsite at churches and schools. In some cases, they work with a large segment of members as they assess ministry efforts and plan for the future. In other cases, the Congregational Services team provides training to church and school leadership. Some examples of Congregational Services’ onsite programs follow.

Mission Together

The Mission Together program brings together multiple congregations in geographic proximity to consider if it would better serve Christ’s mission if they would partner in ministry efforts or possibly even consolidate. In an exploratory meeting the assigned congregational counselor walks all interested members of these congregations through the “whys” and “hows” of doing mission together. If the congregations are interested in taking further steps, the assigned counselor helps them work through the necessary analysis and planning.

WELS School Accreditation

WELS School Accreditation has been accrediting schools for 20 years. As a longtime member of the National Council for Private School Accreditation, WELS School Accreditation remains committed to

maintaining high standards of accountability, distinctly Lutheran values, and a culture of continuous improvement. WELS School Accreditation provides an onsite review of a school's self-evaluation. Schools assess their current practices against a set of standards and identify opportunities to build on their strengths. Currently, the WELS School Accreditation standards are being updated, with implementation targeted for the 2026–27 school year. These revised standards will introduce flexibility for various school governance models and establish a unified set of categories applicable to early childhood programs, Lutheran elementary schools, and Lutheran high schools.

Everyone Outreach

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

Telling the Next Generation

Nationwide, 17 percent of students in our Lutheran elementary schools and 33 percent of those in our early childhood ministries report having no church membership. This one-day seminar is designed for pastors, principals, early childhood directors, teachers, and congregational lay leaders. It assists congregations in the development of a harvest strategy, a plan that focuses on intentional ways to connect unchurched families with the gospel. Newly developed post-workshop support provides guidance and encouragement in the creation and implementation of a harvest strategy.

AXIS

AXIS helps congregations produce a long-range plan. The assigned congregational counselor helps the congregation conduct a thorough situational analysis, both of the current congregational ministry efforts and the community. He then helps the congregation establish its top priorities and develop the corresponding goals and objectives.

Adaptive consultations

Often the assistance a church or school needs does not align well with an established Congregational Services consultation. In those cases, Congregational Services works with congregational leadership to produce an adaptable scope-of-work plan that fits the ministry's specific needs: conducting staffing needs assessments, helping determine if and how to start a new children's ministry, providing lay leaders with plan management training, etc.

In the past biennium, Congregational Services was engaged with between 70 and 90 churches and schools at any given point in time. That represents a 150 percent increase in active consultations from a decade prior.

Resources

Congregational Services produces a variety of resources to help churches in their gospel efforts to feed the faithful, reach the lost, and pursue the straying. Most are disseminated at **welscongregationalservices.net** and are free.

The Foundation: Weekly ministry resources

The Foundation is a suite of resources that builds upon the importance of public worship both on Sunday morning and throughout the week. Resources contained in *The Foundation* include seasonal thematic worship plans, weekly worship plans, school resources, WELS Preachers Podcast, and worship series promotional graphics and videos. In addition to these free resources, all the Congregational Services devotions—WELS online daily devotions, family devotions, school devotions—capture the worship themes for that week. Thus, congregations that use *The Foundation* have a focused spiritual message that is repeated throughout the week in the homes of members who utilize those devotions. About 60 percent of congregations are currently using components of *The Foundation*.

Schools theology standards and curriculum

In the past biennium, Teacher Melanie Giddings, who coordinated the initial work of the WELS Theology

Curriculum Task Force, had her call made full time and permanent, as the work now transitions to the production of that curriculum. The task force has released the WELS Theology Guiding Principles and Standards for early childhood through grade 12, completing the framework. These principles and standards will guide the development of four new instructional programs and the production of all the supporting resources in our effort to meet the needs of the children and their families who appreciate the blessings of Lutheran education. That effort begins this summer.

Christian Worship: Supporting resources

Supporting resources of the new hymnal suite continue to be developed. Congregations just beginning to adopt the new hymnal or looking to expand their use of resources will find helpful guidance at **welscongregationalservices.net**. (Search “hymnal introduction resources” or click on the navigation link to “The Foundation.”) Additional hymnal resources can be found at **christianworship.com**.

Women’s ministry resources

Through online webinars, Bible studies, devotions, and programs like Advent/Lent by Candlelight, Women’s Ministry nurtures, encourages, and equips the women of our congregations to faithfully use their gifts for service in God’s kingdom.

MadeKnown.net

A 2023 study of exit surveys found that most young WELS members who left WELS because they identify as LGBTQ did so without having spoken to anyone. The *made. known.* website aims to walk in Spirit-wrought love and Scripture truth with individuals wrestling with these temptations. The website is home to a growing library of resources.

Early childhood ministry support resource

Each week, more than 11,000 children are brought by their families to one of our 345 WELS early childhood ministries. This resource has been created to help create understanding of what Christ-centered, high-quality early childhood ministry includes, along with ways to support those serving in an early childhood ministry. It is written for stakeholders and church leaders seeking to build and strengthen early childhood ministries and those serving in them so that we can maximize the opportunities and minimize the barriers to providing gospel-focused excellence in early childhood care and education.

Devote Yourself

This electronic newsletter provides helpful articles and practical approaches to teaching, preaching, and leading worship. To subscribe, go to **welscongregationalservices.net**. At the bottom of the page, under “useful links,” you will find “subscriptions.”

Stewardship Legacy: Beautiful Truth

This is the second in a five-part stewardship series. This installment explores the beauty of Christian truth and the responsibility of congregations to steward it for future generations. It includes worship and Bible study resources and can be plugged into various portions of the church year.

Defending the Faith

This Bible study helps Christians understand that the theological discipline known as apologetics is really a ministry of caring. It teaches believers how to listen to skeptics and then respond clearly and lovingly with God’s Word.

Heart Imprints

Whether you are giving a children’s sermon or planning chapel for your Sunday school, early childhood ministry, or Lutheran elementary school, this resource provides ideas for your message that coordinate with the church year and Sunday worship. *Heart Imprints* dovetails with *The Foundation* resources.

Conquerors through Christ

Conquerors through Christ helps Christians who struggle with the temptations of pornography. Its website, **conquerorsthroughchrist.net**, has been effective in motivating people to seek help from their pastors or professional counselors. Downloadable resources for those who are struggling, or those who want to support such individuals, can also be found on that website. The Conquerors through Christ Committee has also started online support groups for those who struggle with these issues.

WELS Youth Night

This resource provides a series of youth-focused events with the aim of gathering youth from congregations in geographic proximity for fellowship and Scripture study. This resource provides all the pieces needed to plan, train, promote, and host a Youth Night event. Every package in the series has its own unique event theme, keynote video, and small group discussion guide.

Ministry training

Congregational Services also offers ministry training to help individuals (both called workers and laity) carry out their ministry efforts.

Freedom for the Captives: Abuse prevention training

Freedom for the Captives offers a free online training program to help churches and schools develop plans to prevent child abuse on their campuses. Freedom for the Captives also provides devotions and a blog to offer support to those who have suffered the trauma of child or sexual abuse. Resources are available at freedomforcaptives.com.

Let's Go: Personal Witnessing Training

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

Welcome Home—soul care/elder training

This video-based program is designed to help equip lay leaders of your congregation to identify and reach out to missing members from your church family. The videos are short yet focused and include accompanying guide sheets to facilitate discussion about how to increase the congregation's shepherding activity. *Welcome Home* aims to create a culture within your congregation where it is understood that straying members will be pursued lovingly and aggressively. Creating that culture requires congregational leaders who themselves are strengthened and encouraged for this endeavor. That is why "before" and "after" devotions are included with every video chapter.

Future school leader training

The shortage of principals and leaders in our schools has grown to the point that about one in eight Lutheran elementary schools has a principal vacancy and is operating with an interim plan. Lutheran Schools supports, mentors, and provides training for new and aspiring school leaders through the Director Apprentice Mentoring Program and Principal Training Program and partners with Martin Luther College on the Early Childhood Credential Cohort, Director Training Program, and Principal Credential Cohort. A business certificate program was also launched thanks to grants from the Milwaukee School of Engineering and the Kern Foundation.

WELS chaplain certification

This continuing education initiative is a joint effort of the Commission on Special Ministries and Martin Luther College. It requires ongoing education to renew the certification every three years. In an era of increasing security procedures in institutions, it has become difficult for local pastors to minister in prisons, military bases, and large healthcare facilities. Chaplain certification will be increasingly useful, especially if a pastor or layperson wants to reach out to more than one's own members. Online courses are taught through Martin Luther College. For more information, go to wels.net/chaplain-certification-program.

Assistance with special ministry needs

Through its Commission on Special Ministries, Congregational Services aids congregations and individuals as they bring the gospel to those with needs or circumstances that prevent them from being served or serving with their gifts through a congregation's usual ministry.

Ministry to the Military

The WELS Military Services Committee provides spiritual services to WELS members and others who serve in the US Armed Forces. The committee carries out its mission through a full-time civilian chaplain in Europe and a full-time national civilian chaplain and liaison to the military who coordinates stateside

ministry and communicates with WELS members who are deployed in military service. Go to wels.net/military for more information or to refer a service member so that WELS Ministry to the Military might provide spiritual encouragement to that individual.

Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing seeks to help congregations share the gospel of Jesus Christ with members of WELS and others who are deaf or hard of hearing. Addressing the needs of these individuals will improve gospel ministry in worship services and Bible classes. This committee recently launched an online dictionary of religious sign language signs, found at gospelhands.net.

Mission for the Visually Impaired

The Mission for the Visually Impaired helps people who are unable to read normal-sized print, whether they are blind or have impaired eyesight. The mission produces devotional and other materials in Braille, large print, and online audio files. These materials are distributed free throughout the world to WELS and non-WELS people. This past year the Mission for the Visually Impaired partnered with Northwestern Publishing House to produce a large-print version of the 2021 *Christian Worship* hymnal.

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry

The Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry promotes and encourages sharing the gospel with those who have special education needs or developmental disabilities. It urges churches to provide a supportive Christian network for people with special needs in our synod and encourages their active participation in the congregation. The ministry develops resources and provides information to parents, caregivers, children, adults, pastors, teachers, and congregations about education programs, mentoring networks, support groups, and printed and digital materials.

Conferences and gatherings

Congregational Services plans a variety of different events to provide spiritual encouragement to different groups and to discuss our ministry efforts. Here are the events from this past biennium.

WELS International Youth Rally: "From the Mountaintops"

Approximately 2,200 teens and 600 adults gathered at Colorado State University in June 2024. The event celebrated 50 years of WELS youth rallies, offering opportunities for worship, faith-based learning, and fellowship.

WELS Women's Ministry Conference: "Empowered to Proclaim"

More than 450 women from across the country came together in July 2024 in Pewaukee, Wis. Keynote speakers and breakout sessions encouraged and equipped women to share God's Word in their homes, communities, workplaces, and congregations.

WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts: "Sing a New Song to the Lord"

This July 2024 conference welcomed more than 1,000 people to grow in the art of worship planning.

Analysis of expanded efforts

In 2024 Mr. Dan Nommensen, operations manager for Congregational Services, conducted an analysis that concluded that the expansion of Congregational Services' ministry efforts was outpacing capacity of current staffing levels. To note:

- Congregational Services is annually working with more than double the number of congregations compared to a decade prior. Congregational Services only works with congregations at their request. However, requests for various types of assistance have been rising annually dramatically in recent years.
- The number of resources Congregational Services produces has increased exponentially. Many of them are large in scale and require ongoing work, e.g., *The Foundation*, WELS Youth Night, etc.
- The number of events/conferences has increased, as has their scale. For example, the various Congregational Services events held in the summer of 2024 required about 8,000 hours of labor (called workers, hired staff, contracted staff) from planning to execution.

This doesn't just affect Congregational Services. WELS Communication Services has noted the challenges in creating awareness and promotion for this level of activity as well as creating the materials needed.

Congregational Services has intentionally avoided adding called workers to staff, both due to the called worker shortages and avoiding a rapid spend-down of project funds. Instead, to manage the increased requests for consultations, Congregational Services is looking at how to better prioritize and manage both resource production and events.

Other commission news

Commission on Worship personnel

Pastor Bryan Gerlach, who served as the director of WELS Commission on Worship since 1995, retired this past biennium. In that capacity, Gerlach was involved in the production of two hymnals, as well as the launch of the WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts, which grew to be one of the largest conferences of its kind. A grateful synod thanks him for his faithful service. Pastor Paul Prange has accepted the call to replace him.

Early childhood ministry personnel

Teacher Cindi Holman, who has served as the coordinator for WELS early childhood ministries since 2011, is retiring this summer. During Holman's ministry, early childhood ministries in WELS expanded greatly. She was crucial in developing early childhood ministry standards and championed programs like Director Apprentice Mentoring. She conducted the *Telling the Next Generation* harvest strategy program in many WELS early childhood ministries. A grateful synod thanks her for her faithful services. Teacher Jamie Walta has accepted the call to replace her.

Prison Ministry transition

For more than 30 years, WELS Prison Ministry, as one of the eight areas of Congregational Services' Commission on Special Ministries, has operated an extensive ministry-by-mail program, as well as provided training to congregations that would like to begin a local jail ministry. This past biennium an analysis of this ministry concluded two things. First, the nature of the work is changing. Increasingly, correctional facilities do not allow print devotional materials to be disseminated but ask that all materials be shared electronically via tablets they provide. Second, there was some mission redundancy with Institutional Ministries, a WELS-affiliated ministry that has been doing work in prisons and other institutions for more than 125 years. Thus, the work of WELS Prison Ministry is being assimilated by Institutional Ministries. We thank Staff Minister Dave Hochmuth for his faithful service overseeing WELS Prison Ministry's efforts for the past seven years.

A look ahead

WELS Congregational Services will continue to identify common needs within our congregations and schools and produce the resources or programs that help meet those needs. Here are just a few of the resources, efforts, and events being planned that you can look for in the upcoming biennium.

Resources

Come and See

This resource helps congregations encourage members to invite unchurched people in their lives to connect to God's Word and God's people in their congregation. It includes a congregational survey that can be used to discover aspects of congregational life that encourage or discourage members from inviting the unchurched. The congregation can then address any aspects that discourage invitational evangelism. Removing these barriers will, Lord willing, lead more members to offer invitations to others.

Speak to My Heart

This video-based marriage enrichment resource centers on the redemptive love story in the book of Ruth. It allows couples to reflect and apply lessons to their marriages. The resource is designed to be flexible in how it could be used: congregational Bible study over multiple weeks or weekend seminar.

Welcome Home 2.0

This is an updated version of a resource Congregational Services shared years ago that had the aim of helping congregations plan a *Welcome Home* Sunday celebration, with the aim of having 100 percent of congregational members come together for worship on that special weekend. This is part of a larger effort to address members drifting away. Resources include a planning guide and promotional videos. This resource partners well with the previously released *Welcome Home* online elder training.

Consultations

Shadow of the Leader

Every organization has its own culture, including Christian congregations. A congregation's culture has a tremendous impact on its ability to carry out the ministry God has given it. The *Shadow of the Leader* program helps WELS congregations better understand their congregation's culture and the role of congregational leaders in shaping that culture. The workshop is currently being offered to pastoral conferences throughout WELS. It is one resource that ties into the "Christ through us" long-range strategic plan, which places a major focus on strengthening congregational culture.

365 Together

This consult has a team from Congregational Services working with a congregation for close to a week. In that time, the team members help the congregation establish or strengthen every critical ministry system: soul care, worship planning, outreach, harvest strategy. The leaders of the church produce a detailed annual ministry plan. For the next 365 days, members of Congregational Services will work remotely with members of the congregation in the execution of that ministry plan.

Conferences and gatherings

WELS National Education Conference

This conference is being held in June in Green Bay, Wis. The education conference brings together teachers, principals, pastors, and other school leaders to discuss the challenges and opportunities before our Lutheran high schools, elementary schools, and early childhood ministries. It also provides time for professional growth and the study of pedagogical best practices.

WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership

The 2023 leadership conference brought together more than 1,300 called workers and laymembers for encouragement and fellowship, to discuss the big challenges facing our churches, and to examine some best practices for every area of ministry. The next leadership conference will be held January 19–21, 2026. Under the theme "Christ through us," the next leadership conference will explore some of the major goals of WELS' next long-range strategic plan. For the latest information, go to lutheranleadership.com.

WELS International Youth Rally

At this synod convention, WELS celebrates its 175th anniversary under the theme "Christ through us." We thank the Lord of the Church for the grace and providence he has shown our church body throughout the past seven generations. At this upcoming youth rally, under that same theme, we will ask the eighth generation to consider what Christ might accomplish through them in their lifetime. Youth retention and equipping the next generation of leaders are major themes of WELS' long-range strategic plan.

These Congregational Services events, spanning through the end of 2026, are locked in. As was mentioned previously, we are examining Congregational Services' capacity for events moving forward, both in terms of budget and workflow. Some being considered: another WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts in summer 2027; a joint Mission and Ministry conference (a merger of other conferences) in downtown Milwaukee in summer 2028. The future event schedule will be a major focus of the Congregational Services Coordinating Committee this fall.

Conclusion

Most ministry groups—Home Missions, World Missions, and Ministerial Education—work *for* you, doing things that would be challenging for an individual congregation to do on their own: starting new churches across the country, planting new gospel beachheads around the world, providing called workers. WELS Congregational Services is the ministry group that works *with* you as you strive to faithfully and zealously proclaim the gospel in your corner of the world. We are thankful for that privilege.

Rev. Jonathan Hein, reporter

Rev. Donn Dobberstein, director of WELS Commission on Discipleship

Rev. Joel Gaertner, director of WELS Commission on Special Ministries

Teacher Melanie Giddings, coordinator of curriculum development for Commission on Lutheran Schools

Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services and director of WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling
 Mr. Dan Nommensen, operations manager for Congregational Services
 Teacher Paul Patterson, associate director of WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools
 Rev. Paul Prange, director of WELS Commission on Worship
 Teacher James Rademan, associate coordinator of WELS Congregational Services and director of WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools
 Rev. Eric Roecker, director of WELS Commission on Evangelism
 Teacher Jamie Walta, coordinator of WELS Early Childhood Ministries

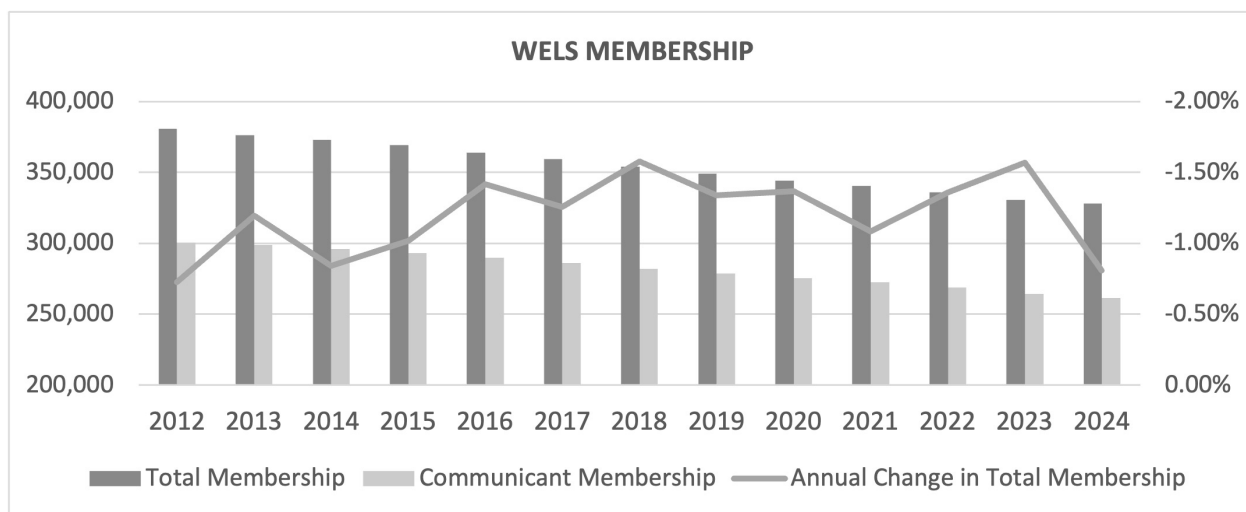
Appendix:

2024 statistical summary highlights

WELS Congregational Services is responsible for collecting and analyzing statistical data within WELS. 2024 was an interesting year. While challenges remain, there are also signs of the Lord's continued blessings. Here are some notable highlights from 2024.

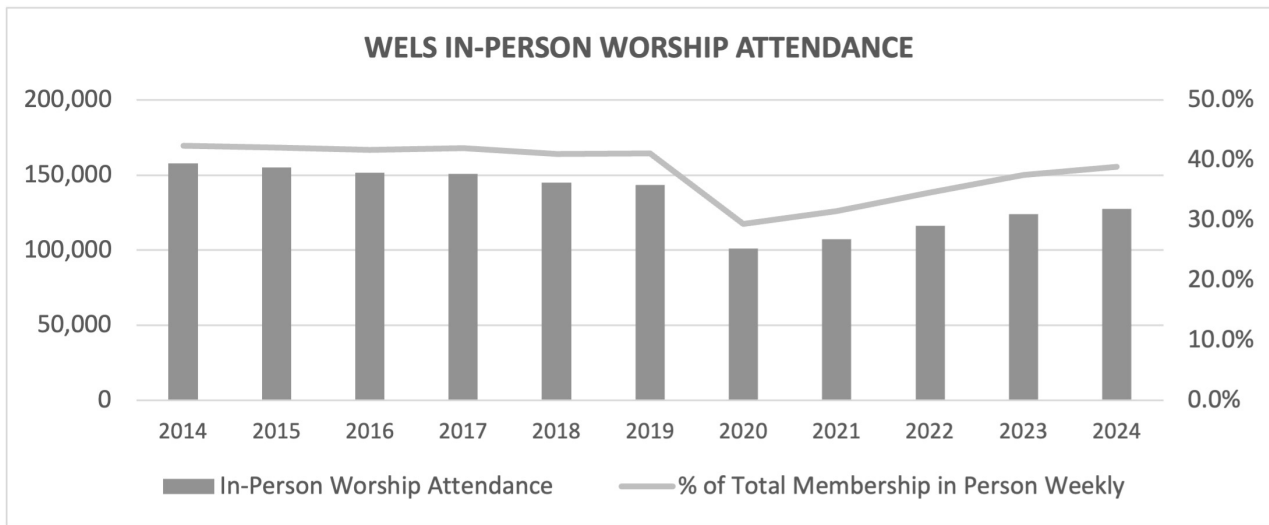
Membership decline

WELS total membership declined from 330,618 at the end of 2023 to 327,943 at the end of 2024. That is a loss of 2,675 members, 0.8 percent in total membership, the smallest one-year decline since 2011.



Worship/Bible study increases

In 2023, WELS congregations averaged a total in-person weekly worship attendance of 124,042. In 2024, in-person worship rose to 127,594, a 2.9 percent rise. The percent of total WELS members in weekly worship is close to where it was at prior to COVID. When you factor in that post-COVID some members have made watching worship online part of their habit, the percentage of WELS members hearing a weekly sermon is higher than it was pre-COVID.

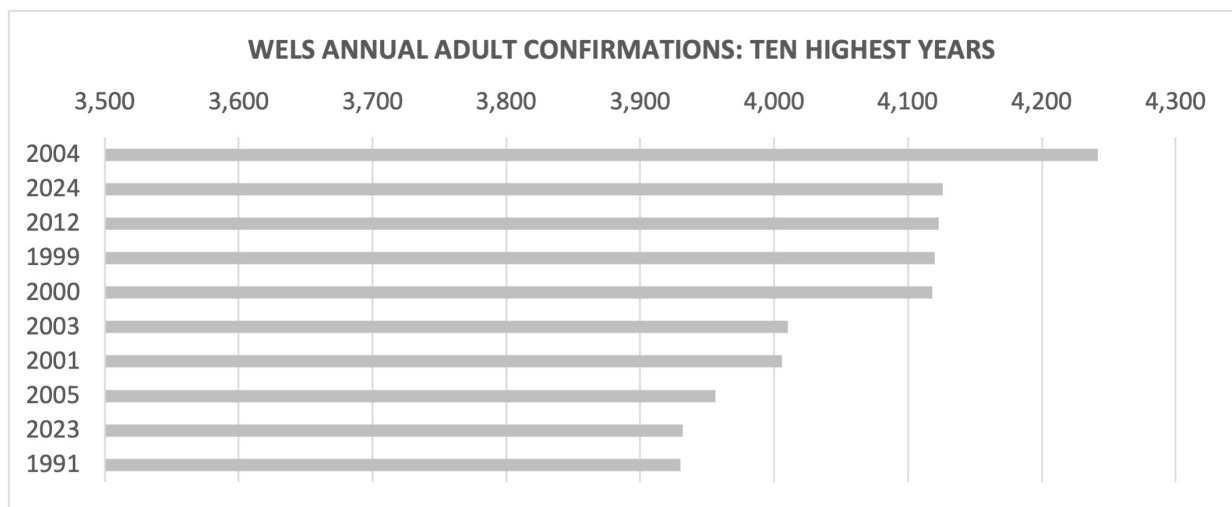


There have been similar bounce-backs in adult and youth Bible study attendance. Both rose last year (1.9 percent and 0.8 percent, respectively). For both categories, that is also the fourth year of increases.

Spiritual gains/losses

In 2018, WELS began asking congregations to share in-person ministrations by called workers and laity, e.g., face-to-face evangelism and delinquency visits. Those have been trending up sharply in recent years. Post-COVID, many congregations made concerted shepherding efforts to reconnect with members and “prospects” (i.e., potential members). It would appear that the Lord is blessing those efforts. We see the Lord’s hand in the in-person worship attendance increases. We also see it in the fact that in recent years spiritual gains have been trending upward and spiritual losses downward.

In 2024, the Spirit blessed WELS congregations with 4,126 adult confirmations. That is the most adult confirmations since 2012 and the second highest total since WELS has been tracking that statistic (for more than a half-century). To put that in perspective, over the past decade, WELS has averaged 3,300 adult confirmations annually. 2024 marks the fourth straight year that total adult confirmations has increased. Professions of faith remain fairly level (about 1,700 to 1,800 annually). We note with thanksgiving that these new-to-WELS “spiritual gains” (adult confirmations and professions of faith) brought 2,161 children along with them.



At the same time that WELS “spiritual gains” are rising, WELS “spiritual losses” are trending down. (Examples of “spiritual losses” would be individuals who quit their WELS church to join a church not in fellowship with us or who walk away from church completely.) In 2024, WELS had 2,315 “spiritual

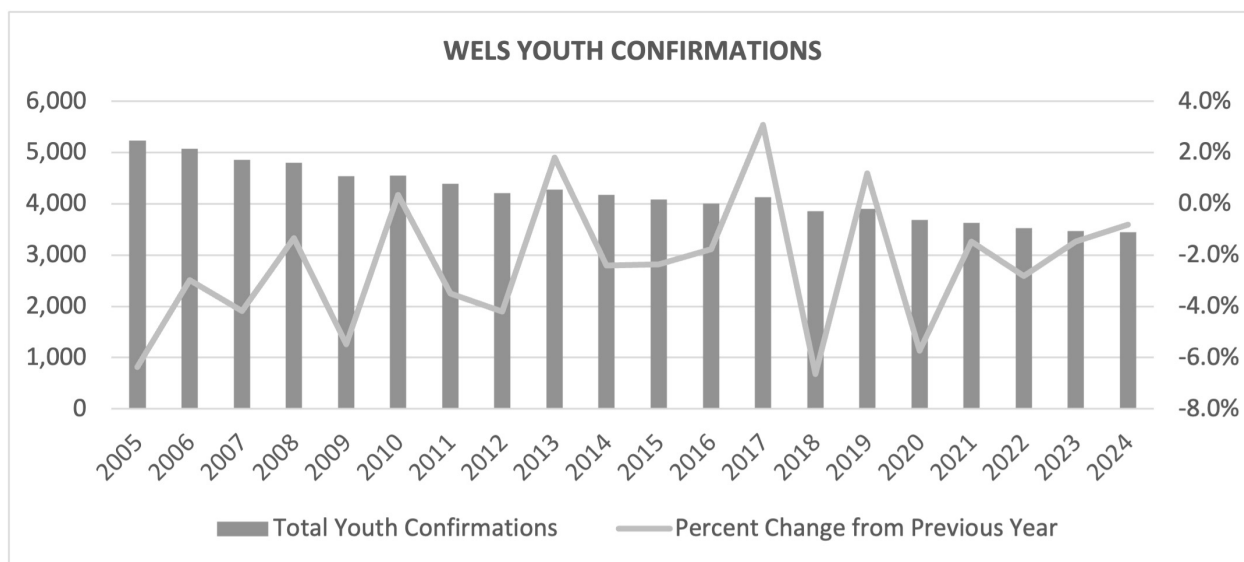
losses,” the lowest total since WELS has been keeping such records. To put that in perspective, over the decade prior, WELS averaged annual spiritual losses of around 5,300.

Life cycle gains/losses

In 2024, there were 2,985 children born to WELS members. A total of 3,345 WELS members went to their true home in heaven. That is five straight years where total births in WELS have been at or under 3,000. To put the decline in births in perspective, in the decade prior to the past five years (2010–2019), WELS averaged just over 5,700 births annually. So, while total deaths of WELS members is fairly consistent from year to year, births have dropped sharply. 2024 marks the fifth straight year WELS had more deaths than births.

The decline in birth rate, while more drastic in the recent past, has been occurring for the past generation. In previous statistical summaries, we have noted that while part of the reason for the decline is WELS couples having fewer children, the bigger issue is that WELS has fewer young adults today than it did a generation ago. While back-door losses are trending down, the ones that have occurred over the past two decades have come largely from that demographic.

We see this impacting other aspects of ministry. In 2024, WELS had 3,445 youth confirmations, the lowest total in WELS history. In 16 of the past 20 years, WELS has had fewer youth confirmations than the previous year.



We also see this decline in birth rate creating an enrollment shift in our schools. At the high-school level, there are approximately as many WELS students enrolled today as there were a decade ago. But as we get into middle school and elementary school, the percentage of WELS-member enrollment goes down compared to a decade ago. So, for many of our schools moving forward, if they hope to maintain enrollment they will need to increase the percentage of the student body that is non-WELS members.

In summary

While WELS has pivoted to life-cycle losses (more deaths than births), WELS’ spiritual gains are trending up and back-door losses are trending down. Thus, losses in total membership, while still occurring, have also been trending down a bit. We pray that will continue. The fact that, despite membership losses, worship and Bible study attendance have trended upward for multiple years is another blessing.

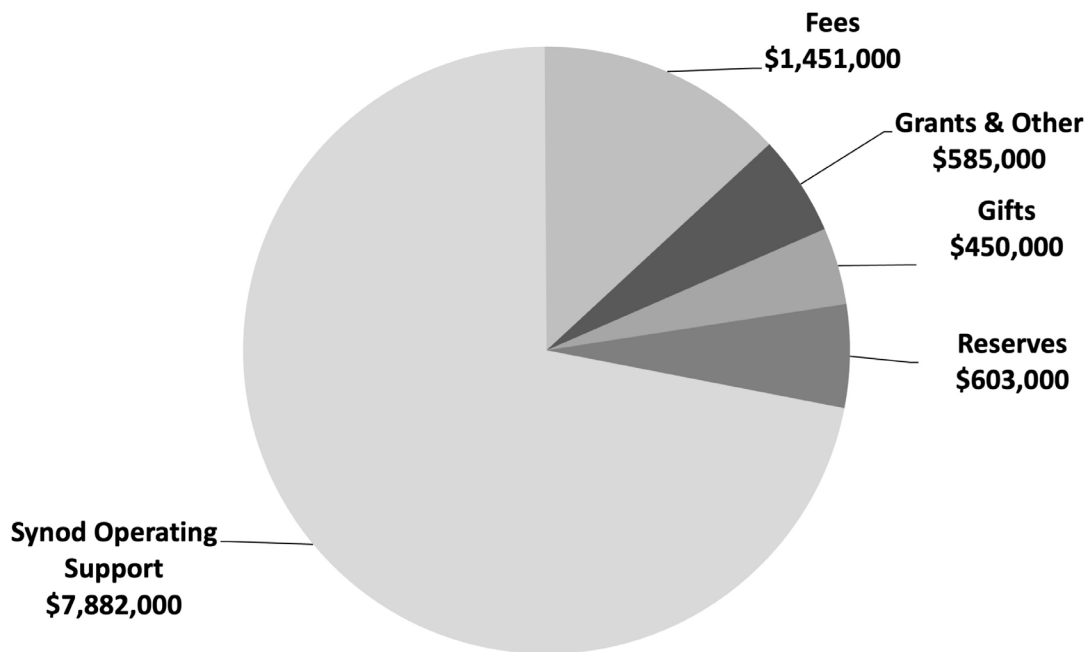
Given WELS’ demographics and the birth rate collapse, it is almost inevitable that WELS will continue to lose members over the next decade. However, if the Lord would continue to bless recent trends, it is possible that coming out of that decade, WELS losses have flattened out, and shortly after that, perhaps will even achieve membership growth. That is, of course, not our job. The statistical growth and

spiritual growth of the church are ever and always up to the Lord of the Church. Yet, as the theme of this convention stresses, Christ works through us. We thank him for the recent blessings he has provided through the gospel efforts of our church body.

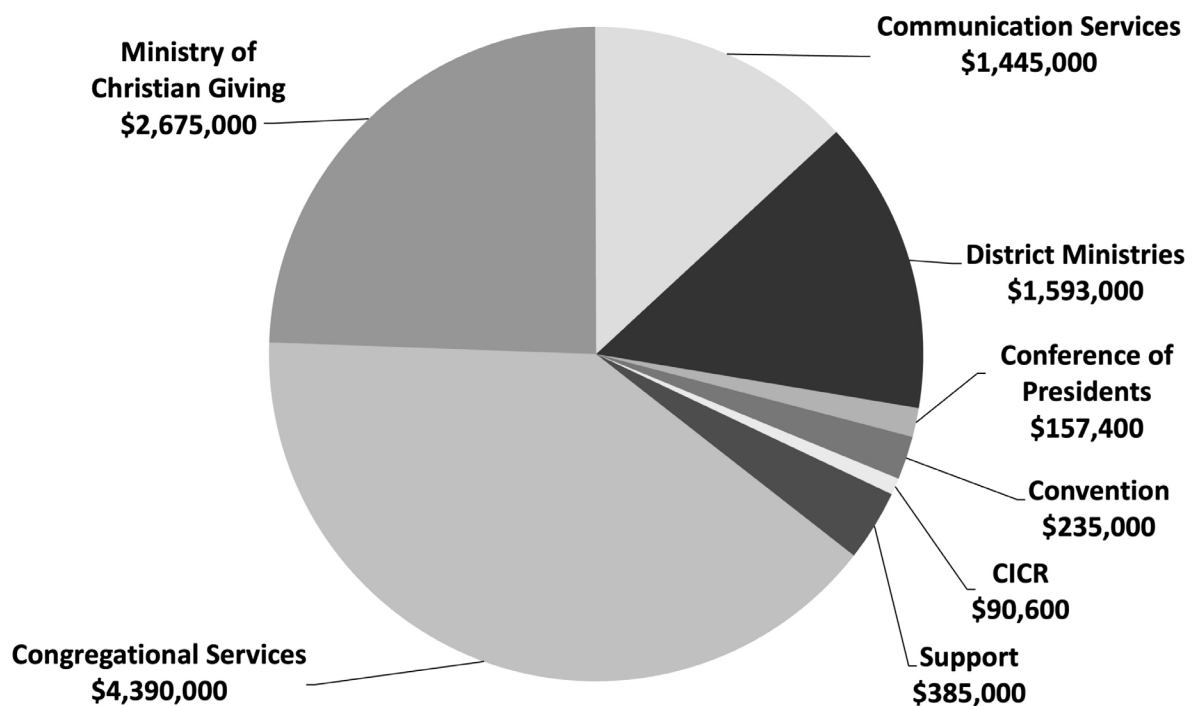
More statistical information and analysis

The full 2024 Statistical Analysis & Summary is available at welsconvention.net/boram. At welscongregationalservices.net, you can find all the data submitted in 2024. It is available in a PDF formatted for print, as well as an MS Excel file to allow sorting and queries.

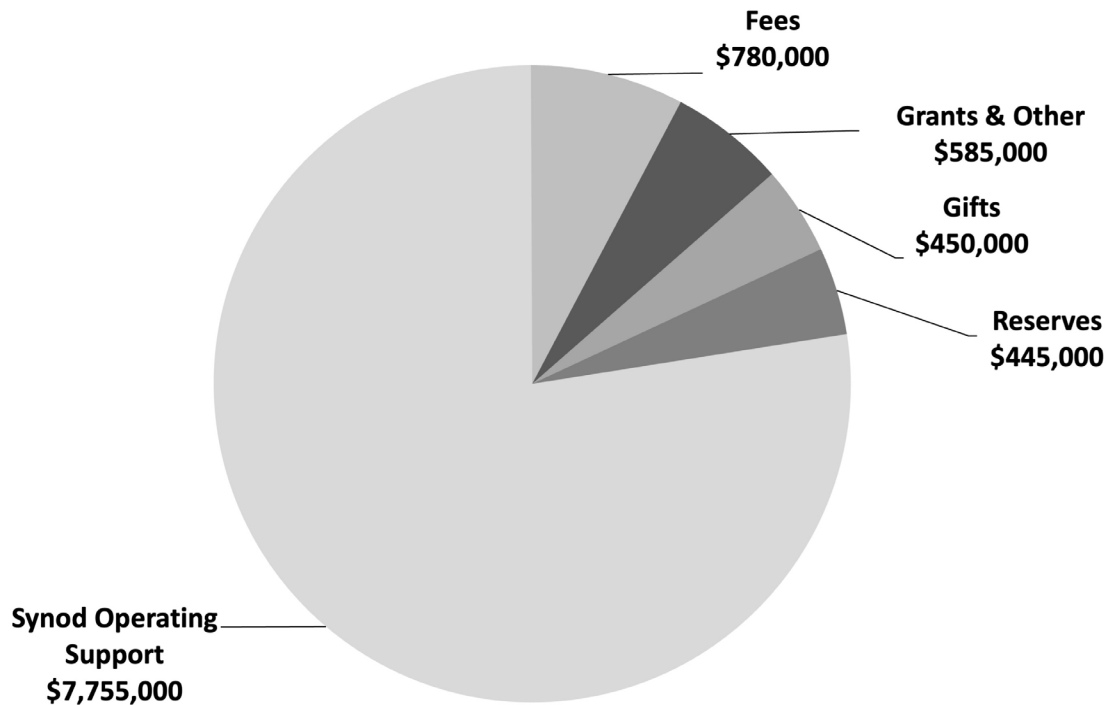
**FY 2025-26 Support
Congregation & District Ministry
\$10,971,000**



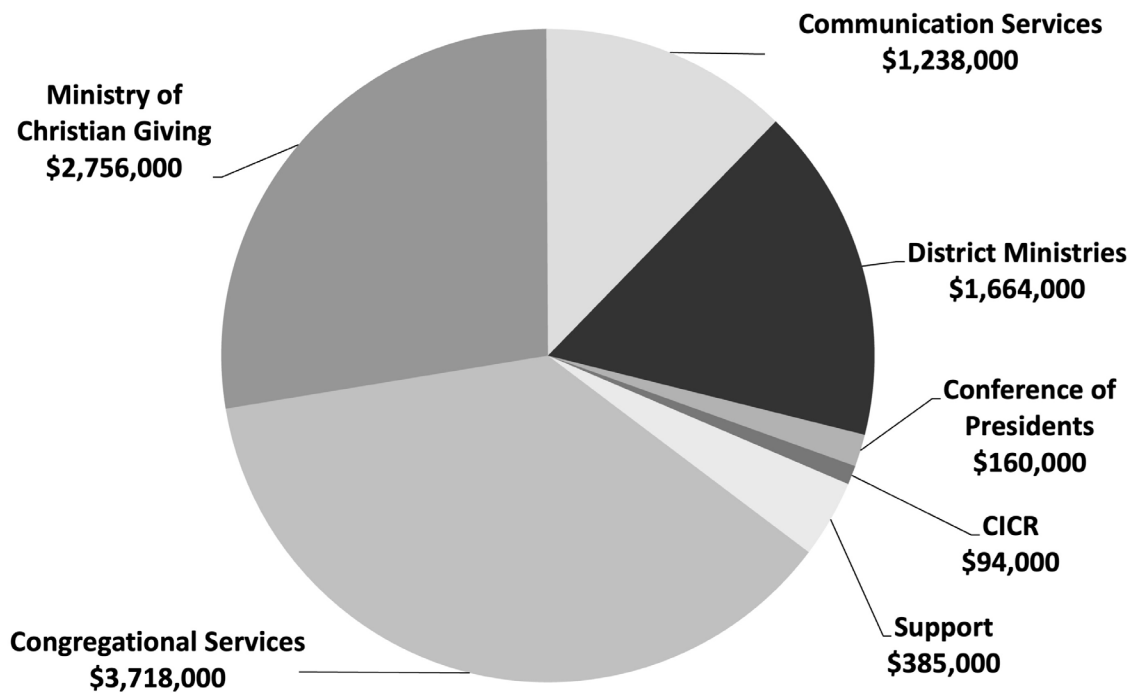
**FY 2025-26 Expenses
Congregation & District Ministry
\$10,971,000**



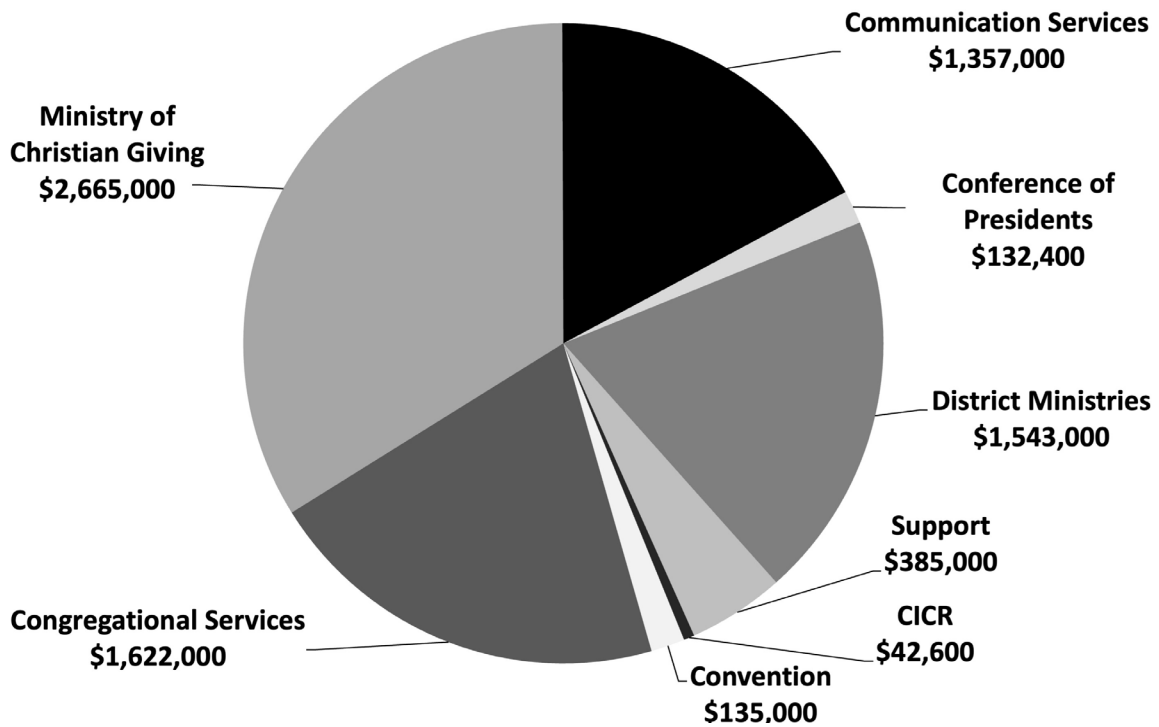
**FY 2026-27 Support
Congregation & District Ministry
\$10,015,000**



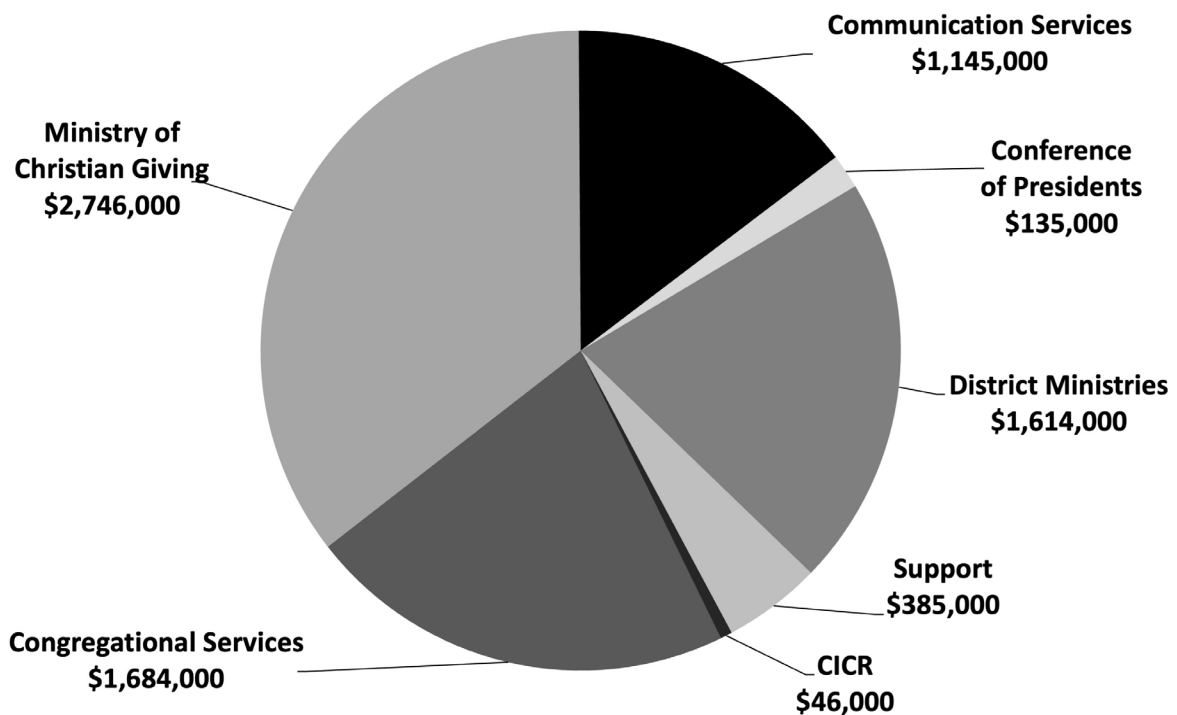
**FY 2026-27 Expenses
Congregation & District Ministry
\$10,015,000**



**FY 2025-26 Synod Operating Support Allocation
Congregation & District Ministry
\$7,882,000**



**FY 2026-27 Synod Operating Support Allocation
Congregation & District Ministry
\$7,755,000**



Ministry Support

The Ministry Support area of the ministry financial plan includes the Synodical Council and all entities overseen by the Synodical Council. These include:

Synodical Council

- Expenses for all regular and special meetings of the Synodical Council
- Some insurance expenses

President's Office

- Compensation for the synod president
- Stipends to the congregations of the first and second vice presidents
- Office staff serving the president and the Synodical Council
- Travel expenses for the synod presidium
- Colloquy expenses

Facility Services

Expenses related to the maintenance and operation of the Center for Mission and Ministry, including insurance costs

WELS Archives

WELS Historical Institute (see p. 173)

WELS Christian Aid and Relief

Expenditures related to humanitarian aid and relief programs; funding for the programs of Christian Aid and Relief is provided by gifts from individuals, congregations, and other organizations

Technology Services

- All expenditures related to maintaining the technology infrastructure of the synod
- Maintaining the synod's database for personnel and systems for financial records and transactions
- Meeting the needs of all areas of ministry to communicate using web technologies

Financial Services

- Prepares and provides accounting and financial information and services that support WELS ministries and subsidiaries
- Payroll processing
- Risk management
- Investments, banking, and cash management
- Expenses for the Accounting Oversight Committee

Human Resources

- Oversees development and communication of the synod's personnel policies and procedures
- Assures compliance with federal and state employment laws
- Serves as a resource for the Compensation Review Committee
- Serves as a resource for congregations in the matters listed above

Synodical Council

Floor Committee #7

The Synodical Council (SC) is responsible for the implementation of all decisions and resolutions made by the synod in convention and for overseeing all activities of WELS in pursuit of its mission (other than those that are the specific responsibility of the Conference of Presidents). In keeping with the WELS Constitution and Bylaws, the Synodical Council has the authority to act on behalf of the synod between conventions when proper and necessary.

As it carries out the broad oversight described above, the Synodical Council is responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and overseeing all programs of ministry carried out by WELS. Part of that oversight is the management of all financial activities of the synod, assuring fiscal soundness, preparing and updating support forecasts, and monitoring expenditures to maintain a balanced financial plan. In the years when the synod meets in convention, the Synodical Council is responsible for working with all areas of ministry to develop and propose a balanced biennial ministry financial plan (budget) that supports the work of WELS in keeping with its long-range ministry plan.

The Synodical Council receives regular reports from all areas of WELS mission and ministry and departments, including subsidiary organizations and their operational and investment policies, as it carries out its oversight responsibilities.

Standing committees

The Synodical Council is organized into three standing committees. The Finance Committee establishes the support forecast and recommends the overall level of spending for budgetary planning. The Finance Committee also monitors the financial performance and works closely with the WELS chief financial officer to oversee the risk management, banking, and general financial situation of WELS. The Administration Committee develops and implements general policies and procedures; provides oversight of WELS' subsidiary organizations; and oversees WELS Human Resources, Communication Services, and Technology. It also provides recommendations for WELS called worker compensation (with the input of the Compensation Review Committee). The Ministry Committee oversees and coordinates the plans and activities of all areas of ministry and works to monitor and evaluate how the various areas of ministry are carrying out their tasks in keeping with WELS' long-range ministry plan.

The Finance Committee establishes the recommended spending levels based on the support forecast, while the Ministry Committee then determines what portion of available resources is allocated to each area of ministry. This arrangement for developing the ministry financial plan, in place since 2011, has proven to be very beneficial as the areas of ministry work together cooperatively rather than competitively to allocate the levels of financial support.

The Compensation Review Committee is a standing subcommittee that reports to the Administration Committee. The Compensation Review Committee reviews and recommends adjustments to the WELS compensation guidelines for called workers, subject to the approval of the Synodical Council.

Departing and new Synodical Council members

The following members of the Synodical Council have completed their service:

- Mr. Kenneth Gosch, Dakota-Montana District
- Mr. Steven Hansen, Arizona-California District
- Pastor Joel Heckendorf, pastor-at-large
- Mr. Thomas Schermerhorn, Northern Wisconsin District
- Mr. Lee Hitter, director of WELS Communication Services, advisory
- Pastor Paul Prange, administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education, advisory
- Mr. Sean Young, senior director of WELS Missions Operations, advisory

The following will complete their service on the Synodical Council at the end of this convention:

- Pastor James Huebner, WELS first vice president
- Pastor Joel Jenswold, pastor-at-large

We thank them all for their faithful service!

The SC welcomed five new members and two new advisory members in 2024:

- Mr. Noel Ledermann, Arizona-California District
- Pastor John Bortulin, pastor-at-large
- Pastor Matthew Brown, chairman of WELS Board for Home Missions
- Pastor Mark Gabb, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions, advisory
- Mr. Seth Hansen, Dakota-Montana District
- Mr. Timothy Lehman, Northern Wisconsin District
- Mr. Daniel Nommensen, director of WELS Communication Services, advisory

We pray for God's blessings on their service.

Long-range strategic plan

The Synodical Council appointed a committee to develop a new long-range strategic plan for the next ten years. Entitled "Christ through us," it will be presented to the 2025 convention for adoption. Pastor Jonathan Hein chaired the planning committee; its members included Mr. Dan Nommensen (who replaced Mr. Lee Hitter after his retirement), Pastor Paul Prange, Pastor Mark Gabb, Teacher Jim Rademan, Pastor Larry Schlomer, Pastor James Huebner, and Mr. Sean Young. See p. 60 for details on the plan.

Financial results

The Synodical Council monitors the financial results for the synod and all its subsidiaries. Broadly speaking, the financial results in terms of financial support from congregations and individuals continue to remain extremely positive. Expenses have continued to be diligently managed, including some underspending within several ministry and ministry support areas. Areas of ministry and ministerial schools continue to report strong levels of reserves, and the balance of the Financial Stabilization Fund remains strong.

The details of the financial results for the previous biennium covering fiscal years 2023–24 and 2024–25 can be found in the Financial Results and Ministry Financial Plan report beginning on p. 88.

Our thanks to God for his gracious providence and for the faithful way, motivated by the gospel, in which congregations and their members continue their faithful support for the mission and ministry of our synod.

Annual audit

The independent auditing firm of Baker Tilly US LLP (Baker Tilly) conducted annual audits of the consolidated financial statements of WELS, its ministerial education schools, and its support service subsidiaries for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024. Baker Tilly issued an unmodified opinion (the best possible) on the financial statements and did not identify any material weaknesses in internal controls. The Accounting Oversight Committee reviewed the financial statements and the auditor report and recommended approval. The Synodical Council approved these at its November 2024 meeting.

Ministry financial plan for the next biennium

The Synodical Council has the responsibility of crafting and recommending to the synod convention a ministry financial plan (budget) for the coming biennium. The development of the ministry financial plan being recommended by the Synodical Council to this convention began more than a year ago. A support forecast estimated the amount of financial resources that are conservatively expected to be available to support the various WELS ministries. This forecast takes into consideration the funds available from all sources, including, but not limited to, congregation mission offerings (CMO), gifts, grants, bequests, investment income, tuition and student fees, special funds/reserves, and the Financial Stabilization Fund. Based on that forecast and in keeping with the SC policy to maintain the Financial Stabilization Fund within an acceptable range, the Synodical Council recommended the overall spending levels, as well as the planning assumptions that will be followed (compensation, cost of insurance, retirement benefits, etc.). The support forecast is adjusted periodically, if necessary, to reflect changing financial circumstances.

Each area of ministry and synodical department submitted its proposed ministry plans and requested operational support, along with planned use of special funds, to the synod president. The president, taking into consideration the established priorities of WELS outlined in the long-range plan and in keeping with the spending levels adopted by the Synodical Council, and with input from areas of ministry and departments and subsidiaries, crafted a draft comprehensive ministry financial plan. This draft was reviewed by the President's Advisory Council, in which representatives from all synodical areas of ministry and departments discussed the plan proposal and made suggestions for modifications. The president, with the unanimous support from the President's Advisory Council, then recommended the plan to the Synodical Council. The Finance Committee of the Synodical Council reviewed the plan and recommended the approval of the level of funding that would be provided in the ministry financial plan. The Ministry Committee of the Synodical Council reviewed the plan and recommended the allocation amounts for all areas of ministry and departments. In April 2025, the Synodical Council adopted the plan and is now forwarding it to the synod convention for discussion and approval. The plan can be found on p. 93.

This planning process has been followed for more than a decade and has served the synod well. All areas of ministry have demonstrated a great deal of brotherly cooperation and a willingness to consider the overall needs of WELS.

Strategic capital planning for ministerial education schools

Over the past few years, the synod has worked to refine the planning process for capital projects at its ministerial education schools while maintaining a responsible approach to funding. This approach provides each ministerial education school with greater flexibility in managing small to mid-sized capital projects within their ministry financial plans while establishing a structured process and benchmarks for major capital projects.

In April 2023, the Synodical Council established the Synod Capital Projects Fund (balance of \$5 million as of Dec. 31, 2024) to support major capital project development for the ministerial education schools. A portion of the fund is dedicated to early-stage site design and planning costs, while the remainder is preserved for future debt service through strategic use of bridge financing to accelerate project initiation. Rather than waiting to raise the full cost of a project up front, each major project will follow a structured generosity campaign in two phases. The quiet phase, conducted alongside the project's design development through preconstruction, focuses on securing commitments and gifts from major donors. Once a significant portion of necessary funds is raised, committed, or designated, construction begins through bridge financing, with a public generosity campaign focused on broadening donor engagement to facilitate rapid debt repayment.

To strengthen the long-term campus planning, the synod engaged Credo, a consulting firm specializing in strategic and master site planning for higher education institutions. Through Credo, the synod is developing a cohesive master site plan for the entire ministerial education system, ensuring that each campus' facilities align with their strategic objectives. This collaborative approach ensures a long-term vision for each campus, extending beyond the next biennium.

Initial steps have already been taken on advancing potential major capital projects at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Luther Preparatory School, including engaging firms for schematic design drawings. The synod remains committed to responsible financial stewardship and strategic campus development to support the mission of ministerial education.

Reports

The Synodical Council has reviewed the reports of all WELS subsidiaries and other entities that are under the supervision of the Synodical Council. Those entities that submit reports are WELS Investment Funds, WELS Foundation, WELS Church Extension Fund, Northwestern Publishing House, Communication Services, Human Resources, Technology, WELS Benefit Plans, and WELS Archives. Reports from all these entities are included here in the Book of Reports and Memorials. The Synodical Council also reviewed reports from the areas of ministry, Congregational Services, and WELS Christian Aid and Relief.

Martin Luther College strategic and financial sustainability initiative

In spring 2024, WELS engaged a consultant from the Association of Governing Boards of Universities

and Colleges (AGB) to help Martin Luther College (MLC) address structural deficits and improve financial health. Driven by declining enrollment and increasing college closures nationwide, this synod-funded initiative involved a financial review; SWOT analysis; and feedback from students, faculty, staff, and the MLC Governing Board, along with a review of MLC's strategic priorities. The deliverable was an action plan of objectives and priorities aligned with MLC's existing strategic plan, focusing on 1) improving fiscal sustainability and operations efficiency, 2) expanding educational opportunities and accessibility, and 3) enhancing brand identity and outreach efforts. The Synodical Council reviewed MLC's implementation plan and encouraged swift action on these objectives and priorities.

Compensation Review Committee

The World Missions Foreign Service pay schedule provides modest compensation in addition to missionaries' regular pay to recognize the challenges of serving in a foreign setting far from home. Since the schedule had not been reviewed or updated for many years, the Compensation Review Committee conducted an evaluation and recommended increases in foreign service pay, which were ultimately approved by the Synodical Council.

The Compensation Review Committee conducted a survey of congregations to assess congregations' understanding of the WELS Called Worker Compensation Guidelines (commonly referred to as "synod code"). These guidelines provide recommended compensation levels for synodical workers and serve as a reference for self-supporting congregations when determining compensation for their called workers. The survey revealed that many congregations do not fully understand these guidelines or their various components. In response, the Synodical Council encouraged the Conference of Presidents to enhance congregations' awareness and understanding, including working with circuit pastors to verify the compensation provided to called workers. Once this information is gathered, the Conference of Presidents will be in a better position to encourage congregations to provide compensation that meets or exceeds synod code recommendations.

One significant challenge in recent years has been the impact of inflation on called worker wages. While adjustments have been made to the salary matrix to help offset these effects, both the synod and individual calling bodies recognize the importance of ensuring fair compensation. There is a strong desire at all levels to provide appropriate financial support for called workers.

The WELS Called Worker Compensation Guidelines take multiple factors into account, including ministerial position, years of experience, additional ministry responsibilities, and education. These guidelines provide fair and reasonable salary recommendations to assist calling bodies in determining appropriate compensation. However, they are not mandates. Each self-supporting calling body has the flexibility and latitude to go above these base guidelines to address individual circumstances, localized cost-of-living considerations, and other relevant factors that ensure called workers are adequately and fairly supported. The calling body is tasked with giving careful and thoughtful consideration to providing a salary that demonstrates honor to the Lord's servant and appreciation for the labors carried out in Christ.

Beyond the base salary, a called worker's total compensation package includes various additional components, such as:

- Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA)
- Cash housing allowance or parsonage/teacherage
- SECA (Self-Employed Contributions Act) contributions
- Employer contributions for retirement savings
- VEBA health insurance premiums, which should be fully covered by the calling body
- Tax benefits through the minister of the gospel status (parsonage allowance), which provide significant after-tax financial advantages

These components distinguish called worker compensation from typical secular employment and substantially improve after-tax income. Ensuring proper financial support for called workers is a shared responsibility between the synod and each self-supporting calling body. While the synod provides guidance, each self-supporting calling body is responsible for carefully considering all relevant factors to determine fair and adequate compensation for its called workers.

Property sale authorizations

The Mission for the Visually Impaired, a ministry of WELS Commission on Special Ministries, had an office condominium in St. Paul, Minn. The condominium was purchased in 2005 with funds provided by both the Mission for the Visually Impaired and WELS Prison Ministry. The condominium was being underutilized, and Special Ministries and Congregational Services leadership believed that selling the condominium and seeking other local space to rent would be the best way to manage resources. Mission for the Visually Impaired identified available space at a nearby congregation where it can carry out its work. In the interest of wise stewardship of resources, the Synodical Council authorized the sale of the condominium in November 2023. In April 2024, the condominium was sold for \$400,000. The net proceeds of the sale were placed into the special funds of Congregational Services to provide support for Mission for the Visually Impaired and other ministries overseen by Congregational Services.

World Missions operates in Malawi under the registered name of “Lutheran Mission,” governed by a Board of Trustees. Lutheran Mission owns a home in Lilongwe City, Malawi, which sits on leased government-owned land. World Missions has determined that it no longer needs the home and received authorization from the Synodical Council to sell the property, with the proceeds to be used in Malawi for mission work, offsetting standard monthly mission requisitions. Indications are that the market value could be slightly higher than \$200,000.

Rising Son Campus Ministry, a WELS campus ministry and a ministry of WELS Home Missions, operates a WELS-owned student center in Oshkosh, Wis. The Campus Ministry Committee, in consultation with Home Missions, evaluated options for cost-effective operation of the ministry and concluded that the expenses outweighed the opportunity. Home Missions received authorization from the Synodical Council to sell the property and use the proceeds for funding new mission starts. The property’s market value is estimated to be \$400,000 to \$500,000.

Martin Luther College owns a residential triplex in New Ulm, Minn., located about two miles from campus. Given declining usage in recent years, rising maintenance costs and demands, and strategic emphasis on other campus infrastructure improvements, Martin Luther College received authorization from the Synodical Council to sell the triplex and to use the proceeds to support other campus facility needs. The property’s market value is estimated to be approximately \$375,000.

Ministry financial plan modifications

The Synodical Council reviewed and approved the following requests for modification of the FY25 ministry financial plan:

- Congregation and District Ministry (Conference of Presidents)—1.0 FTE increase for the addition of the Southeastern Wisconsin District educational assistant (assisting the district president). No impact on synod budget as wages for the position were already built in.
- Martin Luther College—\$1.6 million increase in FY25 expenses, primarily related to donor-funded capital projects including the completion of phase two of the lower-level renovation of the Chapel of the Christ and restroom renovations in Centennial and Summit Halls. No additional synod support was required.
- Synod Capital Projects Fund—\$120,000 increase in FY25 expenses for the engagement of the firm Credo to complete comprehensive master site planning for all four ministerial education schools. No additional synod support was required.
- Home Missions—\$2.0 million increase in special fund expenses in FY25 for increased Mission Program Support Agreement requests, higher expenses for new mission starts, and expenses associated with district mission board funds not in the plan. No additional synod support was required.
- Communication Services—\$176,000 increase in FY25 synod support for one-time consulting costs related to a WELS branding update, increased costs from department staff realignment, and other ongoing increases in general operations.
- Luther Preparatory School—\$493,000 increase in FY25 expenses for costs related to the design development of a potential new music center and auditorium, replacement of the Campus Center air handler, increased student management software costs, Chromebooks, and a vehicle replacement. No additional synod support was required.

- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary—\$554,000 increase in FY25 expenses for costs related to the design development of a potential new education center, gathering hall, and classroom renovations; faculty home renovation; gym HVAC replacements; various exterior maintenance items; the first payment for capital campaign services; and a 0.5 FTE increase related to kitchen staff. These expenses are partially offset by anticipated savings in the vicar program. No additional synod support was required.
- Congregational Services—\$470,000 increase in FY25 expenses for the Worship Conference (originally built into FY24) and the Women’s Ministry Conference with costs fully covered by event registration fees. No additional synod support was required.

Capital Projects Planning and Approval Policy

The Synodical Council adopted a revision of the Capital Projects Planning and Approval policy, which governs capital planning and approval across WELS entities. The revised policy establishes a tiered framework for capital projects—Operational (under \$50,000), Strategic (\$50,000 to \$3 million), and Transformational (over \$3 million)—with defined approval pathways. It incorporates program maintenance planning, master site planning, and short-term bridge financing. The policy enhances local autonomy for smaller projects while reinforcing fiscal oversight and strategic alignment for major initiatives.

Ministerial education recruitment encouragers

A generous donor has offered to provide four years of funding for five people to serve as recruitment encouragers for ministerial education. The intent is for these encouragers to enhance our recruitment efforts for pastors, teachers, and staff ministers by identifying effective recruitment strategies and working with called workers and congregations to implement these strategies across the synod. The funding for this effort is included in the Board for Ministerial Education’s financial plan for the next biennium. Plans are to implement this project after a new administrator for the Board for Ministerial Education begins his work.

Appendices to this report

Following this report, Appendix #1 provides the WELS convention compliance listing as a means of reporting how the resolutions of the previous convention have been addressed (p. 59). Appendix #2 is the proposed “Christ through us” long-range strategic plan (p. 60).

A look ahead

Those who serve on the Synodical Council are deeply mindful of the trust that has been placed in them by the members of our synod. They recognize that they can carry out their responsibilities faithfully only with the help and guidance of our gracious God. The Synodical Council’s members look forward to continuing their service to the synod, to doing everything they can to communicate both blessings and challenges, and to making decisions that give glory to God and support the proclamation of his saving gospel.

Rev. Mark Schroeder, reporter

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president and chairman

Mr. Pete Aisbet, Southeastern Wisconsin District

Rev. John Bortulin, pastor-at-large

Rev. Matthew Brown, chairman of WELS Board for Home Missions

Mr. John Fowler, South Atlantic District

Mr. Seth Hansen, Dakota-Montana District

Rev. Philip Hirsch, Conference of Presidents

Rev. Joel Jenswold, pastor-at-large

Mr. Chris Kestner, Michigan District

Mr. Noel Ledermann, Arizona-California District

Mr. Tim Lehman, Northern Wisconsin District

Mr. Jake Lemke, Western Wisconsin District

Mr. Brent Masters, Pacific Northwest District

Mr. Brent Nemmers, South Central District

Dr. Ryan Olson, North Atlantic District

Teacher Thomas Plitzuweit, teacher-at-large

Rev. Duane Rodewald, chairman and acting administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education
Mr. Kurt Sames, Minnesota District
Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, chairman of WELS Board for World Missions
Rev. Charles Westra, Conference of Presidents
Mr. Chip Woods, Nebraska District
Rev. Joel Zank, Conference of Presidents

Advisory:

Mr. Kyle Egan, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer
Rev. Mark Gabb, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions
Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services
Rev. James Huebner, WELS first vice president
Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving
Mr. Dennis Maurer, director of WELS Human Resources
Mr. Dan Nommensen, director of WELS Communication Services
Teacher Jim Rademan, associate coordinator of WELS Congregational Services
Rev. Larry M. Schlomer, administrator of WELS Board for World Missions
Mr. Martin Spriggs, WELS chief technology officer
Rev. Joel Voss, WELS second vice president (serves as the secretary of the Synodical Council)

Appendix 1: 2023 WELS convention compliance listing

Resolution or report	Responsible group/individual	Resolution description	Status
2021 Res. 16-01	Northwestern Publishing House	Encourage NPH to pursue completion of the Theology Curriculum Project for K-12 schools	<i>Conference of Presidents appointed a committee and a project coordinator; work is progressing</i>
2023 Res. 01-03 and 01-04	Synod President	Appoint a task force to study the shortage of called workers and address challenges to recruitment for WELS ministerial education schools	<i>Task force appointed and completed its work. Its recommendations have been given to the Board for Ministerial Education for implementation.</i>
2023 Res. 02-02	Conference of Presidents	2025 synod convention to be held at Martin Luther College	<i>Planning complete</i>
2023 Res. 02-03	Conference of Presidents	COP to prepare a pastoral brief on “the importance of justice and analyzing critical theories in light of Scripture”	<i>Committee appointed and prepared a pastoral brief in keeping with its assignment. The brief was distributed.</i>
2023 Res. 03-01	Commission on Inter-Church Relations	Affirm fellowship with <i>Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional</i>	<i>Fellowship affirmed by the 2023 convention</i>
2023 Res. 03-02	Commission on Inter-Church Relations	Declare fellowship with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod—Uganda	<i>Fellowship declared by the 2023 convention</i>
2023 Res. 03-03	Commission on Inter-Church Relations	Informal discussions with Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod	<i>Informal discussions are continuing and will next take place in December 2025</i>
2023 Res. 07-01	Synodical Council	Ministry financial plan	<i>Plan approved and implemented</i>
2023 Res. 10-01	Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary	Encouragement to MLC and WLS to explore opportunities to enroll non-traditional students for ministry training	<i>Currently ongoing</i>
2023 Res. 18-01, 18-02, 18-03	Synod President	Revisions to the synod bylaws	<i>Completed</i>

Appendix 2: “Christ through us” WELS’ long-range strategic plan: 2025–2035 Floor Committee #9

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who 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. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

In these verses, St. Paul describes two precious gifts.

The first: *God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ.* Reconciliation. Redemption. Restoration. In Christ, God became man so that he might lay down his perfect life as the atoning sacrifice for sin.

The second: *We are . . . Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.* Recruitment. Responsibility. Representation. God gives all believers a new and lofty purpose—sharing that message of reconciliation with others as Christ’s ambassadors.

So, we celebrate two inseparable truths: *God through Christ* and *Christ through us*.

In gratitude for the gracious gift of Christ’s righteousness, the believers of WELS joyfully take up this “Christ through us” calling.

- We know that Christ desires that his message of reconciliation go into the whole world.
- We affirm that only that gospel of reconciliation can create and sustain faith.
- We trust that the Spirit will work through the means of grace he has entrusted to us.
- We entrust the spiritual outcomes of our work to Christ, the Lord of the Church.

With hearts full of thanksgiving, we carry out this ministry of reconciliation as individuals and as congregations united in a confessional Lutheran church body. Together, we proclaim the gospel, standing unwaveringly on the full truth of God’s Word as expressed by the Lutheran Confessions. We will labor diligently, yet humbly, knowing that our efforts are but instruments in the hands of the Spirit, who alone brings life. Thus, we press forward in this sacred task—steadfast in our doctrine, bold in our witness, and ever reliant on Christ to accomplish his good work through us.

OUR PURPOSE

As we plan our shared ministry efforts and marshal resources as good stewards of God’s blessings, we do so with this sense of purpose:

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to glorify God by proclaiming the truth of the 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.

OUR PRIORITIES

In 2025, the people of WELS lift their hearts in gratitude to God for the 175 years of grace he has lavished upon our church body. Since 1850, Christ has mightily worked through us, his ambassadors, to share the message of reconciliation with countless souls, drawing them to his cross. Across those seven generations, we see that mankind’s greatest affliction—sin—remains unchanged, as does its only remedy: the righteousness of Christ, freely bestowed through faith.

However, we also acknowledge that the world in which we carry out this sacred mission has transformed dramatically. In North America, the cultural landscape has shifted. Secularism and skepticism have surged.

Increasingly, Americans dismiss faith as being irrelevant and view the church with suspicion, associating it with judgmentalism or hypocrisy. The vast majority of Christian denominations in America are declining at a pace that strains their ability to sustain ministry. WELS, too, has felt the weight of these challenges.

Yet at the same time, across the world, the Lord is opening doors wide. In regions where Christianity was once unknown or unwelcome, the gospel is taking root and flourishing. Through Word and sacrament, the Holy Spirit is drawing new believers to Christ—often in the face of opposition or persecution—building his church in ways that defy human expectation. These global opportunities remind us that the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us is not bound by borders or eras, but is a living, Spirit-driven mission that transcends all perceived obstacles.

As WELS steps into its eighth generation, the “Christ through us” long-range strategic plan emerges as our prayerful response to these current realities. With humility before God’s grace and bold confidence in his promises, we seek to navigate this shifting landscape by supporting congregations in their effort to faithfully extend the reach of the gospel locally and abroad.

This issues-based strategic plan names four strategic priorities—sweeping areas that face our gravest challenges. Each priority offers a rationale for its urgency, followed by goals—tangible steps showing how, by God’s grace, we will meet these trials. Priorities frame the struggles; goals forge the path. (Note: The order of the priorities and goals reflects no ranking; each stands equal in our collective mission.)

These priorities and goals must guide our collective efforts through 2035. All our efforts, initiatives, and objectives will align with this thought—Christ through us.

With unwavering reliance on God’s Word, we pray that he would bless all our work, multiply all our efforts, and accomplish his will *through us* for the sake of souls yet to know his reconciling love.

PRIORITY: CULTURE

Cultivating a gospel-driven culture

Culture is a shared mindset—commonly held values, assumptions, and expectations—that shapes what an organization does. As we mark 175 years of God’s grace, we recognize that the cultural landscape around us has shifted dramatically, with secularism, skepticism, and apathy toward faith challenging the church’s voice. Yet these realities do not diminish the power of the gospel; rather, they compel us to cultivate a gospel-driven culture within our congregations—one where the message of reconciliation, rooted in Christ’s sinless sacrifice, becomes the heartbeat of all we are and do.

A strong, gospel-driven culture determines whether our congregations are outward-reaching or inward-focused, whether members see themselves as Christ’s ambassadors or merely as mission spectators, and whether the good news of salvation permeates our daily lives or fades into a Sunday-only thought. In this priority, we ask the Holy Spirit to work through Word and sacrament, transforming not just our actions but our very identity as a confessional Lutheran church body, so that we might be poised to meet the challenges and opportunities of this generation with boldness and humility.

Imagine a future where congregations assess not just what they are doing in ministry but also ask why, where leaders diligently diagnose unhealthy thought habits within the congregation—pride, complacency, or fear—and prayerfully plan how to nurture new ones rooted in Christ’s love. Imagine a future where leaders see their role as not only orchestrating ministry programs but also cultivating a vibrant, gospel-driven culture that empowers those plans to flourish—a culture where every member embraces their role in the ministry of reconciliation and where the gospel’s light shines brightly into a skeptical world.

Here is what we pray Christ might accomplish through us.

GOALS

1. Raise up culture-shaping leaders

A congregation’s culture flows first and foremost from the leader—Jesus Christ—who, through his gospel of reconciliation, renews our minds and hearts. Yet in his gracious design, Christ also works through human leaders—called workers and laity alike—to mold the culture of congregations. What leaders

emphasize, the priorities they champion, the way they lead—with humility, boldness, compassion, curiosity—profoundly shape the attitudes and habits of the members of their congregations.

Our goal is to help leaders see the weight of their influence—how their words and example can cultivate a gospel-driven culture where the mission is not merely a program but the natural, Spirit-sustained heartbeat of congregational life, flowing from a shared mindset that all believers are Christ’s ambassadors.

2. Foster a zealous gospel mindset

The challenges facing our congregations can sometimes lure us into a maintenance-mode mentality, prioritizing institutional preservation—maintaining familiar programs and routines—over the urgent call to bring the message of reconciliation to a world in desperate need of Christ’s righteousness. This mindset, while understandable in a time of uncertainty, risks adversely affecting our mission efforts as Christ’s ambassadors.

Our goal is to help congregations foster a zealous gospel mindset where the proclamation of Christ drives every decision and action. Rooted in the unchanging truth of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, we will encourage believers to explore fresh ways to reach souls, while holding fast to our doctrine and confidence in Christ’s means of grace. This passion transforms us into bold ambassadors, not content with mere survival but eager to carry the ministry of reconciliation to the lost, blending heartfelt zeal with thoughtful adaptability to ensure the gospel thrives amid the opportunities and trials of this generation.

3. Make outreach a personal effort

In a Western society increasingly drifting from the church, corporate outreach efforts—while still valuable—are becoming increasingly less effective in piercing the cultural haze. The message of reconciliation shines brightest when shared within the context of personal relationships—through believers speaking boldly and lovingly about their Savior in everyday conversations with family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Personal evangelism must become the vibrant heartbeat of WELS culture, where every believer embraces their role as a living witness to Christ’s love in daily life.

Our goal is to help congregations cultivate this culture by shifting the perception of outreach from a formal church program to an organic, Spirit-led part of daily discipleship. We will provide resources that help believers share their faith confidently and joyfully, trusting the Holy Spirit to multiply these efforts into a harvest of souls.

4. Encourage cross-bearing discipleship

The call to serve as Christ’s ambassadors is a high privilege, but it is not an easy path. Jesus himself warned that following him demands self-denial and cross bearing—sacrifices that challenge our natural inclination to seek comfort and security over the costly demands of the gospel. It is tempting to embrace a discipleship that avoids risk, staying within familiar routines rather than risking discomfort for the gospel. Yet the ministry of reconciliation requires believers who are willing to embrace the challenges and hardships inherent in this calling, reflecting the same love that led Christ to the cross.

Our goal is to help congregations shape a culture of cross-bearing discipleship, where members are moved beyond their comfort zones, not out of obligation but out of a Spirit-fueled passion for Christ’s mission. Through encouragement and examples rooted in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, we will help believers to demonstrate courageous love and to bear bold witness to the gospel, even when it invites opposition.

5. Build deep Christian community

The church, united as God’s family by Christ’s reconciling love, stands in a fragmented society where isolation and division fracture relationships, leaving many yearning for authentic community beyond fleeting connections. In this broken age, the world—especially young people—seeks more than shallow ties. People are looking for a community that helps one another: sharing burdens, constant encouragement. This is exactly what Christ intended his church to be!

Our goal is to help congregations knit members together into something more than friendly acquaintances—the deep Christian community Christ declares us to be: a family of faith. This authentic fellowship not only guards us against the loneliness tearing at our time but also offers a compelling

gospel witness, showing a fragmented world the unity and love found in Christ. Trusting the Holy Spirit to work through these bonds, we aim to draw those aching for belonging into the reconciling embrace of the Savior.

PRIORITY: CONGREGATIONS

Strengthening WELS' backbone

The congregations of WELS form the vital backbone that supports our shared gospel efforts. WELS congregations are beacons of light and truth in their communities, proclaiming the life-giving gospel to a dying world. However, these congregations are not only local gospel outposts but the foundation of the synod's broader ministry efforts. Through their offerings, they sustain worldwide missions and the planting of new churches. Through their nurture, they identify and encourage the future called workers who will serve the next generation. Through their witness, they embody the love of Christ who reconciled us to God.

Yet we face a sobering reality: the cultural tides of secularism and skepticism threaten to erode this backbone. Strengthening our existing congregations and establishing new ones is not just part of the commission Christ has given; it is strategically essential for the future ministry efforts of WELS.

Imagine a future where our churches pulse with vibrant discipleship, their members deeply engaged in reaching out to their communities with the gospel's hope and working hand-in-hand across the synod to strengthen and expand ministry efforts at home and abroad. Imagine congregations where members see themselves as active participants in Christ's mission—boldly sharing their faith as a natural way of life—rather than passive spectators on the sidelines. Imagine a network of churches, both longstanding and newly planted, radiating the unity and love of Christ, drawing the lost into fellowship and equipping the faithful to stand firm in a fragmented world.

Here is what we pray Christ might accomplish through us.

GOALS

6. Unleash the laity in mission

God grants spiritual gifts to all his people to build up his church. However, sometimes congregations function with the mindset that called workers are the ones who do all gospel ministry—evangelism, youth discipleship, etc.—with laity's responsibility being only to support that ministry with prayers and offerings. This mentality can inadvertently inhibit the universal priesthood, limiting that congregation's mission efforts.

Our goal is to help congregations better equip every member to embrace their God-given role in Christ's mission, unleashing the laity to view their neighbors as their personal mission field and their homes as the heart of youth discipleship. We want all God's people—men and women, young and old—to see that their ideas, insights, and talents are vital as their congregation plans zealous ministry efforts. We will provide training and resources to help congregations foster an environment where every believer joyfully and confidently serves Christ's mission according to their gifts and callings.

7. Support ministry enhancement efforts

Every WELS congregation faces a distinct blend of opportunities and challenges, shaped by shifting ministry contexts. Some will seek to enhance or revitalize their current mission efforts, particularly if their ministry context has changed. Others will explore regional collaboration, shared ministry, or consolidation to amplify their gospel reach. Still others will prayerfully consider the objectives of their childhood ministries, including Lutheran schools: discipleship, outreach, or both. They will seek to ensure such childhood ministries are sustainable long term.

Our goal is to offer support to WELS congregations in whatever ministry enhancement effort they choose to undertake for Christ's glory. When asked, we will help them assess their strategies, providing the encouragement, advice, and resources that can help them plan and implement efforts that enhance their outreach and discipleship ministries.

8. Expand WELS' reach through strategic church planting

Driven by Christ's reconciling love, we are called to bring the gospel to every corner. Yet America's shifting

landscape—marked by growing diversity and population drift—leaves millions beyond the reach of WELS’ gospel witness, with only two percent living near our congregations. This gap cries out for action, as souls hunger for the hope of reconciliation in regions where confessional Lutheran ministry is rare. Planting new churches not only meets this need but fortifies our synod’s backbone for enduring mission impact.

Our goal is to broaden WELS’ reach by planting congregations strategically in underserved areas, pinpointing locations where a faithful Lutheran presence is scarce and equipping them with resources and support grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. We will nurture these new missions to stand as beacons of Christ’s love and truth.

9. Elevate the home as the first mission field

The exodus of young members from WELS underscores a critical need: the home must be reclaimed as the first mission field. In a society—and even within our church—where marriage and childbirth are in decline, we face a diminishing appreciation for family as God’s blessed design. Strengthening homes is essential to sustain our congregational backbone and ensure the gospel thrives among future generations.

Our goal is to lift up the home within WELS as the first mission field, equipping parents to embrace their role as spiritual leaders in passing down the faith, with congregations standing to support—not supplant—these family efforts. Future discipleship efforts and resources, especially ones aimed at our younger brothers and sisters, will affirm marriage and childbearing as divine blessings. Trusting the Holy Spirit, we aim to fortify our homes as gospel strongholds.

10. Provide sound Lutheran resources

The most impactful ministry moments tend to happen in face-to-face encounters—personal conversations, shepherding, and witnessing—where Christ’s reconciling love touches hearts one soul at a time. At a time when biblical literacy wanes and cultural resistance to Christianity is high, congregations must prioritize these moments. Yet called workers and lay leaders, burdened by administrative tasks and content creation, often lose time for the relational gospel work that bolsters our congregational backbone in a faith-starved world. Seeking help and efficiency, they may find that many of the resources readily available fall short of what a confessional Lutheran congregation would desire.

Our goal is to empower WELS congregations with sound Lutheran resources—for discipleship, worship, outreach, planning, leadership—that reflect confessional Lutheran theology, not generic Christian content, saving time and amplifying impact. God willing, these tools will free congregational leaders for frontline, face-to-face ministry.

PRIORITY: COMMISSION

Bringing Christ to the nations

God has entrusted us, as his ambassadors, with the message of reconciliation, commissioning us to proclaim the gospel to every nation, tribe, people, and language—a charge that echoes with urgency in our time. While Christianity wanes in much of the Western world, its light blazes anew in regions where the gospel is still a fresh whisper, revealing the Spirit’s boundless power to gather souls. Yet over 6.5 billion people—more than two-thirds of humanity—dwell in places where Christ’s name is barely known, their hearts unreached by the hope we bear.

In 2025, as WELS reflects on 175 years of grace, we stand at a crossroads: The decline of faith in North America contrasts with unprecedented global opportunities, calling us to extend our confessional Lutheran witness beyond familiar borders. This commission is not a mere task but a sacred privilege, strengthening our synod’s resolve to bring the nations to the foot of the cross.

Imagine a future where, through us, the unchanging truth of God’s Word resounds across continents, uniting over a million souls in faith and sparking a global movement anchored in our confessional Lutheran heritage. Picture not just WELS dispatching missionaries worldwide, but new Lutheran church bodies—birthed by our mission efforts—rising as partners in this divine calling. Envision a day when these vibrant churches, from distant hemispheres, send well-trained missionaries to a spiritually dimming North America, rekindling the message of reconciliation with confessional clarity. Imagine a symphony of nations, bound by the gospel, proclaiming Christ together in joyful unity.

Here is what we pray Christ might accomplish through us.

GOALS

11. Forge a borderless support network

Envision a wave of generosity and support—resources, prayers, people—flowing freely across national borders, a vision born of our call to share Christ’s reconciling love with all. The Great Commission is too big for one church body alone. WELS has long leaned almost exclusively on stateside funding and missionaries—a faithful and blessed beginning to our world mission efforts but now poised to grow. By fostering strong international partnerships, we will expand this holy work, bringing the Spirit’s life-giving power to a dying world.

Our goal is to forge a global support network, transcending national boundaries. We will nurture robust mission collaboration with confessional Lutheran church bodies in full doctrinal fellowship with WELS, equipping pastors and congregations worldwide to thrive as Christ’s ambassadors.

12. Equip a global missionary force

Mature church bodies, entrusted with Christ’s reconciling love, do not merely receive missionaries—they send them as ambassadors to the nations. Historically, WELS has dispatched stateside workers to plant the gospel, but a world ripe with harvest calls for more. Training indigenous leaders—pastors and evangelists from sister churches globally—unlocks a boundless force to proclaim reconciliation where expatriates alone cannot reach. This shift from dependence to partnership magnifies the Spirit’s work, gathering the elect across borders. It also strengthens our stateside mission, as these global voices will enrich our cross-cultural outreach with fresh zeal and wisdom. Picture a future where thriving Lutheran churches in distant lands send missionaries to a spiritually dim North America, echoing the gospel back to us.

Our goal is to equip a global missionary force through WELS, training indigenous leaders from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and beyond to carry the gospel into new regions. We will guide expatriate missionaries to focus on empowering these leaders with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, fostering a borderless network that sends workers to their own lands and new frontiers.

13. Establish confessional Lutheran seminaries

A strong church depends on well-trained shepherds who proclaim Christ’s reconciling love. Training called workers has long been a historic strength of WELS, equipping faithful pastors to serve with confessional clarity. As the gospel spreads globally, emerging Lutheran church bodies crave this same depth to sustain their witness. Planting seminaries in strategic regions builds on this foundation, ensuring the Spirit’s reconciling work thrives through our Lutheran heritage for years to come.

Our goal is to establish confessional Lutheran seminaries in key global locations through WELS, training pastors and leaders to shepherd with theological depth and Lutheran fidelity. These centers—grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions—will empower a worldwide movement to proclaim reconciliation faithfully in their own contexts.

14. Expand multi-language mission efforts

The rapid rise of mission churches worldwide offers rich opportunities to share Christ’s reconciling love, yet poses challenges in grounding believers in Lutheran doctrine amid diverse tongues. Many nations lack Lutheran resources in their native languages, risking theological drift where the gospel’s clarity could fade. Expanding multi-language efforts to deliver sound Lutheran materials strengthens these churches, ensuring the Spirit’s work of reconciliation takes deep root in every land for faithful witness and growth.

Our goal is to expand WELS’ multi-language mission efforts, translating, publishing, and distributing confessional Lutheran materials in print and digital forms to equip churches globally. We will invest in Lutheran media, digital outreach, and theological publications to bolster both evangelism and discipleship efforts. Trusting the Holy Spirit, we aim to empower believers worldwide with tools to grow in faith and proclaim the gospel boldly in their own languages.

15. Pioneer missions in high-risk and unreached areas

WELS has planted mission fields across many lands, yet vast swaths of humanity remain unreached—cut off from Christ’s reconciling love—especially where hostility or strict limits shroud the gospel’s light.

These high-risk regions, home to countless souls who may never hear of their Savior, beckon us as his ambassadors to step boldly into the breach. Tailored strategies for such places can pierce the darkness, extending the Spirit's reconciling work to the farthest edges of the earth.

Our goal is to pioneer WELS missions in high-risk and unreached areas, identifying and crafting strategies—discreet underground networks, business-as-mission efforts, or digital outreach—fitted to these tough contexts. We will train and support workers to bring the gospel where it's least known.

PRIORITY: CALLING

Producing workers for a growing harvest

Jesus declared the fields ripe for harvest yet lamented the scarcity of workers—a truth that echoes today as WELS, entrusted with the message of reconciliation, expands its gospel reach. Planting new churches, opening mission fields, and growing Lutheran schools amplify the call for pastors, teachers, and staff ministers to serve as Christ's ambassadors. Yet decades of declining birth rates and membership contraction press us to face a sobering reality: our capacity to produce called workers strains under these demands.

At WELS' 175th anniversary, we stand at a pivotal moment. Faithful stewardship of this mission requires us to act with wisdom and urgency. We must intensify efforts to recruit and train workers while aligning plans for ministry growth with projections of a sustainable workforce. This dual task is not merely practical but a sacred charge to equip God's people to proclaim his love to a world in need, now and for generations ahead.

Imagine a future where men and women eagerly heed the call to ministry, their hearts stirred to carry Christ's gospel to the nations and their communities. Picture diverse pathways into service—flexible, faithful training that welcomes more gifts into the harvest—where pastors, teachers, and staff ministers eagerly answer the calling to public ministry. Envision a WELS where planned expansions thrive, unhindered by persistent vacancies, as a steady stream of called workers, grounded in confessional Lutheran truth, sustains vibrant churches, schools, and missions with joy and purpose.

Here is what we pray Christ will accomplish through us.

GOALS

16. Expand pathways into gospel ministry

The Lord of the Church, having entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation, provides workers in diverse ways to gather his harvest. Ministerial education has been a tremendous strength of WELS. By God's grace, we have cultivated servants deeply versed in the theology and artistry of Lutheran ministry. Yet a rapidly shrinking candidate pool urges us to broaden access, ensuring every willing heart is equipped to meet the new challenges of 21st-century ministry. Thus, in recent years, WELS has provided new ways to enter ministry (e.g., enhanced competency-based ministry certification for teachers).

Our goal is to carefully expand pathways into gospel ministry, with all efforts overseen by Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. We will better leverage technology to accommodate remote learning, while simultaneously stressing the blessing of the bonds developed with future ministry colleagues through in-person learning. We pray these pathways will reach a broader and more diverse pool of candidates, ensuring that every willing and qualified individual is equipped to serve.

17. Innovate recruitment efforts for future called workers

The Lord entrusts the church with his ministry of reconciliation, then calls workers to lead in the mission, one ever urgent as new fields open. Though the percentage of WELS youth training for ministry holds steady, decades of membership decline yield fewer souls to heed this call. To sustain—let alone expand—our gospel reach, we must pursue bold, creative recruitment, stirring hearts both young and seasoned to answer Christ's calling, publicly proclaiming Christ's reconciliation in a world aching for hope.

Our goal is to innovate recruitment within WELS, seeking fresh ways to spark zeal in youth and second-career candidates for gospel ministry. Congregations will lead, cultivating spaces where all ages are urged to serve, armed with practical tools and guidance to identify and encourage future workers. We will tirelessly forge a steady stream of servants, trusting the Holy Spirit to multiply our efforts for an abundant harvest.

18. Ensure the long-term stability of ministerial education

For generations, WELS has been richly blessed by a robust ministerial education system, equipping faithful workers to proclaim the gospel with steadfast clarity. The sacred task of training called workers to share Christ's reconciling love rests on our ministerial education schools. These schools must remain steadfast, adaptable, and financially sound to equip servants amid shrinking numbers and shifting needs. Without a stable foundation, we risk faltering in our mission to raise up workers who proclaim reconciliation for generations in a world yearning for hope.

Our goal is to ensure the long-term stability of WELS' ministerial education system, sustaining our schools to train new workers for generations to come. We will pursue a strategy, including a comprehensive facilities plan, that keeps these schools financially secure and right-sized for the workers we can realistically expect to prepare, ensuring a steady supply of servants to share Christ's love.

19. Establish a sustainable strategy for called worker development

Expanding gospel ministry flows from our longing to share Christ's reconciling love, yet uncoordinated growth strains us when called workers fall far short of mounting needs. WELS must weigh the desire to expand ministry efforts against our capacity to raise up called workers, a stewardship vital for a sustainable future. Without a steady plan, we risk leaving missions understaffed or overburdening our servants. Since Christ works through us, both those risks potentially dim the gospel's reach.

Our goal is to help WELS leaders—in the synod, congregations, and schools—consider their options for sustainable staffing models. We will share strategies—pacing growth, pooling resources—to help align called worker demand with supply. Trusting the Holy Spirit to bless these efforts, we will ensure that the growing number of ministry opportunities is matched by a workforce that is prepared, supported, and able to serve effectively for years to come.

20. Support the well-being of called workers

The Lord sends workers to a harvest that demands steadfast endurance. WELS called workers pour out their lives to proclaim this gospel, yet ministry's potentially heavy yoke—intensified by rising demands and fewer hands—can sow weariness and lead to loss. With workers scarce, retaining these faithful servants is as crucial as recruiting them, their strength a lifeline for the mission. Upholding their well-being keeps Christ's light ablaze in a world shrouded by sin's darkness.

Our goal is to bolster the well-being of WELS called workers, equipping them with resources for spiritual renewal, emotional fortitude, and physical vigor. We will empower congregations with practical tools—assessment and care strategies—to gauge and meet workers' needs, fostering resilience and joy in service.

OUR PROCESS

To bring the "Christ through us" long-range strategic plan to life, we entrust its execution to key groups within WELS, uniting their efforts to proclaim the message of reconciliation through 2035.

- The synod president, in counsel with the President's Advisory Council (PAC), will craft a biennial ministry plan for the Synodical Council and the Synod in Convention, weaving continuity in our gospel mission with bold responses to emerging opportunities and challenges.
- WELS ministry groups will align all objectives and efforts with the goals of this plan, detailing their work annually in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* and *Report to the Twelve Districts*, ensuring our work focuses on our priorities.
- The Conference of Presidents (COP) will coordinate the work of circuit pastors, WELS Communication Services, and the Ministry of Christian Giving (MCG) to encourage both Congregation Mission Offerings and special gifts from individuals and groups for the general work of WELS, as well as for special efforts that fall under the "Christ through us" goals.
- The Synodical Council (SC) will steward Congregation Mission Offerings, prior gifts in the Financial Stabilization Fund, and new contributions, allocating them wisely in each biennial plan while monitoring progress to keep our mission thriving.

These groups will unite in purpose, steadfast in God's Word, assessing progress regularly to refine our course and faithfully serve Christ's harvest with unwavering resolve.

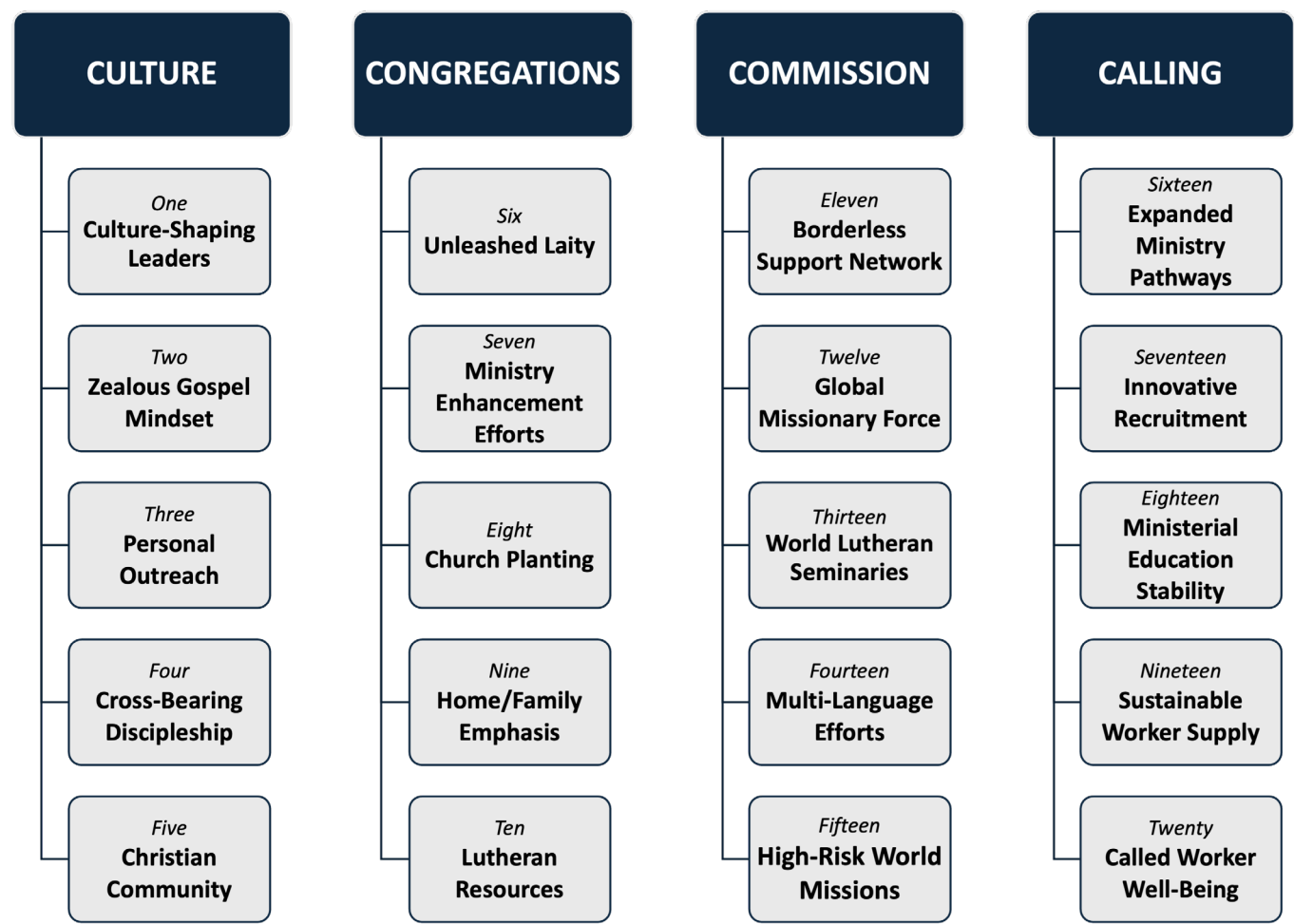
OUR PRAYER

Under the banner “Christ through us,” we rejoice in all that Christ has wrought across seven generations, taking our synod from just three humble congregations in the greater Milwaukee area to what is now a worldwide church body, boldly proclaiming Christ’s reconciling love in every hemisphere. We thank our gracious God that he, in his boundless mercy, chose us—flawed, frail, and sinful though we are—to bear this gospel to countless souls. Looking back, we lift our praise for every blessing, every soul drawn to faith through his mighty Spirit. We thank Christ for choosing to do this through us.

The “Christ through us” long-range strategic plan now turns our gaze forward, to a horizon brimming with both challenge and promise. This vision summons every heart in WELS to embrace the role Christ gives to each, understanding we all have a role to play in this collective effort. We commit our plans to the Lord, trusting in the power of his Word. Our prayer is that, with the faith and strength that Christ himself provides, as each of us labors with the message of reconciliation, then by 2035:

- We will not merely plant a few new home mission congregations but see every WELS church operating with the evangelistic zeal of a mission church.
- We will not limit thoughts of new mission fields to distant continents but see them in every neighbor across the street, every soul near our doors yearning for hope.
- We will not settle for a few hundred new called workers but awaken hundreds of thousands of Lutherans to live as the ambassadors Christ has made us to be.

The work of the church is *Christ’s* alone, yet he deigns to work *through us*. As WELS steps into its eighth generation, may his Spirit, through the Word, empower us for his purpose, multiply our humble efforts, and gather a harvest of souls into his eternal embrace.



WELS Long-Range Planning Task Force
Rev. Mark Gabb, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions
Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services
Rev. James Huebner, WELS first vice president
Mr. Kurt Nitz, member of WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling
Mr. Dan Nommensen, director of WELS Communication Services
Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education
Rev. Larry M. Schlomer, administrator of WELS Board for World Missions
Mr. Martin Spriggs, WELS chief technology officer

“Christ through us”: Addendum A

Strategic plan components

Priorities and goals

The “Christ through us” strategic plan contains four priorities—broad ministry directions we have identified as crucial in the coming years. Priorities answer the question, “What must we focus on right now?” These are few in number and long-term in focus, providing clarity and alignment across the synod.

Each priority has corresponding goals—key long-term outcomes we pray the Lord of the Church allows us to achieve. Goals answer the question, “What are we aiming to accomplish?” Goals bridge the high-level direction (priorities) and the day-to-day action (objectives).

Objectives

Objectives are the specific actions, efforts, or programs we carry out to accomplish each goal. Objectives answer the question, “How are we going to get there?” Priorities and goals are broad and long-term. Objectives are SMART:

Specific: answering “who, what, when”

Measurable: there are criteria for tracking progress

Achievable: 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

Areas of ministry will pull their biannual objectives into a framework that includes:

Objective: a concise description of the action, effort, or program

Goal: the goal(s) of the “Christ through us” strategic plan that objective supports

Who: the entity(s) that is responsible for the objective

When: the due date for the objective (some are ongoing)

Funding: A) operational funds, B) divisional funds, C) additional funding needed

KPIs/Conditions: how progress of the objective is measured or assessed

Management

The priorities and goals remain fixed, providing focus as we begin the eighth generation of WELS ministry and attempt to navigate the challenges before us. The objectives are expanded over time, as opportunities or challenges present themselves, yet always align with the goals of “Christ through us.”

An ongoing list of objectives for all areas of ministry, including the components of that framework, will be reported in future issues of *Report to the Twelve Districts* and *Book of Reports and Memorials*. That list will also allow the Synodical Council to look at funded and unfunded efforts in its efforts to steward Congregation Mission Offerings and other funding sources.

In all these efforts, we place our confidence not in our planning, but in Christ, who works through us.

“Christ through us”: Addendum B

The importance of culture

Every organization has a culture—commonly held values, assumptions, and expectations—that shapes what that organization does. Congregations are no different. You can picture congregational health as a pyramid. The foundation is Word and sacrament. St. Paul says, “You are . . . fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19,20). Without that foundation, the church does not exist.

The top of the pyramid is our strategies and tactics—the ways we use Word and sacrament in our mission to disciple believers and evangelize the lost.

In between is congregational culture—the thought habits of the members. If a congregation is going to choose sound strategies and execute them well, members must have the right thoughts, attitudes, and expectations comprising their culture. Healthy culture supports sound ministry efforts.

Every WELS congregation has aspects of healthy culture. For example, by God’s grace, WELS congregations have maintained a rock-solid trust in the efficacy of God’s Word.

Sola Scriptura. We know that God chooses to create and sustain faith through Scripture alone.

Thus, all our ministry strategies have the ultimate aim of leading people into the gospel. However, congregations often have unhealthy elements as part of their congregational culture. This inevitably acts to the detriment of those congregations’ gospel ministry. Shaping a healthy, gospel-driven culture is a major focus of the “Christ through us” plan.

The list below contains some examples of unhealthy cultural aspects that WELS congregations have observed when doing honest self-assessment. For each example there is an explanation of how we pray that Christ, through us, might shift culture: *FROM* the unhealthy mindset *TO* a mindset that is more supportive of our gospel efforts.

This list is shared to illustrate the importance of congregational culture. It may also serve as a diagnostic tool for individuals congregations. With more than a thousand congregations in WELS, there is a broad range in congregational culture. Just as each congregation is unique, the path taken from using this diagnostic will be unique. (Note: The *Shadow of the Leader* program, developed to support “Christ through us—Goal 1: Raise up culture-shaping leaders,” helps congregational leaders with this effort.)

FROM Institutional preservation as the *de facto* focus

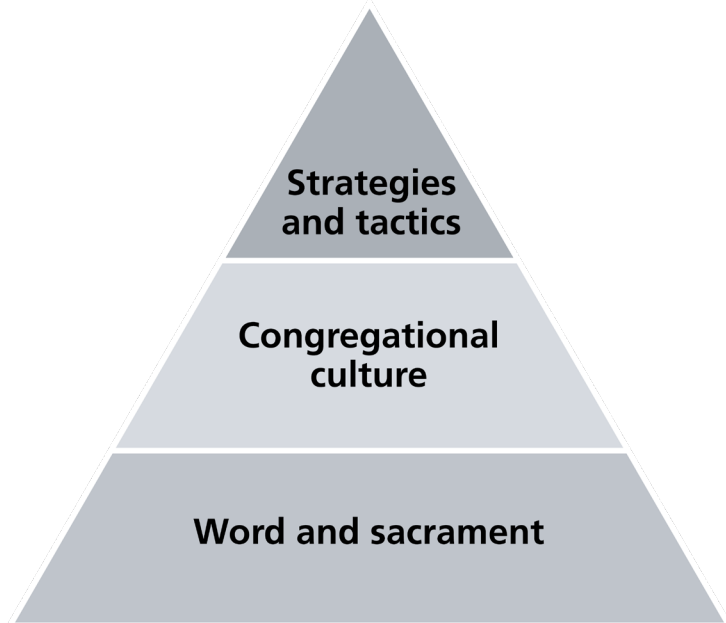
TO Zealous gospel proclamation as the explicit, overriding focus

Some WELS congregations operate with a maintenance-mode mentality. Zealous gospel proclamation means shifting from “How do we sustain our congregation?” to “How do we bring Christ to more souls with urgency and joy?”

FROM Outreach occurs primarily through congregational programs and committees

TO Outreach occurs primarily through members interacting with the unchurched

WELS congregations often rely on structured outreach programs, expecting those to draw people in. Yet many of the unchurched in our communities have a negative view of organized religion. However, they



are still willing to discuss spiritual matters with their Christian neighbor. This culture shift means members joyfully embrace their individual role as Christ's ambassador, sharing the message of reconciliation with which we have been entrusted.

FROM Ministry is accomplished through our called workers, with support of the members

TO Ministry is accomplished by our members as equipped by our called workers

Sometimes congregations default to a "pastor does the ministry" model. The expectation is for members to support and cheer on the church's efforts. For example, in many congregations, schools disciple kids with minimal parental input and corporate outreach is stressed over personal evangelism. This shift sees pastors not as the doers of all gospel ministry but as ones who equip members as they embrace their callings as Christ's ambassador: growing in faith and sharing it, spiritually leading their family, etc.

FROM Comfortable Christians

TO Cross-bearing Christians

Sometimes in our Christian lives we prefer to keep our faith low profile and safe, staying within familiar routines rather than risking discomfort for the gospel. The shift is to a culture of cross-bearing Christians, where service in Christ's kingdom pushes us beyond our comfort zones—embracing the challenges and sacrifices of sharing the message of reconciliation.

FROM *Status quo* mindset; reluctance to depart from tactics

TO Thoughtfully exploring new ideas with curiosity

Ministry tactics must be examined to see if they are serving the gospel well. Some congregations resist change even when better ministry models could strengthen the church and reach more people. The shift would mean maintaining fidelity to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions while embracing curiosity about methodology.

FROM Resigned to decline

TO Committed to renewed efforts

Membership drops and aging demographics can foster a fatalistic slump: "There's nothing we can do." The shift is to a culture of hope—that through his means of grace the Lord of the Church can spark ministry revitalization. We give Christ our most zealous mission efforts while always leaving the results of those efforts completely in his loving hands.

FROM Not fully utilizing women's insights or gifts

TO Women using their gifts in every biblically appropriate way

In some WELS congregations, at times, the ideas and insights of women are unheard and their gifts and skills not fully tapped. This can lead to sisters in Christ feeling discouraged, and it harms the congregation's efforts. The shift is to a culture where women are appropriately involved in congregational ministry, not altering or bypassing biblical principles but upholding them in a way that reflects the complementary design God established at creation.

Culture is a major focus of the "Christ through us" long-range strategic plan, serving as one of the priorities. You will note culture shifts embedded throughout the goals of that plan.

Accounting Oversight Committee

Floor Committee #7

Our calling

The Accounting Oversight Committee serves WELS and its ministerial education schools, subsidiaries, and affiliates that are under the oversight of the Synodical Council. The committee serves the Synodical Council by assisting management with ensuring appropriate accounting policies and internal controls are established and financial systems are efficient and effective; retaining external auditors; assisting in ensuring that financial personnel have the requisite skills; and assisting in ensuring that financial reports are prepared timely, accurately, and in compliance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America (U.S. GAAP).

The Accounting Oversight Committee keeps the Synodical Council informed of its action through the Synodical Council's appointed member of the committee. The synod's ministerial education schools and its subsidiary and affiliate boards, commissions, and committees are informed through WELS' chief financial officer and treasurer.

Our current situation

The Accounting Oversight Committee engaged the independent audit firm of Baker Tilly US, LLP (Baker Tilly), to conduct the annual audits of the consolidated financial statements of WELS, its ministerial education schools, and its support service subsidiaries for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024. All of the audits were completed within four months of the fiscal year end (consistent with historical precedent), with all entities receiving an unmodified opinion—the best you can get—on the financial statements' compliance with U.S. GAAP. In addition, the auditors did not identify any material weaknesses in internal controls. Copies of the annual financial statements are available on WELS Financial Services' site at wels365.sharepoint.com/sites/finance/Financial%20Reports/Forms/Financial%20Reports1.aspx.

WELS successfully implemented new accounting guidance changes issued by the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) related to the measurement of credit losses for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024. While this new standard generally did not have a material impact on the ministerial education schools' or support service subsidiaries' financials, it did significantly impact the process for estimating credit losses associated with the loan portfolio of WELS Church Extension Fund. WELS Financial Services worked with the third-party accounting firm Forvis to help develop a new model for estimating credit losses and successfully implemented the new methodology for WELS Church Extension Fund and WELS during fiscal year 2024.

In addition to the annual WELS financial statement audits, the Accounting Oversight Committee also engaged Baker Tilly to audit the WELS VEBA Group Health Plan and WELS Pension Plan for calendar year 2024. These financial statements received unmodified opinions for 2023, and the auditors did not identify any significant deficiencies or material weaknesses in internal controls. The 2024 calendar year audits for these two entities won't be available until summer 2025 and are expected to be similar to prior years' results.

The Accounting Oversight Committee approved a five-year renewal of our agreement with Baker Tilly, extending its role as our independent auditor through fiscal year 2029. This decision followed a thorough evaluation of market trends, alternative audit firm proposals, and fee negotiations to ensure a fair and sustainable agreement. The renewal reflects our commitment to financial transparency while maintaining a strong, long-term partnership with an audit firm that understands our organization's unique needs and provides a service team with the expertise to match them.

A look ahead

With no new accounting standards anticipated to be adopted in the near future and the recent renewal of audit services, the Accounting Oversight Committee will continue to focus on its core responsibilities.

This includes ensuring strong financial oversight, maintaining effective internal controls, and supporting the financial personnel across WELS and its affiliated entities. The committee remains committed to upholding best practices in financial management and transparency to support the mission of WELS.

Mr. William Schultz, reporter

Mr. William Schultz, chairman

Mr. Todd Backus

Mr. Jeffrey Fisher

Mr. David Maccoux

Mr. Daniel Riebe

Mr. Kevin Rusch

Mr. Seth Hansen, Synodical Council liaison

Advisory:

Mr. Kyle Egan, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

WELS Archives

Floor Committee #7

Our calling

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives is the official repository of the permanent records of WELS and its congregations, called workers, and WELS-affiliated ministries. These permanent records are those of significant historical value for the synod and its congregations, and they document all aspects of WELS administration, mission, and ministry. The mission of the archives is to preserve and protect these records and make them available for researchers as well as provide information services to the synod and its called workers and congregations.

Our current situation

2024 was a year of growth to the holdings of the archives. Many collections were donated including the Richard E. Poetter collection and the Richard E. Lauersdorf collection. Additions were made to the Arizona-California District collection and the Congregational Services collection. Smaller donations of bulletins and other pieces were also routinely added to the collection. In early 2025 Bethany Lutheran Church, Fort Myers, Fla., closed and sent its collection to the archives. A large donation from Luther Preparatory School relating to previous ministerial education high schools was also received in early spring 2025. Due to the growth in the archives this past year, a section of shelving was converted to high-density moveable shelving in April 2025 to help create more storage space. Plans are in place to convert the rest of the shelving in the coming years as needed.

With this large growth in collections, it has been a true blessing to have the help of the volunteers who graciously give their time to help the archives. Their dedication allowed organizational work to be completed on the Commission on Inter-Church Relations collection, the Richard E. Lauersdorf collection, the Divine Peace collection, and additions to the Nebraska District collection. Work continues on the pastor biographical files and the Martin Westerhaus collection. Itemization of the early presidential letters collection continues, as does work on other smaller collections. With the gracious assistance of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library, digitization of *The Gemeinde-Blatt* was completed. These digital issues reside on the Essay File found on the seminary's website at wls.edu/resources/essay-files.

Working with WELS Technology, a contract was signed with MirrorWeb, a website archiving company, in July 2024. This company captures all the WELS websites and preserves them for future research. Captures happen quarterly or yearly depending on the site.

2024 ended with just under 150 research requests, 22 in-person research appointments, and 13 tours that came through the archives and visitors center. Along with the tours, there were several other opportunities for outreach this past year. WELS Archives and WELS Historical Institute had a table at several conferences, including Mission and Ministry held at the seminary; the Southeastern Wisconsin District Convention in Milwaukee, Wis.; the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society Convention in Sioux Falls, S.D.; the Women's Ministry Conference in Pewaukee, Wis.; and the National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts in Kenosha, Wis. The archivist also gave a presentation on the archives to the OWLS at Peace, Hartford, Wis., and had a display table at the Northwestern College Alumni Dinner held at Luther Preparatory School in May 2024. In October 2024, the archivist attended the Biannual Meeting of the Lutheran Historical Conference held in Baltimore, Md. At this conference, several presentations were given on WELS history.

2024 also saw the completion of projects for the 175th anniversary of WELS. The pictorial history book was completed in the summer of 2024 with final edits completed in October 2024. At the time this report was written, the book was with the printer with an expected release date in early summer 2025. Initial work was also completed on the interactive timeline of synod history. This timeline went live in January 2025 and can be found on the 175th anniversary page on WELS Historical Institute's website at welshistoricalinstitute.org/175th.

A look ahead

The day-to-day work in the archives will continue in the same way this next year. Processing and cataloging work on the collections will continue with priorities shifting as new collections come in. Reconciling Koehler's index with the early presidential collection will continue in the online catalog, as will cataloging on other collections. Fulfillment of research requests will be a high priority for the archivist in the coming year as well. Another area of emphasis in the coming year is the continued development of historical resources available on WELS Historical Institute's website as part of the 175th anniversary.

A variety of outreach opportunities are available in the next year, including the WELS Education Conference in Green Bay, Wis., and the synod convention in New Ulm, Minn. The archivist will be a presenter at the WELS Church Librarians Conference held in October 2025 in New Berlin, Wis. The archivist will attend many of the 175th anniversary events, including having a display table at the 175th anniversary dinner being hosted by WELS Historical Institute at Salem Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, Wis., on May 28. During this special 175th anniversary year, the opportunity is presented for us to look back with thanksgiving at all the blessings God has graciously granted our synod.

Mrs. Susan Willems, reporter

WELS Christian Aid and Relief

Floor Committee #13

Our calling

WELS Christian Aid and Relief is one of our synod's ministries of compassion (sometimes also known as "mercy ministry"). Our goal is to reflect Christ's love and compassion to souls suffering as the result of disasters or other hardships by helping them with physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Christian Aid and Relief provides this help in the form of financial grants, food, clothing, medical supplies, and trained volunteer labor. Christian Aid and Relief also 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 help to build trusting relationships that lead to opportunities to share the good news of our Savior. In addition, WELS Christian Aid and Relief works with WELS congregations to assist members and prospects who are experiencing severe medical or financial crises.

The theme passage that guides the ministry of Christian Aid and Relief is Galatians 6:20: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Because of the great compassion God has shown to us in his Son, we are eager to reflect that compassion to those who are hurting. We strive to personalize our efforts by distributing funds through our churches and missions. We partner with them to encourage local relief efforts for their members and neighbors. We bring in trained volunteers to assist with relief efforts when appropriate.

Our current situation

WELS Christian Aid and Relief is not funded through the synodical budget. To carry out its vital ministry of compassion, Christian Aid and Relief relies on the special over-and-above gifts of God's people in WELS. With profound gratitude we thank you for your gifts of love that allow us to show mercy and love to those who are suffering.

The expenditures of WELS Christian Aid and Relief are divided into three main categories: disaster relief, humanitarian aid, and personal relief grants. From July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, \$331,625 were utilized for disaster relief, \$608,224 for humanitarian aid, and \$380,470 for personal financial grants. From July 1, 2024, to January 30, 2025, \$301,033 were utilized for disaster relief, \$247,554 for humanitarian aid, and \$181,930 for personal financial grants.

Disaster relief

God provided WELS Christian Aid and Relief with numerous opportunities to help those impacted by disaster during the past biennium. Here are some of the highlights:

- **International disasters**—We provided funding to help with the rebuilding of several churches in Malawi destroyed by Cyclone Freddy. We sent grants to assist victims of flooding in India, Kenya, Thailand, and Vietnam; religious persecution in Pakistan; war in Myanmar; and an earthquake in Nepal.
- **Hurricane Ian**—We deployed volunteers to southwest Florida to assist with repair and clean-up for five impacted congregations, members of those congregations, and people living in the neighborhoods surrounding the churches.
- **Tennessee tornadoes**—An assessment team visited following the tornadoes and determined that we did not need to deploy volunteers. We provided grants to assist some members of our churches whose homes were damaged.
- **San Carlos fire**—We worked with the Native American Mission team to provide trauma counseling, fuel cards, cleaning supplies, and tools for clean-up.
- **Hurricanes Helene and Milton**—We responded with assessment teams, a small deployment, and numerous grants for families in need. We also met with pastors and leaders in Florida and North Carolina to review the work that was done and discuss ways to improve our disaster relief efforts.
- **California wildfires**—We partnered with Hope, Los Angeles, to provide grants to assist people with basic needs in the immediate aftermath of the fires.

We continue to utilize our disaster relief website, **welsdisasterrelief.net**. This vital tool helps us manage disaster relief opportunities. This website employs powerful software that helps us to securely manage volunteer information, communicate with volunteers, and connect them to opportunities to serve those impacted by disaster. Each volunteer that registers is required to complete three qualifications to be eligible to serve on one of our disaster relief deployments. They must sign a general liability waiver, submit to a background check, and view a basic safety video. These qualifications help to ensure the safety and security of both our volunteers and those they serve in Jesus' name.

In October 2021 our Disaster Relief Task Force was formed for the purpose of researching and producing disaster relief training methods and materials to enhance disaster relief efforts across the synod. The group studied best practices for disaster relief and wrestled with how best to use these strategies in a WELS setting. The task force produced a Field Operations Manual for two main purposes: 1) To set the standard for the safe and effective management of a disaster relief deployment. 2) To serve as a guide for training leaders to help manage our disaster relief deployments. This group also produced several articles to inform and guide both congregations and volunteers on the topic of disaster relief and a suite of resources to assist congregations in preparing for disasters before they happen. These resources are available at **wels.net/relief**.

The first training session based on the Field Operations Manual was held at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry on Feb. 4 and 5, 2025. Six laypeople received training to serve as Incident Management Assistance Team leaders. This terminology comes from the National Incident Management System and is widely used by disaster relief organizations. These leaders were prepared through their training to help lead our disaster relief deployments as incident commanders, safety officers, administration/logistics section chiefs, and several other positions. They have been asked to help improve our systems and procedures for managing disaster relief deployments. We hope to increase the number of trained leaders and plan to repeat this type of training at least once per year.

With this training the work of the Disaster Relief Task Force is complete. Some members of this task force have agreed to continue serving on the Disaster Relief Advisory Council. This more informal group will continue to share advice and insight on best practices for disaster relief with the director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. We thank those who faithfully served on the task force: Mr. Jim Bublitz, Mr. Bryan Gran, Pastor Wayne Halldorson, Mr. Ron Kerr, Pastor Tom Spiegelberg, and Mrs. Elizabeth Zambo.

Humanitarian aid

WELS Christian Aid and Relief is privileged to partner with WELS Home and World Missions to provide basic needs to those who lack them through our humanitarian aid program. In fiscal year 23–24, \$702,390 in grants were approved to fund humanitarian aid requests. In fiscal year 24–25, the amount approved was \$490,154. These grants fund projects such as food distribution for the poor, free health clinics, lunch packs for breastfeeding mothers, sewing classes, winter fuel for refugees and orphans, smokeless stoves, backpacks and school supplies for underprivileged children, support for legal immigrants, food for the hungry, clean water for the thirsty, and many other examples. This work is happening all over the world in places like Malawi, Zambia, Nigeria, Indonesia, Albania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Mexico, Canada, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and right here in the United States. These projects offer our home and world missionaries a chance to connect with the people in our mission fields by showing them the love and compassion of Christ. This, in turn, leads to many opportunities to share the good news of salvation in Jesus' name.

To assist WELS congregations in carrying out compassion ministry in their local communities, WELS Christian Aid and Relief established the Community Care and Compassion Matching Grants program. This program provides annual matching grants of up to \$4,000 to self-supporting WELS congregations that are reaching out to their communities with the compassion of Christ by assisting those in need. This is an increase from the previous limit of \$2,500. Many congregations have received grants through this program for compassion ministry efforts such as food pantries, community gardens, pregnancy counseling, holiday meals, support for medical workers, support for the homeless, school supplies for underprivileged children, and many others. Congregations who are interested in receiving a grant should contact Pastor Daniel Sims, the director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, at daniel.sims@wels.net or 414-256-3204.

Personal relief grants

God provided many opportunities to do good through personal relief grants. When a person in one of our congregations, whether a member or a prospect, is going through a serious medical or financial crisis that is beyond the ability of the local congregation to handle, WELS Christian Aid and Relief comes in at the congregation's invitation to help with the need. In each of these cases, we consider ourselves the assistants of the congregation. We do not "take over" and so rob the congregation of the joy and responsibility to help its own who are in need. The process of getting assistance begins with the congregation's pastor, who reaches out to the director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief to request assistance.

Team members

We welcomed two new members to our commission this biennium: Pastor Paul Biedenbender of Christ, Denver, Colo., and Pastor Curt Backhaus of Risen Savior, Austin, Texas. The members of the commission serve in an advisory capacity to the director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. We also acknowledge with gratitude the service provided by outgoing commission members Pastor Richard Warnecke and Pastor Bruce Marggraf.

Recently we said farewell to a key member of our team. After 20 years of faithful service, Mrs. Beth Zambo left her role as administrative assistant for WELS Christian Aid and Relief to pursue other opportunities. She provided capable and compassionate service to hurting people. Her presence will be especially missed in disaster relief work, where her experience and empathy helped to bring hope to those on their darkest days. Thank you, Beth.

A look ahead

We are constantly working to improve and expand this ministry. In particular we are working to improve our disaster relief ministry. During the next biennium we plan to train several more disaster deployment leaders through our Incident Management Assistance Team training program. We plan to produce a disaster relief trailer manual to assist with the efficient management and deployment of our disaster relief trailers. We also intend to create a chainsaw training program to ensure that the sawyers on our disaster relief deployments are well trained so that they can work safely and efficiently.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief is always looking for ways to improve communication to WELS members. Videos and printed reports are regularly produced to educate people in WELS about our work. We are committed to sharing information with our supporters so they can see firsthand how their gifts are being used. Updates are shared frequently on our Facebook page. More information can be found at **wels.net/relief**. In addition, our webpage provides a convenient way to make an online donation toward Christian Aid and Relief projects. Commission members are available to make presentations to various church and school groups to "tell our stories." Contact us to learn more.

Rev. Daniel Sims, reporter

Rev. Thomas Spiegelberg II, chairman

Rev. Curt Backhaus, secretary

Rev. Paul Biedenbender

Mr. Dennis Palmberg

Teacher Steven Vasold

Advisory:

Rev. Daniel Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief

Support Services

Floor Committee #10

Support Services is the area that encompasses Technology, Financial Services, Human Resources, and Facility Services. These areas support the ministry of the synod and its four ministerial education schools.

Technology

Floor Committee #10

Our calling

The mission of WELS Technology is to support WELS ministries by providing reliable, secure, and accessible technology tools and resources. Reflecting our synod's theme, "Christ's Love, Our Calling," we aim to clearly advance the gospel through effective digital platforms (websites and online applications), data management systems (tools for securely storing and organizing information), software applications, and technical infrastructure (the hardware and networks supporting technology).

Web Services

Web Services manages websites and web applications, ensuring they are user friendly, secure, and accessible. Web Services provides platform updates, design improvements, training, and technical support.

Information Services

Information Services maintains hardware (such as laptops, printers, servers), software licensing, security systems, and network infrastructure (the physical and virtual components that enable network connectivity). Information Services crafts technology policies and procedures to protect data privacy.

Software Services

Software Services develops custom software solutions tailored specifically for synod ministries. These software solutions streamline administrative tasks, enhance communication capabilities, and support various ministry-specific operations.

Our current situation

Over the past biennium, significant developments occurred across all technology areas in response to ministry needs and 2023 convention resolutions.

Web Services

- Celebrated WELS' 175th anniversary with dedicated pages at the WELS Historical Institute website.
- Expanded free leadership resources available at welscongregationalservices.net through Congregational Counseling, Discipleship, Evangelism, and Worship as well as spiritual guidance for families facing LGBTQ+ challenges at madeknown.net.
- Improved online giving capabilities.
- Implemented GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation—a European Union regulation protecting personal data privacy) compliance measures.
- Enhanced PII (Personally Identifiable Information) policies to protect sensitive personal information.
- Introduced archival practices using specialized archival tools to preserve historical website content.

Information Services

- Upgraded firewall protection by replacing Sophos devices with Fortinet hardware devices (firewalls protect networks from unauthorized access).

- Implemented Microsoft Intune for efficient remote management of laptops and Mac devices (Intune is a cloud-based tool for managing computers remotely).
- Upgraded staff laptops to Microsoft Windows 11 operating system.
- Installed video conferencing devices in meeting rooms to enhance compatibility with Microsoft Teams and Zoom meetings.
- Transitioned from physical servers to virtual servers for greater efficiency and flexibility.
- Enhanced cybersecurity training programs for employees.

Software Services

- Completed the redevelopment of the WELSource database system—a centralized system managing ministry data.
- Launched a new call report application, streamlining call processes within congregations.
- Migrated analytics infrastructure to Microsoft Power BI—a business analytics tool—for improved reporting capabilities.
- Enhanced campus ministry registration systems with improved administrative features.

Artificial intelligence update

In February 2025, WELS Technology hosted the WELSTech AI Summit in Doral, Fla. This event focused on integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into Lutheran education and ministry. Key objectives included:

- Educating pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and administrators about AI technologies.
- Enhancing teaching through AI tools that personalize learning experiences.
- Addressing ethical considerations related to AI use within Lutheran contexts.
- Promoting AI literacy and the responsible use of AI.
- Developing policies addressing ethical use, data privacy, and responsible integration of AI in ministry contexts.

Participants discussed challenges such as maintaining ministerial integrity, protecting data privacy, transparency about whether content is human-produced or AI-generated, stewardship (wise use of resources), discernment (critical thinking aligned with Lutheran beliefs), transparency (clear communication about AI use), and preserving human connections amid technological advancements.

A look ahead

Web Services

- Improve unified communication by transitioning multiple newsletter tools into one streamlined platform using HubSpot—a marketing automation tool—to improve efficiency in communicating through more than 20 newsletters, reaching more than 20,000 subscribers.
- Address digital asset management by developing a global strategy for managing digital images/documents efficiently—reducing duplication/simplifying access.
- Partner with the Communication Services team to reimagine and redevelop web properties and develop a comprehensive project plan to improve audience engagement, analytics insights, and design as well as refresh the brand and simplify content structures targeted toward members, ministry leaders, and potential new followers. Infrastructure upgrades will support these enhancements on key websites including wels.net, welscongregationalservices.net, and forwardinchrist.net.

Information Services

Future plans include critical security/infrastructure improvements:

- Complete the transition to Azure Fortinet firewall—a cloud-based security solution adding additional protection layers.
- Conduct comprehensive third-party software reviews, ensuring cost-effectiveness/security compliance.
- Explore artificial intelligence implementation opportunities within area of ministry operations for improving productivity/efficiency.
- Continue emphasizing employee cybersecurity training programs.
- Secure third-party security audit firm to review infrastructure and practices at the Center for Mission and Ministry, synod schools, and Northwestern Publishing House.

Software Services

- Integrate the WELSource database system with new customer relationship management platform—Hubspot—to enhance electronic communication capabilities across WELS ministries.
- Upgrade backend infrastructure, ensuring reliability/security improvements across all software applications used by congregations, schools, and ministries.
- Develop congregational health reports that assist leaders in identifying ministry strengths/growth areas effectively through data insights.
- Enhance core functions within the WELSource database to provide better user experiences for pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and administrative staff, providing and accessing synod information online.

Note: A full list of current and past projects can be found at cloud.wels.net/techprojects.

Artificial intelligence initiatives

The following recommendations will be considered:

- Develop a multi-channel approach for AI education across the synod.
- Create a matrix of AI adoption strategies for different roles and levels of hesitancy.
- Address privacy and security issues related to AI usage in churches and schools.
- Explore the possibility of creating closed system AIs for secure data handling.
- Develop a list of AI experts for continuing education programs and conferences.
- Create a data use policy for AI application within corporate WELS.
- Explore the development of AI literacy programs for pastors, teachers, and staff ministers.
- Establish an AI Task Force.
- Develop a speaker bureau or mentor network.
- Launch a pilot AI literacy training program focused on practical applications.
- Share practical examples and use cases through existing channels.

Technology Advisory Committee

Our Technology Advisory Committee continues providing valuable insights from pastors/teachers/lay leaders across synodical ministries. Current members include Prof. Paul Waldschmidt, Pastor Clark Schultz, Teacher Michael Vlieger, Prof. Rachel Renno, Teacher Emily Platzer, and Ms. Grace Ungemach. Mr. Martin Spriggs (chief technology officer), Ms. Julie Duran (director of Web Services), Mr. Mark Karpinski (director of Information Services), and Mr. Dan Retzlaff (director of Software Services) serve as advisory members.

We remain committed to listening closely to feedback from pastors, teachers, lay leaders, and church administrators, ensuring our technology solutions align closely with their ministry needs. Through these efforts we aim always toward our shared calling: conveying Christ's love clearly through effective use of technology.

Mr. Martin Spriggs, reporter

Financial Services

Floor Committee #10

Our calling

Financial Services prepares and provides accounting and financial information and services that support and serve WELS ministries. This is done by providing timely, accurate, and complete financial statements, reports, and analyses. These reports facilitate ministry by providing God-pleasing, efficient, and effective financial services and operations that are in accordance with policies, procedures, and regulations. Financial Services also designs, implements, and maintains internal control systems that safeguard the assets God has provided.

Financial Services is led by the WELS chief financial officer (CFO) and generally provides the following services to WELS, WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF), WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds (WIF), WELS Historical Institute, WELS Retirement Program Commission, and WELS Voluntary Employee Benefits Association (VEBA) Commission:

- financial planning and forecasting;
- accounting and auditing services, including financial statement preparation;
- transaction processing, including gifts, accounts payable, and accounts receivable;
- special funds accounting;
- financial analysis and reporting;
- payroll processing;
- insurance and risk management;
- short-term investments, banking, and cash management;
- trust and other gift administration;
- coordination of corporate-wide programs including the credit card, foreign travel, and vehicle rental programs;
- non-profit state and federal compliance reporting;
- tax research, contract review, and third-party legal services coordination;
- unclaimed property management; and
- records retention.

Financial Services also provides many of these services through consultation to Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) and WELS' four ministerial education schools. Outside of Financial Services, the CFO also oversees the Human Resources and Facility Services departments. The CFO is the WELS treasurer and an advisor to the Synodical Council as well as an advisor to the Board for Ministerial Education, the Accounting Oversight Committee, and the Compensation Review Committee of the Synodical Council. In addition, the CFO serves as an *ex-officio* member of the board of directors of NPH, CEF, WELS Foundation, WIF, WELS Historical Institute, WELS Retirement Program Commission, and WELS VEBA Commission.

Our current situation

Financial Services is blessed with a dedicated, talented staff with complementary education, training, and work experiences. The following is a summary of significant events or projects the Financial Services team worked on in the past year.

- Completed all audits within four months of fiscal year end (consistent with historical precedent), with all entities receiving an unmodified opinion (the best possible) on the financial statements.
- Implemented a new accounting standard issued by the Financial Accounting Standards Board related to the measurement of credit losses during fiscal year 2024. While this new standard generally did not have a material impact on the ministerial education schools' or support service subsidiaries' financials, it did significantly impact the process for estimating credit losses associated with the loan portfolio of CEF. We worked with the third-party accounting firm Forvis to help develop a new model for estimating credit losses and successfully implemented the new methodology for CEF and WELS during fiscal year 2024.
- Developed a strategic plan to improve the planning and development of major capital projects for the ministerial education schools through a new Synod Capital Projects Fund. This fund will be used to support the site design and planning costs for the ministerial education schools and will help support possible debt service costs if funds are borrowed for a synod capital project.
- Renewed our agreement with Baker Tilly, extending their role as our independent auditor through fiscal year 2029. This decision followed a thorough evaluation of market trends, alternative audit firm proposals, and fee negotiations to ensure a fair and sustainable agreement.
- Monitored the support forecast and ministry financial plan for fiscal year 2025.
- Developed planning assumptions, support forecast, and synod support allocations for the fiscal year 2026 and fiscal year 2027 biennium ministry financial plan.

A look ahead

In addition to maintaining daily operations, Financial Services will continue to identify, investigate, and

implement strategies that improve efficiency and effectiveness, reduce costs, and/or strengthen internal controls within the department and across WELS. Our upcoming plans include:

- Exploring how artificial intelligence can enhance process efficiency and improve financial operations.
- Implementing new reporting tools to provide greater visibility and enhance data analytics for better decision-making.
- Evaluating ways to improve the ministry financial plan planning process, including how plan modifications and capital project requests are managed.
- Researching and implementing a new banking platform to better support the cash needs of the 12 districts while ensuring compliance with key legal, tax, accounting, and governance requirements.
- Exploring a more robust and flexible solution to accept payments from congregations and affiliated organizations electronically.
- Cross-training employees to ensure service continuity during vacations, vacancies, and extended absences.

The Financial Services team is honored to serve and is prepared to use the available resources and its God-given skills and abilities to support the ministries of WELS.

Mr. Kyle Egan, reporter

Human Resources

Floor Committee #10

Our calling

The synod's Human Resources department oversees the personnel functions for synod personnel, including development, communication, and implementation of personnel policies; recruitment; compensation; benefits; performance management; and managing employee relations. Human Resources provides guidance to supervisors on matters such as federal and state legal requirements to ensure compliance with labor laws.

Human Resources (HR) also serves as a resource to WELS congregations and to affiliated groups and entities on the matters mentioned above as well as for risk management and federal and state legal requirements related to personnel matters. Further, in addition to legally mandated reporting to authorities, any charge, report, or allegation of sexual misconduct or physical abuse that has been made of an incident involving pastors, teachers, vicars, full- or part-time employees, and volunteers in any capacity must be reported to the synod president, director of Lutheran Schools, or director of Human Resources.

Our current situation

Current WELS Human Resources staff consists of two employees—a full-time Human Resources director and a Human Resources generalist who splits time between human resources (75 percent) and the WELS Benefit Plans Office (25 percent). Beyond day-to-day human resource management activities, a few key initiatives include:

- Staffing the following key lay worker positions over the last year: assistant director of Missions Operations; administrative specialist, Joint Missions; IT systems support specialist, Technology; digital communications coordinator, Communication Services; investor and donor services specialist, WELS Foundation; marketing coordinator for WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, and WELS Investment Funds; administrative specialist, Commission for Lutheran Schools; benefits specialist, WELS Benefit Plans Office; events manager, Congregational Services; database specialist, Ministry of Christian Giving; executive assistant, Financial Services; junior graphic designer, Communication Services; loan officer, Church Extension Fund.

- Education and training of congregational leadership in application of WELS Called Worker Compensation Guidelines and use of electronic Called Worker Compensation Calculator continues. Popularity and use of the Called Worker Compensation Calculator is evident through a majority of positive feedback provided. Adjustments and improvements continue to be made to the Called Worker Compensation Calculator, including through feedback received from congregation leadership.
- Management of external benefits enrollment and billing to ensure accurate benefits administration, quality customer service, and timely issue resolution, provided by the HR generalist in her shared resource role. This serves participants and sponsoring organizations by providing benefits, eligibility, and enrollment information.
- Collaborating with congregations and WELS district presidents on risk and personnel matters, as well as general compensation, benefit, and policy issues.
- Vetting nominees for synod boards/committees: Human Resources assists in the process of filling board/committee openings for positions appointed by the Synodical Council for WELS Voluntary Employee Benefits Association, WELS Retirement Commission, WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds, Accounting Oversight Committee, and WELS Church Extension Fund. This assistance takes place mainly through vetting of nominees to establish willingness to serve, procuring resume and/or bio forms, and creating a central database to maintain all nominee data and vacancy records.
- Affordable Care Act reporting and compliance: Per Affordable Care Act (ACA) compliance requirements, large employers must file annual reports and monitor measurement periods to comply with the ACA's employer mandate. Human Resources oversees this annual reporting process for the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry and WELS' four ministerial education schools.

A look ahead

With the director of Human Resources planning to retire in early 2026 after 11 years in the position, the most critical area of focus going forward will be the search for his successor and implementation of a development plan enabling a smooth transition for the new director.

Additional priority for the Human Resources team going forward will be to evaluate current operations and to identify where efficiencies could be implemented while maintaining effectiveness. Over the next biennium, HR will, with God's guidance and blessings:

- Update and maintain **welsrc.net/human-resources** and **cloud.wels.net/hr** to ensure information and details provided assist members from both an informational as well as practical aspect.
- Improve utilization of the new Paycom HR software modules and support for the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry and the ministerial education schools.
- Work with the Synodical Council's designated committee(s) in reviewing and evaluating the policies and procedures of Human Resources and the compensation programs at our synod-operated organizations.
- Work with areas of ministry and synodical schools in coordinating timely information and support for our workers.
- Facilitate learning and development programs for the management and staff of the synod entities.
- Provide continued training with synod leaders to continue to reinforce and develop the supervisory skills required.
- Continue providing support to WELS organizations in areas related to our synod human resources.

For synodical salary ranges, WELS compensation guidelines, and other called worker compensation information, see pp. 110-113.

Questions can be directed to hro@wels.net or by calling 414-256-3268.

Mr. Dennis Maurer, reporter

Facility Services

Floor Committee #10

Our calling

Facility Services provides support services to the ministries conducted at or through the synod corporate headquarters known as the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. This objective is accomplished by providing a God-pleasing physical workspace conducive to mission and ministry operations and by creating a welcoming environment to passersby, visitors, guests, and employees.

Our current situation

The Center for Mission and Ministry is located in Waukesha, Wis., along I-94 on Stone Ridge Drive and has approximately 49,000 square feet of space on three floors. WELS and all areas of ministry operate out of the Center for Mission and Ministry, along with WELS support service subsidiaries and its affiliate, including WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds, Northwestern Publishing House, and WELS Benefit Plans. In addition, the Center for Mission and Ministry includes the WELS Visitors Center, a chapel, and archival space designed to preserve and organize historical WELS documents, books, and artifacts. Many of the routine services, such as cleaning, landscaping, snow removal, window washing, and HVAC controls and maintenance are being outsourced.

The Synodical Council created the WELS Building Fund to ensure that an adequate funding source exists for maintenance and improvement of the Center for Mission and Ministry. The policy directs a portion of rents paid by WELS subsidiaries and its affiliate (WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds, Northwestern Publishing House, WELS Benefit Plans) to the Building Fund. As of Dec. 31, 2024, the balance of the WELS Building Fund was approximately \$250,000.

Significant projects completed during the last 12 months include the build-out of three new offices on the second floor, the installation of dehumidifiers in the archives to assist with challenges in maintaining proper temperature control and humidity levels, and replacement of a compressor on one of the 30-ton rooftop HVAC units.

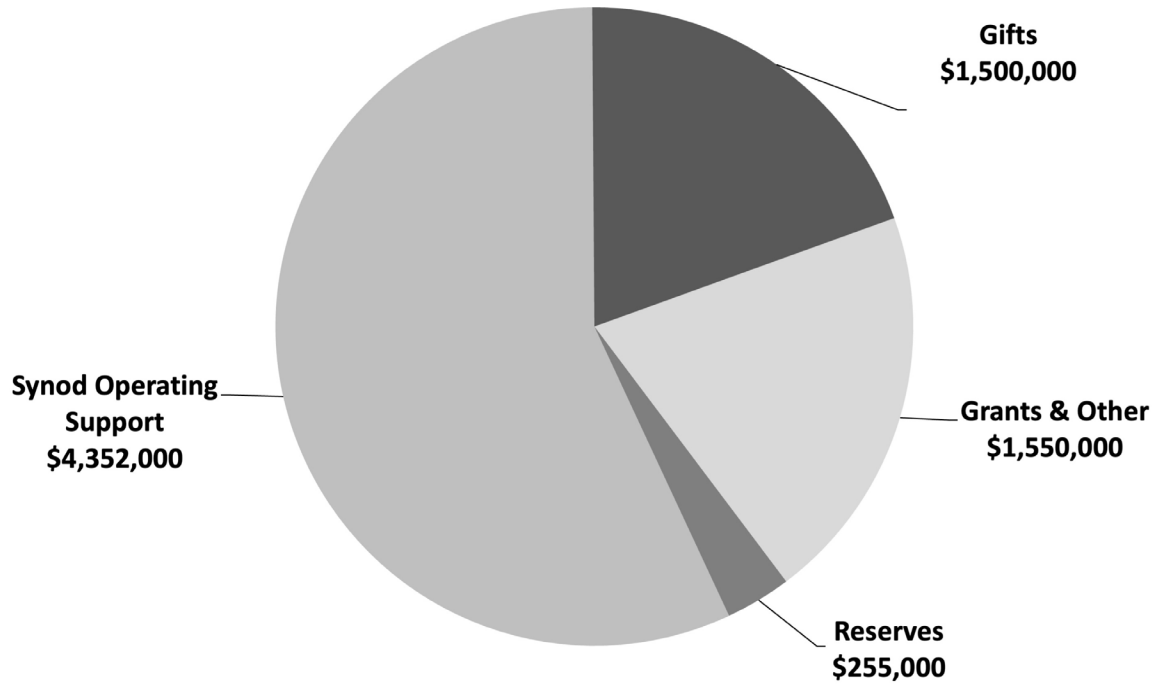
A look ahead

Facility Services is focused on key infrastructure improvements to enhance efficiency and maintain facilities for the long term. Preventative maintenance on all equipment is performed on a scheduled basis. Due to high HVAC equipment replacement costs, repairs are completed as needed and replacements will be completed in phases. The current priority for FY26 is the replacement of the aging HVAC building automation system, which is no longer supported by the manufacturer and is causing inconsistent heating and cooling.

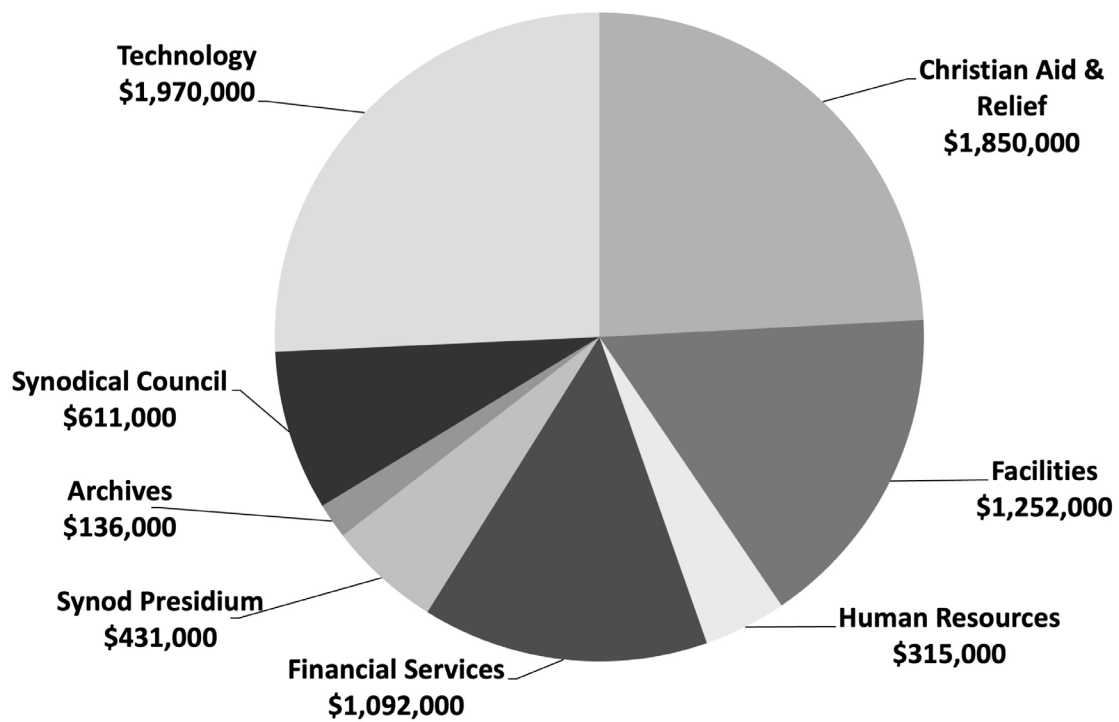
The parking lot is being sealcoated every other year to maintain its condition and extend the lifespan, with the summer of 2025 being the next scheduled sealing and restriping. Additionally, carpet replacements will be addressed in phases as needed to minimize disruption and manage costs. Looking ahead, a multi-year project will introduce a high-density file system in the archives, ensuring adequate storage capacity for years to come. Trees and shrubs around the exterior are also beginning to show a need for replacement and updates and those will be completed by internal staff. Overall, the Center for Mission and Ministry's building, grounds, and fixed equipment are in good to excellent condition.

Mr. Tim Luetzow, reporter

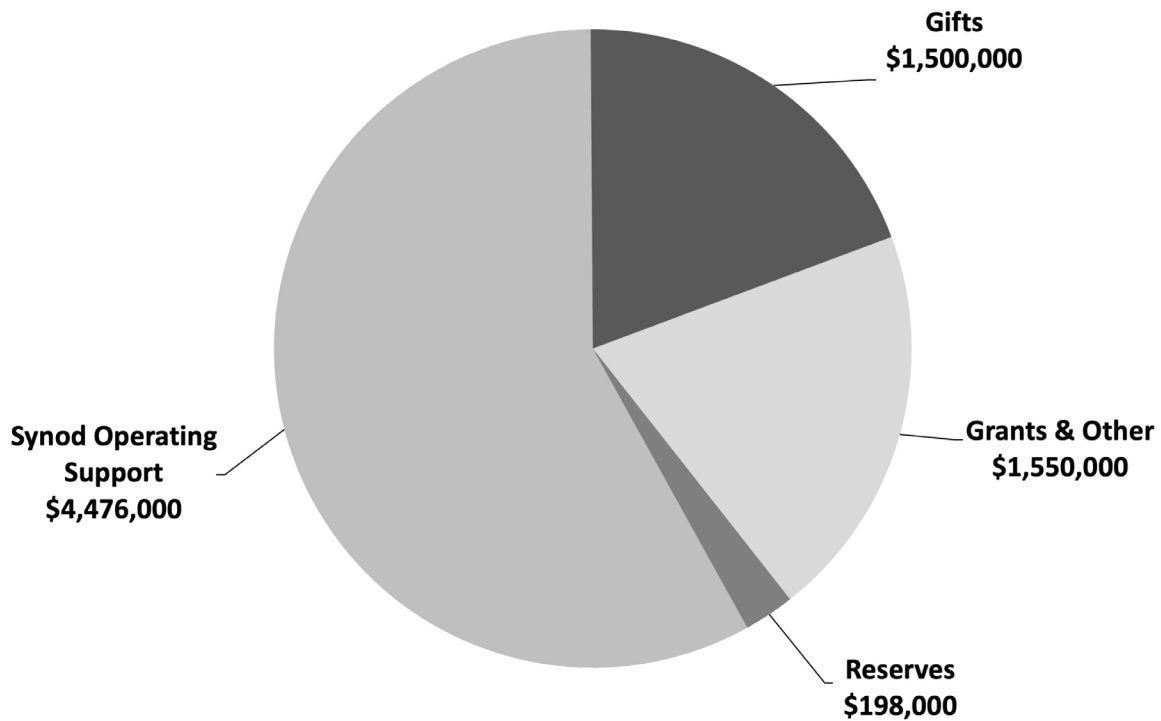
**FY 2025-26 Support
Ministry Support
\$7,657,000**



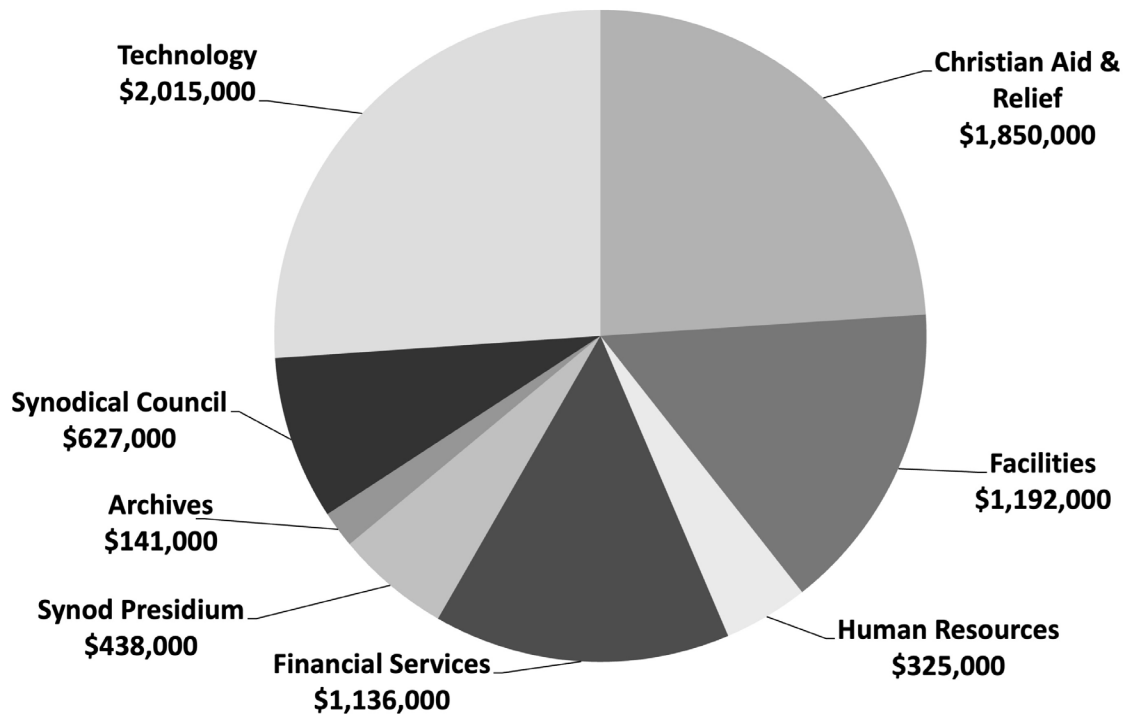
**FY 2025-26 Expenses
Ministry Support
\$7,657,000**



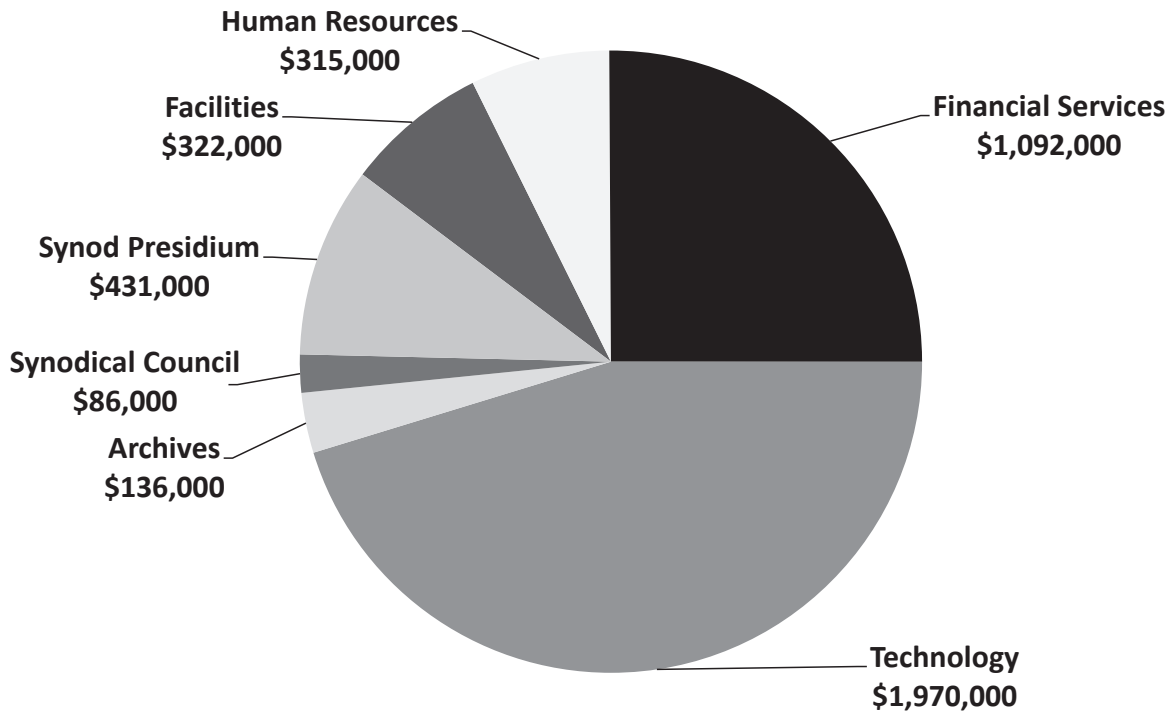
**FY 2026-27 Support
Ministry Support
\$7,724,000**



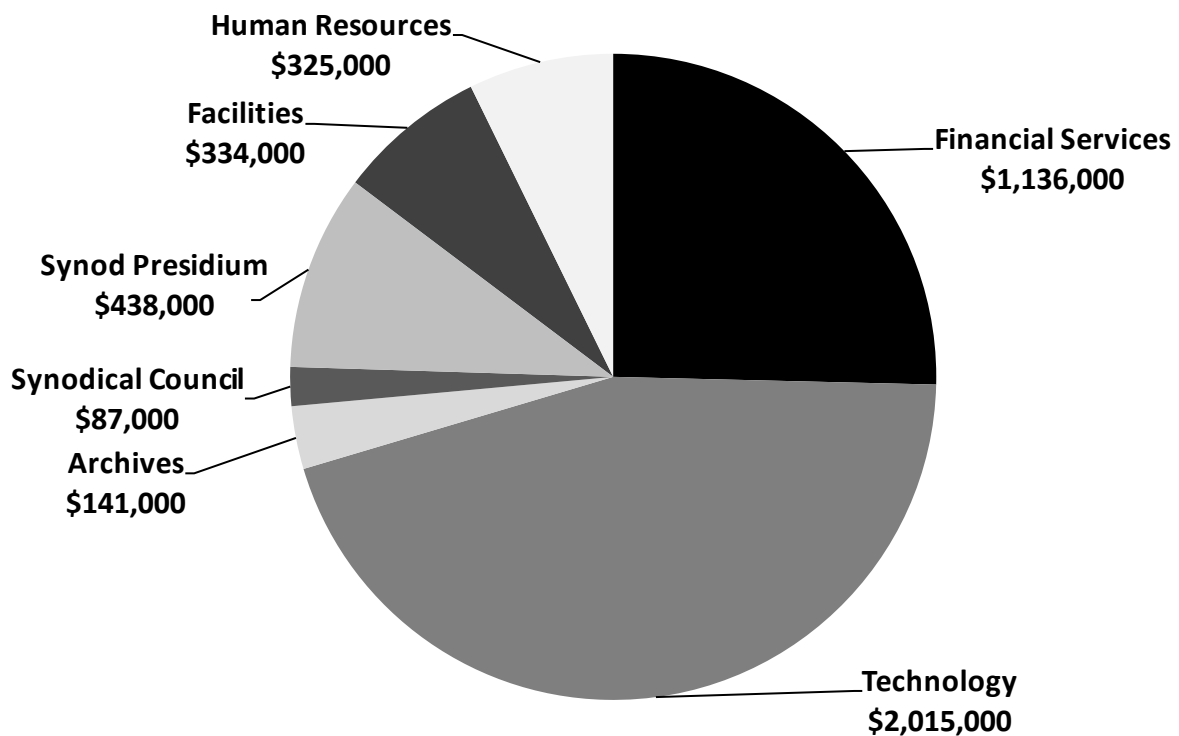
**FY 2026-27 Expenses
Ministry Support
\$7,724,000**



FY 2025-26 Synod Operating Support Allocation
Ministry Support
\$4,352,000



FY 2026-27 Synod Operating Support Allocation
Ministry Support
\$4,476,000



Financial results and ministry financial plan

Floor Committee #8

Overview

The Lord has and we pray will continue to bless WELS with gifts from congregations, members, and others. These gifts are used to reach the lost at home and abroad, train and nurture called workers, and provide services that facilitate and support ministry excellence in congregations and their schools and administration.

WELS manages and reports the financial position of the synod based on a fiscal year (FY) that runs from July 1 to June 30. WELS areas of ministry, ministerial education schools, and support service subsidiaries are fully incorporated into the ministry financial plan (budget) to ensure all sources and uses of funds entrusted to WELS are reported and considered by the synod in convention.

Synod operating support is the amount of unrestricted support allocated for total ministry plan expenses for WELS areas of ministry (excluding the ministerial education schools and support service subsidiaries) covered by unrestricted support sources with approximately 70 percent annually coming from Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) and approximately 30 percent annually coming from other unrestricted support consisting primarily of gifts, grants, bequests, and investment income. The Financial Stabilization Fund (FSF) was created to manage all unrestricted support (other than CMO) to ensure that ministry plans did not need to be adjusted in the middle of a year if these difficult-to-predict unrestricted funding sources turned out to be less than planned. The synod does not hold onto funds within the Financial Stabilization Fund for long-term spending purposes. Rather, funds are used on a continual basis to support the overall operating expenses of the synod. Separately, gifts provided by donors to WELS for a specific ministry are maintained within WELS special funds for general use by that area of ministry. Planning for and use of these gifts is initiated by areas of ministry with guidance from Financial Services and approval from the Synodical Council.

Fiscal Year 2023–24 (FY24)

WELS

WELS is financially strong. WELS areas of ministry (excluding the ministerial education schools and support service subsidiaries) received total unrestricted support in FY24 of \$51.9 million consisting of CMO of \$23.6 million, unrestricted special fund support of \$15.9 million, and other general unrestricted support of \$12.4 million. Synod operating and special fund expenses totaled \$49.5 million, leading to an overall increase in reserves without donor restrictions of \$2.4 million (an increase in unrestricted special fund reserves of \$1.4 million and an increase in the Financial Stabilization Fund balance of \$931,000).

- **Congregation Mission Offerings**—Reported CMO for FY24 was \$23.6 million, an increase of \$198,000 (or 0.8 percent) over the prior year and \$582,000 (or 2.5 percent) better than the original plan. The Lord continues to bless WELS through consistent offerings from its congregations, which helps with the overall process of developing the ministry financial plan.
- **Unrestricted special fund support**—Unrestricted special fund support for FY24 was \$15.9 million, a decrease of \$3.2 million (or 16.7 percent) from the prior year and \$1.2 million (or 8.5 percent) better than the original plan, driven by changes in giving levels and satisfactions of restrictions.
- **Other unrestricted support**—Other unrestricted support consisting primarily of unrestricted gifts, grants, bequests, and investment income for FY24 was \$12.4 million, an increase of \$2.8 million (or 29.8 percent) over the prior year and \$4.1 million (or 50.3 percent) better than the original plan. The increase over the prior year and plan was driven by two large bequests received in FY24 totaling \$3 million and increased investment income due to higher interest rates during FY24.

- **Synod operating and special fund expenses**—Synod operating and special fund expenses for FY24 were \$49.5 million, an increase of \$1.6 million (or 3.2 percent) over the prior year and \$2.6 million (or 4.9 percent) lower than the original plan. The increase in expenses over the prior year was driven by inflationary increases across all areas of ministry and within Home Missions related to the 100 Missions in 10 years initiative and increased Mission Program Support Agreement costs for missions already receiving subsidy. Savings to the original plan were driven by lower than planned spending for World Missions within Africa and Asia, and general underspending compared to the plan within Congregation and District Ministry and Ministry Support.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions in FY24 increased \$2.2 million (or 19.7 percent) to \$13.6 million. Total support without donor restrictions of \$9.1 million was \$1.1 million (or 13.6 percent) higher than the prior year driven by significantly improved investment returns. Total expenses of \$6.9 million were \$512,000 (or 8.0 percent) higher than the prior year driven by faculty residence renovations, technology upgrades to improve network speed, and general inflationary increases in operational and professional services costs.

Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College is financially stable. Reserves without donor restrictions in FY24 decreased \$459,000 (or 2.8 percent) to \$16.1 million. Total support without donor restrictions of \$24.2 million was \$355,000 (or 1.5 percent) better than the prior year driven by satisfactions of restrictions associated with financial aid and chapel basement renovations, partially offset by lower tuition. Total expenses of \$24.7 million were \$692,000 (or 2.9 percent) higher than the prior year driven by costs associated with the work completed on the chapel basement and general inflationary increases in operational and professional services costs.

Luther Preparatory School

Luther Preparatory School is financially stable. Reserves without donor restrictions in FY24 increased \$1.3 million (or 27.0 percent) to \$6.2 million. Total support without donor restrictions of \$10.7 million was \$1.5 million (or 16.1 percent) higher than the prior year driven by increased gifts, bequests, and tuition revenue. Total expenses of \$9.4 million were \$345,000 (or 3.8 percent) higher than the prior year driven by higher Project Timothy expenses, increased recruitment travel and promotional materials, and general inflationary increases in operational and professional services costs.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Michigan Lutheran Seminary is financially stable. Reserves without donor restrictions in FY24 increased \$684,000 (or 52.7 percent) to \$2.0 million. Total support without donor restrictions of \$5.1 million was \$451,000 (or 9.7 percent) higher than the prior year driven by increased gifts. Total expenses of \$4.4 million were \$146,000 (or 3.2 percent) lower than the prior year.

WELS Church Extension Fund

WELS Church Extension Fund is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions in FY24 increased \$4.3 million (or 4.7 percent) to \$95.5 million, resulting from a \$5.0 million increase in net assets from normal operations partially offset by a \$708,000 reduction in net assets due to adopting a new accounting standard related to the measurement of credit losses. Total support without donor restrictions of \$11.0 million was \$190,000 (or 1.7 percent) lower than the prior year driven by decreased gifts and bequests partially offset by increased interest income on the loan portfolio. Total expenses of \$6.0 million were \$942,000 (or 18.6 percent) higher than the prior year due to higher interest expense on the certificate portfolio and increased grant expense for mission loans partially offset by a favorable adjustment to the allowance for credit losses.

WELS Foundation

WELS Foundation is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions in FY24 increased \$879,000 (or 7.0 percent) to \$13.5 million. Total support without donor restrictions of \$7.3 million was \$59,000 (or 0.8 percent) better than the prior year due to increased satisfactions of restrictions related to terminated deferred gifts. Total expenses of \$6.4 million were \$5.5 million (or 46.2 percent) lower than the prior year due to a large distribution from a donor advised fund made in the prior year. WELS Foundation has a

policy governing the management of excess reserves and transferred \$400,000 of its reserves to WELS as operating support in FY24.

WELS Investment Funds

WELS Investment Funds continues to be financially blessed. WELS Investment Funds does not have reserves because it invests and administers funds for others. Assets under management in FY24 increased by \$30.8 million (or 10.5 percent) to \$325.2 million driven by new investments and realized and unrealized market gains.

Northwestern Publishing House

Northwestern Publishing House is financially stable. Reserves without donor restrictions in FY24 increased \$1.3 million (or 9.8 percent) to \$15.1 million. Total revenue without donor restrictions of \$6.2 million was \$330,000 (or 5.1 percent) lower than the prior year driven by higher sales of the hymnal suite of products in the prior year. Total expenses of \$4.8 million were \$194,000 (or 3.9 percent) lower than the prior year due to lower costs associated with lower sales volume in FY24.

Fiscal Year 2024–25 (FY25)

WELS

Support and expense projections point to continued financial strength for WELS in FY25.

- **Congregation Mission Offerings**—Through December 2024 (six months), CMO was \$12.9 million, an increase of \$315,000 (or 2.5 percent) over the prior year. CMO is projected to be \$23.8 million in FY25, approximately \$690,000 (or 3.0 percent) more than planned. This increase in CMO is being driven by strong calendar year 2024 receipts and the recently completed subscription process for calendar 2025.
- **Unrestricted special fund support**—Through December 2024 (six months), unrestricted special fund support was \$8.2 million and is trending slightly better than the planned pace for the fiscal year.
- **Other unrestricted support**—Through December 2024 (six months), other unrestricted support was \$4.5 million and is trending better than planned levels for the fiscal year, driven by increased investment income from higher yields on reserves and a group insurance dividend received from Church Mutual.
- **Synod operating and special fund expenses**—Through December 2024 (six months), total synod operating and special fund expenses were \$26.1 million, an increase of \$1.6 million (or 6.4 percent) over the prior year but still trending lower than the plan for the current fiscal year. Home mission expenses are up due to increased Mission Program Support Agreement costs for missions already receiving subsidy and for new missions under the 100 Missions in 10 Years initiative. Congregation & District Ministry expenses are also up due to expenses for the Worship Conference and Women's Ministry Conference held earlier in the fiscal year.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary remains financially strong. Through December 2024 (six months), reserves without donor restrictions increased \$1.1 million on support of \$5.0 million and expenses of \$3.9 million. Support without donor restrictions has been trending higher than planned levels due to increased gifts and investment returns, while expenses have been trending in line with planned levels.

Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College remains financially stable. Through December 2024 (six months), reserves without donor restrictions increased \$452,000 on support of \$13.0 million and expenses of \$12.5 million. Support without donor restrictions has been trending higher than planned levels due to increased satisfactions for financial aid, while expenses have been trending lower than planned levels due to savings from position vacancies, lower utility expenses and the timing of maintenance projects.

Luther Preparatory School

Luther Preparatory School remains financially stable. Through December 2024 (six months), reserves without donor restrictions increased \$259,000 on support of \$5.1 million and expenses of \$4.8 million. Support without donor restrictions has been trending higher than planned levels due to increased enrollment and increased gifts and investment returns, while expenses have been trending in line with planned levels.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Michigan Lutheran Seminary remains financially stable. Through December 2024 (six months), reserves without donor restrictions increased \$259,000 on support of \$2.5 million and expenses of \$2.3 million. Support without donor restrictions has been trending higher than planned levels due to increased satisfactions for financial aid. Expenses have been trending lower than planned levels due to savings from position vacancies and lower utility expenses.

WELS Church Extension Fund

WELS Church Extension Fund remains financially strong. Through December 2024 (six months), reserves without donor restrictions decreased \$1,000 on support of \$6.4 million and expenses of \$6.4 million. Support without donor restriction has been trending higher than planned levels due to increased interest income from lending activities, while expenses have been trending higher than planned levels due to increased grant expenses for mission loans and increased interest expenses due to higher average interest rates on the certificate portfolio.

WELS Foundation

WELS Foundation remains financially strong. Through December 2024 (six months), reserves without donor restrictions increased \$1.8 million on support of \$5.8 million and expenses of \$4.0 million. The value of deferred giving instruments has increased by \$6.7 million to a total of \$203.6 million compared to the end of FY24 due to a steady increase of new gifts and favorable market gains which more than offset outgoing payments.

WELS Investment Funds

WELS Investment Funds continues to be financially blessed. Through December 2024 (six months), assets under management have increased \$6.2 (or 1.9 percent) to \$331.5 million. Markets have performed well over the past 24 months, however uncertainty surrounding inflation, interest rates and global responses to tariffs could cause market volatility in 2025.

Northwestern Publishing House

Northwestern Publishing House remains financially stable. Through December 2024 (six months), reserves without donor restrictions increased \$873,000 on revenue of \$3.0 million, other income of \$359,000, and expenses of \$2.5 million. Sales through December are tracking higher than planned while expenses trend lower than planned due to tight cost controls across many operating departments. Other income is higher than planned due to favorable investment returns.

Synod Support Forecast & Synod Support Allocations
April 2025

Synod Support for Operating Expenses								
	Actual FY24	Plan FY24	Change		April '25 Forecast FY25	Plan FY25	Change	
			Increase/(Decrease) Amount	Percent			Increase/(Decrease) Amount	Percent
Synod Support								
Gifts from Congregations	\$ 23,592,755	\$ 23,011,000	\$ 581,755	2.5%	\$ 23,817,000	\$ 23,127,000	\$ 690,000	3.0%
Financial Stabilization Fund	8,440,694	9,830,000	(1,389,306)	-14.1%	10,076,000	11,036,000	(960,000)	-8.7%
Total Synod Support	32,033,449	32,841,000	(807,551)	-2.5%	33,893,000	34,163,000	(270,000)	-0.8%
Operating Expenses								
Home Missions	6,120,000	6,120,000	-	0.0%	6,314,000	6,314,000	-	0.0%
World Missions	7,369,000	7,369,000	-	0.0%	7,597,000	7,597,000	-	0.0%
Ministerial Education	8,653,520	8,688,000	(34,480)	-0.4%	8,947,000	8,947,000	-	0.0%
Congregation & District Ministry	6,363,297	6,840,000	(476,703)	-7.0%	7,120,000	7,229,000	(109,000)	-1.5%
Ministry Support	3,527,632	3,824,000	(296,368)	-7.8%	3,915,000	4,076,000	(161,000)	-3.9%
Total Operating Expenses	32,033,449	32,841,000	(807,551)	-2.5%	33,893,000	34,163,000	(270,000)	-0.8%
Surplus (Deficit)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
Financial Stabilization Fund								
	Actual FY24	Plan FY24	Change		April '25 Forecast FY25	Plan FY25	Change	
			Increase (Decrease) Amount	Percent			Increase (Decrease) Amount	Percent
Beginning Balance	\$ 19,772,790	\$ 17,736,733	\$ 2,036,057	11.5%	\$ 20,704,119	\$ 16,136,733	\$ 4,567,386	28.3%
Receipts:								
Schwan Grants	1,875,000	1,890,000	(15,000)	-0.8%	1,861,500	1,890,000	(28,500)	-1.5%
WELS FDN Net Asset Grant	400,000	400,000	-	0.0%	400,000	400,000	-	0.0%
Other Grants	487,371	555,000	(67,629)	-12.2%	556,280	570,000	(13,720)	-2.4%
Gifts from Individuals	1,901,263	1,350,000	551,263	40.8%	1,282,000	1,350,000	(68,000)	-5.0%
Unrestricted Bequests	3,961,457	1,800,000	2,161,457	120.1%	1,000,000	1,800,000	(800,000)	-44.4%
Investment Income	3,194,385	1,900,000	1,294,385	68.1%	3,135,000	1,850,000	1,285,000	69.5%
Endowment Distribution	132,232	135,000	(2,768)	-2.1%	139,250	145,000	(5,750)	-4.0%
Other Revenue	420,315	200,000	220,315	110.2%	429,725	212,000	217,725	102.7%
Total Receipts	12,372,023	8,230,000	4,142,023	50.3%	8,803,755	8,217,000	586,755	6.7%
Redesignations	(2,000,000)	-	(2,000,000)	0.0%	-	-	-	0.0%
Synod Capital Project Transfer	(1,000,000)	-	(1,000,000)	0.0%	(1,000,000)	-	(1,000,000)	0.0%
Synod Support Transfer	(8,440,694)	(9,830,000)	1,389,306	-14.1%	(10,076,000)	(11,036,000)	960,000	-9.5%
Surplus (Deficit)	931,329	(1,600,000)	2,531,329		(2,272,245)	(2,819,000)	546,755	
Ending Balance	\$ 20,704,119	\$ 16,136,733	\$ 5,567,386	34.5%	\$ 18,431,874	\$ 13,317,733	\$ 5,114,141	27.7%

Proposed ministry financial plan for 2025–26 and 2026–27 biennium (FY26/FY27 biennium)

Development of ministry financial plan

Planning for the FY26/FY27 biennium was initiated in April 2024 or about 14 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 an average of 3.5 percent annually, including overall wage increases of 3.5 percent in FY26 and 2.0 percent in FY27, healthcare cost increases of 10.0 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 their fall 2024 meeting. With this general direction by the Synodical Council, the areas of ministry, schools, and support services subsidiaries, working with their boards and commissions, proceeded to develop their ministry plans.

In late summer/early fall 2024, 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 2024. In April 2025, the WELS president submitted a slightly modified ministry financial plan to the Synodical Council, updated for the carryforward impact of current FY25 financial results and slightly modified CMO projections for FY26 and FY27 based on 2025 subscriptions. After review of the proposed plan, the Synodical Council approved the FY26/FY27 biennium plan as presented.

Congregation Mission Offerings

Prior to 2019, CMO had historically been flat to slightly declining since 2008. However, in each of the last six calendar years there has been an increase in CMO. Calendar year reported CMO for 2024 was \$23.9 million, an increase of \$511,000 (or 2.2 percent) over the prior year and \$708,000 (or 3.0 percent) better than 2024 subscriptions. Calendar year 2025 subscriptions serve as the baseline for CMO projections in the FY26/FY27 biennium. CMO subscriptions for 2025 are \$23.7 million, down 0.9 percent compared to actual 2024 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 2026 and 2027 based on recent CMO trends.

Summary of ministry financial plan for FY26 & FY27

The proposed ministry financial plan for FY26 includes synod support for operating expenses of \$35.9 million, other expenses in areas of ministry and at the schools of \$66.4 million, and \$18.8 million of expense at the subsidiaries for a total ministry financial plan of \$121.1 million. The \$35.9 million of synod support is proposed to be allocated to the areas of ministry as follows:

- Home Missions—\$6.6 million (or 18.3 percent of total synod support)
- World Missions—\$7.9 million (or 22.0 percent of total synod support)
- Ministerial Education—\$9.2 million (or 25.6 percent of total synod support)
- Congregation & District Ministry—\$7.9 million (or 22.0 percent of total synod support)
- Ministry Support—\$4.3 million (or 12.1 percent of total synod support)

The FY27 proposed plan includes synod support for operating expenses of \$36.6 million, other expenses in areas of ministry and at the schools of \$64.4 million, and \$17.6 million of expense at the subsidiaries for a total ministry financial plan of \$118.6 million. The \$36.6 million of synod support is proposed to be allocated to the areas of ministry as follows:

- Home Missions—\$6.8 million (or 18.6 percent of total synod support)
- World Missions—\$8.1 million (or 22.2 percent of total synod support)
- Ministerial Education—\$9.4 million (or 25.8 percent of total synod support)
- Congregation & District Ministry—\$7.8 million (or 21.2 percent of total synod support)
- Ministry Support—\$4.5 million (or 12.2 percent of total synod support)

The proposed financial plan relies heavily on the drawdown of the Financial Stabilization Fund, approximately \$8.0 million over the FY26/FY27 biennium—and on areas of ministry and schools using \$9.9 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 FY26 and FY27 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 \$128,000 over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY26 is forecast to be \$8.5 million driven by anticipated average on-campus enrollment of 111 students plus a class of 35 vicars. Total expenses for FY26 are forecast to be \$8.2 million, leading to a surplus of \$345,000.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY27 is forecast to be \$8.5 million driven by anticipated average on-campus enrollment of 98 students plus a class of 39 vicars. Total expenses for FY27 are forecast to be \$8.7 million, leading to a deficit of \$218,000.
- Ending FY27 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$13.3 million.

Martin Luther College

The financial position of Martin Luther College is anticipated to remain stable over the next biennium despite continued enrollment challenges. Martin Luther College is projecting a combined deficit without donor restrictions of \$757,000 over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY26 is forecast to be \$28.4 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 590 students. Total expenses for FY26 are forecast to be \$28.6 million, leading to a deficit of \$255,000.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY27 is forecast to be \$26.4 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 600 students. Total expenses for FY27 are forecast to be \$26.9 million, leading to a deficit of \$502,000.
- Ending FY27 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$14.6 million.

Luther Preparatory School

Luther Preparatory School's financial position is anticipated to remain stable over the next biennium with a combined surplus without donor restrictions of \$17,000 over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY26 is forecast to be \$10.6 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 415 students. Total expenses for FY26 are forecast to be \$10.6 million, leading to a surplus of \$3,000.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY27 is forecast to be \$10.3 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 415 students. Total expenses for FY27 are forecast to be \$10.3 million, leading to a surplus of \$14,000.
- Ending FY27 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$6.4 million.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Michigan Lutheran Seminary's financial position is anticipated to remain stable over the next biennium with a combined surplus without donor restrictions of \$30,000 over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY26 is forecast to be \$4.7 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 190 students. Total expenses for FY26 are forecast to be \$4.7 million, leading to a surplus of \$23,000.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY27 is forecast to be \$4.8 million driven by anticipated average enrollment of 191 students. Total expenses for FY27 are forecast to be \$4.8 million, leading to a surplus of \$7,000.
- Ending FY27 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$1.9 million.

WELS Church Extension Fund

The financial position of WELS Church Extension Fund is anticipated to remain strong as they project a combined surplus without donor restrictions of \$2.4 million over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY26 is forecast to be \$12.1 million. Total expenses for FY26 are forecast to be \$11.9 million, leading to a surplus of \$223,000.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY27 is forecast to be \$12.7 million. Total expenses for FY27 are forecast to be \$10.5 million, leading to a surplus of \$2.2 million.
- Ending FY27 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$97.8 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 FY26 and FY27.

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 16 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 their financial situation through a combined surplus without donor restrictions of \$1.3 million over the biennium.

- Total support without donor restrictions for FY26 is forecast to be \$5.9 million. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY26 are forecast to be \$5.3 million, leading to a surplus of \$633,000.
- Total support without donor restrictions for FY27 is forecast to be \$6.0 million. Total expenses without donor restrictions for FY27 are forecast to be \$5.4 million, leading to a surplus of \$668,000.
- Ending FY27 reserves without donor restrictions are anticipated to be \$17.3 million.

Please refer to the area of ministry, ministerial education school, and support service subsidiary reports throughout this book for more details from 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 (\$2,859,000 in FY26 and \$2,865,000 in FY27)**—The majority of the grants come from the Schwan Foundation and are projected to be approximately \$1.9 million per year for FY26 and FY27. 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 FY26 and FY27. Other grants include distributions of approximately \$580,000 per year from multiple sources.
- **Gifts from individuals (\$1,450,000 in both FY26 and FY27)**—The vast majority of these unrestricted gifts come from individuals and congregations and are projected to be approximately \$1.2 million per year for FY26 and FY27. 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 FY26 and FY27.
- **Unrestricted bequests (\$2,300,000 in both FY26 and FY27)**—Unrestricted bequests represent estate gifts to WELS without donor restrictions and are projected to be approximately \$2.3 million per year for FY26 and FY27. 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 (\$2,800,000 in FY26 and \$2,500,000 in FY27)**—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 expected decreasing interest rates and levels of investable reserves, investment income is projected to decrease from current levels in each year of the next biennium.
- **Endowment distributions & Other (\$370,000 in FY26 and \$390,000 in FY27)**—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.

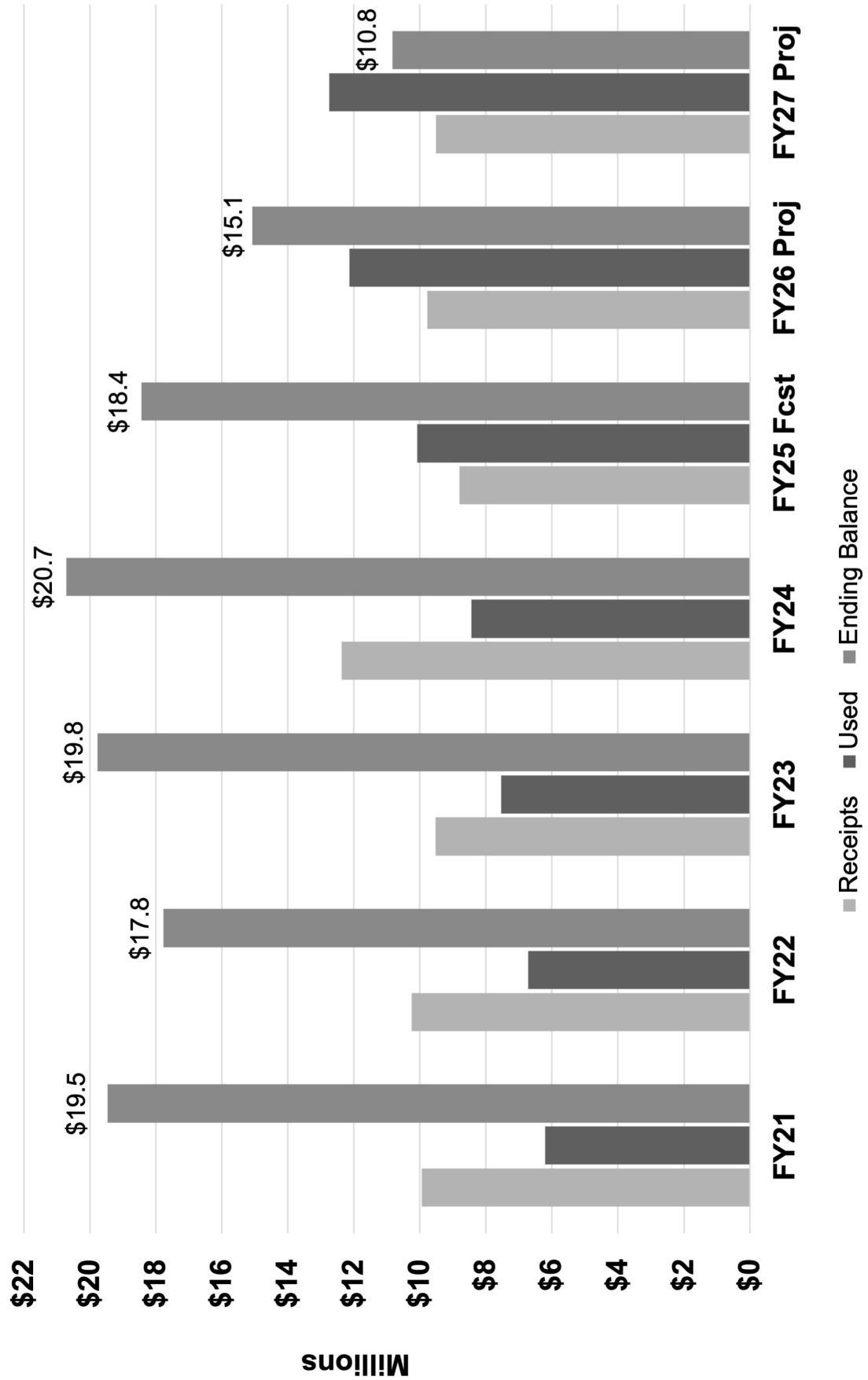
The cumulative total of these sources of support into the Financial Stabilization Fund are projected to be approximately \$9.8 million in FY26 and \$9.5 million in FY27. With planned FY26 synod support of \$35.9 million and CMO projections of \$23.8 million, transfers out of the Financial Stabilization Fund for synod operating support during FY26 are planned to be approximately \$12.1 million. As directed by the Synodical Council starting in FY24, there is also an annual transfer of \$1.0 million from the Financial Stabilization Fund to the Synod Capital Projects Fund in each year of the next biennium. The projected support in FY26 of \$9.8 million, combined with the transfers out for synod operating support and the Synod Capital Projects Fund totaling \$13.1 million results in a forecasted reduction in the balance of the Financial Stabilization Fund of approximately \$3.4 million to end FY26 with a balance of approximately \$15.1 million. In FY27, synod support levels are forecasted to reach approximately \$36.6 million with CMO projections of \$23.9 million leading to an increased level of transfers out of the Financial Stabilization Fund for synod operating support at \$12.7 million. This transfer, along with the \$1.0 million transfer to the Synod Capital Projects Fund results in a forecasted reduction in the balance of the Financial Stabilization Fund of approximately \$4.3 million to end FY27 with a balance of approximately \$10.8 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.

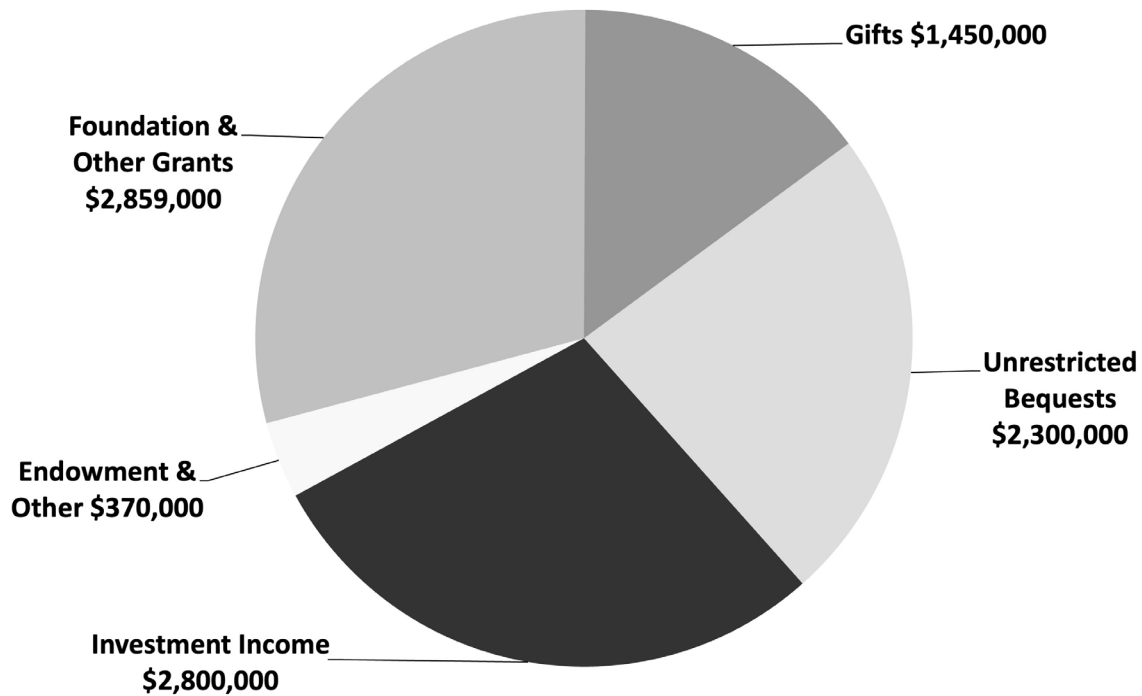
We are thankful to be able to present this ministry financial plan for FY26 and FY27 trusting in God's gracious care for us in our Lord Jesus. At the same time, we also recognize that such trust does not diminish the responsibility God himself entrusts to us to be wise stewards of the finances for the 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

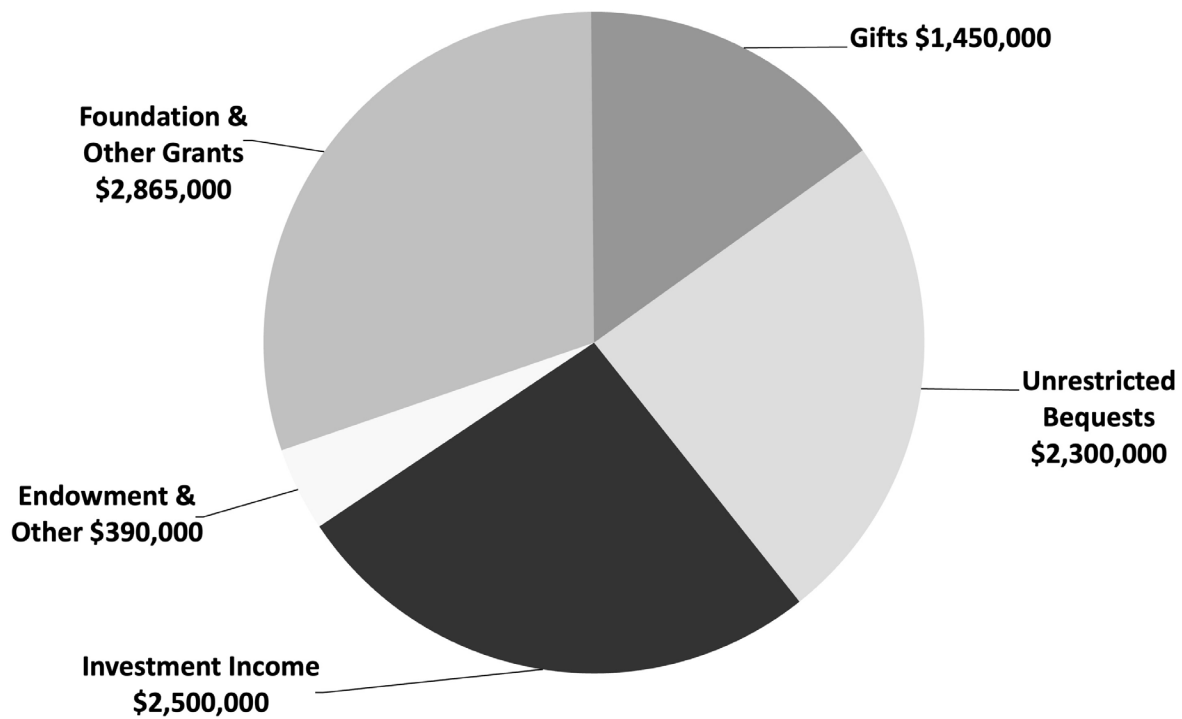
Financial Stabilization Fund



**FY 2025-26 Support
Financial Stabilization Fund
\$9,779,000**



**FY 2026-27 Support
Financial Stabilization Fund
\$9,505,000**



Ministry Financial Plan Summary of Expenses

Funded by Synod Support and Special Funds, Gifts, Tuition and Fees

	FY24 Actual				FY25 Plan				FY26 Plan				FY27 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
SUMMARY																
Home Missions	6,120,000	5,341,956	11,461,956	16.13	6,314,000	7,367,000	13,681,000	16.13	6,580,000	8,812,000	15,392,000	16.13	6,800,000	8,858,000	15,658,000	16.13
World Missions	7,369,000	5,642,133	13,011,133	61.45	7,597,000	7,373,000	14,970,000	62.20	7,900,000	5,970,000	13,870,000	60.20	8,140,000	6,164,000	14,304,000	60.20
Ministerial Education	8,653,520	38,158,645	46,812,165	337.77	8,947,000	42,796,700	51,743,700	343.29	9,179,000	45,193,000	54,372,000	345.49	9,447,000	43,854,000	53,301,000	340.89
Congregation & District Ministry	6,363,297	2,705,102	9,068,399	45.12	7,229,000	2,756,000	9,985,000	50.05	7,882,000	3,089,000	10,971,000	49.53	7,755,000	2,260,000	10,015,000	49.53
Ministry Support	3,527,632	2,521,986	6,049,618	27.70	4,076,000	2,722,000	6,798,000	30.50	4,352,000	3,305,000	7,657,000	30.80	4,476,000	3,248,000	7,724,000	30.80
TOTAL	32,033,449	54,369,822	86,403,271	488.17	34,163,000	63,014,700	97,177,700	502.17	35,893,000	66,369,000	102,262,000	502.15	36,618,000	64,384,000	101,002,000	497.55

	FY24	% of total	% change	FY25	% of total	% change	FY26	% of total	% change	FY27	% of total	% change
Synod Support												
Home Missions	6,120,000	19.1%	3.1%	6,314,000	18.5%	3.2%	6,580,000	18.3%	4.2%	6,800,000	18.6%	3.3%
World Missions	7,369,000	23.0%	3.1%	7,597,000	22.2%	3.1%	7,900,000	22.0%	4.0%	8,140,000	22.2%	3.0%
Ministerial Education	8,653,520	27.0%	3.1%	8,947,000	26.2%	3.4%	9,179,000	25.6%	2.6%	9,447,000	25.8%	2.9%
Congregation & District Ministry	6,363,297	19.9%	3.3%	7,229,000	21.2%	13.6%	7,882,000	22.0%	9.0%	7,755,000	21.2%	-1.6%
Ministry Support	3,527,632	11.0%	7.4%	4,076,000	11.9%	15.5%	4,352,000	12.1%	6.8%	4,476,000	12.2%	2.8%
TOTAL	32,033,449	100.0%	3.6%	34,163,000	100.0%	6.6%	35,893,000	100.0%	5.1%	36,618,000	100.0%	2.0%

	FY24	% of total	% change	FY25	% of total	% change	FY26	% of total	% change	FY27	% of total	% change
Special fund expenses												
Home Missions	5,341,956	9.8%	21.7%	7,367,000	11.7%	37.9%	8,812,000	13.3%	19.6%	8,858,000	13.8%	0.5%
World Missions	5,642,133	10.4%	-8.3%	7,373,000	11.7%	30.7%	5,970,000	9.0%	-19.0%	6,164,000	9.6%	3.2%
Ministerial Education	38,158,645	70.2%	3.6%	42,796,700	67.9%	12.2%	45,193,000	68.1%	5.6%	43,854,000	68.1%	-3.0%
Congregation & District Ministry	2,705,102	5.0%	15.1%	2,756,000	4.4%	1.9%	3,089,000	4.7%	12.1%	2,260,000	3.5%	-26.8%
Ministry Support	2,521,986	4.6%	-15.5%	2,722,000	4.3%	7.9%	3,305,000	5.0%	21.4%	3,248,000	5.0%	-1.7%
TOTAL	54,369,822	100.0%	3.2%	63,014,700	100.0%	15.9%	66,369,000	100.0%	5.3%	64,384,000	100.0%	-3.0%

	FY24	% of total	% change	FY25	% of total	% change	FY26	% of total	% change	FY27	% of total	% change
Total Expenses												
Home Missions	11,461,956	13.3%	11.0%	13,681,000	14.1%	19.4%	15,392,000	15.1%	12.5%	15,658,000	15.5%	1.7%
World Missions	13,011,133	15.1%	-2.2%	14,970,000	15.4%	15.1%	13,870,000	13.6%	-7.3%	14,304,000	14.2%	3.1%
Ministerial Education	46,812,165	54.2%	3.5%	51,743,700	53.2%	10.5%	54,372,000	53.2%	5.1%	53,301,000	52.8%	-2.0%
Congregation & District Ministry	9,068,399	10.5%	6.6%	9,985,000	10.3%	10.1%	10,971,000	10.7%	9.9%	10,015,000	9.9%	-8.7%
Ministry Support	6,049,618	7.0%	-3.5%	6,798,000	7.0%	12.4%	7,657,000	7.5%	12.6%	7,724,000	7.6%	0.9%
TOTAL	86,403,271	100.0%	3.3%	97,177,700	100.0%	12.5%	102,262,000	100.0%	5.2%	101,002,000	100.0%	-1.2%

	FY24 Actual				FY25 Plan				FY26 Plan				FY27 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
Support Services Subsidiaries																
WELS Church Extension Fund	-	6,014,230	6,014,230	4.85	-	7,025,000	7,025,000	5.85	-	11,877,000	11,877,000	6.25	-	10,520,000	10,520,000	6.25
WELS Foundation	-	1,118,083	1,118,083	4.30	-	1,157,000	1,157,000	4.50	-	1,127,000	1,127,000	3.75	-	1,140,000	1,140,000	3.75
WELS Investment Funds	-	497,882	497,882	2.05	-	535,000	535,000	2.25	-	554,000	554,000	2.05	-	572,000	572,000	2.05
Northwestern Publishing House	-	4,814,654	4,814,654	25.20	-	5,017,000	5,017,000	27.00	-	5,284,000	5,284,000	27.00	-	5,358,000	5,358,000	27.00
TOTAL	-	12,444,849	12,444,849	36.40	-	13,734,000	13,734,000	39.60	-	18,842,000	18,842,000	39.05	-	17,590,000	17,590,000	39.05

TOTAL WELS & SUBSIDIARIES	32,033,449	66,814,671	98,848,120	524.57	34,163,000	76,748,700	110,911,700	541.77	35,893,000	85,211,000	121,104,000	541.20	36,618,000	81,974,000	118,592,000	536.60
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**Ministry Financial Plan Summary of Expenses
Funded by Synod Support and Special Funds, Gifts, Tuition and Fees**

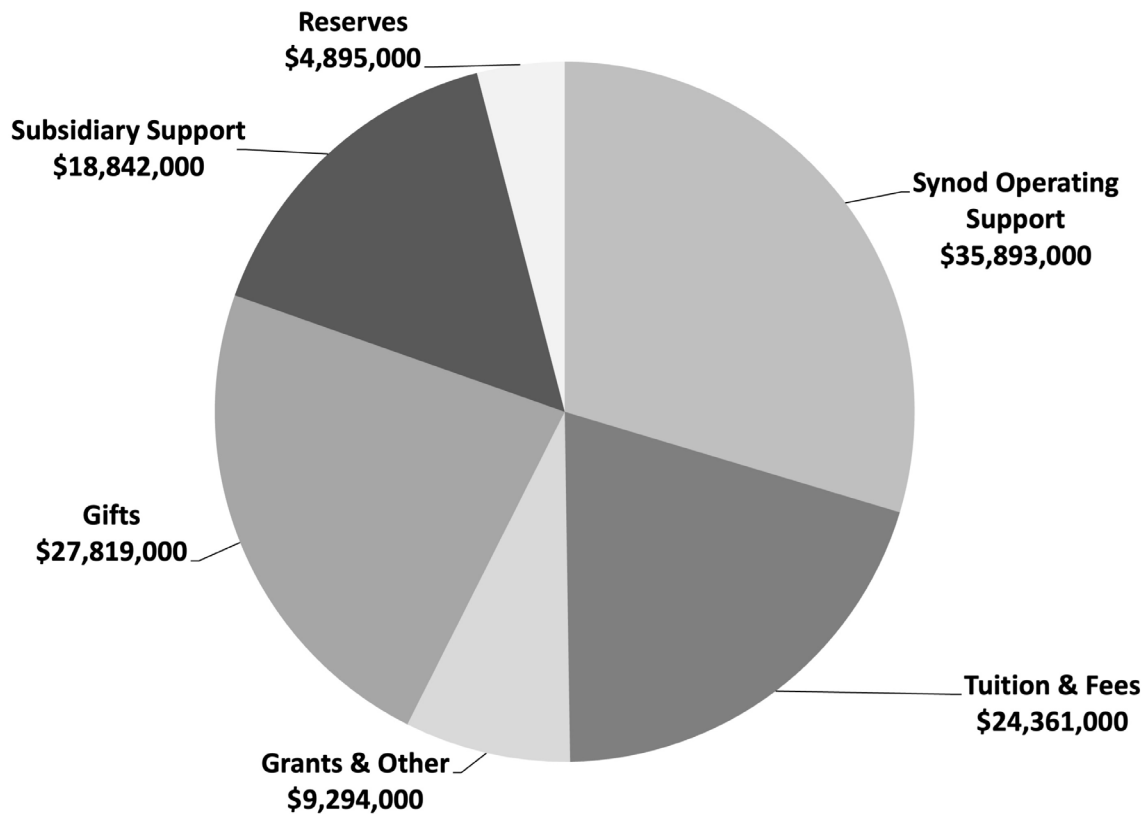
	FY24 Actual			FY25 Plan			FY26 Plan			FY27 Plan		
	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expenses
Home Missions												
Board and Administration	844,984	146,600	991,584	937,433	138,700	1,076,133	1,008,500	113,000	1,121,500	1,041,400	113,000	1,154,400
Vicars in Missions	160,969	29,826	190,795	259,135	-	259,135	260,000	-	260,000	275,000	25,000	300,000
Campus Ministry	441,074	109,716	550,790	446,600	132,980	579,580	706,600	1,000	707,600	726,500	1,000	727,500
Multi-cultural Ministry	731,594	857,753	1,589,347	788,777	1,411,818	2,200,595	743,000	665,600	1,408,600	718,000	667,000	1,385,000
Outreach Ministry	3,941,379	3,451,926	7,393,305	3,882,055	4,969,545	8,851,600	3,861,900	6,958,400	10,820,300	4,039,100	6,998,000	11,037,100
Joint Mission Council Ministry	-	746,135	746,135	-	713,957	713,957	-	1,074,000	1,074,000	-	1,054,000	1,054,000
TOTAL	6,120,000	5,341,956	11,461,956	6,314,000	7,367,000	13,681,000	6,580,000	8,812,000	15,392,000	6,800,000	8,858,000	15,658,000
			16.13			16.13			16.13			16.13

World Missions												
Board and Administration	591,120	168,808	759,928	657,646	404,050	1,061,696	491,000	100,000	591,000	504,000	100,000	604,000
Africa	1,056,309	892,167	1,948,476	929,813	1,665,210	2,595,023	1,395,000	863,000	2,258,000	1,412,000	935,000	2,347,000
Europe	717,175	778,984	1,496,159	737,196	436,658	1,173,854	890,000	413,000	1,309,000	910,000	419,000	1,329,000
Latin America	1,350,151	196,214	1,546,365	1,406,006	162,789	1,568,795	1,390,000	101,000	1,491,000	1,467,000	110,000	1,577,000
Native America	315,528	473,115	788,643	356,372	453,572	809,944	489,000	237,000	726,000	452,000	213,000	665,000
Asia	1,653,657	2,116,182	3,769,839	1,576,659	3,168,600	4,747,259	1,679,000	2,933,000	4,612,000	1,821,000	3,206,000	5,027,000
New Initiatives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	90,000	90,000	-	90,000	90,000
Multi-Language Publications	1,349,659	514,650	1,864,309	1,769,308	320,000	2,089,308	1,134,000	462,000	1,596,000	1,131,000	331,000	1,462,000
Joint Mission Council	-	432,483	432,483	-	599,621	599,621	-	463,000	463,000	-	475,000	475,000
Missionary Support	335,401	69,530	404,931	162,000	162,500	324,500	432,000	302,000	734,000	443,000	285,000	728,000
TOTAL	7,369,000	5,642,133	13,011,133	7,597,000	7,373,000	14,970,000	7,900,000	5,970,000	13,870,000	8,140,000	6,164,000	14,304,000
			61.45			62.20			62.20			60.20

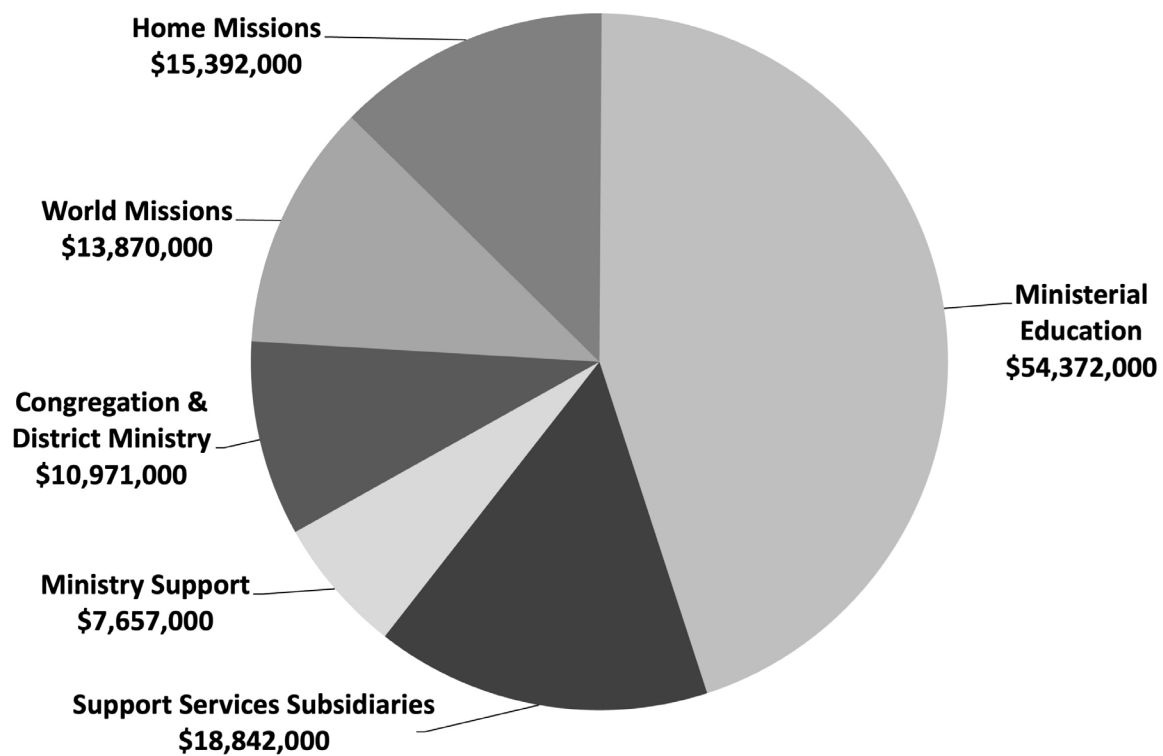
Ministerial Education												
Board and Administration	220,343	1,199,847	1,420,190	265,000	1,270,000	1,535,000	236,500	1,290,000	1,526,500	239,000	1,380,000	1,619,000
Retiree Health Care	27,177	-	27,177	25,000	-	25,000	26,500	-	26,500	25,000	-	25,000
Ministry Recruitment Counselors	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	783,000	783,000	-	840,000	840,000
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary	867,000	6,036,927	6,903,927	893,000	7,624,000	8,517,000	918,000	7,242,000	8,160,000	945,000	7,802,000	8,747,000
Martin Luther College	3,864,000	20,814,320	24,678,320	3,980,000	23,313,000	27,293,000	4,098,000	24,507,000	28,605,000	4,221,000	22,719,000	26,940,000
Luther Preparatory School	2,488,000	6,872,875	9,360,875	2,562,000	7,161,000	9,723,000	2,640,000	7,943,000	10,588,000	2,718,000	7,604,000	10,322,000
Michigan Lutheran Seminary	1,187,000	3,234,676	4,421,676	1,222,000	3,428,700	4,650,700	1,260,000	3,423,000	4,683,000	1,299,000	3,509,000	4,808,000
TOTAL	8,653,520	38,158,645	46,812,165	8,947,000	42,796,700	51,743,700	9,179,000	45,193,000	54,372,000	9,447,000	43,854,000	53,301,000
			337.77			343.29			345.49			340.89

Ministry Financial Plan Summary of Expenses Funded by Synod Support and Special Funds, Gifts, Tuition and Fees													
	FY24 Actual			FY25 Plan			FY26 Plan			FY27 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	
Congregation & District Ministry	Congregation Services	1,565,000	1,926,258	3,491,258	19.45	1,560,000	2,537,000	4,097,000	18.95	1,622,000	2,768,000	4,390,000	17.75
	Conference of Presidents	100,046	(2,355)	97,691	0.00	124,000	50,000	174,000	0.00	132,400	25,000	157,400	0.00
	Christian Giving	2,063,051	(5,643)	2,057,408	17.97	2,588,000	8,000	2,596,000	20.80	2,665,000	10,000	2,675,000	20.48
	Communication Services	755,925	103,089	859,014	7.70	1,094,000	101,000	1,195,000	10.30	1,357,000	88,000	1,445,000	10.30
	District Ministries	1,413,392	36,902	1,450,294	0.00	1,434,000	-	1,434,000	0.00	1,543,000	50,000	1,593,000	1.00
	Convention	130,989	96,042	227,031	0.00	-	-	-	0.00	135,000	100,000	235,000	0.00
	CICR	10,399	550,809	561,208	0.00	44,000	60,000	104,000	0.00	42,600	48,000	90,600	0.00
	Special Support	23,311	-	23,311	0.00	70,000	-	70,000	0.00	70,000	-	70,000	0.00
	Support	301,184	-	301,184	0.00	315,000	-	315,000	0.00	315,000	-	315,000	0.00
	TOTAL	6,363,297	2,705,102	9,068,399	45.12	7,729,000	2,756,000	9,985,000	50.05	7,882,000	3,089,000	10,971,000	49.53
Ministry Support	Facilities	213,873	389,567	603,440	0.00	310,000	320,000	630,000	0.00	322,000	930,000	1,252,000	0.50
	Synodical Council	66,205	468,672	534,877	0.00	86,000	512,000	598,000	0.00	86,000	525,000	611,000	0.00
	Synod Presidium	362,816	89,407	452,223	2.00	408,920	100,000	508,920	2.00	429,000	-	429,000	2.00
	Special Task Forces	102	-	102	0.00	2,000	-	2,000	0.00	2,000	-	2,000	0.00
	Archives	96,599	-	96,599	1.00	109,080	-	109,080	1.00	136,000	-	136,000	1.00
	Technology	1,576,916	2,415	1,579,331	13.00	1,782,000	40,000	1,822,000	14.00	1,970,000	-	1,970,000	14.00
	Financial Services	925,880	-	925,880	7.70	1,050,000	-	1,050,000	9.50	1,092,000	-	1,092,000	9.50
	Human Resources	285,241	415	285,656	2.00	328,000	-	328,000	2.00	315,000	-	315,000	1.80
	CAR	-	1,571,510	1,571,510	2.00	-	1,750,000	1,750,000	2.00	-	1,850,000	1,850,000	2.00
	TOTAL	3,527,632	2,521,986	6,049,618	27.70	4,076,000	2,722,000	6,798,000	30.50	4,352,000	3,305,000	7,657,000	30.80

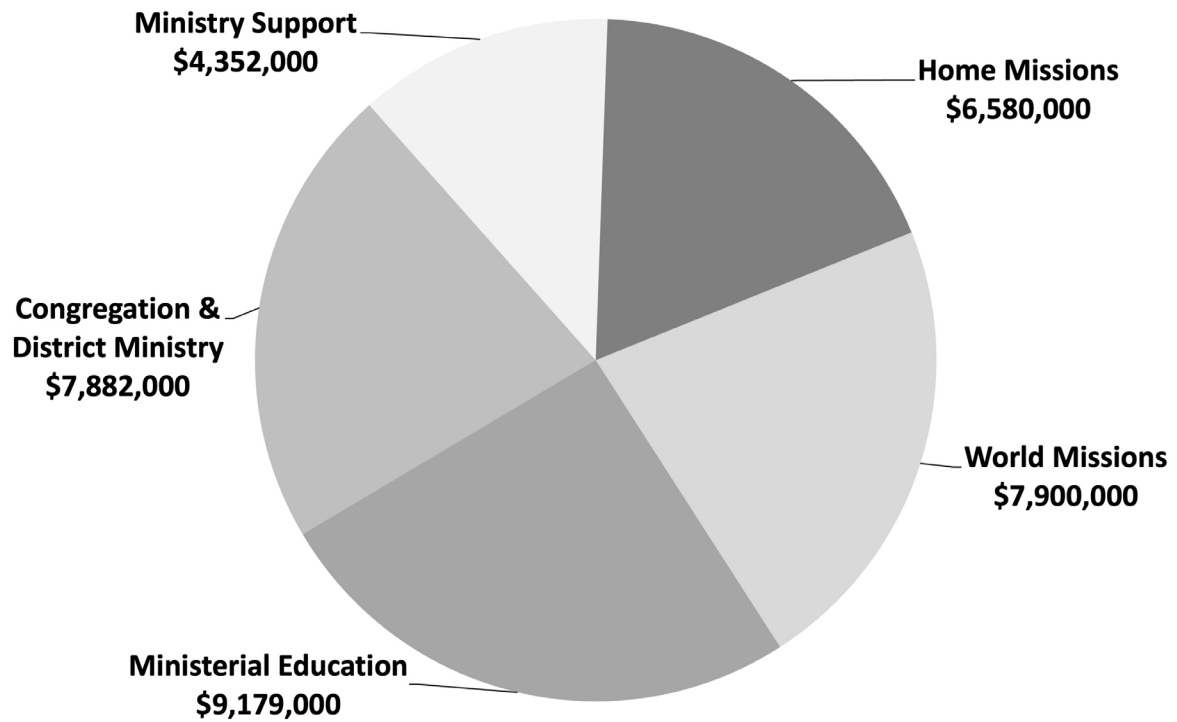
**FY 2025-26 Total Ministry Plan Support
\$121,104,000**



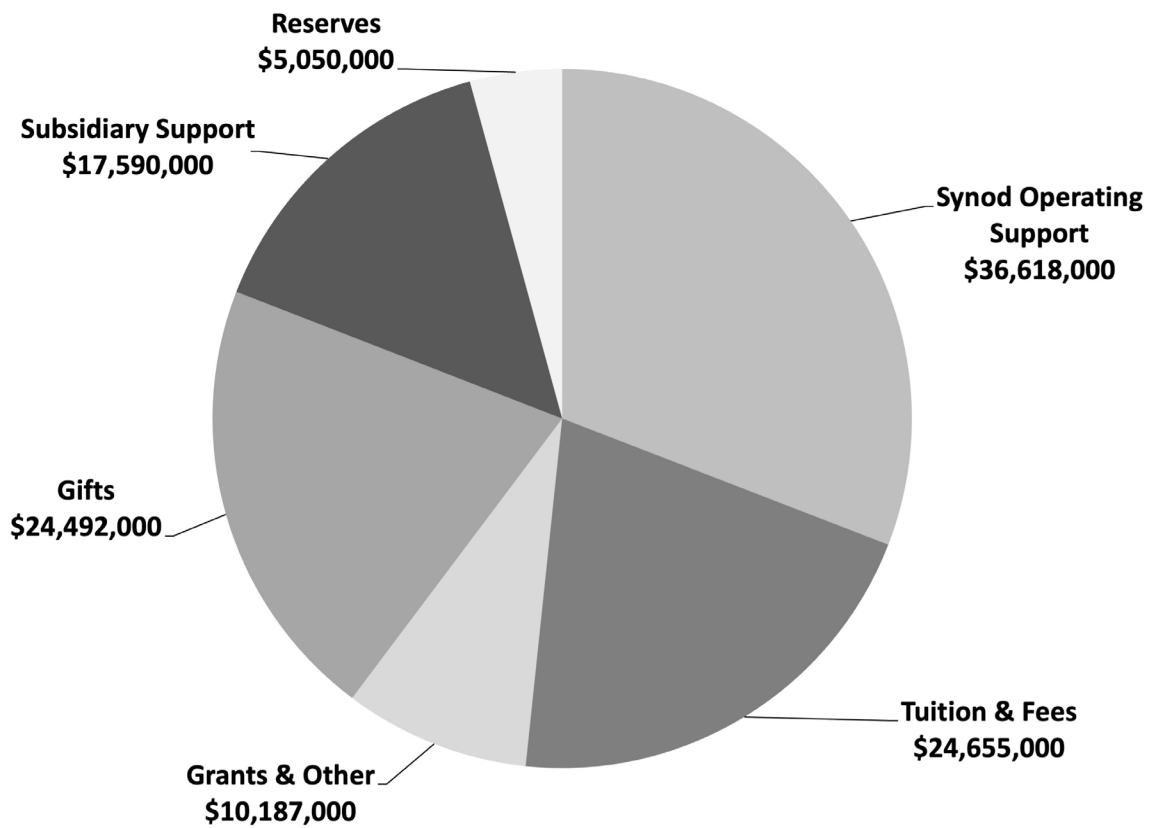
**FY 2025-26 Total Ministry Plan Expenses
\$121,104,000**



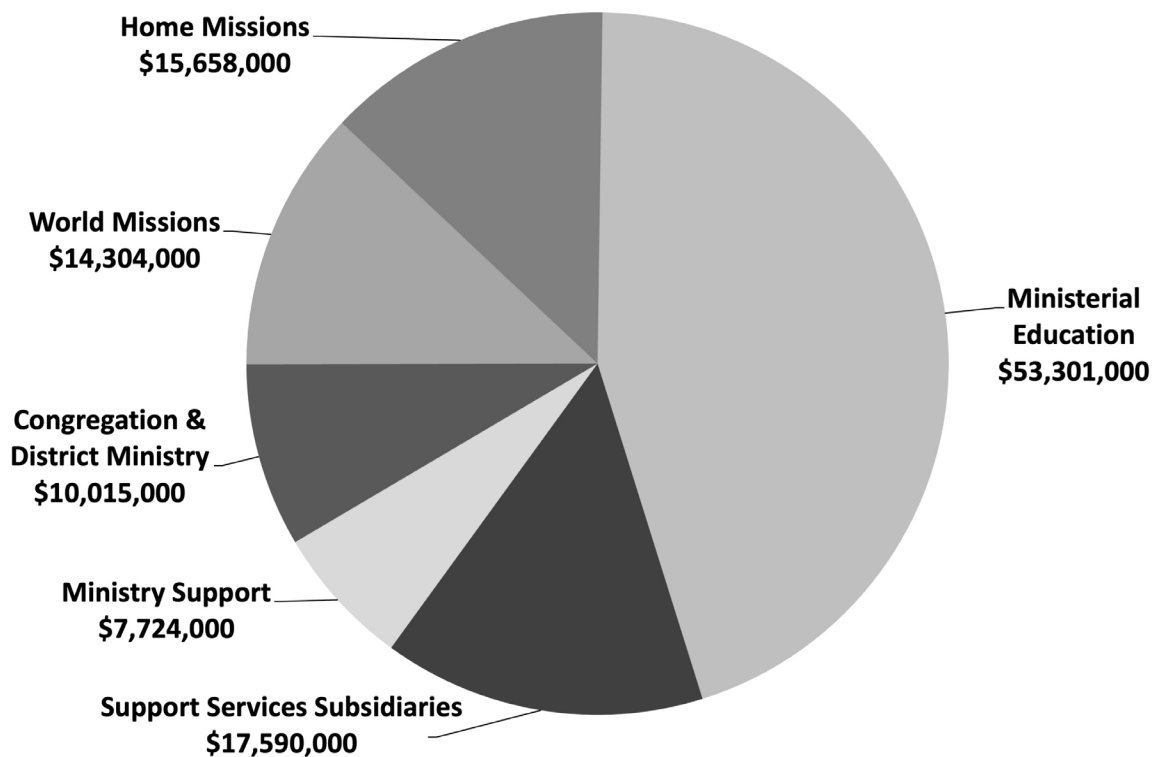
FY 2025-26 Synod Operating Support Allocation
\$35,893,000



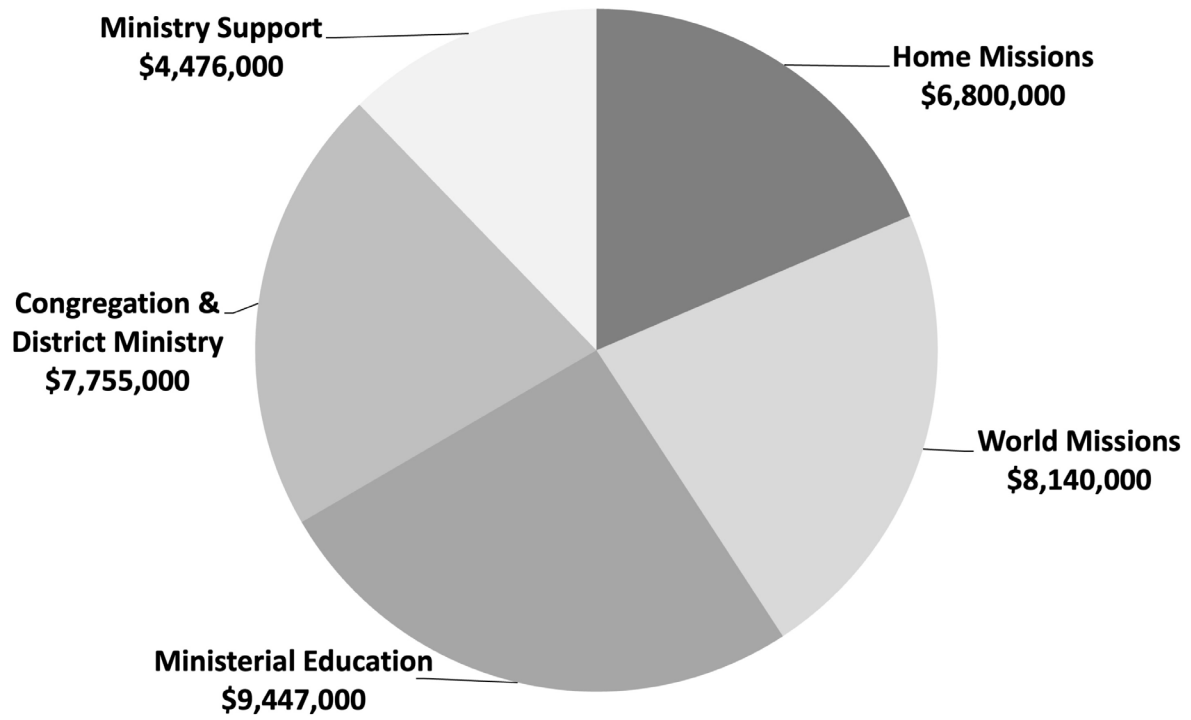
**FY 2026-27 Total Ministry Plan Support
\$118,592,000**



**FY 2026-27 Total Ministry Plan Expenses
\$118,592,000**



FY 2026-27 Synod Operating Support Allocation
\$36,618,000



WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Consolidating Statement of Financial Position
As of June 30, 2024

ASSETS

	WELS	MLC	WLS	MLS	LPS	WELS CEF	WELS Foundation	WIF	WHI	NPH	Eliminations	Consolidated
ASSETS												
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 57,797,911	\$ 1,308,650	\$ 1,887,323	\$ 1,693,080	\$ 12,349,086	\$ 5,919,616	\$ 2,210,761	\$ -	\$ 12,748	\$ 1,208,377	\$ (1,893,676)	\$ 82,493,876
Restricted cash	1,194,115	-	-	-	-	-	1,266,373	-	-	-	-	2,460,488
Investments	11,675,432	16,079,090	5,591,835	317,684	-	34,142,410	196,594,107	325,238,981	-	11,296,377	(255,330,994)	345,604,922
Accounts receivable, net	1,123,019	43,674	44,884	22,505	36,402	-	10,417	-	-	555,522	(43,604)	1,792,819
Gifts and bequests	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
receivable, net	1,361,626	1,249,263	428,263	442,687	483,732	121,500	650,000	-	-	-	-	4,737,071
Accrued interest	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
receivable	-	-	-	-	-	652,621	-	-	-	-	-	652,621
Inventories, net	-	191,076	207,009	31,925	19,731	-	-	-	-	1,950,177	-	2,399,918
Loans to students, net	-	333,410	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	333,410
Property and real estate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
held for sale	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,406,000	-	-	-	-	1,406,000
Loans receivable from	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
congregations, net	-	-	-	-	-	203,220,707	-	-	-	-	-	203,220,707
Cash surrender value of	-	71,840	40,498	1,529	-	-	1,263,924	-	-	-	-	1,377,791
life insurance policies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Assets held in trust	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
outside WELS	-	1,265,137	-	153,001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,418,138
Other assets	731,855	222,870	106,287	1,250	70,353	53,211	1,531	-	-	52,259	-	1,239,616
Interest in net assets of	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
WELS Foundation	23,462,430	3,615,089	2,414,687	2,444,853	576,991	605,737	-	-	-	-	(33,119,787)	-
Beneficial interest in net	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
assets of WELS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Foundation	21,179,911	3,695,190	2,737,929	274,830	618,112	-	-	-	-	-	(28,505,972)	-
Property, plant, and	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
equipment, net	4,111,431	28,554,869	4,940,618	4,887,621	8,539,763	-	-	-	-	432,192	-	51,466,484
Interest in assets of	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
WELS Foundation	28,067,884	23,422,814	26,639,664	1,876,641	3,560,911	-	-	-	-	-	(83,567,914)	-
Due (to)/from related party	249,197	4,173,739	2,076,196	-	3,223,493	-	-	32,257	1,890	603,604	(10,360,376)	-
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 150,954,811	\$ 84,226,711	\$ 47,115,193	\$ 12,147,606	\$ 29,478,564	\$ 244,715,802	\$ 203,403,113	\$ 325,271,238	\$ 14,638	\$ 16,098,508	\$ (412,822,323)	\$ 700,603,861

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Consolidating Statement of Financial Position (continued)
As of June 30, 2024

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

	WELS	MLC	WLS	MLS	LPS	WELS CEF	WELS Foundation	WIF	WHI	NPH	Eliminations	Consolidated
LIABILITIES												
Accounts payable	\$ 1,386,045	\$ 958,786	\$ 217,973	\$ 41,744	\$ 185,002	\$ -	\$ 56,762	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 106,092	\$ -	\$ 2,952,404
Liability for credit losses on unfunded commitments	-	-	-	-	-	96,799	-	-	-	-	-	96,799
Accrued expenses and other liabilities	3,770,768	365,964	90,281	50,754	158,772	2,108,918	-	313,776	-	130,112	(408,066)	6,531,279
Deferred revenue	355,627	476,980	264,315	18,192	99,300	-	-	-	-	625,345	-	1,839,759
Retiree health benefits payable	598,699	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	598,699
Certificates payable	-	-	-	-	-	111,741,256	-	-	-	-	(16,845,487)	94,895,769
Deposits held in custody	1,188,080	322,129	16,906	5,131	26,269	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,558,515
Liabilities to other beneficiaries	-	1,509,523	-	-	-	-	20,912,314	-	-	-	-	22,421,837
Liabilities to outside agencies and organizations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	84,949,234	84,949,234
Gift annuities payable, at fair value	-	-	-	-	-	-	9,564,676	-	-	-	-	9,564,676
Trusts payable	-	-	-	-	-	-	12,607,713	-	-	-	-	12,607,713
U.S. government grants	-	170,071	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	170,071
Due to WELS and Schools refundable	-	-	-	-	-	-	83,722,852	-	-	-	(83,722,852)	-
Due to/(from) related party	-	-	-	112,165	9,622,745	477,021	-	-	-	-	(10,211,931)	-
Total Liabilities	7,299,219	3,803,453	589,475	227,986	10,092,088	114,423,994	126,864,317	313,776	-	861,549	(26,239,102)	238,236,755
NET ASSETS												
Without donor restrictions	61,101,772	16,085,496	13,590,082	1,982,655	6,173,385	95,543,672	13,526,698	324,957,462	14,638	15,089,175	(280,851,012)	267,214,023
With donor restrictions	82,553,820	64,337,762	32,935,636	9,936,965	13,213,091	34,748,136	63,012,098	-	-	147,784	(105,732,209)	195,153,093
Total Net Assets	143,655,592	80,423,258	46,525,718	11,919,620	19,386,476	130,291,808	76,538,796	324,957,462	14,638	15,236,959	(386,583,221)	462,367,106
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$ 150,954,811	\$ 84,226,711	\$ 47,115,193	\$ 12,147,606	\$ 29,478,564	\$ 244,715,802	\$ 203,403,113	\$ 325,271,238	\$ 14,638	\$ 16,098,508	\$ (412,822,323)	\$ 700,603,861

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Consolidating Statement of Activities
As of and For the Year Ended June 30, 2024

	WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS										Eliminations	Consolidated
	WELS	M.L.C.	W.L.S.	M.L.S.	L.P.S.	WELS CEF	Foundation	WIF	WHI	NPH		
MEMBER SUPPORT, REVENUE AND RECLASSIFICATIONS												
Member Support:												
Offerings from congregations	\$ 23,592,756	-	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 23,592,756
Gifts and grants	3,669,827	1,234,058	1,104,940	731,494	570,268	131,437	1,506,548	-	6,546	-	(826,976)	8,128,142
Bequests	3,834,348	804,753	1,106,928	-	525,034	737,310	1,73,196	-	-	-	-	7,181,569
Total Member Support	31,096,931	2,038,811	2,211,868	731,494	1,095,302	868,747	1,678,744	-	6,546	-	(826,976)	38,902,487
Revenues:												
Tuition and student fees, net	-	10,727,873	387,287	1,785,249	5,180,504	-	-	-	-	-	-	18,080,913
Activity fees and retail sales	2,279,137	1,196,680	92,840	203,800	161,144	-	-	10,195,496	7,255	5,197,618	(10,585,866)	8,748,104
Investment returns, net	3,240,141	974,099	1,472,804	78,204	125,880	8,949,576	1,264,097	38,213,110	4	927,637	(38,020,078)	17,225,474
Net gain on sale of property and real estate held for sale	-	-	-	-	-	-	560	-	-	-	-	560
Change in value of trust agreements	-	810	21,640	(80)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21,621
Other	720,447	114,468	36,195	14,212	78,911	-	718,104	-	-	8,518	(85,414)	1,605,441
Transfer from other funds	1,461,383	4,294,929	2,305,101	1,441,540	2,923,882	-	-	-	-	-	(12,426,835)	-
Total Revenues	7,701,108	17,308,859	4,315,867	3,522,925	8,470,321	8,949,576	1,982,761	48,408,606	7,259	6,133,773	(61,118,942)	45,682,113
Reclassifications:												
Net assets released from restrictions	13,059,844	4,871,366	2,613,539	851,255	1,106,717	1,217,321	3,643,505	-	1,460	21,758	(4,962,430)	22,424,335
Total Reclassifications	13,059,844	4,871,366	2,613,539	851,255	1,106,717	1,217,321	3,643,505	-	1,460	21,758	(4,962,430)	22,424,335
Total Member Support, Revenues and Reclassifications	51,857,883	24,219,036	9,141,274	5,105,674	10,672,340	11,035,644	7,306,010	48,408,606	15,265	6,155,531	(66,908,348)	107,008,915
EXPENSES												
Program Services:												
Ministerial education	10,063,575	20,643,723	5,771,137	3,559,059	8,121,659	-	-	-	-	-	(12,341,252)	35,817,901
World missions	12,985,510	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(279,213)	12,706,297
Home missions	11,424,166	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(350,111)	11,074,055
Congregational and district ministry	8,442,855	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(271,583)	8,171,272
Northwestern Publishing House	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,432,254	(101,749)	3,330,505
Total Program Services	42,916,106	20,643,723	5,771,137	3,559,059	8,121,659	-	-	-	-	3,432,254	(13,343,908)	71,100,030
Support Services:												
Ministry support subsidiaries	-	-	-	-	-	5,561,534	2,201,701	-	12,823	-	(2,027,895)	5,748,163
General and administrative	4,401,486	3,266,100	791,781	838,974	1,043,320	452,696	428,517	509,851	2,579	1,382,400	13,964	13,129,668
Mission advancement	2,164,514	768,407	341,009	23,646	195,896	-	-	-	-	-	94,960	3,588,432
Transfer to other funds	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,798,445	17,601,455	300	-	(21,400,200)	-
Total Support Services	6,566,000	4,034,507	1,132,790	862,620	1,239,216	6,014,230	8,428,663	18,111,306	15,702	1,382,400	(23,319,171)	22,466,263
Total Expenses	49,482,106	24,678,230	6,903,927	4,421,679	9,360,875	6,014,230	8,428,663	18,111,306	15,702	4,814,654	(36,663,079)	93,566,293
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS												
NET ASSETS - Beginning of Year	58,725,995	16,544,690	11,352,735	1,298,660	4,861,920	91,231,063	12,647,351	294,660,162	15,075	13,748,298	(250,605,743)	254,480,206
Adoption of ASU 2016-13 (see Note 1)	-	-	-	-	-	(708,805)	-	-	-	-	-	(708,805)
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	\$ 61,101,772	\$ 16,085,496	\$ 13,590,082	\$ 1,982,655	\$ 6,173,385	\$ 95,543,672	\$ 13,526,698	\$ 324,957,462	\$ 14,638	\$ 15,089,175	\$ (280,851,012)	\$ 267,214,023

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Consolidating Statement of Activities (continued)
As of and For the Year Ended June 30, 2024

WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS												
	WELS	MLC	WLS	MLS	LPS	WELS CEF	WELS Foundation	WIF	WHI	NPH	Eliminations	Consolidated
MEMBER SUPPORT, REVENUE AND RECLASSIFICATIONS												
Member Support:												
Gifts and grants	\$ 9,403,450	\$ 4,856,978	\$ 3,205,931	\$ 451,518	\$ 683,956	\$ -	\$ 2,282,987	\$ -	\$ 1,460	\$ 103,000	\$ (24,617)	\$ 20,964,663
Bequests	1,453,436	141,973	251,887	-	-	-	1,114,393	-	-	-	(485)	2,961,204
Total Member Support	10,856,886	4,998,951	3,457,818	451,518	683,956	-	3,397,380	-	1,460	103,000	(25,102)	23,925,867
Revenues:												
Investment returns, net	3,389,663	2,943,911	1,918,480	215,422	365,951	4,181,678	10,214,542	-	-	-	-	23,229,647
Net loss on sale of property and real estate held for sale	-	-	-	-	-	-	(41,488)	-	-	-	-	(41,488)
Change in value of trust agreements	7,013,222	1,840,282	1,006,037	318,169	148,212	82,943	(1,992,977)	-	-	-	(10,317,298)	(1,901,410)
Contributed nonfinancial assets	-	1,250,528	309,526	31,427	666,748	-	-	-	-	-	(2,258,229)	-
Other	84,971	93,741	(1,963)	-	-	-	6,754	-	-	-	(23)	183,480
Total Revenues	10,487,856	6,128,462	3,232,080	565,018	1,180,911	4,264,621	8,186,831	-	-	-	(12,575,550)	21,470,229
Reclassifications:												
Net assets released from restrictions	(13,059,844)	(4,871,366)	(2,613,539)	(851,255)	(1,106,717)	(1,217,321)	(3,643,505)	-	(1,460)	(21,758)	4,962,430	(22,424,335)
Total Reclassifications	(13,059,844)	(4,871,366)	(2,613,539)	(851,255)	(1,106,717)	(1,217,321)	(3,643,505)	-	(1,460)	(21,758)	4,962,430	(22,424,335)
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	8,284,898	6,256,047	4,076,359	165,281	758,150	3,047,300	7,940,706	-	-	81,242	(7,638,222)	22,971,761
NET ASSETS - Beginning of Year	74,268,922	58,081,715	28,869,277	9,771,684	12,454,941	31,700,836	55,071,392	-	-	66,542	(98,093,987)	172,181,322
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	\$ 82,553,820	\$ 64,337,762	\$ 32,935,636	\$ 9,936,965	\$ 13,213,091	\$ 34,748,136	\$ 63,012,098	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 147,784	\$ (105,732,209)	\$ 195,153,083

WELS compensation guidelines

2.21% Matrix Adjustment Factor
(multiply established Cash Housing
Allowances by 1.0221 for new FY)

WELS COMPENSATION GUIDELINES Salary Matrix 2025-26

Range Spread	12,823	13,625	16,029	16,831	17,632	18,434	19,235	20,037	20,838	21,639
Service Incr.	427	454	534	561	588	614	641	668	695	721
Ranges	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
<i>Experience</i>										
0	25,646	27,249	32,058	33,661	35,264	36,867	38,470	40,073	41,675	43,278
1	26,073	27,703	32,592	34,222	35,852	37,481	39,111	40,741	42,370	43,999
2	26,501	28,157	33,127	34,783	36,439	38,096	39,752	41,409	43,064	44,721
3	26,928	28,611	33,661	35,344	37,027	38,710	40,394	42,077	43,759	45,442
4	27,356	29,066	34,195	35,905	37,615	39,325	41,035	42,745	44,453	46,163
5	27,783	29,520	34,730	36,466	38,203	39,939	41,676	43,412	45,148	46,885
6	28,211	29,974	35,264	37,027	38,790	40,554	42,317	44,080	45,843	47,606
7	28,638	30,428	35,798	37,588	39,378	41,168	42,958	44,748	46,537	48,327
8	29,065	30,882	36,332	38,149	39,966	41,783	43,599	45,416	47,232	49,048
9	29,493	31,336	36,867	38,710	40,554	42,397	44,241	46,084	47,926	49,770
10	29,920	31,791	37,401	39,271	41,141	43,012	44,882	46,752	48,621	50,491
11	30,348	32,245	37,935	39,832	41,729	43,626	45,523	47,420	49,315	51,212
12	30,775	32,699	38,470	40,393	42,317	44,240	46,164	48,088	50,010	51,934
13	31,203	33,153	39,004	40,954	42,905	44,855	46,805	48,755	50,705	52,655
14	31,630	33,607	39,538	41,515	43,492	45,469	47,446	49,423	51,399	53,376
15	32,058	34,061	40,073	42,076	44,080	46,084	48,088	50,091	52,094	54,098
16	32,485	34,515	40,607	42,637	44,668	46,698	48,729	50,759	52,788	54,819
17	32,912	34,970	41,141	43,198	45,255	47,313	49,370	51,427	53,483	55,540
18	33,340	35,424	41,675	43,759	45,843	47,927	50,011	52,095	54,178	56,261
19	33,767	35,878	42,210	44,320	46,431	48,542	50,652	52,763	54,872	56,983
20	34,195	36,332	42,744	44,881	47,019	49,156	51,293	53,431	55,567	57,704
21	34,622	36,786	43,278	45,442	47,606	49,770	51,934	54,099	56,261	58,425
22	35,050	37,240	43,813	46,003	48,194	50,385	52,576	54,766	56,956	59,147
23	35,477	37,694	44,347	46,564	48,782	50,999	53,217	55,434	57,650	59,868
24	35,904	38,149	44,881	47,125	49,370	51,614	53,858	56,102	58,345	60,589
25	36,332	38,603	45,416	47,686	49,957	52,228	54,499	56,770	59,040	61,311
26	36,759	39,057	45,950	48,247	50,545	52,843	55,140	57,438	59,734	62,032
27	37,187	39,511	46,484	48,808	51,133	53,457	55,781	58,106	60,429	62,753
28	37,614	39,965	47,018	49,369	51,721	54,072	56,423	58,774	61,123	63,474
29	38,042	40,419	47,553	49,930	52,308	54,686	57,064	59,442	61,818	64,196
30	38,469	40,874	48,087	50,492	52,896	55,300	57,705	60,109	62,513	64,917
31	38,896	41,328	48,621	51,053	53,484	55,915	58,346	60,777	63,207	65,638
32	39,324	41,782	49,156	51,614	54,071	56,529	58,987	61,445	63,902	66,360

See pp. 112 and 113 for current synodical salary range assignments and above base compensation for called workers.

0.73% Matrix Adjustment Factor
(multiply established Cash Housing
Allowances by 1.0073 for new FY)

WELS COMPENSATION GUIDELINES

Salary Matrix 2026–27

Range Spread	12,917	13,724	16,146	16,954	17,761	18,568	19,375	20,183	20,990	21,797
<i>Service Incr.</i>	431	457	538	565	592	619	646	673	700	727
Ranges	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
<i>Experience</i>										
0	25,834	27,448	32,292	33,907	35,521	37,136	38,750	40,365	41,980	43,594
1	26,265	27,905	32,830	34,472	36,113	37,755	39,396	41,038	42,680	44,321
2	26,695	28,363	33,368	35,037	36,705	38,374	40,042	41,711	43,379	45,047
3	27,126	28,820	33,907	35,602	37,297	38,993	40,688	42,383	44,079	45,774
4	27,556	29,278	34,445	36,167	37,889	39,612	41,333	43,056	44,779	46,500
5	27,987	29,735	34,983	36,733	38,481	40,231	41,979	43,729	45,478	47,227
6	28,417	30,193	35,521	37,298	39,073	40,850	42,625	44,402	46,178	47,953
7	28,848	30,650	36,059	37,863	39,665	41,469	43,271	45,074	46,878	48,680
8	29,279	31,108	36,598	38,428	40,257	42,087	43,917	45,747	47,577	49,407
9	29,709	31,565	37,136	38,993	40,849	42,706	44,563	46,420	48,277	50,133
10	30,140	32,023	37,674	39,558	41,441	43,325	45,208	47,093	48,977	50,860
11	30,570	32,480	38,212	40,123	42,033	43,944	45,854	47,765	49,676	51,586
12	31,001	32,938	38,750	40,688	42,625	44,563	46,500	48,438	50,376	52,313
13	31,431	33,395	39,289	41,254	43,217	45,182	47,146	49,111	51,076	53,039
14	31,862	33,853	39,827	41,819	43,809	45,801	47,792	49,784	51,775	53,766
15	32,293	34,310	40,365	42,384	44,401	46,420	48,438	50,456	52,475	54,493
16	32,723	34,767	40,903	42,949	44,993	47,039	49,083	51,129	53,175	55,219
17	33,154	35,225	41,441	43,514	45,585	47,658	49,729	51,802	53,874	55,946
18	33,584	35,682	41,980	44,079	46,177	48,277	50,375	52,475	54,574	56,672
19	34,015	36,140	42,518	44,644	46,769	48,896	51,021	53,147	55,274	57,399
20	34,445	36,597	43,056	45,209	47,361	49,515	51,667	53,820	55,973	58,125
21	34,876	37,055	43,594	45,774	47,953	50,134	52,313	54,493	56,673	58,852
22	35,306	37,512	44,132	46,340	48,545	50,753	52,958	55,166	57,373	59,578
23	35,737	37,970	44,671	46,905	49,137	51,371	53,604	55,838	58,072	60,305
24	36,168	38,427	45,209	47,470	49,729	51,990	54,250	56,511	58,772	61,032
25	36,598	38,885	45,747	48,035	50,321	52,609	54,896	57,184	59,472	61,758
26	37,029	39,342	46,285	48,600	50,913	53,228	55,542	57,857	60,171	62,485
27	37,459	39,800	46,823	49,165	51,505	53,847	56,188	58,529	60,871	63,211
28	37,890	40,257	47,362	49,730	52,097	54,466	56,833	59,202	61,571	63,938
29	38,320	40,715	47,900	50,295	52,689	55,085	57,479	59,875	62,270	64,664
30	38,751	41,172	48,438	50,861	53,282	55,704	58,125	60,548	62,970	65,391
31	39,182	41,629	48,976	51,426	53,874	56,323	58,771	61,220	63,670	66,118
32	39,612	42,087	49,514	51,991	54,466	56,942	59,417	61,893	64,369	66,844

See pp. 112 and 113 for current synodical salary range assignments and above base compensation for called workers.

Synodical salary range assignments

Salary matrices are available on pp. 110 and 111.

Early childhood ministry teacher (no degree)	A
Early childhood ministry teacher (associate's degree)	B
Early childhood ministry teacher (bachelor's degree)	C - F
Teacher (BS or BA base)	C - F
Secondary teacher	D - G
Early childhood ministry director	D - G
Prep professor	D - G
Staff minister	D - G
Principal	E - H
Christian giving counselor	E - H
Prep vice president	E - H
Prep dean	E - H
College professor	E - H
Pastor	E - H
Home missionary	E - H
World missionary	E - H
CMM associate administrator	E - H
CMM associate director	E - H
CMM national coordinator	E - H
Mission counselor	E - H
CMM administrator	F - I
CMM director	F - I
Prep president	F - I
College vice president	F - I
College dean	F - I
Seminary professor	F - I
Seminary vice president	F - I
College president	G - I
Seminary president	G - I
Synod president	J

Note: A periodic review (minimally once per year) should be undertaken to evaluate an individual's compensation level. Changing call responsibilities and educational levels may lead to a salary adjustment.

NOTES:

1. The online Called Worker Compensation Calculator at cwcompcalc.wels.net helps a calling body consider the impact of additional responsibilities and education in determining where in the suggested salary range the worker ought to be placed.
2. Columns C-J increase in 5 percent increments over column C. (For example, Rate Range E is 10 percent greater than Rate Range C, Rate Range F is 15 percent greater, etc.)
3. Each called worker's actual salary is determined by finding the applicable experience row and determining the appropriate rate range. (For example, for FY 2025–26 a teacher with 10 years' experience should receive a salary between \$37,401 and \$43,012. Salaries greater than \$37,401 would recognize additional education credentials and/or responsibility levels.)
4. The basis for the housing equity allowance is the entry level base salary (matrix column "C," 0 years of service).
5. The cost of living adjustment (COLA) is applied to the worker's salary.
6. SECA tax reimbursement, cash housing allowances, and/or housing equity are provided in addition to the salary amount.

Above base compensation components for called workers

1. Cost of living adjustment using Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER) or similar COLA index. Should simply be \$0 if resulting COLA is negative.
2. Cash housing allowance if not provided housing (using HUD Fair Market Rental Values or local real estate info established upon hire date + adjusted annually based on the percent change recommended in upper left corner of the salary matrix. For FY 2025–26 this adjustment would be 2.21 percent, for FY 2026–27 this adjustment is .73 percent.). For renters, the cash housing allowance should be reviewed and reestablished annually until home purchase.
3. Social Security (SECA) allowance (7.65 percent of salary, cost of living, and housing value/cash housing/fair market rental of parsonage-teachership).
4. Housing equity of 2 percent of entry-level base (Column C, 0 years of service) for workers in provided housing (parsonage/teachership). Amount is \$641 for 2025–26 and \$646 for 2026–27.
5. VEBA health insurance or similar.
6. WELS Retirement Program.
7. Reimbursement for business-related expenses such as travel and conferences.

Note: A web-based Called Worker Compensation Calculator can be found at cwcompcalc.wels.net.

Additional called worker compensation resources including the salary matrices are available at welsrc.net/human-resources or on the Human Resources page under “compensation” on WELS Cloud at cloud.wels.net.

Compensation for synod president and congregational support for vice presidents

The synod president is compensated with a salary based on column “J.” In addition to the base salary and the other components of compensation listed with the compensation guidelines, in FY 2025–26 the president will receive above base compensation the amount of \$76,975, and for FY 2026–27 the amount will be \$79,545, as established per Synodical Council policy. This amount shall be reviewed annually for possible adjustment by the Synodical Council during its April meetings.

The proposed budget for the next biennium includes funding for the first and second vice presidents’ congregations in the amount of \$20,000 and \$10,000, respectively. The congregations of the vice presidents are free to request and utilize these funds as they see fit to cover expenses and lost ministry time as a result of the synodical duties of their pastors.

WELS compensation plan worksheet

Visit cwcompcalc.wels.net for the Called Worker Compensation Calculator with options to print/save a worksheet.

Missions

Board for Home Missions Floor Committee #14

Our calling

The Word became flesh and dwelled among us” (John 1:14). That truth never grows old. Whether you hear it again on Christmas Day or read it now, the truth that the One who was true God from eternity became true man in real time to live among us, be one of us, die for us, and rise again for us. As a result, our sins have been forgiven, our guilt has been paid, the devil has been defeated, and the gift of eternal life is given to all who believe. There is no greater peace, joy, and hope than this!

With Christ living for us and working through us, we heed his calling to “go and gather disciples from all nations” (Matthew 28:19). We go with confidence, trusting in the power of his Word and sacraments and armed with his promise that he is with us always as we carry out the Great Commission throughout North America.

That is the role of WELS Home Missions. With support from God’s people, we plant churches and assist mission-minded congregations in the United States, Canada, and English-speaking West Indies so that we can spread the light of God’s Word to more people. Currently, Home Missions supports 144 congregations. Thirty of those congregations are cross-cultural mission congregations. Home Missions also provides more than 50 campus ministries with financial support, while assisting hundreds of other congregations that serve college students around the United States and Canada.

WELS has 14 Home Missions districts, each with their own district mission board. Each district mission board is composed of pastors and lay volunteers who plan the work to start new missions and support existing missions in their districts. Two representatives from each district serve on the Board for Home Missions (BHM). The BHM Executive Committee, made up of members of the BHM, approves new starts and enhancement ministries for the next year and helps set overall direction for WELS Home Missions. District mission boards and home mission churches are supported by three home mission counselors, a Hispanic outreach consultant, an Asian ministry coordinator, and a campus ministry mission counselor. Mission counselors work with district mission boards to help start new home missions and provide counseling and assistance to home mission congregations and the home missionaries who serve them.

Our current situation

100 Missions in 10 Years

At the 2021 synod convention, delegates enthusiastically approved a Home Missions initiative to plant 100 new mission churches and enhance 75 ministries in 10 years beginning in 2023. Since July 1, 2023, Home Missions has approved funding for 21 new mission churches and 24 enhancement ministries. We thank God for the opportunity to partner with God’s people to reach more of the lost with the gospel.

Two years into the “100 in 10” initiative, we are mindful of the ongoing challenges of money and manpower. We strive to strike a balance between being aggressive with our plans, trusting that the Lord is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, while also carefully and thoughtfully navigating the real challenges we face.

The following, from our District Mission Board Chairman Manual, details our core values as we seek to balance aggressive plans with current realities:

- 1) Our plans and decisions will flow from faith in God's promises (not fear) but will also have a healthy dose of reality (i.e., projected growth for a mission will be "aggressively realistic" so that you trust the Lord to bless the work, but you don't assume the mission will be worshipping 300+ by year three).
- 2) As leaders in our districts and synod entrusted with the task of reaching more of the lost by planting new churches and enhancing existing ministries throughout North America, we will strive to be the best and wisest stewards of WELS resources that God has given us. This means we will aim to be thorough in our planning and budgeting and will not avoid asking tough questions, making difficult decisions, and having hard conversations . . . all for the sake of the gospel.

As we let those scriptural core values influence our decisions, we know that the Lord will bless our plans and decisions as he sees fit. As he does, we give him thanks for these blessings and the privilege of equipping God's people to be on the front lines of mission work throughout North America. Our thanks include deep gratitude for the blessed partnerships we share in the gospel with those noted in this report.

Special gifts and offerings

One of the current realities we face is the rising cost of carrying out ministry. In the last several years this cost has risen dramatically. Recently the average cost of planting a mission was around \$1 million. That cost is approaching \$1.5 million and higher in many places—and not just in urban areas.

At the same time, we continue to marvel at the generosity of God's people. In total, more than \$14,438,000 has been given to WELS Home Missions between Sept. 2021 and March 2025. A total of \$5,583,000 (including special Church Extension Fund grants and several other internal transfers) was designated for the "100 in 10" effort.

Missions advancement director

As we give thanks to God for the generosity of God's people, we also recognize the ongoing need for special gifts to financially support the "100 in 10" initiative. To that end, we have hired Mrs. Christine Dovnik to be our full-time missions advancement director. Dovnik has worked with Home and World Missions for seven years as missions advancement coordinator. We have been able to adjust her responsibilities so she can dedicate all her time to advancement work on behalf of Home and World Missions. In this role, she will be working in close partnership with the Ministry of Christian Giving. We are thankful to Pastor Kurt Lueneburg and his Ministry of Christian Giving team for the support they are providing us with this new position.

2024 new starts and enhancements

In 2024, the Board for Home Missions approved 14 new home mission starts and enhancements.

New starts were approved in Bend, Ore.; Cedar Lake, Ind.; Conway, Ark.; Cypress/Waller, Texas; Easley, S.C.; and Williston, N.D. Enhancements were approved at Calvary, Dallas, Texas; Christ the Redeemer, Barre/Montpelier, Vt. (restart); Crossroads, Chicago, Ill. (restart); Faith, Prior Lake, Minn.; Good Shepherd, Plymouth, Wis. (restart); Northdale, Tampa, Fla.; St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.; and St. Paul, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

2025 new starts and enhancements

Arlington, Tenn.: Arlington, located 25 miles northwest of Memphis, is on the brink of rapid growth with Ford Motor Company set to build a new plant for electric truck production. Since 2022, the South Atlantic District Mission Board has been working with a dedicated group of 60 members and Pastor Jim Turriff from Gloria Dei, Memphis, who plan to relocate and establish a fresh start in Arlington under a new name.

Erie, Colo.: Erie, located 30 miles north of Denver, has experienced a 55 percent population increase from 2010 to 2020, with continued growth expected. The Colorado District Mission Board began exploring this area in 2022. A core group of ten adults has been gathering for fellowship and Bible study while attending local festivals to share its plans for a new church. So far, 25 people have expressed interest in learning more about the mission efforts.

Jarrell, Texas: Jarrell is a rapidly growing town located 44 miles north of Austin in northern Williamson County. The county has seen its population surge from 426,000 in 2010 to 671,000 in 2022, with

continued growth expected. For the past three years, Pastor Don Patterson has been working with a core group of 11, which began holding weekly worship in October 2024. The group has identified 90 prospects, many of whom they connected with by volunteering in the Jarrell Bible Community Food Pantry. The plan is to rent space for eight years before securing land and constructing a permanent church home.

Madison, Wis.: The center of Madison is expected to grow by 200,000 in future years, with many residents seeking an urban lifestyle. A core group of 14 adults, familiar with the area, has been working together since 2022—meeting regularly for Bible study and ministry planning—and has also secured a rental space for worship and community activities. Twenty prospects have expressed a strong interest in learning more about this new mission. A new mission plant in the center of urban Madison would allow WELS to reach an entirely new demographic in the area.

San Tan Valley, Ariz.: Located on the eastern edge of Phoenix, San Tan Valley is experiencing rapid growth with no signs of slowing down. Since 2022, the Arizona-California District Mission Board has been working with Heritage in Gilbert, Ariz., to plant a new mission in the area. A core group of 26 adults has been gathering regularly for Bible study and community events, building connections and momentum. In October 2024, they began holding regular worship services and have already identified 127 prospects interested in learning more about the new church.

Enhancements were approved at Christ, Clarksville, Md. (restart); Living Word, Petaluma, Calif. (restart); Living Word, Waukesha, Wis.; Redeemer, Edna, Texas; Risen Savior, Lakewood Ranch, Fla.; and Saint Mark Mankato, Mankato, Minn.

Read more about these new starts and enhancements at wels100in10.net.

Our pipeline

Home Missions has a pipeline of exploratory missions as we look beyond 2025. This is essential as we seek to be proactive in our preparations to open new missions. District mission boards have identified possible locations in their respective districts. In some places, there is already a group meeting for Bible study and training so they can be prepared when funding is approved and a missionary arrives. Our pipeline enables good planning and faithful stewardship. You can view details on some of these exploratory missions in our pipeline in the interactive Google map found at wels100in10.net. An exploratory mission in our pipeline is not guaranteed funding until formally approved by the Board for Home Missions.

Vicar in a Mission Setting

The Vicar in a Mission Setting program has existed since 1988. Home Missions has partnered with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to assign vicars to mission congregations as well as mission-minded congregations. This program has been valuable to Home Missions as it helps prepare future pastors to serve in a mission setting. This current year 20 vicars are serving in a mission setting. Next year that number will also be 20. Missions gives thanks for the blessed partnership with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.

WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF) is a valuable partner of WELS Home Missions and the churches it supports. WELS CEF provides home mission churches a 4-to-1 matching grant for initial land purchase based on a 10 percent down payment. It also provides a 2-to-1 matching grant on a home mission congregation's 10 percent down payment for a facility construction project. Since 1993 CEF has provided \$48.9 million of matching grants to mission congregations and \$17 million of special grants to Home Missions.

From fiscal years 2023–25, as of this writing, CEF has provided \$6.9 million in land and facility grants to mission congregations. During that same time, CEF has provided \$2.9 million in grants to Home Missions. These loans and grants to mission congregations enable Home Missions to lower the overall operating costs for the mission, while the special grants to Home Missions help equip our missions with the resources needed to thrive rather than survive in carrying out their ministry plans. We give God thanks for the partnership in the gospel that we share with CEF and its investors.

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) is another active and generous partner serving both

Home and World Missions. The LWMS produces an annual prayer calendar featuring an aspect of WELS Missions. The LWMS supports the Befriend a Missionary program. At its spring and fall rallies, the LWMS features mission work in North America and around the world. At rallies, offerings are collected so that missions can do “extra ministry” over and above their budgets. At the annual convention in 2024, more than \$100,000 in gifts were given to Home Missions alone. We give thanks to the Lord for all the ways LWMS continues to support Home Missions.

Campus ministry

WELS Campus Ministry, a ministry of WELS Home Missions, provides encouragement, support, and resources to WELS congregations that serve college students around the United States and Canada. These congregations are vital in connecting college students with fellow Christians, strengthening their faith with the gospel message, and encouraging them to share that faith with other college students. The WELS Campus Ministry Committee currently provides more than 50 campus ministries with financial support and assists hundreds of other congregations in their campus ministry outreach.

Campus Ministry financially supports 11 campus ministries with what is called “significant” funding (anywhere from \$5,000 to \$65,000) and provides funding for another 44 campus ministries with funding usually under \$1,000.

Joint Mission Council

Home Missions works closely with the Board for World Missions and the Board for Ministerial Education through the Joint Mission Council. The Joint Mission Council provides opportunities to coordinate ministry efforts that overlap Home and World Missions. See p. 132 for a full report on the Joint Mission Council.

WELS Mission Journeys

WELS Mission Journeys provides an opportunity for all WELS members to walk together in the Great Commission. Through service opportunities in WELS mission fields at home and abroad, members can engage in Christian service. While volunteering, the learning and sharing of outreach ideas will allow individuals and teams to explore how they can use their God-given abilities to engage in outreach activities in their local communities upon their return home. With the Lord’s blessing, these trips will inspire a lifelong journey of service and outreach for all who volunteer.

These Mission Journeys teams have the opportunity to be an active outreach partner as WELS looks to start 100 missions in 10 years. These new home mission pastors and core group members will need additional support from volunteers as they reach out to their communities. There is also potential for longer-term volunteer opportunities, placing mission-oriented individuals in strategic locations to assist in forming and developing quality core groups. Learn more about both short- and long-term opportunities and get in touch with Mr. Shannon Bohme, Mission Journeys coordinator, at wels.net/missionjourneys.

New director of Missions Operations

In January 2025, Mr. Sean Young, senior director of Missions Operations, accepted a call to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to serve as director of mission advancement. Young faithfully served Home and World Missions for nearly 13 years. He was a blessing to many in our mission fields and at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. We are thankful for his faithful service and that he has this new opportunity to serve our synod in this way, and we pray for the Lord’s blessings on his work.

Mr. Stefan Felgenhauer has been hired to be our new director of Missions Operations. Felgenhauer has been the director of World Missions Operations since January 2022 and brings a valuable skillset to the team that will serve Home Missions well. Felgenhauer will be director of Missions Operations over all of Missions. An assistant director of Missions Operations has been hired and will begin his work in late May.

A look ahead

With Christ living for us and working through us, we heed his calling to “go and gather disciples from all nations” (Matthew 28:19). We go with confidence trusting in the power of his Word and sacraments and armed with his promise that he is with us always as we carry out the Great Commission through North America. We do so with the prayer, “May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands” (Psalm 90:17).

To God be the glory!

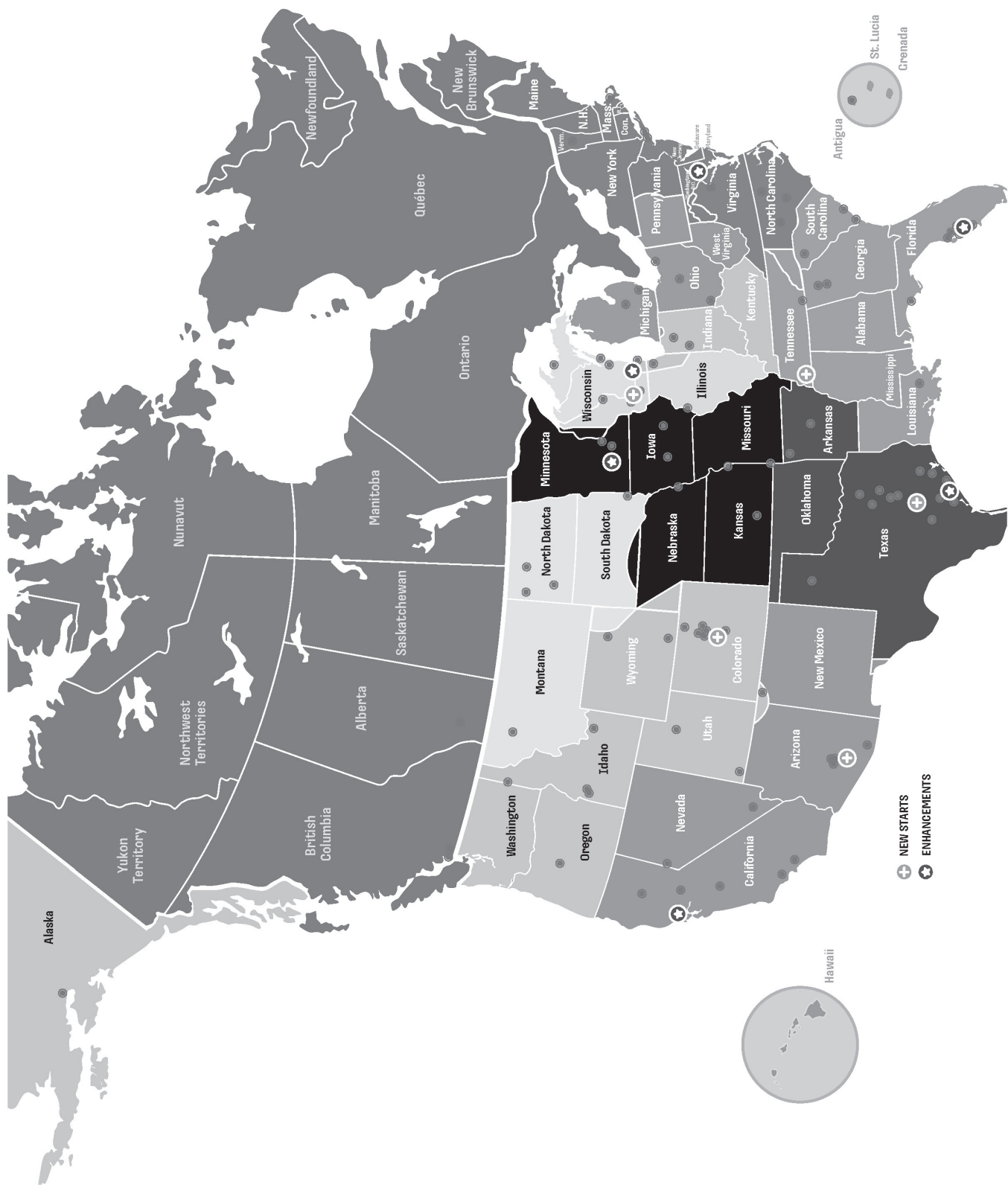
Rev. Mark Gabb, reporter

Rev. Matthew Brown, chairman of WELS Home Missions
Rev. Dustin Blumer, Southeastern Wisconsin Mission District
Rev. Timothy Bourman, North Atlantic Mission District
Mr. Eric Cereske, Arizona-California Mission District
Mr. Dallas Christ, Nebraska Mission District
Mr. Matthew Dettmann, Colorado Mission District
Rev. Brian Doeblen, Arizona-California Mission District
Rev. Aaron Duve, Michigan Mission District
Rev. Benjamin Enstad, Northern Wisconsin Mission District
Mr. Brian Grundmeier, South Central Mission District
Mr. Roger Krahn, North Atlantic Mission District
Rev. Brett Krause, Colorado Mission District
Mr. Scott Krause, Western Wisconsin Mission District
Mr. Werner Lomker, WELS–Canada Mission District
Rev. Jeffrey Mahnke, Western Wisconsin Mission District
Mr. David Malnes, Pacific Northwest Mission District
Rev. Peter Metzger, WELS–Canada Mission District
Mr. Thomas Metzger, Michigan Mission District
Rev. Joel Naumann, Campus Ministry Committee
Mr. Nathan Paul, Northern Wisconsin Mission District
Dr. Douglas Rall, South Atlantic Mission District
Rev. Stephen Schmiel, Minnesota Mission District
Mr. Lee Schull, Dakota-Montana Mission District
Mr. Daryl Schultz, Minnesota Mission District
Rev. Kevin Schultz, Pacific Northwest Mission District
Rev. Aaron Schumann, Nebraska Mission District
Rev. Mark Schutz, Dakota-Montana Mission District
Mr. Scott Stratil, Campus Ministry Committee
Rev. Nathan Sutton, South Central Mission District
Mr. Steven Wolf, Southeastern Wisconsin Mission District
Rev. Benjamin Zahn, South Atlantic Mission District

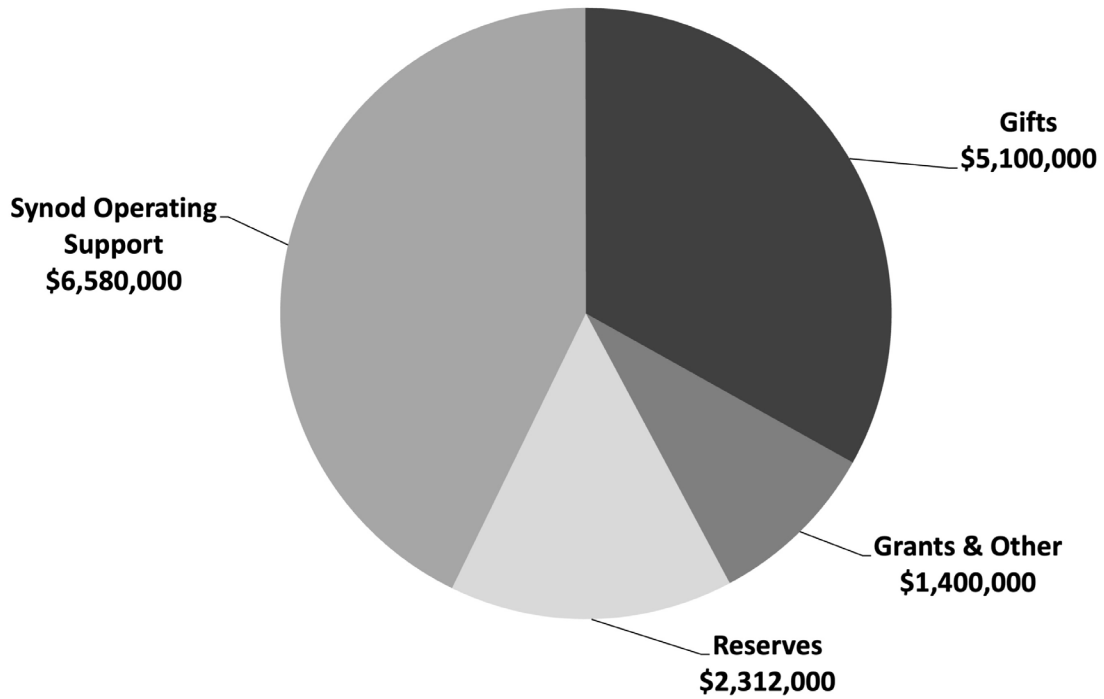
Advisory:

Mr. Stefan Felgenhauer, director of WELS Missions Operations
Rev. Mark Gabb, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions
Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

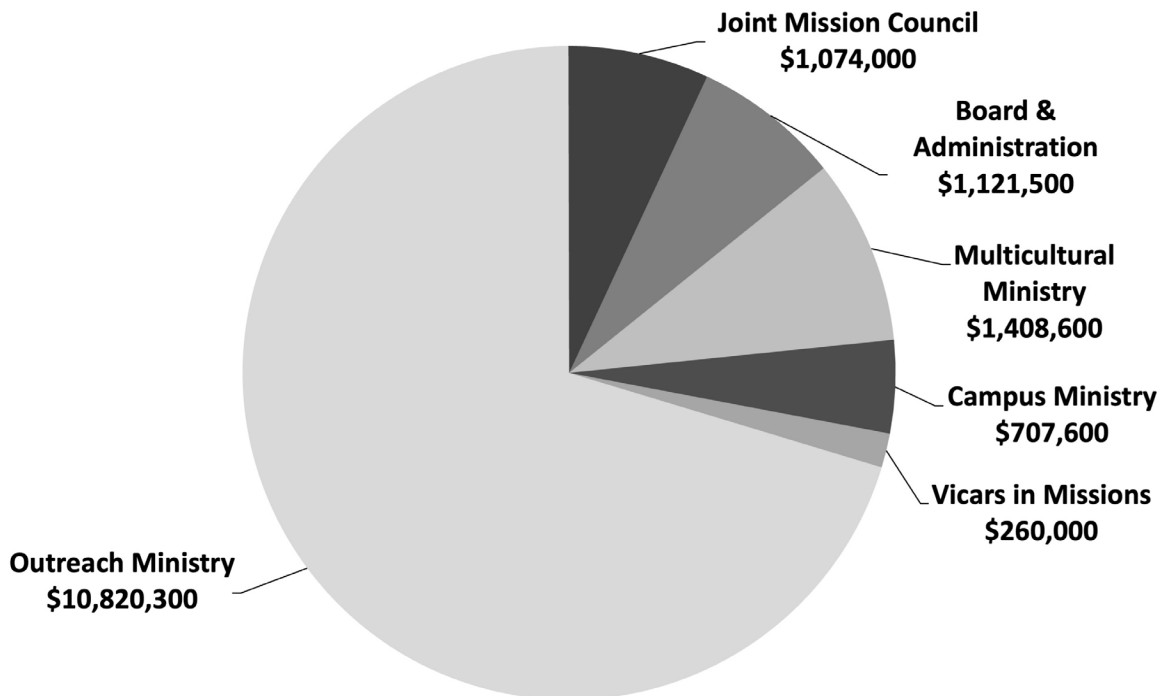
WELS HOME MISSIONS MAP



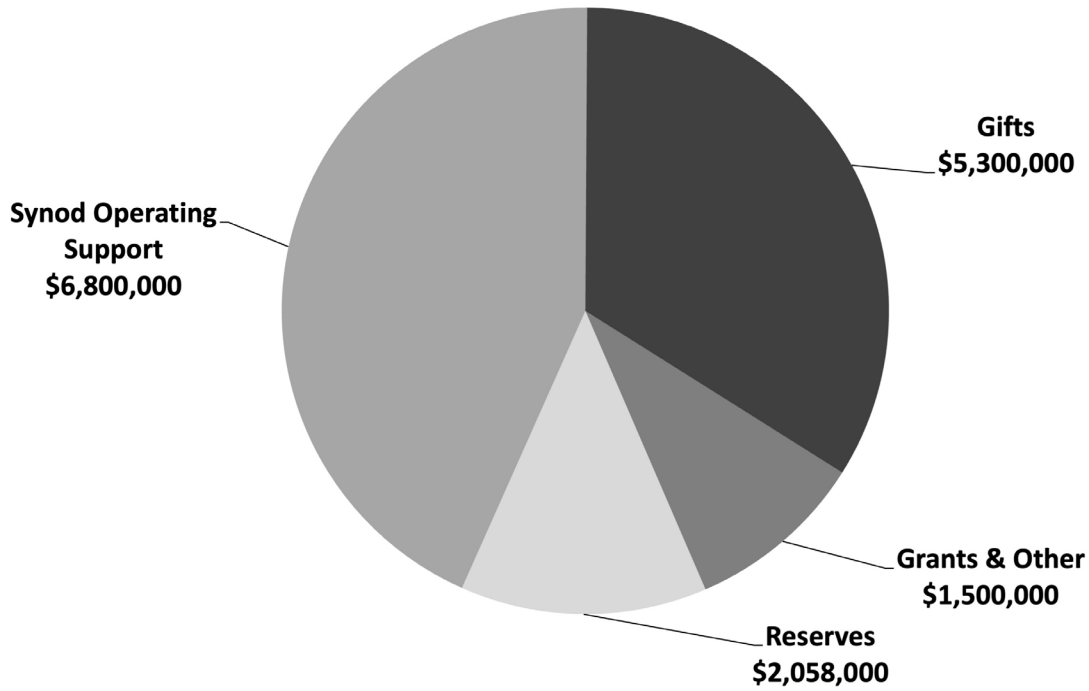
**FY 2025-26 Support
Home Missions
\$15,392,000**



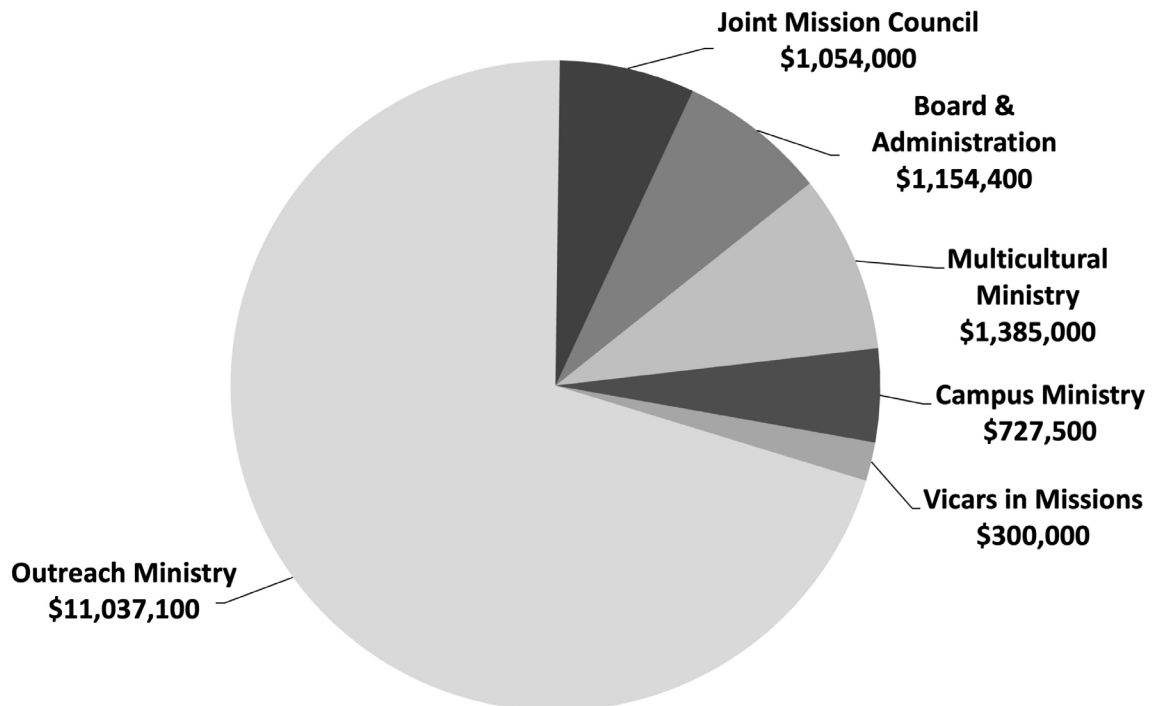
**FY 2025-26 Expenses
Home Missions
\$15,392,000**



**FY 2026-27 Support
Home Missions
\$15,658,000**



**FY 2026-27 Expenses
Home Missions
\$15,658,000**



Board for World Missions

Floor Committee #15

Our calling

Christ's love has done what no human could fathom. He entered our world, bore our sins, and rose victorious to secure our eternity. This love, poured into us by the means of grace, overflows to touch lives near and far. Our calling, as entrusted to the Board for World Missions by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is to carry this gospel to the nations, "sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ for the discipling of all people living outside the United States of America and Canada and those who, because of cultural barriers, have not been made the responsibility of other agencies of WELS" (WELS Bylaws, Sec. 6.1).

Into a world of eight billion souls—many still lost in darkness—our missionaries and partners wield the light of God's unchanging Word. This is not only a duty; it is a gospel-inspired, thrilling, God-given adventure to expand his kingdom. Imagine a future where Christ's promises echo across continents, uniting millions in faith and igniting a global movement rooted in our conservative Lutheran heritage that rejoices in God's grace alone, found in Scripture alone, grasped by faith alone. This report rejoices in our Lord's blessing and proposes direction for the future, trusting whatever path God determines to make disciples of all nations, uniting us all in Christ's love, our calling.

Our current situation

WELS World Missions is partnering to advance the gospel in 46 countries, with exploratory efforts in 19 more, driven by 47 world missionaries, almost 500 national pastors, and more than 380 students in theological training. The Lord is blessing this work with abundant fruit, and our efforts across five continents reveal a vibrant tapestry of growth, challenge, and opportunity.

In **Asia-Oceania**, the gospel is surging forward with remarkable momentum. In Vietnam, we've graduated 60 pastors who now serve rural congregations, with 120 more in training, together ministering to nearly 150,000 souls in the Hmong Fellowship Church—a testament to God's grace among very remote people. Asia Lutheran Seminary, expanding from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai, Thailand, helps the training of dozens of additional pastors across multiple countries, equipping leaders amid rising governmental pressures. New contacts in the Philippines are blossoming into vibrant fellowships, while two missionaries in Australia are gathering groups, laying the groundwork for confessional Lutheran communities. Work has also begun in New Zealand, where partnerships with our sister church in Hong Kong are sparking fresh outreach, amplifying our presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Latin America is thriving with the news of church planting and digital reach. Through *Academia Cristo's* online platform, we're working with thousands of people and 37 additional groups—spanning every country in the region—that are well on their way to joining our sister church, *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*. These groups, spurred on by more than two million weekly digital connections, are forming congregations from Mexico to Argentina, with dozens more in development. Our One Latin America Team supports this growth with live training and mentorship, turning online learners into on-the-ground leaders who share the pure Word with their neighbors, creating a network of faith that transcends borders.

In **Native America**, our mission extends beyond international fields to cultural frontiers within our own continent. New work among the Navajo in New Mexico has begun, building on 125 years of outreach to Native American tribes like the Apache. Through the Apache Christian Training School and emerging partnerships, we're raising up Native Christian leaders to reach the 92 percent of Native Americans who remain outside the faith—a slow but sacred labor rooted in our World Missions heritage. This work, found within the United States, aligns with our calling to bridge cultural barriers, bringing Christ's love to those overlooked by many.

Europe is witnessing the dawn of a new WELS mission era. In the United Kingdom (UK), the launch of our work is thriving, with two UK citizens training as pastors and leading groups in three new locations. Supported by a core team from WELS, Hong Kong, and other European partners, this effort is planting seeds for a broader Lutheran presence in the UK. Our Europe Team, based near Leipzig, Germany, continues to bolster theological training for sister churches, highlighted by new outreach efforts in Finland and Albania.

Africa is our most mature world field and continues to grow. We anticipate welcoming a new church in Tanzania, numbering up to 50,000 people, into our fellowship—a significant step for confessional Lutheranism on the continent. Alongside this, our One Africa Team is assisting in training dozens more pastors in countries like Malawi, Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria, where seminaries are equipping leaders to meet a rising demand for faithful teaching. The TELL Network, an arm of Multi-Language Productions, has uncovered contacts across Africa (and Asia), empowering these believers to share the gospel with their neighbors. This digital outreach is igniting new fellowships, promising to swell Christ's ranks as more souls are won for Christ.

Challenges persist: the need for trained workers; political instability in fields like Cameroon, Bangladesh, India, and the Middle East; and resources remain stretched. In the United States, our members' support is steadfast, but we yearn to see world missions become a personal connection for every individual in WELS. Yet, every story—from Vietnam's pastors to Tanzania's thousands—proclaims God's power. Explore more at wels.net/missions, and see the Commission on Inter-Church Relations report (p. 23) for sister church details.

A look ahead

More than 6.5 billion people still live in areas where Christianity is a small presence. They need Christ's love, facing eternity apart from him without the gospel. Yet, we trust a future radiant with the hope that Christ has won. We know God has promised a world where the unchanging truth of God's Word echoes across continents, uniting millions in faith before he returns. We ask his blessing as we seek to unite a global movement rooted in our conservative Lutheran heritage. This is our calling—a thrilling, challenging, God-given adventure to expand his kingdom. Here is the ten-year plan to make it happen:

- **Plant four pillars of truth:** We will help establish four confessional Lutheran seminary programs with partner churches—beacons of doctrine and devotion—serving as trusted hubs to equip pastors and leaders worldwide. Building on work in Hong Kong, Zambia, Germany, and Latin America, these aren't just schools; they're strongholds as beacons of faithful teaching by 2035.
- **Gather a million souls in fellowship:** Picture a million believers beyond our shores, standing shoulder-to-shoulder in Lutheran faith by 2035—thriving as a vibrant communion. From thousands more in Latin America, Tanzania's additional 50,000 to Vietnam's 150,000, this isn't a number; it's a family, won by Christ, to carry God's promises to the next generation.
- **Unleash a global missionary force:** We'll empower missionaries from our sister churches, turning receivers into senders. With training and support, they'll spread the gospel with borderless boldness in their own countries and beyond—imagine Tanzanian pastors reaching Rwanda, or Filipino leaders planting in Singapore.
- **Forge a borderless support network:** Envision a wave of generosity—resources, prayers, people—flowing freely across nations. We'll encourage a fellowship so strong it transcends flags, uniting us as one body in Christ's work, fueled by US and global churches.
- **Make World Missions personal:** In every pew, every home, we'll share the news so that every WELS member looks beyond their community to see gathering the world's people as their sacred privilege. This is your mission, our mission, alive in every heart—Christ through us.

This vision rests in God's hands, who promises, "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). Over the next biennium, we will maintain our current WELS manpower while expanding digital outreach and training the growing number of pastoral partners in sister churches. Our fellowship could reach a million souls outside North America by 2035—only as testament to God's grace and his power in us.

Your prayers, gifts, and passion drive this work. Together, let us take Christ's love to a world that will be lost without it. May the Lord bless our adventure as we bring him to the nations!

Rev. Larry M. Schlomer, reporter

Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, chairman

Teacher Matt Doering, secretary

Mr. Arlin Bornschlegl

Rev. Michael Ewart

Mr. Mark Schulz

Advisory:

Mr. Stefan Felgenhauer, director of WELS Missions Operations

Rev. Larry M. Schlomer, administrator of WELS Board for World Missions

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

WELS WORLD MISSIONS MAP

NORTH AMERICA & SOUTH AMERICA



 **MISSION PARTNERS**

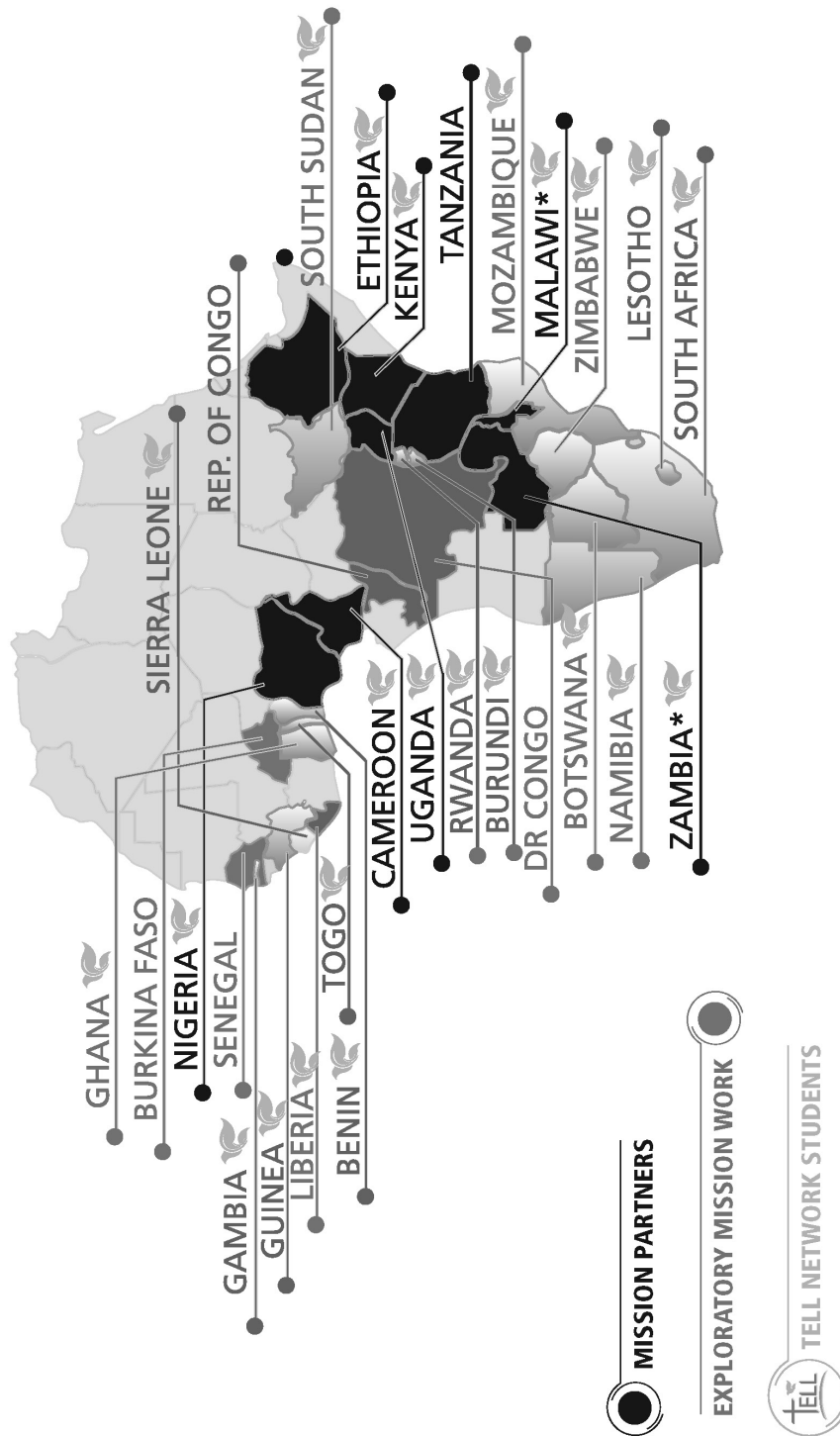
EXPLORATORY MISSION WORK 

 **TELL NETWORK STUDENTS**

*Countries where missionaries reside

WELS WORLD MISSIONS MAP

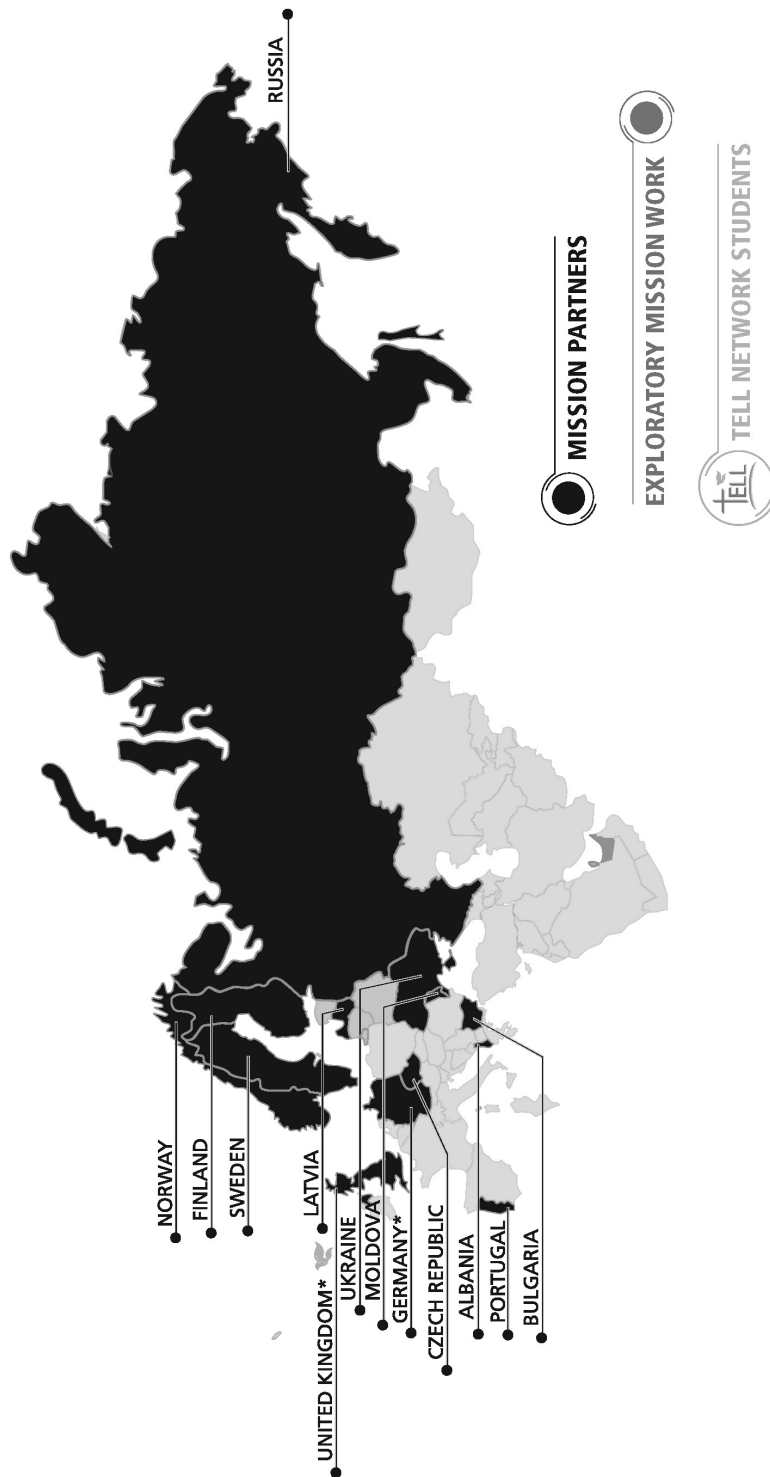
AFRICA



*Countries where missionaries reside

WELS WORLD MISSIONS MAP

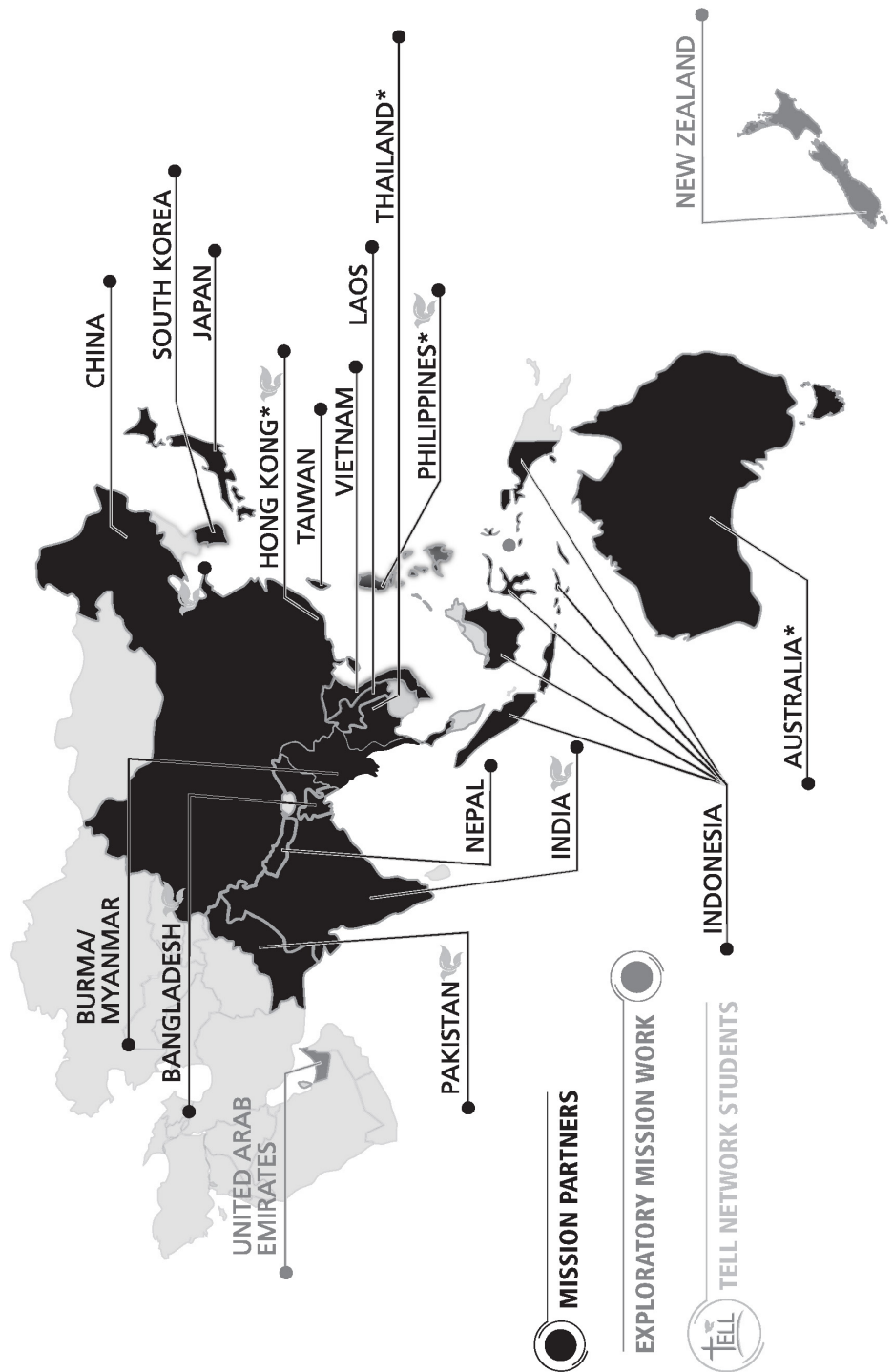
EUROPE & RUSSIA



*Countries where missionaries reside

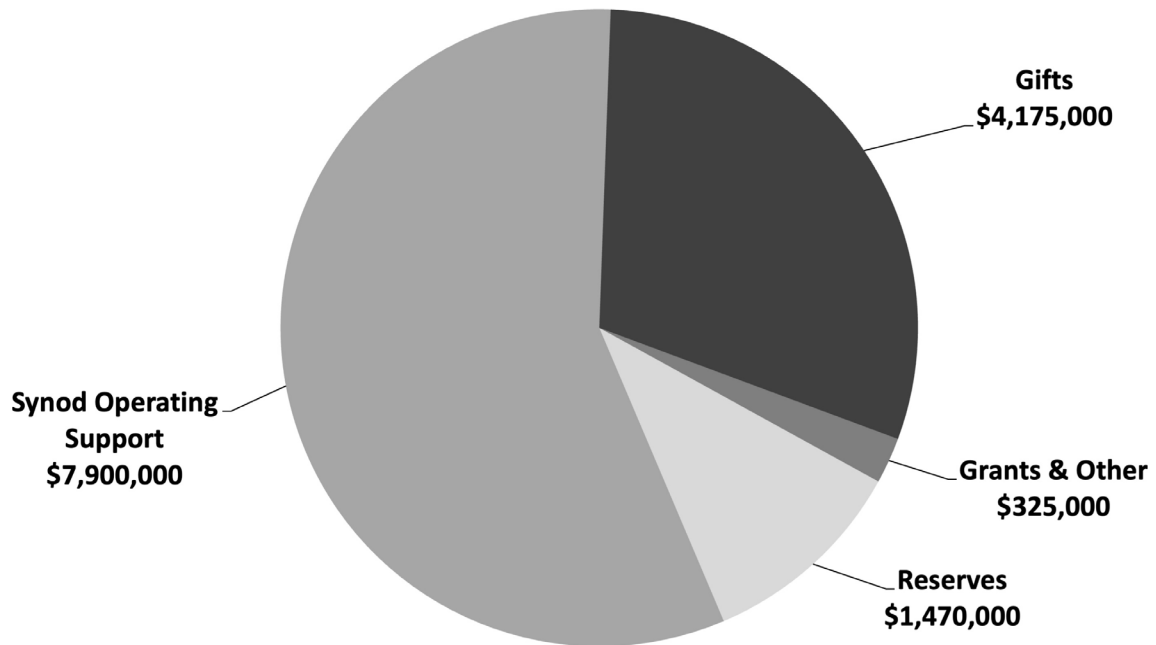
WELS WORLD MISSIONS MAP

ASIA & AUSTRALIA

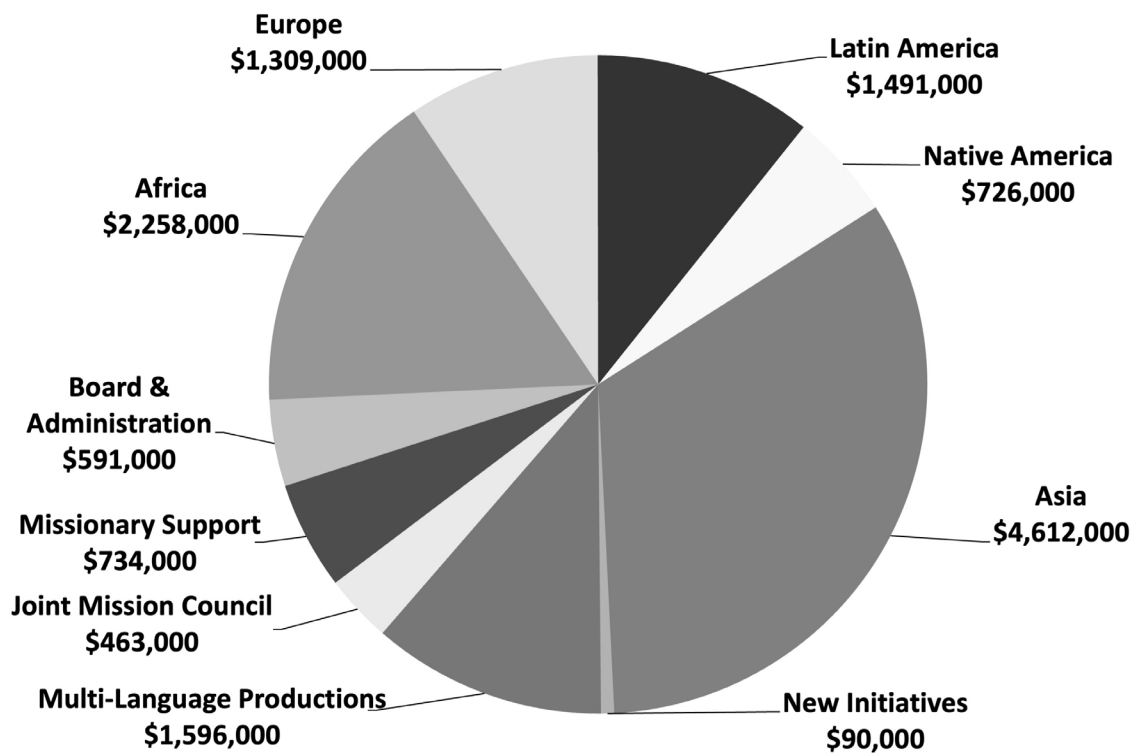


*Countries where missionaries reside

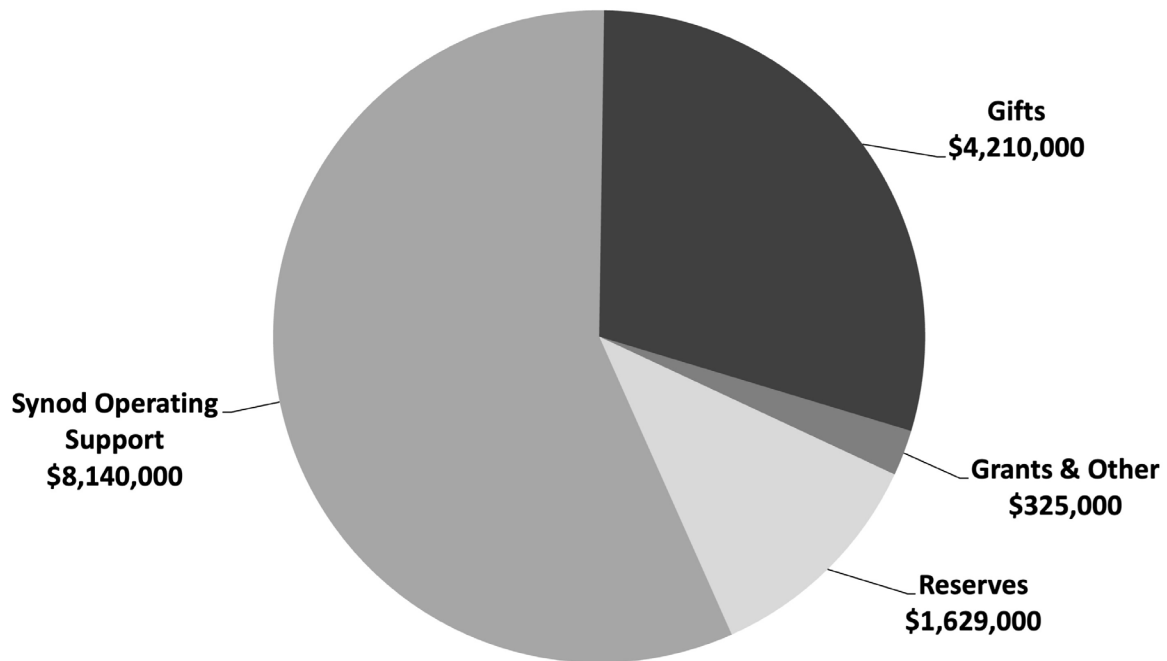
**FY 2025-26 Support
World Missions
\$13,870,000**



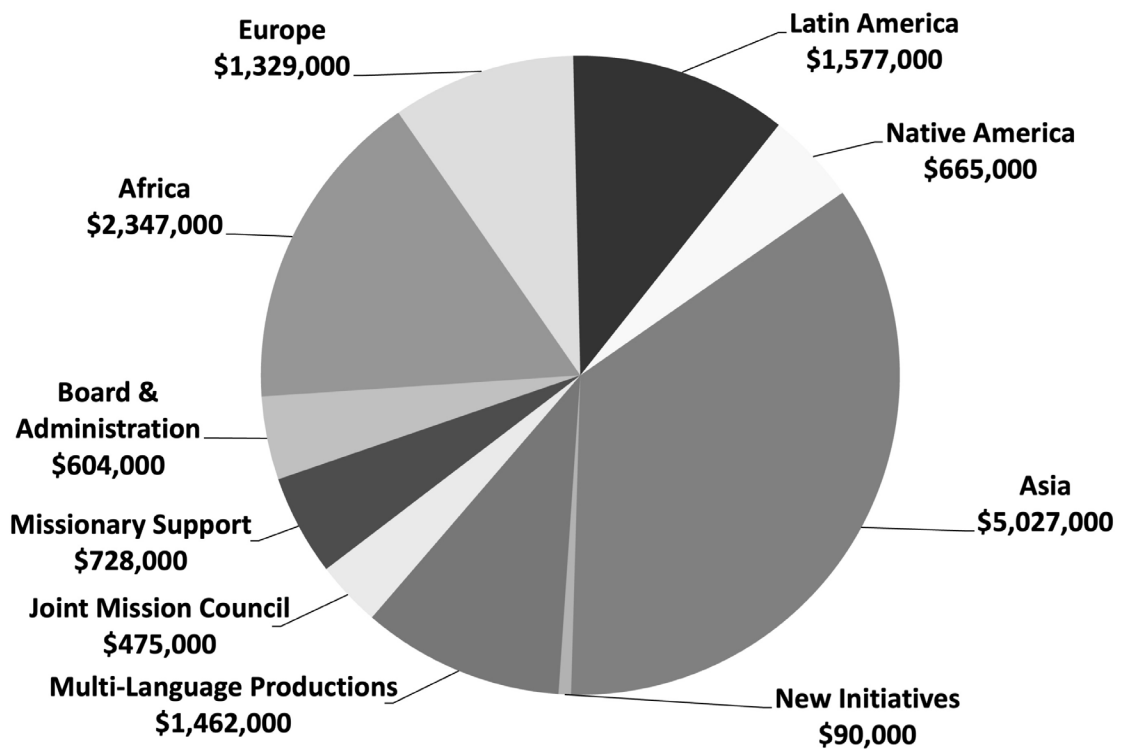
**FY 2025-26 Expenses
World Missions
\$13,870,000**



**FY 2026-27 Support
World Missions
\$14,304,000**



**FY 2026-27 Expenses
World Missions
\$14,304,000**



Joint Mission Council

Floor Committee #15

Our calling

WELS supports cross-cultural outreach at congregations throughout North America. Much of this work centers around diaspora (people group) connections, where immigrants who have joined WELS congregations in North America are able to take the gospel back to friends and family in their home country. The Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) works alongside many cross-cultural ministries to provide pastoral training for their leaders, allowing them to continue working within their individual ministry context.

The Joint Mission Council helps facilitate this cross-cultural ministry. It is made up of representatives from Home Missions, World Missions, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Our current situation

Pastoral Studies Institute

The Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary facilitates much of the work of the Joint Mission Council. Professors Harland “Skip” Goetzinger (director), David Bivens, and E. Allen Sorum make up the Pastoral Studies Institute Team. They are called jointly by the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Governing Board and the Joint Mission Council.

In **Africa**, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team is integrated into the One Africa Team in the areas of theological education, consulting, and assisting One Africa Team’s Confessional Lutheran Institute to carry out formal continuing education, seminary consultation, and professional development throughout Africa. Some examples of the work include: 1) collaboration with the One Africa Team and the Lutheran Church of Central Africa to offer Bachelors of Divinity and Masters of Theology degrees to pastors in our sister church bodies, 2) collaboration with national churches in Kenya and Ethiopia for the training of Nuer pastors in refugee camps in those countries, and 3) consultation with the One Africa Team and the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ–Kenya on the training and continuing education of pastors.

In **Asia-Oceania**, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team is similarly integrated into the Asia-Oceania One Team to provide strategic coordination of the team’s Regional Theological Training Program and Asia Lutheran Seminary. Some specific areas of this work include development of curriculum, organizing course schedules, coordination of visiting instructors, and continuing education workshops. An example of this would be an annual continuing education seminar for the pastors of the church body of our fellowship in Indonesia. In February we began a pan-Asia continuing education event in Chiang Mai, Thailand. It included 15 leaders from across Asia for a three-day learning and fellowship-building intensive. The Pastoral Studies Institute Team is also helping to develop the curriculum, organize the course schedule, and arrange the visiting teachers for pastors of the Hmong Fellowship Church who have been chosen to study at the new training center in Hanoi, Vietnam. A second cohort of the Hmong Fellowship Church recently began the program.

In **Latin America**, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team is consulting with the World Missions One Latin America Team members to determine the partners, the structure, and the program for an online seminary for all Latin American candidates. The Joint Mission Council is also partnering with the One Latin America Team to determine the scope and direction of further Spanish-speaking outreach in North America using the *Academia Cristo* program.

In **Europe**, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team is integrated into the Europe Team and assists with continuing education plans for pastors from sister churches across the continent. In Bulgaria, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team works with Gypsy (Roma) outreach sites. The team is currently instructing one native of the United Kingdom who came into fellowship with WELS while working in Virginia. After returning home to the greater London area, he connected with our London mission. He is receiving

pastoral ministry training from the Pastoral Studies Institute as he continues to serve a second location of WELS members. We are working with a second United Kingdom native who came into contact with our London mission. He is a former Anglican priest who has left that church body, declared fellowship with WELS, and is currently in doctrinal discussions with WELS and Pastoral Studies Institute representatives as he works to establish doctrinal agreement with WELS and our greater Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference fellowship.

In North America, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team continues to train immigrants to the United States for service to their local people group. More than 40 such men are currently enrolled and are committed to completing the Pastoral Studies Institute training program. Currently seven urban Black men in Milwaukee are enrolled in the Joshua Urban Ministry Program. The Pastoral Studies Institute Team also assists the Native American Committee as requested. The Pastoral Studies Institute recently engaged in conversation about reviewing the Native Christians worker training program as it just received a new student for the first time in quite awhile.

Cross-cultural ministry

WELS is committed to sharing the gospel with people from a variety of cultural and language backgrounds here in the US. Hispanic ministry encourages congregations to reach out to their Spanish-speaking neighbors through tools like *Academia Cristo*, English classes, and community events. Hmong ministry continues to serve five communities in the US while also opening doors for mission work in Southeast Asia, with strong connections to the Asia-Oceania Team. North American Asian ministry assists congregations and schools in building relationships with Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese communities, often with leadership from Asian pastors trained through the Pastoral Studies Institute. South Asian ministry focuses on outreach to Hindu and Muslim backgrounds through Bible studies, community programs, and worship services. Sudanese ministry has provided a spiritual home for refugees in the US and now also supports pastoral training and outreach in African refugee camps, coordinated in partnership with WELS' One Africa Team. Through these efforts, WELS remains focused on sharing Christ's love across cultures and continents.

Diaspora ministry

When immigrants are dispersed in other countries in large numbers, they are free to organize themselves into congregations, seek spiritual leadership, and teach the gospel to people in other countries and back home. This type of work is often called diaspora ministry, and the Joint Mission Council appoints diaspora ministry facilitators to help wherever they are able. Pastor Neil Birkholz, North American Asian mission counselor, oversees the diaspora ministry facilitators' work. Other diaspora ministry facilitators include Pastors Aaron Bublitz (Africa), Julius Buelow (Europe), Leon Ehler (Asia-Oceania), Jeff Gunn (Native America), and Andrew Johnston (Latin America).

Mission Journeys

WELS Mission Journeys provides an opportunity for all WELS members to walk together in the Great Commission. Through service opportunities in WELS mission fields at home and abroad, members can engage in Christian service. While volunteering, the learning and sharing of outreach ideas will allow individuals and teams to explore how they can use their God-given abilities to engage in outreach activities in their local communities upon their return home. With the Lord's blessing, these trips will inspire a lifelong journey of service and outreach for all who volunteer. Mr. Shannon Bohme serves as Mission Journeys coordinator. Learn more about opportunities to volunteer at wels.net/missionjourneys.

Mission Journeys can help coordinate one-day mission experiences, 3- to 14-day short-term mission trips, and long-term service opportunities up to a year in length. WELS Mission Journeys refers individuals interested in service opportunities over a year in length to Friends Network, a WELS-affiliated ministry and partner of WELS World Missions. Learn more about longer service opportunities with Friends Network at friendsnet.org.

Campus ministry for international students

In a normal year, almost 400 international students enroll at WELS elementary schools and high schools. Connecting them to one another, to believers of our fellowship from their people group, and to WELS

congregations when they transfer schools is a large undertaking. Pastor Daniel Lindner, the Campus Ministry Mission Counselor for all campus ministries, directs some special attention to international students. The North American Asian mission counselor, Pastor Neil Birkholz, is assisting Lindner in this work.

Our thanks

Pastor Paul Prange and Mr. Sean Young both accepted calls at the beginning of 2025. Prange served as administrator for the Board for Ministerial Education and the most recent chairman of the Joint Mission Council. He now serves as director of worship for WELS. Young served as the senior director of Mission Operations since 2012. He is now the director of mission advancement at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. We thank both of these men for their faithful service to the Joint Mission Council.

Rev. Mark Gabb, reporter

Rev. Mark Gabb, chairman and administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions

Mr. Stefan Felgenhauer, director of WELS Missions Operations

Rev. Harland Goetzinger, director of the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Rev. Larry M. Schlomer, administrator of WELS Board for World Missions

Board for Ministerial Education

Floor Committee #16

Our calling

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:38).

The scriptural purpose of our ministerial education program is the preparation of candidates for the public ministry of the gospel. Pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and missionaries are prepared to proclaim the good news of Christ's love to people in congregations, schools of our fellowship, and mission fields around the world. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Martin Luther College also include in their purpose the continuing education of those who already serve in the ministry of the gospel. Our report gives you an overview of the efforts to coordinate the work. The WELS Resource Center always has the most recent reports from the individual schools at bme.welsrc.net.

Our current situation

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis., offers theological training for men who intend to enter the pastoral ministry of WELS. It serves both first-career and non-traditional students. It began the year with 155 students enrolled, compared to 134 in 2023–24. The graduating class in May 2025 was 24, compared to 27 in 2024 and 37 in 2023. We were pleased to see 47 students finish their first year of studies at WLS, there were 37 middlers, and 39 students spent the year serving as vicars. Grow in Grace, the institute for pastoral growth at WLS, offers opportunities for the theological and professional growth of called workers already serving in the ministry of our confessional fellowship. The Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary guides the preparation of men who would like to serve only their own people groups as evangelists or pastors. The seminary was granted an initial accreditation of seven years by the Association of Theological Schools in April 2024. The process was helpful and will continue to be helpful for the seminary in reviewing its program and in supporting our sister schools overseas. WLS continues to review and revise a strategic plan that will guide it in determining ministry priorities and potential campus improvements. The seminary is working on a potential building project that includes an education center (classrooms), faculty offices, and a gathering hall. More information about Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is available on p. 139 and at wls.edu.

Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College (MLC) is the WELS college of ministry. It trains men and women to meet the public ministry needs of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord. MLC began the second semester of the 2024–25 school year with 589 undergraduates—153 in the preseminary track, 417 in the education track, and 12 preparing for staff ministry, 2 of which are double majoring with education. There are more than 1,000 students enrolled in continuing education and graduate studies programs. Currently 21 students are enrolled in classes that will prepare them to enter the new Alternative Pathway to Professional Licensure Eligibility (APPLE) program, specifically designed for non-traditional students. MLC is working hard to recruit additional students for gospel ministry, including the use of Vision/Traction Organizers® for recommendations given them from the Ministry Recruitment Task Force that was formed following the 2023 synod convention. Additional efforts to address current teaching needs of WELS are detailed in the report from the Commission on Lutheran Schools. More information about Martin Luther College is available on p. 147 and at mlc-wels.edu.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS) is a boarding high school in Saginaw, Mich., with the single purpose of preparing high school students for the public ministry of the gospel and encouraging them to enroll at Martin Luther College. Michigan does not offer a school voucher program, but MLS receives grants for student financial scholarships from the MLS Foundation, which also assists with capital improvements. Michigan Lutheran Seminary began the year with 190 students. More information about Michigan Lutheran Seminary is available on p. 162 and at mlsem.org.

Luther Preparatory School

Luther Preparatory School (LPS) is a boarding high school in Watertown, Wis., with the single purpose of encouraging and preparing young people for a lifetime of service in the public ministry of WELS. Luther Preparatory School participates in the Racine, Milwaukee, and Wisconsin Parental Choice Programs, allowing some Wisconsin families to use vouchers from the state to pay for the cost of education. Luther Preparatory School began the year with 416 students. More information about Luther Preparatory School is available on p. 166 and at lps.wels.net.

Finances

The Board for Ministerial Education distributes synod support to the ministerial education schools from a block grant supplied by the Synodical Council. The model has resulted in stable reserves and normal annual tuition increases at all the schools. MLC has seen positive blessings on its efforts to address the educational debt of its graduates, with decreases in the average debt owed by its graduates for five straight years, and the average debt of graduates is under 50 percent of their first-year salaries. The college has established programs to train students in good stewardship and to increase funds available for student assistance. The Congregational Partner Grant Program has increased its matching funds for tuition assistance provided by congregations to students who attend MLC. The college has an attainable goal of having enough resources available that no freshman should have to take a loan for education purposes.

Vacancy rates

Pastor and teacher vacancies in WELS remain a concern, and indicators are that this may be true for a while. One helpful note is that the average size of the classes at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is larger than previous years and should be for the foreseeable future. The 2023 synod convention approved the formation of a Ministry Recruitment Task Force that met and developed 22 recommendations that were shared at district conventions in 2024 for discussion and input. Those recommendations were then distributed to the appropriate entities for development and implementation. The Ministry Recruitment Task Force list of recommendations is provided at the end of this report. The Board for Ministerial Education has been assigned to work with the various entities mentioned. Another potential initiative that is being supported by a special donation would provide regional recruiters across the synod. Ministry Recruitment Counselors would especially work with those in WELS who are strong encouragers of ministry, with a special focus on encouraging public school students for ministry. For more details on the efforts being made to address vacancy rates, please see Martin Luther College's report (p. 147).

Capital projects

Capital campaigns for buildings at the schools are reviewed and adopted by both the Synodical Council and the Conference of Presidents as a regular part of WELS' ministry planning process and then are conducted in coordination with the Ministry of Christian Giving. A new Synod Capital Projects Fund has been established by the Synodical Council and is intended to assist the schools, including the prudent use of debt, in their development and completion of large-scale capital projects. See the Synodical Council report (p. 52) for more details on the Synod Capital Projects Fund.

An outside agency will be developing a comprehensive master site plan that will include all four schools. Currently two large projects are in early stages of the design phase. WLS is making plans to build an education center, remodel old classrooms into faculty offices, and add a gathering space to the gymnasium. LPS is working toward building a music center and restoring the old gymnasium that is currently used for music and drama back to its original purpose. MLC and MLS continue to address facility needs and improvements on campus and are grateful to the many donations that support these efforts, along with the dedicated work and skill of local staff. The Lord gives us our daily bread, and we are

grateful that the campuses are well maintained, with very few continuing maintenance projects unfunded in the ministry plan for the current biennium.

Partnerships

With the blessing and encouragement of the administrations of Home and World Missions, the ministerial education schools have established good partnerships with the world mission fields and self-supporting overseas churches in our fellowship to help develop their ministerial education programs. In the past few years, we have seen a dramatic increase in requests to the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for help in training existing pastors and evangelists of various people groups to become confessional Lutherans. The reports of the Joint Mission Council (p. 132) and the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (p. 23) detail some of those efforts. Our domestic ministerial education schools have seen some success in their plan to increase the numbers of under-represented minorities on their campuses and in their programs.

A look ahead

We give thanks that the Lord of the Church continues to supply our synod with young men and women who are willing to serve in full-time gospel ministry. It's an extraordinary blessing that they believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God and that they treasure the precious Lutheran heritage of proclaiming the unconditional gospel that has been passed to our generation with remarkable clarity. We are grateful that they present themselves for service as faithful ministers of the gospel who subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions and seek to proclaim God's Word boldly. We also give thanks for the individual congregations and members in those congregations who still think—contrary to the practice of just about every other national church body—that the investment of energy and financial resources in the thorough preparation of candidates for the public ministry of the gospel and the deepening of those who are already serving is a sound and wise synodical commitment.

What can you do to help? Pray! Ask the Lord of the harvest to send more workers into his harvest fields. Encourage people you know to prepare for service in the ministry of the gospel. Support the ongoing work of preparing workers for God's kingdom.

Rev. Duane Rodewald, reporter

Rev. Duane Rodewald, chairman and acting administrator

Teacher Daniel Markgraf, secretary

Mr. Paul Hahm

Teacher James Henrickson Jr.

Rev. Andrew Retberg

Rev. Jonathan Scharf

Mr. Brian Scheele

Rev. Timothy Spaude

Rev. Aaron Voss

Mr. Dean Waldschmidt

Rev. Michael Woldt

Mr. Adam Zastrow

Teacher Gerald Zeamer

Advisory:

Rev. Matthew Crass, Luther Preparatory School president

Mr. Kyle Egan, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Rev. Richard Gurgel, Martin Luther College president

Rev. Mark Luetzow, Michigan Lutheran Seminary president

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

Rev. Earle Treptow, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary president

Appendix:

Ministry Recruitment Task Force recommendations

The recommendations are grouped by entities to which the recommendations were made.

All WELS people

RECOMMENDATION #3: That we each pray for workers.

RECOMMENDATION #4: That we each recruit people for the ministry of the gospel.

Conference of Presidents

RECOMMENDATION #2: That the Conference of Presidents commission a white paper to develop a shared philosophy of ministry at Lutheran schools to guide our efforts.

All calling bodies

RECOMMENDATION #19: That each congregation, school, and mission agency seek to meet or exceed the synod's guidelines for compensation of called workers.

Congregational Services

RECOMMENDATION #6: That WELS Congregational Services develop resources to assist congregations in their ministry with high school and college students through age 25.

Commission on Lutheran Schools

RECOMMENDATION #14: That the Commission on Lutheran Schools assign someone to take the initiative to work with each WELS early childhood ministry on how to enroll each of their workers in the appropriate tier of professional and/or ministerial certification.

All WELS schools

RECOMMENDATION #1: That all WELS schools enroll all existing teachers who are not ministry certified in the appropriate level of MLC courses to achieve ministry certification.

RECOMMENDATION #16: That any WELS school desiring to serve as a satellite location for a cohort of students in educational studies should contact Dr. John Meyer (meyerjd@mlc-wels.edu) to determine how to begin such a program.

Ministerial Education office

RECOMMENDATION #5: That the Ministerial Education office craft an aggressive ongoing promotional program for synodwide recruitment.

RECOMMENDATION #8: That our synodwide promotional program encourage enrollment of students at our preparatory schools.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

RECOMMENDATION #18: That the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary discuss how they might keep in contact with men who have withdrawn from training for pastoral ministry or from the pastoral ministry itself in order to have the opportunity to encourage them as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION #20: That the seminary's Grow in Grace and the Martin Luther College New Teacher Induction leaders discuss a Graduate Gratitude Grant program, recommending the timing, amounts, and funding sources of such a program to the synod president.

Martin Luther College

RECOMMENDATION #20: That the seminary's Grow in Grace and the Martin Luther College New Teacher Induction leaders discuss a Graduate Gratitude Grant program, recommending the timing, amounts, and funding sources of such a program to the synod president.

RECOMMENDATION #7: That the Martin Luther College courses offered for online study to high school students be packaged as a pre-ministerial program and combined at the local level with age-appropriate tastes of ministry.

RECOMMENDATION #13: That the Martin Luther College Alumni Relations office be tasked with developing a program that introduces WELS teachers who did not graduate from Martin Luther College to the undergraduate campus experience for which they will be recruiting.

RECOMMENDATION #17: That the Martin Luther College Office of Graduate Studies and Continuing Education work with the Martin Luther College Staff Ministry program and the Conference of Presidents to develop a certificate of theology for WELS people called as staff ministers in their home congregations.

Martin Luther College prospects

RECOMMENDATION #15: That anyone desiring to serve as a WELS teacher but unable to participate in residential college life at Martin Luther College should contact Dr. John Meyer (meyerjd@mlc-wels.edu) to determine the best course of study.

Donors

RECOMMENDATION #9: That donors continue to validate Martin Luther College's formal goal of reducing the average educational debt of all MLC graduates so that it is at or below 50 percent of the base starting salary of a WELS first-year teacher.

RECOMMENDATION #10: That donors continue to validate Martin Luther College's formal goal of increasing financial assistance for the average student by 10 percent per year.

RECOMMENDATION #11: That donors validate Martin Luther College's formal goal to prioritize the allocation of MLC financial aid so that first-year students will not normally be compelled by financial necessity to take on any educational debt.

RECOMMENDATION #12: That donors validate Martin Luther College's informal goal that no first-year student would have to pay more than \$9,999 in total cost (tuition, room, board, fees).

Rev. Jonathan Hein

Rev. Philip Hirsch

Mr. Theodore Klug

Rev. Donald Patterson

Rev. Paul Prange

Mr. Cameron Schroeder

Rev. Earle Treptow

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Floor Committee #16

Our calling

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) equips pastors for the worldwide mission of WELS, including churches and cultural groups within its confessional fellowship. In partnership with sister seminaries and theological training programs of its fellowship, WLS accomplishes that singular purpose with two distinct emphases. Primarily, the seminary prepares men to begin pastoral ministry by providing the spiritual, theological, and professional training needed to enter that ministry. The seminary also partners with pastors in their ministry-long pursuit of spiritual, theological, and professional growth.

Our current situation

Enrollment

The 2024–25 school year began with an enrollment of 155 students, significantly higher than the 134 with which the previous school year began. That's the highest enrollment since the 2009–10 school year. Contributing to the enrollment increase was a large first-year class, with 49 students, replacing the 27

in the class of 2024. At the time of this writing, 24 men are on schedule to graduate, with 23 presenting themselves for assignment. One has requested a one-year deferment. Thirty-seven men will be assigned to serve as vicars, Lord willing. At present there are 39 vicars.

Not all who enroll at the seminary complete the program and present themselves for assignment as pastors. Some enter the seminary uncertain about becoming pastors and determine along the way that they would like to serve their Savior in another vocation. Exit interviews regularly reveal that the students who withdraw appreciate the opportunity they had to study God's Word and grow in grace and knowledge by the Spirit's work. Faculty members regularly meet with students to encourage them to continue their preparation on what feels like a long road to ministry. In the end, however, the desire to serve as a pastor is a gift the Lord gives.

The weekly call report illustrates the situation in our church body. Many opportunities are available to serve people with the gospel, but there aren't enough gospel servants to take advantage of those opportunities. The Savior's words to his disciples will continue to hold true until he returns to judge the living and the dead: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few" (Matthew 9:37). Everyone who hears about the vacancies in our church body comes to the same conclusion: "Something needs to be done about the shortage of workers. We can't just sit on our hands and hope it resolves itself." The Lord Jesus gives us something to do as a first order of action, not as a last resort: Ask the Lord of the harvest for workers. The more regularly we include a petition for gospel workers in our prayers, the more readily we recognize with thanksgiving the blessing the Lord gives us in the public ministers of the gospel he provides.

In addition, pastors, teachers, and staff ministers need to continue to look for opportunities to speak with gifted young people about the privilege of serving in the public ministry. Perhaps even more importantly, the members of our congregations need to continue to speak highly of the public ministry and those who serve in public ministry so that young people can see how much God's people value gospel servants. If young people see how important public ministry is and the eternal impact the Lord can have on others through them, they are more likely to consider it seriously for their life's work.

Early projections are that enrollment at the beginning of the 2025–26 school year will be around 150, about the same as the 2024–25 school year. It is worth mentioning that the Lord has done more, in answer to the prayers of his people, than provide bodies. He has raised up men with many talents who could serve in many different vocations but are willing to consider presenting themselves to the church for service as pastors.

Faculty

Prof. John Schuetze retired at the end of the first semester, after 28 years of service on the seminary faculty. During his time on the faculty, he taught courses in systematic theology, pastoral theology, and counseling. He also served as campus counselor and registrar, among other duties. His intention is to continue to teach online courses in the master of sacred theology (STM) program. We thank the Lord for working through Schuetze to form many men for service to the Lord and his people in pastoral ministry. The Schuetzes retired in Tennessee.

Prof. Bill Tackmier will retire at the end of the school year after 15 years of service at the seminary. He has taught courses in Old Testament and homiletics and is currently serving as academic dean. He and his wife, Dorcas, who worked in the seminary library, will be living in South Bend, Ind., in retirement. He has agreed to teach some face-to-face courses in the STM program. We thank the Lord of the Church for working in and through him for the blessing of many.

At the time of this writing, the governing board is in the process of calling a professor of systematic theology and homiletics. When the Lord provides the man of his choosing at the time he knows best, the new professor will be 1 of 14 who have begun service at the seminary in the last ten years. That's a significant turnover on a faculty of 18. Many of the men called in that time are pursuing additional coursework to be even better equipped for the work the Lord has given them. The governing board is committed to supporting every faculty member who desires to pursue an advanced degree, both with funding for the program and with a reduced teaching load to accommodate the additional study required of them.

Staff

Mr. Kevin Keller retired from his work as the seminary's director of mission advancement after 20 years of faithful service. When he was hired in 2005, he took up a role that hadn't existed before. He put systems and processes in place that, with modifications along the way, continue to this day. We thank the Lord for his faithful service.

The governing board, in addressing the vacancy, determined that it would be beneficial for the seminary's new director of mission advancement to work even more closely with WELS Ministry of Christian Giving. While the director of mission advancement will still report to the seminary president, there will also be a dotted line relationship with the WELS director of the Ministry of Christian Giving, who will provide training in Christian stewardship practices and ongoing guidance in working with donors. The governing board decided to follow WELS Ministry of Christian Giving's practice of extending calls to Christian giving counselors, since the director of mission advancement is being asked to share the gospel in Christ's name and as a representative of God's people. Mr. Sean Young, who had served as the WELS director of Missions Operations for 13 years, accepted the Lord's call and was installed on March 19, 2025.

Field services

Vicars

The vicar year is, in many ways, the most critical portion of a student's training for pastoral ministry. While it is extremely beneficial, the program does carry a significant cost. For the 2025–26 school year, it will be \$47,640 for each vicar. That amount doesn't all go directly to the vicar. It provides health insurance for all the vicars and their families, subsidizes rental costs for all, and provides a stipend for the vicars so that they can give their full time to ministry and not seek other employment to cover their costs. On average, about 10 to 12 congregations that apply for a vicar have the resources to cover the full cost for the year. That means approximately two-thirds of a typical vicar class will be assigned to congregations that are only able to cover a portion of the cost.

The seminary has worked with the Board for World Missions to have a vicar serve in Colombia for the last four years, serving alongside a pastor in our sister church body. The seminary has also partnered with the Board for Home Missions and its "Vicar in a Mission Setting" program to identify places where a vicar could receive excellent training in gospel outreach in a mission-minded congregation. Home Missions and WLS cooperate financially in the program. The seminary had, in the past, committed somewhere between \$200,000 and \$250,000 to that program each year. For the 2024–25 school year, it was approximately \$260,000. But that didn't cover all the places needed for the vicar class. In the end, WLS had to commit substantially more to the placement of vicars during the 2024–25 school year than it ever has in the past—approximately \$540,000. A larger vicar class and a somewhat significant increase in the cost of the program contributed to the expenditure. That kind of investment is not sustainable over the long term. Congregations that are not covering the full costs are being asked to make a greater contribution. Additional congregations are being encouraged to consider applying for a vicar. The need for gifts to support the vicar year is critical as we gear up for a larger class of vicars in the 2026–27 school year.

Each summer, the seminary provides a seminar to equip supervising pastors for their important work of overseeing vicars. Faculty members explain the training the vicars have received and outline the experiences they would like the vicars to have in their year of hands-on training for ministry. Each new supervising pastor is required to attend; experienced supervising pastors are asked to participate in a training seminar at least once every five years. We thank the Lord of the Church for the many faithful pastors and supportive congregations who are willing to invest time and money in the training of a future pastor.

Early field training

The early field training program has been in place for more than 20 years. In it, first- and second-year students are assigned to a Milwaukee-area congregation. They attend services each week and get involved in different activities to gain perspective on congregational life, with the goal of preparing them for their vicar year. The program is primarily Sunday-focused at present, in recognition of the students' busy schedules during the week. Four of the congregations participating in the program offer seminarians with Spanish abilities the opportunity to use them in ministry.

Student ministry program

Seminary students work part-time jobs during the school year to help cover their living costs. Most work in secular jobs and take advantage of opportunities to witness as they work alongside others. Some of the students work in ministry positions. During the 2024–25 school year, 31 students are serving in ministry positions that fit the training they have received. Seventeen seniors are serving in a ministry position, with responsibilities in preaching, teaching, and visitation. Some receive housing as part of their compensation. Fourteen first- and second-year students are serving in ministry positions with duties that fit the training they have received. In addition, six or seven students each year serve as summer student assistants in congregations across the United States. Typically more opportunities exist for such positions than students able to serve in them.

Education costs

The total cost of education at present is approximately \$34,000 per student per year. Thankfully, no student needs to cover that entire cost out of his own pocket. Tuition and fees for the 2024–25 school year were about \$13,600. The \$20,000 difference is addressed partially through the portion of WELS Congregation Mission Offerings designated for the seminary and primarily through the many generous gifts God's people offer directly to the seminary. The gifts offered over the last five years have been astounding, with several record-breaking years of gifts for student assistance. The students who live in the dormitory pay approximately \$10,000 for room and board. Most married students, who are on their own to secure housing, pay more for housing and food.

In the 2024–25 school year, thanks to the generosity of the many people who give regularly to support the seminary's Scholarship Fund, every student who applied for financial assistance received aid to help defray the costs of attending. All told, the seminary disbursed approximately \$950,000 from its general scholarship fund to assist students. Most of that came in the form of grants based on the student's declared financial need. There were also campus service awards, which acknowledge students who carry out tasks for the well-being of the seminary family, and academic achievement awards, which honor classroom performance as reflected in students' grades. Donors have also provided additional gifts for students that are not reflected in the number above. Thanks to the Lord's gracious working in the hearts of generous donors, students, on average, received assistance exceeding the tuition costs for the year. Many also received assistance to defray their costs for room and board (or housing and food for married students).

The seminary's financial aid officer, Prof. Steve Geiger, carefully monitors student debt. We are concerned about students entering full-time service in the church with a crippling debt, because it will have a negative impact on their ability to serve in ministry. The excellent work being done at Martin Luther College in financial planning has made a positive impact on student indebtedness. The seminary builds on that by offering annual financial presentations, as well as private guidance as needed. We are pleased to report that students do not leave the seminary with more debt than that with which they entered, though they may acquire additional debt through marriage. Most leave the seminary with less debt than when they entered.

Accreditation

On June 7, 2024, the Board of Commissioners of the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) granted Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary initial accreditation for a period of seven years (the longest period possible), beginning April 18, 2024, and continuing until July 31, 2031. They approved both the master of divinity (MDiv) and the master of sacred theology (STM) programs. They also granted approval for limited distance education, which ATS defines as less than half of any approved degree, for the STM program. Accreditation was the culmination of several years of work.

During the 2016–17 school year the governing board passed a motion to explore accreditation with ATS. Faculty members thought there would be great benefit in having objective outsiders who are also engaged in theological education assessing WLS' work and offering critique and commendation. Accreditation also held the promise of making it easier for WLS to enroll international students and for WLS graduates to gain entrance into graduate schools. The board thought accreditation would offer support to sister seminaries overseas. If it became apparent that the seminary's theology or mission would be compromised, the board would cease pursuing accreditation.

Representatives from the Association of Theological Schools offered repeated assurances that they would not require the seminary to act at variance with its mission or doctrinal position. Their goal is to help member institutions be the best version of themselves they can be. The seminary applied for associate membership in the Association of Theological Schools in the fall of 2017. Approval was granted in June 2018. The Association of Theological Schools grants associate membership in the expectation that institutions will complete the accreditation process within five years. Unfortunately, the pandemic delayed the preparation of a readiness report, the first step for an institution seeking initial accreditation.

A committee chaired by Prof. Kenneth Cherney, Jr., completed the readiness report in spring 2021, at least six months later than anticipated. When the Association of Theological Schools approved the readiness report, they also granted the seminary permission to move forward with a self-study, the next step in the accreditation process. Cherney served as the chairman of the self-study. With the help of a steering committee, he established three faculty subcommittees to assess the work of the seminary according to the association's ten standards. Those standards, adopted by the Association of Theological Schools in 2020, reflect a move away from a focus on best practices every accredited school must have to a principles-based approach, which allows schools to meet the standards in different ways, according to their institutional context.

As expected, the self-study led to the discussion of important issues, both within subcommittees and at the faculty and governing board levels. The conversations identified concrete steps to be taken to improve the work being done to form men for service as pastors. After many hours of study, discussion, and writing, a final self-study report was submitted on Dec. 1, 2023. Dr. Stephen Graham, director of accreditation with the Commission on Accrediting and the seminary's liaison with the Association of Theological Schools, shared the self-study report with a visitation team he appointed. The four members of the onsite evaluation committee, all of whom serve at other Association of Theological Schools seminaries and participated in the visit as volunteers, carefully reviewed the self-study report in anticipation of their on-site visit.

The visitation team came to campus in mid-April 2024. They spent two full days on campus, meeting with faculty, staff, students, governing board members, and administrative officers. Their thoughtful questions and astute observations demonstrated their thorough preparation. Their goal was to determine if reality matched what they had read in the self-study report. Before leaving, the visitation team shared a high-level summary of the report they would be submitting to the Board of Commissioners. In general, they spoke in extremely positive terms about what they had observed. They were impressed that at a time when many seminaries have gone to online education, WLS has remained committed to on-campus, face-to-face training of future pastors. They recognize that there is no replacement for time spent with one another in a shared on-campus experience when it comes to forming pastors.

The visitors highlighted something too easily taken for granted: the strong relationship between the synod and seminary. In addition, they noted with appreciation that faculty, students, and staff all embrace the seminary's mission of "pastors forming pastors." They see the value of having men who have served as pastors in congregations and mission fields preparing another generation of pastors. Those who know and love the work of pastoral ministry are particularly well equipped to encourage and train future pastors. The seminary would lose something significant, they felt, if primary emphasis were placed on calling only those who had already earned a terminal degree.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the governing board and administration encourage incoming professors to pursue continuing education in the primary area in which they are called to teach, with costs covered by the seminary. The Association of Theological Schools Board of Commissioners affirmed that practice and recommended that special attention be given to enabling faculty to be active scholars for WELS and beyond. Since nine faculty members are in programs of continuing education at present, with a tenth beginning soon—while also teaching courses—it has been difficult for them to carve out additional time for research and writing.

The Association of Theological Schools Board of Commissioners, even as they granted the longest possible period of initial accreditation, required the submission of two reports to address areas needing

improvement and/or additional information. The onsite evaluation team made it clear that additional reports are regularly required. That only two reports were required, they emphasized, should be viewed as commendation of the seminary's work. The first report, due by April 1, 2026, is on institutional assessment and needs to demonstrate how the information gained from evaluation processes is used to improve the school's institutional outcomes. The second report, due by Nov. 1, 2027, is on curriculum assessment and is to demonstrate a simple, systematic, and sustainable evaluation of student learning outcomes.

Much time and effort have been expended on the pursuit of accreditation. Words of commendation from objective outsiders have been a blessing, as have frank conversations aimed at improving the way the seminary forms pastors for service in Christ's Church. Challenging work remains as we seek to implement changes that will help the seminary prepare men who are equipped for ministry in the contemporary world.

Governing board

The Pacific Northwest District elected Pastor Geoffrey Cortright to serve on the governing board to replace Pastor Nathan Wagenknecht, who accepted a call out of the district and had to step down from his service.

Pastoral Studies Institute

The Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) of WLS, in collaboration with WELS Joint Mission Council, continues to oversee pastoral training for men from various ethnic groups—Vietnamese, Hmong, and Sudanese, to name a few—in places across North America. The PSI Team consists of Prof. Harland (Skip) Goetzinger, who serves as the director; Prof. E. Allen Sorum; and Prof. David Bivens. Bivens has a reduced MDiv teaching load in both semesters to allow him to travel and to teach both semesters. Sorum has a full schedule of teaching at the seminary in the second semester but not the first, freeing him up to travel and teach.

Members of the PSI Team have designed individual study plans for 40 men from 12 people groups in 31 locations in North America currently enrolled in the program. In addition, seven men in Milwaukee are enrolled in the Joshua Urban Ministry Program. The members of the PSI Team provide some of the instruction to the men enrolled, while also working with local pastors who teach other courses in the program's four levels. Other individuals have expressed interest in the program but have not been officially enrolled. The prayer is that the men being prepared for ministry will not only be able to pastor a flock of their people group but will also be able to assist in bringing the gospel to their country of origin, as the Lord provides opportunities. Two men will, Lord willing, graduate from the program this May.

Members of the PSI Team, who are called jointly by the seminary's governing board and WELS Joint Mission Council, work with each World Missions "One Team." Their duties and responsibilities vary by field, from vetting mission opportunities to providing instruction to developing curriculum to offering counsel on various aspects of mission and ministry. The PSI Team collaborates with the One Team leader and the group that WELS is seeking to reach to determine the best way for WELS to facilitate distinctively Lutheran ministries led by solidly Lutheran native leaders.

Grow in Grace

Grow in Grace, the institute for pastoral growth at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, partners with pastors in their ministry-long pursuit of spiritual, theological, and professional growth. Grow in Grace offers courses and events, retreats and mentoring, study packages, and informal resources, all intended to encourage and equip pastors to serve where the Lord has placed them. God's people always benefit when their pastors stretch themselves with additional study, even if the study doesn't seem immediately connected to daily ministry duties.

At the time of this writing, 38 men are currently in active pursuit of a master of sacred theology (STM) degree. Many more have taken courses, but they have not yet requested an advisor and stated their desire to complete the program. Students who enroll in the program choose from one of nine focus areas. Nine pastors are on track to graduate at the end of the 2024–25 school year. That is the largest class of STM graduates in recent memory.

Online courses are offered in fall, spring, and summer and have been well attended. The plan is to offer at least two online courses for each session. In even-numbered summers, Summer Quarter is held on

campus. In odd-numbered years, Summer Quarter hits the road, taking courses into at least nine of the synod's districts, though the courses aren't always in the summer. Last summer, 55 attended courses on campus, with 11 of them coming from sister church bodies overseas. While on-campus Summer Quarter may not be as convenient, there are many benefits associated with being on campus, like daily worship in the chapel, access to the library, and opportunities to talk with brothers in ministry outside of the classroom.

Each spring Grow in Grace arranges ministry celebration retreats for pastors and their wives celebrating 3-, 10-, 25-, and 35-year ministry anniversaries. The retreats provide collaborative opportunities for pastors to learn from one another and to gather with peers celebrating similar ministry milestones. Grow in Grace also oversees a program of mentoring for new pastors during the first three years of their service as pastors. Experienced pastors are trained for the important work of encouraging new pastors as they take up the work of shepherding a congregation.

A look ahead

Building plans

The seminary's current strategic plan, adopted in 2020, called for the development of a plan to update or add classrooms, large- and small-group educational and gathering space, and accessible faculty offices. The current buildings have served the seminary well for the nearly one hundred years the seminary has been on the Mequon campus. The time has come to make significant improvements. The classrooms are undersized and lack natural light. Most faculty members do not have office space on campus to meet privately with students during the school day or to work together more readily with colleagues. Small-group educational spaces and a large gathering area for students and their families do not exist. Simply put, the current facilities are not equipped to serve today's students, especially when it comes to the collaborative parts of learning. We need to do better.

During the 2021–22 school year, the seminary worked with HGA, a Milwaukee architectural firm that had done the chapel renovation in 2005, to develop a master site plan. The plan includes a proposed education center with six new classrooms, a link between the current library and the new education center, the conversion of current classrooms into office space and small-group meeting areas, and a gathering hall connected to the current auditorium/gymnasium.

At the direction of the Synodical Council, WLS contracted with a financial consulting firm to conduct a financial feasibility study to ascertain the support that God's people might offer for such a building project. Based on the consultants' report, the Conference of Presidents authorized the seminary to move forward with a capital campaign. The Synodical Council granted permission to move forward with the design and pre-construction phase of the project. A builder has been selected, and discussions have begun about the needs in the education center and the gathering hall.

Every aspect of the building project aims at serving the men who enroll at the seminary. Larger classrooms with ample outside light will provide a better learning environment for the students, allowing more collaboration in the classroom. Faculty office spaces on campus will give students readier access to professors and allow for private conversations that help form men for ministry. Those faculty office spaces will also encourage greater collaboration between faculty members, which holds great potential for improving courses. Small-group educational spaces will make it easier for professors to meet with a handful of students to discuss, for example, a sermon text. A gathering hall will provide students and their families a place to meet outside of the school day to strengthen their relationships and form a support system they will take with them into ministry.

No specific timetable for building has been established at the time of this writing. Much depends on the cost of the project and the support God's people provide. A completed building project would be a great way to mark the 2029 celebration of one hundred years of the Lord's grace on the current campus.

Rev. Earle Treptow, reporter

Rev. Jonathan Scharf, chairman

Teacher Philip Stern, secretary

Rev. Geoffrey Cortright

Mr. Gregory Green
Mr. Thomas Kissinger
Mr. Clayton Raasch
Rev. Eric Steinbrenner
Rev. Karl Walther

Advisory:

Rev. Jonathan Balge, adjunct member
Rev. Daniel Leyrer, Southeastern Wisconsin District president
Rev. Duane Rodewald, chairman and acting administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education
Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president
Rev. Earle Treptow, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary president

Martin Luther College

Floor Committee #16

Our calling

We thank God for the clear and compelling calling that God has, through our synod, given to Martin Luther College (MLC). Here is our mission statement: "The mission of Martin Luther College is to train men and women to meet the public ministry needs of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord."

That clear and compelling calling yields the greatest blessing of MLC—in Christ, we are united in faith and in a common purpose. We exist for no other purpose than to supply workers for the public ministry needs of WELS. That shared faith and shared mission shapes and forms MLC into a family of faith that has its eyes focused, for ourselves and others, on that which lasts forever.

To help us to carry out that mission, we are operating under a strategic plan of *Pursuing Excellence Under the Cross*. On the pages that follow, we will lay out how we are seeking to pursue excellence under the cross in carrying out the mission our synod has set before us.

Our current situation

As we are pursuing excellence under the cross, we begin by sharing the current gracious gifts God has given to our campus.

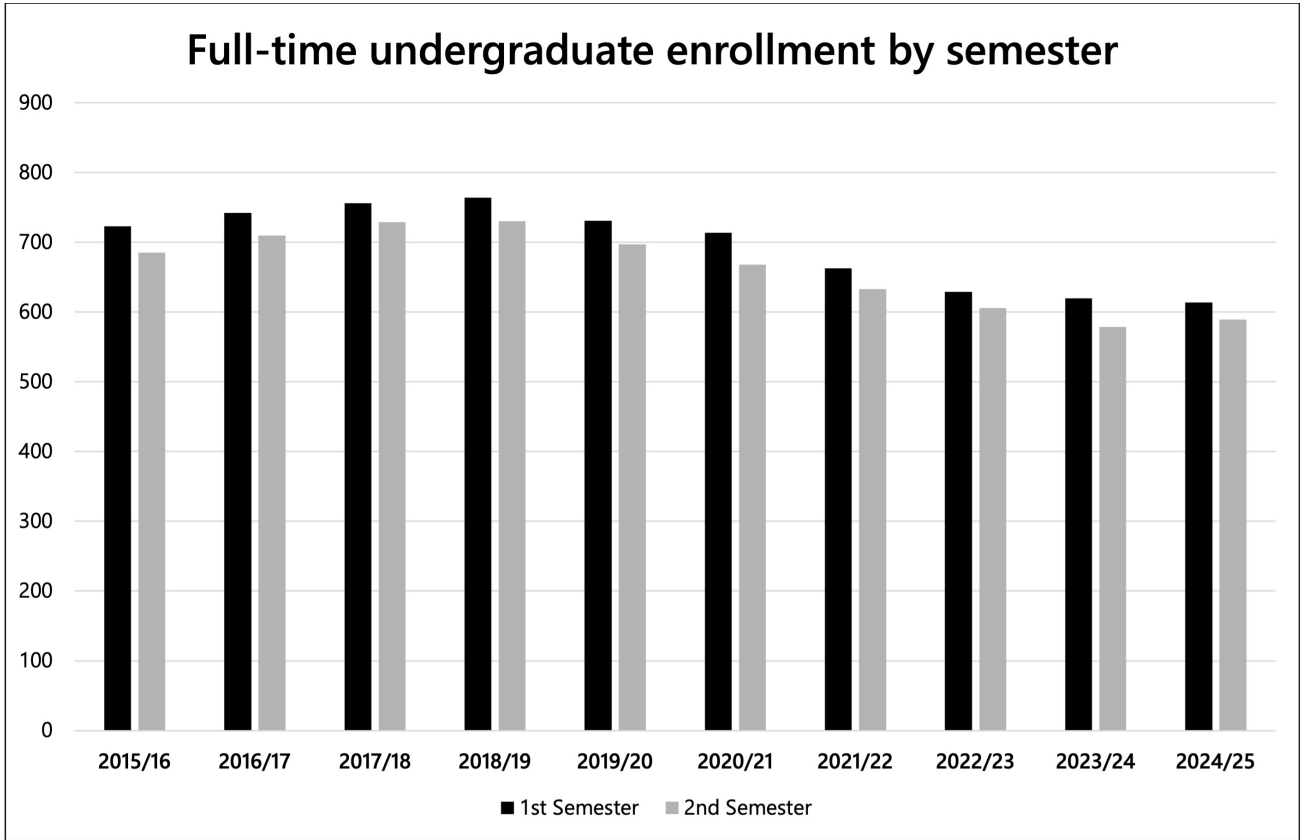
God's gifts to MLC: Our undergraduate students

The enrollment at our worker training college has been on the hearts, minds, and lips of most of us over the past five years. From 2019 to 2024, the enrollment at Martin Luther College has been on a steady decline. We went from a pool of students in the mid-700s to our final enrollment number at the end of the 2023–24 school year of 579. By God's grace, we welcomed 614 students to our campus to start the 2024–25 school year. This number is significant due to the fact that the class that graduated was larger. This larger incoming class was an answer to many prayers. Then, up until Thanksgiving break, God blessed our student body without a single student departing from the student body.

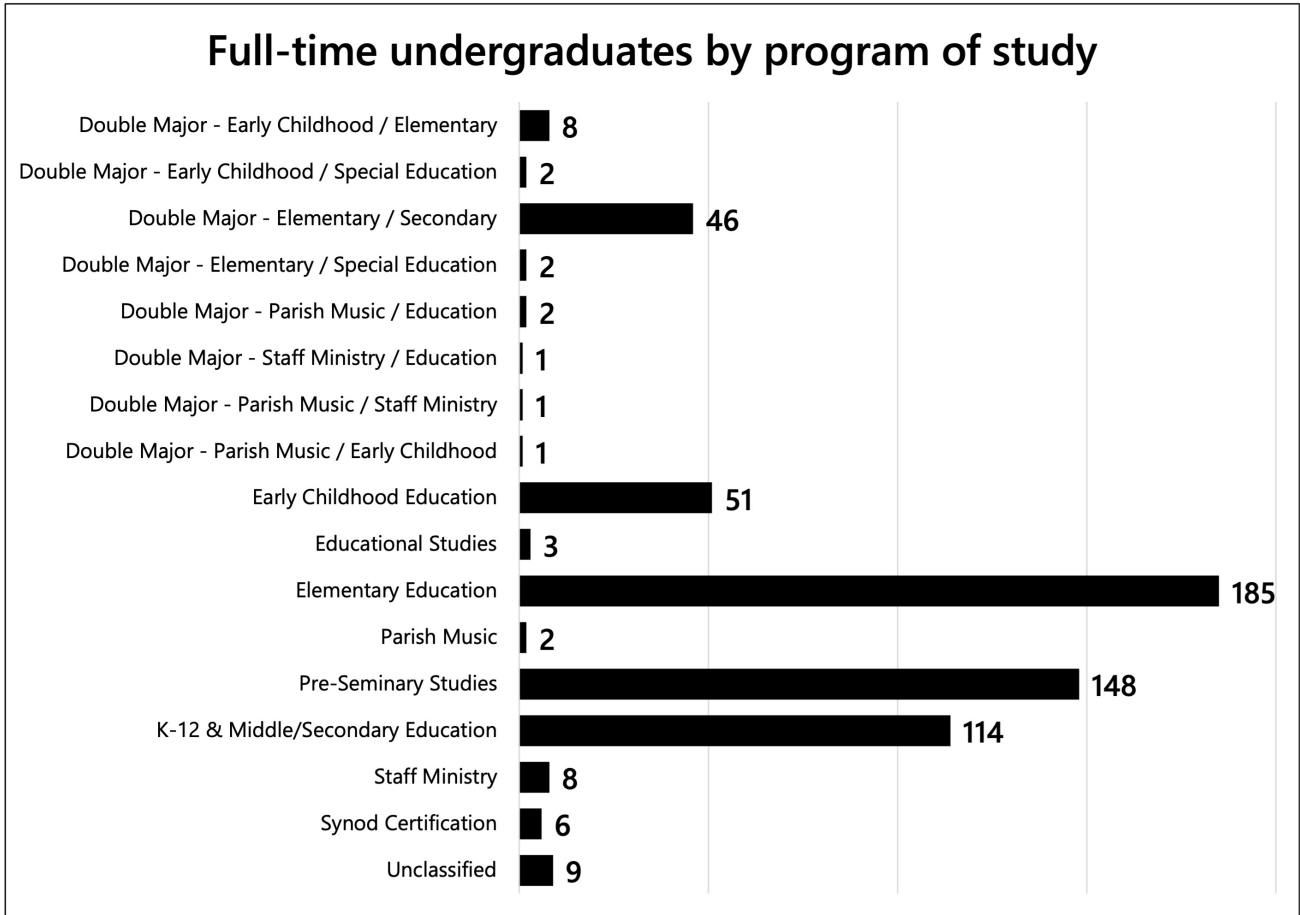
Opening enrollment at Martin Luther College from 2019–2025 with projections:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26 projected
First semester	731	714 ↓	663 ↓	629 ↓	620 ↓	614 ↓	637 ↑
Second semester	697	668 ↓	633 ↓	606 ↓	579 ↓	589 ↑	

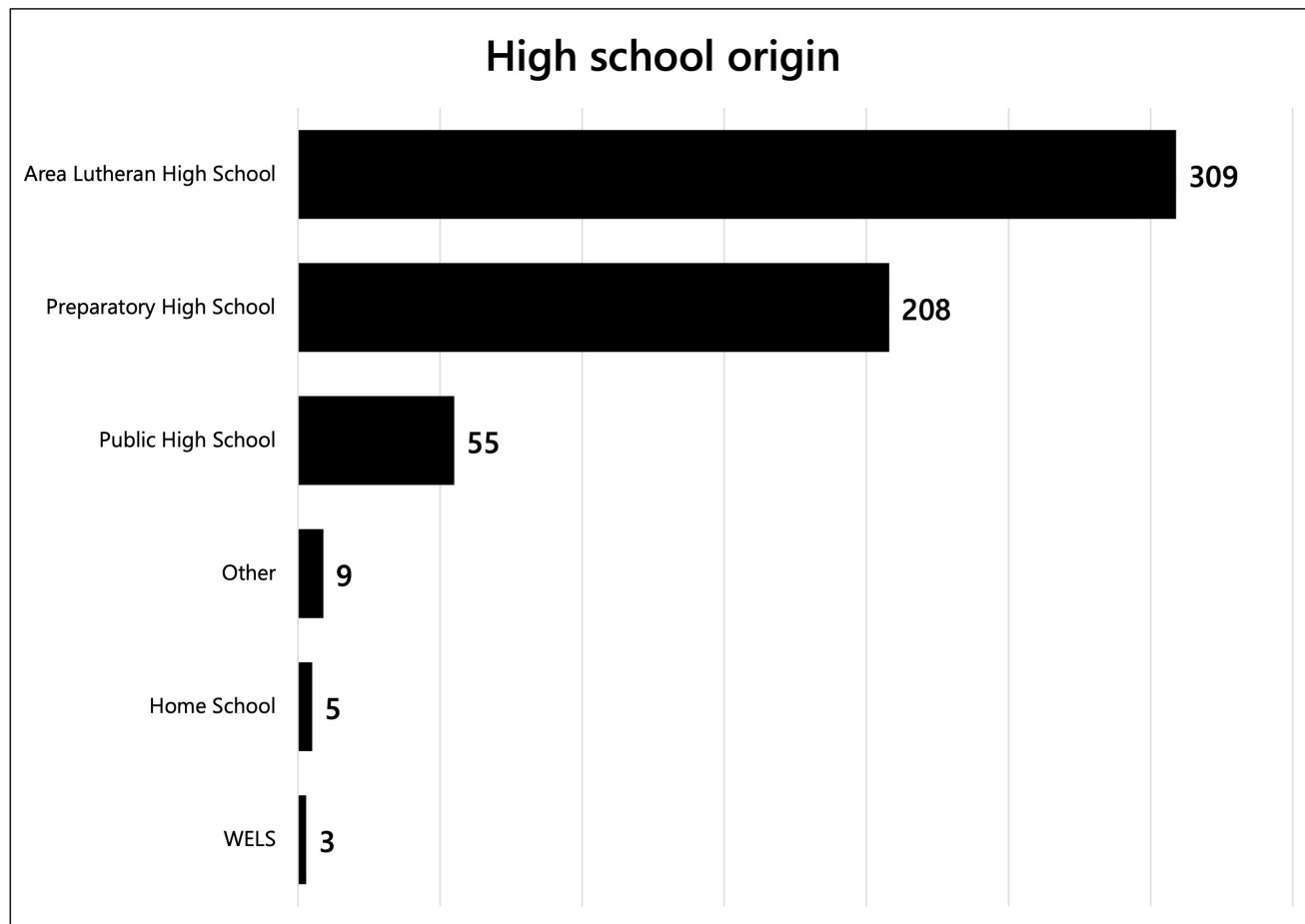
MLC is anticipating the largest incoming class since 2019 this upcoming fall of 2025. We pray that these students find great joy in their preparations for the public ministry at MLC. Because of the exit of smaller-than-normal classes in the coming years, MLC's enrollment should continue to rise for a few years.



The following chart is a breakdown of the number of undergraduate students in each program of study as of the beginning of our second semester of the 2024–25 school year:



The following chart depicts the high school setting from which MLC undergraduate students originated. Fifty-two percent of current undergraduate students came from area Lutheran high schools, followed by 36 percent from the synod's two preparatory high schools, and another 9 percent from public high schools.



The demographic landscape within WELS is shifting significantly. Over the past decade, the number of baptized children has dropped more than 50 percent—from just over 6,000 in 2014 to fewer than 3,000 in 2024. This decline has direct implications for the future of ministerial training and enrollment at MLC.

MLC continues to enroll a steady percentage of WELS students, but the overall pool is shrinking. As stated in the MLC Target Audience Report from Blueprint Schools, “MLC will be smaller if WELS is smaller.” Every member of our synod has a role to play. Prayer is the foundation: We urge all WELS members to regularly ask God to bless our outreach efforts. Beyond prayer, each congregation is encouraged to prioritize outreach to grow their local membership and strengthen the pipeline for ministerial candidates, actively support and encourage young people—and those considering second-career ministry—to explore the public ministry, and promote a culture of joy in ministry through the example and support of called workers. This collective effort is essential to sustain a vibrant, mission-focused church body.

To effectively reach and encourage prospective ministry students, MLC needs the support of local congregations in a practical way: by permitting the sharing of basic directory information for college-aged members with MLC. Historically, responses to directory information requests have been limited, and recent efforts to gather data through bulletin inserts yielded just 12 names. Due to privacy concerns, some congregations have been reluctant to share member data. MLC respectfully encourages congregations to engage members in conversations to gain permission for sharing this information. Doing so will allow MLC to personally connect with potential candidates and support congregational efforts in ministry encouragement. Absent this partnership, MLC would face significant costs in acquiring commercial data that is often incomplete or inaccurate. Instead, we seek to work hand-in-hand with congregations to build a robust, accurate, and ministry-focused outreach strategy.

God's gifts to MLC: Graduate and continuing education students and New Teacher Induction

Graduate studies

For more than 20 years, MLC has equipped WELS teachers and staff ministers through graduate education. Since the launch of the Master of Science in Education in 2005, MLC has added degrees in Educational Administration, Special Education, and Theology, awarding 278 degrees to date. These programs help educators grow in their gifts and prepare for future service. Recently, ten teachers completed a principal-preparation cohort, with five more currently enrolled.

Continuing education

Each year, Martin Luther College supports about 1,000 WELS teachers and staff ministers through a range of professional development opportunities, including free resources, webinars, and conferences. In 2024–25, offerings included webinars on AI integration and reading instruction, as well as the two-day OpenLearning@MLC online conference, where hundreds explored topics such as teacher wellness and updated reading standards.

Early childhood

MLC provides four tiers of support to assist WELS early childhood ministries in on-boarding and training new hires for developmentally appropriate, mission-centered service. Through January 2025:

- Tier One: 42 centers used the free modules for local training,
- Tier Two: 23 teachers completed Childhood Development Associate Credential preparation,
- Tier Three: 56 hired and called teachers engaged in teacher ministry certification, and
- Tier Four: 6 teachers enrolled in the Associate Degree in Early Childhood.

Teaching ministry certification

Teaching ministry certification provides the required training in theology for Lutheran school teachers who graduate from colleges other than MLC. The proportion of non-ministry-certified teachers in WELS schools has grown from 7 percent to 14 percent since 2013.

- 443 called teachers in Lutheran schools (K-16) are not ministry certified.
- 52 percent of the 443 are actively pursuing WELS teaching ministry certification.
- 278 teachers have become ministry certified since 2019.

New Teacher Induction

The New Teacher Induction program is transitioning to a virtual instructional coaching model using the Sibme platform, increasing accessibility and flexibility for mentors and new teachers. To support this shift, New Teacher Induction is retraining mentors, updating the Mentoring and Coaching Certificate Program, and revising its honorarium policy. Beginning in 2024–25, mentors will receive biannual payments, with increases planned for 2025–26, replacing travel reimbursements. These updates streamline mentoring, ensure fair compensation, and reinforce New Teacher Induction's focus on instructional excellence and teacher retention. Virtual mentoring launches in July 2025, equipping mentors to support new teachers more effectively across Lutheran schools.

God's gifts to MLC: Staff and faculty personnel

Anniversary recognitions

2023–24

- Pastor Daniel Balge, 40 years in ministry
- Teacher Heath Dobberpuhl, 25 years in ministry
- Pastor Brian Dose, 40 years in ministry
- Teacher Craig Hirschmann, 40 years in ministry
- Teacher Matthew Pearson, 25 years in ministry

2024–25

- Pastor Richard Gurgel, 40 years in ministry
- Pastor Aaron Robinson, 25 years in ministry
- Teacher Scott Schmudlach, 40 years in ministry

Faculty retirements/conclusions of service

2023–24

- Teacher Alyssa Heckendorf, admissions counselor, concluding service
- Pastor Brian Hennig, professor of theology, concluding service
- Teacher Grace Hennig, professor of music, retirement
- Teacher Robert Klindworth, professor of education, retirement
- Teacher Jonathan Laabs, professor of music, concluding service
- Teacher Mya Peshon, early childhood learning center lead teacher, concluding service
- Teacher Lori Unke, admissions counselor, retirement

2024–25

- Teacher Kelli Green, professor of special education, concluding service
- Teacher MacKenzie Holzbauer, admissions counselor, available for reassignment
- Teacher Kari Muentz, professor of history/social sciences, concluding service
- Pastor Thomas Nass, professor of foreign language, retirement
- Teacher William Pekrul, director of public relations, retirement
- Pastor Nathaniel Savage, dormitory supervisor and instructor, concluding service
- Teacher Catherine St. John, early childhood learning center lead teacher, concluding service
- Teacher Mark Tacke, professor of science, retirement

Faculty additions

2023–24

- Pastor Aaron Bush, dormitory supervisor, instructor
- Pastor Aaron Dolan, professor of theology, assistant men's basketball coach
- Teacher Alyssa Heckendorf, admissions counselor
- Teacher Samuel Hunter, professor of physical education, strength and conditioning coach
- Teacher Martin LaGrow, professor of education, non-traditional education instructional designer
- Teacher Nichole LaGrow, professor of education, director of non-traditional education
- Teacher Duane Vance, professor of education, secondary education student teaching supervisor

2024–25

- Teacher Susan Decker, professor of English
- Teacher Jon Hermanson, professor of music
- Teacher MacKenzie Holzbauer, admissions counselor (one-year assignment)
- Teacher Janet Justice, admissions counselor
- Teacher JoElyn Krohn, professor of mathematics, financial wellness coordinator

Call updates

- Teacher Johanna Fischer accepted the call to serve as lead teacher in the toddler room in the early childhood learning center

God's gifts to MLC: Academic programming

Competency-based education for non-traditional students

To meet growing instructional needs in WELS classrooms, MLC is launching “Alternative Pathway to Professional Licensure Eligibility” (APPLE)—a flexible, online, competency-based Elementary Education degree for non-traditional students. Designed for adults with a prior two- or four-year degree, APPLE:

- Builds on prior academic and professional experience
- Allows flexible pacing through course content
- Mirrors MLC's on-campus program with slight credit modifications

Approved by the Higher Learning Commission, APPLE requires 120 credits and waives electives like PE and music. Current WELS called workers may apply experience toward fieldwork. The first cohort begins in fall 2025, expanding access to Christ-centered teacher training. This program continues to gain financial support, though charitable gifts are still needed as tuition revenue may take several years to fully sustain the initiative.

Accreditation process and the Quality Initiative

MLC is in year six of its ten-year “Open Pathway” accreditation cycle with the Higher Learning Commission. As part of this process, MLC’s Quality Initiative—approved in early 2025—focuses on revitalizing the staff ministry program. Led by Dr. Lawrence Olson, the program director, the team includes:

- Pastor Jonathan Hein (WELS Congregational Services)
- Staff Minister Katherine Klement (2024 MLC staff minister graduate)
- Mr. Todd Russ (Grace in Action)
- Staff Minister Brandon Steenbock (experienced staff minister)
- Staff Minister Mike Westendorf (director of worship operations at a WELS church)

The following MLC faculty and staff are helping to support the Quality Initiative process:

- Teacher Jeff Wiechman (vice president for academics)
- Mr. Robert Martens (director of information technology)
- Pastor Theodore Klug (director of admissions)
- Mr. Mark Maurice (vice president for mission advancement)

A synodwide survey conducted in spring 2025 will guide strategic updates to the program through the following high-level timeline:

- Spring–fall 2025: Data analysis, curriculum review, and development of training options
- Spring 2026: MLC Governing Board approval and launch of a marketing campaign
- Fall 2026–spring 2027: Program implementation
- Summer 2027–spring 2028: Assessment and final report submission to Higher Learning Commission

Ongoing program review

As part of MLC’s seven-year academic review cycle, we continue to evaluate and strengthen our programs to ensure quality and relevance:

- General education: Led by Dr. Timothy Grundmeier, the 2023–24 review produced a revised core purpose and objectives. Current work focuses on aligning coursework with foundational student needs.
- Pre-seminary program: Prof. Daniel Balge’s spring 2025 review assesses progress since the 2017–18 evaluation and identifies next steps in training future pastors.
- Middle/secondary education: This program is scheduled for its second comprehensive review in 2025–26.

January Term

MLC has completed its second January Term (J-Term), providing valuable hands-on experiences during the extended winter break. Third-year clinical students benefit from uninterrupted time in their classrooms, while pre-seminary students now participate in early ministry experiences and Greek/Hebrew reviews. First-year education majors complete their early field experience (EFE1) on campus, and second-year students conduct EFE2 in locations of their choosing. Looking ahead, MLC plans to expand J-Term course offerings, giving student-athletes and others on campus the opportunity to complete additional coursework during this focused academic window.

Another strategic planning effort related to academics

Following strategic planning sessions with the Association of Governing Boards in spring/summer 2024, MLC is implementing mission-aligned academic initiatives. Three are noted earlier: the APPLE program for non-traditional students, the staff ministry Quality Initiative, and the general education review (which also aims to improve credit transferability).

A fourth initiative focuses on expanding dual-credit opportunities in partnership with Lutheran high schools and preparatory schools. While MLC has previously offered limited dual-credit options, this effort aims to broaden offerings by working with credentialed high school teachers to deliver college-level content. MLC plans to finalize memorandums of understanding and expand access to high school students by fall 2025.

God’s gifts to MLC: Caring for our students

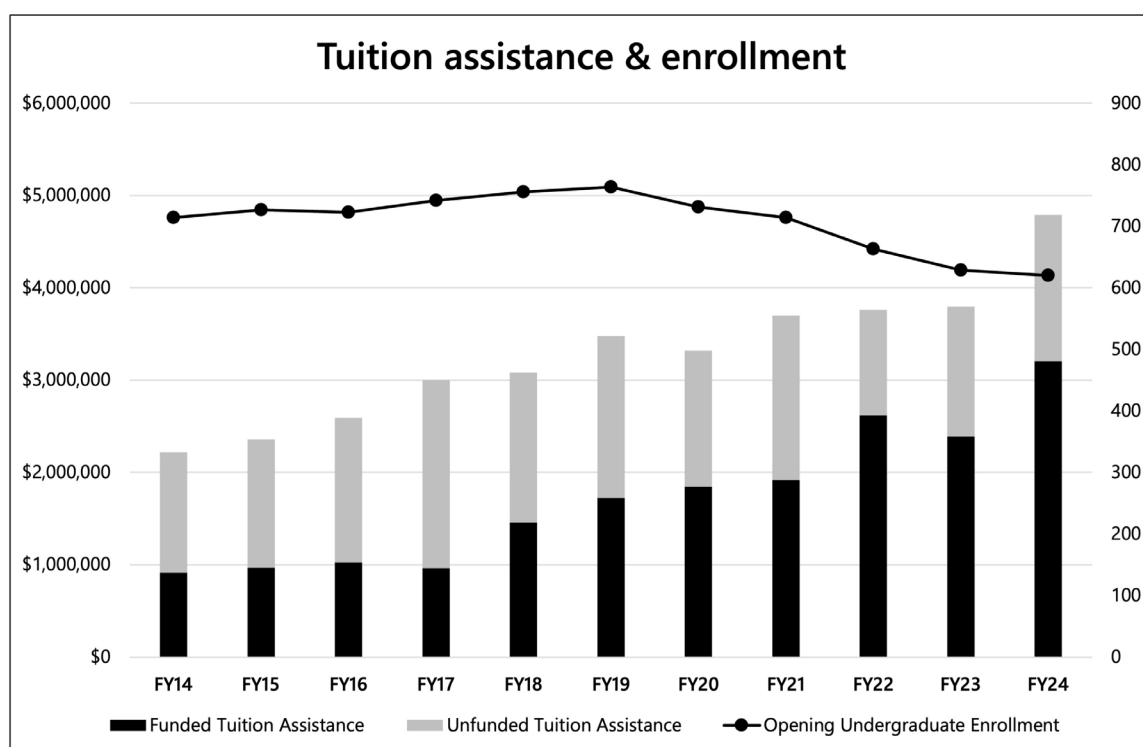
The heart of MLC’s Student Life Department is caring for people—supporting students in their mental,

physical, and spiritual well-being. We have focused on easily accessible mental health resources and work with two Lutheran counseling services. We pay careful attention to the physical health needs of our students, employing an RN on campus who also serves as a liaison with the local hospital, medical clinic, and individual doctors. We sponsor a calendar of speakers, workshops, and events to address mental health, physical health, and healthy relationships. We hold chapel services twice each weekday, offer a number of Bible study opportunities each semester, and make staff available for spiritual counsel and assistance. It is important to note that both our dormitory supervisory staff and our resident assistant staff receive ongoing training in helping students in all of these ways and with a variety of student needs.

The Cultural Engagement Center (CEC) furthers this mission by fostering inclusion and cultural awareness. Through events, education, and training, the CEC ensures that students of color and international students feel fully welcomed, while helping all students grow in cultural understanding and empathy.

God's gifts to MLC: Financial

The pandemic put tremendous pressure on the higher education industry. MLC is not immune to these pressures, and given our focused mission, may even experience a greater impact. Declining enrollment continues to financially challenge MLC; however, we remain committed to limiting increases to tuition, housing, and food costs.

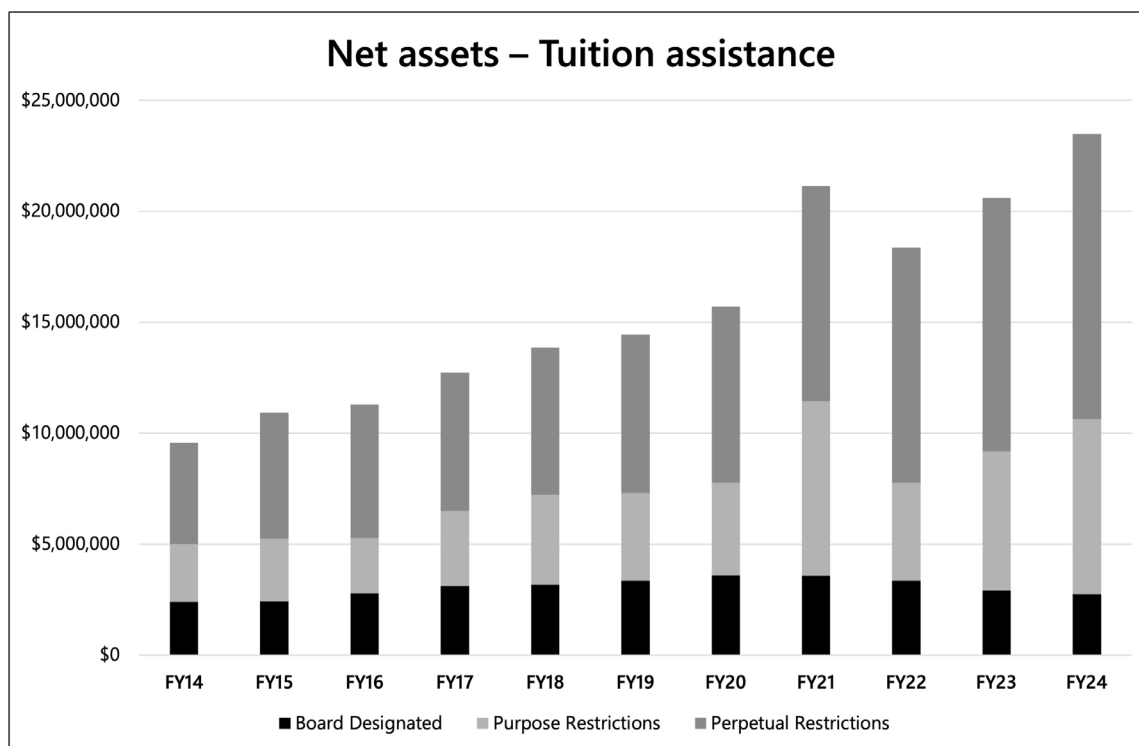


Financial aid—student cost and indebtedness

In recent years, the college has committed to significant increases to student aid in an effort to increase enrollment and reduce graduate debt. MLC plans for a 10 percent annual increase to tuition assistance. Of importance to highlight is the Congregational Partnership Grant Program. At inception, the MLC matching grant was limited to \$1,000 per student. In FY 2025, students' congregational grants are matched up to \$1,450 per student, a limit that increases to \$1,925 by FY 2028.

It is also important to note that during the above referenced years, the opening undergraduate enrollment dropped, about 14 percent, from 714 in FY 2021 to 614 in FY 2025. MLC anticipates providing about \$5.1 million for tuition assistance in FY 2025 and has budgeted \$5.8 million and \$6.4 million for tuition assistance in FY 2026 and FY 2027, respectively.

Generous gifts from WELS members and favorable markets continue to increase the net assets available to help fund tuition assistance at MLC.



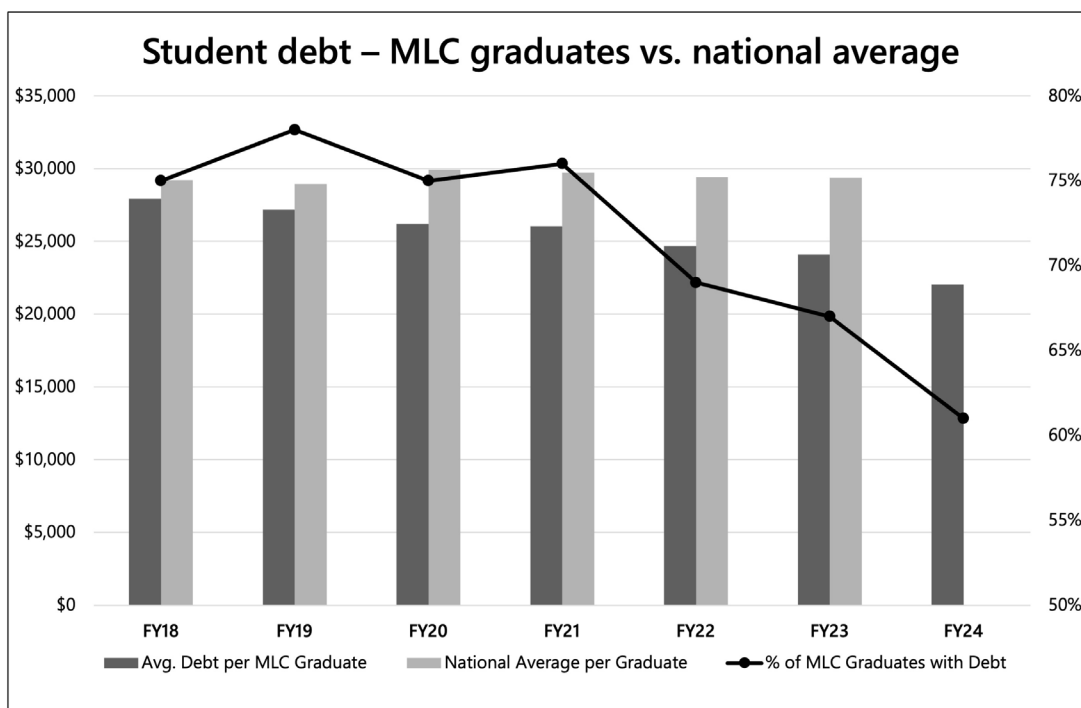
It is important to note that market fluctuations have a significant impact on endowments that fund tuition assistance, which is primarily the reason for the decrease in net assets between FY 2021 and FY 2022.

While increases to tuition, housing, and food have historically outpaced increases to tuition assistance and WELS operating support, MLC is making progress at narrowing the gap as shown below.

	Increase to full-time tuition, housing, & food	MLC Institutional Student Aid	Average MLC aid per student	Average WELS Operating Support per student
2020–21	\$770 – 3.5%	\$3,700,048	\$5,073	\$4,859
2021–22	\$690 – 3.0%	\$3,759,604	\$5,450	\$5,538
2022–23	\$710 – 3.0%	\$3,794,928	\$5,656	\$5,952
2023–24	\$750 – 3.1%	\$4,790,985	\$7,678	\$6,232
2024–25	\$970 – 3.9%	\$5,065,000*	\$8,000*	\$6,482

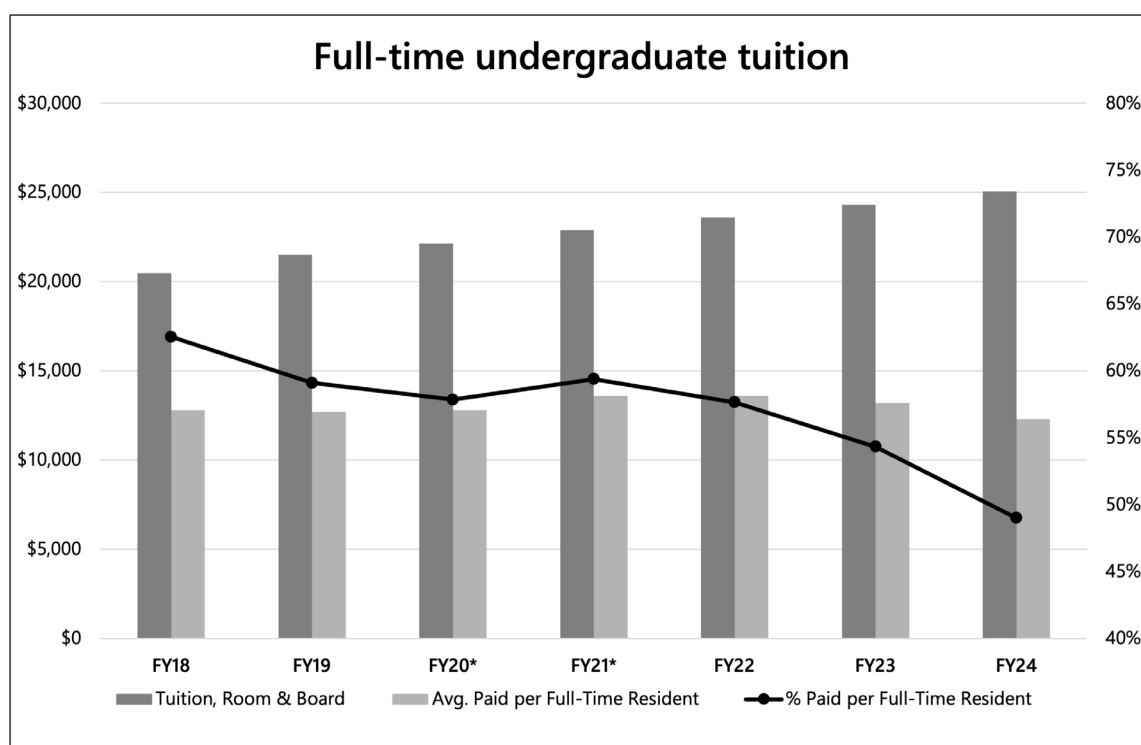
*Projected as of 1/2025

The following chart indicates the ongoing challenge of educational debt for college graduates both at MLC and throughout the country.



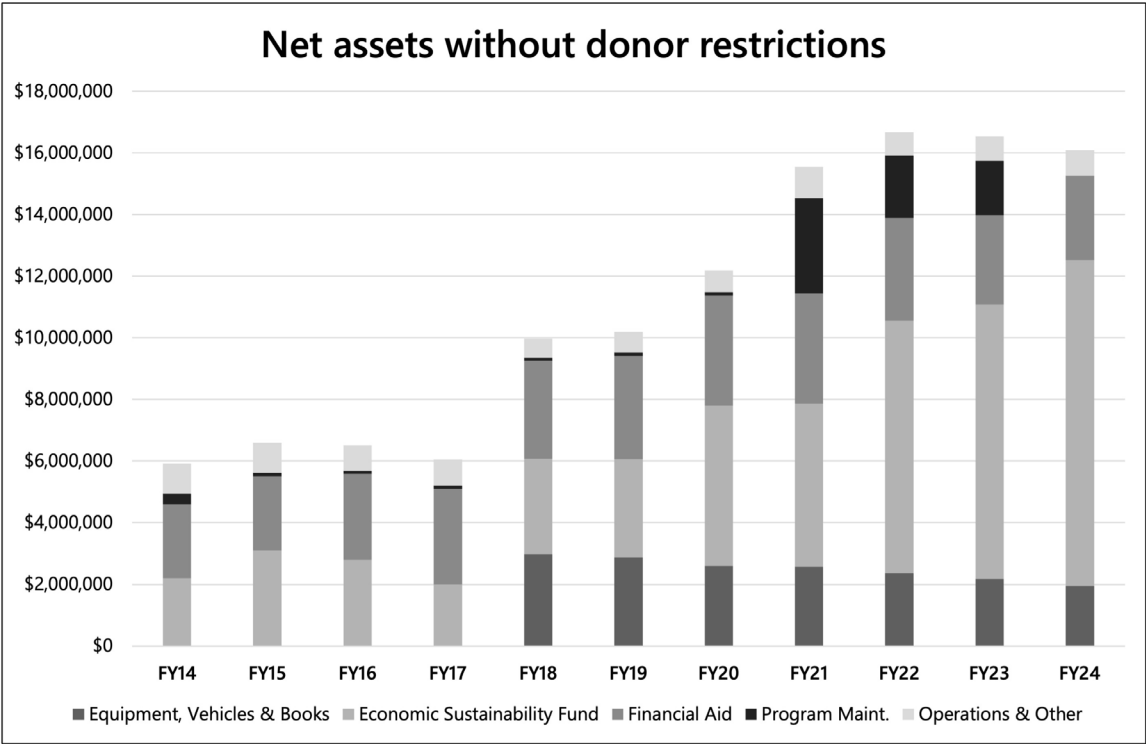
For the sixth straight year, MLC graduate debt has been lower than the year before, with a total reduction of about \$5,900 from the high in FY 2018. Most recently, MLC graduate debt is about \$5,300 below the national average. We attribute these trends to a combination of increased support from WELS, MLC's commitment to increasing student aid, higher donations for student assistance and congregational support, and finally the MLC financial literacy program. We pray for continued improvement in student debt and praise God for the success thus far.

While we still have much work to do, MLC's efforts have been blessed to keep bottom line costs as affordable as possible for our students.



Net assets without donor restrictions

As of June 30, 2024, net assets without donor restrictions at MLC totaled \$16,085,496. A summary of unrestricted net assets from FY14 to FY24 is provided in the chart below.



In the last year, the MLC administration determined construction of a new dorm could no longer be considered good stewardship for the foreseeable future. Therefore, MLC has moved forward with investing donor-designated dorm funding into existing dorm facilities. Amounts previously designated by the MLC Governing Board for the new dorm have been added to the Economic Sustainability Fund.

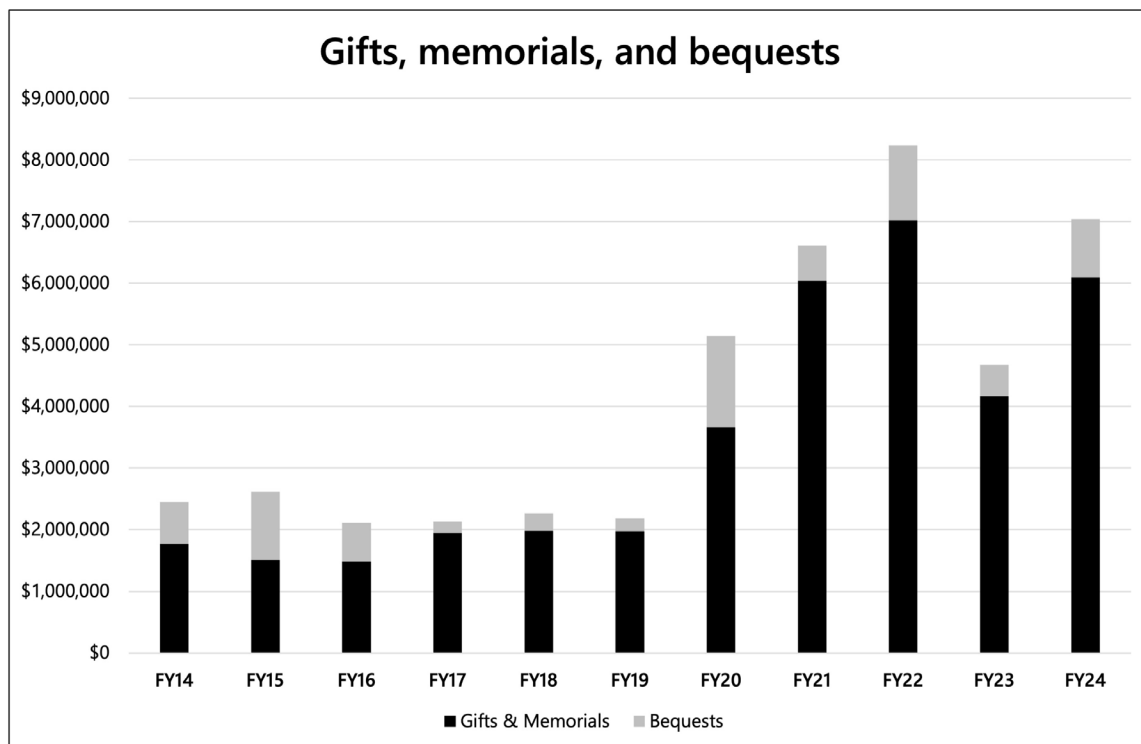
MLC's financial situation

Undergraduate enrollment at MLC has declined by 14 percent between FY 2021 and FY 2025, resulting in a loss of 100 students and more than \$2.6 million in annual revenue. In FY 2025, full-time resident students are charged \$26,020 per year. In response, MLC partnered with WELS and higher education consultants to develop three long-term priorities to strengthen MLC: fiscal sustainability, expanded educational opportunities, and enhanced brand identity and outreach. Change is ongoing, and while challenges remain, MLC is making steady progress.

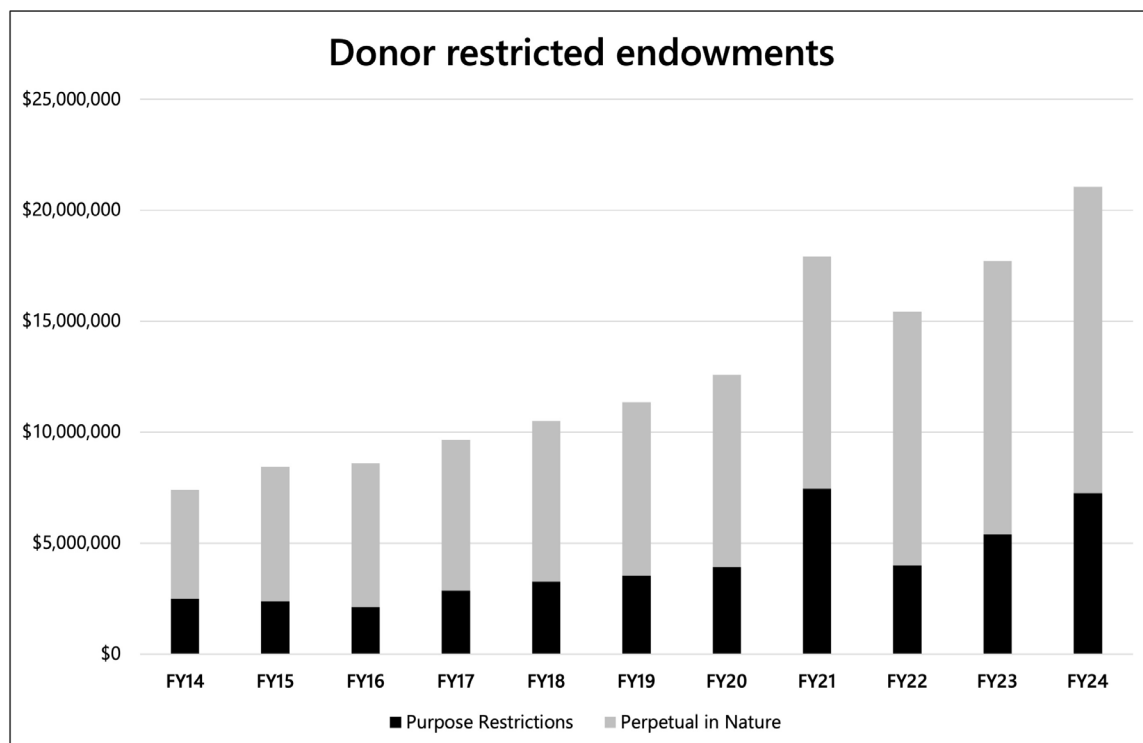
As MLC right-sizes due to lower enrollments, a gradual draw down of employees (two faculty and two staff) has occurred in each year of the current biennium, for a total of eight full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. The same drawdown is planned for the FY 2026–27 biennium, with an additional reduction of eight FTE over that two-year period. MLC set and achieved the goal of reducing deficit spending in the FY 2026–27 biennium plan, and has committed to balanced budgets beyond FY 2027.

Meanwhile, demand for called workers continues to exceed supply. To address this, MLC remains focused on keeping education affordable through increased student aid and limited tuition costs, aimed to boost future enrollment.

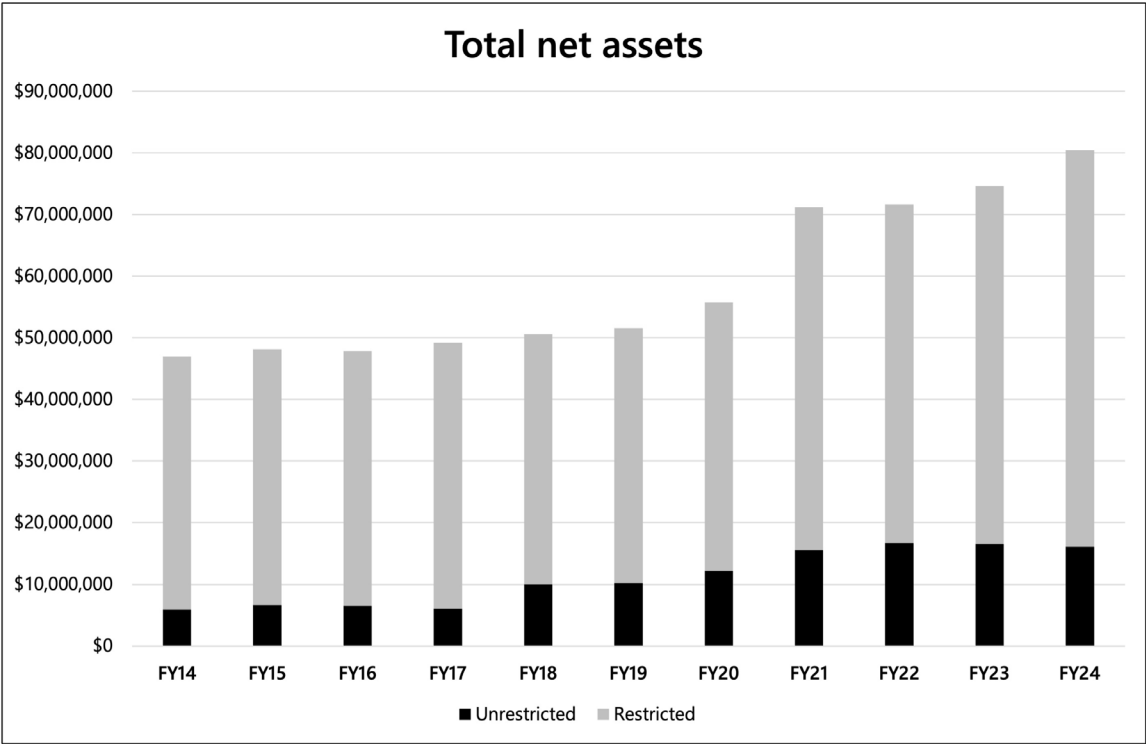
One of the financial bright spots for the college has been the increase in donations. God’s people continue to support the college with generous gifts, as shown on the below chart.



In line with increased donor-restricted donations and healthy market performance, endowment balances have also grown. This growth helps to fund the increased institutional student aid.



Despite the enrollment challenges faced by MLC, donations and healthy markets have helped to offset the decrease in tuition, housing, and food revenue. Coupled with cost reductions, including lowering full-time equivalent positions, the college has been able to increase net assets, as is evidenced in the following chart:



MLC looks to provide exceptional educational experiences to our students and increase the number of qualified workers needed to serve in WELS ministries. At the same time, the college must persist to adjust operations to remain sustainable. We pray that God continue to guide the decisions being made by MLC, so the ministry may thrive.

God’s gifts to MLC: Campus buildings, improvements, and maintenance

Improving and expanding indoor social spaces

As part of MLC’s commitment to student connection and well-being, we continue to enhance our “third spaces”—flexible indoor and outdoor gathering areas designed for study, collaboration, worship, and community. In 2024 two new indoor spaces were added:

- **Library study rooms:** To meet long-standing demand, three new study rooms were created in the library’s lower level by removing outdated materials. Funded through the MLC Golf Classic and the library budget, each room includes flexible-height tables, chairs, a TV screen, and a rolling whiteboard. The rooms are now popular for both student study groups and micro-teaching sessions.
- **Marty’s Place:** The former small gym in Centennial Hall was transformed into a vibrant social hub named by the Student Senate. Opened in February, it features a kitchen with counter seating, lounge furniture, study tables, and a turf game area for bocce ball, beanbag toss, and more. This space offers a warm, welcoming retreat—especially during Minnesota’s winter months.

Improving residence halls

MLC continues to invest in residence hall improvements that foster student well-being, belonging, and retention. In 2024–25, major renovations were completed in Centennial Hall, focusing on expanding and modernizing restrooms, effectively doubling the space and number of showers in each wing. The project was funded through general facility donations and remaining gifts from the "Equipping Christian Witnesses" campaign. Next, Summit Hall is scheduled for similar restroom and shower upgrades beginning in May 2025, funded through designated gifts and budgetary funds.

Improving and maximizing existing spaces

A generous gift enabled the Summit Training Hall to be outfitted with state-of-the-art weight room equipment, enhancing physical education and athletic preparation in a facility that now rivals top collegiate training facilities. Another generous donation funded a new outdoor education adventure course, installed in March 2025. This low- and high-ropes course supports adventure education, team building, and professional development and will be used by MLC instructors to train students in experiential and physical education methods.

Building enhancements

Phases one and two of the chapel lower-level renovation are fully funded, with work underway to create a dedicated rehearsal and recital space for student musicians. Preliminary HVAC and mechanical installations are complete, and architectural and electrical permits have been secured. Wall construction, wiring, and equipment installation are in progress, with sprinkler updates scheduled. Construction will continue through summer and into the next school year.

Maintenance and campus security

MLC continues to invest in campus infrastructure and safety, focusing on projects that support strategic goals, improve the student experience, and preserve the long-term health of its aging facilities. Recent work includes replacing air conditioning systems in Old Main and the library, ongoing window and door replacements, fire panel upgrades, boiler replacements, and LED lighting enhancements throughout campus. The wet pond was converted to a dry filtration system. Security has also been strengthened with new cameras at the Athletic Complex and additional coverage near the Centennial Hall social space.

Decreasing costs with energy-saving initiatives

Eight of the 11 buildings on campus have been upgraded to energy-efficient LED lighting, including an upgrade to warmer-toned LED lighting in the Chapel of the Christ, leading to notable cost-saving investments. Additional upgrades—including new windows, building envelope enhancements, and mechanical system upgrades—further support our goals of efficiency and sustainability.

God's gifts to MLC: Training students in financial literacy

MLC's financial wellness program, MLC Direction, helps students develop practical financial skills grounded in Christian stewardship. Through workshops, coursework, and individual guidance, students are equipped to manage God's gifts faithfully in all areas of life.

- **Campus-wide learning:** In partnership with the non-profit CashCourse, students complete two financial modules annually. Additional workshops during flex periods and a junior-year credit refresher reinforce key principles of money management and the risks of debt. Each April, during Financial Literacy Month, MLC partners with AmericaSaves to promote saving habits.
- **Senior preparation:** Graduating students receive personalized support through group or one-on-one sessions that review loan details, minister of the gospel tax implications, and budgeting tools to prepare for post-graduation life.
- **Integrated academics:** About 80 percent of incoming first-year students take Organizational and Personal Finance, a hands-on mathematics course offering deeper exploration of financial topics.

Across all efforts, these programs weave stewardship into every experience, reinforcing the call of 1 Peter 4:10: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

God's gifts to MLC: Gifts through the Mission Advancement office

MLC's Office of Mission Advancement oversees development, communications, alumni relations, and public engagement in support of the college's mission. From July 1, 2024, through Feb. 28, 2025, MLC received \$6.1 million in charitable gifts from nearly 1,900 donors across the country and beyond. This total includes vital support for the Congregational Partner Grant Program Match Fund, which helps MLC honor its commitment to students and congregations.

Catalysts for charitable support in FY 2024 have been scholarships, the competency-based education program, and the chapel lower-level renovation into a large music rehearsal/recital space. We offer our sincere thanks to everyone who has given so generously to support our students.

Scholarships—annual and endowed

In 2024–25, more than 120 endowed and annual scholarships contributed to MLC’s financial aid awards, helping ease the cost of ministry preparation for students. So far this fiscal year (through Feb. 28), eight endowed and five annual scholarships have been newly established, with more in progress. We thank God for the generosity of his people, who continue to support our future pastors, teachers, and staff ministers through these vital gifts.

Congregational Partner Grant Program

For the 2024–25 school year, MLC matched up to \$1,450 per student in congregational gifts, providing up to \$14,000 in total support over four to five years. More than 550 students from more than 225 congregations benefited from the program, totaling nearly \$1.4 million in matched aid. To meet growing needs, MLC will increase its match by 10 percent annually through 2027.

God’s gifts to MLC: Admissions and student retention

MLC continues explore new ways to connect with potential candidates for public ministry. To guide these efforts, MLC partnered with Bentz, Whaley, Flessner (BWF) and Blueprint Schools to conduct a five-month communications and brand assessment. Nearly 1,500 individuals across WELS were interviewed—including high school and college students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The resulting data provided insights into how MLC can better attract, enroll, and retain students. Blueprint Schools is now helping MLC implement a comprehensive communications strategy, including new branded materials and the hiring of a new marketing and communications leader following Mr. Bill Pekrul’s July 1 retirement. MLC also plans to deepen partnerships with WELS leadership, congregations, and schools to support called worker development and promote ministry pathways with accurate, compelling messaging.

Meanwhile, Focus on Ministry visits remain a vital recruitment tool, bringing 700 to 1,000 high school students to campus each year. Organized by Prof. Hannah Scharf, these visits offer a firsthand look at MLC life. Students interested in pastoral ministry also benefit from a coordinated visit to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, led by Pastor Joel Thomford, to experience the full preparation journey.

MLC Admissions counselors continue to visit each WELS high school and prep school at least twice per year, presenting to freshman and sophomores and meeting individually with students interested in ministry. These personal connections reinforce MLC’s mission and offer valuable guidance on the college experience. God is indeed answering our prayer for more workers in his vineyard. May we continue to ask the Lord of the harvest for more workers.

A look ahead

Below you will find some plans for this new biennium and beyond in carrying out our mission at MLC.

Project Sunrise

While MLC continues to advance its current strategic plan, *Pursuing Excellence Under the Cross*, the college—together with WELS—partnered with the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities for a synod-funded strategic review. From March to July 2024, the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities consultants worked with MLC and synod leadership to refine our direction and identify three key mission-driven priorities, now known as Project Sunrise. Implementation began in FY25 and will continue over multiple years.

- **Priority #1: Improve fiscal sustainability and operational efficiency**—In spring 2025, Pres. Richard Gurgel conducted more than 130 meetings with faculty and staff to gather input. As a result, MLC will streamline its organizational structure, reduce administrative layers, and simplify reporting. Additional goals include developing a concise, regularly updated policies and procedures manual and improving campus-wide efficiency through better use of technology.
- **Priority #2: Expand educational opportunities and accessibility**—MLC is seeking to expand educational opportunities and accessibility through four specific academic areas, detailed earlier in this report under “Academic programming.”
- **Priority #3: Enhance brand identity and outreach efforts**—With support from a generous donor, MLC completed a synodwide marketing study in FY25, partnering with two professional firms familiar with WELS. More details can be found in the “Admissions and student retention” section.

Facilities

Future residence hall plans

Following the 2024–25 renovations in Centennial and Summit Halls, MLC will shift focus to Concord and Augustana Halls. Plans include adding study spaces and double-room suites in Concord Hall and installing an elevator in Augustana Hall to improve ADA accessibility. As part of our strategic and campus master plans, MLC is actively seeking additional financial support for these and future residence hall upgrades.

Building enhancements

Old Main, a beloved and iconic symbol of MLC's mission, is receiving a long-overdue entrance renovation. Years of wear have left the current stairway unsafe—deteriorating concrete and leaning sides pose hazards, especially in winter. Beginning in July, the entrance and front foundation will be replaced with a new covered design that preserves the building's historic character while improving safety and durability. This fully funded project is made possible by the generosity of our Governing Board, President's Advisory Council, staff, faculty, emeriti, alumni, friends, and the New Ulm community—a testament to their shared commitment to MLC's future.

Improving athletic facilities and equipment

MLC will upgrade the gymnasium with a new basketball hoop system and LED scorer's table. Additional improvements for the new building include regrading and irrigating the practice soccer field and replacing the baseball batting shell.

Technology upgrades

Martin Luther College plans to complete a technology infrastructure transformation by replacing the entire campus' fiber network, replacing network switches, and upgrading to modern wireless access points. Once completed, these projects will enable faster and more robust connectivity for faculty, staff, students, and guests.

A closing request

In case you haven't noticed, the world continues to give abundant evidence of its need for its Savior. Then remember, in God's gracious plan, faith in Christ still only comes from hearing the message, the message is heard only through the Word of Christ, and people cannot hear of this without those who proclaim that message to them (Romans 10). So, pray. Pray that God opens the hearts of many young and not-so-young among us to desire to train for ministry. And then look around you in your home, school, or congregation for those for whom you can be God's tool to plant that thought and desire into their hearts. Until the day Jesus returns, it will always be true that the harvest is plentiful and that the workers are few (Matthew 9:37). So, pray for workers. Encourage current and potential workers. And yes, support our worker training schools. Together, God can use us to raise up the next generation of gospel messengers!

Rev. Richard Gurgel, reporter

Rev. Michael Woldt, chairman

Teacher Joe Archer

Teacher Paul Kelm

Mr. Thomas Klaudt

Teacher Joel Lauber

Mr. Timothy Luetzow

Mr. Todd Marten

Rev. Peter Prange

Rev. Karl Schultz

Rev. Larry Seafert

Rev. Peter Snyder

Teacher Jacob Unke

Mr. Michael Valleau

Advisory:

Rev. Richard Gurgel, Martin Luther College president

Rev. Dennis Klatt, Minnesota District president

Mr. Michael Krueger
Rev. Duane Rodewald, chairman and acting administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education
Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president
Mr. Thomas Walters

Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Floor Committee #16

Our calling

Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS) has existed as a preparatory high school for WELS since its re-opening on Sept. 13, 1910. Prior to that, it served as a traditional seminary preparing pastors for the Michigan Synod. We are thankful that the mission of MLS as a preparatory high school has not changed in over a century—to encourage and equip high school students for a lifetime of service in the public ministry of the gospel. MLS is very proud and grateful to fulfill its special purpose of preparing high school students for the public ministry of the gospel, encouraging them to enroll in the WELS college of ministry, Martin Luther College (MLC).

As a preparatory high school of WELS, MLS is owned and operated by the people of WELS. Those who serve and those who study at MLS are reminded that the people of WELS support this ministry with their offerings and prayers as we seek to encourage even more young people to serve in ministry.

Our calling as a preparatory high school of WELS is realized in the hundreds of alumni currently serving as pastors, teachers, missionaries, and staff ministers throughout WELS ministries across our globe. Traditionally, about 40 percent of MLS graduates enroll at Martin Luther College, providing a steady stream of eager servants for gospel ministry. Forty MLS alumni are currently enrolled at MLC. Nearly 20 percent of the large Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) junior class is composed of MLS alumni.

MLS consistently fulfills its calling as a preparatory high school of WELS by encouraging international students to enroll at MLC. The MLS international program regularly receives students from multiple countries with the goal of raising up an international generation of gospel heralds for ministry in their own countries and our own. Over the past two decades, more MLS international students have enrolled at MLC and more have been assigned into WELS ministries than any other high school in our country. The current WLS junior class has two men whose home countries are from Asian fields. A special relationship exists between MLS and our sister synod in Germany, the ELFK. Almost every year one or more students from German congregations attend MLS for an audited year of high school in which they experience American life and foster meaningful relationships within our fellowship. In the past few years, a second generation of MLS German students have enrolled.

Finally, MLS fulfills its calling by operating a fiscally responsible preparatory ministry with annual tuition increases held at 2.5 percent, which is significantly lower than the industry standard of 5 to 6 percent. In the absence of state-sponsored school choice or tax incentive programs, MLS relies on the support of WELS members through an annual subsidy from the Board for Ministerial Education and special gifts from God's people to keep tuition and room and board expenses affordable for prospective families. This is evidence both of God's fulfillment of his promise to provide for his people and the love that the people of WELS have for MLS and its mission.

Our current situation

Enrollment

In spite of a 16.5 percent decline in student enrollment in the state of Michigan over the past two decades, MLS opened the 2024–25 school year with 190 students, which is our historical ten-year average. Those students originate from six different states, four districts of WELS, and four foreign countries.

More than 80 percent of MLS students come from lay member families representing potential first-generation gospel ministers for the church. Almost 60 percent of MLS students live in the dormitory.

Recruitment

As a ministry preparatory high school of WELS, recruitment for ministry is at the core of our school curriculum and culture. Events such as Cardinal for a Day; children's theater; lock-in; summer sports and fine arts camps; boys, girls, and co-ed basketball tournaments; arts and academics fair; and a Junior Cardinals flag football, volleyball, and poms programs all are focused on exposing children to the MLS family and its ministry. For the third year in a row, our children's theater production went "on the road" to give grade school students and families from southern Michigan and northern Ohio an opportunity to experience the fine arts opportunities of MLS. Prospective students are invited to shadow a current Cardinal to experience classes and a night in the dormitory. These programs bring nearly 3,000 grade school students to our campus each year to expose them to the MLS family and our ministry. A travel fund has been established to provide financial assistance to families who come from a distance to visit MLS and experience the MLS family environment firsthand.

Once they become MLS Cardinals, students are given hands-on ministry experiences in every year of their education. Freshmen participate in Ministry Day, when called workers come to campus to share their experiences and encouragement. Sophomore Night connects current MLS students to MLS alumni and MLC and WLS recruiters for an evening of fellowship and ministry encouragement. Juniors travel to various WELS locations (WELS Center for Missions and Ministry, Luther Preparatory School, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary) on their way to Martin Luther College for Junior Tour. For many MLS juniors, this is the first time that they have been able to experience the MLC campus in person, which has proven to be a pivotal moment in their college decision planning. Seniors participate in Taste of Ministry, during which they shadow an experienced pastor, teacher, or staff minister to better understand the ministry behind the scenes. Several times a year senior boys take a trip to WLS to connect their education with the ministry of WLS and pastoral studies on our seminary's campus. Senior boys also are given the opportunity to lead the evening chapel by writing and delivering their own devotion for their classmates.

Two times each year, the entire student body participates in Cardinal for a Day, on which approximately 600 grade school students attend classes and chapel to experience MLS. Our students are given the opportunity to prepare lessons for these grade schoolers and lead them through the course of the day. January's Mission Seminar sets aside a day in which we invite a WELS home or world missionary to speak with the entire student body about the work being done in WELS Missions. Approximately 25 percent of MLS students are chosen annually to participate in Project Titus, a program that connects MLS students with mission-minded congregations to assist with outreach and ministry activities. These experiences are also instrumental for many students in making the decision for entering the public ministry of the gospel. Finally, MLC admissions counselors come to MLS several times each year to talk with students about college options and how MLC trains a core of Christian witnesses.

For the third year in a row, MLS has partnered with the WELS Board for Home Missions to place all senior boys who desired a pastor track taste of ministry experience in mission settings across the country. This year 12 MLS seniors were flown to 12 WELS home mission settings from New York City to Joplin, Mo., to gain firsthand knowledge of the life of a mission pastor. This experience has proven to be influential in encouraging more young men to pursue pastoral ministry.

Needless to say, recruitment for ministry is a robust and continual effort on the MLS campus.

Curricular and extra-curricular

MLS offers a high-quality, Christ-centered curriculum that prepares high school students for entrance into the college of their choosing. MLS graduates exceed the standards established by the State of Michigan and Martin Luther College in most subjects. The average class size of 17 and student-to-teacher ratio of 7:1 ensure that students receive personalized attention and academic encouragement. While standards are high, MLS students averaged a 3.66 GPA in 2024.

A special emphasis is placed on music and languages in preparation for future service in the church. More than 90 percent of MLS students participate in keyboard (piano or organ). The addition of a STEM

(Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) program expands the MLS curriculum and better equips future WELS teachers for their own classrooms.

Because of the smaller size of our campus, students have more options for participation in interscholastic competition with more than 90 percent of MLS students participating in one or more extracurriculars. MLS regularly achieves postseason athletic awards in most major sports.

Accreditation

For the past five years MLS has maintained an exemplary accreditation status by the WELSSA accreditation group (also recognized by the National Council for Private School Accreditation). MLS achieved that status by meeting or exceeding 96 percent of the 280 established standards. The faculty is currently preparing for our re-accreditation site visit in November 2025 with improvements that will better position MLS for an even stronger quality Christian education for future pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and missionaries in WELS ministries. Parents who elect to enroll their child(ren) at MLS can be assured they will receive the highest quality education and ministry encouragement.

Scholarships

MLS already provides more scholarship assistance to its alumni attending MLC than any other high school, but because of the increase of named scholarships that support continues to grow. In 2024, donors to MLS established the Dr. John C. Lawrenz Memorial Scholarship in memory of the fourth president of MLS. That scholarship marks the 23rd endowed scholarship specifically for MLS students enrolling at MLC. Several more named scholarships are currently in the planning stages. We pray that these scholarships will both help to reduce student debt for MLS alumni at MLC and make a commitment to current MLS students and families that their alma mater will support them as they continue on the path to ministry. We thank God for these gifts and ask for him to bless this continuing effort.

Campus improvement

This biennium saw the completion of several smaller capital projects that make our campus an inviting and sustainable place for ministry encouragement. The first of the classrooms in our 1950s wing of our facility was remodeled in summer 2024 with new technology, lighting, and a refreshed look. The Inter-Dorm Office (IDO) was remodeled and now provides a more welcoming and efficient hub for dorm students and the dorm staff. Through donor-provided support and volunteer efforts, the MLS weight room was remodeled with all new equipment, and the gymnasium floor was refinished with a new paint scheme and Cardinal mascot logo.

Strategic plan: Chosen people, special purpose

With MLS in a strong financial position, Prof. Steve Thiesfeldt led the MLS campus through a strategic-planning process that sought to strengthen the MLS ministry with five key initiatives over three years.

- 1) Maximize the efficient use of human resources through a careful and thoughtful review of our administrative structure. *Accomplished 2024*
- 2) Develop a master site plan that maximizes use of current space, allows for future enhancements, and provides the facilities necessary for effectively educating a high school student in the 21st century. *Anticipated completion in early 2026*
- 3) Improve internal and external communication by coordinating existing resources and utilizing available technology tools. *Anticipated completion in fall 2025*
- 4) Refine campus goals for excellence in academic and extracurricular offerings. *Anticipated completion in 2026*
- 5) Enhance current admissions efforts for matriculation of incoming students, retention of current students, and encouragement to continue preparation for the public ministry of the gospel beyond MLS. *Anticipated completion in 2026*

A look ahead

MLS remains committed to partnering with parents to never turn away a student for financial reasons. Ninety percent of students who apply for financial aid receive some financial aid. The average award is more than \$3,600, an increase of nearly 15 percent over the last few years. An encouragement grant program is now in its third year, providing additional assistance for students who exhibit gifts in leadership,

music, and ministry aptitude. Support from WELS members, endowments, and the MLS Foundation make an MLS preparatory education within reach for all WELS members.

MLS is working with MLC to offer more dual credit course options for our students. The 2025–26 school year will see additional courses in the mathematics curriculum expanding students' options for receiving college-level credit while in high school. Additional dual credit and AP courses are currently being explored.

MLS is working with Mr. Tim Luetzow, facility coordinator for the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, and the Credo firm to produce a master site plan that will provide a strategic view of our campus and potential improvements to benefit the recruitment and retention of ministry candidates. With an emphasis on student gathering spaces and more efficient use of current facilities, we are planning to make campus improvements that will serve our student body for many years to come. We anticipate a completed master site plan in 2026.

MLS has partnered with Blueprint Schools to enhance MLS' marketing, branding, and recruitment efforts. The initiative includes conducting a strategic growth analysis, synodical and community research, and parent interviews to identify growth opportunities. Key components include developing a compelling brand message, creating a visitor-friendly website, and implementing a structured marketing plan to attract and engage prospective WELS families. The project is structured in phases throughout 2025. The ultimate goal is to equip MLS with the tools and strategy needed to strengthen its ministry, increase enrollment, and ensure long-term sustainability.

Please visit mlsem.org for more information about your WELS preparatory high school in Saginaw, Mich.

Rev. Mark Luetzow, reporter

Rev. Andrew Retberg, chairman

Rev. Craig Engel, vice chairman, Minnesota District

Teacher Josh Glowicki, Nebraska District

Mr. Kevin Keller, Southeastern Wisconsin District

Teacher John Melso, Western Wisconsin District

Teacher Kevin Needham, Michigan District

Mr. Daryl Ohland, Northern Wisconsin District

Rev. Andrew Schroeder, Arizona-California District

Advisory:

Rev. Mark Luetzow, Michigan Lutheran Seminary president

Rev. Duane Rodewald, chairman and acting administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

Rev. Snowden Sims, Michigan District president

Luther Preparatory School

Floor Committee #16

Our calling

Luther Preparatory School (LPS), Watertown, Wis., has a single mission given to it by the synod when the prep department was first established on the Watertown campus in 1865: To encourage and prepare high school students for service in the public ministry of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. That mission is central to everything we do—in the classroom, in co-curricular activities, in our worship services, and in the personal guidance given to every student.

LPS is owned and operated by WELS. The synod has given LPS the privilege and responsibility to carry out this important work. The LPS Governing Board, faculty, and staff are grateful to our church body, which supports the work of LPS with its prayers, gifts, and gospel-laced encouraging words.

That LPS fulfills its purpose is seen by the fact that since its beginning as a stand-alone prep school in 1995, 55 percent of all Luther Prep graduates have enrolled at Martin Luther College (MLC). Historically LPS graduates have comprised almost 40 percent of traditional Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) graduates. Twenty-five percent of the students enrolled at MLC this past year were Luther Prep graduates. Just shy of 50 percent of the MLC freshmen pastor track students are LPS graduates.

God graciously blesses the work done at LPS, which benefits our synod and our calling in Christ's church.

Luther Prep depends on three sources of funding to carry out its calling: 1) synod support; 2) payments for tuition, room, and board; and 3) special gifts from congregations, groups, and individuals. We are grateful for the gospel's work of prompting such generosity and thankful hearts in God's people.

Our current situation

Enrollment

Enrollment has remained remarkably steady over the past ten years with every freshman class numbering between 100 and 125 students. LPS opened school year 2024–25 with an enrollment of 416. Our students come from 24 states, 4 foreign countries, 170 congregations, and all 12 WELS districts. More than two-thirds of our students come from lay families. Ninety percent of LPS students reside in the dormitories. Fourteen percent are minorities. All 416 students are WELS/Evangelical Lutheran Synod members.

Recruitment to LPS, with an eye on future full-time gospel ministry, remains a top priority. We always invite and welcome all WELS upper-grade students to visit our campus, "shadow" a Prep student, and spend a night in one of the dormitories to get a feel for Prep life. We host annual recruitment events such as WELS area and national co-ed basketball tournaments, Phoenix for a Day, the fall play, children's theater, and the musical, as well as numerous summer athletic camps. Each year these events bring 4,500 WELS grade school students from across the country to our campus.

Members of WELS are aware of the pastor/teacher shortage and its effects on gospel ministry. The LPS Governing Board desires all WELS members to know that incoming students to Luther Prep do not need to know that they will be pastors, teachers, or staff ministers. How many 13-year-olds truly know how they vocationally want to serve Jesus with the rest of their lives? Prep schools are for all WELS students receiving a recommendation from their pastor and, if applicable, their WELS principal, and who are willing to be encouraged toward the goal of ministry. God's past blessings have shown that if Luther Prep's enrollment increased by 100 students, MLC's enrollment will increase by 50.

The LPS Governing Board is also intent on having all WELS families know that LPS does not want finances to be a major obstacle that prohibits families from sending their children to Luther Prep for a Christ-centered education that will prepare them well for public ministry or for any other vocation. LPS President Matthew Crass is willing to talk through financial challenges with any parent considering LPS with a stated desire to make enrollment workable.

We also like to say: “You are not sending your child away, but rather to something. . . . Something that will serve your child most well for all of time and into eternity.” Parent after parent after parent has eagerly and joyously expressed that they are closer to their children because they have sent them to LPS, where the gospel predominates.

Preparing for the mission

The Word is central in all we do. Chapel services—the heartbeat of Prep’s daily living—are held twice daily. All classes are taught from a scriptural perspective, and students are encouraged in their personal devotional lives. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace to encourage and prepare our young people for lives of gospel ministry and service.

The LPS curriculum is designed to prepare students to meet or exceed the requirements of MLC. Prep students dig deeply into religion, social studies, science, mathematics, English, foreign languages, fine arts, and health. Prep’s entire faculty and dorm staff are graduates of MLC or its predecessors, with the ten pastors also being WLS graduates. LPS recognizes the need and desire for future musicians in our Lutheran congregations and classrooms. More than 95 percent of our students take piano lessons. The LPS organ program produces the most organ students for MLC, and perhaps more organists than any high school in America. All students participate in chorus their first year, with more than 90 percent continuing thereafter. Well over one hundred students are involved in the concert band, jazz band, brass choir, and string and guitar ensembles. Our select Prep Singers group sings at worship services in area congregations throughout the year and tours outside of Wisconsin every year during our spring break. All students take at least one year of Latin and three consecutive years of a foreign language in order to thoroughly prepare them for future language studies, especially those in the biblical languages. As a side benefit, data has shown a correlation that students who take Latin and music have increased ACT/SAT scores and increased grade point averages.

Because our purpose is to prepare future pastors, teachers, and staff ministers, LPS offers age-appropriate ministry experiences to its students. All of our seniors take part in our Taste of Ministry program, in which prospective pastor students spend two days with an area WELS pastor over a weekend, participating in some element of worship. We plan to expand the pastoral Taste of Ministry outside the Midwest next year. Our prospective teacher students spend two days in a classroom with an area elementary school teacher. Project Timothy is a program designed to provide mission, ministry, and cross-cultural experiences to LPS students. Approximately 60 students each year assist with outreach and education programs of established and mission congregations in Florida, Virginia, Georgia, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Alaska as well as congregations in fellowship with WELS in Germany and Colombia. Also, senior boys are given the opportunity to prepare and speak an evening devotion to the student body. It is a common practice for classmates to speak words of encouragement to these young men after the devotion is given.

Each year the entire junior class visits Martin Luther College. By the time our students graduate, each one will have met at least four times with an MLC recruiter. An array of missionaries, professors, teachers, pastors, and MLC and WLS students present topical ministry workshops at our annual Ministry Day. The entire student body takes part in Ministry Day. Sophomores also take an annual trip to the seminary, and seniors in the LPS pastor track visit the seminary each fall for worship, class visitation, and a tour.

The State of Wisconsin offers three parental choice programs for Wisconsin residents: Milwaukee, Racine, and Wisconsin Parental Choice Programs. In these programs, parents who fall under a designated family-size-based income threshold receive a voucher from the State of Wisconsin that pays the tuition costs of education for their children at participating private and religious schools.

The governing board approved Prep’s entry into these programs in 2017. Each year the governing board reviews these programs to ensure that they are consistent with the mission of LPS. Approximately 150 students participate in these programs, which have proven to be financially beneficial to our parents who are offering their sons and daughters for ministry. They have also afforded LPS the opportunity to award additional financial aid to many other families who are not able to participate in the programs. Even more, they have fostered LPS fulfilling its purpose as more WELS students have the opportunity to enroll at MLC.

LPS welcomes four new gospel servants who have accepted divine calls to Luther Prep this year: Recruitment Director Pastor Tom Moldenhauer and Professors Ryan Finkbeiner, Anneliese Gumm, and Phil Schroeder.

After 38 years of service in ministry, Prof. Brian Maurice has announced his retirement at the conclusion of the 2024–25 school year. We thank God for his faithful labors in the Lord.

Capital projects/improvements

Though the numerous capital projects and improvements have not been glitzy over the past biennium, they have been necessary to maintain the synod's beautiful 35-acre campus and its buildings. We invite anyone who is in the Watertown, Wis., area to visit this well-maintained synodical campus at almost any time. We would gladly give you a tour as well.

A look ahead

Music is an integral component of our heritage, the church, and Lutheran worship. The Lord has blessed LPS with an excellent music program and numerous musically gifted students, all preparing for service in the church. The LPS music auditorium, built during the President William Taft administration, is 113 years old. The Luther Prep Governing Board has addressed the construction of a new music center. When a new music center is built, the present auditorium would be repurposed to its original use and serve as a secondary gymnasium to accommodate our freshman teams, wrestling team, dance team, and plethora of intramural teams, as well as functioning in other capacities. LPS also plans to add additional parking.

Since the last synod convention, LPS had a conceptual design produced by Tredo Group, undertook a financial feasibility study, and entered what is known as a "quiet phase" for gathering gifts for a new music center. LPS has received approval from WELS Synodical Council to proceed with architectural firm Strang, Inc., for the schematic and design phase. This will help Prep and synod determine and confirm the size and the related costs of the structure. As of this March, Prep is involved in contractual discussions with Strang, Inc., and has on hand \$4 million in gifts and designations for a new music center. LPS continues to work in harmony with WELS synod leadership and WELS Ministry of Christian Giving as it moves forward.

Magnify is the name of the music center campaign. Music's noble purpose is to praise and proclaim the God of salvation. The *Magnify* theme stems from Psalm 96:2: "Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day," as Prep students are being encouraged and prepared to proclaim the Savior's name from pulpits, in classrooms, living rooms, hospital rooms, etc., throughout the world. The theme also echoes Mary's Magnificat. We pray a new music center serves our WELS students preparing for ministry for another century, as the old one has.

Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2). The saints have been praying that prayer for the past two millennia. With the large number of vacancies in WELS pastoral and teaching ministries, and with our synod's gospel-driven plan of opening 100 missions in 10 years, the Lord's invitation to prayer becomes even more compelling. We pray fervently that the Lord will move the hearts of parents to offer their sons and daughters for gospel ministry and that young people will consider the high calling of gospel ministry.

We'll say it again. LPS welcomes all WELS/Evangelical Lutheran Synod students to apply for enrollment. They will be encouraged and prepared for full-time ministry in their years at Prep. Should they choose a different direction after graduating, we know that they will be firmly grounded in faith and will serve the Lord Jesus and his church in some other vocation.

All information included here and so much more can be found at lps.wels.net or by calling LPS at 920-261-4352.

Rev. Matthew Crass, reporter

Rev. Timothy Spaude, chairman

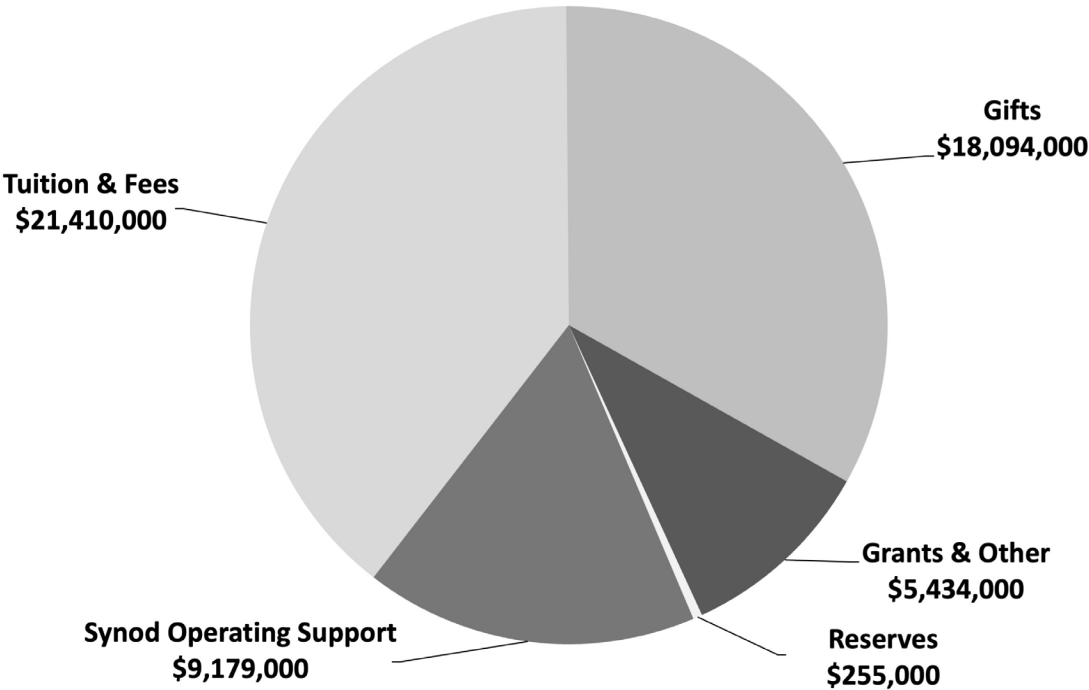
Rev. Daniel Schmidt, vice chairman

Teacher Peter Gumm, secretary
Teacher Seth Fitzsimmons
Mr. Clark Holz
Rev. Jesse Johnston
Mr. Jack May
Rev. Thomas Moldenhauer
Rev. Jonathan Werre

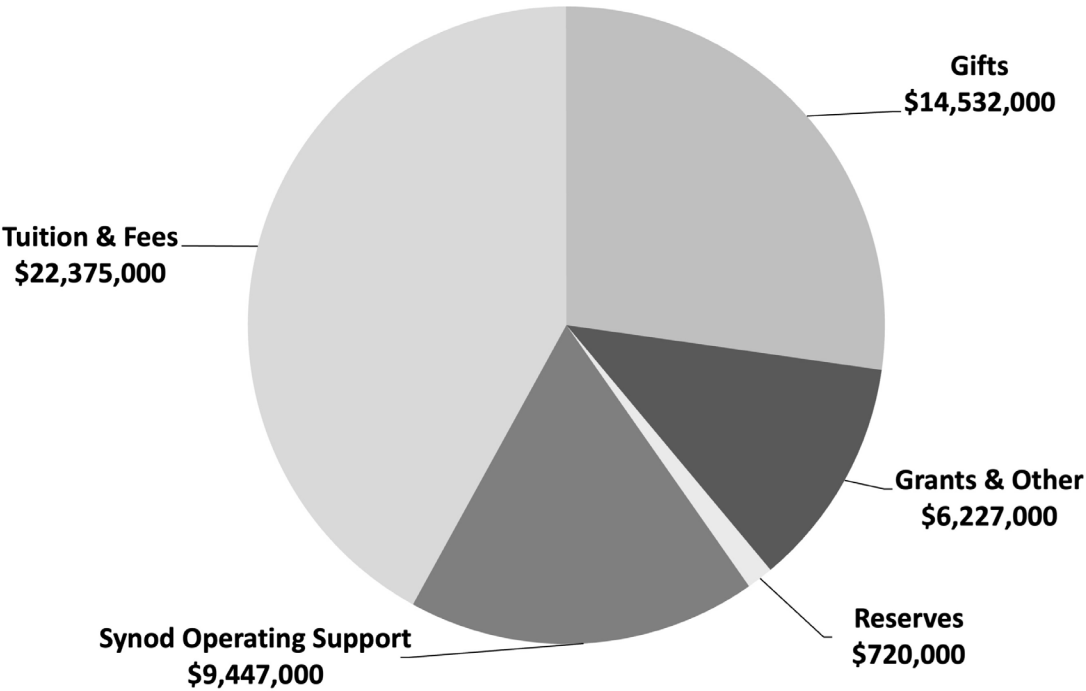
Advisory:

Rev. Matthew Crass, Luther Preparatory School president
Rev. Michael Jensen, Western Wisconsin District president
Rev. Duane Rodewald, chairman and acting administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education
Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

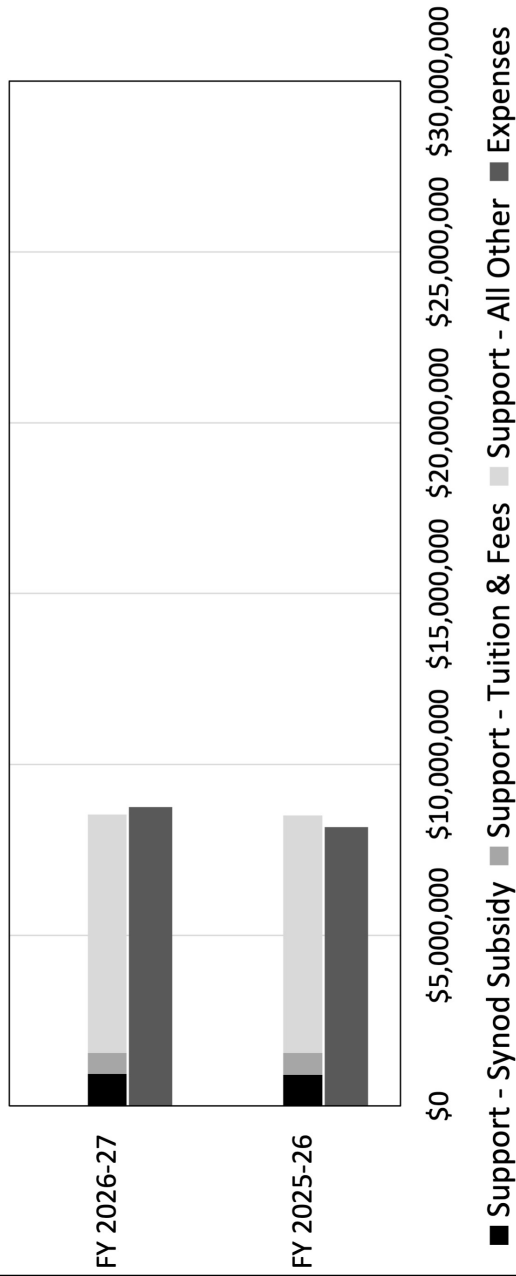
**FY 2025-26 Support
Ministerial Education
\$54,372,000**



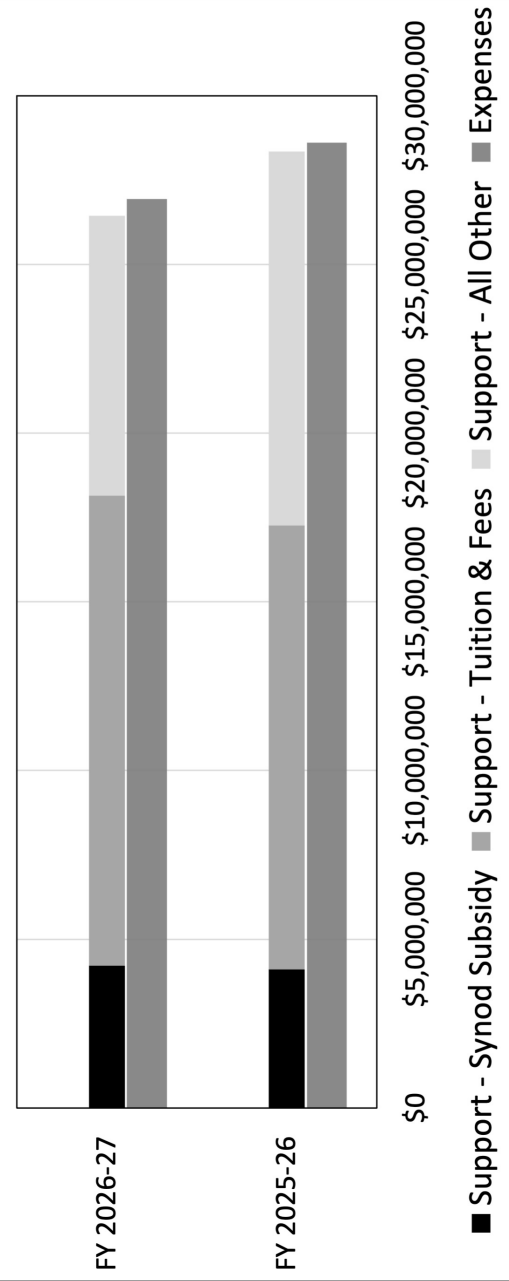
**FY 2026-27 Support
Ministerial Education
\$53,301,000**

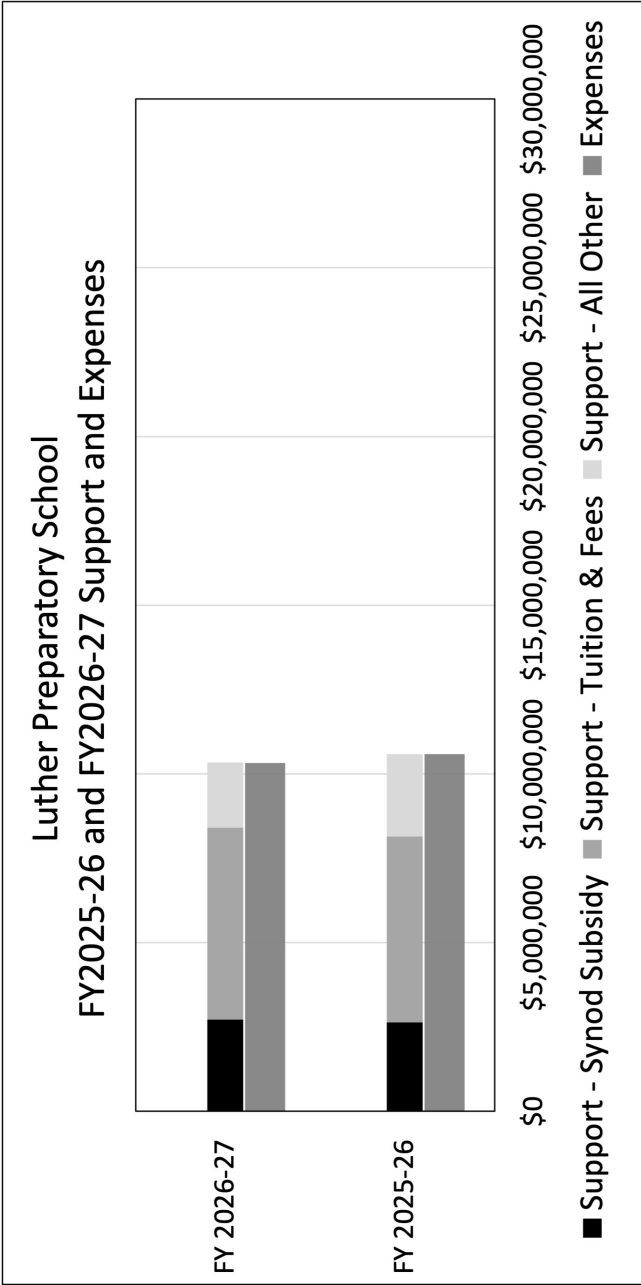
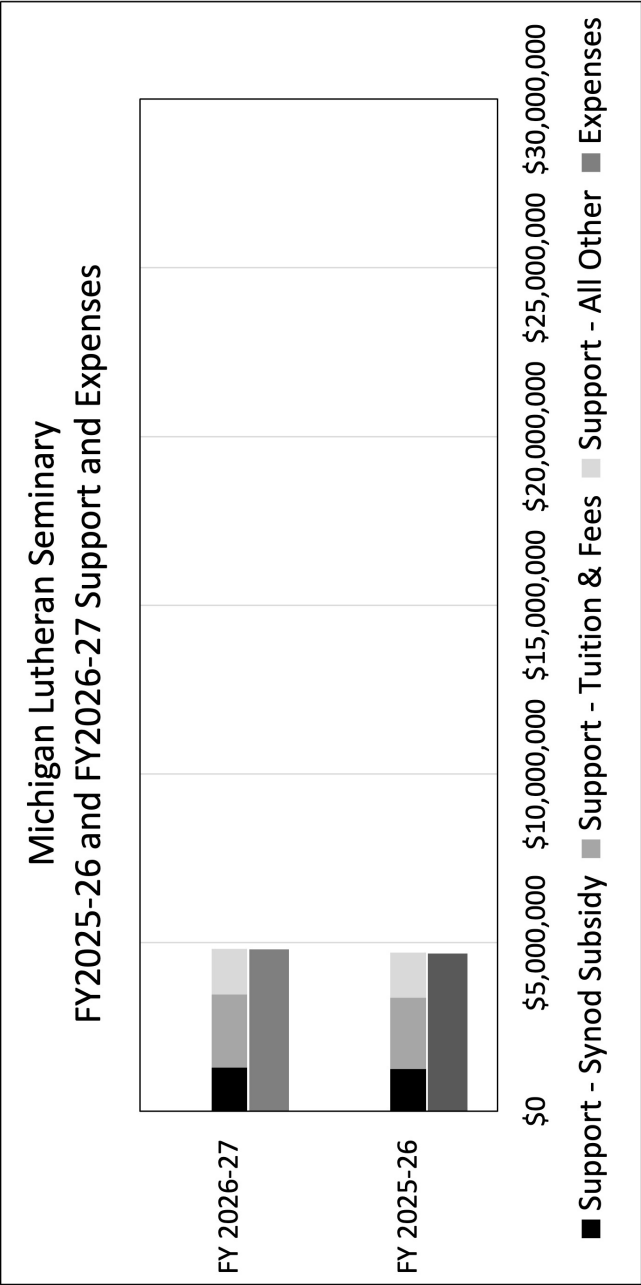


Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary FY2025-26 and FY2026-27 Support and Expenses



Martin Luther College FY2025-26 and FY2026-27 Support and Expenses





Subsidiaries and Benefit Plans

Several subsidiary groups and one affiliate (WELS Benefit Plans) serve the synod. These entities do not receive support from the synod's operating budget. Each is governed by a board that is accountable to the synod via the Synodical Council.

WELS Historical Institute Floor Committee #11

Our calling

WELS Historical Institute has the privilege and opportunity to serve the synod in preserving, researching, and communicating the history of Christ's love to and through our church body. WELS Historical Institute has the following purposes:

1. To promote interest in the history of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (hereinafter referred to as the synod) and Lutheranism in general;
2. To assist WELS' archivist in the collection and preservation of articles and artifacts of historical value;
3. To stimulate historical research and to publish its results in journals, newsletters, and other such publications;
4. To maintain Salem Landmark Church, birthplace of the Wisconsin Synod, and the WELS Museum.

WELS Historical Institute is thankful for the opportunities to serve WELS through researching and promoting the study of our synod's history. History, in general, is vitally important. Our salvation is founded on real historical events. The continuing study of church history is the study of God's work in the world, through his church and through the proclamation of his Word by his church, to gather his believers into his church. As we study WELS history, we grow in our gratitude for God's work through and for our beloved synod.

Our current situation

WELS Historical Institute endeavors to carry out its purposes for WELS in a variety of ways. The work of Mrs. Susan Willems, the WELS archivist, preserves WELS history and provides an avenue for research (see the report of WELS Archives on p. 73). Fruits of historical research are published in *WELS Historical Institute Journal* and communicated in presentations about events, people, congregations, schools, and developments in WELS history. Many of these presentations are livestreamed, recorded, and archived on the WELS Historical Institute website at welshistoricalinstitute.org. The "Our Great Heritage" series on the history of WELS ministerial education schools continued with a presentation on the history of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary presented by Prof. em. John Brenner. Pastor Mark Jeske continued a series of presentations on Lutheran churches in Milwaukee. At the 2024 annual meeting, Prof. Souksamay Phetsanghane of Luther Preparatory School spoke about the August Pieper article that he and some of his German students translated, "Hitler and the Protestant Church in Germany."

Several WELS writers again received recognition by Concordia Historical Institute for their contributions to American Lutheran historiography. In 2023, Eric Hartzell received an award of commendation for his book, *Inashood: The Story of the Arizona Apache Lutheran Missions and Their Pastors*, and Phetsanghane received an award of commendation for translation of Pieper's article that appeared in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*. In 2024 Pastor Peter Prange received an award of commendation for his *Wielding the*

Sword of the Spirit trilogy, while Pastor Benjamin Schaefer received an award of commendation for his master's thesis that was published in *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, "Avoiding the Hornet's Nest: Woman Suffrage and Synodical Conference Lutherans." In both years, several WELS authors received honorable mention recognition. It is encouraging to see that those outside of our fellowship are taking an interest in what WELS historians are researching and writing about.

WELS Historical Institute has been actively involved in the 175th synod anniversary celebration. Digital and online resources for the anniversary are accessible at welshistoricalinstitute.org/175th, including bulletin inserts, videos, promotional materials, resources for congregational historical work, and an interactive timeline of synod history. This has helped to drive traffic to the WELS Historical Institute website and hopefully will increase interest in WELS Historical Institute. Most of these resources will continue to reside on the WELS Historical Institute website after the anniversary celebration is completed. Numerous presentations and events are scheduled for the anniversary year, including a banquet and a bus tour.

WELS Historical Institute continues its work of maintaining and restoring the WELS Museum and Salem Landmark Church. In the past biennium, an extensive roof replacement project was completed. WELS Historical Institute is grateful for the grant from WELS that made it possible to get this necessary work done. The bathrooms were refurbished in early 2025. Extensive reorganization of the WELS Museum has been accomplished by the new museum curator, Pastor William Schaefer. In 2024 the museum opened a new display space called "The Gallery," featuring a wall of pictures from our WELS history and other items in our collections. Special thanks to Schaefer for the many hours he donates to keep the museum in good shape and to host tour groups. Visits to the WELS Museum can be arranged at welshistoricalinstitute.org/visit/salem-museum.

A look ahead

WELS Historical Institute is anticipating a busy 2025 with the synod anniversary. As mentioned, several events and presentations are planned, more than is usual during a given year. The "Our Great Heritage" series will continue with Prof. Paul Koelpin giving a presentation on ministerial education in New Ulm at the synod convention, and WELS President Mark Schroeder giving a presentation on prep schools in Watertown at the WELS Historical Institute annual meeting in October 2025. Prof. Joel Otto will continue the series with a presentation on the history of Northwestern College in 2026.

Materials promoting WELS Historical Institute will be part of the anniversary celebration with the hope that membership will see an increase. A WELS Historical Institute flyer will be included in copies of the new pictorial history book. Those who join WELS Historical Institute at the synod convention will receive a special reprint of the most popular issue of *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, "The WELS Forty-Niners." WELS Historical Institute will have a presence at various WELS events, including the WELS Education Conference and the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership. The board has the goal of increasing awareness of WELS history and membership in WELS Historical Institute. If you are interested in membership, please visit welshistoricalinstitute.org/membership.

WELS Historical Institute is facing challenges with the upkeep of Salem Landmark Church. The board is seeking funding to carry out a master site plan and lead abatement before other major projects are tackled, such as the repainting and repair of the steeple and tuckpointing. Ongoing interior work continues to be carried out as funds are available. Gifts to WELS Historical Institute are always welcome to carry out these projects that retain the history of this venerable building on the site of the synod's founding.

It is the hope and prayer of WELS Historical Institute that the synod anniversary will spark a renewed appreciation for God's gracious activity for and through our little corner of his kingdom and an ongoing interest in the work of WELS Historical Institute.

Prof. Joel Otto, reporter

Prof. Joel Otto, chairman

Mr. Daniel Nommensen, vice chairman

Rev. William Schaefer, secretary

Mr. Ryan Haines, treasurer
Rev. Justin Dauck
Mr. Kyle Egan, *ex-officio*, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer
Mr. Steve Miller
Mr. Carl Nolte
Rev. Peter Prange
Ms. Mary Rindfleisch
Rev. Benjamin Schaefer
Rev. Paul Schleis
Rev. Robert Weiss

Advisory:

Prof. em John Brenner, editor, *WELS Historical Institute Journal*
Mrs. Susan Willems, WELS archivist

WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc. Floor Committee #11

Our calling

WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc. (CEF), is a self-supporting, not-for-profit, wholly-owned subsidiary corporation of WELS. Its primary purpose is to provide loans and grants for mission congregations whose parsonage, land, and facility projects are under the direction of WELS Board for Home Missions and loans to mission-minded self-supporting congregations for facility expansion and renovation as tools for gospel outreach.

Our current situation

CEF is financially strong as it maintains a stable and conservative balance sheet with a healthy capital-to-asset ratio of approximately 50 percent. Funding to conduct our calling comes primarily from three sources: member investments, operating revenue, and gifts and bequests. Individual WELS members, WELS congregations, and affiliates of WELS may invest in CEF term certificates and savings certificates. As of March 2025, more than 2,700 investors have entrusted CEF with approximately \$121 million of investments. WELS member investments in CEF provide the principal funding for the loan program and net revenues from operations, investments, and gifts and bequests made to CEF provide funding for the congregational grant program and special grants to Home Missions. After several years of rapid interest rate hikes, the rate environment appears to be stabilizing, with the Federal Reserve lowering benchmark rates in late 2024 for the first time since 2020. CEF remains committed to balancing an affordable lending rate structure for borrowers while also offering competitive interest rates for its investment certificates. As market conditions continue to evolve, CEF will monitor and adjust its approach to ensure both the sustainability of its lending program and the attractiveness of its investment offerings.

Loan program

As of March 2025, the CEF loan portfolio includes 195 loans, with more than \$207 million in outstanding balances—a 5.3 percent increase from the previous year. Currently CEF has 13 congregations in the construction process with \$11 million outstanding to complete those projects inclusive of \$2.7 million of grant dollars. New loan applications for fiscal year 2025 trail prior years in the number of applicants and project sizes.

Grant program

CEF provides matching grants to eligible mission congregations after they have provided a minimum 10 percent down payment for their initial land purchases, existing facility purchase, or new facility

construction projects. A congregation's down payment dollars combined with a CEF matching grant allows the mission congregation to move forward with a more manageable loan payment. CEF has provided matching grants to mission congregations of \$3.2 million, \$0.3 million, and \$2.7 million during the fiscal years ended June 30, 2024, 2023, and 2022, respectively.

Special grants to Home Missions

In addition to the matching grant program to borrowing mission status congregations, CEF provides special grants to WELS Board for Home Missions for assisting mission congregations with operations, land, and facility projects. These grants have totaled \$1.6 million, \$2.1 million, and \$1.6 million during the fiscal years ended June 30, 2024, 2023, and 2022, respectively.

Leadership transition

After years of faithful service, Mr. Scott Page retired as executive director of CEF on June 30, 2024. CEF is grateful for his leadership and dedication in advancing its mission. Stepping into the executive director role is Mr. Brian Roser, who has been a part of CEF since 2016, working closely with congregations in the lending process. He brings extensive experience both from the private banking sector and other church extension fund organizations, providing him with a strong foundation to lead CEF in its mission. His leadership will help ensure continuity and continued support for WELS congregations.

A look ahead

We pray by God's grace that WELS CEF will continue to benefit from positive operational results, ensuring the safety and soundness required of financial institutions, and be able to continue to provide loans and grants over and above its present lending operations and matching, endowment, and unrestricted net asset grant programs to assist more congregations and Home Missions.

We anticipate the loan portfolio to remain stable through the remainder of 2025 and into the first half of fiscal year 2026 based on annual loan repayments and existing approved lending commitments. We are hopeful that Home Missions' "100 in 10" church-planting initiative will help continue to build the loan portfolio and provide CEF with lending opportunities into the new biennium and beyond.

CEF remains committed to strengthening our role as a mission partner, supporting Home Missions and the congregations we serve. As we look forward, we recognize the importance of continued collaboration, clear communication, and expanded resources to assist mission congregations in navigating the complexities of real estate and financing.

To better serve congregations, CEF leadership has increased onsite visits, fostering deeper relationships and ensuring a better understanding of each mission's unique context. Additionally, we continue to hold regular meetings with Home Missions leadership to enhance alignment and strengthen our shared mission. Recognizing the need for greater awareness and education, we have hired a marketing coordinator to bridge the knowledge gap, broadening understanding of CEF's services and role within WELS.

As part of a broader synodwide effort, we are also working on website improvements to make key information more accessible and provide additional educational resources for CEF investors and borrowers. While this project will take time to implement, our goal is to create a more user-friendly platform that better serves congregations in the long term.

At the same time, maintaining a healthy and disciplined approach to operations remains essential to CEF's long-term financial health. Ensuring a fair and attractive interest rate environment for both investors and borrowers allows CEF to continue serving WELS congregations while upholding its fiduciary responsibility.

We also continue to encourage individual WELS members, congregations, and affiliated organizations to consider supporting CEF through investment, savings, and retirement IRA certificates, as well as through gifts and bequests. These investments not only provide a meaningful way to steward God's blessings but also play a vital role in advancing our shared mission by enabling CEF to continue offering financial resources to growing congregations. We deeply appreciate the trust and support of our investors and mission partners as we continue working together in God's kingdom.

Contact WELS CEF at 1-866-511-7793 or cef@wels.net. Visit our website at wels.net/cef.

Mr. Brian Roser, reporter

Mr. Seth Hansen, chairman

Mr. Timothy Boerneke, vice chairman

Mr. Ron Kerr, secretary

Mr. James Bodendorfer

Mr. Kyle Egan, *ex officio*, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Mr. Timothy Gensmer

Mr. Mark Hartman

Mr. David Hiron

Mr. Joel Kock

Rev. Michael Otterstatter

Advisory:

Rev. Mark Gabb, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions

WELS Foundation, Inc.

Floor Committee #11

Our calling

Established in 1965, WELS Foundation, Inc., serves the Synodical Council by organizing exclusively to provide, direct, channel, and manage funds for religious, charitable, and educational purposes consistent with the principles of the synod.

Our current situation

WELS Foundation exists to help God's people support gospel ministry through WELS. It provides planned giving services and administrative support for gifts benefiting WELS congregations and ministries. WELS Foundation strives to be the foundation of choice for members, entities, and affiliates of WELS. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, WELS Foundation had the privilege to administer and distribute \$12.1 million in donor-directed planned gifts to various ministries throughout the synod. During the six-month period ending Dec. 31, 2024, an additional \$8.8 million was distributed.

WELS Foundation provides various planned giving opportunities, including charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, donor-advised funds, and endowment funds. It currently administers 1,338 charitable gifts on behalf of WELS members for the benefit of WELS ministries.

As of Dec. 31, 2024, the total assets were \$203.6 million with net assets of \$81.0 million. The net assets held by WELS Foundation are managed for the benefit of WELS ministries as designated by the donor. These ministries include WELS Missions and Ministerial Education schools (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Luther Preparatory School, and Michigan Lutheran Seminary), congregations, and numerous affiliated ministries such as area Lutheran high schools. Assets held with a long-term time horizon are invested through WELS Investment Funds.

Endowment funds

Endowment funds are permanently restricted funds established to receive and administer all gifts that are designated by the donor(s) for an endowment from sources such as cash, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, bequests, life insurance, charitable gift annuities, insurance policies, trusts, real estate, personal property, or any other gift, whether current or deferred.

Lord willing, expenditures from endowments further the work of the church by providing ongoing financial support for ministry until the Lord returns.

Donor-designated endowments can be established through WELS Foundation for the benefit of WELS congregations, area Lutheran high schools, or other WELS-affiliated ministries. WELS Foundation also administers synodical endowment funds for WELS, WELS Home and World Missions, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Luther Preparatory School, and Michigan Lutheran Seminary.

As of Dec. 31, 2024, WELS Foundation administered 439 endowment funds with a total market value of \$141.4 million.

Charitable gift annuities

A charitable gift annuity is a contract between a WELS member and WELS Foundation, by which the member makes a gift of cash or securities in exchange for fixed quarterly annuity payments for life. After the Lord calls the member home, the remainder of the gift annuity will be distributed to the congregation or ministry as designated. Income payments from a charitable gift annuity may begin immediately, may be deferred until a specific date in the future, or may be deferred until an unspecified date in the future.

As of Dec. 31, 2024, WELS Foundation administered 691 charitable gift annuities with a total market value of \$15.5 million.

Charitable remainder trusts

A charitable remainder trust is created when a donor transfers cash, securities, or real estate into a charitable trust but keeps a specified income interest—usually for life. When the trust ends per the donor's designation, the assets in the trust pass to the designated beneficiaries such as the church and/or synod.

As of Dec. 31, 2024, WELS Foundation was the trustee for 107 charitable remainder trusts with a combined market value of \$28.5 million.

Donor-advised funds

A donor-advised fund is a charitable giving vehicle wherein an individual, family, or corporation makes an irrevocable, tax-deductible contribution of cash, securities, or other property to WELS Foundation and at any time thereafter can recommend grant distributions to qualified WELS ministries. The fund can be established with current gifts, deferred gifts (i.e., charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts), and testamentary gifts (i.e., wills, living trusts, beneficiary designations of life insurance policies, or retirement accounts).

The WELS Foundation donor-advised fund program provides an alternative to a private family foundation. WELS members can accomplish many of the same goals but with far less administrative work and expense.

As of Dec. 31, 2024, WELS Foundation administered 96 donor-advised funds with a total market value of \$8.3 million.

Pass-through gifts processed

Not all WELS ministries have the capacity to process complex gifts. At the request of donors, during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, WELS Foundation distributed \$3.6 million to WELS ministries from 795 pass-through gifts. These gifts included assets such as appreciated securities, qualified charitable distributions from IRAs, real estate, life insurance contracts, and crops. Proceeds from these gifts are distributed to the WELS ministries designated by the donor.

Other gift administration services

WELS Foundation also provides gift administration for letters of instruction, gifts of securities, qualified charitable distributions from IRAs, real estate gifts, life insurance contracts, crops, and other donor-designated gifts.

Educational webinars

In 2024, WELS Foundation hosted a series of 12 educational webinars. The monthly webinars were timely presentations on various planned giving topics and made available by WELS Foundation at no cost to WELS Christian giving counselors, mission advancement representatives, and congregational planned giving committee leaders.

A look ahead

WELS Foundation continues to produce videos that focus on the blessings and benefits of planned gifts. View the WELS Foundation videos at vimeo.com/showcase/9415316. Other marketing efforts include quarterly reports to WELS conferences and conventions and a newsletter for our WELS Foundation partners with resources to help them serve their donors. WELS Foundation also sponsored the mission advancement sectionals at the WELS Association of Lutheran High Schools conference in March 2025 and will continue to have a sponsorship and display presence at local and national WELS events. In conjunction with WELS Ministry of Christian Giving, WELS Foundation will continue to produce *Grace of Giving*, a biannual newsletter to WELS donors and pastors that highlights planned gifts and how they can benefit gospel work. WELS Foundation, in partnership with WELS Church Extension Fund, also provides marketing materials and promotional items to all Lutheran Women's Missionary Society rallies and other WELS gatherings.

To carry out its mission, WELS Foundation will continue to identify the most cost-effective means to:

- Provide knowledgeable planned giving support to members through WELS Christian giving counselors and other WELS mission advancement representatives.
- Provide various planned giving opportunities, including charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, donor-advised funds, and endowment administration.
- Provide printed and online educational material regarding various planned giving opportunities benefiting WELS ministries.

Learn more about WELS Foundation at wels.net/foundation.

Mr. James Holm, reporter

Mr. Mark Maurice, chairman

Mr. Mark Schulz, vice chairman

Mr. Michael Krueger, secretary

Mr. Kyle Egan, *ex officio*, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Rev. Jonathan Kolander

Mr. Scott Neitzel

Mr. John Pahmeier

Mr. David Wendland

Advisory:

Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving

WELS Investment Funds, Inc. Floor Committee #11

Our calling

WELS Investment Funds, Inc., was established in 1997 to serve under the Synodical Council by providing investment portfolios for the benefit of WELS and its schools, congregations, and other affiliated organizations.

Our current situation

WELS Investment Funds provides cost-effective, professionally-managed investment portfolios. WELS Investment Funds currently manages more than \$330 million of investments for WELS ministries, including more than 250 congregations and WELS-affiliated ministries. WELS congregations, area Lutheran high schools, and other affiliated ministries are encouraged to utilize WELS Investment

Funds for their long-term investment needs, such as endowment and scholarship funds. By pooling our God-given talents and resources with other congregations, we can take advantage of lower-cost, institutionally-priced investment opportunities that would not otherwise be available. As more congregations and organizations invest in WELS Investment Funds, the cost-reduction benefits also increase. It's another way we can help support each other.

The WELS Investment Funds Board of Directors is responsible for the overall operations of WELS Investment Funds. The directors are members of WELS congregations, nominated from throughout the synod, vetted by WELS Human Resources, and appointed by the Synodical Council. Currently nine qualified directors serve on the board. The day-to-day operations are carried out by WELS employees leased to WELS Investment Funds.

The board has retained Mercer Investments LLC (Mercer) as the investment consultant for WELS Investment Funds. As a co-fiduciary, Mercer is responsible for making investment recommendations to the board. Once the board approves the recommendation, the investment consultant has the discretion to implement and oversee the investment recommendations.

WELS Investment Funds offers four investment portfolios, collectively known as the WELS Funds.

The WELS Balanced Fund seeks long-term capital growth and a low to moderate level of current income. It has a target asset allocation comprised of 60 percent equity and 40 percent fixed income and has a mid- to long-range investment time horizon.

The WELS Endowment Fund seeks long-term capital growth with some current income and is designed primarily for endowment funds. It has a target asset allocation comprised of 75 percent equity and 25 percent fixed income and has a long-range investment time horizon.

The WELS Equity Fund seeks long-term capital growth by investing in a portfolio of equity securities that is diversified by industry and company size. It is composed of 100 percent equities and has a long-range investment time horizon.

The WELS Income Fund seeks to provide income by investing primarily in investment-quality debt securities. It is composed of 100 percent fixed income securities and has a short- to mid-range investment time horizon.

The WELS Balanced Fund and WELS Endowment Fund invest in differing ratios of the same underlying mutual funds as the WELS Equity and WELS Income Funds. The WELS Equity Fund and WELS Income Fund are for ministries that desire an asset allocation other than the WELS Balanced Fund and WELS Endowment Fund.

The market weathered another volatile year in 2024 as the US equity market continued to be dominated by a handful of AI-related megacap technology stocks. The US Federal Reserve continued to grapple with inconsistent macroeconomic signals while its interest rate stance remained a key factor behind market volatility. Additionally, the uncertainty surrounding the potential wide-ranging policy changes under a new administration heightened. The WELS investment portfolios have notched solid returns amid these challenges, benefiting from the discipline of staying in the market and prudent risk management through diversification. At the end of 2024, the portfolios went through a couple of minor changes, e.g., moving into slightly longer duration posture and closer-to-market weighting between US equity and non-US equity, positions that could prepare the portfolios well for both the knowns and unknowns in 2025.

Additional information, including director biographical information, the investment policy statement, audited financial statements, and the 2024 annual report to WELS ministries, is available at wels.net/welsfunds.

A look ahead

Marketing and communication efforts include the distribution of quarterly WELS Fund Fact sheets and live quarterly update webinars for investors that include a quarterly market recap, an investment performance review for the WELS Funds, and Mercer's market and economic outlook. Ongoing marketing

efforts include producing brief Q&A videos regarding topics impacting our investors, quarterly reports to WELS conferences and conventions, and an in-person display presence at nationwide WELS events.

WELS Investment Funds is committed to continuing to serve WELS congregations, area Lutheran high schools, and other affiliated ministries. Those responsible for overseeing the long-term investments for their organization are encouraged to review their investment objectives, asset allocation, investment costs, and time horizons.

WELS Investment Funds is hoping to continue to grow the investment portfolios and is willing to work with ministries to review their investment needs. To schedule a free review in person or via conference call or video, contact us at 414-256-3206 or jim.holm@wels.net.

Mr. James Holm, reporter

Mr. Joel Luehmann, chairman

Mr. John Wenker, vice chairman

Mr. Ronald Schmitz, secretary

Rev. em. Charles Degner

Mr. Kyle Egan, *ex officio*, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Mr. Benjamin Schmidt

Mr. Jonathan Vannice

Mr. Max Wenck

Mr. Matthew Zuleger

Advisory:

Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving

WELS Benefit Plans

Floor Committee #11

Our calling

The WELS Benefit Plans Office (the “Benefit Plans”) serves synodical workers and organizations through the administration of the WELS Voluntary Employees’ Beneficiary Association (VEBA), the WELS Pension Plan, and the WELS Shepherd Plan. Oversight of the VEBA Plan is the responsibility of the WELS VEBA Commission, and oversight of the Pension and Shepherd Plans is the responsibility of the WELS Retirement Program Commission. The commission members are appointed by WELS Synodical Council. Each commission is composed of a pastor and a male teacher from the called worker roster, four laymen, and the *ex-officio* member. Contributions toward the cost of plan benefits and operations are held in separate trusts, each invested in diversified accounts with outside money managers overseen by an independent investment advisory firm. The plans employ outside professionals that provide benefit design, actuarial, consulting, banking, legal, and auditing services.

Our current situation

Much of the work to freeze the Pension Plan and begin providing retirement benefits through defined contributions to workers’ Shepherd Plan accounts was completed by the end of 2022. During 2023–24, the focus of the Retirement Program Commission and Benefit Plans shifted to improving Shepherd Plan administrative efficiencies and evaluating options to improve worker benefits in future years.

Improved efficiencies have allowed defined contributions to be deposited into workers’ Shepherd Plan accounts earlier in each quarter since the retirement program transition, providing workers with earlier access to the investment and use of those funds. Additionally, the significant growth in Shepherd Plan participants and assets resulted in a 9.8 percent decrease to Shepherd Plan administrative fees paid by

participants since 2022, as the total market value of Shepherd Plan assets increased from \$223.7 million as of Dec. 31, 2022, to \$348.0 million as of Dec. 31, 2024 (+55.5 percent). The administrative fees will further decrease by 5.4 percent when total Shepherd Plan assets exceed \$350 million.

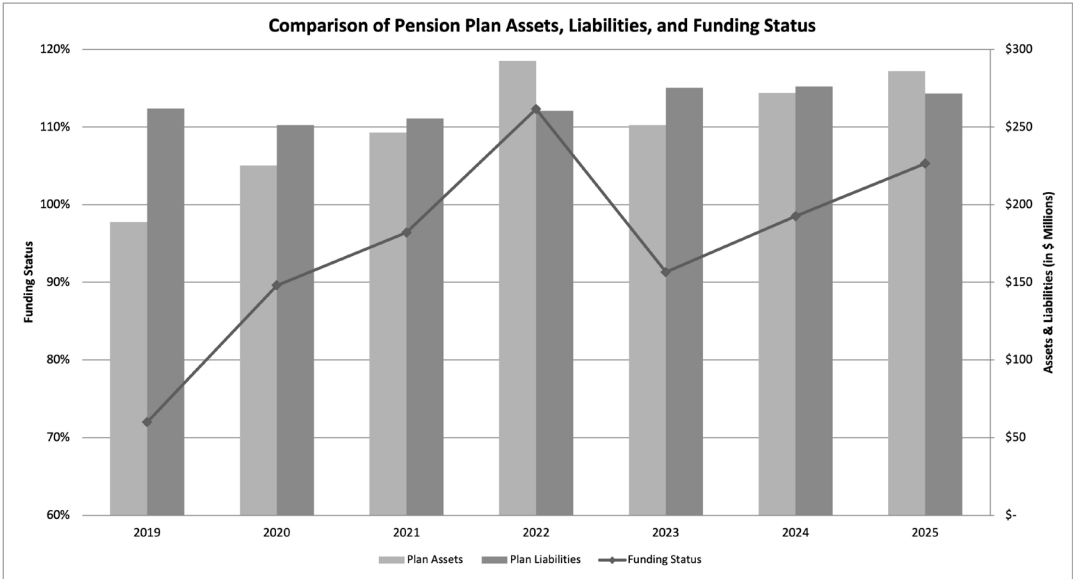
The Pension Plan’s funded status (which compares the plan’s assets with the present value of benefits earned by participants) increased from 98 percent as of Jan. 1, 2024, to 105 percent as of Jan. 1, 2025, based on the Retirement Program Commission’s actuarial assumptions. This funded status improvement permitted the commission to keep the quarterly retirement contribution rate charged to calling bodies unchanged for 2026 and will mark the sixth consecutive year of no increases to this rate.

The VEBA Commission welcomes the opportunity to serve a growing number of workers and calling bodies, as VEBA Plan membership increased by 2.5 percent during 2023–24 while more than 80 percent of calling bodies continue to participate. However, VEBA Plan claims experience turned sharply worse following the COVID-19 public health emergency due to a return to care utilization, significant cost inflation, and more severe catastrophic claim situations. The addition of government-required benefits for COVID-19 and mental health parity, as well as compliance with new government reporting requirements, has also increased VEBA Plan costs. Although the VEBA Commission provided rate stability by not increasing rates for the 2021 and 2022 plan years, the aforementioned headwinds required rate increases of 9.5 percent for 2023, 11 percent for 2024, and 7 percent for 2025.

In 2025, the VEBA Commission began a three-year effort to update the VEBA Plan’s rate regions and rating factors so that rates will better reflect current health care costs across the country. The health care industry has changed significantly since the former VEBA Plan rate regions were developed approximately 15 years ago, and improved data has allowed the VEBA Plan’s actuaries to better assess the relative differences in health care costs across local markets. The new regional rating factors will be implemented over three years to spread out the financial impacts to sponsoring organizations.

To ensure that the VEBA Plan maintains sufficient reserves during this high-cost period, for 2026 the VEBA Commission will consider increasing rates (potentially in the double digits) and deductible and coinsurance amounts to maintain pace with inflation. The plan design changes may include discontinuation of the \$500/individual and \$1,000/family deductible amounts currently available under VEBA plan option 1.

The Pension and VEBA trusts achieved investment gains of 9.3 percent and 5.9 percent, respectively, in 2024, and 11.9 percent and 6.7 percent, respectively, in 2023. Unaudited results from the 2024 plan year show net assets available for benefits in the Pension and VEBA trusts as \$286.2 million and \$33.7 million, respectively. In comparison, final audited results from the 2023 plan year show net assets available for benefits in the Pension and VEBA trusts as \$271.8 million and \$34.2 million, respectively. Both commissions continue to evaluate investment allocation and diversification strategies that are expected to achieve target returns with reduced risk.



A look ahead

The commissions and Benefit Plans will continue their emphasis on maintaining long-term stability for the VEBA, Pension, and Shepherd Plans while considering new ways to engage participants and calling bodies through improved communications.

The Retirement Program Commission will continue to balance the need to preserve the security of Pension Plan benefits earned by workers with the desire to enhance the defined contribution plan, while minimizing the cost to calling bodies. The commission closely monitors the retirement benefit contribution rate charged to calling bodies and its impact on the Pension Plan's funded status. The Commission also monitors the Shepherd Plan's financial activities and noticed that only 55 percent of workers who received defined contributions also contributed their own dollars to their Shepherd Plan accounts in 2023. The Shepherd Plan provides a diversified set of investment options and helpful financial planning resources for workers to manage the contributions made to their accounts. Increasing awareness of these opportunities will help workers to meet their financial goals for retirement. In addition, because retirement benefit contributions are made to workers' accounts each quarter, it is more important than ever for organizations to timely report call status changes to WELS so that workers timely receive the correct contributions.

The VEBA Commission and its advisors will carefully monitor the higher inflation environment and uncertainties with financial markets and the long-term impacts of the pandemic as well as their impacts on the VEBA Plan. It is likely that VEBA Plan rates will continue to increase to offset cost inflation and maintain adequate reserves. In addition, the VEBA Commission and Benefit Plans will be more closely observing worker participation in the VEBA Plan and health care arrangements at participating calling bodies to protect the Plan's long-term sustainability in the rapidly changing health care environment. Providing an affordable health plan with consistent nationwide benefits is essential to supporting synodwide mission and ministry activities.

Benefit Plans, as well as the VEBA and Retirement Program Commissions, are acutely aware of the need to keep benefit plan costs as low as possible to allow calling bodies to preserve valuable assets to fund ministry efforts. The primary goal for the benefit plans going forward is to strike the best balance between acceptable costs to calling bodies and meaningful benefits to participants.

Mr. Joshua Peterman, reporter

WELS VEBA Commission:

Mr. Kyle Koltz, chairman

Mr. Todd Poppe, vice chairman

Mr. James Gabriel, secretary

Mr. Kyle Egan, *ex-officio*, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Teacher Daniel Markgraf

Rev. Joel Sauer

Mr. Norman Sowatzke

Advisory:

Mr. Joshua Peterman, director of WELS Benefit Plans

Ms. Lori Schrank, claims manager of WELS Benefit Plans

WELS Retirement Program Commission:

Mr. Thomas Medema, chairman

Mr. Lee Miller, vice chairman

Mr. Samuel Kruschel, secretary

Mr. Kyle Egan, *ex-officio*, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Teacher James Hahm

Rev. James Turriff

Mr. Jeffrey Verbeke

Advisory:

Mr. Joshua Peterman, director of WELS Benefit Plans

Northwestern Publishing House

Floor Committee #12

Our calling

The WELS Constitution states, “The object and purpose of the synod shall be to extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.” As outlined in the constitution, Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) fulfills this object and purpose “by printing, publishing, purchasing, selling, and disseminating literature that maintains Lutheran doctrine and practice” and “by furnishing appropriate literature for parish schools, Sunday schools, missions, institutions, and churches.” NPH is governed by a board of directors responsible for fulfilling this purpose through establishing employee duties and adopting policies for the operation of NPH.

The mission of Northwestern Publishing House is to deliver biblically sound, Christ-centered resources within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and beyond. For 133 years, NPH has prepared materials that are consistent with this mission and aligned with Lutheran doctrine and practice. The proceeds NPH receives from sales of materials to individuals, congregations, and schools are used to develop and publish new and relevant resources and materials. Our calling, then, is to continue to proclaim God’s love in Christ through the careful use of the resources God grants to us through purchases of the resources and materials we make available.

Our current situation

In the past two years, Christ has blessed NPH with the release of more than 25 new books, devotionals, Bible studies, professional volumes, and periodicals as well as 45 musical publications and worship resources. Many of these became available in digital form: PDF downloadable, e-books, and audiobooks.

Print publishing program

NPH continues to publish new books, music, and other materials for our pastors, teachers, and WELS members. These new materials, along with previously published NPH books, Bible studies, curriculum, church supplies, and a selection of books and materials from other publishers, are available through NPH’s website, nph.net, and by phone at 800-662-6022.

NPH continues to publish *Forward in Christ*, *Meditations*, and *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* periodicals.

Visit the NPH website regularly to discover resources and materials that support your ministry and that will strengthen the faith of all WELS members.

Digital publishing program

NPH continues to expand content in ways that are relevant today with 226 books in e-book format, distribution of 154 titles through Logos, 800 downloadable products, digital *Forward in Christ*, 5 audiobooks, and the *Meditations Daily Devotional* app for both iOS and Android platforms.

Music and worship

Since the release of the *Christian Worship* hymnal suite, 22 print volumes have been released to date, as well as *Christian Worship: Service Builder*. More than 650 congregations are using this valuable resource to save time in worship planning and bulletin creation.

Since the launch of *Christian Worship: Musician’s Resource*, more than 1,700 resources became available and this will continue to grow over the years. *Christian Worship: Musician’s Resource* can be found via the NPH website and in a downloadable format.

Regular resource development has continued on keyboard collections (piano and organ), music for choirs (adult and children), annual children’s Christmas service and Lent kits, and the weekly worship folder cover subscription program. Content comes from multiple sources, including submissions, commissions, and within NPH. Special attention has been given to creating resources that support new hymnody in

Christian Worship. Several commissions have been possible through partnership with WELS Commission on Worship. NPH also continues to curate a selection of resources from approximately a dozen other sacred music publishers, vetting these for doctrinal accuracy, musical excellence, accessibility, variety, and appropriateness for confessional Lutheran liturgical worship.

Outsourced editing program

Another of NPH's major projects during the past two years was the creation of an outsourced editing program. Eleven talented and dedicated editors have begun helping NPH move manuscripts through the production process, increasing your publishing house's ability to produce the resources you need for life, family, and ministry.

Collaborative efforts

NPH continues to collaborate with WELS commissions, committees, and WELS-affiliated organizations.

In collaboration with WELS Communication Services and WELS Conference of Presidents, NPH is the publisher and distributor of *Forward in Christ*, which is available in print and digital formats.

NPH is collaborating with WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools for the development of a new theology curriculum.

Close collaboration continues between NPH and Multi-Language Productions (MLP), with NPH providing content that is translated by MLP for use throughout the world. Additionally, NPH has assumed responsibility from MLP for the printing, subscription services, and mailing in North America of a German devotional periodical, *Gott ist Für Uns*, which is published by our sister church the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church–Germany. Additionally, NPH provides customer service, marketing, sales, and distribution services for MLP's materials and resources to support its ministry.

A look ahead

As our world continues its downward moral spiral, our church body, blessed with the purest gospel message of Christ's love, is being called to provide it not only to our own but also to those in other denominations and to those who don't even know him. Our church body is graced to share grace as clearly and deeply as possible with everyone. NPH is committed to doing so and helping you do so.

NPH is broadening its reach through new distribution channels targeted at mainstream retail channels, both e-commerce and brick and mortar.

Numerous books, Bible studies, devotionals and other resources are currently in production that will be released in print and/or digital formats in the next biennium.

Branching Out: From Sunday to Sunday—A digital catalog

To help WELS members remain or become deeply rooted and nourished daily in God's Word, NPH is pleased to introduce *Branching Out*, a comprehensive digital catalog filled with Christ-centered resources, programs, and plans. This collection aims to strengthen WELS members by providing materials that foster a daily connection to the Word. Some ideas are the product of the dedicated work of NPH staff, while others are field-tested programs developed by faithful servants in public ministry. We encourage you to explore these ideas and consider how they can be utilized or adapted to enrich your church community.

E-book accessibility

As NPH continues to produce books in e-book format, it is in the beginning phase to make each new e-book in an "accessible" format. Accessible e-books are made readable and navigable for people with disabilities, including those with visual, auditory, cognitive, or mobility impairments through features like adjustable fonts, text-to-speech, and alternative text for images.

Christian Worship

Work continues on the remaining planned print manuals in the suite, along with populating playlist recordings (the Service Builder add-on that is the successor to HymnSoft) and continued creation and curation of musical support resources available through **nph.net**, including *Musician's Resource*, **nph.net/musicians-resource**.

People's Bible Devotions

Currently under development is a new series of books/e-books related to the People's Bible commentaries. People's Bibles Devotions are being developed to address relevant issues facing WELS members today and encourage a deeper study of God's Word through the People's Bible commentaries.

The 12 books in the series will be introduced over time and will roughly align with the order of the books of the Bible. The planned organization of the series is as follows:

- *From the Beginning—God's Salvation Plan* (The Pentateuch)
- *Being People of the Promise* (Joshua–2 Samuel)
- *Faithful God—Flawed Followers* (1 Kings–Esther)
- *Wisdom and Folly* (poetical books)
- *Hope in Dark Times* (the major prophets)
- *God Has a Word for You* (the minor prophets)
- *Who Do You Say Jesus Is?* (Matthew and Mark)
- *The Gospel Knows No Boundaries* (Luke and Acts)
- *I Want to Know Christ* (Paul's great epistles)
- *Until Christ Comes—Passing On the Gospel* (Paul's mission and pastoral epistles)
- *You Are God's Special Possession* (the universal epistles)
- *We Have Seen His Glory* (books of John)

Children's books

Motivated to support family faith life at home, NPH currently has under production the first of many, Lord willing, children's books. Titled *Why God Made Dads*, it celebrates our heavenly Father and thanks him for the good he built into earthly dads.

Our thanks

Throughout the past biennium and more, we have all experienced levels of uncertainty. As a result, our churches and schools, pastors, and teachers have made changes in the way they carry out their God-given ministry of preaching and teaching the gospel. The same has been true for Northwestern Publishing House. Through it all, we recognize that the Lord has always been in control, that he has blessed us and makes all things work for the good of his people. We humbly and gratefully give thanks to our gracious God who has sustained us and has allowed us to continue serving him in his kingdom work of spreading the gospel.

We also thank our pastors, teachers, and other called workers who have continued to recognize and value the partnership NPH has with them in supplying Christ-centered, biblical resources to help them with carrying out their work in the Lord. We thank the many wonderful WELS members who come to NPH to strengthen and enrich their lives in Christ.

We praise God that he provides wise counsel through our board members.

Finally, we glorify our Father in heaven for richly blessing the ministry of NPH, the NPH staff, and the lives of all WELS members.

"You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever" (Psalm 118:28,29).

Mr. Jeremy Angle, reporter

Rev. Luke Werre, chairman

Mr. Dwight Luedtke, vice chairman

Mr. Jeremy Korell, treasurer

Mr. Matthew Groth, secretary

Rev. Justin Dauck

Mr. Kyle Egan, *ex-officio*, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Prof. Paul Koelpin

Prof. Steven Pagels

Mr. John Pratt
Mr. Joel Raasch

Administrative officers:

Mr. Jeremy Angle, president
Rev. Chris Cordes, vice president, publishing
Mr. Eric Krueger, vice president, finance and accounting

Committee on Constitutional Matters

Floor Committee #17

Our calling

The Committee on Constitutional Matters serves under the Conference of Presidents to interpret the constitution and bylaws for the synod and its constituency. It is responsible for maintaining and distributing accurate updates of these documents as changes are made by the Synod in Convention. The current editions of the WELS Constitution and Bylaws and the Constitution for the Districts are available at wels.net/about-wels/synod-reports. You may also contact the President's Office to request a printed copy.

Our current situation

In addition to revising the document to incorporate the amendments approved by the 2023 synod convention, the committee has been asked to address 11 inquiries regarding constitutional matters since the convention to the date of this report. We also reviewed four proposed bylaw revisions that will come before the delegates to the 2025 convention. We found that each proposal is compatible with our current bylaws and does not cause any other problems or inconsistencies. It is not the task of our committee to endorse or recommend one proposal or another, especially in the case of multiple proposals on the same subject. There are two such proposals. Both deal with the nomination and election of synod officers. One comes from the Conference of Presidents and the other from the Arizona-California District. All four proposed bylaw revisions follow this report. The convention may also consider any other proposed amendments to the constitution or bylaws that have been sent to all voting and advisory delegates at least 60 days prior to the convention.

A look ahead

Following the convention, our committee will see to it that the Constitution and Bylaws is updated by adding any amendments or changes approved by the delegates. Then we will publish the revised constitution and bylaws. Notice will be given when the document is complete. It will be available, as now, at wels.net/about-wels/synod-reports or by contacting the President's Office for a printed copy.

Rev. Eric Steinbrenner, reporter

Rev. Eric Steinbrenner, chairman

Mr. Kenneth Gosch

Rev. Richard Waldschmidt

Proposed bylaw revisions

The following bylaw changes have been recommended. Background rationale is provided for each recommended change and is italicized. Bylaw changes require a two-thirds majority for approval. If approved, the bylaw will go into effect immediately after the convention. Only those areas of the bylaws recommended for change are included here; those not being amended are not printed here but can be found in the WELS Constitution and Bylaws and the Constitution for the Districts.

All of the recommended changes have been reviewed by the Committee on Constitutional Matters.

Note: Strikethrough indicates deletion and underlining indicates an addition.

Recommendation #1A: Procedure for nominating synodical officers (submitted by the Conference of Presidents)

Background: *This recommendation, submitted by the Conference of Presidents, suggests a change in the procedure for nominating synodical officers (president, first vice president, second vice president, and recording secretary).*

Please note that a second similar recommendation for an amendment regarding the nomination process for the synod presidium has been submitted by the Arizona-California District. It can be found immediately after this recommendation from the Conference of Presidents. It was submitted for the same reasons that prompted the memorial from the Conference of Presidents. The chief difference is that the COP recommendation retains the current practice of having convention delegates nominate candidates for each office to be filled, while the Arizona-California District recommendation calls for each congregation in the synod to submit one nomination for the office to be filled.

Rationale for the proposed changes: *Our current procedure for the election of officers presents some difficulties both for convention delegates and for those who are nominated and elected.*

Currently, when the election is held at the convention, each delegate is asked to submit one nominee for the position. Once those names are submitted, the top five candidates for the office of president and the top three candidates for the offices of first vice president, second vice president, and recording secretary, are placed on the election ballot. Each delegate then receives the biographical information of the candidates and is given only a short time to review that information. This puts the delegates in the position of having to cast a vote for someone about whom they may have very limited knowledge.

When it comes to those who are actually elected to these positions, they are expected to make their decision to accept or decline this divine call in 24 hours. In the case of the synod president, the acceptance of this call means leaving his current place of service and moving his family to within driving distance of the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry in Waukesha, Wis. It is a life-changing decision for him and his family, and the current procedure allows only a very short time for him to consider the call and to seek counsel and advice from his wife and others. And even though the offices of vice president and recording secretary do not require the person elected to leave his current place of service, they do involve significant commitments of responsibility, time, and travel with no opportunity to consult with his current calling body.

To address these concerns, the Conference of Presidents is suggesting the following changes:

- *On or before May 15 prior to the convention, delegates will be asked to submit one name for each office being filled.*
- *Delegates will be required to submit their nominations by June 1.*
- *As it is done currently, for the office of president the five nominees who have received the largest number of nominations, and for the offices of vice president and recording secretary the three nominees who have received the largest number of nominations, will comprise the ballot. No additional nominations will be allowed at the convention.*
- *The ballots, along with biographical information, will be sent to all delegates by June 15.*
- *The actual elections will take place at the convention.*

This change will enable the delegates to have more time to consider names that they might nominate. It will also give them several weeks to discuss the names on the ballot with the members of congregations that they represent or with others whose opinions they value.

Even though a quick decision will still be necessary, this change will also enable the nominees to at least begin considering their willingness and ability to serve, should the Lord call them to that position.

For these reasons, the Conference of Presidents is recommending the following amendments to the synod bylaws. If approved, the change will take place at the 2027 convention.

Synod Bylaws

Section 2.80

Election of the President, Vice Presidents, and Recording Secretary

(a) The election of the president and second vice president, or, in alternate conventions, the first vice

president and recording secretary, shall take place at each regular synod convention and shall precede all other elections. Any of these offices vacated by election prior to the end of the officer's term shall be filled by election at that convention for the remainder of the unexpired term. If an office other than the president is vacated by election, a nominating ballot will be held at the convention in which each delegate is asked to nominate one person. The three nominees who shall have received the most number of votes on the nominating ballot shall be the candidates for that office. After biographical information on each candidate is provided, the election will then be conducted as specified in Section 2.80(d).

(b) ~~The nomination election~~ of candidates for the offices of president and second vice president, or first vice president and recording secretary, shall be conducted by the synod in convention in alternate conventions in the following manner. on written nominating ballots. Notice of a request for nominations for these positions shall be given to the convention voting delegates by May 15 prior to the convention. A secure and verifiable means to submit nominations electronically (along with instructions) will be made available by the recording secretary. Nominations must be received by June 1 of the convention year to be considered valid. For the office of president anyone listed on the most current synodical roster of "pastors - active" shall be eligible. For the office of vice president only parish pastors on the same roster shall be eligible. For the office of recording secretary, all male called workers listed as active in the most current synodical roster shall be eligible.

(c) ~~The five nominees who shall have received the largest number of votes on the nominating ballot~~ nominations for president shall be the candidates for that office. The recording secretary shall notify the top five nominees of their nomination and seek their consent to appear on the ballot. In the event of a death, declination, or unavailability of any candidate, the nominee having the next highest number of votes shall be added to the ballot. In the event of a tie for the final candidate position, all names involved in the tie shall be included as candidates. No additional candidates may be nominated from the floor of the convention. The ballot, along with biographical information for each nominee, will be provided to the delegates and published on the synod website by June 15. The nominating ballot shall not be declared an election.

~~(d)~~ The synod in convention shall then proceed to the election. If no candidate receives the majority of the votes cast on the first ballot, the name of the candidate receiving the fewest votes shall be stricken, and a new ballot shall be taken. The balloting shall continue in this manner until one candidate shall have received the majority of the votes cast. The chair will then ask for a motion to make the election unanimous.

~~(d)(e)~~ The nomination and election of the vice presidents and recording secretary shall follow the same procedure as followed in the nomination and election of the president, except that the three nominees who shall have received the largest number of ~~votes on the nominating ballot~~ nominations for ~~first vice president, second vice president, and recording secretary~~ shall be the candidates for the respective office.

~~(e)(f)~~ The term of any newly elected officer shall begin immediately after the close of the regular convention at which the officer is elected. In the event of the election of a new synod president, the Synodical Council may ask the departing synod president to assist the newly elected president in a time of transition as established by the Synodical Council.

Recommendation #1B: Procedure for nominating synodical officers (submitted by the Arizona-California District)

Background: *The following is the resolution adopted by the Arizona-California District, which provides the rationale for the recommendation.*

Subject: *The nomination of synod presidents, vice presidents, and recording secretary*

WHEREAS 1) our Lord Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as the ransom price and propitiation for the sins of all people (Mark 10:45; 1 John 2:2); and

- WHEREAS 2) the Lord himself has established the one ministry of the gospel and this one ministry may assume various forms among us, such as pastor, teacher, professor, missionary, synod president, and others (Ephesians 4:11; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; WELS Doctrinal Statement on the Ministry), in order that the body of Christ might be built up in this knowledge of the truth and for works of service (Ephesians 4:12); and
- WHEREAS 3) our synod normally elects qualified men to serve the Lord and his church through a process of nominations, which includes the following: allowing men to accept or decline nominations well in advance, voters consider factual biographies prior to convention, and then cast votes in person at the synod convention; and
- WHEREAS 4) this process has served us well for nearly every leadership position within our synod as outlined in WELS Bylaws Section 3.40 "Nominating Committee"; and
- WHEREAS 5) our constitution recognizes that our synod consists "of all congregations, pastors, and male teachers who shall have joined the synod through their respective districts" and others commonly refer to our synod as a "grass roots" organization (cf. WELS Constitution, Article III MEMBERSHIP; Pres. Schroeder's video welcome message to 2023 synod delegates); and
- WHEREAS 6) the offices of synod president, first vice president, second vice president, and recording secretary are entrusted with significant spiritual and administrative duties, and yet these offices have not been part of the normal nomination process that applies to other positions because of various concerns, such as the fear of "politics" or campaigns entering the church; and
- WHEREAS 7) the Lord specifically warns his people against fighting for positions or lording their positions over others (cf. Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:25-27; 1 Peter 5:2-5), and Christian men in our synod will gladly follow the Lord's commands, no matter the form of nomination and election process chosen; and
- WHEREAS 8) the nomination and election process of synod president, vice presidents, and recording secretary are an adiaphoron which has taken various forms in the history of our church body and over the years various procedures have been employed in our constitutional bylaws to suit the needs and technology available at the time; therefore be it
- Resolved, a) that we thank the Lord for providing men who meet the biblical and constitutional requirements necessary to serve in the positions of synod president, vice presidents, and recording secretary; and be it further
- Resolved, b) that our district memorialize the 2025 WELS synod convention to give every congregation a voice in the nomination process by amending the bylaws regarding the nomination process for synod president, first vice president, second vice president, and recording secretary so that every congregation of the synod may nominate one qualified man to serve in each office for the 2027 synod convention; and be it further
- Resolved, c) that our district recommends the following constitutional bylaw changes to the Synod in Convention to reflect this desired "grass roots" change; and be it finally
- Resolved, d) that our district entrusts this entire matter to the Lord of the Church and humbly asks him to bless our synod in the future as he has in the past, even as we pray for our leaders and submit to their authority (cf. Ephesians 6:19; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17).

Arizona-California District in convention

Synod Bylaws

Section 2.80

Election of the President, Vice Presidents, and Recording Secretary

- (a) The election of the president and second vice president or first vice president and recording secretary

shall take place at each regular synod convention and shall precede all other elections. Any of these offices vacated by election shall be filled by election at that convention for the remainder of the unexpired term.

(b) The nomination of candidates for the offices of president and second vice president or first vice president and recording secretary shall be conducted by the synod in convention in prior to alternate conventions on written nominating ballots, as follows: For the office of president anyone listed on the most current synodical roster of "pastors – active" shall be eligible. For the office of vice president only parish pastors on the same roster shall be eligible. For the office of recording secretary, all male called workers listed as active in the most current synodical roster shall be eligible.

i. Each member congregation of the synod shall be entitled to nominate one candidate for each office. For the office of president anyone listed on the most current synodical roster of "pastors – active" is eligible for nomination. For the office of vice president only parish pastors on the same roster shall be eligible. For the office of recording secretary, all male called workers listed as active in the most current synodical roster shall be eligible. The nomination of ineligible candidates will be disregarded and not counted.

ii. The recording secretary shall provide a secure and verifiable method that will offer opportunity for every congregation of the synod to submit a nomination. He shall, with the approval of the Synodical Council, obtain the assistance necessary to accomplish this task.

iii. The nominating process shall begin on April 1 in the same year of the convention and be closed April 30. There shall be no opportunity provided for additional nominations.

iv. The recording secretary may engage, with the approval of the Synodical Council, an external auditing firm to tabulate the nominations.

(c) The five nominees who shall have received the largest number of votes on the nominating ballot in the aforementioned nomination process for president shall be the candidates for that office, after they have been contacted by the recording secretary and consented to serve. The recording secretary shall notify the top five nominees and receive their response in writing by May 31. In the event of the death, declination, or unavailability of any candidate, the nominee having the next highest number of votes shall become a candidate. In the event of a tie for the final candidate position, all names involved in the tie shall be included as candidates. The nominating ballot shall not be declared an election. The list of the top five shall be sent to the approved synod convention delegates along with factual, biographical information about each nominee, such as age, residence, number of years in the ministry, present position, offices previously held in a district or the synod, former ministry calls/locations, and any other specific experience and qualification for the office. The approved nomination list will be published on the synod's website by July 1. The synod in convention shall then proceed to conduct the election when gathered together in person. If no candidate receives the majority of the votes cast on the first ballot, the name of the candidate receiving the fewest votes shall be stricken, and a new ballot shall be taken. The balloting shall continue in this manner until one candidate shall have received the majority of the votes cast.

Recommendation #2: Amendment to the bylaws for WELS Retirement Program Commission (submitted by the commission)

Synod Bylaws

Section 7.40

WELS Retirement Program Commission

(a) There shall be a WELS Retirement Program Commission that shall serve the Synodical Council by administering the synod's retirement program, including the synod's pension plan and the synod's 403(b) (9) retirement income account plan (the "Plans"), in keeping with the Plan document(s) approved by the Synodical Council.

(b) The commission shall consist of one pastor, one teacher and four laymen not less than four nor more than nine members, including at least one pastor and at least one teacher, appointed by the Synodical Council. Appointments shall be for a term of four years. Members may succeed themselves twice. A

vacancy on the commission shall be filled as soon as practicable by appointment by the Synodical Council. The president's designee, if one is appointed per 7.40(d), shall be an ex-officio member of the board of directors commission and shall serve in addition to the members appointed by the Synodical Council.

**Recommendation #3: Amendment to the bylaws for the WELS VEBA Commission
(submitted by the commission)**

Synod Bylaws

**Section 7.50
WELS VEBA Commission**

(a) There shall be a WELS Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association (VEBA) Commission that shall serve the Synodical Council by operating and administering the group medical plan(s) approved by the Synodical Council for the benefit of the synod's workers and such other workers within the synod who may qualify under the plan(s).

(b) The commission shall consist of ~~one pastor, one teacher, and four laymen~~ not less than four nor more than nine members, including at least one pastor and at least one teacher, appointed by the Synodical Council. Appointments shall be for a term of four years. Members may succeed themselves twice. A vacancy on the commission shall be filled as soon as practicable by appointment by the Synodical Council. The president's designee, if one is appointed per 7.50(d), shall be an ex-officio member of the ~~board of directors commission~~ and shall serve in addition to the members appointed by the Synodical Council.

Memorials

Memorial (2025-01)

Subject: *Encouragement for education about the history, tenets, and threat of critical theory, and the Lutheran response*

Floor Committee #2

- WHEREAS 1) critical social theories in their many forms (queer theory, race theory, intersectionality, DEI, critical pedagogy, Marxism, third wave feminism, postcolonialism, etc.) have thoroughly permeated our culture (entertainment, government, sports, academia, advertising, workplaces, religion, etc.), exposing parishioners to a worldview that threatens to supplant their Christian worldview; and
- WHEREAS 2) the term critical theory (CT) for the purpose of this memorial describes the multi-headed hydra of ever-evolving critical social theories whose central tenets include the social binary (oppressor and oppressed groups and intersectionality), hegemony (structural oppression), lived experience (experiential knowledge prioritized over empirical evidence, reason, truth, and particularly, God's Word), and social justice (critical social theory in praxis, an activist effort to dismantle hegemonic norms and the social binary); and
- WHEREAS 3) CT rejects the biblical creation account, undermines the biblical understanding of the anthropology of man, denies that "male and female [God] created them" (Genesis 1:27), denies God's institution of marriage and family, divides God's people on the basis of sexuality, socio-economic status, genealogy, and other criteria, while rejecting God's redemptive work by grace through faith on account of Christ; and
- WHEREAS 4) CT thoroughly rejects all authoritative texts, particularly God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions, in its activist effort to dismantle hegemonic structure and the social binary; and
- WHEREAS 5) CT nomenclature uses terminology and expressions in its hollow and deceptive philosophy (Colossians 2:8) to which it has attached new meaning—it uses our words, but not our definitions—thereby confusing and deceiving many; even among CT adherents, their nomenclature evolves and is debated; and
- WHEREAS 6) just as Satan's *modus operandi* has always been to encapsulate lies in an element of truth, even misusing God's Word against God himself (Matthew 4:9-11), insidiously leading many to accept heresy and false doctrine; so also CT often asks valid questions that rightly identify many of our world's sins, but presents as a solution not Christ's redemptive work, but instead a lethal worldview that offers an elusive earthly utopia in place of the hope of heaven, and ultimately deceives unsuspecting and well-intended Christians who want to be on the "right side" of today's issues; and
- WHEREAS 7) the 2023 Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Convention adopted Resolution 02-03, "Pastoral brief on critical theories in light of Scripture," commissioning a pastoral brief on critical theory and social justice; and
- WHEREAS 8) the Conference of Presidents released "A pastoral brief on critical theory (especially critical race theory)" in response to Resolution 02-03; and

- WHEREAS 9) given the continued prevalence of CT in our culture, there is a need to further educate the pastors, teachers, leadership, and laity of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod on the history, character, tenets, and threats of CT in a way that prepares our people to appropriately respond (1 Peter 3:15) when manifestations of CT become apparent in the church or people's vocations; therefore be it
- Resolved, a) that the WELS Conference of Presidents prepare a comprehensive educational essay or monograph on critical theory to be widely published for the benefit of WELS pastors, teachers, leadership, and the laity; and be it further
- Resolved, b) that this essay or monograph on critical theory include sections on the history and lineage of critical theory, its characteristics and central tenets (the social binary, hegemony, lived experience, social justice, etc.), and differences in nomenclature used by adherents of critical theory vs. the biblical and confessional Lutheran definitions; and be it finally
- Resolved, c) that in order to enable pastors, teachers, synod leadership, and the laity to be prepared to defend the faith and offer reasons for the hope they have in Christ, that the essay on critical theory educate about CT's hollow and deceptive worldview and anti-biblical solutions to what ails our world, contrasting that with God's solutions through Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Mr. Brian A. Heinitz, Henderson, Nevada

Memorial (2025-02)

Subject: *Financial support for synodical schools*

Floor Committee #16

- WHEREAS 1) there is a strong continued need for more called workers in our synod due to the high number of pastoral and teaching vacancies and increased efforts to start more mission congregations and expand our Lutheran schools; and
- WHEREAS 2) our church body has been blessed with a strong ministerial education system that is essential for encouraging, training, and equipping the vast majority of these called workers; and
- WHEREAS 3) our two preparatory schools and college of ministry are financially stable but not financially strong; and
- WHEREAS 4) Martin Luther College, an integral institution in preparing nearly all of our called workers, is currently facing a financial deficit; and
- WHEREAS 5) we do not desire to see Martin Luther College or any of our ministerial education schools experience more severe financial struggles; and
- WHEREAS 6) a stronger financial position would allow our ministerial education schools to focus their efforts on continuing their essential work and expanding their efforts without needing to consider or pursue options that would actually limit their ability to carry out their mission; and
- WHEREAS 7) the synod is financially strong and currently has \$18.8 million in its Financial Stabilization Fund; therefore be it
- Resolved, a) that we continue to ask the Lord of the harvest to send more workers into his harvest field; and be it further
- Resolved, b) that we give thanks to God for our ministerial education schools and to all who serve at these schools for the essential work that they do in training and equipping the called workers of our synod; and be it finally

Resolved,

- c) that our district ask the synod in convention to direct the Syndical Council to allocate a higher percentage of the money currently available in the Financial Stabilization Fund to assist with the current ministerial education financial needs.

Arizona-California District in convention

Memorial (2025-03)

Subject: *Ensuring our worker training college is protected from the influence of the critical theory worldview*

Floor Committee #16

- WHEREAS 1) critical theory (CT) permeates our culture, particularly academia, with a complex, fluid, evolving, and multifaceted worldview (queer theory; race theory; diversity, equity and inclusion; Marxism; disability theory; critical pedagogy; etc.), all of which at their core share a dogma that rejects and seeks to dismantle authority, objective truth, and God's Word; and
- WHEREAS 2) CT views authoritative texts, particularly the Bible, as oppressive and objectionable; its anthropology is counter to Scripture; it defies God's created order for man, woman, and marriage; it exchanges the truth for lies (Romans 1:18-32); and
- WHEREAS 3) CT offers a utopian worldview that appeals to many when it asks valid questions, sets laudable goals, and rightly identifies the world's sins, but its solutions insidiously lead to heresy, reject Christ's redemptive work, offer an elusive utopia in place of the sure hope of heaven, and ultimately deceive unsuspecting and well-intentioned Christians who want to be on the "right side" of today's important questions; and
- WHEREAS 4) attempts to apply CT through diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) programs and other efforts result in neither diversity (particularly in thought), equity, nor inclusion, but in division and disunity, with ideas that CT adherents falsely call knowledge (1 Timothy 6:20) but are contrary to God's Word; and when applied in the institutions of the church they drive a wedge between believers, planting ideas that undermine sound doctrine; and
- WHEREAS 5) Israel adopted worldviews antithetical to the faith by adulterating their worship with the practices of the peoples around them, thinking they could safely mingle the heathen worldview with God's order; similarly, it is a fool's errand to try to implement the perceived good parts of the CT worldview and reject the bad; because in CT the concept of intersectionality leaves no room for accepting some of its tenets while rejecting others; the proponents of CT and DEI—activists by nature—will not tolerate a compromise position that rejects any aspect of their worldview while permitting the gospel to stand; and
- WHEREAS 6) the practices of entryism and subversion, which originate with CT theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, seek to effect change by waging a hidden war of position within institutions; intentionally infiltrating institutions, particularly academia, in an attempt to replace traditional principles and beliefs with those aligned with the critical cause; and
- WHEREAS 7) within the university system of another church body, which is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, entryism and subversion are cited as causal to the adoption of CT principles and the implementation of DEI programs, leading to division, discord, and claims of doctrinal deviation; and
- WHEREAS 8) the Higher Learning Commission, which also accredits Martin Luther College, has implemented EVOLVE 2025, a program that seeks to adopt DEI concepts internally and then impose them on colleges through accreditation standards, stating on its website

that “an equity framework should permeate not only all levels of institutions (e.g., students, staff, faculty and governing boards) but also their accreditors”; additionally, the Higher Learning Commission’s Goal 1 is to “. . . ensure that concepts of equity, diversity, access, and inclusion are demonstrated in its mission and other foundational statements”; and

- WHEREAS 9) Martin Luther College coordinates with the State of Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) for teacher licensure, and the PELSB establishes Standards for Effective Practice (SEPs), publishing resources that promote material related to the tenets of CT; therefore be it
- Resolved, a) that we give thanks to God for the blessing of Martin Luther College, whose mission is to faithfully train men and women in the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions in order to meet the needs of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to provide workers for the world’s ripe harvest fields; and be it further
- Resolved, b) that we pray that the Lord of the Church will protect Martin Luther College and its administrators, faculty, and students from the assaults of Satan that would through entryism and subversion supplant the Word of God with a worldview antithetical to Christianity; and be it further
- Resolved, c) that we thank the Lord for the steps that the leadership of Martin Luther College has taken to ensure that neither the Standards for Effective Practice (SEPs) of the State of Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) nor the accreditation standards of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), including its new EVOLVE 2025 program, can provide a gateway for CT principles to supplant Christ; and be it further
- Resolved, d) that MLC be directed by the Synod in Convention to continue to monitor the teacher licensure program and the Standards of Effective Practice (SEPs) applied by the State of Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) to identify and reject any standards and process which might impose aspects of CT upon the college; and be it further
- Resolved, e) that MLC be directed by the Synod in Convention to continue to monitor the accreditation standards applied to MLC by the Higher Learning Commission, particularly the new EVOLVE 2025 initiative, to identify and reject any standards which might impose aspects of CT that provide a foothold for a worldview which conflicts with God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions, threatening to shipwreck our worker training college; and be it finally
- Resolved, f) that MLC be directed to prepare a report for the WELS President and the Conference of Presidents for inclusion in the 2026 *Report to the Twelve Districts* of its past and continuing efforts to keep our worker training college firmly rooted in Christ.

Mr. Brian A. Heinitz, Henderson, Nevada

WELS acronyms

ALHS Area Lutheran high school—a high school operated and funded by area congregations with general, ministerial education, and specialized course offerings

AOC Accounting Oversight Committee—serves the Synodical Council by retaining external auditors and by assisting in ensuring that appropriate accounting policies and internal controls are established and financial systems are efficient and effective; that financial personnel have the requisite skills; and that financial reports are prepared timely, accurately, and in compliance with generally accepted accounting principles

BHM Board for Home Missions—board that oversees mission opportunities in the United States, Canada, and the English-speaking Caribbean; made up of a pastor and layman from 13 district mission boards; coordinates work of various mission districts and allocates available personnel and money

BME Board for Ministerial Education—oversees all areas of educating future WELS called workers; schools include a seminary, a college, and two preparatory high schools

BORAM *Book of Reports and Memorials*—published in odd years; reports the work of the synod to synod convention delegates and also includes recommendations known as memorials for the convention delegates to consider

BPO Benefit Plans Office—administers the synod's self-administered, self-insured insurance program for all called workers and lay workers employed at the Center for Mission and Ministry and in congregations and schools

BWM Board for World Missions—conducts gospel outreach in 40 foreign countries and is exploring outreach opportunities in many additional countries

CAMM Central Africa Medical Mission—a WELS-affiliated ministry that provides health care to people in Africa through clinics in Malawi and Zambia; works closely with WELS World Missions and the Lutheran Church of Central Africa in Malawi and Zambia

CAR WELS Christian Aid and Relief—the synod's ministry of compassion, bringing physical relief to people suffering from natural disasters and severe medical and financial emergencies as well as distributing humanitarian aid through WELS home and world missions

CCC Commission on Congregational Counseling—a commission of Congregational Services that assists WELS congregations to assess and evaluate ministry, review biblical teachings and principles that impact ministry, develop plans to adjust and expand ministry in appropriate ways, and carry out their plans

CCCW Care Committee for Called Workers—a subcommittee of WELS Special Ministries that assists WELS calling bodies in the spiritual, physical, intellectual, and emotional care of their called workers

CCM Committee on Constitutional Matters—reviews questions about and proposed amendments to the WELS Constitution and Bylaws and submits recommendations to the convention

CECW Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee—assists called workers in continuing to grow in all their God-given callings for all their years in service in the public ministry; reports to the Conference of Presidents; includes representatives from the Board for Ministerial Education, Martin Luther College, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as well as representatives from WELS Congregational Services

CEF WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.—primary purpose is to make loans to newly established congregations under the direction of the Board for Home Missions (BHM) and the Board for World Missions (BWM); loans are used to acquire parsonages, land sites, and ministry facilities as tools for gospel outreach

CELC Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference—organization of worldwide church bodies in fellowship, of which WELS is a member

CFO Chief Financial Officer

CFS Christian Family Solutions–Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service—a WELS-affiliated organization that offers Christian counseling, and member assistance programs

CGC Christian giving counselor—a member of the Ministry of Christian Giving’s team; serves as an information source on planned and deferred giving for congregations and members in all 12 WELS districts

CICR Commission on Inter-Church Relations—meets with potential and current sister church bodies; monitors actions of church bodies outside of our fellowship

CLS Commission on Lutheran Schools—a commission of Congregational Services that oversees coordination of early childhood ministries, Lutheran elementary schools, and area Lutheran high schools

CMC Campus Ministry Committee—helps congregations see the opportunities they have for outreach at area college campuses and provides counsel and aid in such outreach, a ministry of WELS Home Missions

CMM WELS Center for Mission and Ministry—synod headquarters located at N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive in Waukesha, Wis.

CMO Congregation Mission Offerings—offerings submitted by local churches for the work of preaching the gospel, training called workers, and administering the synod

COE Commission on Evangelism—a commission of Congregational Services that assists congregations in seizing every opportunity the Lord provides to evangelize lost souls, making use of media communications, structured programs, and every-member witness

COLA Cost of Living Adjustment—a component of called worker compensation to reflect the variance in the cost of living from region to region

COP Conference of Presidents—a group of 15 men—synod president, two synod vice presidents, and 12 district presidents—who maintain the synod’s doctrine and practice and are responsible for funding the synod’s budget

CRC Compensation Review Committee—a standing committee that reports to the Synodical Council through its Administration Committee

CS Congregational Services—provides services and resources to congregations, schools, and individuals in the areas of Lutheran schools, special ministries, worship, evangelism, discipleship, and congregational counseling

CSB Christian Standard Bible—a translation of the Bible published by Holman Bible Publishers

CSC Communication Services Commission—assists the Conference of Presidents in communicating WELS’ mission to the members of the synod

CSM Commission on Special Ministries—a commission of Congregational Services that provides for spiritual needs of those who are often not served through regular parish programs

CTO Chief Technology Officer

CW *Christian Worship*—the WELS hymnal, published in 1993 and then revised and published under the same name in 2021

C/W Commission on Worship—a commission of Congregational Services that assists parishes with worship that glorifies God and strengthens his people

DMB District mission board—oversees home missions within its own district; evaluates mission work in the district, counsels missionaries and missions, and decides the steps to be followed next in a mission effort and also recommends to the Board for Home Missions where missions should be started

DP District president—oversees activity of a district and is a member of the Conference of Presidents

ECE/ECM Early childhood education/Early childhood ministry—ministry to young children through preschool and childcare programs

EFL/ESL English as a foreign language/English as a second language—English as a foreign language is taught to those who live in a country where English is not the primary language spoken; English as a second language is taught to those who live in a country where English is the primary language spoken but the student's primary language is not English; many home and world mission fields use these classes to build relationships so they can share Jesus with their students

EHV Evangelical Heritage Version—a translation of the Bible published by Northwestern Publishing House

ELFK Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany—sister church body in fellowship with WELS

ELS Evangelical Lutheran Synod—sister church body in fellowship with WELS

ESV English Standard Version—a translation of the Bible published by Crossway

FIC *Forward in Christ*—WELS' official monthly magazine

FTE Full-time equivalent—a way to express employee work hours (for example, an FTE of 1.0 means that the person is equivalent to a full-time worker, while an FTE of .05 means that the worker is half-time)

FY Fiscal year—WELS' fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30

IDDM Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry—this organization, which operates under WELS Special Ministries, strives to share the gospel with those who have special education needs or developmental disabilities and to provide a supportive Christian network for them

IMO Individual mission offerings—offerings given by individual members, not through their congregations

JMC Joint Mission Council—helps facilitate cross-cultural outreach at congregations throughout North America. It is made up of representatives from Home Missions, World Missions, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

KW Kingdom Workers—a WELS-affiliated organization that supports WELS missions through the use of volunteers; also supports ministries in fellowship with WELS

LCMS Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod—not currently a sister church body but engaging in informal doctrinal discussions with WELS

LES Lutheran elementary school—a school operated by a local congregation

LSMG Lutheran Military Support Group—a WELS-affiliated organization dedicated to strengthening ministry to WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod military members and their families, as well as to veterans

LPS Luther Preparatory School—synodically supported preparatory school in Watertown, Wis.

LWMS Lutheran Women's Missionary Society—a WELS-affiliated organization of women whose purpose is to support WELS home and world missions

MCG Ministry of Christian Giving—assists the Conference of Presidents by developing programs for funding the synod's budget and for establishing lines of communication between the synod's leaders and local congregations

MDHH Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing—this organization, which operates under WELS Special Ministries, seeks to help congregations share the gospel with members of WELS and others who are deaf or hard of hearing

MLC Martin Luther College—prepares teachers and staff ministers for WELS congregations and pastoral candidates for Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary; also offers professional growth opportunities to those already serving in ministry; located in New Ulm, Minn.

MLP Multi-Language Productions—a program of the Board for World Missions that facilitates the production, publishing, warehousing, and distribution of a wide variety of religious materials

MLS Michigan Lutheran Seminary—synodically supported preparatory school in Saginaw, Mich.

MVI Mission for the Visually Impaired—this organization, which operates under WELS Special Ministries, helps people who are unable to read normal print by providing items in Braille, large print, and on cassette tape

NASB New American Standard Bible—a translation of the Bible published by the Lockman Foundation

NIV New International Version—a translation of the Bible published by Biblica

NPH Northwestern Publishing House—the official publishing arm of the synod for printing, publication, and distribution of books, periodicals, and literature considered beneficial to the Lutheran faith

OWLS Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors—this organization, which operates under WELS Special Ministries, encourages involvement, fellowship, mutual support, life enrichment activities, and service to others for those 50 years or older

PAC President's Advisory Council—a group of synod administrators that meets regularly with the synod president to discuss opportunities and challenges facing the synod. Membership includes the administrators of the Boards for Ministerial Education, Home Missions, and World Missions; director of Missions Operations; director of Congregational Services; director of the Ministry of Christian Giving; WELS chief financial officer; WELS chief technology officer; WELS director of communications; and the president of Northwestern Publishing House

PSI Pastoral Studies Institute—a partnership between the Joint Mission Council and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary; prepares spiritual leaders from diverse ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds

RTTD *Report to the Twelve Districts*—publication put out in even years that reports the work of the synod to the districts in their conventions

SC Synodical Council—the governing body of WELS, with all responsibilities not given to the Conference of Presidents or the Synod in Convention

SMO Synod mission offerings—Congregation Mission Offerings plus individual mission offerings

TELL Think, Evaluate, Learn, Lead—an English-language online Bible-based training platform developed to bring the gospel to English-speakers outside the United States; comprises a Facebook page with more than 1 million followers, self-led Bible study courses, and deeper studies with a live online instructor, all with the goal of students leading their own small group in Bible study or worship; a full-time TELL missionary focuses on furthering relationships with national pastors, lay workers, and volunteers as well as developing relationships with online students

TLC Translation Liaison Committee—established in November 2013 by the Conference of Presidents to carry out a resolution of the 2013 synod convention; its purpose is “to evaluate major Bible translations; to communicate with their editors and publishers; to offer, when appropriate, suggestions to improve such translations; and to share its findings with the synod at large” (2013 *Proceedings*, p. 68)

VEBA Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association—WELS employee health-care insurance that gives benefits to called workers

WELSSA WELS Schools Accreditation—an accreditation process for WELS schools coordinated by WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools that involves thorough self-study based upon ten accreditation standards, site visitation by a team of outside individuals, and accountability for annual school improvement

WIF WELS Investment Funds, Inc.—manages investment funds for WELS and its congregations

WLC Wisconsin Lutheran College—private WELS-affiliated liberal arts college located in Milwaukee, Wis.

WLS Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary—offers theological training that prepares men to enter the pastoral ministry of WELS or a church body within its fellowship; also offers theological and professional growth opportunities to those already serving as pastors; located in Mequon, Wis.

